When Good Neighbours Become Good Friends

The Australian Embrace of its Millionth Migrant

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The arrival of Australia's 'millionth' post-Second World War migrant in 1955 provided the occasion for a nationally choreographed embrace of a young British woman posed as both culmination and promise for an immigrant nation. This article traces various treatments of this event and explores the transitional national, political and cultural narratives produced and negotiated. It examines the ways in which the story of the millionth migrant was taken up as a matter of national interest in Australia and reveals how the British migrants the nation apparently embraced were processed and deployed as salves for anxiety about national identity and in the development of notions of Australian community. It argues that for many British migrants, this process was often fraught: assumed to be willing, welcome and easily assimilated, their identity as migrants was too often smothered by an embrace that ignored broader migratory experiences.

At her last dinner aboard the *Oronsay*, Mrs Barbara Porritt confessed to the ship's Captain that she was worried about her future. The 21-year-old from Yorkshire was about to begin a whirlwind week of official engagements as Australia's designated 'millionth post-war migrant'. Though accompanied by the husband who had convinced her that 'Australia offers you everything', Mrs Porritt appreciated the reassurance of the Captain at what had been planned as a dinner of welcome. 'Gallantly', Captain Burnand 'put her mind at ease' by putting his arm around her and planting a kiss on her cheek. Australian Minister for Immigration, Harold Holt, who was also at the dinner, immediately leapt to his feet and shook the Captain's hand, congratulating him for 'doing what everyone else had wanted to do to her as soon as they saw her'.¹

THIS IS BUT ONE episode among popular accounts of the arrival in 1955 of British migrant Mrs Barbara Porritt.² These are stories that have been told many times: conscripted as Australia's 'millionth' post-war migrant, Mrs Porritt's photogenic face featured prominently in many magazines and newspapers as both culmination and promise for an immigrant nation. Posed as the central figure in

¹ *Age* (Melbourne), 9 November 1955, 5. Similar stories also appeared in the Melbourne papers *Herald*, 8 November 1955, 1; *Sun*, 9 November 1955, 2; and also *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November 1955, 1.

² While emphasising that the analysis is my own, and that in some respects it may differ from their interpretation, I would like to thank both Barbara and Dennis Porritt for agreeing to share their story with me for the purposes of this research.

a national 'self-congratulatory ceremony' designed 'to generate public support for migration'—as a symbol of the Australian-British migrant embrace 'for whom talk of assimilation seemed irrelevant'³—the millionth migrant has more recently been identified by historians and museums as an immigration icon;⁴ as testimony to the calculated marketing of a discriminatory post-war program.

Yet, alongside the stage-management of public perception and the marking of broad social change that has interested historians and museums, there is another story. It is a story about post World War II migration to Australia as a process of outward embrace by the host nation and of the invisibility of the migrant; and about the way migrant identity is 're-placed' upon arrival in a new country. In particular it is a story about the place and identity in Australia of post-war British migrants who were attracted by a variety of assisted passage schemes and who comprised 36 per cent of all immigrants (or approximately one million people) up to the early 1980s when sponsorship programs ceased.⁵

It is also a story about gender and national identity, and particularly about women's roles in the postwar re-construction of notions of 'home'. Media representations of the millionth migrant deployed gendered notions of national identity and 'home' to link a homeland of origin with settled homes at places of destination.⁶ This discursive negotiation underlined values of stability and rootedness, and of the 'way of life' that was coming to be a key marker of Australian national identity during this period. Furthermore, in constructions of national identity that focussed upon 'British stock', women's capacity to bear children was envisaged as part of the solution to stabilising imperial (and racial) boundaries.⁷ It was no accident that the millionth migrant was a woman.

³ John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2000), 149–50; Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press (hereafter MUP), 2001), 26.

⁴ The National Museum of Australia in Canberra features a photo of the Porritts arriving in Melbourne under the heading, 'Marketing Migrants'. A touring exhibition, 'The Millionth Migrant: Picture of a Citizen, Pictures of a Nation', focused on the publicity surrounding the 'girl in a million' as an attempt by immigration authorities to signal the success of government immigration policy. See the exhibition catalogue by Elizabeth Gertsakis, *The Millionth Migrant: Picture of a Citizen, Pictures of a Nation* (Canberra: Australia Post, 1998).

⁵ For a succinct overview of post World War II British migration to Australia, see relevant sections in the chapters on the English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh in *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins*, ed. James Jupp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (hereafter CUP), 2001).

⁶ As Bronwen Walter has argued, gender is deeply implicated in the ways in which ties are formed between these connected but contrasting places. Bronwen Walter, *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place and Irish Women* (London: Routledge, 2000), 194–214.

⁷ Kathleen Paul, 'British Subjects' and 'British Stock': Labour's Postwar Imperialism, *Journal of British Studies* 34 (April 1995): 233–76; Wendy Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945–64* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 28–32. That the construction of home during this period was also significantly raced is beyond the scope of this article, but for work on raced notions of 'home' in Britain during this period see in particular the work of Kathleen Paul, Chris Waters and Wendy Webster, cited below.

Australia had, of course, previously extended a 'welcoming embrace' to 'British domestic girls', and the story of the millionth migrant resonates with stories of British migrants who came during the interwar period. As Michael Roe details at length, this was a period in which 'two polities [sought] maximum advantage for interests dominant in either place, with very little regard for the migrants themselves'. Roe emphasises the 'tensions and toughness which mark this story', and Roe's argument—that the Australian government's pursuit of its own interests 'modif[ies], almost to extinction, any picture of Australian federal governments of these years ... as being supine and obsequious before the mother country'—is applicable also to the postwar period.⁸ In 1938 it was noted that having 'emerged into nationhood, we want and will have only the best that Britain can send us',⁹ and the Australian 'embrace' of its post World War II British migrants was often just as circumspect.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the most crucial 'missing' chapter in the story of the arrival of the millionth migrant, and of postwar British migrants to Australia more generally, is of migration as an event that profoundly affects identity and sense of place, resulting in complex changes in relationships with the 'homeland' and creating a transformed sense of self and community in Australia. Taking a particular, though in some respects prominent, instance this article examines the ways in which Mrs Porritt's migration was taken up as a matter of national interest in Australia and reveals how the British migrants that the nation apparently embraced—'the most pampered and protected of the intake'¹¹—were processed and deployed not only as salves for anxiety about national identity, but also in the development of notions of Australian community. It does this first by exploring the cultural spaces produced by coverage of Mrs Porritt's arrival in Australia, and in particular by examining the transitional national, political and cultural narratives produced and negotiated. Finally, the article counterpoises the celebrated 'girl in a million' with the historical experience of the migrant, asking questions about the warmth of the Australian embrace and whether it really did 'offer her everything'.

'Our millionth'

Nowhere was Mrs Porritt more warmly embraced than in the *Good Neighbour*, the monthly bulletin issued by the Australian Department of Immigration. The paper

⁸ Michael Roe, *Australia, Britain, and Migration, 1915–1940: A Study of Desperate Hopes* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 1.

⁹ Janet Mitchell, *Spoils of Opportunity: An Autobiography* (London: Methuen, 1938), 62–3.

¹⁰ Sara Wills and Kate Darian-Smith, 'Beauty Contest for British Bulldogs? Negotiating (Trans)national Identities in Suburban Melbourne,' *Cultural Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (November 2003), forthcoming.

¹¹ Richard Bosworth, 'Australia and Assisted Immigration from Britain, 1945–1954,' *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 34 (1988): 187–200. See also Velma Joan Joynson, 'Post-World War Two British Migration to Australia: "The most pampered and protected of the intake"?' (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1996).

had been established in 1950 to assist the working of the Good Neighbour Council and its committees, the objectives of which were to help in the settlement and assimilation of migrants to 'the Australian way of life'.¹² In the year after Mrs Porritt's arrival the report of the Victorian Good Neighbour Council celebrated 'appreciable growth' in the 'interest in assimilation activity over the last twelve months',¹³ and their coverage of Mrs Porritt's arrival was both cause and effect of this growth. The *Good Neighbour's* coverage of Mrs Porritt's journey to Australia was exceptional in the amount of space devoted to her story, but also symptomatic of the broader concerns of the paper and of media coverage more generally. It provides an excellent medium through which to gauge the national embrace of 'our millionth'.

The *Good Neighbour* began its coverage of Mrs Porritt's journey to Australia in October 1955. On the cover the paper announced 'Our 1,000,000th Migrant Due in November'. 'The migrant', the *Good Neighbour* explained, 'is young, attractive Miss Barbara Ann Wood, 21, a former stenographer, of 28 Greenlands Road, Redcar, Yorkshire' who 'had been chosen to carry the title of Australia's 1,000,000th post-war migrant to mark this milestone in our migration story'. 'For Miss Wood', the paper continued, 'the journey to her new life in a new land of opportunity will be a romantic honeymoon trip' because 'she was married to Mr Dennis Porritt, 25, on September 17'. 'Mr Porritt', the readers were told, was 'an electrical fitter', who would go directly to employment as a skilled tradesman with the State Electricity Commission (SEC) in Yallourn, Gippsland, Victoria.¹⁴

On this front page devoted to the story of Mr and Mrs Porritt, the reader discovers the many happy coincidences in the choice of Mrs Porritt as millionth migrant. For one thing, she had been born 'only 10 miles' from the birthplace of Captain Cook. This was 'an association', according to the paper, that had 'cemented their desire to migrate to Australia'. Happily too, the Porritts arrived in the year that was a 'milestone' not just for migration in general, but for British migration in particular, because by the end of the year '500,000 post-war settlers from British sources will have reached our shores'. The newspaper thought readers would also be pleased to hear that the couple would be among 307 British migrants to arrive on the *Oronsay*, and among a total of between three and four thousand assisted migrants to arrive from the United Kingdom in November. Next to a photo of the couple 'looking out across the seas towards their new homeland', readers were reassured that the Porritts were 'typical of the young

¹² On the work of the Good Neighbour councils and committees throughout Australia, see: Gwenda Tavan, "'Good Neighbours': Community Organizations, Migrant Assimilation and Australian Society and Culture, 1950–1961," in *The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s*, eds John Murphy and Judith Smart (Melbourne: MUP, 1997), 77–89; Gillian Winter, *The Hand of Friendship: A History of the Good Neighbour Council of Tasmania, 1949–1992* (Hobart: Good Neighbour Council of Tasmania, 1993); Michael James Kelly, 'A Social History of the Good Neighbour Councils of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia: 1949–1971' (MA thesis, La Trobe University, 1979).

¹³ Good Neighbour Council of Victoria, *Annual Report 1957–1958* (Melbourne: The Council, 1958), 4.

¹⁴ *Good Neighbour* (hereafter GN), October 1955, 1.

healthy migrants who are coming to Australia from the United Kingdom to add their strength and skills to the great post-war development of the Commonwealth'.¹⁵

In the next issue of *Good Neighbour* readers were again treated to a front cover devoted to Mr and Mrs Porritt, this time assuring them that all was being done to ensure a warm welcome for 'our millionth'. The paper described in detail the reception awaiting the couple upon arrival in Melbourne to celebrate this 'great milestone in Australia's history'. At this dinner, floral decorations would twine Australian flowers around the white rose of York 'to symbolise the link between the great countries of Britain and Australia'. Further down the page, the paper described the way in which the Porritt's 'quiet, home-town wedding' had been turned into a 'world event'. A feature had been the reading of a cablegram from the Immigration Minister, Harold Holt, assuring them 'on behalf of nine million prospective good neighbours, of a warm welcome to Australia'. Holt's cablegram also reminded Mrs Porritt that she had

been chosen to carry the title of Australia's millionth migrant because we see you as the most fitting representative of the first million settlers of this period ... and because, with your husband, you typify the kind of migrant we hope will follow you in even greater numbers ... May the success and contentment which are yours for the asking in Australia continue enduringly for you the happiness of your wedding day.¹⁶

Page three then featured a description of the home and workplace where this happiness would, hopefully, endure. Good neighbours in Yinnar Street, Newborough, were photographed having a working bee outside the SEC-provided house that was pre-cut and shipped from England; neighbours Mrs Stewart and Mrs Evans were shown planning a welcome for Mrs Porritt over a friendly cup of tea; Mr Porritt's 'skilled' new workmates could be seen hard at work at the Yallourn power station; and a picture of Yallourn's 'model shopping centre and pretty town square of green lawns and colourful gardens' completed this picture of a place where they would 'find all they want—in an atmosphere far removed from the traditional idea of a coalmining town of depressing surroundings'.¹⁷

And it seems readers, or at least writers of *Good Neighbour*, could not get enough of Mrs Porritt, for in the next (December) issue several pages were again devoted to her story. The paper covered the first day in Melbourne of this 'modest young couple', one half of whom was now also described as 'our girl in a million'. We see them visiting Captain Cook's cottage in the Treasury Gardens, which

¹⁵ Ibid. For the emphasis on skilled migrants see, for example, 'Skilled Men Coming From Britain', which announced the arrival of building tradesmen, metal workers and prospective railway employees selected under a Melbourne Tramways and Victorian Railways scheme, *GN*, June 1955, 2. For the similar, though more class-oriented emphasis on migrant 'type', see 'Bright Prospects for UK Migration', which includes comments by H.R. Mitchell of the Immigration Advisory Council that 'a better type of prospective migrant is now offering', *GN*, August 1967, 8.

¹⁶ *GN*, November 1955, 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3. On the broader creation of an 'Arcadian image' for Yallourn, see Meredith Fletcher, *Digging People Up for Coal: A History of Yallourn* (Melbourne: MUP, 2002), 92 and *passim*.

'reminded them of home', being given a bouquet by Mrs Pryde of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Society of Victoria, inspecting the Melbourne Cricket Ground, 'main stadium for the Olympic Games of 1956', and being welcomed by the President of the Victorian Good Neighbour Council (see figure 1).¹⁸

The front page covered Minister Holt's speech at an evening reception for the couple. Holt said it was 'fitting that this couple from Yorkshire should have been designated as the end of a line of a million migrants because it was from Yorkshire about 180 years ago that Captain James Cook set off on the first stage of his voyage in which he took possession of Australia for the British Empire'. He indicated that Mrs Porritt's arrival gave Australians 'the opportunity to make a firm declaration of our faith in our own future and the destiny which we believe to be ours in this part of the Southern Hemisphere'. Describing Australia as a 'great nation with mighty industries and a happy, prosperous people', Holt congratulated the Australian people as good neighbours who 'have absorbed these people with relatively little discomfort ... seeing that our new settlers are never without a friend'.¹⁹

We never find out about the ease with which Mrs Porritt is absorbed by the good neighbours and community of Newborough, because this is the last we see or hear of her in *Good Neighbour*. Melbourne's daily newspapers continued to follow their 'girl in a million', however, firstly to an 'international pageant of welcome' at the Myer Department store, where 'New Australians from 25 different countries' were featured 'in their national dress'.²⁰ And the *Argus* even followed 'Mrs Million' to the threshold of her Yallourn home.²¹ Having seen her carried in by her husband and 'settled', however, even the daily press relinquished possession and left her in place in Newborough.

This is not, of course, the full story of Mrs Porritt's arrival in Australia. Yet it is necessary to consider this popular version because it is representative of the broader, prescriptive 'good news story' propaganda in *Good Neighbour*, and of what newspapers invariably failed to mention: the personal stories of 'unsettlement'; of upheavals of place, home and the fracturing of connections and relationships.²² Before considering the history this failure obscures, it is helpful to explore at a more general level the culture surrounding the arrival of British migrants in Australia that impeded greater comprehension of their experience. Presumed to present little problem in terms of assimilation (a stance clearly reflected in the literature of the Good Neighbour

¹⁸ *GN*, December 1955, 1, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁰ *Age*, 10 November 1955, 3.

²¹ *Argus*, 15 November 1955, 1.

²² Typical examples of *GN*'s coverage of migration stories include articles such as: 'She Wants to Shout From the Housetops', concerning a family from Northumberland who are '100 per cent satisfied migrants who have been finding new things to praise and delight in ever since they landed at Fremantle in September 1952', February 1954, 2; 'Happy Young Migrants in Children's Homes,' January 1954, 2.

movement),²³ British migrants such as Mrs Porritt were frequently represented as ready participants in a broader national embrace.

The national embrace

The notion that British migrants required little help in the way of settlement and assimilation reflected continued attachment to the idea of 'the indissoluble unity of the British people everywhere',²⁴ that 'Britons were less migrants than transplants to British settlements overseas'.²⁵ Thus, 'taking stock [of] aspects of mid-century life in Australia', W.D. Borrie argued in 1953 that 'we need not worry overmuch about the British immigrants';²⁶ while Prime Minister Menzies, arguing for a redistribution of 'Empire population', believed we should 'no more question the movement of people from England to Australia than we would question a movement of people from Yorkshire to Somerset or Melbourne to Perth'.²⁷ Certainly being British meant that Mrs Porritt could enjoy the significant benefits that being a full 'member of the national family' enjoined,²⁸ and that her journey to Australia (and thus the process of migration more generally) could be represented—to the moment she is carried over the threshold of her new home—as a rapid and complete 'honeymoon' assimilation.²⁹

Such coverage of migrant arrivals in *Good Neighbour* reflected the views of the first leader of the Good Neighbour movement, J.T. Massey. Massey had argued at the 1953 Citizenship Convention that in relation to the settlement of migrants, 'all that is possible should be done to secure the cooperation and advice of British

²³ See, for example, Good Neighbour Council of Victoria, *Annual Report 1955–1956* (Melbourne: The Council, 1956), 3; 'There's No Risk in Coming to Australia says Migrant from Glasgow', *GN*, January 1954, 5; and 'This is Like Homecoming', *GN*, May 1958, 1, where a British migrant comments: 'We do not feel that we are coming to a strange country. We feel we are coming home'.

²⁴ R.G. Menzies, "'Not to Yield": A Study of the British Problem,' June 1948; quoted in Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (Chippendale: Macmillan, 1992), 146.

²⁵ John Lack and Jacqueline Templeton, *Bold Experiment: A Documentary History of Australian Immigration Since 1945* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), 15.

²⁶ W.D. Borrie, 'New and Old Australians,' in *Taking Stock: Aspects of Mid-Century Life in Australia*, ed. W.V. Aughterson (Melbourne: Cheshire 1953), 173–5.

²⁷ Menzies, 'Not to Yield'; quoted in Brett, 146. In the year of Mrs Porritt's arrival, Federal Opposition member L.C. Haylen told the annual Citizenship Convention that 'British migrants were the best migrants ... largely because with them there was no assimilation problem'. See Joynson, 189.

²⁸ Menzies explicitly referred to the migrants becoming a 'member of the national family' at the 1950 Citizenship Convention. See R.G. Menzies, *Digest of the Australian Citizenship Convention*, 23–27 January 1950 (Canberra: Government Printer, 1950), 3. For details of privileges enjoyed by British migrants, see Ann-Mari Jordens, *Redefining Australians: Immigration, Citizenship and National Identity* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1995), 153–62.

²⁹ Indeed it is almost as if she is marrying Australia; even though she was married well before the paper reported her journey, *GN* presents her initially as a single, attractive and desirable young woman; much more can be made of the way in which, *as a woman*, she is utilised by the papers, a point I return to below.

migrants'. 'The assistance of our own kith and kin in this nationally important work', he insisted, 'is essential'.³⁰ In this respect, just a year on, Mrs Porritt was deployed in similar ways as the Queen. As the movement's literature demonstrates, good neighbours were fond of the Queen, and fond of deploying her strategically along with a cup of tea on unsuspecting non-British migrants (see figure 2). Like the Queen, Mrs Porritt could provide a model for emulation: by seeing, and in some senses 'mixing' with Mrs Porritt 'new' Australians would become better assimilated and 'old' Australians could be reassured of the continuity of the Australo-British embrace.³¹ Other media representations also continued this theme. Under the heading 'Girl in a Million was a radiant bride', cultural and social arbiters such as the *Australian Women's Weekly* dwelt on Mrs Porritt's 'English-rose complexion' in a triple-page spread devoted to her wedding and the 'new friends [who] await the millionth migrant'.³² Such attention was reminiscent of coverage of the young Queen's coronation and preparations for her visit in both *Good Neighbour* and the popular press more broadly.³³

As John Murphy and Nicholas Brown have indicated, 'stage management' of this sort was a common occurrence during the 1950s and part of a broader process of 'governing [both] prosperity' and social change.³⁴ It was no accident, of course, that the millionth migrant was British.³⁵ As it became clear that the hopes of the post-war immigration planners would not be met—that British

³⁰ J.T. Massey, Resolutions re Securing Co-operation of British and Other Migrants with Councils and Branches, Sub-committees, National Groups, Forums. Fifth Conference of Presidents and Secretaries, Good Neighbour Councils, 5–6 June 1953, 9, CRS AA1980/254/45, Australian Archives, Canberra.

³¹ See, for example, the front-page headline, 'Queen's Visit Will Assist Assimilation', *GN*, February 1954, 1. The metaphor of 'mixing' was popular with the Good Neighbour movement; migrants needed to 'mix' with other Australians so that they could be blended into Australian society and, in the words of Massey, experience 'a normal development of selfhood ... so that they may gradually feel that they belong' (Minutes of Conference of Representatives of Good Neighbour Councils, 20–1 April 1951, 3–4, CRS A439/1/1951/11/296, Australian Archives, Canberra. As Tavan has argued, such assumptions 'indicated a view of immigrants as people devoid of history or subjectivity, whose identity could be created in accordance with the needs and desires of the Australian community', 81.

³² *Australian Women's Weekly*, 2 November 1955, 18, 22–3.

³³ For *GN*'s extensive coverage of Queen Elizabeth's 1954 visit, see the February, March and April issues for 1954. On the royal tour more generally (during which the Queen's complexion was often commented upon), see Jane Connors, 'The 1954 Royal Tour of Australia', *Australian Historical Studies* 100 (April 1993): 371–82; and Peter Spearritt, 'Royal Progress: The Queen and Her Australian Subjects', in *Australian Cultural History*, ed. S.L. Goldberg and F.B. Smith (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), 138–57. Philip O'Meara also draws the connection between the portrayal of the Queen and Mrs Porritt in 'Negotiating Change: Representations of Immigration in Australian Magazines, 1947–1964' (PhD thesis, Monash University, 1998), 156.

³⁴ Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 151; Nicholas Brown, *Governing Prosperity: Social Change and Social Analysis in Australia in the 1950s* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), 4–5.

³⁵ For details of the selection process see, 'Publicity Arrangements for the Arrival of the One-Millionth Migrant', Agenda item no. 20, Department of Immigration, CRS A446/189 Correspondence files, Annual single numbers series with Block allocations, 1 January 1953–12 June 1974; item 1962/67627, Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Council, Agenda & Minutes, Meetings 26–28, Australian Archives, Canberra. O'Meara has also discussed this in 'Negotiating Change', 154–6. See also Mr Porritt's comments at interview, discussed below.

migrants would not outnumber the non-British by ten to one³⁶—attention devoted to the arrival of British migrants can be read as an attempt to assuage post-war anxiety about the nation's imagined and projected identity; to echo both Holt and Prime Minister Menzies desire that Australia remain 'a British community ... living under British standards'.³⁷

But while it has often been claimed that the 1950s was a conservative decade in which 'Labor's emphasis on Australian nationalism and identity was replaced by an insistence that migrants assimilate to a British model',³⁸ or argued that 'Australians [even] in this nationalist era thought of themselves primarily as a British people',³⁹ different impulses worked through a culture and society not at a standstill but continuing to respond to post-war changes.⁴⁰ While a British civilization under the Southern Cross was still a point of sentimental attachment, enthusiasm for a more independent Australia championed by earlier Labor leaders had not simply disappeared. In the year after Mrs Porritt's arrival, Sir Richard Boyer, President of the New South Wales Good Neighbour Council (as well as Chair of the Australian Broadcasting Commission), summed up proceedings at the 1956 Citizenship Convention by claiming: 'This is a nation in its own right. We Australians are not just Englishmen, Scotsmen and Irishmen living in Australia'.⁴¹

Moreover this was a period beginning to experience, as Stuart Ward has argued, 'the erosion of a wider sense of British community, and the erection of new conceptual boundaries between the various national communities that had once formed part of the greater imperial whole'.⁴² Thus it has been argued that while Holt spoke of maintaining a 'British community' with 'British standards', '[n]ational self-interest ... lay behind [Australia's] decision ... to participate in imperial migration'.⁴³ Moreover, while Ward persuasively argues that 'the demise

³⁶ Australia, Parliament 1945, *Immigration-Government Policy*, 2 August 1945, no. 23, 5. *GN* reported that between 1947 and 1957 the British comprised 42.7 per cent of assisted immigrants (March 1958, 3). While quoting this figure in an article headline, the paper nevertheless acknowledged in smaller print that the number of British migrants who returned meant that net British migration accounted for less than 40 per cent of all immigrants.

³⁷ Quoted in R.T. Appleyard, *The Ten Pound Immigrants* (London: Boxtree, 1988), 28. One of the more strident of Menzies' many assertions of the 'Britishness' of Australia came at the 1950 Citizenship Convention, where he stated that after a few years all migrants to Australia 'will be British, and they will be, as we are, the King's men and the King's women', Menzies, *Digest*, 3.

³⁸ Lack and Templeton, 42. See also, for example, Donald Horne, *The Australian People: Biography of a Nation* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972), 253–4.

³⁹ Neville Meaney, 'Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography', *Australian Historical Studies* 116 (2001): 79. While not wishing to rehearse arguments about the meaning and definition of 'Britishness' here, I would note that in an Australian context, the construction of individual and collective 'British' identity is as multiple as it is contradictory. See Wills and Darian-Smith.

⁴⁰ Murphy, 2–5, 7–8 and passim; Brown, 1–6 and passim.

⁴¹ Richard Boyer, *Digest: Report of Proceedings of the Australian Citizenship Convention 1956* (Canberra: Government Printer 1956), 31.

⁴² Ward, 247.

⁴³ Paul, 272–4.

of British race patriotism in Australian political culture was not the outcome of a burgeoning cultural nationalism', and refers explicitly to 'the disentangling of Australian and British cultural identities directly informed by the disentangling of their political and economic interests', at the level of the individual migrant these conjoined national cultural identities were strained well before the British shift towards a European trading future in the early 1960s.⁴⁴ British migrants did not experience British and Australian identity as the same thing, and many did not feel much rapport with Australian 'Britishness'. While it is unsurprising that manifestations of British identity might differ according to historical and geographical context and location, my point here is to emphasise that British migrants often encountered these dissimilarities and contradictions at a heightened level or in a sharper and more confronting context. For British migrants, Australian identity was much more than 'imaginable': it was a daily experienced phenomenon.⁴⁵

For, when Australia chose Mrs Porritt as a milestone in its migration story, it was an orchestrated choice to reflect not only British heritage but also to project a desired Australian identity. In this respect, Mrs Porritt was subject to the pressures of a changing orientation; of a moment when British and Australian identities were compressed but deployed in the service of Australian becoming rather than British being: for Australian citizenship rather than British subjecthood. It is possible to find other representations of this compression among stories of British migrant arrivals in *Good Neighbour* and elsewhere in the popular press.⁴⁶ Boyer acknowledged that they were 'compressing history into an amazingly small compass with little time for the absorption of shocks and the healing of the disappointments, fears and resentments so inevitably associated with the uprooting and replanting of human beings'. This 'replanting', he insisted at the 1957 Citizenship Convention, was necessary 'for the good of the nation corporate'. Good neighbours were required, Boyer argued, to assist in this task, but he also indicated the 'need to enlist more of the migrants themselves to serve the later arrivals'.⁴⁷ The role of the British migrant, it was imagined, would be one that afforded rather than requested help.

Enlisted even before departure, Mrs Porritt's scripted announcement on arrival was that she felt the welcome was 'not only for us but for the one million new people'. Stating that she was 'very happy to have been chosen to represent

⁴⁴ Ward, 235, 260, 255.

⁴⁵ My argument here is the result of interviews conducted with migrants living in the Frankston area of Victoria. With a different emphasis (and in a rather more strident fashion), Joynson makes a similar point: that while called upon to be 'the exemplar of trouble-free assimilation', British migrants often experienced not only 'a variety of adjustment difficulties ... in the subtleties of cultural interaction with Australian society', but even 'a certain hostility [which] at times permeated the general community with telling effect', viii, 5, 8, 28.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the following articles in *GN*: 'Proud of Inheritance—A New Land, Life and People,' April 1962, 3; 'Britons to the Fore in Elizabeth City Council [are] "More 'Aussie' than I am" [says] Mayor', April 1966, 2; and 'Mr Britain becomes Mr Australia', April 1966, 8.

⁴⁷ Richard Boyer, *The Australian Good Neighbour Movement—Past and Present* (Canberra: Government Printer, 1957), 7–11.

these people', she then confessed 'I am frightened too', although quickly added 'but I expect that most migrants feel like myself when they first come, and I guess it won't last for long in happy Australia'.⁴⁸ And this was the point Boyer sought to drive home: that

migrant reception and care should never replace or indeed exceed the Australian character of our welcome, [that the] assimilation objective is not just to ensure that the newcomer is contented, comfortable and well occupied—but that he is indeed finding his comfort and well-being in a community which is distinctively Australian ... we should not underestimate the real cultural values of our Australian life ... Each good Neighbour Council should be a centre not only of loving-kindness and goodwill to strangers, but of enthusiasm for our British inheritance and for the wholesome Australian characteristics which, with all our limitations, we have grafted onto that inheritance.⁴⁹

Mrs Porritt was imaged both as an example of British inheritance embraced and Australian culture successfully grafted.

Australian culture successfully grafted

The portrayal of 'happy Australia' and of 'Australian culture successfully grafted' was a crucial part of the narrative surrounding the arrival of the millionth migrant. Coverage of Mrs Porritt's arrival in *Good Neighbour* and other newspapers provided a series of interrelated lessons in 'the Australian way of life' at a time when cultural values and 'way of life' became central for positing national distinctiveness. While largely ambiguous, if not contrived, a homogenous 'way of life' imagined as distinctly Australian could be an effective assimilatory tool in the face of increased immigration.⁵⁰ As a recruit to and recruiting agent for this way of life, Mrs Porritt arrived at what was in many respects a key moment of articulation of this concept.

This was evident in many areas of social commentary and analysis (in 1953 alone, as White noted, three significant interpretations appeared, and throughout the 1950s the concept was central to discussions of Australian society),⁵¹ but particularly in relation to immigration. In 1950 *Good Neighbour* approvingly quoted Minister Holt's assertion that 'we can only achieve our goal through migration if our newcomers quickly become Australian in outlook and way of life'.⁵² Just prior to the Porritt's departure in 1954, *Good Neighbour* featured on its front page a prominently displayed slogan at Australia House, London:

⁴⁸ National Newsreel footage, November 1955, Cinesound Review no. 1255, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

⁴⁹ Boyer, 8–9.

⁵⁰ Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688–1980* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), 158–71.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 158–9.

⁵² *GN*, August 1950, 1.

'The Australian Way of Life as seen by Her Majesty the Queen can be yours ... as the Modern Emigrant'.⁵³

Marketing a set of values and mode of living imagined as distinctly Australian was a central task of the Good Neighbour movement. In his 1957 Citizenship Convention speech, Boyer stated that the Australian experience in migration had been that 'newcomers ... are eager, sometimes pathetically eager, to find in the Australian way of life a set of values, a new centre of pride and patriotism around which a life of dignity may be built; and [that] the task of such interpretation is basic to the Good Neighbour'.⁵⁴ Yet this 'new' set of values, particularly as imagined by Good Neighbours, was often socially and culturally conservative. As Murphy has argued, when post-war Australians spoke of their way of life they were engaging in a nationalist imagining and producing a way of measuring national belonging that involved a "mainstream" conception of the nation, with the private, inner-directed values that gave domesticity and citizenship their middle-class meanings at its core'.⁵⁵ Described as 'a miracle for this kind of world' and 'what was "at stake" in the Cold War', the Australian way of life was imagined by conservatives as a synonym for a US-allied 'freedom', a national egalitarian unity and domestic happiness.⁵⁶ Conscripted for these purposes, the Porritt story involved an imagining of national unity primarily defined in terms of middle-class consumption and domesticity.

Particularly significant in this respect is the way *Good Neighbour*, and other newspapers, put considerable emphasis on the provision of a home for Mr and Mrs Porritt (see figure 3). Part of the State Electricity Commission's obligation under the employer nomination scheme, it is telling that the provision of space for the couple outweighs original descriptions of their place of origin. Thus, while at first it appears that *Good Neighbour* considered it important that readers know where she comes from in Britain—Miss Barbara Anne Wood of 28 Greenlands Road, Redcar, Yorkshire—the fact that is really focused upon is that it is 'ten miles from the birthplace of Captain Cook'. Set up as following in the footsteps of Cook, it is only the fact of this link that is emphasised. No detailed knowledge of her hometown or family is considered relevant. We are told of no family that she leaves behind, no special places or buildings, no memories, no sense of place, nothing that might tie her to Britain.⁵⁷ What is necessary is that Mrs Porritt is available to have herself and her 'Britishness' re-placed. This is a story about Australia's future not her past.

Concurrently, even before her arrival, her prospective home, in a new industrial village in the Latrobe Valley, is covered in detail. The house is described and photographed; the neighbours are interviewed and assure the readers that she

⁵³ Ibid., April 1954, 1.

⁵⁴ Boyer, 11.

⁵⁵ Murphy, 74, and more generally 66–77.

⁵⁶ White, 158–61.

⁵⁷ *GN*, October 1955, 1.

will like her new home, that she will be surrounded by good neighbours. And from both *Good Neighbour* and other newspaper coverage,⁵⁸ one gets the sense that Mrs Porritt had better be well satisfied, and had better prefer it to what the paper describes as 'those depressing coal mining towns' in Britain. Subjected to the condescension of an imagined prosperity—this lucky woman with good neighbours and a new house—Mr and Mrs Porritt, it is clear, will simply begin the Australian way of life in their new home in Newborough. They will live a comfortable, secure, suburban existence, gradually endowing their home through the fruits of Mr Porritt's labour for the SEC and the domestic accomplishments of Mrs Porritt.

For domesticity, as Murphy noted in his analysis of 'the pursuit of private happiness', was the locale in which Australia's prosperous post-war way of life would be consumed.⁵⁹ Seeing the Porritt's new home in a model town in the Latrobe Valley was closely related to the image of Australia as a (sub)urban consumer society. As White has argued, 'the familiar picture of suburban family life, with its focus on home and garden, and on a catalogue of family possessions ... was the basis of post-war affluence and the vast new consumer economy'.⁶⁰

Consolidated as a universal ideal in the 1950s and 1960s, this vision of Australian suburban life was founded on themes of security and stability. It reflected also, however, a desire for 'progress'. Although ambiguously constituted, this was nevertheless a 'catchword' or vision that 'captured the urgency, the optimism, the exciting potency of the new age'.⁶¹ Such a vision was crucial to the needs of the Australian manufacturing sector, which was increasingly aligning itself with the USA rather than Britain. It registered a form of turning away from British toward American influences: setting a 'depressing' life of British shortages and restrictions against the imagined glamour and affluence of American consumerism. Seen on television after 1956, the American lifestyle rather than the British provided the standard against which Australia measured its 'way of life'.⁶² In 1949, for example, a government think-tank, chaired by the retailer G.J. Coles, demanded 'the American attitude of mind... leaders who can bring the nation to a new way of life' (and were able to comment with satisfaction fifteen years later on 'houses comprehensively equipped with the labour-saving and entertainment-giving "gadgets"'); and in 1951 the Official Commemorative Book for the Commonwealth Jubilee illustrated its article on the Australian way of life with photographs of the major city department stores. The largest of Melbourne's retailing outlets, the Myer Department Store, was the location for a major event in Mrs Porritt's welcome itinerary. Placed at the centre of the 'Myer Pageant of

⁵⁸ See also, for example, *Argus*, 10 November 1955, 6.

⁵⁹ Murphy, 29, and more generally 13–30.

⁶⁰ White, 164.

⁶¹ Grace Karskens, *Holroyd: A Social History of Western Sydney* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1991), 9.

⁶² White, 162.

Nations', Mrs Porritt is not just the normative national type but stands also for a way of life that is crucial to a broader re-construction of post-war Australian identity (see figure 4).

Brown has argued that the consumer also provided a common point of reference for a society that sought to move beyond concepts of class to concentrate on personal economic freedom and 'abstract figure[s] in an abstract market'.⁶³ Figured this way, those participating in the Australian way of life were imagined to be part a united, egalitarian and classless society.⁶⁴ Like the overwhelmingly middle-class membership, social aspirations and values of the broader Good Neighbour movement,⁶⁵ *Good Neighbour's* coverage of Mr and Mrs Porritt occludes any overt discussion of their socio-economic status or background in order to naturalise forms of private as well as social and community life imagined as the 'natural' way of life of the post-war nation.

In a related fashion, the coverage is imbued with an idea of domesticity and 'feminine' home values as a means of securing social cohesion. This focus saw the partial supersession of a formerly masculine rhetoric of national identity by a new emphasis on modes of belonging that were less explicitly imperial or nationalistic and more inward-looking. Emphasising the domestic and private characteristics of national life, this imagined national community was gendered in specific ways: more feminine than it had been, privileging hearth and home, and in certain respects domesticating national identity. Wendy Webster has shown how such representations worked in immigration discourse in Britain, suggesting that 'the foregrounding of domesticity worked to suggest "immigrants" as people who did not belong in Britain' and 'whites as *settlers* who belonged [in dominions or colonies] through a network of attachments to their families and to the land that they owned and cultivated'.⁶⁶ In ways similar to the use of the idea of a 'little England' against a black migrant 'other'—'an "other" perceived as a stranger to those customs and conventions taken to be at the heart of Britishness itself'⁶⁷—it could be argued that in Australia also, the incorporation into the story of the nation of a white woman was used to represent the values of the 'hearth' against 'immigrants'.

By emphasising her placement at home, Mrs Porritt can be seen as a 'lynchpin of suburbia', as an agent of stabilisation in an era of change, who signifies not only familiar domesticity but also steady community as she settles

⁶³ Brown, 88–9, cited in Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1981), 79.

⁶⁴ White, 161. White quotes a 1955 Australian News and Information Bureau pamphlet that states 'throughout this wide-ranging land ... people are united in customs, character and tradition. Few are so rich that they need not work; none so poor that he cannot enjoy recreation', *Australia: Portrait of a Nation* (Canberra: The Bureau, 1955), 16.

⁶⁵ Tavan, 84.

⁶⁶ Wendy Webster, "'There'll Always Be an England": Representations of Colonial Wars and Immigration, 1948–1968', *Journal of British Studies* 40 (October 2001): 557–84.

⁶⁷ Chris Waters, "'Dark Strangers" and in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947–1963', *Journal of British Studies* 36 (April 1997): 208.

into a 'model' town.⁶⁸ For, in *Good Neighbour* coverage there is also an emphasis on her joining a decentralised regional community. This can be understood in light of arguments that the post-war emphasis on individual consumption also required closer scrutiny of this individualised social behaviour, and a conceptual shift from managing national development to governing disparate social change in what was now a seemingly inherently selfish society.⁶⁹ Local community formation could be a means of establishing the capacity for self-government and the regulation of subjectivity through relations between the citizen and state.⁷⁰

As a 'citizen-in-community',⁷¹ the location of her new life in the industrial Latrobe Valley was an important component of her story. Meredith Fletcher has described the development of the Latrobe Valley and particularly the Yallourn area in relation to the state's requirements for non-imported fuel resources.⁷² Thus, media coverage of the Porritt story functioned not only to showcase Australian industry—to appropriate Mr Porritt for the 'vital' project of post-war reconstruction⁷³—but to promote a decentralist ethic that grew out of concern about lingering economic depression in rural Australia and the prospect of protracted economic decline unless regional settlement, production and marketing issues were addressed.⁷⁴ Placing Mrs Porritt within the Newborough-Yallourn community testified to the belief that decentralisation would create 'social amenable and contented' citizens. Promoting or, indeed, creating a sense of community, not seen as pre-existing, it was argued would give 'the individual an opportunity to contribute—to think, to take part in discussion, in decision making and in action—and that makes him feel he matters in the scheme of things'.⁷⁵ Various organizations, conferences and publications promoted these themes,⁷⁶ which were also intrinsic to the Good Neighbour movement, and emphasised in its national annual gatherings and the activities and growth of its many branches and allied community organizations.

⁶⁸ See Murphy's related argument that 'sentiments about domesticity shaped ideas about what it was to be a citizen, and what it was to be a member of the national community', 1; see also Brett's analysis of the attention Menzies gave to women and home, 51–9.

⁶⁹ Brown, 101.

⁷⁰ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1989); and, for discussion of the Australian context for such developments, Brown, 166–8.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷² Fletcher, 138 and *passim*.

⁷³ Fletcher has demonstrated that planning for the Yallourn area was directly influenced by the works such as F.O. Barnett, W.O. Burt and F. Heath, *We Must Go On: A Study of Planned Reconstruction and Housing* (Melbourne: Book Depot, 1944). See Fletcher, 121, 138.

⁷⁴ Brown, 147.

⁷⁵ A.J.A. Nelson, 'Developing the Small Community,' *Start Now: Victorian Community Development Manual* (Melbourne: Develop Victoria Council, 1958), 16; quoted in Brown, 152.

⁷⁶ These include the activities of the Develop Victoria Council formed in 1956, the annual conferences held by this group, and the *Start Now: Victorian Community Development Manual*, first published in 1958. Brown discusses these various decentralisation promotions, 150–5.

Central to the Good Neighbour movement also was the role women played in this imagination of post-war decentralised communities. Women's imagined 'innate' capacities for sustenance and organization were attributed particular value in constituting and maintaining community.⁷⁷ Thus, it was argued by 'progressive' planners, life away from urban centres would need to be made attractive to women through the improvement of domestic, commercial and entertainment services in order to successfully create and maintain community life.⁷⁸ As mentioned above, it was no accident that Australia had a 'Mrs' and not a 'Mr' or even a 'Miss Million'. Married women were central to the projection of an Australian way of life through their imagined role as the consumers of goods for family, garden and home. Paying scant attention to the fact of women's work outside the home and of the high numbers who remained unmarried,⁷⁹ immigration planners increasingly focused on family formation and the selection of single women intended for marriage or married women as dependants.⁸⁰ It is certainly doubtful whether these planners, or *Good Neighbour*, would have been willing to countenance the possibility that 'our girl in a million' might be a careerist or 'modern woman' about town. *Good Neighbour*, while acknowledging briefly that Mrs Porritt would work as a stenographer for the SEC, passed over this fact swiftly with the emphasis in the paper being that she was a 'former stenographer'

⁷⁷ See, for example, Good Neighbour Council of Victoria, *Annual Report 1959–1960* (Melbourne: The Council, 1960), 11; *GN*, October 1964, 1 and November 1962, 2. To say that these capacities were 'imagined' is not to say they did not exist; women's domestic and neighbourly activities were clearly crucial to the establishment of a sense of communal identity. See, for example, Deborah Chambers, 'A Stake in the Country: Women's Experiences of Suburban Development,' in *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997), 86–107; and Peel, 121–34. Peel emphasises that the role played by working class women in Elizabeth was central rather than secondary *because* 'they were centred on home and neighbourhood' and because theirs was 'the harder task of translating wages into outcomes,' 126–7.

⁷⁸ See Brown, 152. See also, however, Chambers' argument that such publicity was aimed at men rather than women, with suburbia 'represented as the object of men's desire as father, husband, owner of property and the family,' 88.

⁷⁹ White, 165.

⁸⁰ By 1955 the post-war intake of migrant men outnumbered women by 125,696 and, as a result of the 1954 Census, much coverage was given to this fact in the broader press. The *Sun's* comment on the arrival of Mrs Porritt, for example, was 'But we want more women,' 7 November 1955, 18. On the one hand, they argued, Australia required more women as textile workers, domestics, hospital workers, office workers and stenographers. But they also echoed church and government officials who worried about 'evils which arise from migration without a balance of the sexes' and of the privations of the 'migrant without a girl'. According to the *Sun*, single women were required to calm the 'paranoid' passions and desires of those migrants whom 'our Australian girls' were rejecting. 'It's as simple as this,' the *Sun* told its readers in 1956, 'Sydney and Brisbane girls love the surf. Migrant men are bewildered by it and when they do seek to show off in it often need the assistance of the big bronzed lifesavers. [And] in Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, a man who cannot discuss the finer points of Australian Rules football is under an enormous handicap in female company,' 27 October 1956, 18. While one suspects the *Sun* did not have the 'paranoid' passions of the Yorkshire-born in mind, given such circumstances, one might surmise that it was fortuitous for both Mr and Mrs Porritt that they married before arrival! See also Z. Kunek, 'Brides, Wives and Single Women: Gender and Immigration', *Lilith* 8 (Summer 1993): 82–113.

now embarking on married life.⁸¹ Failing to broach or mention her own needs or preferences, and having seen Mrs Porritt over the threshold of her new home, the papers stated: 'It's over and now Mrs Million is home' (see figure 5). And it was quite literally as far as the media were concerned. With Mrs Porritt in place, the papers seemed to say, 'and now to the next million'. Released from their embrace, Mrs Porritt disappeared.

Home is where you make it

In February 2002 I was able to meet Barbara Porritt and interview her and Dennis Porritt at length about what they described as 'the millionth business'. I had read already the extensive coverage of their arrival, and had been left wondering what she was thinking at the moment captured by the 'it's over' photo. Were they tears of joy, apprehension, sadness or simply relief, I asked myself, that she brushed from her face as she was carried over the threshold of her new home in Australia? What had it been like to be on the receiving end of such acts of national definition?

It was apparent as soon as I spoke to Barbara and Dennis that they understood the way in which the millionth business had worked. Dennis recognised that they were offered the opportunity 'because we were just getting married and were a young couple, the sort of people they were trying to attract to Australia then'. Having applied to migrate to Australia and then been informed by officials that the situation was coming up, they were interviewed at the employment exchange in Middlesbrough and subsequently told of the publicity plans.

Nevertheless, Barbara reflected that they were in no way prepared for the extent of media attention. While it remained relatively non-intrusive while they were preparing to leave England, there were some indications of what was to come. Barbara recalled an occasion when 'they came to the house and this woman wanted a photo of me packing, and she literally emptied the suitcase and had strewn it all over'. She confessed that this made her 'really cranky', and reflected that they showed little consideration to the fact that she was 'all het up prior to getting married and the fact that we were coming out to Australia'. 'You know, we were just on edge', she explained, 'and they don't think, they just think of themselves, and that's why I think I've wanted to remain [distant from media attention]'. 'When we look back', Barbara stated, we feel that 'they really spoil the wedding in a way because they were there in the background all the

⁸¹ Mrs Porritt relates an interesting extra dimension to her placement with the SEC, which she maintains was never discussed with her prior to arrival in Australia. Rejecting the idea she could be employed merely on the basis that she was the millionth migrant rather than on her own merit, she refused to take up the position and found work herself in a solicitor's office. To some extent this reflects Fletcher's observations of the extent to which the SEC attempted to determine the roles of women as well as men in the Yallourn area as a means of creating 'units of purpose' and a 'harmonious whole'. See Fletcher, 66–77, 84.

time'. They were also upset about the effects on their broader family coming to terms with their emigration. In particular, Barbara was angered that her mother had been given a false impression that she had been in tears when she left the docks at Tilbury and also that they had disparaged life in England. 'I'd shed all my tears when I left Mum that morning', she stated, and 'we never ever said we were glad to get out of there. We just said we came because we felt we might perhaps better ourselves and because there might be more opportunity. But they [the media] projected it all wrong.'

Nor did they feel there was an adequate attempt to equip them for the far greater media presence on their arrival in Australia. While both Dennis and Barbara stated that, as individuals, the officials they dealt with such as the ship's captain and Minister Holt were kind and helpful, Barbara confessed that the spotlight took its toll:

The night that we arrived, we'd had a really terrible day with everything. And I ... well it was a doctor that was in the party who came up and said 'I think you should get her out', because I just collapsed. It was just like hysteria. And I think it was because of all the attention and having to answer questions and constantly being given a microphone to say something. And I'd never done anything like that, and it was bound to tell on you.

None of which is to suggest that the Porritts were unappreciative of attempts to welcome them to Australia, and such personal emotions and events remained in the background. As indicated above, media commentary glowingly described the public performance of the young couple, who maintained an appearance of cheerful interest in all they saw. Moreover, when interviewed Barbara was at pains to emphasise her annoyance at those who 'only bring to the fore what they used to call the whingeing poms'. She sought to establish her distance from the vocal complainants 'who gave ordinary folk like us a bad name', and concurrently to acknowledge the advantages gained through their migration to Australia.

Yet, this did not mean that she immediately found her place in Australia. While Dennis's experience of industry in the Latrobe Valley was to realise 'how much Australia depended on the migrants to build up the trading exercise which was a necessity for them to become a real nation', Barbara simply and apologetically confessed that she 'hated' the house in Newborough. In particular she loathed the coal dust that made 'the whole area dirty',⁸² and admitted 'I was glad to get out of there'. 'That house, it just reminded me of the prefabricated places they had after the war in England', she stated. Imported from England by the Victorian Railways, initially in a scheme dubbed 'Operation Snail', these houses had been designed by Australian architects in components 'ideal for manufacturing and distribution purposes' but un-suited to local conditions. As Fletcher bluntly stated: 'In order to attract tradesmen, the SEC had promised migrant workers a roof over their heads, and that is what they got at Newborough'.⁸³

⁸² On the extent and effects of this coal dust, see Fletcher, 82–3, 114.

⁸³ Fletcher, 149–51.

With its hastily assembled dwellings that were inhabited before facilities and amenities were completed, and with minimal assistance provided by way of maintenance or landscaping, it is not surprising that the Porritts found it starkly new, 'impermanent' and 'difficult to settle into'. 'I would have hated my mother to have come and stayed there', Barbara observed.

The Porritts also found it uncondusive to settlement because 'everybody else was a migrant', for in Newborough in 1956 only eight per cent of residents had lived there for seven years or more.⁸⁴ While many at Newborough were British migrants, the Porritts noted that even among this group of mainly skilled carpenters, electricians and fitters, 'the whole discussion was of "back home", of life "back in the old dart"'. Isolated, and with little inclination to take up the offer of purchasing their home through a scheme introduced in 1956 as the SEC tried to divest itself of responsibility for the houses,⁸⁵ like many other migrants the Porritts discovered that Australia would not immediately 'offer you everything'.

Nor, of course, would it immediately offer a home, understood not just as a physical space, but a place that provided a sense of belonging. 'In the early years', Barbara confessed, 'I was terribly homesick because we didn't know a soul'. Coming from a closely-knit family, she wrote to her mother every week from the time she left, and both Dennis and Barbara felt the responsibility of leaving family behind. Barbara felt saddened that as her mother grew older they 'no longer really connected' and that when she returned towards the end of her life 'she really didn't know us'. It was at such times especially that they re-thought their migration. 'I don't doubt that like everyone else we have said it, "We shouldn't have come"', Barbara stated: 'especially when my mum was ill. We went back and she was not expected to live, we dropped everything, I felt terrible'.

'But then I look at it', she continued, 'and think, well, things would have been a lot different'. And in many respects the most lasting impression gained from meeting Barbara and Dennis was of the deep satisfaction of establishing a family in Australia and of the subsequent connections woven between their families in Britain and Australia. For, while Barbara returned to Britain for six months after the birth of her first daughter in 1960, she had made a decision to reject requests to again put the family in the spotlight on this occasion, and to keep it a more private and family affair. This coincided with a move to Canberra that enabled them to establish a permanent home, a family and sense of place. In this respect the experience of the Porritts reflects an 'interiority'—a drive to fill the inconsonance between place and space domestically—common to much British experience of migration.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Settlers of the Latrobe Valley: A Sociological Study of Immigrants in the Brown Coal Industry of Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1964), 12–24.

⁸⁵ See Fletcher, 150.

⁸⁶ This 'interiority' has also been noted by Jim Hammerton, who has argued that it is reflected psychologically in the way migration structures and organises the narration of a consistent and un-fragmented self among interviewees. Paper delivered by Jim Hammerton, 'Gender, Family and Decision-Making in Narratives of British Migration to Australia, 1947–1961,' Australian Modern British History Association Biennial Conference, La Trobe University, Bundoora, 4–6 February 2001.

Once the Porritt's home was established, visits between family living in England and Australia became frequent, culminating in the migration of Dennis's mother and sisters to Australia. In this respect migration has been a key part of the family history. Yet it is this establishment of family, the weaving of links between two homes, rather than 'the millionth business', that has real meaning for Dennis and Barbara. Barbara in particular was keen to downplay the significance in her life of her role as Australia's millionth migrant. What she wanted to emphasise was that 'my home's in Australia now because my kids are here. And I still maintain that home is where you make it. I still say that'.⁸⁷

Bringing out the migrant in a Briton

That what was important about Mrs Porritt's arrival in a national context was not her personal story is in some respects understandable. That the *Age* focused on 'the remarkable feat represented by the event', which was merely 'perpetuated by an arbitrarily selected figure who happened to be a good looking young woman', perhaps should not surprise either. The *Age* reminded its readers that the reason Australia should be proud of its millionth migrant, despite being 'expensive to install', was that migrants as a whole are 'tremendous productive assets once they are installed ... and above all increase the size of this underpopulated country toward the point where a degree of security is established'.⁸⁸

Security in identity was the main reason for the embrace and installation of migrant Britons, which took on a new urgency and poignancy in the minds of immigration planners. It was not so long after the arrival of Mrs Porritt that the Immigration Department launched its 'Bring out a Briton' campaign, encouraging wider personal and group nomination of British migrants. In the advertisement for the scheme featured in *Good Neighbour*, a kangaroo pulls over a dinghy of 'belongings' at the top of which is perched a woman who serves as little more than ornament, almost as another one of the belongings. The woman is a belonging of the man in the boat, but both appear to be a belonging of the kangaroo making great efforts to tug them in (see figure 6). Like Mrs Porritt and many other British migrants, they arrive in Australia as Australian belongings. 'People are capital', the advertisement stated, 'Bring out a Briton—help to develop Australia'.⁸⁹

However, the experience of belonging in Australia often was not a ready one for many British migrants. That Mrs Porritt has made her home in Australia is beyond doubt. Yet it is necessary to acknowledge that she made rather than found it. Over time, *Good Neighbour* began to recognise this fact: to discuss

⁸⁷ Interview with Barbara and Dennis Porritt, 7 February 2002, Canberra.

⁸⁸ *Age*, 8 November 1955, 2.

⁸⁹ For the advertisement, see *GN*, June 1958, 3. On the 'Bring Out a Briton' campaign more generally, see the following *GN* issues: March 1957, 1–2; May 1957, 1; July 1957, 1; August 1957, 1–2; February 1962, 1; August 1962, 4–5.

(though often counter) letters of frustration and/or complaint and to organise a broader range of services for British migrants.⁹⁰ Three months after the arrival of Mrs Porritt, however, it preferred to warn all migrants against becoming 'victims of innerness', which were described and chastised in the paper's 'Neighbourly Note' column. The column advised newcomers that they 'must conform or convert' and 'realise that it is not what he or she was, but what he or she is that counts with Australians'.⁹¹ Not only did this contravene what many British migrants had been led to expect, but also it rendered invisible the broader experiences of migrants for whom bouts of homesickness and doubts about their migration were perfectly understandable. From the perspective of other interviews with migrant Britons, my sense is that this often happened to British migrants because they were considered to be willing, welcome and easily assimilated.⁹²

Mark Peel has noted that although British migrants were certainly not subject to the same assimilationist demands made upon other migrants, they were not thereby 'rendered native'.⁹³ Yet this is what *Good Neighbour* attempted: to render Britons such as Mrs Porritt 'native'. Making British assimilatory experiences visible, exploring the consequences of this rendering, and the suppression of British migrancy—the failure to ask questions about the experiences of Britons who were personally subject and object of identity 're-placement'—may play a role in understanding contemporary modes of inhabiting a 'new' country. While it is hard to assert that British migrants deserve greater attention when faced by those who experience the lingering hostility of White Australia and those

⁹⁰ In fact *GN* consistently sought to underplay or dismiss the concerns of those who returned by countering with articles on those who migrated to Australia a second time. See, for example: 'Only Minority "Disillusioned",' August 1967, 8; 'These are All "Second-Timers",' and '"Back Home" Not as She Remembered It,' May 1955, 6; 'Our Higher Wages Brought Them Back,' July 1955, 5.

⁹¹ *GN*, February 1956, 5.

⁹² See also Joynson, 5, 6, 8, 20.

⁹³ Peel, 115. Peel's point is not to argue that British migrants were worse off than other migrants, but for the disservice done to the experience of migrants in 'accounts ranging from anecdotal whimsy to an almost hostile dismissal of migrant Britons as the pampered beneficiaries of Australia's cultural cringe,' 114. Fortunately this disservice is being redressed through the work of social historians such as Jim Hammerton, Alistair Thompson, Carole Hamilton Barwick and, less explicitly, Peel himself. British migrant status has also been addressed by cultural analysts who claim to reveal a group of people who feel unanchored or more peripheral citizens as a result of changes in British migrants' status under recent governments. These migrants, it is argued, have subsequently begun a process of a 'self-ethnicisation', which also has the effect of deconstructing the core/periphery system of official multiculturalism by differentiating between the 'core' Anglo-Celt settlers who are supposed to be less migrants than other Australians, and those who self-consciously claim some form of British identity. In other words the self-ethnicisation of the British is upsetting the claim to a homogenous Australian culture that can be set against a variety of migrant or ethnic cultures. I think these arguments rather overstate the impact of the 'professional' British in Australia, and believe that the dominance of the 'Anglo-Celt' identity will not unravel through the assertion of 'multicultural difference' but through the acknowledgement of migrant status—the quality of having arrived. See, Jon Stratton, 'Not Just Another Multicultural Story: The English from "Fitting In" to Self-Ethnicisation,' *Journal of Australian Studies* 66 (2000): 23–47; Wills and Darian-Smith.

whose journeys have been more materially desperate or politically driven, there are good reasons for doing this. To watch with dispassion the Australian embrace of Mrs Porritt, to disentangle the narratives and make her migration her own, is to unravel a cohesive strand in Australian identity construction that has been too unproblematically a part of Australian history. To dispossess the celebrated nation of its too comfortably assimilatory history of migrant Britons illuminates the more unsettled processes of arriving and being in Australia, and may open the way for new and much-needed discussions of the failures of national belonging.

Such failures have tended to impact most critically on those non-British migrants whose stories were either ignored or appropriated for the multicultural fantasies of a 'white nation'.⁹⁴ But it also affected British migrants who were often subject to processes in which their past was used by 'neighbours' seeking to assure themselves of their own identity. Even among those who might seem the least 'different', the nature of the welcoming embrace—the boundaries between being and becoming 'Australian' and the meaning of assimilation—was fraught. For them, the issue was still an Australian nationalist fantasy in which 'we' welcomed (or did not welcome) 'them' (and their 'differences'). Taking the millionth migrant as an example clearly reveals these processes at work. Today Mrs Porritt is subject to revisionist processes that continue to ignore her own experience and focus on her role in the creation of an exclusive sense of post-war national belonging. Thus a photograph of Mrs Porritt now features in the Australian National Museum as an early exercise in post-war immigration marketing. As celebrated but also carefully constructed and monitored 'ideal types', the experience of migrants such as Mrs Porritt expose the kinds of processes still at work in the foundational myths of nationhood and belonging commemorated in 2001.

The six millionth ...

At the end of his survey of social change and analysis in Australia in the 1950s, Nicholas Brown reflected on the similarities between a contemporary mood of anxiety and 'equivalently anxious aspects of the 1950s', and concluded that new attention to citizenship and national belonging might indicate that 'traces of the 1950s are still with us or returning'.⁹⁵ He could be right. Shortly after I visited Mrs Porritt, her name appeared in the papers again. With the arrival in Sydney of Australia's six millionth migrant, Cristina Jurado from the Philippines, Mrs Porritt was invoked as a means of charting the cultural and social differences between the 1950s and the present. Then we had the White Australia Policy and assimilation, now we have 'enlightened multiculturalism', the editor of the *Australian* opined. Having dispatched with Mrs Porritt in this manner, both

⁹⁴ Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1998).

⁹⁵ Brown, 205.

the editorial and another article in the same paper emphasised the twenty-nine-year-old Ms Jurado's skills as a computer systems analyst with fluent English. They indicated that Ms Jurado, accompanied by two young children and a husband who was a production engineer, was 'looking ahead' to home ownership and citizenship.⁹⁶ The Minister for Immigration, Philip Ruddock, issued a press release stating that 'the arrival of Mrs Jurado and her family is an example of Australia's multiculturalism and cultural diversity, which is at the heart of our nation's strength'. The Minister stressed that she arrived as part of a program that is 'well targeted, meeting Australia's labour market and economic needs', and as part of the Government's commitment 'to promote multiculturalism as a unifying force in Australian society'.⁹⁷

Such emphases suggest obvious parallels with the arrival of Mrs. Porritt. Ms Jurado arrived similarly at a time of anxiety about migration, culture and identity. In the wake of the government-manufactured asylum seeker 'crisis', and at a time when sociologists warned that increased migrant settlement in Sydney was causing a 'cultural divide', Ms Jurado was welcomed as the model of a skilled migrant who would not impose costs on the nation. Thus, while critical of the government's treatment of asylum seekers, the *Australian* chose also to emphasise the economic benefits of skilled migration and that

discriminatory immigration policies or rules about where migrants should settle are no substitute for sound free-market policies that promote regional economic development ... Our large percentage of foreign-born residents and our geographical proximity to Asia, enables us to maximise the benefits of globalisation. Our migrant communities are a symbol of what makes Australia a great nation.⁹⁸

Conscripted for the narration of this new version of Australian nationalism, I wonder how Ms Jurado feels about the other contexts of her arrival; about the intersection of globalisation and nationalism that results in the welcome afforded those not defined as 'invaluable assets' but as a threat to the social and cultural boundaries of this not so neighbourly nation.

⁹⁶ 'Six million migrants make us proud', *Australian*, 19 March 2002, 10; 'In immigration, Cristina's one in 6 million', *Australian*, 19 March 2002, 3.

⁹⁷ Ministerial Press Release, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 18 March 2002, MPS 012/2002; at <http://www.immi.gov.au>.

⁹⁸ *Australian*, 19 March 2002, 10, 3.

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