Dr Mandy Kretzschmar

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the evolution, functionality and versatility of constructions of the 'European' and to a lesser extent, of 'Europe, as an integral element of the larger vocabulary of Australian identity formation in press discourses of the 1920s and 1960s. Knowledge of the *Other(s)* and oneself as Australian was (and still is) generated through the processes of minority representation and categorisation. This knowledge germinated within, and was disseminated by, the Australian printed press that served as a preliminary arena within which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion to the imagined national community were drawn. Assessing the press correspondents' deployment of the 'European' and the labels' underpinning attributions, this thesis reveals that the 'European' did not fit neatly into a Manichean divide where representation is constructed through opposition. In contrast to other classifications – 'white' and 'British', in particular – the 'European' stood out as an anomalous category that offered more flexibility in that it allowed for levelling over a range of national, ethnic and cultural cleavages of those subsumed under this label. The thesis shows that it was precisely this malleability that made the 'European' a valuable means to create social cohesion.

This thesis is essentially an investigation into how press correspondents and readers consolidated representations of the 'European' in diverse media contexts to suit contemporary political imperatives. The analysis is sectioned between two decisive periods of radical social and cultural change in Australia that are characterised by intensified nation building. The first section examines the media debates on the settlement of tropical Australia, Southern European immigration and the administration of Australia's territorial dependencies Papua and New Guinea. In each debate, the 'European' emerges as a discursive tool to alternatively describe the multi-ethnic community residing in the north, members of the expatriate community, or dissecting the term along geographical (and assumed racial) lines, as migrants from Northern or Southern Europe. The second section draws comparisons with the first by focusing on the label's deployment and attributions during Australia's transfer of power to its mandated territory of Papua New Guinea, the broadening of the national immigration policy to include European and Asian newcomers and Britain's decision to apply for entry into the European Economic Community that forced Australia to

seek new economic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region. By considering how the 'European' has been conceptualised, this thesis demonstrates the label's decisive role in creating a framework in which Australian self-understandings could be forged.