

ACCEPTED VERSION

Alexander E. Davis & Stephanie Brookes

Australian foreign policy and news media: national identity and the sale of uranium to India and China

Australian Journal of Political Science, 2016; 51(1):51-67

© 2016 Australian Political Studies Association

"This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Australian Journal of Political Science on 02 Mar 2016 available online:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2015.1093093>

PERMISSIONS

<http://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/sharing-your-work/>

Accepted Manuscript (AM)

As a Taylor & Francis author, you can post your Accepted Manuscript (AM) on your personal website at any point after publication of your article (this includes posting to Facebook, Google groups, and LinkedIn, and linking from Twitter). To encourage citation of your work we recommend that you insert a link from your posted AM to the published article on [Taylor & Francis Online](#) with the following text:

"This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in [JOURNAL TITLE] on [date of publication], available online: [http://www.tandfonline.com/\[Article DOI\]](http://www.tandfonline.com/[Article DOI])."

For example: *"This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in Africa Review on 17/04/2014, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/12345678.1234.123456>."*

N.B. Using a real DOI will form a link to the Version of Record on [Taylor & Francis Online](#).

The AM is defined by the [National Information Standards Organization](#) as:
"The version of a journal article that has been accepted for publication in a journal."

This means the version that has been through peer review and been accepted by a journal editor. When you receive the acceptance email from the Editorial Office we recommend that you retain this article for future posting.

Embargoes apply if you are posting the AM to an institutional or subject repository, or to academic social networks such as Mendeley, ResearchGate, or Academia.edu.

Embargo

[Australian Journal of Political Science](#) 18 months

31 October 2017

<http://hdl.handle.net/2440/98259>

Australian foreign policy and news media: National identity and the sale of uranium to India and China

Abstract:

This article explores the utility of a constructivist-media communications approach to understanding the production of national identity in Australia through a case study of the Australian Labor Party's 2011 decision to allow uranium sales to India. The decision came at a time when Australian foreign policy, political debate and news media discourse were increasingly concerned with India and China, as 'rising' superpowers whose prominence offered opportunities for economic prosperity even as it undermined settled regional power balances. This article finds that, rather than a matter of rational strategy, the decision was made in a context of considerable anxiety about the 'Asian century' as the Australian public, politicians and policymakers struggled to comprehend geopolitical change. It further argues that the constructivist project in international relations (IR) can benefit from engaging with insights from media and communications methodologies and by taking a less hierarchical approach to 'elite' and 'non-elite' discursive agency.

Keywords: Australian foreign policy; media and communications; constructivism; identity

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to acknowledge the advice given by anonymous referees and early readers of this research [[identifying information removed]].

Constructivist scholars of IR have recently begun to reconsider the role the media plays in shaping identity and foreign policy and international politics.¹ Within this scholarship, little has been written on the Australian context. In this article, we consider the position of the news media as mediators of ‘elite’ and ‘non-elite’ discourse in Australia. We argue for an approach that sees both as powerful (although not always equally so) and mutually constituted elements of a dynamic, complex communications environment. We illustrate this approach through a case study of Australian print media coverage of the Australian Labor Party’s (ALP) November 2011 decision to allow uranium sales to India, taken at its triennial National Conference. The conference has traditionally operated as a space in which the Labor Party’s policy positions, priorities, and values are debated. It is regularly attended by Labor party politicians, members and supporters as well as representatives from business and union groups, and attracts considerable media coverage. We are not concerned with the strategic value of the decision to sell uranium to India *per se*, but focus on the ideational and discursive space that facilitated the decision and the media’s role in constructing a cohesive account of Australia’s foreign policy. Multiple, competing and overlapping ‘identity’ narratives can be identified in Australian political history. These narratives have defined the nation as multicultural, English-speaking, Asian, democratic, traditional, conservative, neoliberal, socialist, rationalist, moral, colonial, postcolonial, and a ‘creative’ middle power. Policy options are therefore shaped by the conceptions emphasised in the public, political and media discourse at a particular time. This paper undertakes a media discourse analysis, revealing that the decision to sell uranium to India was taken in an ideational context of anxiety about the ‘rise’ of Asia’s ‘giants’ China and India. As a secondary concern, we argue that theoretical engagement between social constructivism and media and communications can assist our understanding of identity construction and foreign policy.

¹ For various examples, see: Turner 2014, Seethaler *et. al.* 2013, Pan 2012, Jackson 2005, Miskimmon *et. al.* 2013.

Constructivism, Identity and Media Discourse

Much constructivist IR (with the exception of social constructivism) has neglected non-elite discourse.² Its most common form, ‘Wendtian’ constructivism has followed neorealist and neoliberal scholarship in seeing IR as having fixed units of influence and limited, elite-centred human agency. This focus on policy elites is also reflected in critical constructivist scholarship (despite its critique of Wendt’s state-centred vision of identity politics). This is perplexing, because a less hierarchical account of the formation of identity, which places ‘elite’ and ‘non-elite’ opinion in the same ideational space with identities flowing ‘up’ and ‘down’ between ‘them (Mandaville 2002), is an established position in a range of disciplines that constructivists draw on for theoretical insights (such as anthropology, sociology and cultural studies). Social constructivists, led by Ted Hopf (2002), have sought remedy this omission by engaging with popular discourse and undertaking some limited analysis of media sources. We seek to extend this here, intervening by suggesting that constructivism can benefit from media and communications approaches to the study of foreign policy and identity.

Though virtually all IR scholarship engages with media coverage or institutions in some capacity, the role that the media play in constructing state identity has only recently been scrutinised. Furthermore, Alister Miskimmon and colleagues (2013) have recently argued that communications as a discipline can make important contributions to IR. Following their work, and that of social constructivists, we argue that the media interprets foreign policy choices outside of interpreting external strategic narratives. In our case study, media narratives of Australia’s place in the world are drawn from the same identity discourses that inform broader public and political debate. Therefore, we need to consider the media’s interpretation of both Australia’s place in the world *and* its narration of other international agents.

² See, for example, Wendt 1992. For a critique, see Ruggie 1998. For further discussions of constructivism, see Doty 1993; Reus-Smit 1997.

Foreign policy has also been considered as part of media and communications research, although the two have rarely been linked. Studies have analysed the relationship between foreign policy, news coverage and public opinion; sought to uncover the ways that news media represents links between foreign policy and national interest and evaluates the role played by national identity (e.g. Nossek 2004); analysed news and influence on domestic and foreign policy agendas;³ considered the impact of external events on coverage of foreign policy (e.g. Goodman 1999; Hou and Ma 2009; Lu 2011; Peng 2004); and questioned the influence of the news media on broader public perceptions of international allegiances and tensions (e.g. Goldsmith and Horibuchi 2010). In an analysis of the media's ability to influence both the public and policymakers, Zhang (2010: 237) argues 'there is much scope for the news media to play a role in the policymaking process'. More recently, researchers have considered the impact of new technologies and formats on these media-foreign policy relationships, notably considering the role of 'soft news' (Baum 2003) and reconceptualising the media's foreign policy agenda-setting power as the 'al Jazeera effect' (replacing the 'CNN effect') (Seib 2008).

Douglas Van Belle (2012: 286) has highlighted resonances between media and IR, identifying key research strands such as bureaucratic responsiveness to the media, agenda-setting, indexing, public opinion, and the role of changing technologies. Despite this, he correctly notes a lack of engagement between media and communications and constructivist IR: '(news) framing and constructivism appear to be estranged'. Although constructivism has generally been concerned with media texts, it has not invested in insights from media and communications theories and approaches. More importantly for this study, however, no attempt has been made to examine the connections between media and foreign policy discourse in the Australian context. We identify two key flaws in constructivist approaches to the media: the first is methodological, as constructivists have not drawn on media and communications approaches; for example, when defining samples for

³ Po-Lin Pan (2008: 31) traces this agenda-setting research from Bernard Cohen's 1963 *The Press and Foreign Policy* to Maxwell McCombs' 2004 *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. See also McCombs and Shaw's seminal 1972 study.

analysis (Vucetic 2006; Hopf 2002). The second is the frequent emphasis on a hierarchical elite/non-elite dichotomy in constructivist approaches, and is of more relevance to the analysis undertaken here.

This hierarchy of discourse can be seen in an emerging strand of constructivist work dealing with the media in new ways (Turner 2014; Seethaler *et. al.* 2013; Pan 2012; Jackson 2005; Campbell 1998). In an excellent analysis Chengxin Pan (2012: 24-25) examines the ways in which discourse on China reflects US identity, suggesting that while the mass media may be ‘the most visible outlets’ of the China threat thesis it is more important to examine it in ‘the more analytical and intellectual domain of China watching in IR’. Oliver Turner (2014: 9) explicitly avoids such a hierarchy. A more explicit example of this discursive hierarchy can be seen in Richard Jackson’s (2005: 17) theorisation of language in constructing the war on terror. Jackson locates government-generated content (‘official speeches, media interviews, press releases, radio and television addresses and articles written by leading figures in the administration’) as the most important discourse. His second and third levels of discourse comprise further government documents (Jackson 2005: 17). Outside this hierarchy, discourses ‘have to be mediated and retransmitted by other social actors; the media’ (Jackson 2005: 20). This visualisation operates akin to a caste system in which media commentators lie outside the hierarchy, and indeed have proven ‘untouchable’ for many IR researchers.

In what Simon Cottle (2009: 17) has described as ‘today’s complex journalism ecology’, the ‘enhanced connectivity, interactivity and invigoration’ of new spaces for citizen journalism and alternative perspectives calls for a reconfiguring of the relationship between elite/non-elite discourses, which we argue is not (and has never been) a simple dichotomy. Elite and non-elite discourses operate in the same ideational space, reflecting and shaping each other in different ways at different times, with definitional power flowing between the two. In this space ‘established and

dominant centres of journalism’ retain elements of their ‘capacity to authorise who enters the news domain, and how, and when’ (Cottle 2009: 17). Furthermore, if constructivists are to assume that the international structure and its actors are ‘mutually constituted’, it follows that state-level structures and their agents (those not engaged in active decision-making) are likewise mutually constituted. On this basis, we contend that the news media provides a crucial public space in which identity discourses are constructed and circulated, and plays a key role in explaining and engaging with international affairs in a way that makes sense of foreign policy for citizens and localises international politics.⁴

Narratives of Australian Identity and Foreign Policy

Coverage of the ALP’s November 2011 decision to allow the sale of uranium to India worked in the sample as a mechanism through which particular constructions of Australian national identity were developed. Two broad narratives of Australian identity and foreign policy emerge. The first, which we identify as ‘traditionalist’, sees Australia’s security as dependent on strategic alliances with the UK and US. This ‘great and powerful friends’ narrative (see Menzies 1958; Howard 2011 for political examples) relies on longstanding conceptions of Australia as a rationalist actor seeking security in a dangerous and unfamiliar region.⁵ India has been seen in an increasingly positive light within this narrative, through an emphasis on colonial legacies as causes for deeper engagement (Davis 2014). The second narrative, more prominent here, sees Australia as a ‘creative middle power’, and emphasises Australia’s active role within Asia. This narrative emphasises Australia’s ‘unique’ place in the world, due to its ‘European’ heritage and ‘Asian’ geography, its special moral responsibilities and ability to ‘punch above its weight’ in world affairs (see Rudd, 2007; Turnbull, 2015 for political examples).⁶ These Australian identity stories are deployed in diffuse manners: India’s refusal to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and pursuit of

⁴ Media and communications scholarship has considered foreign policy: see Robinson 2001 and Nacos et al 2000.

⁵ For a history of these narratives, see Walker 2002.

⁶ For an analysis of representations of ‘Asia’ in Australian political narratives, see Brookes 2012.

nuclear weapons runs counter to the multilateral streak in the ‘creative middle power’ narrative, yet selling uranium to assist a neighbour rising out of poverty appeals to this same narrative. They do not conform to partisan political divides and are not mutually exclusive, overlapping in creative, dynamic ways in political and media discourse.

We are influenced also by critical constructivist approaches to discourse analysis, which treat foreign policy as a space in which the nation’s existence and purpose is narrated to its citizens; noting, however, that such analyses have tended to focus on elite discourse. We follow David Campbell’s (1992: 4) analytical method, examining the political causes and consequences of emphasising ‘one mode of representation over another’ when defining international relationships. Within this approach, we emphasise the role of the media in ‘narrating the nation’ (Bhabha 1990), providing a space in which national identity discourses are constructed, contested, and disseminated. This is always achieved with an awareness of the ‘Others’ who lie beyond ‘our’ borders, and we are further influenced by Edward Said’s (1978) approach in *Orientalism*. In Australia’s case this manifests, as David Walker (2010: 46) has highlighted, with ‘demotic or popular’ narrations of ‘Asia’.⁷

Research Design

In order to explore representations of ‘our’ nation and the ‘others’ beyond its borders, this article undertakes a qualitative analysis of news discourse, drawing on the results of a brief content analysis to guide a more detailed discourse analysis. This approach allows a systematic mapping of news frames, genres and themes to inform exploration of the narratives of ‘self’ and ‘other’ mobilised in newspaper coverage of the ALP’s 2011 decision to end the ban on uranium sales to India (Georgakopolou and Goutsos 2004: 185). In the tradition of scholars like Teun van Dijk (1991; 1993) and Norman Fairclough (1995), this analysis works from the starting point that

⁷ See also Aly and Walker 2007; D’Cruz and Steele 2003.

discourses are historically produced and understood, and that ‘the ideologies of powerful groups’ work through discourse to legitimate power structures (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 3).

The sample is drawn from 19 daily and weekend newspapers, chosen to cover all Australian state capitals and the national capital, national and metropolitan newspapers, major newspaper owners, and both tabloid and broadsheet formats (see Figure One). The sample was compiled through a search in both *Factiva* and *Lexis-Nexis* for 2 – 8 December 2011, ensuring that it includes each day of the week.⁸ The initial search for the terms ‘uranium’ and ‘India’ in the headline, full article or both, yielded a sample of 151 articles. The unit of analysis was a single article and each was coded for a range of identifying criteria, including publication date, author, article type. Articles not related to the decision to overturn the ban on uranium sales, and those not coded as ‘news’ or ‘opinion’, were excluded. This left 132 relevant articles, which were then coded for dominant news frames (domestic, international or financial news) and their position on the decision. Finally, the sample was coded for relevant mentions of China, yielding a sub-sample of 33 articles that were the focus of discursive analysis. Here, 27 letters to the editor from within the broader sample were also considered, 7 of which mention China. This allowed moving beyond the ‘elite’ and ‘non-elite’ dichotomy to consider news media discourse as a space for the negotiation and renegotiation of identities.

Results

National newspaper *The Australian* (and *Weekend Australian*) ran the most stories covering the decision (25), while the *Hobart Mercury* (and *Sunday Tasmanian*) ran only two. When reporting the ALP’s decision, 25 per cent of articles in the broader sample mentioned China (see Figure One).⁹ News articles dominated the broader sample (67.5 per cent), with opinion pieces (25.4 per cent) and editorials (7.1 per cent) making up the remainder. However, mentions of China were more

⁸ Best practice in content analysis of daily newspapers as it accounts for the cyclical nature of coverage Riffe et al 1993.

⁹ Similarly, 26 per cent of letters contain relevant mentions China.

frequent in these opinion and editorial pieces than in news items, and as a result the sub-sample features a more even distribution (46.9 per cent news, 37.5 per cent opinion and 15.6 per cent editorial). The tone of articles was overwhelmingly neutral (77.8 per cent). However, in the sub-sample, the same percentage of articles was ‘positive’ (in support of the decision) as ‘neutral’ (43.8 per cent), suggesting that when considered in an international context, articles were far more likely to take a position. Even ‘neutral’ articles tended to fill the issue with ideational meaning through the selection of quotations and evidence. A smaller percentage of ‘negative’ articles critiqued the ALP’s decision in both the broader and sub-sample (4.8 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively).

This story was most commonly framed as domestic news, suggesting that this foreign policy choice was localised for readers, with 66 per cent of articles in the sample focusing on the political meanings of the ALP’s policy debates and decisions at their National Conference. In contrast, stories that linked the decision to China were more likely to be framed as international, with 72 per cent considering the decision in terms of Australian foreign policy. Significantly, 74.2 per cent of stories framed as international politics linked the decision to China (see Figure Two). A smaller portion of the sample (9.5 per cent) framed the decision as finance/economic news, reporting on the impact of the decision on the Australian mining industry and share prices.

‘In Between the Giants’: Constructions of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’

Our platform enables us to sell uranium to China, but not to India. Now, this is not an intellectually defensible proposition (Gillard in *Asia-Pacific Focus* 2012).

Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s widely reported argument at the ALP’s 2011 National Conference, in support of her proposal that Australia overturn the ban on uranium sales to India, was simple and concise. An open construction, it left space for media coverage and expert commentary to fill in the blanks, drawing on longheld public beliefs and assumptions to imbue the argument with a range of meanings and preconceptions. For example, the Prime Minister’s explanation hinted at rationality,

which a *The West Australian* (2011: 20) editorial paraphrased to remind its readers that it was not ‘rational’ to export to China but not India, ‘the world’s biggest democracy’. National Secretary of the Australian Workers Union, Paul Howes (2011: 90), went further, mistakenly describing China as the ‘world’s largest military dictatorship’ when supporting overturning the ban (which we will discuss below). Gillard’s description took on different meanings when interpreted through a range of media narratives, revealing the process of identity construction at play in media coverage of international affairs.

News media constructions of China and India worked in the sample as a mechanism through and against which narratives of Australian identity were constructed, contested and circulated. Both news and opinion/editorial narratives situated the decision in a framework where Australian identity formation was achieved *through* engagement with its neighbours, allies and rivals. This analysis follows Campbell (1992: 4) in examining the attempt to ‘[render] the unfamiliar in the terms of the familiar’ as a state grapples with ‘rise’ of Others in the international system. Campbell’s words are useful in considering why this was reported primarily as a local political story. Here, dual narratives of Australian identity on the world stage were developed through constructions of India and China who appear throughout the coverage as ‘giants’ (Fleming 2011: 61) whose actions and reactions Australia must manage.

A ‘Victory for Common Sense’: Rationality, Morality and Australia’s ‘Unique Responsibility’

The dual construction of Australian identity as rational and moral was most prominent in opinion and editorial pieces in the sub-sample and echoed in letters to the editor. It was used to justify Australia’s decision-making processes taking both its domestic politics and broader international responsibilities into consideration.¹⁰ Here, longstanding Australian insecurities about the nation’s ability to influence world affairs and its international reputation come into play.

¹⁰ This dual construction of Australia as simultaneously ‘rational’ and ‘moral’ also plays out in the larger sample.

Discussions of ‘rationality’ in the sample were consistently expressed through appeals to ‘common sense’, presenting Australia’s previous refusal to sell uranium to India as an ‘anomaly’ that needed correction (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2011: 10).¹¹ For example, in the *Sunday Telegraph*, Paul Howes (2011: 90) argued there was no ‘rational or acceptable reason’ not to sell uranium to India. He based this on the fact that ‘Australia currently exports uranium to China, the world’s largest military dictatorship – but will not export it to India, the world’s largest democracy.’ Similarly, a letter to the *Canberra Times* described China as a ‘police state’ in contrast to India’s democracy (Gordon 2011: 22). This relies on an evocative but misleading representation of China’s political system, because China is *not* a military dictatorship or a police state, but a one-party state or ‘communist party-state’ (Joseph 2014: 13-4). In this manner, Howes invites the audience to place China alongside the most dangerous of ‘rogue states’: ‘axis of evil’ countries like Iran and North Korea, who might commonly be referred to in such terms. A similar theme is evident in then-ALP Senator David Feeney’s approach to India, which Howes quotes to make his counter-argument. Feeney (in Howes 2011: 90) addressed the Conference in sensationalist terms, arguing: ‘if you’re going to export uranium to India, you may as well start exporting it to Iran while you’re at it’. Further to these rationalist narratives, Howes (2011: 90) argues that this decision ‘is also about maturity... Australian Labor must show it is mature enough to deal with hard issues, and to reject misplaced ideology’. This mixture of rational self-interest and morality is mobilised to argue for change, and while intellectually inconsistent, provides a clear insight into the complex narratives of Australian identity in the sample.

The modernist IR theory of realism has coloured media discourse in Australia that seeks to paint decisions as ‘rational’. In the sample, the notion that China and India are ‘the same’ leads to the ‘rational’ assumption that we should sell uranium to both or neither. In these terms, however, Australian policy is evidently ‘irrational’, as it has taken an inconsistent position. Presenting

¹¹ In the larger sample, Tony Abbott is quoted describing the decision as ‘un-stuffing a stuff-up’ (Nicholson 2011: 4).

Australia as having a rationalist foreign policy, media coverage constructed a rational, enlightened Australian self. However, these were accompanied by an always-present discourse that represented the nation as ‘moral’, relying on factors beyond the purely rational in its foreign policy decision-making. Here, while Australia is obliged to make *rational* choices, it also has a ‘unique’ *moral* obligation to control which other nations can have access to uranium, according to a set of criteria that are not (and cannot be) purely rational.

Discursive constructions of Australia as *moral* were variously expressed throughout the sample as a mechanism both to support and attack the ALP’s decision. For example, the ALP’s Peter Garrett (2011: 21; see also Sweeney 2011: 22) argued in the *Sunday Age* that Australia has a moral obligation *not* to sell uranium to India due to its ‘unique and central role in international efforts to advance nuclear disarmament’ afforded by its vast uranium reserves. Howes (2011: 90), however, presents Australia’s true moral obligation as being to support India’s ‘clean’ development, because India has ‘millions of people who have a right to safe, cheap and clean power’. Australia, here, would be supporting India’s development of clean energy and contributing to global efforts to reduce carbon emissions.¹² In addition, in helping to ‘lift hundreds of millions from poverty’, Australia is able to seize ‘an undeniable economic opportunity’ while simultaneously responding to the ‘profound moral dimension’ of its decision to sell uranium to India (*Advertiser* 2011: 16). From the opposite perspective, ‘Friends of the Earth’ lobbyist Jim Green (2011: 10) argued in a letter to *The Age* that selling uranium to a country in a ‘nuclear arms race’ with Pakistan, ‘with no meaningful commitment... to curb its weapons program’ would be ‘spineless, irresponsible, dangerous sycophancy’ on Australia’s part.¹³

¹² Then-Federal Resources Minister Martin Ferguson made this argument, which was quoted throughout the sample: see *West Australian* 2011: 20.

¹³ A version of this letter appeared in three major newspapers within our sample: *The Age*, *The Advertiser* and *The Australian*.

A key part of this moral consideration is the issue of whether ‘we’ can ‘trust’ India with ‘our’ uranium: the uranium that Australia remains morally responsible for even after it is mined and sold. In one letter to the *Hobart Mercury* this responsibility meant that Australia, ‘as one of the most geological[ly] stable land masses in the world’, should seek to store the nuclear materials after they had been used (Port 2011: 22). Arguments evaluating India’s trustworthiness in the sample highlighted its status as a ‘responsible’ (*Australian* 2011: 13) nation with a ‘perfect non-proliferation record’ (constructed in contrast to China’s record) (Lee 2011: 12). This overplays Australia’s role because India already has multiple sources of uranium *and* already has an extensive nuclear arsenal (Ganguly, 2008). More deeply, however, arguments that we can ‘trust’ India are based on a narrative suggesting not only that they have a record of ‘responsible behaviour’ but also that they are ‘a democracy, just like us’ (Howes 2011: 90): ‘the world’s largest democracy’ (Gillard in Kenny 2011: 4), an ‘English-speaking’, ‘cricket mad’ nation with whom we have ‘strong common interests’ (Fleming 2011: 61). Here, India shares many characteristics with our ‘great and powerful friends’; its development offers Australia an opportunity to deepen ties to this trustworthy superpower. In contrast, the argument *against* trusting India with our uranium relies on a discourse in both opinion columns and letters to the editor that constructs India as irrational, stubborn, ‘warlike’, unstable and (therefore) threatening (see, for example, Hanson 2011: 13; Butfoy 2011: 8; Gordon 2011: 22; Shepherd 2011: 22). Selling uranium to ‘them’ would therefore reflect poorly on our own moral standing. Both supporters and opponents of the sale of uranium to India invoke morality and rationality as universalising meta-discourses, while grounding their recommendations in different perceptions of India’s needs and intentions. These competing perceptions of India are manifestations of a deeper discourse reflecting Australia’s longstanding ambivalence about its place in, and engagement with, the broader Asia-Pacific region.

Discourses of Danger: Asia as a threatening region

Australian public and political discourse has long been a space in which anxieties about the nation's geographic location in a potentially threatening region have been expressed (Walker 1999; White 1997; White 1981). This has been the case since Australia's inception as a British colony, to the 'White Australia' policy, and, as Anthony Burke (2008) has argued, to its contemporary asylum seeker policies. In this context, anxiety about Australia's geopolitical situation pervades the sample, manifesting in a discourse where potential risk is managed by ensuring that its neighbours 'play by the rules... in an increasingly volatile world' (Arnold 2011: 74). These 'rules' are the attitudes and behaviours expected of a democratic nation on the international stage; the same rules that are implicitly followed by 'us' and our allies. One strand of discourse emphasises that 'strong safeguards' will be put in place to ensure Australian uranium is not put to any 'improper' use in India (*Sunday Telegraph* 2011: 7); and significantly, it is argued that these must not be 'weaker' than those Australia has in place in agreements with China and Russia (Medcalf 2011: 15). This conceptual linking of China and Russia is also evident in the recurring argument that sales to India are justified because Australia already sells uranium to 'countries like China and Russia' (Steketee 2011: 26; Forde 2011: 12). This forms part of a discourse in both news and letters to the editor where China is one of a series of large, unpredictable (and here, Communist or post-Communist) nations that pose a potential threat to Australia due to their 'aggressive' expansionist policies (Gordon 2011: 22). This ties into the traditionalist narrative in which Australia unquestioningly sells uranium to the US and the UK, but will not trust other major powers of differing cultural backgrounds. More broadly, the discursive construction of India, China and Russia as requiring careful management stands in stark contrast to a silence in these news narratives around safeguards in sales to the US, France, Japan, Canada and the UK (Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism 2012).

While India is positioned in these parts of the sample as worthy of the same treatment as China and Russia, its position as an 'illegitimate nuclear weapons state' within the NPT deepens

feelings of anxiety about safeguards. In addition, there is a clear concern about Australia's ability to enact its 'creative middle power' role to manage the relationship and hold India to account in light of the US' failure to do so. As Marianne Hanson (2011: 13; see also Hudson 2011: 11) writes in *The Canberra Times*:

If the US was unable to extract real concessions from [their] deal, what makes Julia Gillard think that India will accept or comply with the 'strict' conditions on uranium sales asked for by Australia?

This concern about Australia's ability to manage its relationship with an increasingly powerful India, described as 'rising' (e.g. Medcalf 2011: 15) in the same way that Australia imagines a 'rising' China', also manifests in the repeated emphasis on its physical characteristics and population. China and India emerge as economic and strategic 'rivals', seeking to maximise their own development while also earning recognition as 'major power[s] with increasingly global interests' (Defence White Paper in Ellery 2011: 6). The positioning of China and India as competing is also used to represent these states as potentially aggressive. A key element, here, is the construction of India's large, and growing, population as 'balancing out' China's, in the hope this will neutralise any potential threat:

Analysts say the US sees friendly ties with a democratic and increasingly militarised country of 1.21 billion people as a potentially powerful deterrent to any plans China might have to throw its weight around (Fleming 2011: 61).

India's militarisation and population size is seen as a plus for the US and, by proxy, Australia, allowing India to serve as a potential ally and 'democratic counter-weight' (e.g. Murphy 2011: 1; Steketee 2011: 26) to China (positioned as the true threat and implicitly *not* democratic when compared to India). Trust in democracy and liberalism are central to Australia's identity narrative as a liberal, rationalist state operating in a world in which it can only trust other liberal democracies. While India's size and militarisation are constructed as positive in these articles, a second strand of discourse positions these same characteristics as representing a potential geopolitical risk for Australia. This is seen in expressions of angst over the perception that India is engaged in a perpetual war with Pakistan and has a history of border conflicts and communal violence. Here,

India's rise is presented as a potential threat in itself and, in Katherine Fleming's (2011: 61) piece in the *West Australian*, secretive, masked by the simultaneous rise of China: 'while the world has been focused on the astronomic growth of China, India has been amassing money, power and influence'. Here, the implication is that India has been *surreptitiously* strengthening while the world's attention has been on China, which reflects Australia's preoccupation with the 'rise of China'. This strand of discourse implies lingering (post)colonial fears over India's intentions and credibility as a trustworthy, liberal-democratic 'Anglosphere' state (Davis 2014).

'Charming' her with Yellowcake: (Ir)rationality, Orientalism, and Gender

The flip side of seeing Australia as rational and/or moral in the sample is the representation of Others. India and China appear throughout the sample as aggressive, underhanded, unpredictable or irrational. This language bears the legacy of orientalist discourse, playing out most clearly in opinion pieces and letters to the editor. A debate-style opinion piece begins its critique of the ALP's decision with the phrase: 'India is a land of contrasts' (Arnold 2011: 74). This common orientalist trope presents India as unknowable through Western rationality. This discourse relies on a 'common-sense' notion that India has high income inequality. This is a persistent popular perception even though income inequality levels in India and Australia are extremely similar, and these levels are actually far higher in the United States (World Bank 2012). More deeply, however, this positioning of India seems out of place in the context of international uranium trade; it frames India as perplexing and conflicted from the outset. The article went on to define India as a risk in far more specific terms:

It has a history of military clashes with its neighbours, alongside a history of political assassinations and large-scale sectarian violence. Bombings of hotels, railways stations and other facilities are attributed to local terrorists, militants from across the border or even India's police and security services (Arnold 2011: 74).

'Clashes with neighbours' can be read as a reference to India's 1962 border war with China as well as more obvious tensions with Pakistan (a common argument marshalled against selling uranium to India in the coverage). India's instability is emphasised as both internal and external, significantly

with its *own* police and security positioned as part of a broader culture of violence. Similarly, India emerges as ‘endemically corrupt’ in a letter to *The Age* that opines:

[W]ho will make sure none of the enhanced uranium ends up in nuclear weapons or the hands of terrorist organisations – the poor guard who takes a few rupees to look the other way while the businessmen do their deals? (Fisher 2011: 16)

This overblown discourse of threat constructs India as irrational and dangerous,¹⁴ inviting the reader to perceive India as unpredictable and therefore a risk. In a time of crisis, it is implied, they may well use their nuclear weapons against both Pakistan and China without concern for the consequences.

This strand of discourse echoes across the sample in articles that quote ‘expert’ political and academic sources in support of the argument that Australia should not export uranium to a country that ‘has had three wars with its neighbours’ and is ‘developing rockets to send nuclear weapons into its neighbours’ (Cameron in Johnson 2011: 1).¹⁵ Here, the implication is that India and China have a history of conflict and are therefore likely to fight one another again. Cameron’s assertion was unpicked in a letter to the *Canberra Times*, which pointed out that India’s war with Pakistan in 1971 ‘arguably also prevented a genocide’ (Gordon 2011: 22). The construction of Australia as rational, relies on this unsettling suggestion that India and China are *not* rational actors and are likely to engage in a war which would ultimately result in their own ‘mutually assured destruction’. This creates a clear contrast between ‘our’ rationality and ‘their’ irrational actions and motivations. Andy Butfoy (2011: 8) constructs India as fundamentally untrustworthy due to its less-than-perfect non-proliferation record. India’s nuclear program is presented as evidence of aggression and duplicity: India has ‘duped’ its suppliers of ‘civil nuclear technology’ and ‘*gatecrashed* its way into the nuclear weapons club’ (Butfoy 2011: 8; emphasis added). This metaphor implies India is impatient and aggressive, unwilling to accept established liberal international ‘norms’, and therefore outside Australia’s trustworthy circle of liberal democracies.

¹⁴ India’s security forces are widely regarded to be comfortably under the control of government (Cohen 2002).

¹⁵ India has fought four wars with Pakistan, and one with China.

Alongside these constructions is the use of gendered language, which feminises and stereotypes India as an attractive, 'seductive' actor(ess). This orientalist language describes both India's power and Australia's desire to connect with her. Strikingly, 'relationship' metaphors are employed in a number of articles to describe the motivations behind and implications of Australia selling uranium to India. This language constructs international uranium sales as a competition between Australia and other states for access to India's growing wealth; 'chief among India's suitors', here, 'is America' (Fleming 2011: 61). The term 'suitor' presents a gendered construction of India as feminine, being pursued by masculine states who wish to use her resources; for example, visions of nuclear power plants as providing clean electricity to India's poor are referred to as 'seductive' (Arnold 2011: 74).¹⁶

Greg Sheridan (2011: 12) uses this 'relationship' metaphor explicitly in an opinion piece in *The Australian*, 'Gillard charms India with yellowcake' (emphasis added). Sheridan (2011: 12) concludes: 'Though we are very rich, India is a much bigger nation than we are. If we want to get its attention and build a serious relationship, we need to take the initiative.' This constructs Australia as a small, unattractive nation (despite its wealth), needing to make a 'gesture' to show its affection for India. Here, India can pick only from certain appropriate 'suitors' (Australia, the US, Canada, France, etc); and although 'we' have valuable resources, India is an attractive 'catch' that will require Australia to 'punch above its weight' (a common theme of the Australia's creative middle power discourse).¹⁷ Sheridan's relationship metaphor relies on gendered language that treats international politics like speed dating, constructing India as an attractive, exotic woman encircled by powerful, rich, white men; with Australia struggling to gain her attention amongst the more powerful, masculine suitors. As Walker (2010) shows, Australia has long feminised Asia within its

¹⁶ On the feminisation of Asia, see Walker 2010.

¹⁷ This is common colloquial terminology see, Beeson 2011.

identity discourse, which reflects a vision of itself as masculine. Australia remained as masculine in the international context despite being led by its first female prime minister.¹⁸

It is worth noting, finally, that the question of nuclear deterrence is not raised in the sample, despite IR's realists often suggesting that India-Pakistan relations are stabilised by nuclear weapons (Ganguly 2008). Constructions in the sample tend to idealise a rational and moral Australia, and the coverage mostly regards India and China with trepidation: as they *may not* act rationally and therefore cannot be 'trusted' to follow what are seen as *our* (neoliberal, democratic) norms. This constructs a moral, rational Australian Self against irrational 'Asian' Others, with the possibility of nuclear war a result of *their* characteristics and a justification for *our* behaviour. There is a split within the traditionalist narrative of Australian foreign policy in perceiving India as an irrational, dangerous actor and the perception, which emphasises India's 'Anglosphere' characteristics as driving cooperation. Australia's 'realism' is animated by the perception of irrationality in Others. The latter approach is likewise problematic as it relies on an overemphasis on a positive narrative of India's colonial history as a justification for closer relations.

Conclusion: Why the Media Matters to Australian foreign policy

Media coverage of the sale of uranium to India reveals an Australia that is deeply anxious about its place in the world: fundamentally shaped by its history and identity, wondering if it can truly trust those it sees as 'unlike itself', grappling with the implications of the 'rise' of 'Asian giants' China and India, and unsure whether a discourse of rationality or morality should guide its foreign policy. This is reflected throughout the sample in news stories and their quoted sources, opinion pieces and academic commentaries. More deeply, letters to the editor reflect the same narrative choices used by politicians, commentators, academics and journalists, and their inclusion here demonstrates the value of an approach which moves beyond structured, hierarchical

¹⁸ On the gendered politics of the Gillard era, see Johnson, 2015

understandings of the role of ‘elite’ and ‘non-elite’ discourses in identity formation. Although the authors of these newspaper pieces and letters to the editor are not in a position to make policy decisions, this analysis reveals that discourses around Australian morality and rationality are developed, and open to contest, by both policy elite and the general public. The discourses examined here played out in mainstream newspaper coverage, which localises (and at times sensationalises) issues, fills in gaps left by policymakers, influences the commentary that dominates public debate, and provides space for (often-problematic) expert and audience opinion and analysis that makes international politics relevant by describing the unfamiliar ‘in the terms of the familiar’. For Australian foreign policy, the consistent reliance on orientalist tropes and the stereotyping of Others in media and foreign policy discourse is troubling. It is both a symptom and a cause of Australia’s ambivalent relationship with Asia. The mainstream news media, and the complex media ecology in which they sit, should be seen as a crucial space in which Australian identity is formed and contested, where new ideas and narratives of Australian identity may emerge. It is one that analysts of Australian foreign policy have thus far neglected to engage.

Bibliography

- Advertiser. 2011. Uranium sales a chance too good to pass. *The Advertiser* 6 December: 16.
- Aly, A. and Walker, D. 2007. Veiled threats: Recurrent cultural anxieties in Australia. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 27 (2): 203-214.
- Arnold, B. 2011. Should we sell uranium to India? *Sunday Herald Sun* 4 December: 74.
- Asia Pacific Focus. 2012. Gillard turns on the charm in India. *Asia Pacific Focus, Australia Network* 22 October. URL: <http://australianetwork.com/focus/s3615838.htm>. Consulted 19 July 2013.
- Australian. 2011. A victory for common sense. *The Australian* 5 December: 13.
- Baum, M.A. 2003. *Soft news goes to war: Public opinion and American foreign policy in the new media age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Beeson, M. 2011. Can Australia save the world? The limits and possibilities of middle power diplomacy. *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 65 (5): 563-77.
- Bhabha, H. 1990. *Nation and narration*. New York: Routledge.
- Brookes, S. 2012. Secure in our identity: Situating discourses of regional threat and opportunity in Australian election campaign language, 1993 and 1996. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 58 (4): 542-56.
- Burke, A. 2008. *Fear of security: Australia's invasion anxiety*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butfoy, A. 2011. Dangerous fallout for arms control. *Canberra Times* 3 December: 8.
- Campbell, D. 1992. *Writing security: US foreign policy and the politics of identity*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Campbell, D. 1998. *National deconstruction: Violence, identity, and justice in Bosnia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cohen, S. 2002. *India: Emerging power*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Cottle, S. 2009. *Global crisis reporting: Journalism in the global age*. Maidenhead, England: McGraw Hill-Open University Press.
- D'Cruz, J.V. and Steele, W. 2003. *Ambivalence towards Asia: Politics, neo/post-colonialism, and fact/fiction*, Rev. Edn. Clayton VIC: Monash Asia Institute.
- Davis, A.E. 2014. The identity politics of India-US nuclear engagement: Problematizing India as part of the Anglosphere. *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 10 (1): 81-96.
- Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism. 2012. Australia's uranium industry factsheet. *Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism Website*, June. URL: <http://www.ret.gov.au/resources/Documents/Mining/uranium/Uranium-Industry-factsheet.pdf>. Consulted July 18 2013.

- Doty, R.L. 1993. Foreign policy as social construction: A post-positivist analysis of U.S. counterinsurgency policy in the Philippines. *International Studies Quarterly* 34: 297-99.
- Ellery, D. 2011. Australia set India military deal. *Canberra Times* 7 December: 6.
- Fairclough, N. 1995. *Media discourse*. New York: Edward Arnold.
- Fisher, S. 2011. Promises worthless. *The Age* 7 December: 16.
- Fleming, K. 2011. In between the giants: Massive market, despite poverty. *West Australian* 3 December: 61.
- Forde, B. 2011. No proliferation. *Canberra Times* 6 December: 12.
- Ganguly, S. 2008. Nuclear stability in South Asia. *International Security* 33 (2): 45-70.
- Garrett, P. 2011. Uranium sales would send the wrong message. *Sunday Age* 4 December: 21.
- Georgakopolou, A. and Goutsos, D. 2004. *Discourse analysis: An introduction*, 2nd Edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Goldsmith, B. and Horuichi, Y. 2010. In search of soft power: Does foreign public opinion matter for US foreign policy? *World Politics* 64 (3): 555-85.
- Goodman, R.S. 1999. Prestige press coverage of US-China policy during the Cold War's collapse and post-Cold War years: Did a deteriorating Cold War paradigm set the stage for more independent press coverage? *International Communication Gazette* 61: 391-410.
- Gordon, M. 2011. No grasp for facts. *Adelaide Advertiser* 8 December: 22.
- Green, J. 2011. Dangerous precedent. *The Age* 6 December: 10.
- Hanson, M. 2011. Selling uranium to India a blow to arms control. *Canberra Times* 6 December: 13
- Hopf, T. 2002. *Social construction of international politics: Identities and foreign policies, Moscow 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Hou, J. and Ma, Y. 2009. China's national power and US news coverage. *Annual Meeting of the NCA, 95th Annual Convention*, 11 November, Chicago IL.
- Howard, J. 2011. The Anglosphere and the advance of freedom. Heritage Foundation Lecture on Democracy and Human Rights, January 3. URL: <http://www.heritage.org/research/lecture/2011/01/the-anglosphere-and-the-advance-of-freedom>. Consulted 25 November 2013.
- Howes, P. 2011. The really divisive question. *Sunday Telegraph* 4 December: 90.
- Hudson, P. 2011. Nuke vote tears Labor in two. *Herald Sun* 5 December: 11.
- Jackson, R. 2005. *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, politics and counter-terrorism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Johnson, C. 2011. India set to buy country's uranium. *Canberra Times* 5 December: 1.

- Joseph, W. A. 2014. 'Studying Chinese politics'. In W. A. Joseph, ed. *Politics in China: An introduction*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, C. 2015. Playing the Gender Card; The Uses and Abuses of Gender in Australian Politics', *Politics & Gender* 11(2): 291-319.
- Kenny, M. 2011. Jobs bonanza on yellowcake road to India: Gillard, Weatherill win on uranium. *The Advertiser* 5 December: 4.
- Lee, L. 2011. Labor finally sees the light on uranium sales. *The Australian* 5 December: 12.
- Lu, X. 2011. From 'ideological enemies' to 'strategic partners': A rhetorical analysis of US-China relations in intercultural contexts. *Howard Journal of Communications* 22 (4): 336-57.
- Mandaville, P. 2002. Reading the state from elsewhere: Towards an anthropology of the postnational. *Review of International Studies* 28: 199-207.
- McCombs, M. and Shaw, D. 1972. The agenda-setting function of the mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (2): 176-87.
- Medcalf, R. 2011. Uranium sales to India would spread trust, not nuclear arms. *The Age* 2 December: 15.
- Menzies, R. 1958. *Policy Launch Speech*, Canterbury Memorial Hall. Melbourne, 29 October.
- Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B. and Roselle, L. 2013. *Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order*. New York: Routledge.
- Murphy, K. 2011. Uranium: Now for a deal with India. *The Age* 5 December: 1.
- Nacos, B.L., Shapiro, R.Y. and Isernia, P. 2000. *Decision-making in a glass house: Mass media, public opinion, and American and European foreign policy in the 21st century*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Nicholson, B. 2011. India nuclear negotiations start next year, but Pakistan sales not on cards. *The Australian* 6 December: 4.
- Nosseck, H. 2004. Our news and their news: The role of national identity in the coverage of foreign news. *Journalism* 5(3): 343-68.
- Pan, C. 2012. *Knowledge, desire and power in global politics: Western representations of China's rise*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Pan, P. 2008. US news coverage of new leaders in China: An investigation of agenda-setting abilities of US newspapers and government. *China Media Research* 4(1): 31.
- Peng, Z. 2004. Representation of China: An across time analysis of coverage in the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*. *Asian Journal of Communication* 14(1): 55.
- Port, L. 2011. Uranium export wrong. *Hobart Mercury* 7 December: 22.
- Riffe, D., Aust, C.F. and Lacy, S. 1993. The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling in newspaper content analysis. *Journalism Quarterly* 70(1): 133-39.

- Robinson, P. 2001. Theorising the influence of media on world politics: Models of media influence on foreign policy. *European Journal of Communication* 16(4): 523-44.
- Rudd, K. 2007. Leading, Not Following: The Renewal of Australian Middle Power Diplomacy. *The Sydney Papers* 19(1): ii-13.
- Ruggie, J.G. 1998. *Constructing the world polity*. London: Routledge.
- Said, E.W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.
- Seethaler, J., Karmasin, M., Melischek, G. and Wohlert, R. 2013. *Selling war: The role of the mass media in hostile conflicts from World War I to the 'War on Terror'*. Briston: Intellect Books.
- Seib, P.M. 2008. *The al Jazeera effect: How the new global media are reshaping world politics*. Washington DC: Potomac Books.
- Shepherd, M. 2011. Worse than Howard. *Adelaide Advertiser* 8 December: 22.
- Sheridan, G. 2011. Gillard charms India with yellowcake. *The Australian* 8 December: 12.
- Steketee, M. 2011. Can we talk? Reversal on uranium sales to India opens up a whole new world. *Weekend Australian* 3 December: 26.
- Sunday Telegraph 2011. The export plan that divides MPs – ALP National Conference. *Sunday Telegraph* 4 December: 7.
- Sweeney, D. 2011. In breach of treaty. *The Age* 3 December: 22.
- Sydney Morning Herald 2011. Labor turns its back on reform. *Sydney Morning Herald* 6 December: 10.
- Turnbull, M. 2015. Assessing the Future of the Asia-Pacific, *Malcolm Turnbull MP Website*, January. URL: <http://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/future-of-the-asia-pacific>. Consulted April 9 2015.
- Turner, O. 2014. *American images of China: Identity, power, policy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Van Belle, D.A. 2012. 'News media'. In S.W. Hook and C.M. Jones, eds. *Routledge handbook of American foreign policy*. New York: Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T.A. 1991. *Racism and the press*. New York: Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T.A. 1993. *Elite discourse and racism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Vucetic, S. 2011. Why did Canada Sit out the Iraq War?: Once Constructivist Analysis, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 13 (1): 133-153.
- Walker, D. 1999. *Anxious nation: Australia and the rise of Asia 1850-1939*. St Lucia QLD: University of Queensland Press.
- Walker, D. 2002. National narratives: Australia in Asia. *Media History* 8(1): 63-75.
- Walker, D. 2010. The flow of Asia – vocabularies of engagement: A cultural history. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 45(1): 45-58.

Wendt, A. 1992. Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics. *International Organization* 46: 395-421.

West Australian 2011. 'Party politics wins out again at lacklustre ALP Conference', *West Australian* 6 December: 20.

White, R. 1981. *Inventing Australia*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin.

White, R. 1997. Inventing Australia revisited. In W. Hudson and G. Bolton, eds. *Creating Australia: Changing Australian history*. St Leonards NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. 2001. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage.

World Bank 2012. GINI Index (World Bank Estimate). *The World Bank*. URL: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>. Consulted 13 November 2014.

Zhang, L. 2010. The rise of China: Media perception and implications for international politics. *Journal of Contemporary China* 19(64): 233-254.