

Extracts from *The Honest History Book*

‘History means interpretation’, said EH Carr, and he was right. The discipline of history is a contest between interpretations. Honest history – the concept – is interpretation robustly supported by evidence. History is distinguished from myth by the strength of the evidence supporting the interpretation. Dishonest history is characterised by tendentious or selective interpretations or by inadequate evidence. All historians select evidence. It is how they select it that matters, not the fact that they do ...

The Honest History coalition has always recognised that war is important in our history – not so much because of what Australians have done in war but because of what war has done to Australia, to Australians and to others – but so are many other events and influences. Our mantra has been ‘Not only Anzac but also’ – the ‘also’ being shorthand for all the non-Anzac influences.

Some people believe the Australian nation was born on the beaches of Gallipoli in 1915. But focusing on that single foundation moment oversimplifies Australia’s history and constrains its identity. Honest History – the coalition – has argued instead for a rebalanced view of Australian history, where Anzac is reduced to a proportionate place and other influences are recognised. Downsizing Anzac need not mean doing away with Anzac altogether, but does mean winding back its excesses.

Geoffrey Serle, historian and biographer of Sir John Monash, coined the term ‘Anzackery’ in 1967 to apply to the sentimental, jingoistic commemoration of Anzac. When Serle wrote, Anzackery seemed to be fading away, but it has come back, stronger, more sentimental and just as jingoistic, in the last 25 years. Finally, in 2016 the word ‘Anzackery’ appeared in a dictionary: the second edition of the *Australian National Dictionary* defines it as ‘[t]he promotion of the Anzac legend in ways that are perceived to be excessive or misguided’ ...

The best way of downsizing Anzac and seeing off Anzackery is by promoting the non-khaki side of our national story. A century after Gallipoli, surely it is time to pay more attention to the winding and fascinating tracks – environmental, social, political, cultural, scientific, and so on – down which Australians have travelled to where we are now.

In her chapter in this book, Larissa Behrendt wrote of our need to ‘acknowledge that there is no one dominant national narrative but many concurrent, competing and conflicting stories that reflect the diverse backgrounds and perspectives within Australian society’. This means looking at the many elements of the nation that has grown from the one the men of Anzac thought they were defending all those years ago. It means rejecting silly claims that a single, narrow story is ‘our story’. It means trying to understand the history of our environment, of the multicultural country that immigrants from 200 countries have built, of the devastating effects of economic upheaval but the smugness that prosperity can breed.

It means confronting the evidence of the growing gap between unequal 21st-century reality and our comforting national myth of egalitarianism. It means asking why leadership by women has not been recognised and promoted, so that our first is not our only female prime minister, and young women can aspire to and become leaders in all fields. It also means confronting – and ending – our continuing adolescent relationships with the monarchy,

regardless of the 'star power' of its current representatives, and with great and powerful friends who take us for granted.

Most of all, upsizing our non-khaki side means facing up to what Larissa Behrendt calls 'the invasion moment', for 'until we do that we will never have found a way to truly share this colonised country'. That invasion of 1788 and its consequences deserve far more of our attention today than do the failed invasion of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and our military ventures since. 'Not only Anzac but also' is shorthand for a complex history that deserves exploration, understanding, commemoration and even, sometimes, celebration. Australia is more than Anzac – and always has been.