MULTICULTURALISM IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN DRAMA

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of Leicester

by

Thamir Rashid Shayyal Az-Zubaidy

School of Arts
University of Leicester

February 2018
Abstract

This thesis investigates the representation of Australia’s cultural diversity in contemporary Australian drama from 1990 to 2014. It traces Australian governments’ reports and statements of the policy of multiculturalism from 1977 to 2017 and critiques their promulgation of Australian multiculturalism as mainly aligning with the dominant culture. Through its analysis of nine plays by eleven playwrights from diverse cultural backgrounds, plays which reflect Australia’s linguistic and cultural diversity, this thesis contends that literary writing – and drama in particular – opens a space for alternative models of multiculturalism. Through its exploration of the journey motif in most of those plays, the thesis challenges the assumption that themes of displacement, alienation and belonging are restricted to works by playwrights from migrant backgrounds. In this sense, it argues that multicultural writing is not restricted to works by writers from migrant backgrounds or dealing with the issues of migration. Through its engagement with the relationship between form and content in these plays, and the role of form in conveying the fluidity of Australian identity, the thesis contributes to scholarship on postcolonial drama. It also argues that resistant postcolonial writing is not restricted to Aboriginal writing but can incorporate works by white and migrant Australians as well.
Acknowledgements

I would like to seize the opportunity to express gratitude to many people and bodies for their help and assistance. Firstly, I gratefully acknowledge my supervisor, Dr Lucy Evans, for her extensive support, insightful guidance and continuous encouragement throughout the period of writing this thesis. I want to thank Dr Corinne Fowler who encouraged me to make a formal application to the University of Leicester. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Zalfa Feghali who was my temporary supervisor for 8 months (October 2016-May 2017). I would like to express my gratitude to my sponsor, Wasit University, the Ministry of Higher Education in Iraq, the Iraqi Cultural Attaché in London for their financial support throughout the period of my doctoral programme.

I would like to express my gratitude to my friends who supported me in Australia or provided me with valuable information about Australia or theatre in Sydney including Jamal Ali Alhalaq, Mohsin El Dreih, Sally Sussman and Hale Isil Cosar. I’m grateful to playwright Donna Abela for providing me with the final version of her play, Jump For Jordan. I’m thankful to all the persons who I interviewed or emailed and playwrights whose plays are analysed in this thesis.

Thanks to my mother, Behiya, who always spared time to pray for me and also my brothers and sisters for their continuous support. To my wife, Zainab, for her patience and understanding of leaving the whole responsibility of house and children on her shoulders and my children Wihad, Mustafa, Hussein and Huda for their love and encouragement.

This study is respectfully dedicated in homage to my wonderful father, Rashid (1945-2013), and my ambitious brother, Hameed (1966-1991).
# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgments ......................................................................................................... iii

Table of Contents .......................................................................................................... iv

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1

Multiculturalism: General Overview ........................................................................... 2
The Policy of Multiculturalism in Australia, 1977 to the Present ................................. 4
Towards an Australian Identity: Conflicting Perspectives .......................................... 15
Australian Theatre ......................................................................................................... 22
Thesis Structure ........................................................................................................... 33

**Part One: Aboriginal Drama**

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 39
Chapter One: The Journey to a Brand New Day in Jimmy Chi and Kuckles’ *Bran Nue Dae* ................................................................. 46
Chapter Two: Oral Performance in Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman’s *The 7 Stages of Grieving* .................................................. 59
Chapter Three: Reconciliation in David Milroy’s *Waltzing the Wilarra* .............. 73
Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 87

**Part Two: Settler Drama**

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 89
Chapter One: Language, Law and Place in Nick Parsons’ *Dead Heart* ................. 92
Chapter Two: Representing Migrants in Michael Futcher and Helen Howard’s *A Beautiful Life* ........................................................................ 107
Chapter Three: An African Priest in the Suburb in Tommy Murphy’s *Gwen in Purgatory* ....................................................................... 123
Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 133

**Part Three: Diasporic Drama**

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 135
Chapter One: Multiple Identities and Belonging in Janis Balodis’ No Going Back ... 141

Chapter Two: The Retrieval of Women’s Voices, Resistance and Empowerment in Anna Yen’s Chinese Take Away ................................................................. 158

Chapter Three: Excavating Another Woman’s History in Donna Abela’s Jump for Jordan ........................................................................................................ 171

Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 185

Thesis Conclusion ................................................................................................. 187

Bibliography .......................................................................................................... 196
Introduction

This thesis investigates how Australia’s diversity of cultures is manifested in its contemporary drama. While exploring the depiction of diversity in nine selected plays by eleven playwrights from diverse cultural backgrounds, the study examines the political context and considers its influence on literary representations of cultural diversity. Australian playwrights’ manifestation of this diversity varies according to whether they are promoting multiculturalism or critiquing what they regard as dysfunctional multiculturalism. The study, therefore, highlights these playwrights’ attempts to resist negative models of inclusion and portray alternative ones. Through its employment of nine works by Aboriginal, Anglo-Australian (settler) and migrant playwrights, the study challenges the perception that multicultural drama is restricted to migrant plays or issues.

The study addresses the following questions: How do these plays portray cultural diversity in Australia? In what ways does the political context affect these playwrights’ representation of multiculturalism? To what extent and in what ways do these plays challenge the official discourse of multiculturalism in Australia? And to what extent do they problematise the perception that ‘multicultural drama’ is a category limited to works by playwrights from a migrant background?

In its investigation of the representation of multiculturalism in Australian drama, the study focuses on the years 1990 up to 2014, the year when the last play considered in this thesis, Donna Abela’s *Jump for Jordan*, was performed and published. The choice of this specific year, 1990, as a starting point, is due to the fact that it was in 1989 that the National Multicultural Advisory Council’s report, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, broadened the ambit of multiculturalism to all Australians whether Aboriginal, Anglo-Australians or citizens from migrant backgrounds. Through its investigation of nine plays written by Aboriginal, settler and migrant playwrights, the study aims to develop an analysis of the extent to which and the ways in which multiculturalism is represented in Australian drama. As well as considering existing research on contemporary Australian drama, I draw more widely on scholarship on multiculturalism, Australian culture, the history of Australian drama and also postcolonial studies as a basis for my focus on contemporary Australian drama.

This introduction is divided into five sections. The first section is a general overview of the rise and decline in support for multicultural policies in western states. The second section engages with the reports and statements issued by Australian federal
governments on the policy of multiculturalism from 1977, a year before the adoption of multiculturalism, to the present. It examines the limitations of the policy of multiculturalism whose scope was broadened in 1989 to include all Australians, the reports issued by Australian governments to define the policy of multiculturalism, the period of disapproval towards multiculturalism during the Howard government (1996-2007), and the reaffirmation of a commitment to multiculturalism by the succeeding governments, the Gillard and Turnbull governments. The third section deals with the implications of the policy of multiculturalism and cultural diversity for theorising Australian identity. It casts light on two groups of scholars, one of which believes in a unitary idea of Australian identity while the other critiques this assumption. The fourth section traces the establishment of Australian theatre. It investigates the transition, at the end of the 1960s, from a theatre mainly dependent on British plays and, to a lesser extent, American and European works to one mainly committed to local works. Indeed, it is this transition which gradually opened up space for marginalised voices, Aboriginal and migrant playwrights, to have their narratives performed on Australian stages. In the concluding section I outline the thesis structure.

**Multiculturalism: General Overview**

Multiculturalism dates back to the 1970s when certain western states began to adopt policies to accommodate their ethnic diversity resulting from importing workers to rebuild their postwar economy. As migrants came mainly from European countries, they were expected to assimilate and ‘become indistinguishable’ from the citizens in those countries.¹ When they started to come from societies whose differences were no longer ‘invisible’, western states began to adopt new policies to replace assimilation and to guarantee non-hierarchical ethnic or racial relations among people. The adoption of those policies varied among western countries; whereas it culminated in the adoption of official policies such as multiculturalism in Canada and Australia, it took the shape of egalitarian principles which attempted to hinder racial discrimination in other national contexts such as Britain. Recognising that a society had become multicultural, Tariq Modood claims, means ‘that a new set of challenges were being posed for which a new political agenda

was necessary’. Yet, this does not imply that support for multicultural policies is unanimous; while one group of people and scholars perceives multiculturalism as ‘an attractive diversity of ways of life, mutual respect among citizens from different backgrounds, free expression and creativity, colourful dances, exotic customs, culinary variety’, others observe it, George Crowder observes, as fostering fragmentation and undermining ‘the social cohesion and shared identity that any society needs’. Following the terrorist attacks in the US (2001) and Britain (2005), liberal multiculturalism, Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield state, faced ‘a very difficult time keeping its abstract principle of egalitarian plurality from becoming a set of shared values’. Multiculturalism, however, is not solely an acknowledgement of a country’s cultural diversity but also an ongoing process among its diverse cultural groups. As Anne-Marie Fortier puts it, ‘[m]ulticulturalism entails shifting the mechanics of creating national communities’ and ‘a wider search for new grammars for national identity’. Moreover, as it involves the reconfiguration of ‘all functions of the state’ which adopt ‘national and cultural homogeneity’, multiculturalism ‘has been accused of challenging these assumptions, and rejecting fundamental principles of the liberal secular state and of the national identities’. As stated above, support of state-sponsored policies of multiculturalism in the first decade of the twentieth-century declined in a number of western countries where the focus, Anne-Marie Fortier proposes, is no longer on ‘the respect of cultural identity and the production of self-worth, as it is about identification with and within a single unitary nation’. Gradually, multiculturalism has been diverted from its liberal orientation to signify a ‘ludic’ one where cultural diversity is celebrated ‘in the form of multicultural festivals’ which ‘show people clothed in various “ethnic” garb, “ethnic” food to the tune of “ethnic

---

5 Fortier, p. 4.
7 Fortier, p. 7.
or “world” music with the dancers showcasing “ethnic” steps in the background’. Fortier’s argument resonates with that of Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, who notes that compared to critical multiculturalism which acknowledges ‘tensions of cultural transfer’, celebratory multiculturalism means ‘simply a shallow celebration of different goods and forms of entertainment’.

This notion aligns with Stanley Fish’s notion of ‘boutique multiculturalism’ which he defines as ‘the multiculturalism of ethnic restaurants [and] weekend festivals’ that ‘does not and cannot take seriously the core values of the [minority] cultures’. Indeed, such a premise can be identified in the Australian governments’ policy reports which subject Australians’ expression of their cultures to the law and promote the perception that Australians share united values and one national language.

The Policy of Multiculturalism in Australia, 1977 to the Present

Three groups of people and their descendants can be identified in Australia: Aboriginal, settlers, mainly from English and Irish backgrounds, and migrants from other parts of Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world. Aboriginal people inhabited Australia almost 60,000 years before the arrival of the first settlers in 1788. The first fleet which entered Sydney Cove on 26 of January 1788 consisted of 11 ships. There were about 751 convicts (20% of them were women) and their children and 252 sailors and their families as well as some officers. The convicts indicated ‘a multicultural flavour’ because they were ‘English and Welsh (70%), Irish (24%) or Scottish (5%)’ as well as other convicts from Canada, India, ‘Maoris from New Zealand, Chinese from Hong Kong and slaves from the Caribbean’. Moreover, there are references in historical studies to Afghans and other nationalities including the Chinese who arrived during the nineteenth century searching for better chances of life during the gold rushes. Because of the religious intolerance the

---

8 Ibid., p. 22.
9 Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, After Multiculturalism (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2000), p. 34.
Old Lutherans experienced in Germany, they established their presence in South Australia since 1838. However, Australia witnessed the peak of its diversity following the implementation of a post-war immigration policy to meet economic demands and respond to the call ‘populate or perish’ after the Japanese invasion of the country’s northern part during World War II. Indeed, it is this diversity which has caused the dramatic change in Australia’s national policy from a racist policy of White Australia in 1901, following the foundation of the Australian Commonwealth, to a non-discriminatory one culminating in the adoption of multiculturalism as a government policy when the Fraser Government (1975-1983) accepted the Galbally Report.

In 1977, a year before the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism, the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council chaired by Jerzy Zubrzycki made a submission entitled *Australia as a Multicultural Society* to the Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs which embodied the council’s response to the Australian Population and Immigration Council’s paper entitled ‘Immigration Policies and Australia’s Population’. Relying on the council members’ experiences in ‘ethnic affairs’, the report suggests three guidelines – social cohesion, equality and cultural identity – which were elaborated in the succeeding reports by multicultural councils in four areas: settlement, education of adults of non-English-speaking backgrounds, education of children, and community consultation and a special media for Australians from non-English-speaking backgrounds – the second and last are now the only vestiges of these areas. In this report, the council foregrounded the ‘guidelines for immigration and settlement policies appropriate to a multicultural Australia’ and even articulated a definition of Australia’s multicultural society as:

*a society in which people of non-Anglo-Australian origin are given the opportunity, as individuals or groups, to choose to preserve and develop their culture – their language, traditions and art – so that they can become living elements in the diverse culture of the total society, while at the same time they enjoy effective and respected places within one Australian society, with equal access to the rights and opportunities that society provides and accepting responsibilities towards it.*

---

Although responding to immigration policies adopted by the Fraser Liberal government (1975-1983), the council’s report established the principal guidelines of multiculturalism which were employed in the succeeding governmental reports. While the report grants cultural minorities the right to preserve their culture, the reference to ‘non-Anglo-Australians’ indicates a key limitation in the idea of a multicultural society because it positions Anglo-Australians as dominant and as the cultural norm from which other groups, such as the Aborigines and migrants, deviate.

The above report was influential in the Fraser government’s decision, on 31 August 1977, to nominate Frank Galbally to head the ‘Review of Post Arrival Programs and Services for Migrants’ which presented its report in April 1978. Although its main task was reviewing migrant post-arrival settlement services, the report went far beyond that to become a grounding source for the policy of multiculturalism by stating four principles ensuring equal access to programs, services and provision as well as the migrant’s right to maintain their former culture. The Fraser government accepted the recommendations of the Galbally Report, especially the first one regarding its commitment to ‘develop a multicultural attitude in Australian society’ and ‘foster the retention of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups and promoting intercultural understanding’. Moreover, the government established an advisory council, the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA), and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS).

In 1982, the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs presented a policy paper entitled *Multiculturalism for Australians – Our Developing Nationhood* in which it stated that multiculturalism addresses all Australians. The paper states that all people in Australia are ‘ethnic’ because the word ‘ethnic’ is derived from ‘ethnos’ meaning ‘people’ or ‘nation’ and, thus, does not indicate Australians from non-English-

---


speaking backgrounds. Such a clarification, however, is not strong enough to counter the widespread perception of the word which links it mainly to cultural minorities. The policy paper recognises a ‘widespread uncertainty’ among Australians ‘about the meaning of multiculturalism for Australian society’ and responds by asserting that multiculturalism is ‘a way of looking at Australian society’ rather than simply ‘the provision of special services to minority ethnic groups’.

Broadening the ambit of multiculturalism is maintained in the Hawke Labour government (1983-1991) policy report, National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (1989), which addressed all Australians regardless of their race, culture, religion, gender and place of birth. Australia, according to this report, is and will be ‘a multicultural society’, and that multiculturalism is ‘a policy for managing the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole’. The report identifies the following dimensions of this policy:

- cultural identity: the right of all Australians, within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion;
- social justice: the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity, and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender, or place of birth; and
- economic efficiency: the need to maintain, develop, and utilise effectively the skills and talents of all Australians, regardless of background.

These dimensions, the report asserts, ‘apply equally to all Australians, whether Aboriginals, Anglo-Celtic or non-English-Speaking background; and whether they were

---

20 Sneja Gunew, for instance, proposes that ‘ethnicity etymologically carries of connotations “heathen” or “pagan” – in other words, the barbarians at the gate or “the other”’. For further details see Sneja Gunew, ‘Arts for a Multicultural Australia: Redefining the Culture’, in Culture, Difference and the Arts, ed. by Sneja Gunew and Fazal Rizvi (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994), pp. 1-12 (p. 5).
21 Multiculturalism for All Australians, p. 17.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
born in Australia or overseas.\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, it is this commitment to include all Australians regardless of their cultural backgrounds under the umbrella of multiculturalism which underpins my choice of 1990 as a starting date to investigate the representation of multiculturalism in contemporary Australian drama.

With the arrival of the Howard government (1996-2007), most of the programs addressing migrants’ issues were reduced and multicultural councils were either abolished or given new names. The Howard government also commissioned the National Multicultural Advisory Council to investigate the terminology. The next policy report, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness*, was issued in 1999 by the National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC). At 137, it is the longest report ever written by a multicultural council, the richest in defining the policy and the first in acknowledging the diversity of Australian peoples whether migrants, Aboriginals or descendants of ‘members of the First Fleet [who] came from a number of ethnic backgrounds.’\textsuperscript{26} It presents a definition of multiculturalism which indicates its uniqueness as an Australian one. Australian multiculturalism, in this sense, becomes ‘a term which recognises and celebrates Australia’s cultural diversity’ and ‘accepts and respects the right of Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy.’\textsuperscript{27} While indicating the existence of ‘a potentially divisive debate by a few individuals’ who have criticised the policy of multiculturalism, the report asserts that the ‘substantial majority of Australians are strongly supportive of multiculturalism and value the benefits that cultural diversity has brought to the whole community’ and states that, in response, the council ‘strongly recommends that this commitment [to the policy] is championed by the Prime Minister’.\textsuperscript{28}

The Howard government sought to redefine the policy of multiculturalism and restrict Australians’ – especially non-Anglo Australians – expression and sharing of their cultural heritage through a new wording of the former guidelines under a new name ‘principles’:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{26} National Multicultural Advisory Council, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century* (Canberra, 1999), p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 78.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., pp. vii-3.
\end{itemize}
• Civic Duty: All Australians are obliged to support the basic structures and principles of Australian society – our Constitution, democratic institutions and values [...];
• Cultural Respect: subject to the law, the right to express one’s own culture and beliefs involves a reciprocal obligation to accept the right of others to do the same;
• Social Equality: all Australians are entitled to equality of treatment and opportunity enabling them to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia, free from discrimination;
• Productive Diversity: the significant cultural, social and economic dividends which arise from the diversity of our population should be maximised for the benefits of all Australians.29

The above principles were repeated in the government’s report in 2003 and, thereby, demonstrated the Howard government’s determination to reorder the policy of multiculturalism and reconstruct it according to a neo-assimilationist trajectory. In the 2003 report, Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity, the Howard government reconfirmed its commitment to multiculturalism with a vision of a ‘multicultural Australia, united by a shared future, an overriding commitment to our nation and its democratic institutions and values, and support for the rule of law, with English as a common language.’30 In both reports, the Howard government imposed a conformist doctrine to reinstate, James Walsh claims, ‘classic conceptions of citizenship, nationhood and “Australianness”’.31 In addition to this, the reports dropped the previous focus on welfare and settlement services for new migrants.

Accordingly, instead of being a policy for promoting cultural diversity, while the Howard government was in power, it became a commitment to Australian citizenship. The repeated assertion of liberal values set between the rule of law and Parliament, and English, which is described once as a ‘national’ and later as a ‘common’ language, presents these values as assimilative rather than protective of diversity. Moreover, it is problematic to call these values Australian or claim that they stem from ‘Australian democracy’ because they are universal and not linked to one country or one background.32 It is also problematic to label them as traditional, as the then Australian Minister Chris

29 Ibid., p. 56.
32 See, for example, p. 9 in Multicultural Australia.
Bowen described them, especially for a country with a record of racism towards both Aboriginals and migrants. While affirming their commitment to a multicultural Australia, these reports depict an image of Australia that is English-speaking and white.

It is worth noting that the 2003 report, especially in its final part entitled ‘strategic directions’, articulates the government’s response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and their influence on Australian society. Although Australia has never been an arena for such terrorist attacks, it has become a field for their outcomes. As stated in this report, ‘[i]nnocent Australians are being wrongly blamed by association, are being threatened or isolated, have been hurt, or had property damaged.’

Although never named in this report, those ‘innocent Australians’ are Australian Muslims. Following the attacks of 9/11, ‘expressions of revulsion and hostility’ spread across Europe where countries began to retreat from their multicultural policies and adopt, Jeffrey C. Alexander purports, ‘a more assimilative mode of incorporation’ under the guise of ‘civic integration’. This European wave had its impact on Australia. The government’s support for the policy of multiculturalism diminished under the Howard government which expunged the term ‘multiculturalism’ from governmental use, especially in its last year, 2007. By this as well as other steps, including replacing the title ‘multicultural affairs’ with ‘integration’ in the Department of Immigration and introducing a citizenship test, the government attempted to ‘revive the ideals of cultural unity, assimilation and integration’.

Such a negative attitude towards the policy of multiculturalism conflicted with views of the majority of the Australian population; as revealed by a Sydney Morning Herald poll in 2005, 81 per cent of the population supported the policy of multiculturalism.

The Howard government’s attitude towards the policy of multiculturalism had an influence on the succeeding one, the Labor government of Kevin Rudd (2007-2010) which, although it retained the title ‘multicultural affairs’ on the parliamentary secretary

33 Ibid., p.10.
level, ‘showed little interest in multiculturalism’. This attitude towards the policy of multiculturalism pushed the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC), in 2009, to meet ‘state and territory government agencies’, hold discussions in capital cities and receive submissions from stakeholders to develop a more fully accepted policy. In April 2010, the council presented a report, *The People of Australia*, which states that Australian political leaders have to consider the benefits multiculturalism has brought, including ‘innovation, ideas, skills, energy and achievements’, and recognise that it ‘makes us richer in all kinds of ways, including our “identity”’. While indicating that almost one third of the Australian people surveyed were subject to discrimination whether due to their race or cultural background, it draws attention to the prominent role schools and educational institutions play ‘in developing Australians’ ability to live together and embrace the opportunities that arise within a diverse society’.

These two issues became one of the ten recommendations presented to the government with a call for ‘establish[ing] an anti-racism strategy […] and education program for all Australians, with particular reference to discrimination, prejudice and racism’. This emphasis on educational institutions echoed a similar one conveyed in the Galbally Report to foster the people’s understanding of the policy of multiculturalism and its significance to Australian society. However, over three decades what has been achieved in this field is not promising. Investigating multicultural education in the schools of New South Wales, Megan Atkins, Gareth Lean and Greg Noble conclude that ‘more needs to be done’.

In 2011, the Julia Gillard government (2010-2013) accepted the recommendation of the report and stated that multiculturalism is for ‘all Australians’ who unanimously have the right to ‘practice and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and languages

---

39 Ibid., p. 17
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., p. 18
within the law and free from discrimination.’ Accordingly, Australians are no longer entitled solely to expressing their cultural heritage, which is subject to law, as the case was especially in the 2003 report of multiculturalism, but also to maintain it. Indeed, I read this as a revival of the notion of multiculturalism in the reports of the Australian governments (1978-1996) which preceded the Howard government. As an assertion of its commitment to the policy of multiculturalism, the Gillard government decided in 2012 to appoint a minister for Multicultural Affairs. However, this post was changed into the minister for immigration and border protection when the Liberal/National Coalition won the elections at the end of 2013. This change of post from ‘Minister of Multicultural Affairs’ to the ‘Minister of Immigration and Border Protection’ suggests that the Liberal/National Coalition was more committed to the idea of integration and border protection policing than to the idea of multiculturalism. This change remained the same when, in September 2015, a new leader for the Liberal Party, Malcolm Turnbull, was elected to replace Tony Abbot. Yet, Turnbull decided to have Zed Seselja in his cabinet as Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs which conveys a commitment to multicultural affairs which was developed in the Turnbull government’s multicultural statement in March 2017.

It is important to indicate that the Gillard government’s affirmation of its commitment to multiculturalism in 2011 came at a period when multicultural policies were declared unsuccessful in major European countries. In October 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that ‘the approach [to build] a multicultural [society] […] has failed, utterly failed’. Similarly, at the Munich Security Conference in February 2011, the then British Prime Minister David Cameron stated that ‘[u]nder the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream’. In the same month, the then French President Nicolas Sarkozy insisted that ‘[w]e have been too concerned about the identity of the person who was arriving and not enough about the identity of the country’.

---

46 David Cameron quoted in Gamble, ‘Multiculturalism and the Public Sphere’, p. 281.
that was receiving him’. Commenting on these declarations of failure, Chris Bowen, the Minister of Immigration and Citizenship in the Gillard government, attributes the achievement of Australian multiculturalism to three factors: ‘its respect for traditional Australian values’, including equality, tolerance, freedom and democracy, ‘political bipartisanship’ support, and being ‘citizenship-based’ where citizens enjoy complete benefits of citizenship. In addition to giving the impression that these values work better in Australia than the afore-mention countries, I regard Bowen’s comparison between these three countries and Australia as potentially misleading because neither Germany nor Britain nor France received as large an influx of migration as Australia did. According to the 2011 census, 46% of the Australian population were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas.

The Turnbull government’s commitment to the policy of multiculturalism is confirmed by its multicultural statement (2017), Multicultural Australia – United, Strong, Successful which ‘renews and reaffirms the Government’s commitment to multicultural Australia, in which racism and discrimination has no place’. Australians, this statement asserts, ‘are not defined by race, religion or culture, but by shared values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law and equality of opportunity’. It also confirms the government’s commitment to settlement programs that enable new migrants to be self-sufficient and active members of society. In this statement, with its positive use of the pronoun ‘we’, the Turnbull government indicates that there is no fixed image for Australia because ‘we are as old as our First Australians’ and ‘we are as young as the baby in the

---


51 Ibid.
arms of her migrant mother’.  

Ghassan Hage criticises the dominant political rhetoric which is replete with the use of “we appreciate” diversity and which produces, Hage maintains, ‘a gulf between the “we” and that which is appreciated’.  

Bearing in mind Ghassan Hage’s critique of the ‘we appreciate’ wording, the Turnbull government’s statement, in which ‘we are’ abounds, bridges the gulf between the ‘we’ and Australia’s cultural diversity and conveys a progressive recognition, within the governmental level, of Australian identity as evolving and never fixed.

However, the Turnbull government’s statement’s reference to English language as ‘a critical tool for migrant integration’ is interpreted as swinging ‘the multiculturalism pendulum back towards “integration” of migrants’. The concept of multiculturalism has been topical since the 1980s and remains so in Australia. My review in this section of the reports and statements issued over four decades, from 1977 to 2017, highlights the controversy surrounding both the meaning of multiculturalism and support for the policy, whether among the Australians or within the government. While the reports state that the majority of the Australian population supports the policy, the case is not the same at the governmental level. Over a decade (1996-2007), the Howard government swung the pendulum of multiculturalism back to assimilative modes until 2011 when a new government reaffirmed its commitment to the policy of multiculturalism. These varying, and sometimes contrasting, stances towards the policy of multiculturalism would have their impact on representations of cultural diversity in Australia. My review of the policy of multiculturalism as articulated in the successive Australian governments’ reports and statements (1977-2017), and my evaluation of the potential and limitations of this official discourse on multiculturalism inform my reading of the nine plays in this study which are published within those decades. Investigating how cultural diversity is depicted in contemporary Australian drama and the influence of the political context on literary representations of multiculturalism are key issues in my study. My topic is, thus, timely and worthy of investigation.

---

52 Ibid. Emphasis Added. In the foreword to this statement, which is 242 words, Turnbull uses the word ‘we’ 4 times. Interestingly, on page 5, for instance, the number rises to 13.


Towards an Australian Identity: Conflicting Perspectives

This section engages in scholarly debate on Australian identity. It begins by considering how the idea of Australian identity as fluid and evolving is foregrounded in the policy of multiculturalism report in 1999 before looking at contrasting opinions where one group of scholars promotes the idea of a unitary Australian identity while another critiques this assumption and asserts that Australian identity has been enriched and diversified following Australia’s cultural diversity and the implementation of the policy of multiculturalism.

The 1989 report on the policy of multiculturalism, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, which states that Australians have the right to express their cultural heritage, makes no reference to any particular cultural identity. The same premise is augmented in the council’s report in 1999, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century*, which positions Australian culture within the frame of a political culture:

In its broadest sense, culture is often seen as a term that refers to the way of life of a society. In this sense it is the structures and traditions of Australia’s democratic society, the customs and habits, the aspirations and values, and the individual and collective achievements of the Australian people, living within these democratic arrangements, that make up Australian culture.\(^{55}\)

To those who believe that multiculturalism ‘is denigrating Australian culture’ with its “Anglo” or “old Australia” heritages’ through ‘promoting other cultures as more worthy’, the report asserts that:

Australian culture is dynamic. It starts with and retains its links to our total heritage, but is not a fossilised entity which remains static from the time a particular group sets foot on Australian soil. [...] It has been modified and enhanced by the arrival of many migrant groups. It continues to be developed by the evolution of ideas and customs within Australia and by global influences.\(^{56}\)

The relationship between multiculturalism and Australian culture, as emphasised in the 1999 report, is a reciprocal one because ‘far from denying Australian culture, it is in fact one of its achievements’ and helps in shaping it.\(^{57}\) This notion finds resonance in *The Sydney Morning Herald* which states in an editorial that ‘Multiculturalism is not at odds with Australian values’, but, in fact, ‘an integral part of the Australian identity; it is part

---

\(^{55}\) NMAC, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century*, p. 45.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) NMAC, p. 47.
of the glue that holds our Australian society together.’\textsuperscript{58} The controversy over Australian identity is noted in the 1999 report that draws attention to a minority of Australians who regard the policy as suppressing or even denying Australian culture. Indeed, such a notion is the outcome of an attack on multiculturalism and an expression of critical perspectives on Australian identity as unitary and homogenous which began in 1984 when Geoffrey Blainey, a professor of history in Melbourne University, called for a reduction in the intake of Asian migrants. In his book, \textit{All for Australians}, Blainey expressed a nostalgic attitude towards the era of White Australia by inquiring that ‘[i]f the people of each minority should have the right to establish here a way of life familiar to them, is it not equally right – or more so, in democracy – for the majority of Australians to retain the way of life familiar to them?’\textsuperscript{59} During the federal election campaigns in 1990 and 1993, John Howard, the then Leader of the Opposition, grasped the opportunity to attack multiculturalism, considering it as ‘an aimless divisive policy’.\textsuperscript{60}

The radical change to Australian culture and identity following the adoption of multiculturalism and the non-racist migration program which allowed multi-racial migration to Australia is the reason why some scholars like Miriam Dixon and Blainey long for a past where Australian culture rested firmly on British foundations. For those scholars, especially Dixon, the crisis over Australian identity is to be settled by ‘let[ting] the old identity do its essential work, to go on playing the cohesive role it has discharged since 1788 […] in building a twenty-first-century Australia’.\textsuperscript{61} It is, indeed, a problematic view that regards the colonising of Australia as a cohesive process despite its pernicious effects on its original inhabitants, Aboriginal people, and their culture, and its conflict with Australia’s egalitarian principles. The attack on the policy of multiculturalism continued in the works of scholars, such as Brian Galligan and Winsome Roberts, who proclaim that there are two aspects of this policy, transitional and national. The first, they propose, is concerned with assisting migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds; the second, which they regard as destructive, intends to make ‘a nation of many cultures’

\textsuperscript{59} Geoffrey Blainey, \textit{All for Australians} (Sydney: Methuen Haynes, 1984), p. 124.
\textsuperscript{60} John Howard, quoted in Brian Galligan and Winsome Roberts, \textit{Australian Citizenship} (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2004), p. 89.
and ‘create lasting enclaves of ethnoculturally distinct peoples’.\textsuperscript{62} As proponents of an integrationist approach, Galligan and Roberts maintain that ‘[i]f we must use the term at all, this is multiculturalism of the traditional kind: assisting integration and not promoting distinct immigrant cultures that endure beyond the immigrant generation, and not having government policies directed at fostering distinct cultures.’\textsuperscript{63} While admitting that Australian culture is ‘enriched’ and ‘diversified’ into something ‘new’ and ‘strange’, they insist that Australian culture, which they perceive as Anglo-Australian culture, should influence minor cultures without being impacted by them.

Galligan and Roberts’ premise in this essay regarding the children of migrants’ tendency to marry outside their cultural group and their claim that multiculturalism is a policy for integrating migrants echo the ideas expressed in their paper entitled ‘Australian Multiculturalism: its Rise and Demise’.\textsuperscript{64} Their notion of ‘Australian identity’ as having ‘an Anglo base’ and influencing migrants and their children to abandon their cultural group through marriage, supposedly with persons from the dominant culture, conveys an assimilative perception of Australian culture; assimilation aimed at, Zappala and Castles purport, ‘bas[ing] national identity on British heritage’ where migrants are supposed to give up their cultural heritage and absorb ‘into the dominant Anglo-Australian culture and identity’.\textsuperscript{65} Influenced by the Howard government’s attitude towards multiculturalism, Galligan and Roberts foresaw a ‘demise’ of this policy since they found in Howard a champion for their belief that ‘[m]ulticulturalism rejects the unity of Australian society in favour of an aggregate of different Australian communities and identities’.\textsuperscript{66} This perception, indeed, aligns with Howard’s opinion of the policy as divisive.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{63} Ibid., p. 215.
\bibitem{66} Galligan and Roberts ‘Australian Multiculturalism: its Rise and Demise’, p. 5.
\end{thebibliography}
Having commented on the perspectives of proponents of a homogenous Australian identity, I will cast light on Eduardo Galeano and Bhikhu Parekh’s opinions on national culture before exploring the perspectives of the second group of scholars who assert that Australian identity is, in fact, multiple and heterogenous. Instead of being defined by its origin, national culture, Galeano suggests, can be defined by its content:

National culture is defined by its content, not by the origin of its elements. Alive, it changes incessantly, it challenges itself, it contradicts itself, and it receives external influences that at times increase it, and that are wont to operate simultaneously as a threat and a stimulus.  

Defining a national culture according to its content rather than its beginning or origin problematises attempts to regard it as authentic and homogenous. Moreover, those contents are not static but vulnerable to change across time. Parekh postulates that ‘[c]ultures grow out of conscious interaction with each other and are shaped by the wider economic, political and other forces’. More important, in a multicultural society, the ‘sense of belonging’, Parekh maintains, ‘cannot be ethnic or based on shared cultural, ethnic and other characteristics, for a multicultural society is too diverse for that, too political in nature and based on a shared commitment to the political community’. These views align with the opinions of the second group of scholars who regard Australian identity as heterogenous rather than homogenous. Although the policy of multiculturalism grants Australians the right to express and share their cultural heritage, ‘it put less emphasis’, James Jupp asserts, ‘on cultural or ethnic maintenance’. Indeed, the policy focuses, as I stated earlier, on the individual, and its reference to ‘all Australians’ in its dimensions and guidelines evidences this. In this sense, no particular significance is ever given to any specific culture.

The impact of both migration and the policy of multiculturalism on Australian identity is emphasised by Andrew C. Theophanous who suggests that:

---

69 Parekh, p. 341
traditionally there have been two strands to our national identity. The first is the British legacy and the second is the commitment to a limited form of egalitarianism. I have made the point that both these strands of our identity were unfortunately intertwined with an emphasis on cultural, even racial, superiority. Obviously, multiculturalism challenged this negative feature of our earlier Australian identity. The idea of the superiority of constructed Australian culture, and of the British heritage on which it was supposedly based, clearly could not be maintained perpetually after the arrival of people from so many other cultural backgrounds.\(^71\)

Theophanous points out that those who insist on a monocultural identity ‘have had problems dealing with Australia’s cultural diversity’ which they may tolerate only if ‘at some point in the future, migrants will come to accept and assimilate to an ideal of Australian identity and culture.’\(^72\) Further, he maintains that ‘even in the absence of Australia’s own cultural diversity’, modern changes around the world make it plain ‘that our identities would be changing anyway.’\(^73\) The same point is made by Hugh McKay who states that:

> Since the early 1970s, there is hardly an institution or a convention of Australian life which has not been subject either to serious challenge or radical change. The social, cultural, political and economic landmarks which we have traditionally used as reference points for defining the Australian way of life have either vanished, been eroded or shifted.\(^74\)

The assumption that Australian identity is unitary and resting on British identity is also opposed by postcolonial critics who draw attention to the impact of the new land on the imported culture. Speaking about the white settlers in settler countries including Australia, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin propose that they ‘faced the problem of establishing their “indigeneity” and distinguishing it from their continuing sense of their European inheritance’.\(^75\) Accordingly, there is no valid reason for perceiving Australian identity as resting solely on British heritage.

---


\(^72\) Ibid., p. 288.

\(^73\) Ibid.


The premise that the cultural other is either supposed to adapt to the dominant culture or be silenced is critiqued in the plays analysed in this thesis. An example of this can be found in Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman’s *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (2001) when the white coloniser orders the Aboriginal performer, the Woman, in the play not to dance, not to speak and not to do anything she is used to doing. This is not limited to the past or to Aboriginal people but extended to other cultural minorities as well; in Michael Futcher and Helen Howard’s *A Beautiful Life* (2000), the Australian Prosecutor tells the Iranian migrant characters to forget the past, and the white lawyer, Brendan, asks them not to speak Farsi in his presence. Cultural practices like speaking a foreign language or singing or dancing are interpreted, in these plays, as expressions of difference which are not always tolerated or accepted by characters from the dominant culture. Such intolerance is critiqued in these plays as well as in Nick Parsons’ *Dead Heart* (1996), where pressure to entirely adapt to white law and relinquish Aboriginal customary law is resisted.

Commitment to Australia, Theophanous claims, is more important to Australians than their ‘commitment to the monocultural idea of the Australian nation’ and maintains that ‘[w]hen Australian identity is defined according to these terms, it is possible to accept that people from diverse ethnic communities can and will commit themselves to Australia as a socially just, multicultural nation.’ If multiculturalism has defined Australia’s character, migration has enriched Australian culture through a cross-cultural fertilisation which has emerged gradually over the last three decades. Australia, as portrayed in this study, has become a contested stage where cross-cultural exchange and cultural hybridisation are articulated. However, the multicultural character of Australia is rarely depicted in the mainstream media which presents the country mainly as white. In addition to this, the depiction of Australia’s cultural diversity in its theatres, which was apparent in the Australian stage during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, diminished in the following years. The responsibility for this change is placed, Lee Lewis claims, ‘on the current conservative political climate, which has as much effect on theatre companies as anything else’ by threatening their survival. The same point is shared by Tony Mitchel who asserts that

---

76 Theophanous, p. 325.
Since the 1996 election of a Liberal-National Coalition government in Australia and the policy and doctrine of multiculturalism [...] has begun to be dismantled in the context of a series of rabid funding cuts in favour of what increasingly seems like a throwback to the “white Australia” immigration policies of 1950s.78 Accordingly, the number of playwrights and artists ‘working in the area of bilingual, bicultural or multicultural theatre’, Mitchell notes, has reduced.79 In addition to these two sectors, Australia’s ‘multicultural character’, Tim Soutphommasane suggests, ‘appears absent from the leadership of its major economic, political, governmental and civil societal institutions’ which remains, to date, a privilege of the dominant group.80 It reflects, Soutphommasane maintains, a discriminatory perception where leadership operates according to ‘typically Anglo cultural styles’.81 Although cultural diversity in senior institutions is outside the scope of this thesis, Soutphommasane’s point indicates that multiculturalism has not yet advanced to ‘break down structures of social power and privilege’ and ‘embrace cultural change within institutions’.82

The policy of multiculturalism creates, Levey notes, ‘a space in which cultural diversity and difference could be seen as legitimate and as part of one’s Australian identity.’83 Within such a ‘liberal national conception’, the nation is perceived, Levey postulates, ‘in terms of a community of shared culture and language grounded in a territorial homeland, but rejects the requirement of ethnic or common decent’.84 Culturally hybrid characters and cross-cultural relations are key issues in contemporary Australian drama. If cultural diversity enriches Australian identity, contemporary Australian drama opens spaces where not only difference but also hybridisation is negotiated. Contrary to Levey’s perception of Australia as ‘a community of shared culture and language grounded in a territorial homeland’, the variety of narratives and cultural backgrounds of characters presented on stage affirm that Australian identity is not restricted to a specific geographical landscape, language, race or place of birth. As

79 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 295.
84 Ibid.
portrayed in some of the plays in this study, hybridisation is not restricted to culture and language but entails hyphenated identities as well; in *A Beautiful Life*, the Anglo-Australian Brendan appears to share an ancestor with the Iranian-Australian Amir, and the same is identified in Chi’s *Bran Nue Dae* between Willie, an Aboriginal Australian, and Slippery, a German-Australian, who share one mother. Thus, what some of the plays I analyse here envisage is more hybridised than what Australian scholars such as Levey might have expected. To sum up the discussion in this section, Australian identity is no longer perceived as fixed or as based solely on British heritage. As indicated in the viewpoints of the second group of scholars whose work I have discussed, Australian identity and culture are open to the enrichment and contribution of Australians from diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Australian Theatre**

This section traces the creation of Australian theatre from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, with an emphasis on the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s which coincided with the appearance of a new wave that influenced Australian dramatic process and content. Establishing a national theatre dedicated to local writings and works was the main concern of the Australian playwright Louis Esson (1878-1943) who travelled to London and Dublin in 1904 to meet J.M. Synge and W.B. Yeats. Both had a great influence on him, especially Yeats who convinced him of the necessity of an Australian national theatre and advised him to keep within the Australian borders and ‘regard [Australia] as the centre of the universe’.\(^{85}\) On his return, in 1921, Esson and his group, The Pioneer Players, presented Australian narratives on stage, but four years of lack of support and limited audience forced them to give up.\(^{86}\) After Esson’s death, the Chifley Government (1945-1949) tried, in 1949, to establish a national theatre and to this end it requested the help of the English director, Tyrone Guthrie (1900-1971). Guthrie suggested inviting about twelve British and European companies and starting a group of Australian actors to be trained in classic plays in London. However, this attempt by the Chifley Government ended with the end of its tenure and was ignored by the succeeding government, the Menzies Government (1949-1966).\(^{87}\) The task of establishing a national

---

85 McCallum, p.33.
87 Ibid.
theatre was later pursued by the English director, Hugh Hunt, who arrived in Australia in 1955 to head the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust for five years. During this time, he helped in forming the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) to train students in the performing arts.

In his essay 'The Making of an Australian Theatre’, Hugh Hunt identifies the main obstacles which impeded the establishment of an Australian national theatre, such as financial problems and the huge size of the country. Hunt claims that due to the geographical distribution of its main cities, Australia needed six theatres. In addition to those problems, Australian theatre suffered from the lack of trained actors, an adequate playhouse, and a theatrically accustomed audience. An Australian national theatre, Hunt asserted, should ensure a balance between classics, especially from other countries, and contemporary plays. Yet plays by Australian playwrights, Geoffrey Hutton purports, were hardly presented on stage and ‘[l]ocal writers and local actors are making their names in radio, but not in theatre’. However, the success of Ray Lawler’s *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1955) in Melbourne convinced Hunt, Hutton states, to have it performed in Sydney where it achieved an ‘instantaneous success’. The play’s cast of sugar-cane workers and barmmaids and its employment of Australian idioms presented Australians with a story of their own life and environment. The success of this local play was a response to Australian officials such as Menzies who, Russell Vandenbroucke asserts, was against such an initiative fearing that ‘the play’s morality’ would have a negative influence on the country.

This mistrust of local work was identified by A. A. Philips who drew attention to the negative aspect of assuming that ‘the domestic cultural product will be worse than the imported’. This assumption, which he named as the ‘cultural cringe’, would underestimate Australian works through on-going comparisons with English works.

---

88 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
David Williamson, an acclaimed Australian playwright, shared the same concern and complained that unless it is recognised by ‘a large culture’, such as the British, Australians will not trust their local product. In 1952, John Sumner, the third English person interested in improving Australian theatre, arrived in Melbourne to take the responsibility of managing the Union Theatre within the University of Melbourne which changed its name to the Melbourne Theatre Company. Though convinced that there was an audience who would enjoy Australian plays, Sumner favoured a careful choice of local plays. In 1962, Sumner chose Russell Street Theatre to present Australian plays including Patrick White’s *A Cheery Soul*, Alan Seymour’s *The One Day of the Year* and Ray Lawler’s *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. The success, though not a financial one, of these plays encouraged other cities to have their own theatre companies, namely the National Theatre in Perth in 1956, the Old Tote Theatre in the University of New South Wales in 1962, the South Australian Theatre Company in Adelaide in 1965, and the Queensland Theatre Company in Brisbane in 1970. Moreover, Australian actors and directors took the opportunity to form their own companies albeit their efforts were challenged by financial issues which the Australia Council for the Arts, which was established in 1968, helped to overcome. The interest in funding the arts encouraged the emergence of four theatres dedicated mainly to Australian plays: Jane Street Theatre in Randwick in 1966, La Mama in Carlton in 1967, and the Pram Factory and the Nimrod (now the Belvoir Street Theatre).

Esson’s interest in a theatre dedicated to local plays was revived in 1965 following Prime Minister Menzies’ decision to send some troops to aid the Americans in the Vietnam War (1955-1975). This decision, which followed another one in November 1964 when a compulsory national scheme was introduced compelling twenty-year-old Australians to join the army, caused an active protest as tens of thousands, mainly students in universities, demonstrated against war, conscription, the American policy, Australia’s involvement in war and the Menzies government. This climate accelerated the birth of the ‘new Australian theatre’ which altered, Denise Varney asserts, ‘a culture based around

---

96 Vandenbroucke, p. xvii  
98 Ibid., p. 15.  
99 Ibid.  
100 Ibid.
imports from abroad to one that drew on international trends to write its own play’. The new theatre movement which was labelled as ‘the New Wave’ intended, Julian Meyrick points out, ‘to throw off what is perceived was an Anglo-obsessed legacy dating back to colonial times.’ The ‘New Wave’ refers to, McCallum posits, ‘a group of practices and ideas accompanied by the radical changes in the conditions and processes by which the theatre was produced and consumed.’ Through prominent works by playwrights including David Williams, Alex Buzo, John Romeril and Jack Hibberd, the New Wave, Meyrick claims, ‘changed the face of Australian theatre forever.’ In addition to protesting against the Vietnam War, the demonstrators share a tendency, McCallum maintains, to bring ‘individual and social issues’ to the stage and ‘appropriate and rework Australian history’ which was missed or, in fact, dismissed by their forebears. This zest for production and playwriting was influential in the establishment of Currency Press in 1972 to provide Australian playwrights with the opportunity to have their works published and make them consider writing worth pursuing.

Though many playwrights of the ‘New Wave’ relied on local events as themes for their plays, as can be seen for example in Alex Buzo’s Norm and Ahmed (1968) and David Williamson’s The Removalists (1970), Australia’s involvement in Asia was explored in plays such as Williamson’s Jugglers Three (staged in 1972 and published in 1974), about the Australian involvement in Vietnam, and John Romeril’s The Floating World (staged in 1974 and published in 1975), which addressed the Japanese treatment of Australian prisoners of war during World War II. Both plays share an anti-war agenda, especially the second, which is filled with, Varney states, ‘anti-British, anti-war and anti-capitalist language’. Another group of playwrights was less interested in the Australian environment and more focused on foreign settings to explore the relation between their country and the wider world. Notable examples are Stephen Sewell’s Traitors (staged

---

103 McCallum, p. 141.
104 Meyrick, p. 7.
105 McCallum, p. 141.
106 Varney, p. 21.
in 1979 and published in 1983) about the 1917 Revolution in Russia and Louis Nowra’s *Visions* set in Paraguay. Another political perspective was articulated through the works of female playwrights starting with Alma De Groen whose two plays, *Betty Can Jump* and *The Jess Adams Show* (premiered in 1972 and published in 1977) marked ‘the first expressions of Second Wave feminism in Melbourne theatre and fed into the growing momentum of the local branch of the women’s liberation movement.’\(^{108}\)

This atmosphere where local works and local voices were encouraged was pivotal in providing spaces for Australian migrant playwrights and the descendants of migrants to negotiate their search for an identity and belonging in a new country in plays including Theodore Patrikareas’ *The Uncle From Australia* (1964) and *The Divided Heart* (1992), Tes Lyssiotis’ *The Journey* (performed in 1984), Janis Balodis’ *Ghosts* trilogy starting with *Too Young for Ghosts* (1985), and Noelle Janaczewska’s *The History of Water* (1992). The themes these play explore are the focus of Part Three in my study. This period witnessed also the appearance of Aboriginal playwrights who dedicated their plays to key concerns of their groups, namely, colonialism, dispossession, the Stolen Generations, injustice and racism which I address in Part One of my thesis. Examples are Kevin Gilbert’s *The Cherry Pickers* (written in 1968), Robert Merritt’s *The Cake Man* (1975), Jack Davis’ *The Dreamers* (1982), *No Sugar* (1985) and *Barungin* (1988), and Jimmy Chi’s *Bran Nue Dae* (1990). During the last three decades, works by playwrights from minority groups or cultures, including the above, have resisted their marginal label and gradually infiltrated the Australian dramatic repertoire to the extent of, Veronica Kelly claims, ‘challen[ing] its centrality’ and influencing ‘its dramaturgical practices.’\(^{109}\) Indeed, the emergence of the New Wave and later the adoption of multiculturalism as a government policy have had a great impact in opening spaces for playwrights from minor groups to have their narratives performed on the Australian stage. A significant accomplishment of multiculturalism, Joanne Tompkins proclaims, ‘is normalising the representation of the “ethnic” even to the point of replacing the more stereotypical “bronzed Aussie” images of Australians’.\(^{110}\)

---

108 Varney, p. 25.
With the arrival of the Howard government, cultural diversity became underrepresented in Australian theatres. During his visit to Australia at the end of 1990s, Vandenbroucke states that he often heard of the word ‘multiculturalism’, but the seventeen plays he watched proved the contrary; their playwrights, the actors and the audience were all white or ‘homogenous’. This conveys that multiculturalism is a contentious issue not only in Australia’s political context but also in its literary context. Indeed, a survey of the plays staged in 2010, 269 plays, showed that ‘only 7% (16) were written by an author with an indigenous cultural background, and only 10% (28) were by an author from a non-English-speaking background’. Although multiculturalism is not a topic related solely to cultural minorities, these figures convey the marginal opportunities playwrights and even actors from these minorities have in Australian theatres which are funded by the federal or state governments.

Funding for theatre companies in Australia takes place mainly through the Australia Council of the Arts which funds the Major Performing Arts Board through ‘annual and, later triennial Program Grants to established companies’. The Major Performing Arts Board funds, Milne notes, ‘nine “theatre” companies (including Circus Oz) on a triennial grant basis’ and ‘cover[s] grants to over fifty clients, including Program Grants to fourteen “youth theatres” and twenty-seven adult theatre organisations […] [that] comprise what has come to be called […] the “small-to-medium” sector.’ To qualify for grants and funds, a theatre company in this sector must ‘show evidence of a sizeable and increasing audience base and have a minimum average total income of $1.54 million over the previous three-year period and demonstrate an ability to be financially viable’. If a company fails to do so, it has to wait for another three years to apply for a

---

111 Vandenbroucke, xii.  
114 Ibid., p. 23. The nine major theatre companies that are funded by the Major Performing Arts Board are Bell Shakespeare Company, Company B and Sydney Theatre Company in Sydney (NSW), Black Swan Theatre State Company (Western Australia), Circus Oz, Malthouse Theatre and Melbourne Theatre Company in Melbourne (Victoria), Queensland Theatre Company (Queensland), State Theatre Company of SA (South Australia).  
115 Ibid., p. 24.
grant. However, the funding those theatre companies receive does not cover all their needs and consequently the remaining part ‘has to be earned through the box office and through corporate sponsorship’.116 For theatre companies such as La Boite Theatre Company, federal and state funding, Christine Comans claims, comprises ‘28% of its revenue’ forcing it thereby to consider that ‘there [should be] no room for box office failures’.117 It is worth noting that starting from 2017 the Australia Council for the Arts has adopted a new Four Year Funding program to finance the 128 theatre companies in the small-to-medium sector.118

Bearing in mind the demographic change in Australian society following migration and the adoption of multiculturalism, Australian theatres, whether those run by the nine major companies or those in the small-to-medium sector, should be the sites where the multicultural character of Australia is manifested. However, plays depicting such multicultural character represented, as stated above, only 16% of the whole Australian dramatic repertoire. Australian theatre is supposed to articulate what Meyrick calls ‘[a] genuine multicultural theatre’ which presents Australia as ‘always culturally porous’.119 Yet, achieving this aim has become financially risky in the last two decades. Chris Mead proposes that major theatre companies may be willing to present the work of a non-English-speaking playwright, but ‘expend[ing] real dollars on something as risky as a brand new play by a non-English-Speaking writer – however remarkable s/he might seem but without a proven track of some kind – that is asking too much.’120 The negative impact of funding on the representation of cultural diversity in theatres is also observed by Lewis who states that ‘a multicultural stage costs money and, as theatres see their funding under constant threat […], they decide to mimic the government’s isolationist immigration policies and retreat to conservative, risk-averse, funding-safe, White-casting agendas’.121 If this policy of funding continues, the marginalisation of cultural diversity

116 Ibid., p. 25.
119 Meyrick, pp. 52-59.
121 Lewis, pp. 54-55.
within Australian theatre therefore seems likely to remain. Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert identify two types of multicultural theatre which they call small ‘m’ multiculture and Big ‘M’ multiculture theatre. Lo and Gilbert regard the second type as a distinctive phenomenon in both Australia and Canada which ‘have well-established track records of this form of theatre’ due to their adoption of multiculturalism. This type of multicultural theatre, they propose, ‘promote[s] cultural diversity, access to cultural expression, and participation in the symbolic space of the national narrative.’ On the contrary, small ‘m’ multicultural theatre, they maintain, ‘gives the appearance of diversity without necessarily confronting the hegemony of the dominant culture.’ Although both of these types of multicultural theatre are found in contemporary plays, their number, as stated above, does not adequately reflect Australia’s multicultural character.

As Sneja Gunew observes, multicultural writing is perceived in Australia as ‘reserved for those who write from outside’ the dominant group. Such a perception indicates a narrow-minded notion which regards diasporic works, Gunew asserts, as being ‘not really rooted in the place at all’ and talks about people ‘situated outside’. Many Aboriginal writers have resisted being labelled under this category, Tompkins asserts, fearing that its supposed relationship to migrant writing does not take into account their ancestors’ presence in Australia centuries before the arrival of both settlers and migrants. The way in which multiculturalism was introduced in 1978 as a policy mainly focusing on migrant settlement and welfare might be the reason why it was interpreted as being mainly dedicated to migrants and their concerns. Yet, as this study demonstrates, multiculturalism is a concern of many playwrights with a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

Vandenbroucke’s comments on the underrepresentation of cultural diversity in Australia’s theatres resonate with Jon Stratton’s premise of the presence of two types of multiculturalism in Australia: official multiculturalism and everyday multiculturalism. The first – evident through the mass media – operates within the concept of a core culture,

---

123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
127 Joanna Tompkins, “‘Homescapes” and Identity Reformation in Australian Multicultural Drama’, *TRI*, 26:1, (2001), 47-59 (p. 48).
where other cultures are marginalised. The second, which is ‘tempered by its acceptance of change through the inclusion of cultural practices’ and its focus on ‘the individual rather than the ethnic group’ embodies the lived representation of cultural diversity.\textsuperscript{128} Ghassan Hage references the same notion when, responding to Howard’s disapproval of the policy of multiculturalism in his last year in power, he differentiates between two perceptions of multiculturalism, multiculturalism as policy and as a reality. The first, Hage claims, is ‘clearly dependent on the state and can appear and disappear according to certain political whims’ and the second, he maintains, is ‘multiculturalism as reality [which] cannot disappear so easily’ because ‘it is not dependent on policy’ but on activists whom he calls ‘champions of multiculturalism’.\textsuperscript{129} If the Australian mass media fails to depict the diversity of cultures Australia has come to have, Australian drama provides an arena where the diversity of cultures can be manifested – albeit not as expected. It is also the field where stereotyping of the cultural other is critiqued. The Australian mass media’s focus on and negative stereotyping of cultural groups is the topic of two of the plays I examine in this thesis, namely, Futcher and Howard’s\textit{A Beautiful Life} (2000) and Abela’s\textit{Jump for Jordan} (2014). Drawing on Hage’s ideas, I suggest that Australian playwrights who portray the country’s cultural diversity in a nuanced way and resist attempts to contain its cross-cultural practices are worthy of being labelled as ‘champions of multiculturalism’.

Little has been written about multiculturalism in contemporary Australian drama. The only paper which has tackled this topic is an interesting article by Roanna Gonsalves, ‘Multiculturalism and Mainstage Australian Theatre’, which I discuss in relation to the third play in Part Two of this thesis. Gonsalves’ paper is limited to only three plays presented in Australian mainstage theatres where the third one, a production of\textit{The Brothers Size} (2011), is written by Tarell Alvin McCraney, an African American playwright, not Australian. In his book,\textit{Belonging: Australian Playwriting in the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century} (2009), McCallum dedicates fifteen pages to multiculturalism. These pages, however, turn out to be about plays by Australian playwrights who are mainly migrants or from a migrant background. All these plays have migrants in their cast and explore issues of displacement and alienation. Although McCallum’s work makes reference to


\textsuperscript{129} Ghassan Hage, ‘What should “Championing Multiculturalism” Mean Today?’, \textit{The Ethnic Broadcaster}, Autumn 2012, pp. 2-5 (p. 2).

30
plays that predate the implementation of the policy of multiculturalism in 1978 and includes two plays which are written by playwrights from the dominant culture following the introduction of this policy, namely, Hannie Rayson’s *Mary* (1981) and Futcher and Howard’s *A Beautiful Life* (2000), he replicates the same belief as others such as Tompkins who consider ‘multicultural’ plays as limited only to migrants’ issues.\textsuperscript{130}

The above point is shared by Hilary Glow in her monograph, *Power Plays: Australian Theatre and the Public Agenda* (2007), in which she dedicates eight pages (138-45) in Chapter Four to explore ‘multiculturalism in the theatre’. In these pages, she casts light on the issues of multiculturalism, refugees and asylum seekers, border protection and war on terror in theatre and television. By referring to the same plays McCallum mentions in his book, especially *A Beautiful Life* and *Mary*, she replicates the same perception that limits multicultural writing to works either by playwrights from a migrant background or about migrant issues. In her study, *Radical Visions 1968-2008: The Impact of the Sixties on Australian Drama* (2011), Denise Varney dedicates five pages (138-42) in Chapter Four entitled ‘John Romeril – The Asian Australian Journey’ to what she termed as ‘Multiculturalism in the northwest’. However, the focus in these pages is just one play, John Romeril’s *Miss Tanaka* (2001), which, as Varney states, has ‘a multi-cultural and Aboriginal cast’.\textsuperscript{131} It is also missed in Katharine Brisbane’s *Not Wrong Just Different: Observations on the Rise of Contemporary Australian Theatre* (2005), a collection of her articles and reviews as a theatre critic which explores the development of Australian theatre from 1967 to 1974. In Richard Fotheringham and James Smith’s book, *Catching Australian Theatre in the 2000s* (2013), the focus is the ‘current theatre’s industrial challenges and the varied responses of the artists, audiences and policy-makers’.\textsuperscript{132} In Emma Cox’s monograph, *Performing Noncitizenship: Asylum Seekers in Australian Theatre, Film and Activism* (2015), the latest book to explore Australian theatre, no reference is ever made to multicultural drama or even the policy of multiculturalism. The same interpretation of multicultural plays is echoed in the only PhD thesis that explores Australian multicultural drama, Tricia Hopton’s ‘Re-Imaging

\textsuperscript{130} For more details on Tompkins’ perception and parameters of multicultural plays see p. 120 in ‘Inter-referentiality’, and pp. 48-49 in “‘Homescapes’ and Identity Reformation in Australian Multicultural Drama”.

\textsuperscript{131} Varney, p. 138.

Citizenry: National Identities in Canadian and Australian Multicultural Drama’. Supervised by Professor Joanna Tompkins, Hopton reinforces her supervisor’s beliefs that multicultural plays are those penned by migrants or their descendants or addressing migrants’ issues. Identifying the characters of the plays she analyses in her thesis, Hopton states that ‘[t]he plays’ immigrant characters and/or their first-generation offspring experience comparable situations as they work to establish themselves in their new homelands’. Limiting herself to these criteria might be the reason why three of the Australian plays she chooses are written by one playwright, Noelle Janaczewska. My thesis, on the contrary, is more inclusive. While being restricted to the Australian repertoire, it includes the works of playwrights from diverse strata of Australian population, namely, the Aboriginals, the dominant group and those from a migrant background.

Although Australian drama is part of English drama, it has been marginalised in book-length critical studies, readers and anthologies of contemporary drama. Despite being a vibrant and growing area of cultural production with, as stated in the bibliography in McCallum’s book, more than 2200 plays, Australian drama is underrepresented in drama studies. No reference is made to Australian drama or dramatists in critical studies including Katharine J. Worth, Revolutions in Modern English Drama (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1973), C.W.E. Bigsby (ed.), Contemporary English Drama (London: Edward Arnold, 1981) or The Cambridge Companion to Modernism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) which dedicates a chapter to ‘Modernism in Drama’. The focus in these studies is on Britain, the USA and, in the case of the third book, Europe. The same can be said about David Ian Raby’s book, English Drama Since 1940 (London and New York: Routledge, 2014) which focuses on British and Irish drama and playwrights. Even when Cambridge University issued an anthology of Australian literature, Elizabeth Webby’s The Cambridge Companion to Australian literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), the chapter that explores Australian drama, ‘Theatre from 1788 to the 1960s’, stops at the year 1961 with Patrick White’s The Ham Funeral (1961). Thus, it does not deal with Australian drama and theatre following the emergence of the

---

New Wave at the end of the 1960s when the focus was on local narratives rather than on imported works from Britain and America. My study is important because it contributes not only to scholarship on Australian theatre but also to drama studies by offering a substantial critical work on Australian drama, a topic which has not been sufficiently looked at. Moreover, it fills a void in the existing oeuvre on multicultural drama which is still governed by a perception restricting it solely to migrant issues and narratives.

**Thesis Structure**

This study comprises three parts which address, respectively, the works of eleven playwrights from Australia’s three groups, namely, the Aboriginals, the descendants of settlers, and the culturally diverse groups of migrants. My thesis is restricted to nine plays premiered in various Australian theatres which are partly funded by the government and are therefore supposed to be the sites where Australia’s cultural diversity, albeit in a small proportion of plays, is portrayed. The study includes works of both male and female playwrights who are Australian citizens and reside in Australia. The plays under study explore a diversity of cultural backgrounds and voices and cover a wide geographical distance from the north to south and west to east of Australia and span a period of twenty-four years though the plays’ settings, sometimes, exceed this time frame.

In Part One which I have entitled ‘Aboriginal Drama’, I address three works by Aboriginal playwrights, namely, Jimmy Chi’s *Bran Nue Dae* (1991), Wesley Enoch’s and Deborah Mailman’s *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (2001), and David Milroy’s *Waltzing the Wilarra* (2011). I explore how these plays outline Aboriginal peoples’ struggle for land rights as well as other issues such as the Stolen Generations, death in police custody, racism and the erosion of culture. I investigate the literary tools and dramatic techniques these Aboriginal playwrights employ in exploring Aboriginal identity and the diversity of their people and narratives. The three plays end with a call for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia. The process of reconciliation started in 1988 but stalled during the Howard government which decided that reconciliation could be achieved through services and provision for the Aboriginal people rather than through apology and reparation. Accordingly, the optimistic atmosphere and the celebration of cultural diversity present in Chi’s play diminishes in the following two plays.

In the first play, *Bran Nue Dae*, Chi presents a musical which reflects on the inclusive aspects of Aboriginal culture, espouses the cultural diversity of the country and celebrates the dawning of a new day where reconciliation is accomplished between
Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia. He structures the musical as a journey from Perth to Broome to convey the role songs, music, dances and stories play in Aboriginal culture. His celebration of the diversity of cultures in Broome is conveyed through the use of various languages, including English, the authority of which is subverted through the use of other languages such as Aboriginal language, Aboriginal English, English with a German accent and German. Although the play begins with a song about the invasion of land, it does not rest at this but moves beyond to celebrate the diversity of cultures in Australia where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians participate jointly in the play’s songs and dances. I argue that one of the great achievements of this play is that it challenges the limitations of the official policy of multiculturalism which fails to incorporate Aboriginal peoples, since the cast in this play includes Aboriginal, white Australians from the dominant culture (settlers) and others from a German background.

Enoch and Mailman’s *The 7 Stages of Grieving* takes the form of a monodrama to depict how telling Aboriginal peoples’ stories is a major step towards sharing histories in Australia especially if it is achieved through the intersubjective communication medium of drama. Through the use of this genre, the play perpetuates the oral discourse of people with a strong oral culture such as the Aboriginal. The recuperation of orality in this play is depicted in two ways: firstly through an oral performance of an Aboriginal written text; and secondly by a reading of a white policeman’s written text on stage which is, I argue, one way of undermining white authority. In the third play, Milroy chooses, as a setting for his play, a club in Perth to investigate relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples within two separate timelines, 1947 and 1997. By incorporating these two narratives, the stage metaphorically becomes a sitting room where the characters negotiate reconciliation. With a gap of about 50 years between the two acts, the play’s temporal framework contributes to the Aboriginal characters’ articulation of traumatic experiences whether individual, familial or collective. The bleaker outlook of the engagement in these two plays with the issue of cultural diversity, I argue, is a critique of Australian governments’ reluctance, if not refusal, to achieve a reconciliation with the Aboriginal which is a major issue in all three plays.

Part Two, which is entitled ‘Settler Drama’, focuses on the depiction of cultural diversity in works by Australian playwrights from the dominant culture, namely, Nick Parsons’ *Dead Heart* (1996), Michael Futcher and Helen Howard’s *A Beautiful Life* (2000), and Tommy Murphy’s *Gwen in Purgatory* (2010). These plays, respectively, take
us from the Northern Territory to Brisbane and then to Canberra. This geographical orientation underlines a thematic one where the focus shifts from settler-Aboriginal relations to settler-migrant relations. I argue that these playwrights articulate cultural diversity by providing Aboriginal characters, in the first play, and migrant characters, in the second, with the opportunity to act as major players who have enough space for self-expression. When this space becomes limited on the stage, as it does in the third play, the playwright’s intention is to critique the marginalised inclusion of culturally diverse persons on the national stage. In this sense, these works demonstrate how the three groups, namely, settlers, Aborigines and migrants, are not discrete on the Australian stage but in an ongoing negotiation.

The first play, Parsons’ *Dead Heart*, is a politically engaged play which shows that ‘oppositional postcolonial writing’ is not restricted to Aboriginal Australian writings but can be extended to include some white Australians’ writings as well. Cinematic strategies in the play enable the author to take his audience on a tour through the desert where he narrows the distance between the two camps, the whites’ and the Aborigines’, until they engage in conflict. In addition to subverting white authority through the use of Aboriginal English and even replacing the English language with Pintupi, the local Aboriginal language, the play depicts the alienation of white people. By validating Aboriginal law and conveying white law’s inability to acknowledge or accommodate Aboriginal beliefs, the play, I propose, portrays the difficulty of policing a society made up of such culturally distinct groups and the need for a reconciliation that would enable both whites and blacks to accept each other, ensure a peaceful coexistence and open spaces to negotiate cultural difference between them.

The focus in the second and third plays is settler-migrant relations: the playwrights challenge the perception that migrants’ issues feature only in diasporic drama. Futcher and Howard’s *A Beautiful Life* addresses the representation of migrants, Iranian Muslims, in the mainstream media and their treatment by the legal process. It critiques the mainstream media’s negative portrayal of migrants which affects their status within the host societies. In this play, I explore how Futcher and Howard, through the medium of

---

**Note:**

Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra state that there are two models of postcolonial writing, oppositional and complicit, and they do not consider works written by persons from the dominant culture in Australia as oppositional. For further details, see Hodge and Mishra, *The Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), pp. xi-xii (p. xi).
theatre, construct alternative representations of migrants which draw out the complexity of their lives and their relationship to Australia and their homeland. Accordingly, the scenes in their play become porous where past and present timelines intersect to depict these migrants’ search for belonging between two homes which appear unwelcoming. Engaging with Paul Ricoeur’s concept of identity as a narrative process, I consider how narration provides migrant characters in the play with opportunities for identity construction. Furthermore, I argue how through their choice of characters with Iranian, Irish and other origins, Futcher and Howard explore the problems as well as the possibilities of a multicultural society, making their play, I contend, a good example of what Lo and Gilbert term a Big ‘M’ multicultural theatre.

The setting in the third play, Murphy’s Gwen in Purgatory, is a house in a suburb in Canberra. The play features the Houlihans, a multi-generational family, who receive a Nigerian priest to bless Gwen’s house. I argue that in this play Murphy explores minoritarianism thematically, temporally and spatially. Drawing on some of the concepts discussed in Hage’s White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society (2000), namely those of managerial capacity, national belonging, tolerance, and the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, I argue that the play offers a critique of dysfunctional models of multiculturalism which include persons from minor cultures in the national and social spaces in a way which reinforces their marginalisation. I also argue that through having a black priest within the cast of the play Murphy addresses the paucity of non-white characters in Australian mainstage theatres.

Part Three, diasporic drama, looks at the works of three playwrights from a migrant background, namely, Janis Balodis’ No Going Back (performed in 1992 and published in 1997), Anna Yen’s Chinese Take Away (2000) and Donna Abela’s Jump for Jordan (2014). It considers how these playwrights portray the experiences of migrants and their children in a new country. This part features these playwrights’ attempts to construct their identity and position it within Australian society on social and literary levels. Furthermore, it explores their contribution to broadening the (multi)cultural context of Australian theatre. The diversity of narratives, settings and techniques covered in these plays allows me the opportunity to address how these playwrights, who are from diverse migrant backgrounds, enrich the dramatic repertoire and multiply the stories performed on the Australian stage.

The three playwrights whose work is covered in this part are second-generation Australians who were born in Australia. In addition to depicting the migration
experiences of their parents, these plays portray their playwrights’ search for a sense of belonging. They also challenge the fixity of identity through various techniques. In the first play, *No Going Back*, Balodis employs doubling where Latvian migrant characters also play the roles of Leichhardt, a German explorer, and his group. I read this use of doubling as a strategy to disrupt any fixed version of identity. While exploring Latvian migrants’ oscillation between Latvia and Australia, the play features the protagonist’s search for identity and belonging which culminates in recognising his hyphenated identity as a Latvian-Australian. In *Chinese Take Away*, decentralising the fixity of identity is dramatised on stage when Anna Yen employs the technique of polycharacterisation to relate verbally and corporeally a collective narrative including hers, her mother’s and her grandmother’s. Dramatising these stories through one performing body, I argue, is an expression of resistance that not only destabilises the assumption of a fixed image of the Asian woman, but also problematises Spivak’s premise of the incapacity of the female body to send a message to a receiver. In the third play, Abela tells the story of a second-generation Australian woman from a Jordanian-Palestinian background who lives with fragments of family history. To dramatise this protagonist’s attempts to complete the jigsaw of her cultural heritage, Abela turns the stage into a dig site where past and present timelines intersect with imagined scenes. In the process, the play becomes, to quote Toni Morrison’s term, a ‘literary archeology’, where the protagonist searches for remains of her family history. By presenting us with a cast of female characters from migrant and settler backgrounds, Abela creates a third wave feminist play which resists assumptions that generalise women’s experiences and gloss over the diversity of their backgrounds.

Through its analysis of these nine plays, the study investigates how the diversity of cultures is manifested in contemporary Australian drama. It also outlines the influence of the political context on the literary representation of multiculturalism. Moreover, it considers the extent to which multiculturalism, which has been adopted as a national policy, is critiqued or promoted by Australian playwrights. Furthermore, it compares the perspectives of Aboriginal, settler, and migrant playwrights on the topic of multiculturalism. Last but not least, it challenges the perception that multicultural drama is restricted to migrant plays. My study offers a contribution to knowledge by addressing the limited engagement with multicultural Australian drama in both Australian literary

---

studies and in drama studies. Further, through its analysis of the works of nine Australian playwrights from different cultural backgrounds, the study conveys the diversity of narratives and techniques that enrich the dramatic repertoire and open spaces where characters negotiate their cultural differences.
Part One: Aboriginal Drama

Introduction

Defining the concept of Aboriginality is a difficult task even for Aboriginal peoples who due to the process of colonising Australia vary, Anita Heiss posits, in their ‘access to family, culture and community’.¹ Michael Dodson disapproves of attempts to define Aboriginality or Aboriginal identity which he perceives as ‘fall[ing] into the trap of allowing Aboriginality to be another fixed identity’.² As Aboriginal peoples’ notions of identity vary, writing becomes a vehicle, Heiss maintains, to define their sense of identity and ‘educate non-Aboriginal readers’.³ Furthermore, writing becomes their means, Dodson observes, to ‘create our own representations’ and produce ‘Aboriginalities that arise from our experience of ourselves and our communities’.⁴ As such, those representations and Aboriginal works or writings emphasise Aboriginal peoples’ ‘right to be different and practice our difference’ and resist ‘categorisation of the dominant culture’.⁵ In addition to expressing difference and resisting categorisation, they become the response to white expectations which prophesied the end of Aboriginal cultures; Stephan Haag, a former director of the Australian Elizabeth Theatre Trust claimed in 1969 that the Aboriginal cultures are ‘doomed’ and that Aboriginal peoples are ‘faced with either a void or the complete adoption of an alien culture – our culture’.⁶ Aboriginal peoples have been subject to drastic experiences of colonisation, dispossession, assimilation, racism and death in police custody which become recurring themes, Larissa Behrendt proposes, ‘in Aboriginal storytelling, whether oral or written’.⁷ Aboriginal stories, Behrendt maintains, ‘assist in explaining distinctive Aboriginal experiences in

³ Heiss, ‘Blackwords’.
⁴ Dodson, p. 38.
⁵ Ibid., p. 39.
This notion of writing as a means to teach non-Aboriginal echoes Heiss’ viewpoint and resonates with Ruby Langford Ginibi’s conception of her writing; in an interview with Christine Watson, Ginibi states that ‘I write for myself and my people, but I also write for the white world, too, to educate them so they will know more about us and be less racist in their dealings with Aboriginal people’.9

In this part of my study, I use ‘Aboriginal’ rather than ‘indigenous’ to describe this category of Australian drama because ‘Aboriginal’ is widely used by Aboriginal Australian scholars. It is also common in anthologies about Aboriginal literature written by Aboriginal writers such as Kevin Gilbert (ed), *Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry* (1989), Anita Heiss and Peter Minter, *Anthology of Australian Aboriginal Literature* (2008) and Belinda Wheeler (ed), *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature* (2013). As such Aboriginal writers recognise that their literature ‘is a distinct and separate expression of the Indigenous cultural world’.10 Moreover, as indicated by the Act Council of Social Service Inc, which aims to draw attention to the appropriate terms when referring to Australia’s first peoples, ‘Aboriginal (adjective, capitalised) is a term extensively used and widely accepted throughout Australia when referring to Aboriginal peoples and topics’.11 Furthermore, although the term ‘indigenous Australians’ covers both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ‘many Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people do not like to be referred to as “indigenous” as the term is considered too generic.’12 In addition to this, the term ‘indigenous’ is used by the UN when referring to the indigenous peoples all over the world. Ample example is the

---

8 Ibid., p. viii.
declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples issued in 2007 which Australia voted against and then reversed its position in 2016.\textsuperscript{13}

Since literary works by Aboriginal writers explore the shared experiences of their people, Aboriginal plays depict, Adam Shoemaker observes, their playwrights’ ‘direct observation and recollection of personal experiences’.\textsuperscript{14} Aboriginal plays or performances become, Maryrose Casey states, ‘a map for representation and communication’ as well as a stage of encounter between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.\textsuperscript{15} W. E. Stanner draws attention to a ‘Great Australian Silence’ since the beginning of the twentieth century where the Aboriginal peoples of Australia have somehow been excluded from Australian history.\textsuperscript{16} Since the 1960s, Aboriginal playwrights have written plays in which they attempt to break this silence and map their people’s history and culture. In addition to this, they also assert, Casey maintains, their right to relate their people’s stories on stage.\textsuperscript{17} Former representations of Aboriginal peoples on stage by white playwrights, Marcia Langton purports, did not portray real Aboriginals. What white Australian producers depict, Langton asserts, is ‘not a relationship between actual people, but between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors […] who relate to stories told by former colonists’.\textsuperscript{18} Consequently, Aboriginal writers’ determination to have control over their cultural and literary production and representation is a response to decades of being represented by white Australians.

Indigenous peoples were often represented by writers who claimed to be indigenous. Prime instances are Grey Owl in Canada and Mudrooroo in Australia. Carrie Dawson regards ‘imposture’ as ‘an act of misrepresentation’ that ‘cannot be constituted outside a relationship: that is, imposture exists not as a pose undertaken in isolation but


\textsuperscript{15} Maryrose Casey, ‘Bold, Black, and Brilliant: Aboriginal Australian Drama’, in \textit{A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature}, pp. 155-69 (p. 155).


\textsuperscript{17} Casey, ‘Black, Bold, and Brilliant’, p. 156.

as a pose *imposed* on others*. While Owl is an instance of settlers’ attempts to benefit from passing as indigenous, Mudrooroo’s origin is not confirmed as his ancestors, Patrick Brantlinger, could be ‘part white and part African or African-American’. Mudrooroo’s claim to Aboriginal identity, as being a Nyoongah, was challenged by his sister and some Nyoongah people. Brantlinger states that until 1996, ‘Mudrooroo didn’t know that he was not of Aboriginal descent’. Moreover, Mudrooroo’s sense of Aboriginal identity was both defined and determined, Maureen Clark proposes, by his patron, the late Dame Mary Durack. As a result, he changed his name from John Collins to Mudrooroo in 1988 to celebrate this ‘Aboriginal’ identity and also to challenge, Terry Goldie remarks, ‘Australia’s bicentennial celebration’. Mudrooroo’s case is an instance of white people’s interference in Aboriginal peoples’ representation. Yet, as a person who started to draw attention to his literary career since the publication of his first novel, *Wild Cat Falling* (1965), almost two decades before changing his name to Mudrooroo, it is inappropriate to assume that he claimed Aboriginality to gain benefits. Despite his scandal which ignited a heated discussion surrounding Aboriginal identity and authenticity, there are important Aboriginal figures who still regard him an Aboriginal. Ruby Langford Ginibi, for example, remarks that ‘Mudrooroo “couldn’t write the way he does if he is not Aboriginal”’. Furthermore, although he is not a representor of Aboriginal identity and culture, Mudrooroo is an important Australian writer whose ideas are employed even by Aboriginal writers such as Dodson who, quoting Mudrooroo, writes that Aboriginal writers’ representations of Aboriginal peoples and cultures ‘heal  

---

19 Carrie Dawson, ‘Never Cry Fraud: Remembering Grey Owl, Rethinking Imposture’, *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 56 (Fall 1998), 120-40 (p. 121).
22 Brantlinger, p. 358.
the rape of the Aboriginal soul and the wound of being removed from one’s mother tongue’.  

The first Aboriginal play to be written and also presented on the Australian stage was Kevin Gilbert’s *The Cherry Pickers*. It was written in 1968, when Gilbert was in prison, and performed when he was released in 1971, almost twenty years before its publication in 1988. Gilbert’s work was the first play to use Aboriginal English on an Australian stage. The second play is *The Cake Man* (1977) by Robert Merritt, another Koori playwright. Whereas Gilbert’s play deals with the lives of wandering Aboriginals earning their living by picking fruits, Merritt’s work explores life in the mission. However, both plays share, Shoemaker suggests, a ‘search for Aboriginal identity’ and portray ‘the loss of traditional authority structures’. With Gerald Bostock’s *Here Comes the Nigger* (1977), the setting shifts Aboriginal characters from the bush to an urban environment. During the 1980s, the Noongar playwright Jack Davis resumed the mission setting where the action takes place in Moore River Settlement in three plays, *Kullark* (1983), *No Sugar* (1986) and *Barungin* (1989). In these plays, Davis deals with Aboriginal families’ dispossession from land in Western Australia and their resilience while facing assimilationist policies.

The 1980s also witnessed the emergence of Aboriginal women playwrights with their strong interest in issues relating to Aboriginal women and children. A prominent figure was Eva Johnson who McCallum regards as the ‘first woman Aboriginal playwright’. During the 1980s and 1990s, Johnson wrote plays which showed her interest in representing Aboriginal women and children on stage and depicting the drastic effects of the issue of the Stolen Generations in a few works including *Tjinarella* (1984), *Murras* (1988), *Mimini’s Voices* (1989) and *What Do You Call Me?* (1991). Another powerful voice who explored similar issues is Jane Harrison who, in her play *Stolen* (1997), focused on the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their mothers.

---

26 Mudrooroo quoted in Dodson, p. 39.
30 Shoemaker, p. 242.
31 McCallum, p. 312.
Aboriginal playwrights’ interest in having control over their works led to the emergence of three Aboriginal theatrical companies dedicated to Aboriginal works, Ilbijerri theatre in Victoria (1991), Kooemba Jdarra in Queensland and Yirra Yaakin in Western Australia (1993). The purpose behind this was to generate drama that was totally Aboriginal from story to direction. In their works, Aboriginal playwrights addressed the stereotyping of Aboriginal people as inhabiting the remotest parts of the country, suffering from specific social issues such as poverty, and sharing definite appearances. This brings up the politics of identity which returns us to the concept of Aboriginality which I addressed earlier in this introduction. Morrissey notes that ‘it would be disingenuous to claim in a nation as obsessively racialist as Australia that being Aboriginal was ever anything but a stereotyped identity invested with historical baggage irrespective of the desire of the individual’. Reflecting on this issue, Aboriginal playwright and director Wesley Enoch asserts that Aboriginal playwrights ‘have to tell all the multitude of stories and then people can see that we are more complex people than just one face allows’.

The tendency to tell stories paved the way for the appearance of biographies and autobiographies which often take the form of monodramas. Moreover, it shows how theatre is perceived as a stage upon which, Enoch claims, Aboriginal history is written. Notable examples of this genre include Eva Johnson’s *What Do They Call Me?* (1989), Leah Purcell’s *Box the Pony* (1997), Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman’s *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (2001), Tammy Anderson’s *I Don’t Want to Play House* (2002), David Milroy’s *Windmill Baby* (2005), David Gulpili and Reg Gribb’s *Gulpili* (2006), Jack Charles and John Romeril’s *Jack Charles and the Crown* (2010) and Gray Foley’s *Foley* (2011). In these monodramas, an Aboriginal performer relates the stories that s/he has witnessed while facing the audience. Two purposes are, thereby, achieved: firstly, the plays document Aboriginal people’s survival in the face of 200 years of white settlement

---

33 Morrissey, p. 58.
36 Casey, ‘Black, Bold, and Brilliant’, p. 162.
of Australia.\textsuperscript{37} Secondly, they become a means of passing on experiences and preserving Aboriginal oral tradition.

While addressing past and present injustices, recent Aboriginal performances stress the need for acknowledging them and reforming relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia through a reconciliation process. The three plays analysed in this part, namely, Jimmy Chi and Kuckles’ \textit{Bran Nue Dae} (1991), Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman’s \textit{The 7 Stages of Grieving} (2001) and David Milroy’s \textit{Waltzing the Wilarra} (2011), are notable examples of this. In addition to addressing the significant role of reconciliation in mending relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, these plays acknowledge their people’s special status as the first people of Australia, their culture as a defining part of Australian culture and identity, and the diversity of their peoples and their narratives.

\textsuperscript{37} Aboriginal people celebrate their survival each year in the second week of July. See p. 43 in Colin Brouke, Eleanor Brouke and Bill Edwards (eds), \textit{Aboriginal Australia} (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2009 [2004]).
Chapter One: The Journey to a Brand New Day in Jimmy Chi and Kuckles’ *Bran Nue Dae*

Jimmy Chi and Kuckles’ *Bran Nue Dae* (1991) was the first Aboriginal musical performed on stage. The play comments on Aboriginal Australians’ affinity with land and their long struggle for land rights. It also dramatises the inclusive aspect of Aboriginal culture and espouses the cultural diversity of the country; this is evident in Act Two where the action takes place in Broome. In addition, it celebrates the dawning of a new day where reconciliation is accomplished between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia. I argue that the play envisions reconciliation in Australia in a utopian way because no apology has ever been offered for the injustice committed. However, I propose that the play also draws attention to the limitations of such a vision in a country where the Aboriginal people are the only community committed to reconciliation. To encourage both groups to share in the process of reconciliation, Chi structures the musical as a journey from Perth to Broome where songs, music and dancing ease the pain of the first group and welcome the second to participate. Accordingly, it conveys the role songs, music, dancing and stories play in Aboriginal culture. The musical, in this sense, becomes a journey for the characters in the play and a means through which the audience can find out about Aboriginal culture. In discussing the play, I draw on some of the issues explored in Mudrooroo’s *Us Mob* (1995) and Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly’s *Creating a Nation* (1996), namely those of white settlement, Aboriginal family structure, Aboriginal identity, land rights, language and reconciliation.

The idea of writing songs for this first Aboriginal musical began in 1975 when Chi met Steve Pigram and Mick Manolis, the other two members of the band, Kuckles.\(^1\) It stems, Peter Bibby claims, from Chi’s experience of life in Broome.\(^2\) Broome, the city where Chi was born and raised, is about 2300 km to the north of Perth in Western Australia. It gained international attention during the 1860s following the discovery of the world’s largest pearl shell in the world in its waters.\(^3\) Since then, it has become a destination for a culturally diverse population of fortune seekers which has considerably enriched its musical tradition. Accordingly, Broome became replete with songwriters

---

3 Casey, *Creating Frames*, p. 182.
who, Bibby maintains, nurtured Chi’s ‘special gift for melody’.\(^4\) In 1988, Chi and Kuckles’ *Bran Nue Dae* started to attract attention and support. The Aboriginal Writer, Oral Literature and Dramatists Association (AWOLDA) enabled a staging workshop of Chi’s idea of the musical in Perth where Jack Davis provided Chi with advice. With the help of the then Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australian Council, Chi went to Sydney in January 1989 to perform some scenes and songs. At the end of the show, Philip Parsons of Currency Press commented that Chi’s work was the ‘Australian musical we’ve been waiting for. It has everything, it must be done.’\(^5\) To ensure the success and suitability of the play for the stage, Andrew Ross was approached to direct it. At the end of 1989, Black Swan State Theatre Company agreed to perform the work ‘at the Festival of Perth in February 1990’.\(^6\) The success of Chi’s play was influential, Gilbert and Lo claim, in ‘the establishment of a course in musical theatre for Aboriginal students at the Western Australian Academy of performing Arts’ and prompted other experiments in this genre including Tony Briggs’s *The Sapphire* (2000).\(^7\) Because of its critical acclaim, the play had two national tours between 1990 and 1993.\(^8\)

As stated earlier in this section, the musical stems from Chi’s experience in Broome and expresses personal aspirations. Because of his mixed-racial heritage, Chi was subject to racism at school from both whites and blacks.\(^9\) Later, a car accident compelled him to quit university and caused a permanent schizophrenia. At that time, he found consolation in music.\(^10\) Chi’s personal experience with music made him hope that this musical would ease the pain in the heart of Aboriginal people and heal the relationship between them and white Australians. Accordingly, while presenting a bitter picture of the present, the play envisages a future which will be different and brand new. The musical traces the journey of a young Aboriginal, Willie, his father, Tadpole, and two members of the Stolen Generations, Slippery and M. Annie, from Perth to Broome. It enacts a journey of self-discovery and offers a commentary on Aboriginal people’s social life in the last decade of the twentieth century. While delineating aspects of Aboriginal culture

\(^4\) Bibby, p.vi.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. vii.
\(^6\) Ibid., p. viii.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 57.
\(^9\) Thompson, p. 24.
\(^10\) Ibid., p. 28.
in songs and dances, the play tackles issues of major concern for Aboriginal people, namely land rights, the Stolen Generations, Aboriginal death in police custody, language and reconciliation. It is divided into two acts without further subdivision into scenes though this subdivision is obvious through the change of settings and the entrance of the chorus. The chorus, mostly women, plays various roles such as dancers, people at the fringe of Perth and a congregation. Act One begins at Broome where we see Willie with his girlfriend Rosie before joining the mission at Perth. The second and third scenes take place at the mission before Willie’s dismissal and the remaining scenes in Act One describe his journey back to Broome with Uncle Tadpole, Slippery and M. Annie. Act Two takes place in Broome where we encounter revelations, confessions, a family reunion and a celebration of diversity.

Mudrooroo argues that for Aboriginal peoples the arrival of the first groups of white settlers whom he calls ‘invaders’ is but an ‘interlude’ in their ‘long possession of Australia’.11 In Bran Nue Dae, Chi addresses the issue of land rights and white settlement of Australia right from the beginning. In Scene 3, after being hurled to the ground with a crook by Father Benedictus for participating in the raid on the tuckshop, Willie rises and sings defiantly:

There’s nothing I would rather be
than to be an Aborigine
and watch you take my precious land away.

I’m glad you say that land rights wrong
then you should go where belong
and leave me to just keep on keeping on.

Now you may think I’m cheeky
but I’d be satisfied,
to rebuild your convict ships
and sail you on the tide.12

12 Jimmy Chi and Kuckles, Bran Nue Dae (Sydney and Broome: Currency Press and Magabala Books, 1991), p. 15. All further references to the play are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses in the text.
In these lines, Willie not only tells the white settlers that Australia is not their land but also reminds them of their convict heritage since the majority of the persons in the first fleet were convicts. Such a reminder serves a political purpose bearing in mind that the play was performed two years after the official celebration of the bicentennial of white settlement of Australia in 1988.

This firm stand against white settlement does not mean that Aboriginal people are against the settlement, whether temporary or permanent, of non-Aboriginal people in Australia. Mudrooroo states that Aboriginal peoples received visitors such as the Baijini and Macassans in the north of Australia.\(^{13}\) The two groups are mentioned in Aboriginal traditional songs which describe their vessels, houses, clothes and the food they cultivated.\(^{14}\) There are even references, Jon Stratton states, to the presence of other groups such as Chinese, Afghans and Kanakas prior to the Federation in 1901.\(^{15}\) While some of those visitors returned home, others preferred to remain and be members of Aboriginal families. As Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly explain, the relationship with European settlers was a different one; they intended not only to stay forever but also to interfere with Aboriginal ways of life, philosophies and culture.\(^{16}\) Chi touches on the issue of welcoming visitors when Willie meets Tadpole who fools two visitors and persuades them to take him and Willie to Broome. The visitors are two white hippies, Slippery, a German tourist, and his girlfriend M. Annie. During the Pentecostal ceremony, Slippery is discovered to be Theresa’s (Willie’s mother) son from a German missionary whom she calls the devil (70). Theresa’s relationship with this missionary shows that white settlement of Australia not only dispossessed Aboriginal peoples and eroded their identity and culture but also damaged their family ties and kinship structures. White settlers’ relations with Aboriginal women, Grimshaw et al state, caused a real danger for the Aboriginal community; they led to the birth of thousands of

---

\(^{13}\) Mudrooroo, p. 4.
mixed descent children and made it difficult for Aboriginal men to find wives.\textsuperscript{17} In \textit{Bran Nue Dae}, family ties are impinged upon by Benedictus, a white missionary who seduced Theresa, Willie’s mother and Tadpole’s wife. This incident severed her relationship with her husband, Tadpole, who felt compelled to leave Broome and become addicted to alcohol for twenty years. Tadpole’s attitude towards Slippery, however, does not change after knowing his identity. On the contrary, in a prime instance of Aboriginal inclusiveness, Tadpole invites Slippery and M. Annie to his village (78) and is even ready to have Slippery as a second son, saying: ‘I’m your father ‘nother way’ (83).

\textbf{Aboriginal Society and Culture as Inclusive}

In \textit{Bran Nue Dae}, Chi takes the lead in expressing the unique inclusiveness of the Aboriginal Australian community at a time when relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians were tense following the celebration of the bicentenary in 1988. Taking the form of a journey from the confinement of the city to the heart of openness and merriment, love and forgiveness at the Roebuck Bay in Chinatown and Kennedy Hill in Broome, the musical creates, Peter Wyllie Johnston suggests, ‘an optimistic vision of how society could develop in the future’.\textsuperscript{18} The inclusiveness of Broome is also conveyed through the names of places such as Chinatown which also signifies the multicultural character of the place whose shacks and iron roofs are ‘white like pearl’ (50) – an indication of the bygone days of the pearl trade. \textit{Bran Nue Dae}, I argue, is a journey of personal discovery not only for Aboriginal but also for white Australians. Though almost all Aboriginal plays begin, Mudrooroo posits, with ‘a cry from the heart directed at the invaders of [the] land’,\textsuperscript{19} Chi’s play does not rest at this point but moves beyond that to celebrate the diversity of cultures in Australia where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal characters participate jointly in the songs and dances. In this sense, I regard Broome in the play as an inclusive Aboriginal territory rather than just, as Paul Makeham sees it, ‘a predominantly Aboriginal and socially cohesive dramatic world’.\textsuperscript{20} Chi’s interest in the present and the future which he believes and hopes to be ‘brand new’ is behind such a

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 25.
\textsuperscript{18} Peter Wyllie Johnston, “‘Australian-ness’ in Musical Theatre: a Bran Nue Dae for Australia?”, \textit{Australasian Drama Studies}, 45 (2004), 157-80 (p. 169).
\textsuperscript{20} Paul B Makeham, ‘Singing the Landscape: “Bran Nue Dae”’, \textit{Australasian Drama Studies}, 28 (1996), 117-32, (p. 3).
depiction of Broome which sometimes seems utopian. A notable instance of this is when Benedictus arrives in Broome at the end of the play. No accusation or complaint is ever addressed to him for seducing Theresa and taking away her child, Slippery. I read the play as conveying the limitations of such utopian visions of reconciliation in a society where only one community, the Aboriginal, is committed to reconciliation.

Benedictus’ sexual relationship with Theresa in Chi’s play casts light on the missionaries’ intrusion into Aboriginal marriages. The missionaries’ intrusion extends beyond the family, Grimshaw et al assert, to affect the Aboriginal community by marryng mission-educated young men and women, and thereby undermining the authority of their Aboriginal parents and elders.21 Because of Benedictus’ sexual relationship with Theresa, Tadpole left the city and she gave birth to a child. Her plight was aggravated when Benedictus took their child away. This is an illustration of the forcible removal of thousands of mixed descent Aboriginal children, who came to be called the ‘Stolen Generations’, from their families. Those children were taken to orphanages or white families presumably to be taught the settler’s culture and language but the core purpose, Martin Renes believes, was to control the growth of the Aboriginal people’s population.22 Those children ended up belonging neither to the settlers nor to their Aboriginal peoples. This issue is reflected upon in the play through the characterisation of M. Annie. At the Pentecostal ceremony, M. Annie reveals her identity as an Aboriginal who was taken as a child and ‘raised in the city, to be white’ (79). The sole memory she has of her original or biological family is ‘a sea of wailing black faces’ which indicates not only the tragic effect of the incident on her family but also the enormous number of Aboriginal families who share the same sad experience (79).

Being between two identities affects mixed descent Aboriginals when they have to take sides if tension rises between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. The dimensions of the territory they occupy gradually get narrower, especially in official nomenclature when they, sometimes, must identify themselves as Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal.23 In the play we may notice how taking a side is sensitive for mixed descent Aborigines, especially those whose outward appearance does not signify their

21 Ibid., p. 142.
Aboriginality. During the journey from Perth to Broome, M. Annie does not speak about her Aboriginal identity. She waits until the last scenes of the play to declare this, and it comes in the form of a confession. Slippery and M. Annie’s stories confirm the injustices of imperial practices such as the policy of assimilation which, Helen Gilbert argues, repressed and denied the expression of Aboriginal identity.24 Chi is very aware of the experiences of such persons as his mother is, in fact, a member of the Stolen Generations who was taken away by missionaries.25 In the play, this racist policy is reversed when we see Slippery and M. Annie happy to declare and accept their Aboriginal identity.

Aboriginal inclusiveness, which the play comments on, is evident when the two are welcomed in Broome even before the disclosure of their Aboriginal identity. M. Annie is happy to have Tadpole and Theresa as a family and Slippery is joyful to have Willie as a brother when he knows that Theresa is his mother. Indeed, Marc Maufort perceives the play as unsettling and even undermining the ‘Self/Other binary’ because it depicts Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians as being ‘inseparable’.26 The journey charted by the play is a discovery of identity especially for these two characters from a mixed descent background. The closer they approach to Broome, the more they learn about their identity and, more importantly, the more they can reconnect with their culture and its traditions. Aboriginal peoples’ reconnection with their culture plays, Linda Archibald, Jonathan Dewar, Carrie Reid and Vanessa Stevens assume, a major role in their healing process.27 Chi’s play offers the opportunity for Slippery and M. Annie as well as Willie to reconnect with Aboriginal culture while they are on the way to Broome. This is portrayed through a number of performances accompanied by the music of clapsticks and didgeridoo as in the song ‘Is this the end of our people?’ (40). In this sense, I argue that Chi’s musical plays an important role in conveying Aboriginal culture because it depicts this on stage through songs and performances rather than reflecting it solely through dialogue.

25 Casey, p. 182.
The family welcome M. Annie and Slippery receive is not an implicit call to encourage members of the Stolen Generations in Australia to declare their Aboriginal identity increasing, thereby, the low percentage of Aboriginal people. One might assume this while listening to the song ‘Is You Mah Baby?’ where Tadpole, Theresa, Willie, M. Annie and Slippery embrace while singing ‘Let’s multiply the Aboriginal Race’ (77). However, this is not the case and Chi is not writing the musical simply to please an Aboriginal audience. I read this family welcome as a means through which Chi reduces the impact of the issue of being not a ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal on these characters and also encourages Aboriginal people to accept and welcome all Aborigines regardless of the percentage of their Aboriginality. Such an attitude where less emphasis is laid on authenticity facilitates solidarity among the Aboriginal and buttresses reconciliation among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia. Further, I argue that what is meant by multiplying the ‘Aboriginal Race’ in Bran Nue Dae is not a literal multiplication of Aboriginal people for how could this be the case if the female Chorus in a song in the same act entitled ‘Seeds That You Might Sow’ tells the male Chorus that they will not let the latter approach them to engage in a sexual intercourse unless they use condoms (73)? The notion of multiplying the Aboriginal Race in Bran Nue Dae is closely linked to an attitude of inclusiveness where all are welcomed regardless of their colour, race, country of origin and religion. Aboriginal peoples, as depicted in the play, are worthy of this title for they take the lead in adopting this inclusive attitude.

**The Role of Songs and Dances in Aboriginal Culture**

As a musical, Bran Nue Dae shows the role songs and dances play in Aboriginal life and culture. Musicals have been performed on the Australian stage since 1932 when the first musical, Nathalie Rosenwax’s Collits’ Inn, was produced in Sydney.\(^\text{28}\) Chi’s great achievement in this play lies in its hybrid form where he adapts the musical, a European popular tradition, to reflect on Aboriginal tradition of songs, storytelling, dance and musicality.\(^\text{29}\) Music, songs, ceremonies, dance and storytelling, Mudrooroo argues, constitute the essence of Aboriginal tribal culture.\(^\text{30}\) As these performances delineate Aboriginal people’s affinity with land and nature, they become sacred ceremonies or rituals. Aboriginal art, in this sense, seems sacred as it becomes a means of

---

\(^\text{28}\) Johnston, p. 158.

\(^\text{29}\) For more information on this issue, see Makeham, ‘Singing the landscape’, p. 117.

\(^\text{30}\) Mudrooroo, Us Mob, p. 201.
communication with or relation to the ancestors. Accordingly, the Aboriginal artist holds an elevated position of a ‘creator’ and ‘re-creator’ as s/he is ‘responsible for reactivating the spiritual powers of the Dreamtime spirits’ and maintaining their relationship with the Aboriginal community.31 Journeys of the Dreamtime, Mudrooroo claims, are enacted in contemporary Aboriginal works through the employment of dancers who are ‘elaborately painted and decorated with special symbolic designs’.32 By taking the form of a journey, the play becomes a prime example where characters, chorus and audience meet dancers who appear painted to perform traditional dances as in the scene where Tadpole sings the song of ‘Jalangardi’.

Mudrooroo defines ‘Dreamtime’ as ‘a psychic state in which or during which contact is made with the ancestral spirits or that special period of the beginning now past which is still heavily pervasive in the present and can be contacted in a “dreaming” state’.33 Symbolically, the journey from Perth to Broome is a journey back home where not only Willie, but also Tadpole and Slippery are going back to their place of birth – M. Annie is not mentioned here as no definite birthplace for her is ever mentioned in the play, a matter which complicates her plight as a member of the Stolen Generations. Birthplace, Grimshaw et al assert, is crucial in Aboriginal culture because it enables the person since the moment of his/her birth to create a special affinity with a site.34 As the song of ‘Jalangardi’ is accompanied by dance where performers appear with painted bodies, it offers the Aboriginal characters an opportunity to attain the ‘psychic state’ through which they contact their ancestral spirits and reunite again with their culture and, consequently, reverse the assimilation process. Chi’s placement of this dance at the end of Act One and before Act Two where Tadpole, Willie, Slippery and M. Annie reach Broome is effective since it is an indicator of the group’s approach to an Aboriginal territory where attaining this psychic state is quite possible.

The journey in Chi’s play simulates a journey in the Dreamtime; it explores both past and present events and unites them in one trajectory. Events of the past are related at the beginning of Act one where Willie refers in his song to the usurpation of Aboriginal land by white settlers and the dispossession of Aboriginal people. In the Roebourne Lockup scene, the play reflects on the issue of the imprisonment of Aboriginal peoples.

31 Ibid., p. 205.
32 Ibid., p. 201.
33 Ibid., p. 41.
34 Grimshaw et al, p. 10.
where cell voices address Tadpole by his name and call him ‘bro’ (34-5). This scene also
deals with the atrocities of the past through a song entitled ‘Listen to the News’. In this
song, Tadpole and the chorus, women inmates, sing: ‘Man of the gun come shut up the
son / and the girl and the child and the mother’ (36). Accompanied by clapsticks and
didgeridoo, Tadpole’s song reflects on stories of past atrocities which recur, in this scene,
through the injustices of the present. The imprisonment of Aboriginal people in the past,
symbolised by the cell voices, is intertwined with Tadpole, Willie, Slippery and M. Annie’s imprisonment. Relating these kinds of stories is a common feature in Aboriginal
drama which aims to make them known to non-Aboriginal Australians.

**Inclusiveness in Aboriginal Language**

At stated at the beginning of this chapter, land rights hold a priority in Aboriginal peoples’
identity. The other issue which increases Aboriginal peoples’ loss of identity is the use of
the settler’s language which comes second after land to sever their connection with their
ancestors and cultures. After two hundred years of white settlement, many Aboriginal
languages, which are estimated by Grimshaw et al to be more than 500 languages, have
been lost.35 What remained of the Aboriginal tribes which spoke them were put together
in reserves or missions where they were compelled, Mudrooroo asserts, to relinquish their
Aboriginal languages and learn English so as to communicate with the settlers as well as
with each other.36 In addition to marginalising colonised peoples’ languages, the imperial
language becomes, Ashcroft et al argue, ‘the medium through which a hierarchical
structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which the conception of
“truth”, “power”, and “reality” become established’.37 But the imperial language of the
settler will never be the same as the language which the colonised peoples speak.
Consequently, a new form or a variant appears to suit the environment where it is used.38
This variant is further undermined in the play when it is divided into Broome Kriol and
English with a German accent and challenged by German.

In *Bran Nue Dae*, Chi employs Standard Australian English in most of the songs,
especially the religious ones and those addressing the white settler such as ‘Nothing I
Would Rather Be’. Aboriginal English is used when the Aboriginal characters include

---

35 Grimshaw, p. 132.
36 Mudrooroo, p. 57.
38 Ibid.
Aboriginal words, as is the case in the song ‘Jalangardi’, which means a big lizard. This song is replete with Aboriginal words denoting names of animals and Aboriginal language groups:

*Jalangardi, Jalangardi*  
The chase is on  
Gotta run, pass ‘em gun  
The chase is on.  
*Karrajarrri, Yawuru, Nyikina, Bardi*  
All running, all running  
Must have that mungari, mayi,  
And wali and arli, and arli, and arli. (43)

Whereas wali means meat and arli, fish, ‘*Karrajarrri, Yawuru, Nyikina, Bardi*’ indicate Aboriginal language groups. In addition to validating Aboriginal words and language, the song emphasises the diversity of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia.

The employment of Aboriginal words in Australian plays, especially when no explanation is ever delivered in the text or performance, is conceived by Glow as serving a political purpose. It privileges, Glow posits, ‘the connection with those in the audience who understand the language and puts white audience in the uncharacteristic position of being the outsiders’.39 Chi’s purpose in using Aboriginal words, I argue, is not to put white audience members in the position of outsiders, but rather to convey the richness of Aboriginal languages. Aboriginal words in this play are used not to alienate a white audience but rather to offer them an opportunity to engage with Aboriginal languages and learn the meaning of words. Accordingly, I read this as another instance of how Chi’s play conveys an inclusive Aboriginal community. An example of this can be seen in the following dialogue where humour is embedded in a detailed interpretation of an Aboriginal word when Tadpole, in Act One, goes behind a nearby hill and Slippery wants to know what he is doing. This exchange can be read as an expression of the richness of the Aboriginal language in Broome which has three equivalent words to the English word ‘lizard’:

Slippery: Vat iss he doing?  
Willie: *[Dully.]* Chasing barni.  
Slippery: Who is Barney?  
Willie: Bungarra.  
Slippery: Boong arrow? *[Making motion of drawing bow.]*

39 Glow, p. 31.
Willie: Jalungardi.
[Slippery still perplexed.]
Willie: Goanna.
Slippery: Why Anna go?
Willie: BEEEEG LIZARD. (41)

In Slippery’s repeated questions and his use of words which rhyme with those Willie mentions, the imperial language is employed to interpret the language of the ‘colonised’. In this sense, the colonising language becomes, I argue, subsidiary to the Aboriginal language.

English with a German accent is first employed by Father Benedictus and later by Slippery, his son. In Scene Two, Benedictus welcomes Willie into the mission, saying: ‘Villie! Come een fellow!! Velkom to der city. How are you, my leedle flend?’ (4). It is also used by Willie imitating Benedictus while he and other boys are having their feast at Rossmoyne Pallottine Aboriginal Hostel. There are even examples of the use of German when Slippery presents a matching photo to that of Theresa’s of the same person whom he calls ‘[m]einfada’. Amazed by the return of her lost son, Theresa shouts happily ‘my son’ and Slippery ‘mein mutter’ (68). At Benedictus’ arrival in Broome, he and Slippery sing ‘Is You Mah Baby?’ in German (83). Moreover, after hearing the congregation saying that ‘we’re all born black!’ (70), Slippery accepts the fact that his mother is an Aborigine and says ‘Ich bien Ine Aborigine!!’ (71).

In 1988, the time when Chi started drafting the musical, Aboriginal elders presented what was known as the Barunga Statement to the then Prime Minster Robert Hawke (1983-1991) calling for a negotiation between the Aboriginal people of Australia and the government. This statement appears to be their response to the official bicentennial celebration which took place in the same year. The statement’s main items are permanent control of ancestral lands and compensation for the loss of their use, respect for Aboriginal identity and the Aboriginal people’s right to be educated in their own languages. In reply, Hawke asserted the government’s commitment to negotiating a treaty with the Aboriginal people. Later, Hawke changed the terminology from treaty to reconciliation. Reference to that period where the Aboriginal people were waiting for Hawke’s decision is indicated in Tadpole’s words at the end of Act Two where he addresses the audience saying:

40 Mudrooroo, p. 215.
Us people want our land back, we want ‘em rights, we want ‘em fair deal, all same longa white man. Now this fella longa Canberra, he bin talkin’ about a Bran Nue Dae – us people bin waiting for dijwun for 200 years now. Don’ know how much longer we gotta wait, and boy it’s making me slack. (84)

Tadpole’s words convey a hope that the Prime Minister’s promise of a new day for Aboriginal peoples would prove true because they are tired of promises and waiting. The two-year period of waiting from the submission of the statement in 1988 to the performance of the play in 1990 is emphasised through reference to the two centuries of waiting from 1788 till 1988. This reference might be interpreted as an expression of concern that the Aboriginal people would have to wait longer. While addressing this issue, which might be perceived as solely related to Aboriginal people, Tadpole, in the end, assures the audience that Willie’s song ‘Bran Nue Dae’ is not only for the Aborigines but for all Australians. This assertion resonates with what he stated earlier in the song ‘Everybody Looking for Kuckle’, where he addresses all Australians, regardless of their colour, to look for kuckle: ‘everybody lookin’ for kuckle / blackman, whiteman and grey’ (58).

_Bran Nue Dae_ demonstrates Aboriginal peoples’ resilience and struggle for land rights and respect for their identity and culture. Chi organises his play to dramatise this through a journey from Perth to Broome. The journey to Broome is not only a discovery of identity but also a portrayal of the inclusiveness of Aboriginal cultures and the richness of Aboriginal languages. In this play, Chi adapts a European popular tradition, the musical, to recuperate Aboriginal cultural tradition. By blending songs, dances and storytelling, the play connects form and content to celebrate Aboriginal cultural heritage and Australia’s cultural diversity. Through its large cast of Aboriginal, white and German Australians, the play celebrates Australia’s cultural diversity. Through its celebration of the return of two members of the Stolen Generations, especially in the case of Slippery, it undermines the Self/Other binary as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal have become brothers and members of one family. In this sense, it envisages a bright future where reconciliation is achieved between black and white Australians. Through this depiction of reconciliation on the dramatic stage between its black-white cast, the play paves the way for a large-scale reconciliation on the national stage between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.
Chapter Two: Oral performance in Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman’s *The 7 Stages of Grieving*

Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman’s *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (2001) celebrates the oral traditions of Aboriginal peoples. The playwrights’ commitment to demonstrating their people’s cultural heritage through the employment of storytelling, however, does not mean that their play is solely meant to address Aboriginal peoples. On the contrary, their intended audience is mainly non-Aboriginal. The play, I argue, conveys that telling stories is a major step towards sharing histories especially if it is adopted in the communication medium of drama. Drawing on Walter J. Ong’s *Orality and Literacy* (2012) which stresses the dynamic and social aspects of oral utterances, I read the play as a perpetuation of the oral discourse of a people with a strong oral culture such as the Aboriginal. It recuperates orality twice: firstly, through an oral performance of an Aboriginal written text and secondly by reading a white policeman’s written text on stage. In doing so, the play celebrates Aboriginal language and culture in the first and undermines white authority in the second. This abrogation of the written text by the Woman, an Aboriginal performer, is further maintained in the play when it is followed by an Aboriginal counterdiscursive oral and physical performance. Further, I argue that the Aboriginal oral performance in the play at once invokes, and departs from, the tradition of dramatic monologue as it is found in canonical English poetry. The Woman and the characters whose stories she relates are not differentiated figures but members of her family and people. Further, by addressing members of the audience directly and placing the suitcase containing those characters’ stories and the word ‘reconciliation’ at their feet, she adopts rather than refrains from the position of being a spokesperson for those characters.

*The 7 Stages of Grieving* is a one-woman show which relates stories about the playwrights’ relatives and other Murri peoples in Queensland. It was first premiered at the Metro Arts Theatre in Brisbane in 1995. This performance was directed by Enoch who was the artistic director of Kooomba Jdarra from 1994-1997 and played by Mailman ‘in state capitals across the nation and at Festivals in Zurich and London’.¹ Like other Aboriginal plays, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* explores issues such as the Stolen Generations, the erosion of Aboriginal culture, racism, stereotyping of black people and the death of

---

Aboriginal peoples in police custody. The play’s greatest achievement is its employment of storytelling, a recuperation of Aboriginal oral tradition, which is demonstrated on stage in a communal form. The play draws much, Enoch asserts, on Aboriginal peoples’ history of survival in the face of overwhelming injustice and grief.\(^2\) This one-woman show is both an invitation to the public to grieve over Aboriginal Australians’ suffering and a celebration of their survival.

In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter J. Ong asserts the primacy of orality and the basic orality of language. While stating this, Ong draws attention to the dominance of textuality in the scholarly mind which perceives oral performance as ‘art’ only after being written down, forgetting the simple fact that that reading a text converts it back to oral utterances.\(^3\) Accordingly, Ong decries the assumption that speech is a variant of writing.\(^4\) Ong differentiates between two types of orality, primary and secondary. The first is the orality of cultures ‘untouched’ by writing whereas the second is the present culture of orality maintained through television, radio, telephone and electronic devices which relies heavily on writing and print. Ong draws attention to the ‘pre-emptive’ and ‘imperialist’ activity of writing which assimilates oral performances to itself.\(^5\) He even warns that literacy has to be monitored for although it restores the memory of an oral people, it consumes their oral antecedents.\(^6\) The impact of teaching the coloniser’s language, the English, would be heavier on colonised peoples, such as Aboriginal Australians, where the introduction of writing coincided the process of colonisation. With the passage of time, much of the meaning in oral cultures is either lost or impacted upon in the switch from oral to written scripts. As Ismail S. Talib puts it, ‘the meaning presented in the written text is not as comprehensive as that presented in its oral form, or in song and performance, as meaning conveyed through facial gestures or hand movements cannot be included’.\(^7\) A notable example of this is the ‘Mugshot’ episode in the play discussed on p. 68. Talib’s notion echoes Kamau Brathwaite, who proposes that culture exists in the oral and written texts of language. As such, when an oral text ‘is written, you lose the

\(^2\) Wesley Enoch, ‘Why Do We Applaud?’, in *Contemporary Australian Plays*, pp. 271-74 (p. 274).


\(^4\) Ong, p. 11.

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 12.

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 15.

sound or the noise, and therefore you lose part of the meaning.\(^8\) Acknowledging that writing is an imperialist activity, Ong indicates that the transition from orality to literacy is an ‘agony’ for people of oral culture since it compels them to relinquish ‘much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world’.\(^9\) This agony could be interpreted, I argue, as a yearning for a performer-oriented communication where both speaker and listener are present at the moment of sharing experience.

The capacity of writing to restore oral communication is a capacity to represent rather than to reconstruct. Even at this stage, it cannot represent the dynamic aspect of oral utterances. It is this dynamic aspect which leads Ong to share with Bronislaw Malinowski the belief that oral language is a ‘mode of action and not simply a countersign of thought’\(^10\). Still, ‘topographic folk’ often exaggerate the capacity of writing to assimilate words into objects on paper, forgetting that oral words are ‘powered’ and concrete events.\(^11\) Having drawn attention to the dynamic aspect of language, Ong proceeds to discuss its social aspect, considering how oral communication ‘unites peoples in groups’ rather than driving them into solitary life worlds as writing and reading do.\(^12\) I argue that by employing the technique of storytelling in their play, Enoch and Mailman dramatise the dynamic and social aspects of oral performance. The episodic structure they adopt enables the Woman to tell her stories within a performer-audience connection. The connection between the Woman and the audience is slightly severed when she starts reading a written text, the police report, which is not her story. However, this connection is maintained later when she resumes telling stories to her audience. This change to her style is a theatrical technique to demonstrate that a written text, contrary to an oral one, is meant to document events rather than maintaining group connection.

Storytelling is a deeply rooted tradition in oral cultures such as Australian Aboriginal cultures where contact between the audience and the storyteller constitutes, Daniele M. Klapproth proposes, a ‘vital and integral part’ in this ‘social practice’.\(^13\) Aboriginal stories, Klapproth states, are ‘part of a cultural heritage’ whose preservation

\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Bronislaw Malinowski, quoted in Ong, p. 32.
\(^11\) Ong, pp. 32-33.
\(^12\) Ibid., p. 68.
is crucial for maintaining ‘cultural identity and cultural life’.\textsuperscript{14} In this sense, stories form, Klapproth maintains, ‘a body of socially distributed cultural knowledge’.\textsuperscript{15} Sharing stories implies a physical creation where the spoken word, Ong asserts, ‘manifests human beings’ to the audience.\textsuperscript{16} What assures this manifestation is the oral not the written word. This is clearly stated by Ong when he confirms that it is ‘impossible for script to be more than marks on a surface unless it is used by a conscious human’.\textsuperscript{17} A real thought or speech can solely be articulated in a ‘context of give-and-take between real persons’.\textsuperscript{18} The employment of storytelling where stories are related by one performer emphasises the role this technique plays in passing on knowledge and depicting history on stage. The episodes in \textit{The 7 Stages of Grieving} are not arranged chronologically. Further, they are not arranged from the inside into the outside according to their protagonists’ relationship with the Woman. In this sense, all the protagonists appear to share the same level of significance and closeness to her. Storytelling achieves a communication which is not possible in the written text. A written text is evidence of a culture where knowledge, Ong claims, is thought to be ‘more specifically informational’ than ‘performance-oriented’.\textsuperscript{19} The police report that the Woman reads in the play, I suggest, is an example of this informative process since it is hard to identify the recipient who is always absent and therefore hard to anticipate his/her reaction.

Drama is, indeed, the space where an exchange is achieved between oral and written forms. The outcome of this process is a reduction of the authority of the written text and a recuperation of oral tradition. Drama, thus, becomes the enabling context, Gilbert suggests, for ‘forging post-colonial voices’.\textsuperscript{20} \textit{The 7 Stages of Grieving}, accordingly, opens up theatrical space for Aboriginal oral cultural expression and also provides the opportunity for oralising the written text as we see when the Woman reads the white policeman’s report relating the death of a young Aborigine, Daniel Yocke, in police custody. Oralising the white policeman’s written text, I argue, is an abrogation of the settler’s language. This abrogation is further demonstrated in the play when this slow-

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 381.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ong, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 74.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 173.
paced text is contrasted with a dynamic performance in the form of singing, accompanied by dance and music. Though both episodes, the Woman’s story and the written police report, follow a linear trajectory in describing events, they differ in the presentation. One is official and adheres to the conventions of white historical documentation and the second takes the form of storytelling. I read the Woman’s oralisation of the white policeman’s written text as a revolt against white hegemony and a response to the white coloniser who asks the Woman in the ‘Invasion Poem’ episode ‘not to speak […] not to do what [she has] always done’.  

Storytelling is one way of giving voice to Aboriginal people on the stage. Multiplying the stories means multiplying the voices of Aboriginal peoples. The play incorporates voices from the past and the present and locations from the coast to urban places such as Brisbane in Queensland. In so doing, the play aims, I would argue, to frustrate a white mentality which perceives Aboriginal people in a unified racialised image which, as Andrew Bolt does, restricts their existence to the bush territory. Enoch insists on telling various stories which convey Aboriginal peoples’ long history of injustice and grief. He maintains that ‘let’s not tell one story, let’s tell all the multitude of stories and then people can see that we are more complex people than just one face allows’. Multiplying faces and stories is also a reference to Aboriginal peoples’ diversity of languages, habits, and stories. Enoch insists that he shares with all Aboriginal Australians ‘an amalgam of experiences and projects’ that constitutes their history as ‘people of conversation [and] stories of events’. It is their history, Enoch asserts, which they cannot go anywhere without as it is their tradition and inheritance.

Commenting on his job as a director and a co-author of plays, Enoch states that work in the theatre involves a responsibility for building a ‘shared understanding’ in the community. This might be the reason why the elements of theatre for him comprise an

21 Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, ‘The 7 Stages of Grieving’ in Contemporary Australian Plays, pp. 276-94, p. 283. All further references to the play are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses in the text.
23 Casey, p. 161.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 9.
actor, an audience or a witness and a shared place. Accordingly, theatre is a group or shared activity where an exchange is made between the performer who has something to tell and the witness who is ready to listen. The 7 Stages of Grieving draws on biographies of the two playwrights’ family members and friends. It is a collective story of public grief. The sense of pain apparent in Aboriginal works is the outcome, June Perkins notes, of decades of injustice and cultural dispossession. It manifests, Perkins maintains, in ‘a feeling of internal invasion’ where the writer is left with two options: either escaping the pain or working through it. In this play, Enoch and Mailman choose the second.

The 7 Stages of Grieving contains a blend of traditional and contemporary arts forms such as storytelling, scenery tools like the piles of red sand, projections of letters and lights on a screen and the woman’s body and clothes, direct address as well as the suspended block of ice. It might be ‘the first great Aboriginal work’, McCallum claims, to achieve this mixture and ‘create a new culturally hybrid form of performance’. However, these contemporary tools, I argue, are employed to strengthen and renew traditional Aboriginal modes of storytelling. The way storytelling is employed in this play draws attention to the dynamics of Aboriginal oral culture which maintains continuity with the past while also developing new modes of expression. A literary work’s heavy reliance on orality, Gilbert proposes, might impede its wider recognition by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Yet I argue that the dynamic and social aspects of this oral performance are enough to ensure such recognition.

When the play opens, we notice ‘a large block of ice’ which ‘is suspended by seven strong ropes’ and melting and ‘dripping on a freshly turned grave of red earth’ (277). This poetic image implies much; the freshly turned grave is a reference to stories to be related which are stories of dead persons. This is further suggested by the dripping of the block of ice indicating the grief of the Aboriginal people which continues during seven stages (seven ropes). This red-earth grave is in the centre of a ring of black powder which is encircled by a white line. This white line is not meant to be a border of protection

---

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
30 Ibid., p.21.
31 McCallum, Belonging, p. 318.
for Aboriginal people; rather it is an imprisonment which chokes and consequently destroys Aboriginal peoples’ lives as it is the case with Yocke.

The Woman begins her performance with a ritual where she sings a song in the Murri native language for the spirits of the dead requesting permission to relate their stories of grief (278). Then she starts relating her stories, starting with ‘Nana’s story’. In this story she talks about her grandmother from whom she inherited the art of storytelling. For Aboriginal peoples, the storyteller such as the Woman’s grandmother is a preserver of history and tradition. Thus, when she dies, the Woman maintains, she ‘took so many stories with her to the grave [including those of] our traditions [and] our heritage’ (280). The Woman’s grandmother was a ‘strong-God fearing woman’ who left this world to rest (279). Like the other stories which the Woman relates, ‘Nana’s story’ is one of pain and fear where rest can solely be attained through death. The same idea is explored in Chi’s Bran Nue Dae (1991) where Willie says: ‘when I die I know I’ll be going up, / cos you know that I’ve had my hell on earth.’

In the ‘Black Skin Girl’ episode, the Woman demonstrates how white settlement changes drastically everything in Aboriginal peoples’ life except their skin. When the Woman sings and dances childishly, the letters of the ‘English’ alphabet appear on her dress and stop her. The Woman tries hard to evade them by taking off her dress, but her efforts are in vain. She appears topless with the letter ‘Z’ on her chest (282). This scene shows the heavy and inescapable impact of white culture on Aboriginal culture and depicts Aboriginal peoples’ reaction to this. By taking off her clothes, the Woman expresses a rejection of white Australian culture symbolised in clothes and the English language. The Woman’s black body is her identity and her attempt to reveal her body in the play, I argue, represents an act of resistance as well as a determination to fight. It becomes an assertion of her Aboriginality which cannot be taken away or assimilated. ‘Being an Aboriginal isn’t all misery’, Melissa Lucashenko asserts, ‘it can be a riot!’ Aboriginal people’s black bodies, in this sense, have become their weapons. This is evident on the stage where the black skin of the Aboriginal performer, Enoch explains, cannot be depoliticised. In ‘Nana’s story’, the Woman says that ‘the only thing black at

33 Chi, Bran Nue Dae, p. 16.
35 Perkins, p. 22.
a funeral should be the colour of your skin’ (279). Thus, as depicted in the play, Aboriginal peoples’ black skin becomes their site of both pain and resistance.

The appearance of the English letters is but a prologue to the following poem, entitled ‘Invasion poem’, which relates a story of Aboriginal grief. It is a story of invasion, dispossession, the Stolen Generations and the erosion of culture and tradition which culminated in the imposition of English, the coloniser’s language, on Aboriginal people. The poem offers images of pain and suffering intermingled with blood and orders of ‘not to speak, not to dance’ and not to do what they used to do before (283). This is followed by the appearance of the date 1788 and a shout like that of a traffic policeman addressing the newcomer, the colonising-settler: ‘Hey, you! Yeah, you with that hat! You can’t park there! You’re taking up the whole harbor!’ (284). Employing such a direct address is a clear message to the settler and when addressed to white audience members, it becomes a reminder of their ancestors’ invasion of Australia which began at the harbour and ended up with the whole continent. In this sense, it serves not only a dramatic purpose through reducing the gap separating the audience from the Woman, but also a political one; it is a response to a white historical amnesia which insists on celebrating the arrival of the First Fleet on the 26th of January 1788 as Australia’s Day and ignoring, thereby, the fact that Australian Aboriginal history extends back in time thousands of years beyond this date. Due to this direct address, the audience is no longer invisible; rather, the audience is encouraged further and further to take the responsibility in mending Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations.

The episodes I have discussed so far are striking examples of the conflict between a white written text and an Aboriginal oral performance. The audience is aware of the static form of the white written text which appears either as separate letters on the Woman’s clothes and body or a date, 1788, on a screen. The audience is also aware of the dynamic oral Aboriginal performance which takes the form either of song and dancing or of complete sentences in the direct shout. Both are employed to maintain the connection between the speaker and addressee. This engagement with the conflict between the two texts continues in the ‘Mugshot’ and ‘March’ episodes. In the ‘Mugshot’ episode, the Woman speaks about Aboriginal death in police custody by reading a white policeman’s report. The Woman states that on 7th November 1993, Daniel Yocke was followed by the police, arrested with no warranty or charge, had his hands cuffed behind his back, put on the ground and then taken to the Oxford Street Hostel in Brisbane. Later, Yocke was carried to the Brisbane City watchhouse. At 7 p.m. that evening, Yocke’s death was
announced.\textsuperscript{36} The written text describes in detail how the police arrested Yocke but lacks any reference to what they did to ensure his safety:

Yocke ran but was intercepted and arrested by Symes. In the course of the arrest Yocke went to the ground. Bishop and Harris then pursued members of the group towards the hostel leaving Symes and Domrow with Yocke. Shortly after the arrest of Yocke another Dutton Park vehicle containing Sargent Crowley and Constable Crozier arrived at the scene. Crowley handcuffed Yocke’s hands behind his back. Crowley and Symes then left Domrow and Crozier with Yocke and drove down to the Oxford Street Hostel. After remaining on the ground for some time with Domrow and Crozier, Yocke was then driven to the hostel.

\textit{In this section the Woman breaks away from the written word. This requires the actor to improvise the text in her own words.}

On Yocke’s arrival at the watchhouse his condition aroused immediate concern. When they looked closer they saw that he wasn’t breathing, he didn’t have any pulse. The people at the watchhouse didn’t know what to do so they called the ambulance. The ambulance got there and they had to pump needles into him, they were pounding his chest, giving mouth-to-mouth, whilst the others stood back and watched. They took him to the Royal Brisbane Hospital, pounding and pushing his limp body.

\textit{The Woman returns to the written word.}

The resuscitation attempts were unsuccessful and at 7.13 p.m. he was pronounced dead. (288-89)

The police report conveys the monotony of the white written text which repeats the names of the policemen, their cars and the places they went to. The Woman is aware that her toneless speech while reading the police report would affect her connection with the audience and therefore she breaks away from it and starts improvising it with her own words. It is only when she does this that we notice a human and humane relationship between the persons in the ambulance and Yocke which culminates in them pounding his chest and even giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. With this emphasis on mouth-to-mouth, I argue, the Woman generates a connection between the sender and the addressee which the informational context of the white policeman report lacks.

\textsuperscript{36} Yocke’s death is a real event. His real name is Daniel Yock and the addition of the letter ‘e’ at the end of ‘Yock’ indicates the playwrights’ respect to an Aboriginal tradition of not writing the names of the dead. See Mudrooroo, \textit{Us Mob}, p. 2.
The ‘March’ episode is about the march of the Aboriginal peoples the following morning after Yocke’s death was announced. The Woman relates it in the present tense. This change in tense indicates a change from a static written text, the police report, to a dynamic and lively one. The change to the present tense is necessary to maintain the connection between the performer and the audience. News about Yocke’s death and the march is spread through faxes, mobile phones, leaflets, printed papers and also word of mouth (289). Six thousand people participate in the march including the Woman, her family and her grandmother. The Woman tells the audience that four helicopters circle the march which is described in headlines as a ‘Defiant Aboriginal March’ that stopped the traffic (290). As the Aboriginals stop outside the police watchhouse in Herschel Street and sit, Yocke’s family sings and dances and the dancers play their clapsticks. The watchhouse is no longer the police’s territory as it is the Aboriginals who are now occupying the centre of the stage and are the main performers. The police are there but they are standing to the side equipped with their cameras as if they are a chorus, subsidiary to the main action. The rhythm of Aboriginal traditional song, dance and music engulfs not only the crowd but also the buildings and the street as ‘if coming up from ground to swallow everything in revenge’ for the continuous grieving of the Aboriginal peoples (290). I read this performance as a way of freeing Yocke’s soul which is imprisoned in the white written text. Reflecting on how Aboriginal people’s history is manifested mainly in white settlers’ books, Mudrooroo states that ‘[o]ur very being had to be inscribed and imprisoned on the pages of books’ and it is ‘as if our souls had to be imprisoned’. Yocke’s story, which ends passively with his death in the police report, is released from its static status. This traditional performance becomes an expression of strength which resurrects Yocke’s memory.

I will employ Ong’s concept of ‘second orality’ to comment on how the play portrays the white community’s and Aboriginal peoples’ means of spreading the news of the march. By ‘second orality’ Ong refers to the ‘present-day high-technology culture’ which uses telephones, mobile phones, television and other electronic apparatus. Even in this type of orality, the two cultures vary in their expression. Whereas the headlines of the whites’ media take the form of informational-oriented context where the recipient is absent, the Aboriginal address resumes its performance-oriented one. Although

37 Ibid.
38 Ong, p. 11.
Aboriginal peoples’ message depends on faxes and leaflets which are printed texts, the addressee is known, and mobile phones are used for person to person oral communication. Moreover, their message is reinforced in the use of ‘word of mouth’, an oral performance where the information is transferred to an existent listener. The incorporation of technology in the promotion of the march is another example of the way in which Aboriginal oral culture is dynamic; it adapts and changes in response to new technologies while also retaining aspects of its traditional form.

While relating her stories the Woman works hard to create in her audience’s mind a full image of what she is relating. In the ‘Aunty Grace’ episode, the Woman holds a suitcase while telling the audience that Aunty Grace came from England solely to attend the funeral of her younger sister, the Woman’s grandmother. This story reflects much about the Aboriginal employment of oral tradition as a means of documenting their history. The Woman says that her grandmother told her that Aunty Grace married a white man at the end of World War II and left the country. The Woman says that she took Aunty Grace to the cemetery before going to the airport. After spending some time at the grave, Aunty Grace went to the car and returned with a suitcase. Then, while holding the suitcase, the Woman says that Aunty Grace opened her suitcase, threw what was inside out and filled it with red earth from Nana’s grave. This exchange shows that all she has kept in her suitcase through fifty years of residence in England is cheap compared to the memory of her family and the red earth of her home.

The affinity between Aboriginal oral and physical performances is resumed in the ‘Home Story’ episode where the Woman performs her most powerful piece while maintaining the performer-listener relation by addressing the audience: ‘Are you with me?’ (292). In this episode, the Woman explains Aboriginal kinship and family patterns with reference to the issue of the Stolen Generations. An Aboriginal dramatic technique is used here when earth is presented as a text to be read; the Woman takes handfuls of red earth from the grave and makes a large pile to resemble the land, the source of everything (291). She then makes a circle round this pile to symbolise culture, tradition, family, song and dance (291). Around the large pile within the circle, she makes eight small piles to indicate the children. This is a reference to Aboriginal belief where Aboriginal children are ‘born of women but conceived by a spiritual source whose font is the land’. I read this demonstration of affinity between children and land which symbolises their essence

as an indication of Aboriginal peoples’ unique status as neither settlers nor migrants. To explain the cruelty of the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their parents, the Woman relocates the smaller piles on the white line surrounding the black performing area. This white line is a dramatic visual symbol of the encroachment of the settlers and their culture on the Aboriginal people and culture. To portray how this removal is intended to demolish family ties and erase Aboriginal people’s existence in Australia, the Woman thrashes her hand through the large pile and circle and destroys them (292).\(^4\)

The Woman’s performance while telling her story conveys Aboriginal people’s strong affinity to land and the role storytelling plays in maintaining this affinity.

When she finishes relating the ‘Home Story’, the Woman opens the suitcase and throws all the red earth and family photos on the stage, before packing the word ‘reconciliation’ in it. In the following episode, ‘Everything Has Its Time’, the word ‘RECONCILIATION’ is projected on a screen as the Woman addresses the audience saying that reconciliation is not ‘something you read or write’ but ‘something that you do’ (269). Then she retrieves the suitcase where the word ‘reconciliation’ is packed, locks it and tells the audience, commenting on the issue of reconciliation, that ‘[e]verything has its time’ (269). This relates to the moment in Chi’s Bran Nue Dae when Tadpole addresses the audience at the end of the play saying that Aboriginal peoples have been waiting for 200 years and they are tired of promises and waiting. This period of Aboriginal waiting is also indicated in this play through the projection of the date 1788.

Having finished relating her stories, the Woman approaches the audience and puts the suitcase containing the word ‘reconciliation’ at their feet. It is the audience’s duty to take the suitcase and share in easing the Aboriginal pain through reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia. Putting the word reconciliation in the suitcase serves a political purpose since the stage becomes a table of negotiation where the Aboriginal people deliver their message and wait for responses. This, indeed, conforms to Enoch’s idea of a shared reality transmitted in a shared space where we have a performer and an audience. The audience is no longer a listener with a passive role but instead a waiting participant whose role is yet to come.\(^4\)

\(^4\) For further information on how assimilation is intended to breed out the Aboriginal race see A. O. Neville, Australia’s Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community (Sydney: Currawong, 1947), p. 56.

\(^4\) Enoch, “We Want Hope”, p. 12.
The play has an episodic structure where each episode involves a new character linked to the woman with no need to have them on stage. They are members of her family and people whose stories she knows by heart and, thus, can tell directly to the audience. The Woman’s stories are not to be perceived as a dramatic monologue where the audience is thought of as a silent and passive listener whose words are anticipated or rephrased by the speaker or the monologist as is the case, for example, in Robert Browning’s ‘My Last Duchess’ (1842). The Duke of Ferrara, in this monologue, anticipates that the listener, the envoy, is asking him why he keeps the portrait of his last duchess behind a curtain. The Woman never regards the audience as a ‘stranger’ while the Duke of Ferrara does this in the poem and even addresses the envoy, the listener, as a stranger. Further, in the dramatic monologues of both Browning and Tennyson, Dorothy Mermin claims, the poet and the speaker are ‘two sharply differentiated figures’. Moreover, the speaker in the dramatic monologue, H. Forman asserts, refrains from ‘any appearance as a spokesman’. In Enoch and Mailman’s play, the Woman not only claims the stories of her people as hers but also addresses the audience directly as present listeners who are in a position to respond to and act on what they have heard. The Woman and the persons whose stories she tells are not ‘sharply differentiated figures’ because contrary to what we find in the dramatic monologues of the English literary canon, in telling them she shares them. The stories are therefore communal rather than belonging to individuals. Moreover, by addressing the audience directly and placing the suitcase at their feet, the Woman is adopting rather than refraining from the position of ‘spokesperson’. In placing the suitcase with the word ‘RECONCILIATION’ at the audience’s feet, the Woman refuses to let the audience play the role of the passive listener anticipated (even required) by the traditional monologue.

In *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, Enoch and Mailman adopt the theatrical technique of storytelling to ensure a connection between the performer who tells the story and the audience whom the former considers as willing to listen and respond. Through this technique, the play recuperates an Aboriginal tradition of oral performance. It opens up theatrical space for the Aboriginal oral tradition and destabilises the hegemony of the dominant white culture. It achieves this by oralising a white policeman’s written text on

---

42 Dorothy Mermin, ‘The Damsel, the Knight and the Victorian Woman Poet’, *Critical Inquiry*, 13 (1986), 64-80 (p. 76).
stage through the voice of an Aboriginal performer. By offering multiple stories and ways of attracting the audience through songs, dance and direct shouting, the Aboriginal performer maintains a direct connection with the audience and reduces the gap separating them. In so doing, the performer demonstrates the dynamic and social aspects of oral performance compared to a static performance of a white policeman’s written text presented in an informational context. By sharing Aboriginal stories with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences on stage, the play explores how the sharing of (hi)stories might achieve the long-awaited reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples on the national stage.
Chapter Three: Reconciliation in David Milroy’s *Waltzing the Wilarra*

David Milroy’s *Waltzing the Wilarra* (2011) delves into the past to investigate relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, taking as its setting a club in post-war Perth where they jointly participate in activities such as singing and dancing. In this chapter I argue that the play is a critique of the racial policies adopted in Western Australia which restricted Aboriginal peoples’ movements and forbade their mixing with white Australians. It discloses the devastating effects of the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families (1910-1970) which affected their health and psychology and undermined family ties and parental capabilities. Considering the relation between white and black female characters in the play, I look at the role of white females in the double marginalisation of Aboriginal women. The play also explores the impact of war experiences on returned soldiers’ health and family relations. Drawing on the works of some scholars interested in the field of trauma theory, I consider the transmissibility of traumatic experiences among the characters in the play. Tracing the process of reconciliation in Australia and its difference from reconciliation processes in other countries such as South Africa, I consider how the play casts light on the country’s difficulty coming to terms with this issue. I also highlight the play’s achievement in opening spaces on the stage where listening to and remembering Aboriginal people’s traumatic experiences is extended beyond the Aboriginal community.

*Waltzing the Wilarra* was first performed on 5 February 2011 by Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company at the Perth International Arts Festival’s theatre program. The temporal setting of the play takes as a starting point the 1940s post-war era at a club in Perth while the second act addresses the process of reconciliation in the present time with a gap of about 50 years between the two acts. The play comprises Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal characters who are supposed to be members of a musical band at a club in Perth. As the play opens, it draws attention to the government policies restricting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples’ interaction. We see Old Toss, an Aboriginal, and Young Harry, a white Australian, acting as a chorus for the play. Indicating the restrictions imposed on Aboriginal people in West Australia, Old Toss tells Young Harry that he has to leave Perth before 6 p.m. because A. O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines, has declared the city of Perth ‘a prohibited area’ for Aboriginal people.1

---

1 David Milroy, *Waltzing the Wilarra* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2011), p. 2. All further references to the play are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses in the text.
Putting limits on Aboriginal people’s movements and presence, which the play indicates, was one step in Neville’s plan to breed them out. Reflecting on this plan, Neville stated that ‘[i]t is to the benefit of our own race that the full-blood should not any longer be encouraged to mate with other than full-blood’.\(^2\) This involved not only the whites but also the mixed descent Aboriginal whose contact and relation with the full-blood Aboriginal, Neville asserted, would ‘prolong the process of absorption’ and delay the efforts intended to leave ‘no virile full-blood remaining alive’.\(^3\) Commenting on Aboriginal people’s marginal presence, Young Harry tells Old Toss that he can accompany him in prohibited places as a ‘black shadow’ for a ‘white’ person (2). Although they might be imprisoned for consorting, there is one place where mixing between blacks and whites is tolerated; it is a club in Wilarra where the events of the play take place. Indeed, there was such a club called Coolbaroo in east Perth which was founded by two Aboriginals and one white who served together during World War II.\(^4\)

_Waltzing the Wilarra_ is a musical in Act One and a scripted dialogue in Act Two. When Act One opens, we listen to love songs; the first is by Mr Mack, the Aboriginal master of ceremonies at the club, and the second by the Aboriginal duo Charlie and Elsa. This merry tone of love songs changes abruptly when Jack, a white returned soldier and Elsa’s husband, sings ‘Desert Rats’, relating the hardships of about 14,000 Australian soldiers who were besieged in World War II by the German and Italian forces in Tobruk, Libya. This experience starts to have a negative impact on Jack’s mind after his decommission. As the action proceeds, relations among the characters in the play are revealed. Mrs. Cray, the club organiser, is Elsa’s mother and Fay’s Aboriginal nanny. Fay Griver is a young white participant in the club who is from a well-to-do white family. Mrs Cray cannot express her motherly affection for her daughter, Elsa, as she is a domestic servant in Fay’s family. Accordingly, she cannot live with Elsa or even come for a night to celebrate her first wedding anniversary:

Elsa: Then come and live with me and Jack.
Mrs Cray: Listen Elsa, this is not the place to be talking about –
Elsa: You’re my mother not hers. I need you!
Mrs Cray: It’s not that I don’t want –
Fay: Nanny lives with our family and that’s that! (9)

\(^2\) Neville, p. 56.
\(^3\) Ibid.
We also come to know that Jack and Charlie have been brothers since the day Jack’s father brought Charlie, a member of the Stolen Generations, to the house and treated him as his own son (11). We become aware of the impact of Jack’s traumatic experience of war on his marriage for he beats Elsa unconsciously while he is asleep (13). We also notice Fay’s collusion in aborting Elsa’s reunion with her mother for the second time:

Charlie: You should go with her, Mrs Cray.
Fay: Sorry, Charles, but it’s Daddy’s birthday tomorrow and she has to be up bright and early to fix Daddy’s breakfast.
Charlie: Just for tonight.
Mrs Cray: I’m sure you can fix Oscar with breakfast.
Fay: No-one cooks bacon like you, Nanny!
Eliza: I’ll be fine! Wouldn’t want to break up a happy family. (14)

Elsa is a member of the Stolen Generations and although she finds her mother after years of separation, she cannot be with her in the same house. The above dialogue discloses not only the impact of the forcible removal of Aboriginal children on them and their relationship with their parents but also the role white women play in reinforcing patriarchal authority. I argue that this instance is a protest against white women’s complicity in marginalising Aboriginal women. In Waltzing the Wilarra, Aboriginal women such as Mrs Cray and her daughter, Elsa, have experienced marginalisation twice; they suffered the first marginalisation like Aboriginal men when they were colonised and treated as inferior to white men to the extent of being black shadows for them as Young Harry earlier stated. The second marginalisation occurred when they lost their familial role and were forced to work as domestic servants. Through the character of Fay, we see how white women are complicit in this double marginalisation of Aboriginal women. Fay’s excuse for aborting their reunion, which is the preparation for her father’s birthday, evidences her complicity in maintaining white patriarchal authority.

Old Toss and Young Harry resume their discussion of the political context surrounding black-white relations in Australia to mock the doctrine of terra nullius which denies the presence of the Aboriginal people prior to white colonisation of Australia. Terra Nullius is a Latin word which means ‘no one’s land’. When it was used in Australia it meant a ‘[l]and to which no European state as yet lays claim’. Reflecting on its use in Australia, Sven Lindqvist claims that it means ‘legitimizing the British invasion and its

---

accompanying acts of dispossession and the destruction of indigenous society’. To explain how Britain employed this doctrine in Australia which was earlier inhabited by the Aborigines, Lindqvist maintains, it comes to mean a ‘[l]and where the original inhabitants are, or can be rendered, so few in number as to be negligible’. Benedict Anderson defines nation as ‘an imagined political community’ and his reason for describing it ‘imagined’ is because people in any nation ‘will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’. Further, communities are distinguished, Anderson maintains, ‘by the style in which they are imagined’ rather than by their ‘falsity/genuineness’. In so doing, he emphasises the role of imagination in the articulation of nationalism as a political force and its role in creating nations. Such a perception of nation or a community can be identified in the process of colonising Australia and the policy of white Australia. Although numerous books have documented encounters with the Aboriginals and the policies issued to regulate their movements and welfare, Australia was regarded as terra nullius. Thus, Anderson’s ideas can be applied to Australia where imagination played a role in the white settler’s perception of the ‘new’ nation whose community is conceived to be white and homogenous regardless of the presence of the Aboriginal peoples and other ethnic groups. In Milroy’s play, the perception of Australia as a white nation where Aboriginal Australians do not exist or deemed ‘shadows’ is critiqued along with the doctrine of terra nullius in the dialogue between Old Toss and Young Harry.

Young Harry agrees that ‘All men were created equal’ but he is amazed to see a ‘Terra Nullian’ like Old Toss ‘demand[ing] the right to be equalised, dignified and polished!’ (16) Equality, freedom and dignity, in this sense, are ‘reserved for citizens of Australia not Terra Nullians’ (16). This dialogue mocks the doctrine of terra nullius, which denies the existence of Aboriginal peoples prior to white settlement of the country while at the same time issuing acts and implementing policies to control their movement. Moreover, it casts light on the confiscation of lands and property and the forcible removal of Aboriginal children so that, Old Toss maintains, ‘nothing can be handed down and

---

6 Ibid., p. 4.
7 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
there’ll be no-one to hand down to’ (16). The forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their mothers was intended, Neville claimed, to make all ‘eventually forget that there were ever any Aborigines in Australia’.10 Reflecting on this issue, Old Toss and Young Harry discuss the possibility of refuting the concept of *terra nullius* through a bathing suit competition which Old Toss intends to participate in at the club. Young Harry warns him ‘if you do not win, at least you didn’t come first’ (16) – he means the first people of Australia. The refutation happens at the end of the play when Old Mack announces that the winner of the bathing suit competition is Old Toss (58).

As the action proceeds in Act One, we become aware of changes in white people’s commitment to the racist policies restricting mixing between blacks and whites. Fay confesses her love to Charlie and draws his attention to the possibility of their marriage saying: ‘[d]addy will have trouble accepting that’, but later ‘he’ll come around’ (30). Another prime instance of such change is Jack’s marriage to Elsa, although the increasing negative impact of his traumatic experience at war threatens their marriage and Elsa’s life. It is this which compels Charlie to quarrel with Jack and provides, thereby, the dramatic excuse for their imprisonment and Jack’s mysterious death.

Act Two begins 50 years after the setting of Act One. Bearing in mind that Act One begins in 1947 and that Act Two takes place 50 years later, 1997, we can conclude that it coincides with the release of the *Bringing Them Home* report, the first official report to address the issue of the Stolen Generations. Act Two, which depicts a pre-apology Australia, opens with a young pregnant woman, Athena, who enters a hall which seems in a state of disrepair. This hall is, in fact, the place which the characters used as their club in Act One. Athena has taken on the reconciliation process in the play as part of her interest in contemporary political issues although she admits later that it is her grandmother’s (Old Fay) idea. The first members of the old group of the club to arrive are Old Mack, Old Elsa and Old Charlie. Athena tells them that she took money from the Reconciliation Council to organise the meeting (39). She has distributed flyers and made a reconciliation banner which she asks Old Mack and Old Charlie to put outside the hall.

Seeing Old Fay coming, Old Elsa decides to leave, but the former persuades her to stay by telling her that she has brought wonderful photos of her Nanny, Old Elsa’s

---

mother. The quarrel between the two over Mrs Cray’s photos casts light on the past which has to be explored no matter how traumatic it is:

Old Elsa: I’ll never forgive your family for putting me in that bloody children’s home!
Old Fay: You can’t blame my family! It was the right thing at the time!
Old Elsa: Oh no! Couldn’t let a baby get in the way of cooking and cleaning and wiping your arse!
Old Fay: If you want to blame someone, blame the Native Welfare!
Old Elsa: I blame your family!
Old Fay: At least you had the opportunity to become civilised! (43)

Fay’s response reflects the mentality of white officials who assumed that removing Aboriginal children from their families was a way of civilising them by bringing them up to white ways. Acting as a facilitator of what she calls the ‘Learning Circle’, Athena tells the group that they should decide collectively their aims and objectives and the issues to be addressed (43). In this sense, reconciliation is finally seen as a collective work in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians are enrolled. The Woman’s address to the audience in The 7 Stages of Grieving, where she states that reconciliation is ‘not something you read or write [but] something that you do’, is put into action.¹¹

As the relationship between the two groups is of great significance, Athens starts by asking Elsa to speak about her feelings ‘when [the whites] rammed religion down [her] throat in the Children’s Home’ and ‘beat [her] for speaking [her] language’ (46). The impact of colonisation on Aboriginal languages and cultures moves beyond teaching English to Aboriginal peoples and the introduction of writing to include attempts to eradicate Aboriginal languages. As thousands of Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their parents, they were not only ‘prevented from speaking their languages’ but also ‘threatened with punishment if they did so’.¹² Relating her tragic experience as a member of the Stolen Generations at an early age, Old Elsa says: ‘[w]hile your grandmother was being spoonfed I was scrubbing floors and freezing all night in those bloody dormitories.’ (46) Old Fay conflates facts by equating Elsa’s suffering as a stolen child with her loss of her own daughter, Athena’s mother, due to breast cancer. Old Fay considers her daughter, Athena’s mother, as having been stolen from her in the same way Old Elsa was stolen from her mother (47). Old Fay equates the two losses and their impact, forgetting that at the time of loss she was over sixty while Old Elsa was a child.

¹¹ Enoch and Mailman’s, The 7 Stages of Grieving, 269.
¹² Talib, p. 80.
Reflecting on her grandmother’s response, Athena emphasises the significance of truth to the processes of reconciliation: ‘[a]t least in Africa they called it Truth and Reconciliation but here [in Australia] they just call it Reconciliation because it’s got nothing to do with the truth!’ (47) This reference to truth and reconciliation, I suggest, indicates a collaboration between David Milroy and Wesley Enoch, the director of this play. Enoch raised this issue a decade earlier while commenting on The 7 Stages of Grieving:

How can we deal with reconciliation if we haven’t heard all the stories and cleaned up all the mess that’s here? That moment is to say ‘Let’s put reconciliation in the suitcase’ until the time is right. [...] You actually do it by knowing people, by listening to stories. It is interesting in South Africa. They have the council of truth and reconciliation. Here we have a council of reconciliation. We’re not here about telling the truth. 13

Milroy explains that he wrote the second act of his play after he heard the apology Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2007-2010) offered in 2008 to the Aboriginal people in general and members of the Stolen Generations in particular. The apology not only ‘inspired’ the writing of Act Two but also ‘evoked memories’ of Milroy’s mother’s childhood in a children’s home. 14 Such a ‘monumental moment’, Milroy maintains, ‘made [him] realise that people and politics may choose to live in the past but truth has a mind of its own and can outlive the hardest stalwarts of denial’. 15 The focus on truth is evident in the comments of both the playwright and the director and it is Rudd’s apology which prompted them to turn reconciliation from a word locked in a suitcase in The 7 Stage of Grieving into an act performed on stage.

To ensure truth in the process of reconciliation, the persons involved have to listen to Aboriginal peoples. They should not pretend as Athena does that her generation ‘know[s] what needs to be done’ for the Aboriginal and are ‘much more educated and enlightened’ than the older generation and, thus, ‘won’t make the same mistakes in formulating policies for indigenous people’ (48). Athena’s assumption that she knows what is good for the Aborigines is critiqued when Milroy introduces Old Toss in the middle of Act Two. Old Toss relates the various stages of the Aboriginal people’s collective trauma which began with white colonisation of Australia. Acting as cook, Old

---

15 Ibid.
Toss prepares what he calls a ‘shin stew’. In a satiric tone intended to mock Athena’s earlier statement, he addresses his song to an imagined Aboriginal saying:

You’re a happy little vegemite with paint upon your cheeks,  
Wandering round the bush for forty thousand years,  
But that just ain’t good enough; we know what’s good for you’ (48).

To make this dish of ‘shin stew’, Old Toss sings the recipe which begins with ‘colonisation’, and then ‘miscegenation’, ‘assimilation’ and ‘reconciliation’ (49). When Athena smells the stew and finds it bad because, Old Toss comments, ‘everyone [including her] wants to trifle without tasting the stew’ (50). Through Old Toss’s performance, Milroy comments on the devastating effects of the 200 years of white settlement of Australia on Aboriginal history, culture and identity. During this period, policies were made without listening to or consulting Aboriginal people.

Old Toss’s performance silences Athena and drives Old Mack to take the initiative to have a new start by welcoming them all in his Noongar Aboriginal language to Western Australia, his ‘Noongar country’ (50). Old Mack’s Noongar welcome has a positive impact on the group; Athena says that they are ‘deeply honoured’ and puts up an Aboriginal flag; Old Fay tells Old Elsa that she is ‘welcome to look’ at Mrs Cray’s photos. Then Old Mack addresses the two women suggesting that they share a mother’s love rather than blood: ‘You might not be blood sisters but you’re still bloody sisters’ (52). Athena adds that they ‘shared the same mother’s love’ and maintains that ‘[i]f [they] were sisters [she]’d have two grans and two mothers!’ (52). But Old Elsa is not willing to relive her mother’s traumatic experience and be Athena’s baby’s ‘black nanny!’ as her mother was to Fay (54). However, she apologises to Athena, attributing her reaction to the negative impact of her forcible removal from family at an early age:

I never had a mother to show me any affection or even do the little things like brush my hair. Even when I found her, I couldn’t be with her. I don’t know what happened in her life but she couldn’t even put her arms around me. (54)

Old Elsa and Charlie evidence the drastic impact of the policy of assimilation which amounts to genocide as it was, Raphael Lemkin explains, ‘a co-ordinated plan of different actions aimed at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups themselves’.16 Indeed, the Bringing Them Home report describes the forcible removal of

---

16 Raphael Lemkin, quoted in Anna Haebich, ““Clearing the Wheat Belt”: Erasing the Indigenous Presence in the Southwest of Western Australia’, in Genocide and Settler
Aboriginal children as genocide and ‘a gross violation of human rights norms legally binding on Australia since late 1946’.\textsuperscript{17} Drawing on the very short lines between Elsa and her mother where the latter could not express overt affection for her daughter, I propose that Fay and her family have not only denied mother and daughter any opportunity of reunion but also compelled Mrs Cray to have Fay as her ‘white’ daughter. Further, by introducing Old Fay as the grandmother of a pregnant young girl, Milroy depicts the white character as having a multigenerational family whereas the Aboriginal couple is childless. Through these two samples of families, Milroy, I suggest, displays the devastating effects of this policy on members of the Stolen Generations whose separation from their families at an early age prevents them from experiencing family affection, learning parental capabilities and expressing them to young people.

Separation from family, as we notice in Old Elsa’s case, is an instance of a familial experience which causes her personal trauma. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as ‘an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucination and other intrusive phenomena’.\textsuperscript{18} Exploring the traumatic events soldiers encounter in war, Caruth draws attention to the relation between physical and mental experiences. She observes that the physical wound is ‘not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor’.\textsuperscript{19} In Milroy’s \textit{Waltzing the Wilarra}, Jack’s psychological wound following his experience in Tobruk desert turns into a physical affliction as he unconsciously and inadvertently beats his wife Elsa while he is asleep. It is also an example of the involuntary and subconscious repetition of the traumatic experience in nightmares that Caruth speaks about.

While Caruth limits the notion of ‘a wounded psyche’ to the traumatised person, Jack’s traumatic war experience, as stated above, extends beyond himself. I argue that the play’s engagement with the concept of trauma extends beyond or challenges Caruth’s theory in that it invites us to consider the transmissibility of trauma from one person to


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 4.
another. As such, trauma is refigured as something collectively experienced, rather than an experience confined to the psyche of an individual. Roger Luckhurst points out that trauma ‘leaks between mental and physical symptoms, between [...] victims and their listeners or viewers who are commonly moved to forms of overwhelming sympathy, even to the extent of claiming secondary victimhood’.20 Jack’s trauma is transmitted to his wife, Elsa, and this makes him experience it doubly as he notices its influence on Elsa’s body. In this sense, his psychological wound is dramatised physically in front of his eyes when he sees Elsa curl up crying. It is also transmitted to Charlie who doubly experiences it as sympathy with both Jack, a brother, and Elsa, a beloved.

Charlie notices the physical impact of Jack’s psychological wound on Elsa’s hand in the club. And in the lockup, he recognises it in the terror in Jack’s eyes while relating his nightmare:

At night, I try to knock myself out with the medicine because I’m too scared to sleep. When I’m dreaming it’s not her I see, she’s just someone I’m fighting. I wake up and there she is, curled up on the floor crying. Tomorrow they’re gonna let me out of here ... [speaking with terror in his eyes] but I just want it to end. (26)

Jack’s hand that beats Elsa at home ‘squeezes Charlie’s hand’ in the lockup guiding it to end his psychological pain and ‘crack the whip’ (27). As he sees Charlie taking the scarf from his pocket, Jack smiles and closes his eyes. He is happy as his eyes will no longer see Elsa curled up on the floor and crying. Even though it is guided by Jack’s hand and his pleas, the physical wound that Charlie inflicts on Jack (killing him) is also part of the transmissibility of Jack’s trauma. Reflecting on the night he spent with Jack in the lockup, Charlie says that Jack ‘knew that one night, when he was having one of his nightmares, he’d kill Elsa.’ (56) His decision to end his life by Charlie’s hands is his determination to end his pain and ensure Elsa a survival. Interestingly, this physical wound (killing Jack) retains its psychological state as we see at the end of Act two when Charlie confesses the crime of killing a brother before reconciling with Jack’s spirit. In this sense, the play depicts trauma as passing through a cycle of transmissibility.

Elsa’s traumatic experience, however, extends beyond Jack’s unconscious beating of her and losing him to that of an ongoing aborted reunion with her mother. Elsa’s

reunion with her mother is interrupted again and again by the latter’s work as a domestic servant in Fay’s white family. Elsa’s longing for familial love and her damaging experience as a child in the children’s home, along with her ignorance of what happened to her mother, multiply her traumas. In Act Two, she tells Athena that she inherited her incapability to show motherly love from her mother. Old Elsa’s words not only convey the transmissibility of trauma but also the possibility of inheriting it. E. Ann Kaplan comments on the traumatic effects of the process of colonisation in Australia stating that ‘[w]hen one’s lands have been invaded or snatched away, one’s culture destroyed (or nearly so), it is as if a deep wound has been made in the social body’.21 As conveyed in this play and the two plays discussed in the previous chapters, the traumatic effects of colonisation include the rupture of family ties and the forcible removal of children. As these effects are ‘[t]ransmitted from generation to generation’, Kaplan maintains, ‘the wound remains open’ and ‘[t]he traumatic past […] shapes the nature of contact’.22 Accordingly, if the distance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians remains unbridged, Aboriginal experiences of colonisation, dispossession, erosion of culture and the forcible removal of children will be ‘a deep wound […] in the social body’ of the nation which will haunt the public perception and ‘shape the nature of contact’ between the two groups.

In taking us back in Act Two to events that happened 50 years before, Milroy achieves a dramatic purpose in making almost the entire group of characters meet again so that we, as readers and audience, can see if a real change is ever achieved in the relation between the two groups. Commenting on the temporal dislocation of the traumatic event, Caruth argues that this event ‘is not assimilated or recognised fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it’.23 Its impact lies, Caruth maintains, ‘in its belatedness’ and ‘its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time’.24 The traumatic memory, in this way, disrupts linear time as it shows how the past is constantly influencing the present. This is obvious in the play

---

22 Ibid., p. 47.
24 Ibid., p. 9.
where the incidents of Act One, including Jack’s traumatic experience at war and its impact on Elsa and Charlie and Elsa’s aborted attempts to reunite with her mother, are revisited in Act Two which takes place fifty years later. As such, the play’s temporal framework contributes to the characters’ articulation of trauma as we have seen with Old Elsa and Old Charlie. It also offers the opportunity for representing trauma whether individual, familial or collective, and showing how it operates. Acknowledging past atrocities and exploring traumatic experiences have not only a therapeutic but also an ethical purpose which, Marianna Hirsch and Leo Spitzer assert, can be ‘transmitted and conveyed across generational and political boundaries’ and also ‘entail our determined and collective efforts to prevent or stop’ their recurrence.²⁵ The play accomplishes this in Act Two in which the traumatic experiences of Aboriginal characters which took place fifty years ago, in Act One, are explored again through the process of a ‘learning circle’. In Milroy’s play, the transmissibility of traumatic experiences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal characters takes these experiences beyond the individual level to that of the national or collective. Abigail Ward argues that ‘developing an awareness of the needs of those that have experienced trauma’ is ‘a warning against repeating mistakes and violence of the past’.²⁶ Through portraying these traumatic experiences on the dramatic stage, Milroy not only draws attention to the needs of such persons but also offers the chance for those on the national stage to participate in both remembering past wounds and preventing their recurrence.

The reconciliation process requires both an apology from the Australian government and forgiveness on the part of the Aboriginal. This mutual responsibility of apology and forgiveness seems vital to heal the Aboriginal wounds and repair the rift in the relationship between Aboriginal and white Australians. The major step towards reconciling Australia with its past was the release in May 1997 of the Bringing Them Home report which, David Mellor, Di Bretherton and Lucy Firth propose, broke the silence about the forcible removal of Aboriginal children who were placed in institutions to bring them up to white ways and standards.²⁷ The report was the first official document

to take those victims’ harrowing stories beyond the domain of Aboriginal community, repositioning them as part of a central narrative in the Australian consciousness.28 Further, it recommended that Australian Parliaments ‘officially acknowledge the responsibility of their procedures for the laws, policies and practices of forcible removal’ and negotiate ‘official apologies’.29 The Howard Government (1996-2007), however, refused to offer a general apology, stating that his generation ‘should not be expected to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they have no control’.30 Howard overlooked that his government is the successor of earlier governments which implemented those racist policies and thus his apology is that of a succeeding government, not a succeeding generation. Further, he overlooked that his and other Australians’ generation is complicit in this as they are directly or indirectly enjoying the privileges of the dispossession of Aboriginal Australians. When Howard refused to apologise, he stalled the possibility of forgiveness from Aboriginal peoples. Howard’s refusal to take responsibility and apologise has resonance in Old Fay’s words when she tells Old Elsa that she should direct her blame to the Native Welfare rather than her family (43). It is this denial of responsibility which makes Athena state that the reconciliation process in Australia lacks the emphasis on truth found in states such as South Africa. While demonstrating the impossibility of having a truth commission on the national stage, Milroy shows that the dramatic stage is wide enough to implement it as we notice in Act Two where the wrongdoer and the wronged, Old Fay and Old Elsa, sit together and look at the photos of Mrs Cray who they both share as a mother.

Waltzing the Wilarra reveals in Act One an era in Western Australia’s history where racial tension and arrests for consorting damaged the relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. The aim of the group’s reunion fifty years later in Act Two is to have a ‘happy pre-demolition’ (39) which is, in fact, a demolition of all those policies which created barriers to separate Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal Australians. If the national space is not capacious enough for a truth commission, the play responds to this in Act Two where the stage becomes a ‘learning circle’ and traumas of the past are narrated. This explains why the play shifts from the format of a musical, which prevails

29 Bringing Them Home, p. 250.
30 Cited in Mellor et al, p. 16.
in Act One, into a tightly scripted dialogue in Act Two where the emotional wounds of the characters are acknowledged, and truths revealed to accomplish better understanding. In so doing, it dramatises the impact of white settlement on Aboriginal people which leads to various traumatic experiences, namely personal, familial and collective. Yet, Milroy opens the space in his play to incorporate the traumatic experiences of white Australians as well. Last but not least, the play celebrates the process of reconciliation and reflects on the country’s difficulty coming to terms with it.
Conclusion

Although they vary in style, form and genre, the three plays, namely Chi’ Bran Nue Dae, Enoch and Mailman’s The 7 Stages of Grieving and Milroy’s Waltzing the Wilarra, share in addressing the political-historical context of Aboriginal peoples. In addition to demonstrating the damaging impact of white settlement of Australia since 1788 on their identity, culture, language, and family and kinship ties, Aboriginal playwrights document their peoples’ resilience and survival. Their commitment to demonstrating their peoples’ cultural heritage is manifested through the employment of storytelling, music, songs and dance. While depicting Aboriginal peoples’ pain and grief, the three plays show Aboriginal peoples’ resistance through abrogating the coloniser’s language, challenging imposed narratives and celebrating their culture and tradition. Another common feature is the plays’ inclusion of the theme of a journey, whether temporal or geographical. As well as depicting the revolt of Aboriginal people against white confinement, the journey becomes a process through which reconnection with ancestral spirits is achieved, traumatic experiences are explored, and the diversity of Aboriginal cultures is conveyed.

While exploring Australia’s difficulty coming to terms with the process of reconciliation, the three plays envisage the possibility of bridging the gap separating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Australia. This is dramatised through a joint participation in shared activities such as singing and dancing in Bran Nue Dae, a communal social practice of storytelling and listening in The 7 Stages of Grieving or the shared responsibility in accomplishing reconciliation in Waltzing the Wilarra. The family welcome which Chi portrays in Bran Nue Dae is resumed in Milroy’s Waltzing the Wilarra where Australians are believed to be members of one family. The three plays cast light on the previous Australian governments’ refusal – the temporal timelines of the three plays predate the Rudd government’s apology in 2008 – to offer an apology to Aboriginal people for the injustice they experienced and to the Stolen Generations, in particular, for forcibly removing them from their families. They also critique these governments’ unwillingness to achieve a reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians which has stalled since 1988. This is portrayed on stage through Benedictus’ refraining from offering an apology to Theresa and Tadpole in Bran Nue Dae, the policemen’s passive attitude following Yocke’s death in The 7 Stages of Grieving, and Fay’s refusal to apologise to Elsa for the wrongs her family did in Milroy’s Waltzing the Wilarra. In addressing the
issue of reconciliation, the three plays, in different ways, engage with the influence of the political context in Australia.

McCallum states that ‘[m]any Aboriginal theatre artists in the 1980s and 1990s wanted no part of multiculturalism and objected to being “ethnicised”’ because, he maintains, they are ‘descendants of the first people [who] had a spiritual and philosophical relationship with this continent and their own creation story and cosmology’. While recognising and emphasising this special status, I contend that portrayals of Aboriginal narratives and histories on stage is a means of sharing these narratives with non-Aboriginal Australians and acknowledging the injustice they have endured. The failure or refusal to achieve a reconciliation means that Aboriginal people’s feelings of injustice will remain, and the possibility of its recurrence continue. Such a possibility of repeating previous mistakes is reflected in the plays, for example, in Willie’s imprisonment along with Tadpole, Slippery and M. Annie in Chi’s play, in Yocke’s death in The 7 Stages of Grieving and in Athena’s mistaken perception, in Milroy’s play, that her generation knows what is best for the Aborigines. Performing these narratives on stage, I argue, is one means of drawing attention to and warning against repeating these injustices in the future. While challenging the official narratives and undermining hierarchies by presenting new models of connection between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, including Slippery and Willie, Aunty Grace and the white Englishman, Jack and Elsa and Fay and Elsa, these plays draw attention, as is the case in Chi’s play, to characters from a migrant background such as Father Benedictus.

31 McCallum, p. 300.
Part Two: Settler Drama

Introduction

Graham Huggan posits that in postcolonial countries, ‘a local settler literature emerges that continues to be marked by the European traditions from which it wishes increasingly to dissociate itself’. It is this aspect which indicates how ‘settler writing’ is ‘being riven by ambivalence’ and which ‘point[s] to the constitutive insecurity of postcolonialism’s foundational categories: self and other; colonizer and colonized’. Huggan’s premise resonates with Stephen Slemon’s discussion of settler writing where he dismisses the idea that settler writing is postcolonial, asserting that white Australians’ writing status within the postcolonial field is often suspected because it is both ambivalent in its resistance and not adequately ‘pure in its anti-colonialism’. Further, white Australians’ texts are seen by Susan Sheridan as occupying a position which is neither postcolonial nor colonial. This ambivalence in settler literature is also indicated by scholars such as Hodge and Mishra who regard Australian culture and literature as being ‘determined massively by [their] complicity with an imperialist enterprise’. Their distinction between ‘oppositional’ and ‘complicit’ postcolonial writing implies that they do not notice a uniform resistance in Australian writing to the imperial enterprise and norms. By attaching the second type, complicit, to ‘the neo-colonialist’ writing of white Australians, they draw attention to ‘the contradictory figure of the (male) explorer/convict/bushranger’, Huggan posits, who is ‘forever battling to assert presence in a country not his own’. Through my discussion of the three plays written by four white Australian playwrights, I contend that labelling white Australian literature altogether as complicit is a generalisation that overlooks the resistance to the imperial process demonstrated by some white Australian works.

2 Ibid.
4 Susan Sheridan, Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race, and Nation in Australian Women’s Writing, 1880s-1930s (St. Leonards, Allen and Unwin, 1995), p. 167.
5 Hodge and Mishra, p. x.
6 Huggan, p. 30.
Australian literature is not only contentious in the postcolonial context but also in its multicultural context. In Australia, multicultural writing, Gunew proposes, is believed to be ‘reserved for those who write from outside the prevailing Anglo-Celtic traditions’. However, this dominant perception has been challenged by certain writers from the dominant group, whom I label as ‘settler’ playwrights, in their attempt to represent diversity in Australia. Settler writers’ interest in tackling cultural diversity and migrant stories was initiated by Louis Esson (1878-1943) who, in his short play The Sacred Place (1919), introduces four hawkers and a shop-keeper, Indian Muslims, and two white Australians, the Rev. Jordan and Constable Mathews. Esson’s play celebrates the diversity of cultures within a slum quarter in Melbourne during the period of White Australia and sixty years before the adoption of multiculturalism as a government policy. In this play, Esson not only employs a cross-cultural cast but also makes the migrants major characters.

This interest, on the part of settler playwrights, in migrants’ stories and issues continued after Esson. Other examples of settler playwrights’ engagement with migrants’ issues are to be found in Sydney Tomholt’s Anoli the Blind (1936), Jean Devanny’s Paradise Flow (1938), Oriel Gray’s Sky Without Birds (1950), Majorie McLeod’s Horizons (1952), Richard Beynon’s The Shifting Heart (1957), and Anthony Coburn’s The Bastard Country (1959). Though these plays criticise the country’s racist policies and portray tragic incidents faced by migrants, the majority of them, McCallum states, present migrants as outsiders whose story is ‘peripheral to the main action’. Thus, characters from a migrant background in these plays are no longer given major roles or provided with opportunities for cultural expression as is the case in Esson’s play. Taking into consideration the political context in Australia, one may assume that such a peripheral way of representing migrants or cultural minorities would have changed dramatically following the adoption of multiculturalism as a national policy by Fraser Government since 1978. However, as stated in the introduction in this thesis, multicultural plays are underrepresented in Australian theatres.

Part Two in this thesis investigates the representation of cultural diversity in three plays by four Australian playwrights from the dominant culture, namely Nick Parsons’ Dead Heart (1996), Michael Futcher and Helen Howard’s A Beautiful Life (2000) and

7 Gunew, ‘Preface’, in Framing Marginality, p. x.
8 McCallum, pp.286-87.
Tommy Murphy’s *Gwen in Purgatory* (2010). While examining settler-Aboriginal relations, as is the case in the first play, or settler-migrant relations, in the second and third plays, the three plays depict, I argue, how the three groups of the Australian population are not separate but in a cross-cultural negotiation. Furthermore, while the first play asserts the need for a reconciliation between Aboriginal and no-Aboriginal Australians, the second and third, respectively, problematise the negative representation and stereotyping of migrants in the mainstream media as well as the marginal inclusion of minority groups in national and social spaces.
Chapter One: Language, law and place in Nick Parsons’ *Dead Heart*

In a settler society such as Australia several issues come to the fore when discussing its ‘postcolonial’ literature, among them, as Ashcroft et al note, ‘the relationship between the indigenous populations in settled areas and the invading settlers [as well as] the relationship between the imported language and the new place’. In this respect, asserting difference from the literary traditions of the mother country and modifying language to reflect the impact of local environment on white people and the imperial language become apparent features in white Australians’ works. Focusing on the afore-mentioned issues, namely the relationship between Aboriginal and white Australians, and the relationship between the imported language and the new place, I argue that in *Dead Heart* (1996), Nick Parsons presents a politically engaged play which shows that oppositional postcolonial writing is not restricted to Aboriginal Australian writings but can be extended to include some white Australian writings as well.

For Alan Lawson, postcolonialism is ‘a politically motivated historical-analytical movement [that] engages with, resists, and seeks to dismantle the effects of colonialism in the material, historical, cultural-political, pedagogical, discursive, and textual domains’. However, not all the peoples in postcolonial societies are expected to be involved in this movement or process. Ismail S. Talib, for instance, defines postcolonial literature as a ‘literature written by colonised and formerly colonised peoples’. Talib’s definition relates to the controversy surrounding that category of literature written by descendants of white settlers. Although perceived as an era following colonisation, postcolonialism is not separated from it. Such a notion is emphasised in Ashcroft et al’s definition of postcolonialism which covers cultures influenced by ‘the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day’. This notion is echoed by Raka Shome who claims that ‘the prefix “post” does not mean a final closure, nor does it announce the “end” of that to which it is appended’. In addition to emphasising the ‘unfinished’ status of colonised countries postcoloniality, Ashcroft et al’s notion of

---

1 Ashcroft et al, p. 15.
3 Talib, p. 17.
4 Ashcroft et al, p. 2.
postcoloniality which incorporates all cultures implies that they share one position which negates the differences among them.

Equating diverse peoples’ experiences regardless of their different historical fortunes is critiqued by Ella Shohat who notes that white and Aboriginal Australians do not occupy the same “periphery”, as though they were co-habitants vis-à-vis the “centre”. This generalisation indicates, Hodge and Mishra suggest, a ‘shadow of new imperialism’ which considers the literatures of all postcolonial societies, whether settler or colonised, as oppositional or resistant. This notion is emphasised by Aboriginal writers who assert that their peoples have not yet passed the colonial state to be part of the postcolonial one. Aileen Moreton-Robinson notes that ‘[i]n Australia the colonials did not go home and the “postcolonial” remains based on whiteness’ and thus the postcolonial spaces in Australia are not inhabited by the Aboriginals. Anita Heiss observes that ‘it’s hard to believe there is any such a thing as post-colonial when you are the people who’ve been colonised’. Consequently, decades after its first employment in the theoretical and critical field, the debate surrounding the term ‘postcolonial’ appears far from being settled even among scholars in one postcolonial society such as Australia.

In this chapter I argue that resistant postcolonial writing is not restricted to Aboriginal Australian works but can be extended to include some works by white Australians such as Nick Parsons’ Dead Heart. Nick Parsons, the son of Philip Parsons of Currency Press and Katherine Brisbane, graduated from the NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art) and has a diploma in directing. He worked as a resident director for NIDA in 1994, a year before his play, Dead Heart, was produced by the NIDA Company at the NIDA Theatre in Kensington on 12 May 1993. Later, the play had a joint production by both the Black Swan Company in Perth and the Belvoir Street Company at the latter’s theatre in Sydney. It takes as a theme the relationship between white and

---

6 Ella Shohat, ‘Notes on the “Post-Colonial”’, Social Texts, 31/32 (1992), 99-113 (p. 102).
7 Hodge and Mishra, p. xii.
11 Ibid.
Aboriginal Australians in Wala Wala, a settlement near Alice Spring in the Northern Territory. Though it is not the first play to tackle this issue, it has been deemed the most effective exploration of the painful conflict between the two groups in Australia. Much of Parsons’ play, which portrays a white police officer arresting an Aboriginal for a tribal murder, resembles a well-known film entitled Journey Out of Darkness (1967). It is worth noting that Parsons’ first intention when writing the story was to have it filmed and this explains why Dead Heart appears so cinematic. Although the play shows an interest in Aboriginal issues, Parsons insists that his perspective in writing it is white. This duality in interest and perspective is perhaps the outcome of an intention to portray, Parsons asserts, ‘what happens when two cultures, with completely different values, come into conflict’. To do so, Parsons needs to fairly depict what he perceives as ‘good and bad on both sides without prejudice or sentimentality’. Foregrounding the point of view of an Aboriginal character enables this.

The play begins with Poppy, an Aboriginal character, telling two other Aboriginal characters, who are sitting with him in the desert, that he has been in Wala Wala settlement to destroy a specific place which we later understand it to be the lock-up at the police station. Interestingly, the play also ends with Poppy sitting in the same place with the same persons, making the play thus appear to be presented from his point of view. Moreover, since Poppy is present in almost all the scenes of the play, he acts as a plot-mover who pushes the plot forward whenever the pace of the action slows down. The action of the play accelerates dramatically from Scene Two where Danny, an Aboriginal, is found hanged in the same lock-up which Poppy mentions in his story. Danny’s death brings the clash between watpalla (white man) law and Aboriginal customary law to the fore and, consequently, places emphasis on the conflict between the two groups in this small town. Danny’s tragic end is followed, in Scene 51, by that of Tony, an Aboriginal young man, due to the sacrilege he commits by taking a white woman, Kate, to a sacred ceremonial place dedicated to men’s business where the two engage in sexual intercourse.

---

14 Ibid.
15 Parsons, ‘Author’s Note’, p. xi.
16 Ibid.
(Scenes 16 and 17). Events in the play become complicated after Tony’s death culminating in the departure of most of the white characters from the settlement. This summary of the plot suggests that conflict overwhels the relationship between Aboriginal and white Australians. Such a relationship is shaped by several factors including language, law and relationship to land. Accordingly, these three issues are the focus in this chapter.

Language

The imperial language plays a key role in the process of colonialism. Teaching the imperial language to the colonised people was claimed to achieve a civilising job. This premise is articulated by Talib who argues that ‘colonialism has been described by the colonists as having a civilising mission, in the sense that the colonised stand to benefit from it in educational and social terms’. Moreover, ‘English has been viewed as a potent force for the assertion of command and control’. Thus, teaching English to colonised peoples, Talib maintains, served both ‘the civilising mission’ and ‘the imperial mission of exerting better control over them’. It is often assumed crucial for the colonising process which, as John McLeod explains, ‘uses educational institutions to augment the perceived legitimacy and propriety of itself, as well as [provides] the means by which colonial power can be maintained’. The significance of the English language as a tool of Empire can be seen in Thomas Macaulay’s insistence on teaching English to the people of the colonised countries. Taking part in a debate, in 1835, concerning teaching the young in British territories such as India, Macaulay states that ‘[w]e must teach […] some foreign language’ to people who cannot be ‘educated by means of their own mother-tongue’. The foreign language Macaulay talks about has to be English because of its preeminent position among western languages. In Parsons’ play, Macaulay’s words carry their resonance in those of Les Mathiesen, the white teacher of the school at Wala Wala settlement, who insists on teaching English to a young Aborigine named Tjulpu.

---

17 Talib., p. 8.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 9.
22 Ibid.
Tjulpu is Mannga’s grandson and the son of the person found hanged in the lock-up, Danny. Poppy catches Mathiesen attempting to teach Tjulpu English and warns him that Mannga will fix him with a spear if he sees him doing so. The debate continues in Scene 22 at the police station where teaching English and ‘whitefella’s law’ appears to be inextricable:

Les: He must go to school. That’s whitefella law.
Poppy: No! We teach that one. We do it right way!23

By linking teaching English with the white man’s law, Mathiesen draws attention to the strong bond between the two and seeks Senior Constable Ray’s aid. When the latter reacts indifferently, Mathiesen turns to questioning the presence of white people in Australia: ‘Well, Ray: in that case, what we are doing here? I mean, I can’t even teach English, exactly what we are supposed to be doing here?’ (27) When David Muller, an Aboriginal and the community advisor, pacifies the situation by suggesting that, due to ‘tribal law’, Tjulpu is not to be forced to go to school, Mathiesen threatens that if Tjulpu does not learn English, he will ‘drop the whole thing’ (27). This conveys that for Mathiesen teaching English is essential for the presence and authority of white Australians in the settlement and when not fulfilled the whole work which the whites are doing collapses.

Considering the same issue but from a legal point of view, Ray starts to speculate about the consequences of not learning English. If Tjulpu does not learn English, Ray maintains, ‘he’ll get on the grog, he’ll start sniffing, he’ll just … lose himself. Few years down the track he’ll spend a night in the lock-up and we’ll find ’im … hung like someone’s overcoat’ (29). Though Ray, here, appears to be more a soothsayer than a policeman, his words offer an indirect hint at the issue of death in custody of Aboriginal peoples. Learning English is perceived by Ray to be a barrier protecting Aboriginal peoples from bad habits such as drinking which leads to tragic ends. Significantly, both of these things happen to Tony, an Aboriginal and a teaching aide at the school. Tony’s case is an example of how learning English and an immersion in white culture can have a negative impact on Aboriginal young men. Being brought up in an orphanage has reduced Tony’s respect for the sacred sites of Aboriginal peoples and cultures and has also shattered his memories of his ‘dreaming’, his country.

23 Nick Parsons, Dead Heart (Sydney: Currency Press, 1996), p. 26. All further references to the play are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses in the text.
The word ‘dreaming’ indicates, John Rickard claims, ‘the relationship between people and land’. Affinity with land is so important for Aboriginal peoples because it is an expression of identity. This is conveyed later in the play when Tony and Kate, Mathiesen’s wife, go to Kuninka Waterhole. By telling Kate about his feelings of loss of family and identity due to having been taken away from his family at an early age and given a new name, Tony becomes a living example of the issue of the Stolen Generations. The same could have happened to Tjulpu but he was saved by his grandfather, Mannga, who ‘stole [him] away’ and took him to live in the desert. Tony thus considers Tjulpu a ‘real blackfella’ for he has ‘never seen a watpalla, [and] never been to school’. By regarding Tjulpu as a real black man, Tony admits that he does not see himself so. Taking Tjulpu back is crucial in keeping him ‘real’ and intact, an issue which is of grave significance for Mannga, Poppy and the other Aboriginal elders in Wala Wala. We see the outcome of this decision later in the play when Tjulpu is employed by these elders to punish Tony who shows little respect for their sacred places. Poppy’s words to Mathiesen that he and other elders will teach Tjulpu and will do it right implies the Aboriginal elders’ fear of the negative impact of western ways of teaching on their young children.

The power which ‘imperial’ language enjoys is repudiated, Ashcroft et al assert, ‘in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice’. In postcolonial countries, a new form or, rather, a ‘variant’ of the Standard English appears to suit the environment where it is used. The appearance of such a variant, Ashcroft et al maintain, serves to narrow the gap between ‘those whose language seems inadequate to describe a new place’ and ‘those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power’. Such a variant is not only apparent in Aboriginal plays but also in the plays of white Australians which have Aboriginal Australians within the cast. Dead Heart is replete with examples of a variant of the imperial language which is called Aboriginal English. A good example of this is when Ray speaks it with Mannga who demands a payback as a penalty for his son’s death at the lock-up. Ray, apparently not

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 10
recognising him as Danny’s father, asks him about his name saying: ‘what your name?’ and an Aboriginal character responds: ‘He father that lock-up one’ (6).

There are even moments when Pintupi, the native language in Wala Wala, becomes as valid in the text or on stage as English.28 Indeed, having the imperial language put between brackets following the native language prioritises the latter over English as we see in this dialogue between Tjulpu and Mathiesen about directions of places in a book:

Tjulpu: Ngaanya. [‘This one.’]
Les: Um … ‘MacDonnell Rangers’.
Tjulpu: [pointing to the distance] Ngarrawana. [‘That way’.] (25)

As well as having the English teacher speaking Pintupi, we see Ray, the representative of white authority, speaking it too; when Tjulpu refuses to go inside the lock-up, Ray threatens him with the shotgun saying: ‘Eh! Kumatjila, minipuka! [Come on, fucking cunt!]’ (62). By refusing to learn English or speak it, Aboriginal characters, including Tjulpu and Mannga, compel white characters to speak their native language. In these examples, the ‘colonizing language’ is therefore not only ‘appropriated as English’ with the use of Aboriginal English but is also ‘replaced’ by the native language.29 When this is done by the major representatives of white authority and its power, Ray and Mathiesen, it is perceived as an assertion of not only ‘abrogat[ing] the privileges of standard English by hybridising its grammatical structures and its lexicon to suit the purposes of the colonised group’, as the case is in the first example, but also an indication, as conveyed in the second example, that native language becomes as valid as English.30 Since the relation between language and authority is so inextricable, subverting the colonising language is undoubtedly a subversion of white authority and a destabilisation of its power.

Law

The other critical issue in the relation between the two groups in the play is the clash between the two laws, white law and the Aboriginal customary law. In Scene 84, Parsons pursues the controversy over the English language to critique the language with which

---

28 For further information on the distribution of Aboriginal languages see p. 124 in Colin Brouke et al, Aboriginal Australia.
29 Ashcroft et al., p. 10
30 Helen Gilbert, ‘Reconciliation? Aboriginality and Australian Theatre’, in Our Australian Theatre in the 1990s, pp. 71-88 (pp. 82-83).
law in Australia is written and its implementation by white police officers like Ray. In this scene, which follows Tjulpu’s arrest, Gordon, a white television journalist, interviews Ray and questions him about the right of imprisoning Tjulpu according to a law which he does not know:

Gordon: [out of view] Well, he [Tjulpu]… he doesn’t speak English. He’s being held under a law he’s never heard of. Is that fair?
Ray: […] … The law … has to apply equally to everyone.
Gordon: […] Mr Tjangala’s had no contact with white law, his father was not so lucky: he died in police custody. In fact, in your custody.

Gordon: [out of view] It’s Aboriginal custom to avoid places where … where death has occurred. Where family have died. But Mr Tjangala is now being held in the same cell his father died in a few months ago. How do you think he feels? (64)

Through such questioning of the implementation of white law, Gordon draws attention to Aboriginal customary law. Through this disclosure of the inhumane treatment of Aboriginal people at the hands of white policemen, we become aware how white law seems less humane compared to the Aboriginal law. Gordon’s words also cast light on the clash between the two cultures and demonstrates the white law’s rigidity and its inability to acknowledge or accommodate Aboriginal beliefs in places such as Wala Wala. The scene ends with Ray dragging the reporter to the store room at the police station for daring to ask him ‘why are you still here?’ (64). Gordon’s questioning of Ray’s existence is, in fact, a questioning of the legitimacy of his presence and Ray’s violent reaction is evidence of the deterioration of his authority.

Gordon, however, is not the only person to suffer from the maltreatment and tyranny of Constable Ray whose expression of threat increases as his anger mounts. To compel Charlie, a white anthropologist, to provide him with information about Tony’s death, Ray threatens Charlie with the ‘charge of concealing a murder’ (53) and also terminating the work he does in the settlement and his grant money. In a fit of rage and frustration, Ray threatens to nail Charlie to the wall (54). Furthermore, in a moment which shatters Ray’s claim that law applies equally to all people in Wala Wala, we see him prohibiting Aboriginal characters from drinking beer in whereas he does so in the police station. Gordon’s questioning of Ray’s presence in the town and Ray’s violent reactions towards him and Charlie cast light on the unjust treatment of the Aboriginal people at the hands of white policemen like Ray and the fallacy of democracy and equal treatment.
Dead Heart draws attention to Aboriginal customary law especially when Ray finds himself compelled to tolerate the application of the payback penalty. When Mannga demands the imposition of payback as tribal justice and spears Billy, holding him responsible for his son’s death in the lock-up, Ray tells Sarah who comes to treat Billy that Aboriginal peoples do not wait for an inquest (14). In addition to this, the play demonstrates how white law is inadequate for tackling issues of grave importance to Aboriginal people, including death in police custody and sacrilege, and has no article or item against imprisoning persons in the same cells in which their relatives died. Aboriginal customary law has not been written on paper as white law has, but instead has been handed down orally from one generation to another and passed on by guardians who gather whenever there is a problem or a dispute to discuss the appropriate punishment for the law breakers.31 In scene 28 in the play, we see Mannga and Poppy meet to discuss the sacrilege Tony has committed by taking Kate to a sacred site and the appropriate punishment (34).

The play conveys how living under white law has not been a positive experience for Aboriginal people. Moreover, as Ruby Langford Ginibi explains, there is no penalty in white law for things which Aboriginal people regard as offences such as ‘insulting elder[s], singing sacred songs in public and showing sacred objects to women’.32 Thus, punishing perpetrators of such offences which white law does not have penalties for is considered a crime in white law. While highlighting these shortcomings in white law, the play portrays how white law is violated by its representative in the town, Ray, who arrests Tjulpu without a warrant although Sarah’s medical verdict states that Tony died of a heart attack. Regardless of Sarah’s statement, Ray insists on chasing Tjulpu simply because the latter ‘doesn’t know anything about white law’ (74). Moreover, he imprisons Billy, the black tracker, because he considers him responsible for Tjulpu’s escape. Further, he tolerates and then prohibits Aboriginal law in accordance with his will and applies white law as he interprets it. In doing so, Ray acts as an elder for white law although the law which he represents does not recognise this title.

While casting light on Aboriginal law in Wala Wala, it is worth noting that in 1998, there was a conference at the Northern Territory where a draft constitution was made for the territory if it attained statehood. In this draft Aboriginal customary law was

32 Ibid., p. 11.
to be considered ‘a source of law in the new State’. Although the draft constitution was rejected by the voters in the Northern Territory which aborted the aim to attain the status of statehood, it remains the first significant paper to recognise Aboriginal customary law. Incorporating Aboriginal law within Australian law requires first writing it down and interpreting it so that it can be understood by everyone. This would mean that it would no longer be subject to the interpretation of the Aboriginal elders but would instead be interpreted by the lawyers who would define it to suit their clients’ interests. Aboriginal customary law would also have to be consistent with international human rights law. Thus, punishments such as ‘payback’ would have to be given new terms so as not to imply an obvious indication to bodily harm. In addition to penalties, Aboriginal customary law comprises a set of rules which tackles ‘social relations, economic rights, land ownership, wildlife conservations, land management and intellectual property rights’. This explains why the Sessional Committee of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly on Constitutional Development found in 1996 that Aboriginal customary law is ‘a living system of law for many Territorians, one that is central to their existence and daily lives’. In Dead Heart, Parsons validates Aboriginal customary law, albeit temporarily, and demonstrates Aboriginal people’s respect for their traditional law and elders but he portrays it mainly, as is the case with ‘payback’, as a law of punishment.

**Place and displacement**

Other key issues that play a significant role in the articulation of identity in postcolonial societies are place and displacement. Fostering a relationship with place, Ashcroft et al argue, is crucial in defining identity and resisting erosion of identity through removal and displacement. Incidents in Parsons’ Dead Heart take place near the desert which occupies the centre of Australia. This centre was perceived by nineteenth-century explorers, Rachel Fensham states, as ‘a space of emptiness and desolation’ and was

---


34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 42.


38 Ashcroft et al, p. 8.
described by the scientist Cecil Madigan as the ‘Dead Heart’.

This terminology indicates, Fensham maintains, ‘a failure to accommodate an indigenous or postcolonial ecology of space’. Parsons’ play is replete with examples which indicate Aboriginal characters’ strong affinity with the place compared to white characters who feel alienated. Whereas Charlie and Ray depend on maps to find their way in the desert, Aboriginal characters such as Poppy, Mannga and Tjulpu have maps of the places in Wala Wala engraved in their minds. Moreover, while the Aboriginal characters enjoy meeting in the evening in the open air where they sit on the sand around campfires, the white characters prefer to gather inside. Affinity with place is also explored metaphorically in the play where the sand becomes a text upon which Aboriginal characters draw their ideas. While relating his story at the beginning of the play, Poppy draws four lines on the sand to symbolise the lock-up. He does the same when he asks David to decide which camp he belongs to, the black or the white (72).

At Kuninka Waterhole, the alienation of the white characters from place comes to the fore; while Kate is drawing a picture of the beautiful place there, Tony notices that her skin is turning red. He begins anointing it with a block-out cream and comments that the redness on her skin is nature’s way of saying: ‘Go home, white man’ (21). If artificial substances such as this cream help Kate protect her body from the sun’s rays, she needs natural substances to get an admission into places situated deep down at the centre of Australia such as this sacred site for Aboriginal characters. Before letting Kate go inside the crevice in the cliff face, Tony pours some of the fine sand over her naked body until she becomes totally ochre. In so doing, Tony attempts to protect her by tricking ‘pankalangu’, a spirit which the Aboriginal characters believe guards the waterhole, so as not to see Kate, a ‘white woman’ (22).

Tony’s efforts to hide Kate’s white skin prove fruitless as the painting documents her presence in the place. When Kate finds the easel empty, fear and memories of the past strike her. The outcome of their visit to Kuninka Waterhole is not limited to Tony’s tragic end but has its traumatic impact on Kate. At her birthday party, Kate is horrified to see Mannga’s face at the kitchen window (39). Seeing Mannga’s face reminds Kate of former experiences she had with her family one Christmas at Haast’s Bluff before coming to

---


40 Ibid., p. 12.
Kate relates her memories of that bloody experience without stating the cause saying:

> [t]he drinking started and by afternoon it was … People kept coming to the door with blood pouring down. We bandaged them up. Then the man who ran the store – Frank – he came and he was bleeding. And a crowd gathered and they wanted him; to kill him. My mum and dad were staying: they didn’t know what to think. We just sat there with the crowd outside; black faces everywhere, every window (41).

Kate’s memory of that incident has an impact on the guests who become ‘suddenly conscious of the dark expanse of the desert beyond the house as the waning candles illuminate their faces’ (41). This image of white characters’ consciousness of ‘the dark expanse of the desert beyond the house’ might metaphorically be interpreted to convey alienation as they feel disconnected from – and even threatened by – the land which the Aboriginal characters feel an affinity with. Kuninka Waterhole, in this way, becomes the trigger for traumatic experiences white people had in previous places and also their feelings of alienation.

White characters’ alienation, however, is not restricted to Kuninka Waterhole; While waiting with Mathiesen, Kate and their children for the plane to take them away from the settlement, Charlie releases the map on which he has been marking places of major concern in his study. The way he watches his map blowing illustrates that after months of hard work it becomes nothing other than ‘another piece of rubbish blowing around the settlement’ (90). Reflecting on the role maps play in maintaining imperial control, Gilbert regards it as ‘one of the more subtle but pervasive tactics by which imperialism establishes, maintains, and justifies control over alien space.’⁴¹ I argue that by letting the map blow around the settlement, Charlie depicts, unconsciously, a white failure to control space. White characters’ relationship with place is fragile, like their work in the settlement that can be ended very quickly. Ray puts it very plainly at the meeting during Kate’s birthday by saying that everything they have done at the settlement might ‘wash off […] [l]ike a fresh coat of paint’ (38-39). Such a fragile relationship to place is further emphasised when Ray, in Scene 34, tells the white characters at Kate’s birthday party that the Aboriginal characters are ‘hunter-gatherers’ who have ‘gathered a handful of white people in the middle of the desert’ (p. 38). In so doing, he describes his

---

fellow whites as ‘preys’ who are ‘gathered’ and brought by the Aboriginal, the hunters, to Wala Wala which, accordingly, becomes their cage.

The play shows the influence of the conflict between the two cultures and laws on white characters who appear to be fluctuating between them. We find Ray caught between applying white law and tolerating Aboriginal customary law, and also between sticking to normal procedures and relying on the medical verdict of death by heart attack, as in Tony’s case, or relying on his knowledge of tribal methods of murdering persons with no marks. Moreover, there are moments when Ray appears torn between Christian imagery and Aboriginal tricks; he threatens to nail Charlie to the wall and intimidates Gordon by informing him of a ‘blackfellas’ way of hiding the body of a dead person by putting it in ‘a hole in a termite mound’ where it would disappear within a few hours (p. 65). Ray’s long period of service in the settlement and his knowledge of Aboriginal habits and skills make the boundaries between the two groups, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, blur to the extent that Ray appears to be oscillating between them. While chasing Tjulpu into the desert, Ray catches David at a waterhole and calls him ‘a fuckin’ white man’ (83). Ray tells David that he can catch him in the desert because he ‘got more blackfella’ in him than David will ever have (84).

The conflict in Wala Wala cannot be settled when Ray loses and Poppy wins, as McCallum implies. Contrary to such a reading, I suggest that the end of the play where we see Poppy, Mannga, and Tjulpu at a waterhole in the desert spearing Ray’s body does not signify the triumph of the Aboriginal characters over the whites. If this was Parsons’ aim, he would have ended his play with Ray’s death in the waterhole. Parsons’ play emphasises that what is needed in Wala Wala is not a fight to be settled with the victory of one side over the other but an understanding that would enable both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal characters to accept each other and ensure a peaceful coexistence. This point is demonstrated, I argue, at the waterhole deep in the desert of Wala Wala. There, Ray is pierced by Tjulpu’s spear and David rushes and throws himself across Ray’s body shouting ‘enough’ to Tjulpu, Mannga and Poppy. In an answer to Poppy’s question ‘[y]ou: blackpalla [or] watpalla’, David responds ‘I’m just a fella’ (88). David’s response teaches Poppy and Ray that there is a middle road between the two camps, ‘whitepalla’ and ‘blackpalla’, where diversity, compromise and reconciliation can flourish. It is a middle road that neither Poppy’s spear nor Ray’s shotgun can obliterate. This scene at the

---

42 McCallum, p. 325.
waterhole, to sum up, envisages the long-awaited moment of reconciliation between the two communities and, more broadly, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Acceptance of the other opens spaces to negotiate cultural differences between the two groups.

Ending the play with Poppy sitting in the same place in the desert with the same First and Second Man gives the play a cyclical structure. The play does not have a fixed historical setting although the presence of the camera and the Toyota car helps to specify an era which is the last quarter of the twentieth century. There are also scenes when the action freezes and events recur; for example, in the scenes where Ray watches the tape recorded by the reporters following Tony’s death (scenes 56, 58, 60, 62 and 64). The non-linear time frame is one of several features Dead Heart shares with Aboriginal plays. Aboriginal plays often alternate, Casey and Craigie claim, ‘between speech and silence, between the past and the present and between performance and speech’. Dead Heart is replete with scenes where there is only performance and no speech including scenes 8, 12, 19, 23, 28, 29, 30, 39, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 30, 74, 75, 76, 77, 82, 83, 89, 91, 92, 93, 100, 105, 113, 115 and 119. There are also scenes which alternate between speech and silence such as scenes 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, 20, 22, 26, 27, 31, 34, 35, 52, 54, 55, 59, 62, 67, 68, 70, 73, 79, 81, 84, 97, 108, 110, 116 and 121. In addition to this, starting and ending the play with Poppy telling a story to two Aboriginals presents the play in the form of storytelling often found in Aboriginal plays. In Aboriginal drama, Gilbert and Tompkins state, ‘story-telling’s presentational style and format challenge the naturalistic conventions by which western theatre usually stages its subject matter.’ I would therefore argue that by presenting his play in the form of storytelling and the employment of Aboriginal language and Aboriginal English, Parsons draws on aspects of style often employed in Aboriginal drama. Accordingly, Parsons’s play, as an example of an oppositional postcolonial work, achieves this in both content and form.

A major way in which a writer avoids being complicit with the dominant culture in addressing postcolonialism in Australia, Sheridan claims, is by ‘open[ing] up the national narrative to a wide variety of previously marginalized voices, perspectives, and experiences’. Having Dead Heart start and end with an Aboriginal character is just one

---

43 Casey and Craigie, ‘A Brief History of Indigenous Australian Contemporary Theatre’.
44 Gilbert and Tompkins, p. 126.
45 Sheridan quoted in Huggan, Australian Literature, p. 32.
way in which Parsons achieves this. Moreover, he exerts significant effort to make the language of his play ‘move beyond the boundaries of domination’ to become, in bell hooks’ words, a ‘place of struggle’. In Parsons’ play, the ‘colonizing language’ is not only appropriated but also replaced, though temporarily, by the native language. Furthermore, the play is full of examples of Aboriginal characters fostering their relationship with land. By giving Aboriginal characters major roles, Parsons moves beyond the typical representation of the cultural other in the work of settler playwrights. Moreover, *Dead Heart* validates Aboriginal law and shows the inadequacy of white law to tackle issues which the Aboriginal peoples regard as offences. It also conveys the inhumane application of white law by white policemen in places of mixed communities (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). In this sense, it makes a broader point about the difficulty of policing a society made up of such culturally distinct groups. While exploring the conflict between the two groups, the play also envisages reconciliation between them. Finally, it tackles issues of major concern to Aboriginal people including death in police custody and the Stolen Generations. Accordingly, *Dead Heart* demonstrates that white Australian playwrights can write ‘oppositional’ postcolonial plays which challenge the imperial norms.

---

Chapter Two: Representing Migrants in Michael Futcher and Helen Howard’s *A Beautiful Life*

In *A Beautiful Life* (2000), which tells the story of a real migrant family, Michael Futcher and Helen Howard investigate the representation of migrants in the mainstream media and their treatment by the legal process in Australia. The play is a critique of dysfunctional models of their inclusion in the national space which buttresses their marginalisation and alienation though they have Australian citizenship. To explore such alienation and marginalisation, I consider the problems with mainstream media representations of migrants, both globally and in Australia, and the role these representations play in creating a negative portrayal of migrants and consequently affecting their integration in the host societies. I also investigate studies of the representation of Muslims in the Australian mass media and their relevance to the stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists in the play. Drawing on the above, I show how the playwrights, through the medium of theatre, construct alternative representations of migrants which draw out the complexity of their lives and their relationship to Australia and their homeland. Relying on Paul Ricoeur’s concept of identity as a narrative process, I consider how storytelling provides migrant characters with opportunities for identity construction. Furthermore, I argue that through their choice of characters with Iranian, Irish and other origins, Futcher and Howard explore the problems as well as the possibilities of a multicultural society, and I contend that this makes their play a good example of what Lo and Gilbert term a Big ‘M’ multicultural theatre.

**Mainstream media representation**

Media representation of minorities or migrants within a country influences public opinion in that country and plays a role either in fostering or weakening their integration in host societies. To obtain high viewing figures, mass media tends to present extraordinary and alarming news. Presenting such news in an exaggerated manner and with no in-depth analysis often leads to a misrepresentation of the subject matter. The impact of such practices, Vanessa Christoph argues, is that if they initiate inaccurate and negative impressions in the minds of their recipients, such impressions will ‘stay anchored in their memory’ even when they are, later on, corrected.¹ Moreover, when a news agency or a

---

journal takes their information from other agencies or journals this leads to a ‘circular dissemination process’ where thoughts and impressions are reused and, thus, established without verification. In so doing, mass media influences the impressions people have about society and politics in that country.

In their endeavour to be ‘attractive’ to their customers, Christoph notes, mass media texts make a ‘selective choice’ of what events are to be covered, and how they are presented to the public. Since these texts focus on spectacular news, very little is reported, Christoph observes, ‘about the everyday lives of migrants and marginal groups’. Such groups become the focus of the media when they create problems to the host society rather than when they face them themselves. The ‘reality’ presented in the mass media is not only selected but also ‘coloured’ by the prejudices of journalists and reporters. (Re)presenting the other through stereotypes strengthens former images people have in their minds about migrants and turns these images, consequently, into facts that cannot be shaken or changed easily. Such negative and biased representations of migrants are not limited to one country. Throughout Europe, the mass media presents migrants in a ‘biased and negative’ way for their presentation is often linked to ‘security issues’. In addition to security issues, migration and migrants are linked to social and economic problems in the host countries which distort public perception and affect migrants’ integration. In A Beautiful Life Futcher and Howard critique such negative representations of migrants offering an alternative characterisation of migrants where the stereotypes shaped by the mass media are resisted and even reversed.

**The Representation of Muslims in Australia**

The play critiques the representation of Muslims in the Australian mass media where Iranian Muslim characters are labelled as a bunch of Muslim terrorists. Linking this with accusations against Iranian Muslims for conducting terrorist acts, the play questions the stereotyping of a group of Muslim protesters as terrorists and the role the mass media

---

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 99.
4 Ibid., p. 98.
5 Ibid., p. 101.
6 Ibid., p. 99.
8 Ibid.
play in creating a consensus on this stereotyping. The Australian mass media, as portrayed in the play, has successfully initiated a consensus about labelling the protesters as terrorists through coverage of the protest at the Iranian Embassy in Canberra. In the play, the white lawyer Brendan tells the Iranian migrant characters, Hamid’s family, that ‘the whole of Australia has seen [the video of the raid] on television about twenty times since yesterday’. The legitimacy of labelling others as terrorists relies on, Bethami A. Dobkin believes, ‘the degree to which consensus is produced’. The influence of the ‘terrorist’ act depends, Dobkin maintains, on the way in which it is made ‘more dramatic’ than other problems. Attention, thus, should be given to ‘the way in which the criminal nature of the act helps determine the manner in which the act will be reported and subsequently interpreted by the audience’. In addition to naming the protesters as ‘a bunch of Muslim fanatics’, their action is described as ‘[b]loody’ though only one Iranian diplomat, Ahmad, is wounded (5). The mass media has influenced the public perception not only in Canberra where the raid took place, but also in Queensland where Hamid’s family lives. The mass media report affects Hamid’s family’s relationship with people in Brisbane who decide not to buy food from their shop. Commenting on this, Amir says that ‘it goes on and on with us still in the papers and everyone ‘round here thinking we’re terrorists.’ (59).

The Iranian protesters in the play are also Middle Eastern Muslims and press articles were responsible, Adam Jamorzik claims, for ‘demonising the refugees from the Middle East countries’ who were either detained ‘behind razor wires or electrified wires’ or sent to ‘penal settlements in far-distant islands’. Muslims, Anne Aly asserts, have been constructed in Australia’s mass media, since 1912, as ‘an antagonistic “other”’ whose religion and culture constitute a ‘looming threat to Australia’s cultural values’.  

---

9 Michael Futcher and Helen Howard, A Beautiful Life (Sydney: Currency Press, 2000), p. 6. All further references to the play are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses in the text.
11 Ibid., p. 36.
Though World War II made Japan and, at a later stage, Communism, the main source of threat, global issues, especially those taking place in the Middle East since the end of the 1970s, might possibly be the reason behind this recurrence of former fears. Scott Poynting argues that since the mid-1990s ‘the Middle Eastern/Muslim “other”’ has been portrayed in the mass media ‘as backward, uncivilised, irrational, violent, criminally inclined, misogynistic and a terrorist threat – a whole litany of evil attributes’.  

Australian perceptions of Islam, Howard Brasted asserts, do not obviously deviate from those of the Western mainstream. Indeed, many of the reports appearing in the Australian major newspapers, Brasted claims, are reproductions which are either taken from agencies such as Reuters, AFP and UPI, or borrowed from major newspapers like the Washington Post, Guardian and The Times. Islam, in those agencies and newspapers, is portrayed as a ‘fallen’ and ‘rival world system’. No matter where they reside – in Arabic or Muslim countries or even India or Australia – Muslims are unanimously regarded as relevant, Brasted maintains, to events such as ‘hijackings, hostage-taking, oil embargos, the Iranian Revolution, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Gulf War, and so on and so forth’. In the play’s trial scene, Brendan draws attention to the same unanimous perception by stating how the mass media arouses Australians’ fear of and anxiety about Muslims by circulating the statement ‘a bunch of Muslim fanatics are running loose in Canberra’ and calling the day when the incident took place ‘Bloody Monday’ (5). As such, the Australian mass media explicitly ‘identifies Australian Muslims as “other” and effectively inculcates fear of Muslims among the broader community by equating Muslims with the threat of terrorism’. As recipients of what the Australian media presents, Australians would be vastly influenced by its contents and orientation. At the end of the press conference before the trial, Brendan asks Amir to tell his parents ‘not to watch the midday news’ (20). Stephanie, on her part, explains to Hamid that in Australia ‘[p]eople pick up on key words’ and of the words Hamid uses in the

---

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., p. 7.
18 Ibid., p. 10.
19 Aly, p. 33.

As the playwrights show, the negative representation of Muslims in Australia in the mass media is not restricted to a specific age or group; Amir tells the audience that students ‘call [him] Saddam Hussein on the school bus’ (59), an illustration of how Muslims in Australia, as stated above by Brasted, are unanimously linked to events taking place in the Middle East. In Amir’s case, this comparison with Saddam Hussein is illogical for the raid took place four years after the end of the first Gulf War, between two Muslim countries, Iraq and Iran. Moreover, it also happened one year after the second Gulf War wherein Iran never participated in the coalition against Iraq, and never aided or sided with Saddam. Furthermore, to protest against the bombing of members of the Mojahedin whose camps were, at that time, in Iraq does not entail siding with Saddam Hussein. Labelling Amir as Saddam Hussein therefore demonstrates the extent to which cultural stereotypes are inaccurate and reductive because they are not informed by fact. This example in the play draws attention to how the Australian population, even the students, are influenced by this unanimous perception of Muslims which overlooks the complexities of the political, economic and social conflicts among Muslim countries.

The Play’s Alternative Narrative

A Beautiful Life was first performed by Matrix Theatre Company at La Boite Theatre in Brisbane on 27 August 1998. It was a ‘co-production with The Brisbane Festival and La Boite Theatre’ and was funded by Arts Queensland and the Australia Council for the Arts.\(^\text{20}\) It relates the story of an Iranian migrant family where the father, Hamid, was imprisoned in Tehran for sheltering a friend, a member of the Mojahedin.\(^\text{21}\) Later, an opportunity is opened for him to flee his country after rescuing the Boltons, an Australian family who visited Iran. However, Hamid’s participation in the raid on the Iranian Embassy in Canberra in 1992 backfires on him; he is labelled as a terrorist and sentenced...


\(^{21}\) People’s Mojahedin Organisation in Iran or Mujaheddin-e Khalq (People’s Fighters) is an Iranian opposition organisation. Because of the severe struggle with the Iranian Government, the organisation decided to take Iraq as a base for its members and for its operations in Iran. Later, the organisation was put on the list of terrorist organisations by the EU, UK and the US. For further information, see Shahram Akbarzadeh, ‘Australia’s Relations with Iran’, <http://asiainstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/884389/SA_PolicyPaper_No1.pdf> [Accessed 7 February 2015].
to a one-year imprisonment. The play moves in two timelines, past and present; to relate events of both times, the playwrights employ storytelling, re-enactment of past events, role-playing, story within a story, and juxtaposition of past and present scenes especially in the trial scene at the end of the play. The effect of these two timelines is to draw attention to parallels in action where the migrant characters face injustice in both their country of origin and the host country. In this respect, the play discloses that, Janis Balodis notes, the ‘[Australian] system of law and justice is no better than that in Iran’. Moreover, it is the best and the strongest reaction of the plays, McCallum posits, to the Howard government’s ‘policies of detainment and forced deportation of asylum-seeking refugees’. Hamid is not only labelled as a terrorist but also threatened with deportation although he is an Australian citizen.

A Beautiful Life, as stated earlier, is based on real events and tells the story of a real Iranian migrant family to whom the playwrights give pseudo names: Hamid and Jhila and their son, Amir. Hamid and Jhila participated with a group of Iranian migrants in the raid on the Iranian Embassy in Canberra in April 1992 to protest against the bombing of Mujahedeen al-Khalq’s bases in Iraq. In the ‘Foreword’ to the play, Janis Balodis states that Hamid and other Iranian protesters were suppressed because the Australian legal system is influenced by the political will to appease Iran which was and is a significant importer of Australia’s wheat and meat. This is emphasised in the play when Brendan, one of the two lawyers who defend Hamid, states that ‘Iran is our biggest export market in the Middle East [and] [w]e’ve got to keep them happy’ (56). Australia’s relations with Iran go back to July 1968 when the two countries agreed to open embassies in their capitals. By 1970, Iran had become Australia’s largest importer of wheat and meat. After Shah Pahlavi’s overthrow at the end of 1978, the Australian government recognised Mehdi Bazargan’s provisional government in February 1979. When the hostage crisis (1979-1981) emerged between Iran and the US, Australia, in September 1979, signed a wheat deal to provide Iran with a million metric tons. Though it cooperated with the US in imposing economic sanctions on Iran, Australia refused to include food sales. At the

---

23 McCallum, p. 298.
24 Balodis, p. vii.
25 Robert J. Bookmiller, Engaging Iran: Australian and Canadian Relations with the Islamic Republic (Dubai: Gulf Research Center, 2009), p. 28.
26 Ibid., p. 40.
end of the 1980s, Australia was competing with Canada to secure an annual trade of 475 million Australian dollars.\textsuperscript{27}

In April 1992, Iran’s jet fighters attacked the Mujahedeen al-Khalq’s bases in Iraq. As a result, many of the organisation’s supporters attacked Iranian embassies in North America, Europe and Australia.\textsuperscript{28} Australia’s foreign minister John Kerin apologised to the Iranian Government and considered the raid on the Iranian Embassy in Canberra a ‘deplorable act’.\textsuperscript{29} \textit{A Beautiful Life} begins with the raid on the Iranian Embassy and explores the consequences of this incident on the Iranian protesters. Act One, Scene One shows Hamid, Jhila, and Kamran as protesters and Ahmad Husseini, a diplomat in the Iranian embassy. Kamran tries to attack Ahmad with a screwdriver, but Hamid rushes to stop him with a spanner. When they recognise Ahmad to be their former torturer in the prison in Tehran ten years before, the action freezes. The playwrights decide to keep that incident incomplete until the end to provide an opportunity for Hamid to tell the past since, as he insists, the present cannot be understood unless the past is unmasked.

Immediately after this incident we see Amir, Hamid’s and Jhila’s son and the play’s main narrator, commenting on the consequences of the raid. Amir says that two days later, he saw on TV his father, mother and other Iranians arrested as ‘terrorists’ but what he noticed on TV are people who look more like ‘lost astronauts’ or people ‘flown in from another planet’ (3). Later, Amir introduces Ahmad Husseini, the Iranian diplomat, to address the audience, accusing the protesters of being ‘Mojahedin terrorists’ and enemies of both Iran and Australia (5). After that, Amir describes the incident as a ‘top story on every TV news’ for it reveals the existence of ‘[t]errorism in Australia’ and states how Australians were scared because ‘a bunch of Muslim fanatics are running loose in Canberra’ (5). Then, a character appears as Prosecutor to clarify that although those protesters are allowed to live in Australia and ‘settle as refugees’, they are asked ‘not to use their presence here as an opportunity to seek revenge for what happened in their homeland and […] to leave their national disputes behind them’ (5). The Prosecutor’s words suggest that persons from minor cultures will be regarded as ‘refugees’ and that their country of origin is the only ‘homeland’ s/he has, even after acquiring citizenship.

Scene One offers an example of the playwrights’ employment of Bertolt Brecht’s alienation effect. According to Brecht, the alienation effect is employed to eliminate a

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 50.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
fourth wall which separates the actor from the spectators for ‘he knows that he is being looked at’ and they know that they are no longer ‘unseen spectators’ at what is happening on the stage. Brecht asserts that to demonstrate a good employment of the alienation effect, ‘the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays’ since the aim is ‘not to put his audience into a trance’ but to think of the message behind what is being presented on stage. Having Amir stepping out of the action to comment on incidents and introduce characters as well as freezing the action are some means which the playwrights employ to distance the audience emotionally and invite them to respond intellectually to what they are watching on the stage. In what remains of the scene we see Ahmad, the Iranian diplomat at the Iranian Embassy in Canberra, voicing Prime Minister Keating’s words and labelling the Iranian protesters as terrorists:

Amir: Everyone is in shock – we’re not used to it here, it’s un-Australian. It must be — Mr Keating said on TV.
Ahmad: Your Prime Minister, he says this is not the kind of violence you are used to here. It is not acceptable. This is good. We must stop this terrorism with tough justice. (5)

As stated above, Prime Minister Keating’s words which Amir quotes are completed by Ahmad, the Iranian diplomat. I argue that through this jump from ‘he’, with reference to Keating’s words, to the pronoun ‘[w]e’, Futcher and Howard briefly and brilliantly indicate a parallel in the stands of both governments, the Australian and the Iranian, towards the raid, and the role trade between them plays in shaping this parallel which leads to Ahmad, as if he is a spokesman for the Australian government, voicing Keating’s words and warning the protesters of ‘tough justice’.

Futcher and Howard’s portrayal of the collusion between the two governments is further demonstrated on stage in the trial scene, which serves to comment on the justice systems in both countries. In this scene, the playwrights juxtapose two distinct incidents where the action takes place in both the past and present time and in two separate locations, the prison in Tehran and the court in Canberra. Hamid, in this scene, is judged

---

by both the Australian Judge and the Iranian Mullah who sit close to each other and when
the former wears his wig, the latter wraps his turban.

Mullah: Name all the Mojahedin traitors here in the prison.
Hamid: I can’t.

Ahmad hits Hamid

Ahmad: [as the Australian Prosecutor] Did you […] attack this diplomat with
a spanner as a weapon.
Hamid: No no—he lunge. I raise my arm like this, because I think ‘He’s
attacking me’. I want to tell the jury, this was the guy who was my torturer —
in Tehran jail. […]

Mullah: You are a traitor to the Islamic Revolution.
Hamid: No. I am not—
Ahmad: ‘Shut up!’
He hits Hamid.
Judge: It’s not the Jury’s task to place on trial the Iranian regime—
Hamid: If I don’t tell the whole thing you can’t understand my action.

Ahmad hits him. He collapses. (98-99)

Having Ahmad playing the role of the Australian Prosecutor and hitting Hamid to silence
him is done on purpose to indicate that they both treat Hamid with the same ‘tough justice’
Ahmad previously spoke about. Moreover, Hamid is silenced also by the Australian Judge
who keeps on asking the Jury to ignore Hamid’s reference to the injustice he faced at the
prison in Tehran.

The collusion between the two justice systems is further portrayed at the end of
the play when Ahmad, the Iranian diplomat, plays the role of the Australian Prosecutor
and voices the same words mentioned before:

Our country has separately responded to the accused in a sympathetic way by
allowing them to come to live in this country as refugees. […] We are allowed to
ask for some things in return. We are allowed to ask them not to use their presence
here as an opportunity to seek revenge for what happened in their homeland. We
are allowed to ask them to leave their national disputes behind them. (99)

In addition to highlighting the collusion between the two governments, the above words
draw attention to the fact that no change can ever be made to the dominant perception of
the cultural other as a migrant or a refugee who is supposed to pay something in return
for being positioned within the national space. The Prosecutor’s words suggest that one
way of showing gratitude for this positioning is to forget about the past which I read as a
reminder of former assimilationist policies when migrants are expected to ‘forget the
languages, behaviour and “ancient quarrels” of their original homelands’. 32 This call for forgetting the past is critiqued by the playwrights who include in their play both past and present events to enable Hamid to tell his story, a process which is, as we see later, essential in forming his identity.

The Australian Prosecutor’s words disclose a perception that although the cultural other is permitted within the national space, this permission is not infinite. As a white Australian, he believes that it is within his power to decide who is to be included and who is to be sent away. Accordingly, to borrow Ghassan Hage’s words, ethnic minorities are perceived as ‘people one can make decision about: objects to be governed’. 33 Such a perception of the white community’s supremacy and authority over ethnic minorities is not limited to the Prosecutor but also shared by the Judge and a Juror’s wife. In the play, Brendan tells Hamid that although he is an Australian citizen, it is within the judge’s right to order his deportation (55). Further, at the end of the trial scene, Stephanie presents a paper which a juror’s wife wrote to her husband. In that paper she tells him, referring to the Iranian protesters, ‘[t]hey are all guilty as sin. Find them guilty and get out of there before Christmas’ (100). The juror’s wife’s opinion of the Iranian protesters is another example of the influence of the mass media on the Australian people.

A Beautiful Life shows how the Australian mass media’s representation of Australian citizens from Iranian origin as a ‘bunch of fanatic Muslims’ diminishes the possibility of those citizens considering Australia as an alternative to the home left behind, especially when that home no longer constitutes a safe place to go to. Home in Australian multicultural drama signifies, Joanne Tompkins argues, three locations: the family home, the home left behind and Australia. Talking about the second location, the country of origin, Tompkins notes that it is the place which ‘many migrants yearn’ for and to which ‘anti-immigration opponents wish migrants would return’. 34 Australia as the third location, Tompkins maintains, is ‘often replete with racism and hardship’. 35 In the play, the Iranian migrant characters – this applies to Hamid, Jhila and Kamran – neither yearn to go to the old country nor find peace in the alternative home, Australia. Iran is the

35 Ibid., p. 49.
place from which Hamid has fled and would face death if returned to and Australia is where he encounters imprisonment and threats of deportation. Moreover, in both places, Iran and Australia, Hamid appears unable to unravel the code of belonging as they both offer him no alternative other than a cell enclosed with concrete walls and iron bars. The playwrights show how ‘home’ is perceived by white Australians to mean solely the country of origin, an issue which creates misunderstanding for the young such as Amir:

Brendan: So, do you miss home?
Amir: Not really.
Brendan: You remember it then?
Amir: I’ve only been away two days.
Brendan: I meant Tehran. (40)

Though Amir was only three years old when his family left Iran, which is not an age at which a person would expect to maintain a sense of belonging outside his family home, Brendan still perceives the old home as the migrant’s only home.

Sometimes the three locations mentioned above in Tompkins’ essay fail to provide the migrant with a home where s/he can maintain a sense of belonging. Tompkins admits that ‘[t]he complicated multicultural cultural and political landscape in Australia’ might ascribe the exploration of a home to ‘metaphysical locations’ especially when the physical fixed location of home fails to provide the person with a sense of identity and belonging.36 At the end of the trial scene, Hamid is sentenced to a one-year imprisonment and to survive this period, as he tells his lawyers, he plans to follow Kamran’s philosophy of inventing in his mind a world of his own. Inside that world, he can lay ‘a carpet over all the sand and dust’, and ‘lie on it’ in ‘an eternal garden’ (78). Within that imagined home, Hamid might live the beautiful life which he could neither live in the old nor the new country. This imagined home might free Hamid, I suggest, from ‘the constrictions of past and present’.37 Still, as it does not have a specific location other than the migrant’s mind, it shows how the physical location of home in both countries fails to provide the migrant with a sense of belonging.

The migrant’s search for an imagined home resonates with Salman Rushdie’s ‘Imagined Homelands’ where the imagined home plays an active role in shaping the present identity of the migrants and their relationship to both homes or places. It is more  

36 Ibid.
37 Steven Michael DeBurger ‘Within the City Dwelling, There is No Room for Daydreams: Bachelard’s Phenomenology of Imagination and the Poetics of Space’, <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~pesaconf/zpdfs/60deburger.pdf> [Accessed 22 April 15].
than escapism. Rushdie asserts that ‘emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss’ which causes their feeling of alienation, indicates their inability to reclaim what they have lost and forces them, consequently, to ‘create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands’. Unlike Rushdie who is determined to maintain the two parts of his identity, the Indian and the British, Hamid is alienated in both countries. I read Hamid’s decision to live in his imagined world as a reaction to the denied access to both homes, Iran and Australia. His status, I argue, is that of a doubled internal exile.

**Narratives and Identity Construction**

Having characters relating their stories on stage is one way of mapping their version of history. Such an act is typical of postcolonial plays which construct, Gilbert and Tompkins assert, ‘discursive contexts for an artistic, social and political present by enacting other versions of [incidents] on stage’. While the raid is treated as an act of terrorism by both the Australian government and the mass media, *A Beautiful Life* explicitly portrays it as a protest against injustice and cruelty. Thus, it resists mainstream media representations of Iranian migrants, adds depth to their stories by linking the past with the present and provides Hamid, Jhila and Amir with the opportunity and space to relate and dramatise events, especially those which took place in the past. As such, they are provided with the chance to construct their own identity orally and corporeally. Storytelling, in this respect, becomes a means of constructing identity. Paul Ricoeur suggests that ‘life has something to do with narrative’, and to be completed this narrative requires a ‘living’ receiver, whether an audience or a reader. Life and narrative, Ricoeur asserts, are pertinent to each other and intermingled because ‘fiction is only completed in life and that life can be understood only through the stories we tell about it’. This process of constructing identity through narration, as Ricoeur perceives it, is not specific to drama but applies to all literary works where a plot makes a story from several incidents. A

---

39 Rushdie describes the person’s confinement to his/her diaspora community as a willing journey into an internal exile, see p. 19.
40 Gilbert and Tompkins, p. 107.
42 Ibid., p. 31.
narrative process enables an identity to be constructed and this construction of the identity on the stage can be examined by the audience. In this way, the identity is constituted by the narrator him/herself and not imposed from outside. In *A Beautiful Life*, Hamid, Jhila and Amir are provided with spaces where they relate their stories using their own voices and, consequently, constitute their identity.

Constituting identity, as portrayed in the play, is far from simple; Hamid and Jhila have not been given complete freedom to articulate their stories. We observe how these stories are interrupted several times by Brendan and Stephanie who try their best to edit Hamid’s story so that it holds more appeal for Australian TV viewers or fits in with the legal case they want to make. Interruptions to Hamid’s story continue in the trial scene at the end of the play where the Judge keeps on reminding the Jury not to consider ‘any political considerations not directly related to the evidence’ and also Ahmad who continues hitting him in an enactment of Hamid’s previous trial in Tehran a decade before (97-99). Still, Hamid’s persistence to tell his story, which reaches the point of him threatening to go on hunger strike, is influential not only in constituting his identity but also in compelling the two lawyers and other audience members to listen, watch and understand. A good example of this is the change in Brendan’s stand concerning the case. Commenting on this, the playwrights note that ‘the lawyers become our means to examine reactions amongst Australians to the [so-called] “terrorists”’. In Act One, Scene Two, Brendan seems amazed to see Stephanie trying to get bail for their clients whom he regards as ‘[a] bunch of Muslim fanatics wrecking a building and ranting bloody slogans to Allah’ (7). Moreover, Brendan links theirs and other Iranians’ participation in the raid to other attacks on Iranian Embassies all over the world and interprets it as ‘part of a global plot’ (11).

During the first meeting with their clients in Scene Three, Brendan is sceptical of their actions, assuming that they are guilty and what they did in Canberra is to avenge the death of their friends, the Mojahedin (9). Moreover, he does not tolerate hearing Hamid’s family speaking a foreign language and calls them ‘Bloody Arabs’ (21). When he is informed by Jhila that the Iranians speak ‘Farsi’, his response is that it is the ‘[s]ame difference’ (22). This shows a conformist and unanimous view of ‘bloody’ others, whether they are Iranians or Arabs. This disregard for cultural and linguistic specificity

---

43 Ibid., p. 32
is an example of Orientalism. Orientalism, Said argues, works as an ‘archive’ where information is ‘commonly’ and ‘unanimously held’. The ideas and values held in this archive not only ‘explained the behavior of the Orientals’ but also ‘allowed the Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics’. The Australian mass media, in this sense, works as an archive which not only explains these Iranians’ behaviours but also shapes the way Australians like Brendan deal with them. Although he is initially a representative of Australians who engage in cultural stereotyping, Brendan, in Act Two, becomes the playwrights’ means to work against such stereotyping. In the trial scene at the end of Act Two, he addresses the court, the audience and readers, saying that ‘Hamid has forged for himself a life like any Australian’ which he would not ‘jeopardise under any circumstances’ (97). The protest Hamid participated in is the outcome, Brendan maintains, of his perception of living in ‘a nation where citizens are free to protest at injustice and cruelty’ (97).

Exploring Cultural Diversity

In their treatment of the story, Futcher and Howard never escape the chance to signify the diversity of cultures in Australia two decades after its adoption of multiculturalism as a national policy. Although the cast is divided into Iranian protesters and a diplomat and two white Australian lawyers, Brendan and Stephanie, Aboriginal peoples and culture are not absent; Jhila, in Act Two, is presented painting ‘Persian-style Aboriginal designs on boomerangs for some Iranian guy in Sydney’ (83). Moreover, the play opens spaces for cultural expression as we listen to Jhila’s visit to the holy shrine at Mashad to pray for Hamid’s release which is their destination in times of distress. There are even instances where the Persian language, Farsi, is spoken on stage:

Stephanie: [...] Let’s talk about the moment when you raised your spanner, remember?
Kamran: [In English] I remember.
Stephanie: Thank you, Kamran, but you weren’t on the video at that point.
Kamran: [in Farsi] Tell her you remember.
Hamid: [in Farsi] Keep quiet!
Jhila: [in Farsi] What does he mean?
Brendan: Speak English please. (71)

46 Ibid., pp. 41-42.
As well as acknowledging cultural diversity in Australia, the playwrights demonstrate how the cultural boundaries between the dominant and the cultural other might intersect to the extent of sharing family origins:

Amir: […] You’re Irish, aren’t you? O’Sullivan?
Brendan: Yeah, way back. Russian too.

Stephanie: Not Russian. Brendan’s great-grandmother was Armenian.
Amir: Hey—you’re one of us! Armenia was part of Persia once. […]
That’s what Iran used to be called.
Brendan: Yeah, well, it’s mainly Irish. (41)

The above lines show how the diversity of cultures which migration brought and brings to Australia operates even within the dominant group where politicians during the period of White Australia were proud of its purity. Through these lines, I argue, the playwrights comment on the falsity of cultural purity in a context where almost every Australian is either a migrant or descended from one. Such a depiction of the unexpected connection between characters from different cultural backgrounds on stage opens possibilities for fostering relations between Australia’s diverse cultural and ethnic groups.

Another example of how the play envisages intersection between cultures in Australia is Jhila’s paintings. These paintings which Jhila draws on boomerangs convey how the two separate entities, the Australian, as represented by Aboriginal designs, and the Asian, as represented by the Persian-style, intersect to unsettle the binaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’ which keep them divided. These paintings are an instance of hybridity. Hybridity, Bhabha notes, ‘resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups […] as homogenous polarized political consciousness’. While resisting such homogenous perception, it opens spaces where cultural differences are negotiated in such a way that problematise the purity and fixity of identity. Although the reference in the example above is to the boomerangs rather than to Jhila, they can metaphorically be explored to signify a cultural process through which Jhila negotiates her identity.

Lo and Gilbert define Big ‘M’ multicultural theatre as ‘a counterdiscursive practice that aims to promote cultural diversity, access to cultural expression, and participation in the symbolic space of the national narrative’. Drawing on this, I argue that A Beautiful Life is a good example of this theatre. The play foregrounds the voices of

48 Lo and Gilbert, ‘Towards a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis’, p. 34.
migrant characters whose stories constitute the main part of the play. Further, while dramatising tensions and conflicts between the dominant and migrant cultures, the play opens spaces where migrant cultures and languages intersect with the dominant culture and language. Such an issue has become, Tompkins argues, a distinctive feature of multicultural drama.49

*A Beautiful Life* unmasksthe dysfunctional models of Muslims’ representation in the Australian media, showing how media narratives stereotype them as terrorists and undermine, in this respect, their opportunities of positive inclusion in society. It reverses the mass media’s depiction of the Muslim migrant from a ‘fanatic’ whose action is ‘un-Australian’ to that of an ordinary Australian protesting against injustice. The play, especially at the trial scene, casts light on the collusion between the two governments, the Australian and Iranian, and their systems of justice which treat Hamid with the same tough justice. Through its portrayal of past and present timelines, the play provides the migrant characters with opportunities to tell their stories which appear crucial for their cultural expression and identity construction. Further, it opens up spaces for cross-cultural encounter among characters from minor and dominant cultures falsifying, thereby, notions of cultural purity. Accordingly, *A beautiful Life* is, indeed, a strong example of a multicultural theatre.

Chapter Three: An African Priest in the Suburb in Tommy Murphy’s *Gwen in Purgatory*

Tommy Murphy’s *Gwen in Purgatory* (2010) deals with several issues such as duty, care, old age, and the memories of the shared history and identity of a multi-generational family in Queanbeyan, one of the suburbs of Canberra. In addition to this, the play explores the visit of an African priest, who has recently come from Nigeria, to Gwen’s new house to bless it. In this chapter, I investigate the representation of cultural diversity in this play and argue that it is a critique of dysfunctional models of multiculturalism which include persons from minor cultures in the national and social spaces in a way which reinforces their marginalisation. In so doing, I consider some of the concepts discussed in Hage’s *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (2000), namely those of managerial capacity, national belonging, tolerance, and the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion. Focusing on the locality of the play, I explore the attitudes of the elderly of the dominant group in the suburbs towards the issue of cultural diversity in Australia. Drawing on Gilbert and Lo’s theory, I argue that *Gwen in Purgatory* is an example of small ‘m’ multicultural theatre. Moreover, I cast light on Murphy’s critique of the paucity of non-white characters on Australia’s stages through the inclusion of a black character, Father Ezekiel, within the cast of the play. I also argue that in this play, Murphy critiques notions of authenticity and authority in Australian society which impede equal participation in Australian national space.

Hage argues that Australia is believed by the whites, whether racists or multiculturalists, to be a nation where they assure their ‘centrality’ as ‘governors’ of Australia and ‘enactors’ of its law over the ‘marginalized’ Aborigines and migrants who are deemed ‘objects to be governed’. ¹ Hage states that:

> both White racists and White multiculturalists share in a conception of themselves as nationalists and of the nation as a space structured around a White culture, where Aboriginal people and non-White ‘ethnics’ are merely national objects to be moved and removed according to a White national will. ²

In the play, Murphy presents us with the Houlihans, a white Catholic family, where the migrant, Father Ezekiel, is introduced simply to bless Gwen’s new house. The location,

---

¹ Hage, *White Nation*, pp.16-17.
² Ibid., p. 18.
thus, illuminates ‘white’ mastery over national space and provides a lens through which we can observe how minorities are marginalised in the Australian national imaginary.

_Gwen in Purgatory_ stems from Murphy’s proposal for Company B Belvoir to write a play about memory. As the play talks about family, it was guided, Murphy claims, by Neil Armfield, the artistic director of Company B Belvoir in Sydney, who believed that Murphy would benefit from his experience as the seventh of eight children. The play’s focus is Gwen, a 90-year-old woman, who has recently moved to a new house in Queanbeyan where she has lived all her life. By choosing the Houlihan family to be four characters in the cast for his play, Murphy is able to focus on their conflicting memories regarding their ‘shared history and shared identity’. The inclusion of the fifth character, the priest, results from Gwen’s wish to have her new house blessed. Gwen’s initial references to Father Ezekiel express respect for him. She refuses to have tea because ‘[she]’ll wait for Father’. Then, she exaggerates his mission and his presence in her house or, rather, the significance of her house, by saying that ‘he is a good priest and here because God sent him’ (11). However, Gwen’s later references gradually diminish his image as a person sent by God, when she relates how he has been denied the sabbatical of his choice: ‘[h]e had wanted his sabbatical in New York or London but we need priests at the Queanbeyan parish’ (11). Moreover, he is alienated from the Houlihans who are both white and Australian through her description of him as a ‘black’ person from ‘Kenya’ (10). Furthermore, his presence in the house is expected to be for a short time since Gwen intends to go to play tennis after the priest’s departure (10).

Father Ezekiel, who turns out to be Nigerian not Kenyan as Gwen thinks, is aware of his position as a migrant in a new country and, thus, seems to feel that an apology is inevitably required as a passport for his entry although we are informed of his expected arrival: ‘I am sorry to visit before you have settled […] It could have waited’ (14). Moreover, Ezekiel assures Gwen and Daniel, her grandson, that he does not ‘want to get in the way’ (15) for he knows that he is leading a marginal role. While blessing the house,

---

5 Murphy, _Gwen in Purgatory_ (Sydney: Currency Press, 2010), p.8. All further references to the play are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses in the text.
Father Ezekiel moves with Daniel from one room to another. Once the blessing is over, the priest’s presence is prolonged when he offers to give Gwen a lift in the car to the court to play tennis although he informed the family, before blessing the house, that in the afternoon he has to use the Skype at the library computer to talk to his mother and sister in Lagos (18).

The priest’s alienation from Australia is emphasised through references to the Nigerian prayer which is ‘mostly song’ (16), his family in Lagos and also sports, for as a Nigerian he prefers football while Daniel prefers rugby (24). Paul Carter suggests that the migrant in a new land will undergo a process of ‘finding resemblances’ between the new country and the old homeland.⁶ However, the role assigned to Father Ezekiel neither qualifies him, through cultural expression, to unsettle the space dominated by the Houlihans nor orientates him as a newly arrived person towards the new country. Lacking the ability to do either, he steps aside, accepting the role assigned to him prior to his appearance, namely that of an observer. As an observer, the priest is depicted as passive and even silent (42, 43, 46, 47) and only interferes, as a pacifier, when Daniel and his uncle Laurie quarrel about Gwen’s car (48-50). However, this change in his passive role is aborted shortly as Daniel and his uncle go out to check Gwen’s car in the garage, settle its price and come back with the keys in Daniel’s hand. The crucial moment comes when the family is inattentive to the priest talking about his family as if in a dramatic monologue (54). This incident emphasises Ezekiel’s culturally marginal status for he fails to attract the Houlihans who seem not ready yet to hear any story other than their own.

Hage speaks of the nationalist as a person who believes s/he inhabits a ‘managerial capacity’ to control the national space. For this empowered manager who assumes a gigantic image or size, the ‘other’ is small and manageable. The relation between the two, Hage maintains, is that of power where the nationalist manager has the right to manage the ‘ethnic object’ through moving and removing.⁷ For such a nationalist manager, the nation is perceived as ‘a homely construct’ where s/he not only lives but ‘feel[s] at home’.⁸ In the play, Gwen, speaking about Father Ezekiel, tells Daniel ‘[h]e had wanted his sabbatical in New York or London but we need priests at the Queanbeyan parish’ (11).

The references he and we clearly specify the variance in size which is inevitably required

---

⁷ Hage, pp. 42-46.
⁸ Ibid.
to provide Gwen’s group with the capacity to manage the priest and frustrate his wish for the sake of satisfying their need.\(^9\)

The expected way for persons, especially non-Australian-born, to seek national belonging, Hage claims, is to try hard to ‘accumulate’ nationality through a cycle of phases beginning with acquiring citizenship. However, this does not entitle them to a full acquisition of national belonging that seems to work according to a hierarchy:

\[\text{a national subject born to the dominant culture who has accumulated national capital in the form of the dominant linguistic, physical and cultural dispositions will yield more national belonging than a male migrant who has managed to acquire the dominant national accent and certain national cultural practices, but lacks the physical characteristics and disposition of the dominant national ‘type’.}\(^{10}\)

Father Ezekiel’s references to the Nigerian prayer and Lagos and Gwen’s reference to him as Kenyan indicate his status as a migrant non-citizen who is temporarily existing within the national space, Australia. Such an existence within the national space does not grant him any kind of national belonging as he is not an Australian citizen.

In Australia, multiculturalism is often linked with tolerance; for conservative persons who oppose multiculturalism, it is accepted only when they interpret it to mean tolerance.\(^{11}\) As tolerance entails not only acceptance but also setting limits and boundaries for the tolerated persons, this necessitates the acquisition of the ‘spatial power’ within which those persons are tolerated.\(^{12}\) Moreover, tolerance is adopted according to a continuous ‘need’ for a careful and cautious monitoring of cohesion in the Australian community to frustrate any possibility of having one dominant ethnicity among migrants.\(^{13}\) Father Ezekiel is aware of the family’s spatial power when he enters the household and, thus, he asks for permission to exist and, consequently, be positioned within the boundaries of the house. Even when he blesses the house, he does it accompanied by Daniel who, in turn, follows his grandmother’s directions. When he blesses her bedroom, Gwen asks Daniel to ‘[s]how him the sewing room’ (p. 20). Later, when the blessing is done, he steps aside giving up the stage to the family, as managers of the space, to discuss their shared memories while acting as an observer which grants him no role except that of watching.

---

\(^9\) Emphasis added.
\(^{10}\) Hage, pp. 53-54.
\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 82.
\(^{12}\) Ibid., p.89.
\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 124.
Migrants are, in fact, workers allowed into the national space to satisfy employment needs. In Australia, the desire to include migrants within the national space, Hage notes, coincides with another desire to exclude them socially. In fact, Hage argues that the two forces activate each other saying that ‘paradoxically, it is precisely the interest in their inclusion that activated the existing social progress of the exclusion, while at the same time setting limits on how far to the margin of society they ought to be excluded.’ Father Ezekiel is a migrant who is ‘brought’ to ‘fill the gap left by dwindling priest recruits’. His inclusion in the house is based on satisfying the need for blessing Gwen’s new house and once it is done, he is excluded from the social space of the Houlihans while they discuss their shared identity and history.

Roanna Gonsalves applies Hage’s concept of enrichment to Murphy’s play stating that the priest ‘is included in the narrative only insofar as he is enriching it, providing Gwen […] with the opportunity to love him.’ Enrichment, Hage observes, is done culturally and it is ‘only in its opposition to the ethnocentrism that the notion of enrichment appears in such an attractive pluralism grab.’ I would argue that such enrichment never happens in the play as no opposition is ever achieved to the hegemony of the dominant culture. Moreover, Ezekiel is never given the chance for any cultural expression. He neither appears wearing Nigerian clothes nor sings the prayer as it is done in Nigeria (p. 16). In an interview with Tahni Froudist, Murphy states how he makes it difficult for Gwen to understand Father Ezekiel since she does not have access to him culturally or emotionally. Moreover, the play is replete with examples to show how the communication between the two is somehow difficult:

Ezekiel: I still feel the cold in this part of the world.
Gwen: Listen, pass the button there, Daniel, and I’ll turn that air conditioner up; Father’s hot. (p. 15)

Ezekiel: […] I celebrate a funeral this morning. Did you know a Mrs Tovey?
Gwen: What’s this?
Ezekiel: A Mrs Tovey.

---

14 Hage, 135.
15 Murphy, p. xi.
17 Hage, p. 118.
Neil Armfield argues that Murphy’s way of writing a play is the ‘reverse’ of that adopted by most playwrights for he creates the characters and the location and waits for his story to develop.\textsuperscript{19} Regarding the priest’s role, Armfield adds that he loves ‘the formal device by which the observer, Father Ezekiel, […] lands in Queanbeyan and provides the frame through which we observe the currents of this particular Irish-Catholic inheritance.’\textsuperscript{20} Taking Armfield’s words into consideration, it is clear that Murphy has, in advance, settled the location of the play and decided to include a Nigerian priest even before developing the story. Armfield’s reading of the priest’s role seems to be suggesting that Ezekiel performs a simply functional role – he is the eyes through which we observe a drama revolving around the Houlihans. I challenge Armfield’s reading of the character of Father Ezekiel because throughout most of the play Ezekiel is observing the play like any audience in the theatre. I argue that through this portrayal of Ezekiel as marginal to the main action of the play, and a passive observer, Murphy comments on the power dynamics within Australian society.

Through the inclusion of Father Ezekiel, Murphy is also able to comment on the Australian Catholic Church’s solution to the shortage of priests. Murphy has discussed this issue at length in an interview:

\begin{quote}
I believe the church is challenged with its potential irrelevance right now, and evidence of this is the lack of younger people wanting to join the priesthood. Rather than dealing with those questions of its relevance […] the church is going to developing nations where there is a surfeit of young priests. […] I interviewed a lot of priests in that situation, several of them from Africa, a couple from Nigeria where my character is from, and I sensed they’re suffering from chronic homesickness. They come […] here to experience a very elderly congregation, very thin on numbers […] I felt it would be interesting if Gwen’s priest isn’t from her generation, someone she has access to emotionally and culturally, but that it’s a young Nigerian priest that comes to the door to bless the house this day.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

Murphy’s words put the blame on this ‘potentially’ irrelevant church for bringing foreign priests such as Ezekiel to Australia to endure ‘chronic homesickness’. The word ‘bringing’ indicates how those foreign priests are somehow perceived as agents to be

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Belvoir, p. 2.
moved by the Australian Catholic Church. Moreover, Murphy’s words show their status as ‘non-citizen’ young priests whose position at the doors of houses they come to bless implies a sense of location where they are, in fact, outsiders. Such a position coupled with the fact that they are being brought to serve ‘a very [few] elderly congregation’ result in feelings of ‘chronic homesickness’ and buttress their marginalisation.

At an interview with Murphy, David Spicer describes the play as ‘an existential comedy about an African missionary in the wilderness of Australian suburbia’. Such a description casts light on the relation between the African missionary, Ezekiel, and the Australian suburb, implying that Queanbeyan does not promise a positive welcome and hospitality. Moreover, Armfield notes that in this play Murphy deals with the ‘contradictions and needs of life lived outside a metropolitan community’. The play demonstrates how migrants such as Ezekiel are received outside the main cities which are not the place migrants prefer to settle in. Graeme Hugh claims that the presence of migrants is felt mainly in the largest cities in Australia and asserts that by 1991, almost 80% of the overseas-born Australians lived in Australia’s largest cities. Responses to changes following the arrival of migrants vary between old and young people. Senior citizens living at the suburbs, Amanda Wise argues, often ‘contrast their negative emotions’ concerning the new condition of their town with ‘memories of a more pleasant [one] that supposedly existed in years gone by’. Unable to ‘lay down positive new place memories’, they ‘end up in nostalgic longing for a past, [which is] now remembered through the present’. Compared to this group, the young, Wise maintains, ‘are more adapting to [those] new environs’. When Gwen in Purgatory opens, we are aware that Gwen not only expects a non-citizen priest in her house but also that day is her first day in her new house, a matter which doubles her apprehension of change.

The variance in responses to migrants between old and young Australians is evident in the play. The young, as it is the case with Daniel, are more open to the change.

---

22 ‘Gwen in Purgatory – a Q and A with playwrights Tommy Murphy’.
23 Armfield, p. vii.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
in the place resulting from the presence of new-comers or migrants. When Ezekiel blesses the house, he does this with Daniel who takes him from one room to another, which shows a willingness to welcome him deep in the centre of the house which is as stated above a miniature of the national space. Moreover, it is through his encounter with Daniel that Ezekiel is provided with the opportunity to cross the boundaries placed on him as an observer and participate, although temporarily, in the action. The first time this occurs symbolically is when Ezekiel gains Daniel’s trust and the latter, even though it takes the form of a confession, discloses personal issues such as his crumbling marriage and the fact that he misses his wife, Bel, and daughter, Mykaela (26-27). The second time it occurs is when, prompted by Daniel’s quarrel with Uncle Laurie, he rushes to pacify the situation, shouts ‘no’, ‘stop’ and ‘peace now’, and pulls Daniel away (50-51). There is a suggestion in these incidents, I argue, for a wider acceptance of migrants, within the younger generation, between the migrant and the young in the dominant group.

Ezekiel’s marginal role is metaphorically explored through locating the play at Queanbeyan, a town in the suburbs of Canberra. This is further emphasised through placing the action of the play at a private house where Ezekiel is the only non-Houlihan. After blessing the house where he is at the centre of the stage, Ezekiel steps aside to the margins for the centre is being occupied by the Houlihans. This change in his position coincides with the change in his part in the plot. Thus, in both form and content and also in text and on stage, Murphy demonstrates the centrality of the Houlihans and the marginality of this non-citizen migrant priest. At this moment the Houlihans start relating their memories which occupies a large part in the play. Those memories of the family’s shared identity and history are interpreted as a nostalgic longing for a time when they were living together with their deceased members, Mr Houlihan and Wendy, Daniel’s mother. As stated in the text, the ages of the Houlihans are as follow: Gwen (90), Peg (65), Laurie (59) and Daniel (32). As Father Ezekiel is only 28, the Houlihans’ memories go back to a time when Ezekiel not only has not come yet to Australia but also has not been born. As their memories go back to the time when Wendy was not even born (45), it means that the time they are talking about is in the 1950s. This date precedes both the abolition of the policy of White Australia in 1966 and the adoption of multiculturalism in 1978. Due to the abolition of the policy of White Australia, the Australian suburbs are no longer culturally homogenous. Moreover, the adoption of multiculturalism, Graeme
Turner postulates, ‘eroded the singularity of earlier versions of national identity’. By setting the play at Queanbeyan, Murphy is able to depict the impact of cultural diversity on the Australian suburbs during the first decade of the twenty-first century and portray how they are no longer homogenous.

As *Gwen in Purgatory* deals with memories of a shared history and identity, it casts light on the issues of authority and authenticity. Settler writing is always comprehended, according to Johnston and Lawson, as working within the dual indicators of authority and authenticity. As the settler is separated from the ‘imperial culture’ which s/he intends to imitate, s/he compensates for this lack of authenticity by assuming authority over the land and the inhabitants. I argue that in this play Murphy critiques notions of authority and authenticity. The memories this multigenerational family relate of their shared history, at a time when Father Ezekiel was not there, are not only disputed but also obliterated; they are related to a house which is no longer theirs because Laurie has sold it and relocated his mother to a new house where she is spending her first day. Renewal of the location or the space undermines opportunities of authority and authenticity and, like dispossession, destabilises affinity with place.

In this play, Murphy portrays Australia thirty years after the adoption of multiculturalism and critiques public perception of this policy which has not yet disarmed the barriers set against equal access and opportunity. I read it as delineating the marginalisation of the cultural other in the Australian national space. In this way, it is an example of what Lo and Gilbert term small ‘m’ multicultural theatre. In this type of multicultural theatre, a play presents ‘a racially mixed cast’ but does not ‘actively draw attention to cultural differences among performers’. The representation of ‘nontraditional’ casting in such plays follows a ‘politically conservative practice’ which, though it ‘gives the appearance of diversity’, does not unsettle ‘the hegemony of the dominant culture.’

Lee Lewis, the artistic director of Griffin theatre in Sydney, claims that Australia’s ‘national identity’ as a ‘multicultural nation’ is underrepresented, if not rarely depicted, in the country’s mainstage theatres. Investigating the plays presented

---

29 Johnston and Lawson, p. 639.
30 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Lewis, pp. 1-2.
for a decade (1997-2007) in the theatres of three major companies in Sydney, namely Bell Shakespeare Company, B-Belvoir (Company B) and Sydney Theatre Company, Lewis asserts that these theatres are ‘reprehensively White’. As theatres funded by the government, these theatres should act, Lewis asserts, as ‘cultural terrorit[ies]’ that are ‘fully engaged with the socio-political complexities of representing hybridisation’.

In addition to critiquing the public perception of the policy of multiculturalism and the dysfunctional inclusion of cultural minorities within the national space, Murphy’s play addresses the paucity of non-white characters in Australian mainstage theatres which Lewis has indicated. Murphy regards the paucity of cross-racial casting on Australian stage as ‘a challenge for the Australian theatre to adequately reflect the diversity of our country’. The answer is not solely that of casting but also of writers who, Murphy observes, have to ‘come from all diverse corners of Australia’ to assure diversity in the stories to be performed. Thus, in presenting a Nigerian priest within the characters of his play, Murphy expresses his and Company B-Belvoir’s commitment to address this issue.

Through locating the play in Gwen’s house, Murphy delineates the national space according to a white perception where the new-comer, Father Ezekiel, is not expected to demonstrate any cultural expression. Moreover, by choosing Gwen’s house at Queanbeyan to be the location of his play, he dramatises the attitudes of white Australians who live at the suburbs to the issue of multiculturalism. Through such a portrayal, Murphy presents a critique of public perception, thirty years after the adoption of multiculturalism, which still places barriers against equal opportunity and participation. He also opens space, though temporary, for the cultural other to transcend his peripheral status and shift from passive into active participation. Moreover, Murphy demonstrates his commitment to address the paucity of non-white casting in the theatres of Australia’s major companies such as Company B Belvoir. Finally, he challenges the dominant perception that restricts multicultural writing to migrant writers and playwrights.

---

34 Ibid., p. 2.
35 Ibid., pp. 2-4.
Conclusion

The three plays discussed in this part offer audiences and readers an insight into perceptions of multiculturalism at the time they were written. Moreover, they cover a span of about seventeen years and a variety of locations, from the desert of Wala Wala in the Northern Territory to the metropolitan community of Canberra and Brisbane and the suburban community in Queanbeyan. Thus, the investigation of the representation of cultural diversity is not restricted to one period or a place. Though these plays are diverse in time and location, they are connected in that they have been written by playwrights from the dominant culture in Australia whom I call settler playwrights. In their plays, the playwrights critique the marginalisation of the cultural other, whether Aboriginal or migrant, in the national space and open up space in their narratives for the voices, identities and stories of Aboriginal or migrant characters. That said, while Murphy critiques dysfunctional models of multiculturalism and offers us a glimpse of the possibility of belonging for migrants, his play does not incorporate space for the voice and stories of the migrant character, Father Ezekiel, to the same extent that other plays do.

The way the cultural other is presented in these plays, whether in a major or peripheral way, depends on whether the playwright is promoting or critiquing the policy of multiculturalism in Australia and the process of the inclusion of the cultural other within the national space. While Futercher and Howard, in A Beautiful Life, critique the policy of multiculturalism and the stereotyping of the cultural other in the mainstream media, Parsons, in Dead Heart, explores the challenges of policing two diverse cultures. In this sense, the plays illustrate how the representation of cultural diversity in Australia can be affected by the political context and the mass media. However, the playwrights challenge the political context and the narratives of the mainstream media through the medium of theatre. In their works, the three playwrights construct alternative representations of the cultural other which draw out the complexity of their characters’ lives and their relationship to Australia. Through its portrayal of the struggle between the settlers and the Aboriginal, Nick Parsons’ Dead Heart calls for a reconciliation and a peaceful coexistence. In the second play, A Beautiful Life, the playwrights challenge calls that migrants should forget the past by intersecting past and present timelines to show that the present for the migrant is not complete unless the past is acknowledged. In Gwen in Purgatory, Murphy critiques the marginal inclusion of non-citizen migrants in the Australian national imaginary. Furthermore, while casting light on the diversity of
cultures in Australia and exploring issues of alienation, marginalisation and migration, these playwrights challenge the dominant perception in the context of drama criticism that restricts multicultural writing to migrant writers and playwrights.¹

As stated earlier in chapter three in this part, Johnston and Lawson claim that the ‘settler subject’ acts according to the ‘double inscription of authority and authenticity’ in which s/he ‘exercises authority over the indigene and the land at the same time as translating desire for the indigene and the land into a desire of native authenticity’.² The settler’s attempt to be ‘more like the indigene whom he mimics’, they assume, reduces his ability to be ‘like the atavistic inhabitant of the cultural homeland’.³ This ‘in-between’ status of the settler, they maintain, is ‘a place of negotiation’ which presents the settler as ‘the very type of non-unified subject’.⁴ Such a position of the settler subject is noticed in the character of Constable Ray in Parsons’ Dead Heart where he appears fluctuating between both groups, the Aboriginal and white Australians. I argue that the plays explored in this part challenge and problematise the settler’s authority. The deterioration of Ray’s authority in Wala Wala and the departure of Mathiesen, the teacher of English language in the settlement, and his family in Parson’s Dead Heart and the disputed memories of the Houlihans and their relocation to a new house in Murphy’s Gwen in Purgatory evidence this. It is also portrayed in Futcher and Howard’s play, A Beautiful Life, where the mainstream media’s stereotyping of the Iranian migrants and the government’s narrative which regards them as terrorists are challenged and even corrected. Consequently, these plays not only challenge the assumption that multicultural drama is restricted to migrant issues but also the notion that settler writing cannot be pure in its anti-colonialism.

¹ See pp. 120-21 in Tompkins, ‘Inter-referentiality: Interrogating Multicultural Australian Drama’.
² Johnston and Lawson, p. 369.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p. 370
Part Three: Diasporic Drama

Introduction

William Safran notes that ‘[t]oday, “diaspora” and, more specifically, “diaspora community” seem increasingly to be used as metaphoric designations for several categories of people – expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities’.¹ Along similar lines with this loose notion of diaspora, Robin Cohen appears more determined to make the concept of diaspora more inclusive of contemporary lived experiences by stating that ‘instead of arising from a traumatic dispersal, a diaspora could be caused by the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to other colonial ambitions’.² In postcolonial studies the focus centres mainly on the impact of dislocation on cultural legacies and the creation of diasporic identities. Since diaspora entails a journey, ‘diaspora journeys’, Avtar Brah posits, ‘are essentially about settling down, about putting roots “elsewhere”’.³ For a diasporic community, group or even a multi-generational family, the ‘multiple journeys may configure into one journey via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory’.⁴ In this sense, the identity of such a group or community, Brah maintains, ‘is far from fixed’ as ‘[i]t is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively’.⁵ This premise aligns with Stuart Hall’s notion of diasporic experience which ‘is defined […] by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity’.⁶ Hall adds that ‘[d]iaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference’.⁷ As they are depicted in the three plays under examination here, the parents’ journeys – sometimes even the

⁴ Ibid., p. 183.
⁵ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid.
grandparents’ as is the case in Anna Yen’s *Chinese Take Away* – intersect with those of their descendants and activate an ongoing process of identity formation and belonging.

Over the course of my exploration of these plays, I employ the term ‘diasporic’ rather than ‘migrant’ because they are written by second-generation Australian playwrights from migrant backgrounds. Persons’ ‘adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated’, Cohen observes, ‘by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history’. Their sense of identity, thus, will be influenced by their parents and grandparents’ migration history. Consequently, ‘diasporic’, rather than ‘migrant’, is more accurate in describing their experiences as the migration (hi)story, McLeod notes, has not been experienced by all members of a diasporic group or community. This premise is underpinned by Brah who notes that while the first generation have a direct relationship to the place of migration, the relationship of ‘subsequent generations’ to this place is ‘mediated […] by memories of what was recently left behind, and by the experiences of disruption and displacement’. Those memories defy the fixity of home since there is a ‘multi-placedness of home in the diasporic imaginary’. The impact of the migration hi(story) on the diasporic member, the ongoing process of identity formation, the search for a sense of identity and the oscillation between the old and new homes are common themes found in the three plays in part three of this study.

The term ‘diasporic’, however, is not widely employed in Australia when referring to such writing which is often labelled as ‘multicultural’. Tompkins, for instance, defines Australian drama tackling migrant issues as ‘multicultural’ and playwrights who are from migrant backgrounds as ‘multicultural writers’. In so doing, she attributes the emergence of this category of Australian literature to the implementation of policy of multiculturalism in 1978. It is worth noting that the same perception applies to Canada, Guillermo Verdecchia asserts, where ‘multicultural’ writing is conceived as ‘the space where “ethnic” artists do their thing and tell their stories’. In this way, instead of meaning ‘inclusion and diversity’, ‘multicultural’ has

---

8 Cohen, p. ix.
9 McLeod, p. 207.
10 Brah., p. 194.
11 Ibid., p. 197.
12 See pp. 120-21 in Tompkins, ‘Inter-referentiality’.
come to mean, Verdecchia maintains, ‘exclusion – alien and incomprehensible otherness’.\(^\text{15}\) Indeed, Verdecchia’s viewpoint resonates with that of Gunew’s. The policy of multiculturalism, however, was not meant to be solely focusing on migrants. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the report presented by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (1989), broadens the ambit of multiculturalism to address all Australians regardless of their race, culture, religion, gender and place of birth.\(^\text{16}\) In addition to challenging a perception that considers such writing as focusing solely on migrant issues and narratives, this part of my thesis asserts that this category of Australian literature is not peripheral to mainstream literature. The three plays I tackle in this part were enacted on three Australian theatres and performed by either a major performing company, Melbourne Theatre Company, as is the case in the first, or a key organisation, Griffin Theatre Company, as is the case in the third. In this way, they critique, I argue, the perception of them as ‘situated outside’ and ‘not really rooted in the place’.\(^\text{17}\)

It is worth noting that labelling writers from migrant backgrounds as ‘multicultural’ is not an approach that is favoured by writers from a migrant background. The Greek-Australian playwright Tes Lyssiotis, for instance, rejects such a terminology, saying: ‘I don’t want to be labelled as “multicultural”, I want to be regarded as an artist’.\(^\text{18}\) Commenting on the limitation of this terminology, Manfred Jurgensen asserts that

> if ‘multiculturalism’ denotes a quality of cultural transformation and the recognition that Australia is a population of diverse cultural background, there can be no reason why only writers born outside this country should be able to produce a multicultural literature.\(^\text{19}\)

In an essay exploring contemporary ‘multicultural’ plays in Australia, Tompkins state three signifiers of multicultural writing, namely, ‘storytelling, the use of English and at least one other language, and the representation of “home”’.\(^\text{20}\) However, she admits that she identifies the playwrights of those plays as ‘multicultural’ relying on ‘their surnames

\(^{15}\) Ibid.


\(^{20}\) Tompkins, ‘Inter-referentiality’, p. 121.
and/or “ethnic” associations.\textsuperscript{21} If the first and second are signifiers of multicultural drama, a rapid review of Aboriginal drama including the three plays discussed in part one of this thesis, namely, Chi’s \textit{Bran Nue Dae} (1991), Enoch’s and Mailman’s \textit{The 7 Stages of Grieving} (2001), and Milroy’s \textit{Waltzing the Wilarra} (2011), shows that storytelling and the use of one language in addition to English are also often employed by Aboriginal playwrights. Moreover, surnames are not always consistent indicators of one’s identity since many Aboriginal peoples, especially members of the Stolen Generations, carry anglicised names. This is not limited to Aboriginal writers but also applies to other Australian writers who, Wenche Ommundsen proposes, either ‘had anglicised their names’ or changed them after marriage.\textsuperscript{22} Reflecting on the representation of home, Tompkins claims that ‘[h]ome is always a vexed place in multicultural writing: it is both the new, if uncomfortable, unforgiving Australia, and the old familiar home of the country which one (or one’s parents) left’.\textsuperscript{23} Tompkins, in another essay, identifies home in three locations: ‘the family home, the “old country” as home, and Australia as an alternative home – if unwelcoming and/or unwelcome one.’\textsuperscript{24} Tompkins’ point, while interesting, is too generalising because she attempts to identify distinctive features of a body of writing which is in reality diverse and heterogenous. In both works Tompkins describes the old home as ‘familiar’ although several plays such as the first and third of the plays discussed below convey a contrary image. Further, she describes Australia as ‘unwelcoming’ whereas in these three plays, neither the migrants nor their descendants blame Australia for the hardships they face.

If references to the home of origin is a distinctive characteristic of multicultural writing, such signs are also found in the works of writers from the dominant culture. Commenting on the early Australian poets in her anthology, Judith Wright notes that ‘[i]t has never been possible for Australian poets to draw on any common accepted background of tradition or literature, except that of England’.\textsuperscript{25} References to the home of origin, in this sense, is not solely limited to writers from a non-English-speaking background. Moreover, themes of alienation and displacement are not restricted to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 120


\textsuperscript{23} Tompkins, ‘Inter-referentiality’, p. 125.

\textsuperscript{24} Tompkins, ‘Homescapes’, p. 48.

\end{flushleft}
migrant or multicultural writing; they are also evident in the majority of Aboriginal plays and also in the works of settler playwrights such as Nick Parsons. Indeed, most of plays written in the early twentieth century by white Australian playwrights explored these themes to the extent that McCallum describes them as ‘plays written in a marginal land by and for exiles.’

McCallum’s words state that both settler playwrights and their readers or audience shared a sense of alienation as ‘exiles’ living in a new land within which belonging had not yet been established.

As depicted in most of the plays under examination in this study, diasporic experiences convey overlaps among these three broad groupings of Australian population. Employing Brah’s notion, Australia is portrayed as the ‘diaspora space’ where the diverse groups of population inscribe narratives of displacement, alienation and belonging. Brah defines ‘diaspora space’ as ‘the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes’.

Brah notes that this concept ‘foregrounds the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of “staying put”’. As such, it is equally inhabited, she maintains, ‘by those who have migrated and their descendants’ and ‘those who are constructed as indigenous.’ While admitting that their positionalities are not ‘identical’ or ‘equivalent’, Brah proposes that ‘the subject position of “native”, “immigrant”, the in/outsider’ are decentred ‘in such a way that the diasporian is as much a native as the native now becomes a diasporian’. As I stated earlier, themes of displacement, alienation and belonging are common in Australian drama and in this thesis. Accordingly, in the diaspora space called ‘Australia’, diasporas of the Aboriginal, settlers and their descendants and diversity of migrants and their descendants intersect to re-inscribe a new notion of Australianness that is no longer perceived to be pure, fixed and homogenous. Depicting issues of diasporic experiences, alienation and belonging, I contend, has never been limited to diasporic or ‘multicultural’ writing but is a feature of Australian drama. Moreover, Australian playwrights’ interest in such themes predated the implementation of the policy of multiculturalism and the post-war influx of migration to Australia. Indeed,

26 McCallum, Belonging, p. viii.
27 Brah, p. 197.
28 Ibid., p. 192.
29 Ibid., p. 209.
the first play by a settler Australian playwright to deal with characters from minor cultures is Louis Esson’s *The Sacred Place* (1919).

Part Three in this study explores themes of identity and belonging in the works of three playwrights, namely, Janis Balodis’ *No Going Back* (1992), Anna Yen’s *Chinese Take Away* (2000) and Donna Abela’s *Jump for Jordan* (2014). The three playwrights are second-generation Australians from migrant backgrounds who were born in Australia, studied in its universities and master the English language which is, indeed, their first language. As well as commenting on their parents’ migration experiences – in Abela’s play, this is done indirectly by writing the story of another woman – the three plays explore these playwrights’ attempts to form their identity and locate it within the social and literary levels of their home, Australia.
Chapter One: Multiple Identities and Belonging in Janis Balodis’ No Going Back

Janis Balodis’ No Going Back is the second play in his trilogy, The Ghost Trilogy (1997), which relates the story of a group of post-war Latvian migrants from their arrival in Queensland in 1948 until the 1990s when they recognise Australia as their home. Balodis’ work deals with issues common in diasporic drama such as identity, alienation and belonging. In this chapter, I address the Latvian migrant characters’ oscillation between two homes: the old in Latvia and the new in Australia. I examine their attempts to create an affinity with the new home, Australia, which is a crucial factor in reducing the pernicious impact of their feelings of alienation and shaping their sense of belonging. I highlight how these efforts to create such an affinity with place are portrayed in their attempts to map space on the stage to the extent of replacing explorers such as the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt and his party where the two narratives, the Latvians’ and Leichhardt’s, juxtapose and intersect. I read Balodis’ employment of the two narratives in the play, Leichhardt’s and the Latvian migrants’, as an indication of how space in Australia has become well traversed and consequently more open for the inscription of more narratives. I also read his use of doubling in the characters as a strategy to decentralise or disrupt any fixed version of identity. As I examine identity formation in Balodis’ play, I draw on works by Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, Paul Gilroy and Manfred Jurgensen to position Balodis’ work within a postcolonial frame. Further, I refer to the experiences of migrant writers and cultural critics such as Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie, Paul Gilroy who, like Balodis and Armand, his doppelganger in the play, straddle two cultures and, consequently, encounter similar challenges in defining their identity.

Balodis’ The Ghost Trilogy draws on the stories of his Latvian parents and their friends who are post-war migrants.¹ These stories are depicted in the first play, Too Young for Ghosts (1985), whose incidents happen before Balodis’ birth and rely heavily on the narratives he heard from his parents. Yet, the second, No Going Back (1992), and the third, My Father’s Father (1996), mainly involve his interpretation of his and their experiences both in Australia and beyond. Too Young for the Ghosts, the first play in Balodis’ The Ghosts Trilogy, was commissioned by the Sydney Theatre Company in 1981 which was advertising epic plays. As the company was ‘strapped for money, Balodis

submitted the play to the Australian National Playwrights’ Conference in Canberra where it was watched by Roger Hodgman, the Director of the Melbourne Theatre Company, who decided to have it for the company’s program in 1985. Clarke claims that being presented during the ‘multicultural times the Ghosts Trilogy must surely have a pre-eminent place’. No Going Back was sparked, Radic states, by Balodis’ visit to Latvia, his parents’ home country, in 1989. The play charts stories of dispossession, exile from and longing for past places and memories of a group of post-war Latvian refugees. It casts light, McCallum suggests, on their attempt to feel at home and unravel the code of belonging. While speaking generally about the three plays in the trilogy, The Ghost Trilogy, McCallum never states how this is achieved in them. Indeed, in McCallum’s, Tompkins’ and also Kelly’s work, No Going Back is either never commented upon, as it is the case with Kelly’s essay, or hardly examined, as it is in McCallum’s and Tompkins’ works.

No Going Back depicts the influence of parents’ experience on their children who are born in Australia but have inherited a culture and a legacy with which they have had no direct contact and which, along with Australian culture, constitute their identity. In this play, Balodis interweaves past and present events to draw parallels between Leichhardt’s expedition in 1847 in North Queensland and the story of the Latvian migrants in the same area during the summer of 1979-80. In both timelines, characters are not confined to one specific place but are instead moving from one location to another where their paths and narratives intersect. The shift in the Latvian migrant characters’ location from the urban site in North Queensland to the country’s interior landscape grants them, I argue, a deeper affinity with land and offers them an opportunity to meet with characters from other cultures such as Brown, an Aboriginal character.

In ‘Falling Between Stools: The Theatre of Janis Balodis’, Kelly indicates the ‘ambiguous status’ Balodis holds in Australian drama ‘as a NESB (person of Non-English-Speaking Background) whose first language is English and who writes for the mainstream’. These ‘discursive boundaries’ of Balodis’ literary identity indicate how

3 Ibid., p. ix.
5 McCallum, p. 288.
Balodis’ status in Australian drama is deeply influenced by his Latvian background. European migrants who were called ‘New Australians’ during the 1950s, Kelly claims, came to be addressed as ‘wogs and reffos’.\(^7\) Such a terminology is not only offensive, Dimitris Tsaloumas suggests, but also divisive as Australian people come to be classified as ‘the Aborigines, Us, and the Wogs’.\(^8\) This placement of ‘Us’ in the centre foregrounds the ethnocentric biases surrounding such terminology which places people from the dominant culture in the centre and the others – whether the Aborigines or the Wogs – on the margins. Such a placement finds its resonance in Hage’s critique of white centrality which I explore in Part Two of my thesis. Hage states that both white Australian racists and multiculturalists believe that Australia is ‘a space structured around a White culture, where the Aboriginal people and non-White “ethnics” are merely national objects to be moved and removed according to a White national will’.\(^9\) Such an assumption of centrality is challenged in this play where both Latvian migrant characters and Brown take centre stage and mark the space with their trips and stories.

The tendency to use a totalising terminology in describing writers from migrant backgrounds continued and the term which was commonly used in the last quarter of the twentieth century is ‘Non-English-Speaking Backgrounds’ which incorporated them and also their children who were born in Australia.\(^10\) Reflecting on this, Balodis satirically states that he is called a ‘Nesbian’ although his love for English language prevented him from writing a bilingual play like other migrant writers.\(^11\) Balodis is aware of the impact of such terminology on his work which would have been received differently, he assumes, if it has been written by an Anglo-Australian playwright.\(^12\) Although Balodis’ plays, Terence Clarke asserts, ‘are superbly dramatic and theatrical [and] emotionally powerful’,

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 117-18.
\(^10\) This term, however, is replaced by ‘Culturally and Linguistically Diverse’ ‘CALD’, which is commonly used now in Australia. Although it does not denote a direct reference to the English language, it still refers to the migrants and their children as minorities whose cultural heritage differs from that of the ‘dominant’ Anglo Australians. For more information, see Queensland Government, ‘Working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds’, <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/childsafty/practice-manual/prac-paper-working-cald.pdf> [Accessed 06 November 2016].
\(^12\) Ibid.
they are rarely produced and seldom studied in Australian universities. Clarke’s statement indicates that access to Australia’s literary resources and opportunities is not equal. It also signifies that writing solely in the English language does not place Balodis in a similar position to that of Anglo-Australian playwrights.

Although acknowledging cultural identity, Balodis notes, ‘fenced off’ the opportunities offered for him as a playwright, he has worked hard ‘to climb over [those]fences’ or ‘dig under them or cut through’. During thirty years of hard work, Balodis wrote about ‘sixteen mainstage plays, two large-scale community theatre works [and] six contemporary music theatre works’. In addition to this, he held the position of the associate director of the MTC (Melbourne Theatre Company) from 1987 until his resignation in 1993 and also the dramaturg-in-Residence and Artistic Associate at Queensland Theatre Company (1995-1996). In his works, Balodis focuses on identity and belonging which are not only themes for his plays but also means of expression and identity formation. In an Interview with Kelly, Balodis expresses how self-definition has become his main concern as a person and playwright:

I started writing as a way of defining how I fall between stools, in a cultural sense, and in a search for some place and identity in Australia. For the first twenty-six years of my life I always thought of myself as a foreigner in Australia […]. I guess I thought of myself as belonging to the migrants rather than to the Australians. And then I went to England in 1976 and discovered that I was very, very Australian. After spending a three and a half years in England I came back, and even part of my decision to return was somehow to sort out what I was; was I a wog or was I an Australian? [...] And so I started to write in some sort of search for myself.

The above depicts Balodis’ struggle to define his identity at a time when a writer needed to specify whether he was an Australian or from a migrant culture. Balodis’ words state overtly that being a ‘wog’ does not mean being an Australian. We do not know how long

---

14 Kelly, ‘Projecting the Inner World Onto an Existing Landscape’, p. 28.
17 Manfred Jurgensen states that Anglo Australian writers ‘continue to feel that one is either Australian or a migrant belonging to a migrant culture’, ‘Multicultural Literature’, p. 83.
Balodis’ journey of self-definition took but the Trilogy in general and No Going Back in particular highlights its main stages, particularly those of alienation, his visit to London and his return to negotiate his identity. The play also draws much on Balodis’ and his family’s experiences and charts their attempts to define their identity and achieve a sense of belonging.

Using a postcolonial framework to consider Balodis’ writing, it is worth situating it in relation to the works of other writers of a migrant background such as Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi. The impact of migration history on migrant writers becomes more powerful, Rushdie states, when they experience the loss of that past which they revisit through the broken images left in their memory. Rushdie asserts that

the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being ‘elsewhere’.

We find a prime instance of this in the play when Armand, the protagonist of the play and the son of a Latvian migrant couple, comments on the complexity of his identity formation, stating how the different parts of his identity ‘belong to different bodies, on different continents’ that are ‘drifting further and further apart’. Armand’s words echo Balodis’ reflection on his writing which began as statement of how he ‘fall[s] between stools’. It is also relevant to Jurgensen’s belief that a migrant writer ‘does not really belong to his native culture’ simply because he is neither here nor there. Although the migrant writer ‘takes seriously the challenge of making Australia a home’, it is not possible for him, Jurgensen adds, ‘to either retain fully his original culture or replace it with a predefined, complex, if not contradictory, Australian identity’. Accordingly, he will pass through a ‘process of cultural metamorphosis’ from which a voice emerges which is ‘not of final identity but of change, not of being but of becoming’. Jurgensen’s words explicitly state that negotiating an identity is a long and continuous process.

19 Ibid., p. 15.
19 Janis Balodis, ‘No Going Back’, in The Ghost Trilogy (Sydney: Currency Press, 1997), pp. 81-175 (p. 149). All further references to the play are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses in the text.
20 Jurgensen, p. 84.
21 Ibid., p. 85.
22 Ibid.
Jurgensen’s viewpoint finds resonance in Homi K. Bhabha’s discussion of cultural difference where Bhabha claims that ‘the agency of identification is never pure or holistic but always constituted in a process of substitution, displacement or projection’. Asserting the continuous character of the process of cultural identity, Bhabha states that ‘designations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity which [...] are always “incomplete” and open to cultural translation’. Jurgensen’s and Bhabha’s theorisations of the continuous process of identity formation are also indicated by Stuart Hall who purports that cultural identity is not ‘fixed’ or ‘once-and-for-all’. Rather, it is a “production”, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This ‘incomplete’ and ongoing process of identity formation is not only the outcome of the present but also the past and the future. Hall explains this by saying:

Cultural identity [...] is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being”. It belongs to the future as much to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, unlike everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.

The above states explicitly that the past cannot be ignored or silenced. If identities have histories, the past is, in this sense, the first constituent on which other constituents are established or accumulated.

Since identities have histories, as Hall suggests, they are also attached to places where those histories started. They might be looked at as birthplaces. Migrant writers, or those with diasporic experiences, have more than one birthplace to which they feel attached. Armand, in the play, states how he feels that he belongs to different bodies or continents. Armand’s words, in fact, echo Balodis’ words describing himself as ‘fall[ing] between stools’. The latter’s words find their resonance also in Salman Rushdie’s ‘Imaginary Homelands’. In this essay Rushdie states that the identity of writers from a ‘post-diaspora community’ is both ‘partial’ and ‘plural’ and consequently they feel they

24 Ibid., pp. 162-63.
26 Ibid., p. 110.
27 Ibid., p. 112.
‘straddle two cultures’ or ‘fall between two stools’.28 Although such a status or ground might seem ‘ambiguous and shifting’, Rushdie maintains, ‘it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy’.29 It can be echoed, Rushdie asserts, ‘in the forms of our works’ as writers with a ‘double perspective’.30 Rushdie’s belief is shared by Paul Gilroy who states that as being black and English he ‘stand[s] between (at least) two great cultural assemblages’ in which ‘[s]triving to be both’ black and English, has enabled him to acquire a ‘double consciousness’.31 The same is also believed by Hanif Kureishi who encountered a similar experience as Rushdie. Kureishi regards the stories he heard during his visit to Pakistan crucial in forming an image of himself. They helped him, he posits, to ‘see myself in the world and give me a sense of the past which could go into making a life in the present and the future’.32 In this sense, Balodis’ ‘falling between stools’, or Rushdie’s ‘straddl[ing] two cultures’ or Gilroy’s ‘[s]tand[ing] between […]’ two great cultural assemblages’ or Armand’s ‘belong[ing] to different bodies’ is no longer a flaw but a privilege. Such a status becomes a ‘fertile territory’ for exploring their subjective experiences and cultural heritage. The unstable status of the migrant writer’s cultural identity, which Gilroy calls ‘unfinished identities’,33 relates to Jurgensen’s notion of the ongoing process of ‘cultural metamorphosis’ which is necessary for shaping the migrant writer’s voice and identity. Stories of the past or the home left behind, accordingly, are both important components in identity construction as well as major resources for cultural writing and expression. Ample evidences are the works of Rushdie, Kureishi and Balodis’ Trilogy.

No Going Back was first performed on 16 July 1992 by Melbourne Theatre Company, one of the nine major theatre companies in Australia, with a cast of 10 characters of which five played double roles. I read Balodis’ employment of doubling in this play, which is repeated in the other plays in his trilogy, as a theatrical technique to disrupt any fixed notion of identity. Other than some songs in Latvian, the play is entirely written and spoken in English. References to the spoken Latvian language are made in

28 Rushdie, p. 15.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 19.
33 Gilroy, p. 1.
the play using stage-directed accents. Explaining this, Balodis states that ‘[w]hen the Latvians talk amongst themselves they speak fluently and without accent’ but ‘[w]hen they speak English their speech is accented’.34 The situation is reversed when Ruth or Armand, Karl and Ilse’s children, who were born in Australia, speak in the play; their speech is fluent when they speak English but accented when they speak Latvian.35

The Latvian migrants’ story in the play is combined with that of Ludwig Leichhardt’s second expedition in 1847 in which he attempted, in vain, to reach Perth. Radic attributes Leichhardt’s presence in the play to the fact that Balodis’ parents’ place in Queensland is close to the area which Leichardt and his party explored in their expedition.36 In addition to this, Radic considers Leichhardt’s presence as a critique of a white perception of Australia as an empty land; he maintains that Leichhardt’s description of Australia as ‘a country too young for ghosts’ means that he could not see ‘that Australia did have a past prior to European settlement, even if the original occupants left few abiding traces of their presence’.37 Tompkins sees Leichhardt as the prominent figure in the trilogy whose narrative is ‘only tangentially and occasionally’ interfered with by that of the Latvian migrant characters.38 Leichhardt, she maintains, is a real and historical explorer while the others are post-war displaced persons who come to ‘find a room in a new land’.39 Rather than placing Leichhardt at the centre of the play, as Tompkins does, I regard the Latvian migrants as the main actors and I suggest that Leichardt’s narrative is included to add depth to their story by surrounding it with a historical background. Further, while Leichhardt and his party remain, until the end of the play, tired spirits unable to leave a mark on the land, Balodis’ family place their mark, their house, on the Australian land which they now consider their home. Leichhardt’s vicissitude is dramatically portrayed in Scene Sixteen, which is a prime instance of juxtaposing past and present timelines; in this scene, we see the Latvian women help Leichhardt and his party, who decide to go back, into their coats and with their swags (157).

34 Balodis, ‘Author’s Note’, p. 85.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid. Original emphasis.
39 Ibid.
Balodis’ play is not the first literary work that relates an encounter between white settlers and Aboriginal Australians in North Queensland, Australia and will not be the last. Notable examples are Patrick White’s *Voss* (1974) and David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* (1994). The solid presence of the Aboriginal character, Brown, in Balodis’ play echoes Aboriginal characters’ portrayal in White’s novel, *Voss*. In addition to his guide Jacki, Voss, the white explorer, is shadowed by the presence of several Aboriginal people whose presence arise fears as ‘members of the expedition were so confronted by apprehension’. Further, Leichhardt’s fears of failure and thoughts of return in Balodis’ play recur in White’s novel when Voss’s health deteriorates: ‘he did begin to falter and was at last wearing openly his own sores which he had kept hidden (365). However, whereas Leichhardt’s vision to conquer the Australian space is shattered when he sees his mark on the tree from a previous expedition and he decides to retreat, Voss is killed and ‘his blood ran out upon the dry earth, which drank it immediately’ (394). In both works, Voss and Leichhardt are overwhelmed by the land they intend to overcome.

Instead of two timelines as is the case in Balodis’ play, Malouf’s work has only one which takes place ‘[o]ne day in the middle of the twentieth century’ in Queensland where three children meet Gemmy, a ‘black’ ‘savage’ who comes out of ‘the no-man’s land of the swamp’. This encounter initiates a process of cross-cultural negotiation between the three settlers and Gemmy which, like that in Balodis’ play, problematises the notion of fixed identities. The character of Brown, who is of mixed-descent, finds resonance in Gemmy who appears covered with the remains of a ‘royal blue’ jacket (12). This jacket perplexes the settlers’ gaze by its portrayal of Gemmy’s hybrid status which is, as Malouf’s puts it, a ‘mixture of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness’ (43). Another similarity between the two works is the subversion of the settler’s primacy. Like in Balodis’ play, the settlers’ primacy in Queensland is obliterated by their encounter with Gemmy which also echoes Leichhardt and his group’s encounter with Brown. Moreover, as Brown guides Leichhardt’s expedition, Gemmy helps Mr Frazer, the minister, study

---

40 Patrick White, *Voss* (Victoria: Penguin, 1974), p. 342. All further references to the novel are from this edition and will be marked in parenthesis.
41 David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 1-3. All further references to the novel are from this edition and will be marked in parenthesis.
trees and plants, learn their Aboriginal names and draw their designs in his notebook (65-67). There are even references in the novel to Leichhardt and Gemmy’s role as a guide for a young settler who has come from Scotland to ‘discover two or three rivers, which he would name after some of his acquaintance […] find Leichhardt, or his bones at least’ and who will not let the people ‘put up a monument’ for him unless ‘Gemmy’s name should be inscribed there along with his own’ (60). Consequently, Malouf’s novel shows that the obsession with exploring space and having monuments haunts even young settlers. In a land claimed to be *terra nullius*, these works problematise assumptions that Australia was an empty land waiting to be filled with white presence and whose landscape was to be tamed and named by white explorers.

Tompkins observes that Leichhardt’s way of carving trees with his initial and the year, ‘L 1845’, is meant to ‘ground his legacy in the landscape’ although she acknowledges that trees are not the appropriate places for creating such a monument or legacy. I do not see Leichhardt as a person attempting to ‘ground his legacy’ because land for him is just a path to tread rather than a site to connect with. His legacy is the successful end of his expedition rather than the mark he carves on trees, and therefore seeing his mark carved in a tree from a previous expedition is never a good omen for him. Leichhardt keeps his eyes on the horizon and insists on carving his initial on trees while standing. Accordingly, no image is ever imprinted in his mind of the land he passes. This is explicitly depicted in the play when Leichhardt’s vision is shattered once he notices his mark on a tree and realises that he is treading the same path of his last expedition. His mark, in this sense, becomes a stamp of failure rather than a legacy of a conquest. Leichhardt’s way of describing Australia as ‘my country to discover’ and ‘my destiny’ which ‘no one can turn me from’ indicates an intention of owning rather than of belonging (158). Such an intention to own is, indeed, an indication of a white mentality obsessed with conquering and possession at the expense of other people such as the Aboriginal. Such a mentality is critiqued in the play when Leichhardt expresses his real fear of failure: ‘How will I be remembered if this [expedition] ends in failure?’ (112), and again in Brown’s (the Aboriginal character in the play) words to the Latvian migrant characters, ‘we livin’ here’ thousands of years before the ‘explorers reckon they discovered’ Australia (133). Unable to meet his aim, Leichhardt ends up a trespasser, a passer-by, and even a ghost like the ghosts that he does not believe this land can have.

---

42 Ibid., p. 87.
While portraying Leichhardt’s failure to create his myth, the play presents Brown in a way that resists both time and space as we see him moving freely between the two timelines of the play and between the two camps, the Latvians and the explorers. In so doing, Brown, I argue, is depicted as transcending both time and place to the extent of being omniscient; he guides Leichhardt and his party in the desert between Queensland and the Northern Territory and informs the Latvian migrant characters about the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. The explorer’s attempts to map place is superseded by its later travellers who, Carter asserts, ‘link up their paths and routes to others’. Thus, legacies of the past are replaced by new legacies and former explorers are replaced by new inhabitants and this is dramatically portrayed, as stated earlier, when the Latvian migrant characters’ trip in the Australian inland reaches the explorers’ camp. In addition to indicating the end of Leichhardt and his group’s role on stage, this scene problematises the sole ownership of the Australian space which Leichhardt, as stated above, intends to represent.

One of the basic constituents in forming an identity, Tompkins argues, is an engagement with the concept of home. Tompkins states that ‘[i]n Australian multicultural drama in the last three decades, “home” has generally been designated at least three locations, [...] the family home, the “old country” as home, and Australia as an alternative home’. Reflecting on the second one, the old country, she states that this place which migrants wish to visit becomes ‘a space of profound ambivalence’, especially when characters in the plays visit it and ‘discover that they now feel more Australian’ than any other nationality. In Balodis’ play, such ‘ambivalence’ is demonstrated through the pairing of Otto and Lydia for whom Latvia becomes an unidentified site or even a period of time lived which cannot be restored:

Lauma: [...] That Latvia when we grew up doesn’t exist. 
Lydia: [accent] But when I am there I can still remember it [...]. I don’t know this place but Latvia I still know in my bones. 
Otto: No we don’t. Not any More. [...] (133-34)

Although Latvia is still existent, it appears different from the Latvia they have in their memory which now ‘doesn’t exist’ and can be attained solely through remembrance. The Latvian migrant characters are not the only migrants to experience such a distorted

---

43 Carter, p. 9.
45 Ibid.
memory or broken image of the home of origin. The fictional or ‘imaginary homeland’ a migrant makes, Rushdie claims, is the outcome of a fragmentary vision or ‘a fallible memory’ which creates ‘broken images’ of the home country.\(^46\) Although being fragmentary and broken, this memory is valuable, Rushdie asserts, for the migrant writer:

> It may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost. But there is a paradox here. The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed.\(^47\)

The significance of such a broken image for Armand will be discussed later in this chapter. Relying on what the play depicts, especially in the case of Armand who perceives himself as belonging to different bodies that are drifting apart, I argue that identity and place appear to be inseparable. Tompkins proposes that the ‘complicated multicultural cultural and political landscape’ in Australia makes it ‘an ideal place for the exploration of a homescape which does not even have to be defined by a physical location’.\(^48\) Without a defined physical place, Armand will remain unanchored and will be carrying his bag at the entrances of airports. The significance of place or space for the ‘identity formation’ is highlighted by Nikos Papastergiadis who asserts that ‘space is a dynamic field in which identities are in a constant state of interaction’.\(^49\) The space which Papastergiadis describes has to be physical so that the ‘agency’ or the ‘cultural identity of the migrant’, he maintains, will be ‘in a state of mutual transformation with its surrounding structures’.\(^50\) This is also suggested by Kevin Hetherington who comments on the relation between place and identity construction, claiming that ‘identity involves an identification with particular places, whether local or national.’\(^51\) In addition to asserting the continuous process of identity formation which Jurgensen, Bhabha and Hall earlier state, Papastergiadis claims that identity formation is influenced by the surrounding structures.

> The influence of the surrounding space or structure on the identity of the migrant is a key theme in the play. As stated earlier, Balodis depicts his characters, especially the

---

46 Rushdie, pp. 10-11.
47 Ibid., p. 11.
50 Ibid.
Latvian migrant characters, in motion which provides them with the opportunity to map space and create an affinity with place. Motion is also important for the migrant’s identity which is, Papastergiadis claims, ‘partly formed by or in the journey’. This motion, as we notice in the play, brings them, at first, in contact with Australia’s first people such as Brown. When he first meets the Latvian women at the beach, Brown complains that their men caught all the fish in the water and, consequently, nothing is left for him to catch (124). From this simple reference to the change in Aboriginal peoples’ fortunes following the arrival of settlers and migrants, Brown proceeds to express his knowledge of issues beyond the domain of Australia such as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan – a counternarrative to the white story of Aboriginal peoples which the women briefly highlight:

Lydia: [...]. [H]e spoke English. On the television they’re always subtitled.
Lauma: His skin was so black.
Ilse: When I first came here, they used to be blacker. He’s probably half white.
But then I was told they were cannibals. (125)

The above dialogue is a critique of the influence of the mainstream media in creating stereotypes about Australia’s First People in the minds of Australians and post-war migrants such as the Latvians migrant characters. They are described as ‘cannibals’ who cannot speak English and therefore they are ‘always subtitled’ on the television. It also draws attention to the influence of white settlers’ sexual relations with Aboriginal women that has led to the emergence of mixed descent Aboriginals such as Brown who is described as ‘half white’. The reference to this character as Brown or ‘half white’ indicates, I argue, the hybrid identity of Australia and the fallacy of a fixed identity.

While the Latvian migrants are strengthening their affinity with place, Armand practices painting which becomes his ‘only way’ to answer questions such as ‘How we came to be here’ and ‘Why here and nor somewhere else’ (115). Armand’s words resonate with those of Balodis’ describing his decision to return from London as his intention to ‘sort out’ whether he is an Australian or a ‘wog’. While Armand is attempting to find answers, the Latvian migrant characters are still obsessed with making comparisons between Australia and Latvia:

Otto: If you look along the beach with the pines and the low grasses, it’s exactly like Jurmala in Latvia

52 Ibid.
Lydia: Except for the mountain.
Karl: And they’re she-oak not pines.
Ilse: And the sand at Jurmala is purest white, not yellow. (116)

Although their comparison appears to focus on showing differences, it conveys their attempt to find resemblances. However, Armand neither has images of Latvia in his memory to help him make such comparisons, nor a meaningful attachment to Australia to make the images he sees and discovers in Australia fixed in his mind:

I was born here, I look around, I remember things but I don’t know them, not in my bones. But I’m not Latvian either. I know some stories, I know some snatches of songs, but I don’t know ... maybe it’s that it’s still so new, so alien, that it has to be discovered and rediscovered. Generation after generation before it’s in our blood, in our bones. (134)

Armand’s words, which relate to Balodis’ illustration of his identity as ‘fall[ing] between two stools’, suggest that Armand does not feel a strong sense of belonging either to Latvia or Australia; indeed, he is caught between these countries. Karl, Armand’s father, is aware that his son has not yet settled and tells him: ‘[y]ou appear to be with us and yet you aren’t. You’re always seeing something else’ (148). And the thing that Armand has realised is that his ‘hand and eye [...] belong to different bodies, on different continents’ which drift ‘further and further apart’ and, thus, he ‘can barely make a mark’ (149). These feelings of alienation and disruption are behind his decision to go back to London. However, in Scene Seventeen, which takes place at the airport, Armand is endowed with the opportunity to familiarise the ‘alien’ and ‘new’ of what surrounds him and fill the jigsaw of his identity and belonging through an enactment of his parents’ and the other Latvians’ journey on board ship from Stuttgart to Australia.

The enactment of this journey on board ship, which is played around Armand in the airport, is active, colourful and loaded with the throbbing of engines, sounds of seagulls and voices of people (161-62), bringing Armand in contact with his parents’ past. The image of the ship is present in the works of scholars such as Gilroy who regards it as ‘a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion’. Ships, Gilroy maintains, ‘focus the attention […] on the circulation of ideas and […] the movement of key cultural and political artefacts’. I read this scene depicting the Latvian characters’ journey on board ship as linking Armand with the past of his family and filling the empty spaces in

---

53 Gilroy, p. 4.
54 Ibid.
his jigsaw of identity and belonging. Although it portrays only a fragment of that past, it accelerates Armand’s process of self-definition and encourages him to regard Australia as a home and appreciate his parents’ cultural heritage. Accordingly, the play shows us the role played by the imagination in the shaping of migrant identity since Armand does not have memories of this journey so he fills in this gap imaginatively. This is further demonstrated in the following scene, Scene Eighteen, where Armand meets Lauma and speaks Latvian with her without the aid of a translator which he, earlier, thought he would desperately need (164). Speaking the Latvian language is an indication of his appreciation of his parents’ Latvian heritage. Further, he tells Lauma that he did not go to England because he would not like to ‘start anew’ (165). Thus, the two components forming his identity are no longer drifting apart. Now, Armand is aware of their presence and significance; he tells Lauma with confidence that he is ‘Australian, more even, than Latvian’ (165).

Reflecting on a memory he had while standing in front of his family house in Bombay, Rushdie notes that ‘[t]he colours of my history had seeped out of my mind’s eyes; now my other two eyes were assaulted by colours, by the vividness of the red tiles, the yellow-edged green of cactus-leaves, the brilliance of bougainvillaea creeper’.\(^{55}\) The same vivid image is played in front of Armand in the airport. Azade Seyhan proposes that ghosts which appear in literary works are ‘the ethereal metaphor for losses’ and ‘the invisible markers of a past visible only to those who suffer from an overload of memory’\(^{56}\). McCallum, however, asserts that ‘[i]n the theatre, ghosts are never ethereal, they are always present, bodies on stage’\(^{57}\). Armand, as stated earlier, remembers the things around him but is incapable of having a meaningful attachment to them, and such incapability increases with events he has not seen or experienced such as the journey of his parents and other Latvian migrants. This incident is not in his memory to regard its enactment as a response to ‘an overload of memory’. Commenting on the appearance of the Ghost to Hamlet in Shakespeare’s play, Martin Scofield purports that Hamlet has to understand it to ‘define his relation to the past, his duty towards it, and his need for freedom of it’\(^{58}\). I read this enactment of the journey as an opportunity to satisfy Armand’s

\(^{55}\) Rushdie, p. 9.
\(^{57}\) McCallum, p. 379.
need to articulate his relation to his family’s past and also a realisation of his duty to document it, as his parents assert, together with their present.

The Latvian migrant characters’ process of belonging is culminated in Scene Twenty which celebrates the family’s move to the new house. During this celebration, Ilse gives a speech in English which signifies that she no longer feels as if she is living in an alien place: ‘Karl never want this house. He couldn’t see point. He always think go back to Latvia. We all think, but we be buried here. And when that happen I sleep peaceful. Not be so foreign soil.’ (170) Giving a speech in English – though her English is rudimentary – is done to suggest her realisation of belonging to Australia. In this scene, I argue, the Latvian refugees have altered the code of living in Australia from temporary to permanent. When they first arrive in Australia, as depicted in *Too Young for Ghosts*, Ilse is amazed to see the corrugated iron houses in North Queensland and comments that those who built them ‘live as if they don’t expect to stay’. In this play, she builds a house for a family which is determined to stay and this is why it is set in concrete. Karl likes his wife’s reference to the house as a home, maintaining that it makes them ‘true Australians’ (173). Thus, their house has become their monument and the mark of their belonging. It is part of the legacy that she wants Armand to document through painting: ‘[y]ou must paint for all of us, what we did, how we came with a vision for a better future, how we struggled, how we squabbled and lost our way because we didn’t dare fail, how making it meant having things’ (p. 174). Then, they all sing the Latvian song ‘Jauniba’ (youth) in Latvian with no accented speech. Finally, both parents and children appear to be sharing the two components of identity, the Latvian and Australian, which, as Armand states earlier in the play, vary in their weight. This shows how the successive waves of migrants have influenced Australian identity which becomes no longer fixed or homogenous than the identities of its inhabitants.

Balodis’ *No Going Back* explores Latvian migrant characters’ journey of creating an affinity with Australia, their new homeland. It demonstrates how their vision of home remains unstable and fluid until the end of the play when a sense of belonging to place is achieved through the building of a house. Further, the play depicts the impact of the parents’ history on their children who struggle to bridge the gap between the two components of their identity which were, as Armand describes them, drifting apart. Based on Balodis’ experience as an Australian with a Latvian background, the play delineates

---

59 Balodis, ‘*Too Young for Ghosts*’, in *The Ghost Trilogy*, pp. 1-80 (p. 22).
how the complexities of straddling two cultures intensify the search for a sense of belonging as well as become a source of stories for his works and a means of self-definition. The various voices and the doubling employed in this play to disrupt any fixed notion of identity are recurring motifs. In the following chapter, Anne Yen uses similar strategies in her play, *Chinese Take Away*. 
Chapter Two: The Retrieval of Women’s Voices, Resistance and Empowerment in Anna Yen’s *Chinese Take Away*

In *Chinese Take Away* (2000), playwright, performer and co-producer Anna Yen, portrays her matrilineal history by tracing her grandmother’s journey from China to Hong Kong, her mother’s from Hong Kong to Sydney, and finally her own in contemporary Australia. In so doing, she exposes her foremothers’ suffering from rape, repeated pregnancies and slavery. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak’s essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988), I consider the women whose stories Yen relates in her play as subalterns. I contend that in *Chinese Take Away*, Yen moves beyond tracing these subalterns’ itineraries, a task Spivak assigns to the ‘postcolonial intellectual’, to retrieving their voices. By employing the technique of polycharacterisation, Yen opens up a performative site where these women’s stories can be passed on: she constructs their characters on stage, relates their stories and reads their written letters. Their voices, in this sense, are not retrieved decades later by a group of male scholars such as the ‘Subaltern Studies’ scholars who Spivak critiques in her essay, but by a woman from the same family. I argue that dramatising these stories in one female performing body becomes an expression of resistance that destabilises the assumption of a fixed image of the Asian woman as a site of sexual appeal and problematises Spivak’s premise of the inadequacy of the female body to send a message to a receiver. In this play, Yen retrieves and empowers her foremothers’ voices as well as portrays resistance. This is particularly evident when she acts as a warrior woman and performs martial arts movements, instances of her embracing of her Chinese heritage.

*Chinese Take Away* premiered in 1997 in Brisbane’s Cremorne Theatre. To have it performed on stage, Yen received financial support from various funding bodies such as the Theatre Fund of the Australia Council, Arts Queensland and the Myer Foundation. Yen’s success in securing funding reflected a theatrical interest in Asian works during the 1990s which coincided, Gilbert and Lo assert, with the Keating Government’s Asian enmeshment campaign that increased the demand for Asian performances and actors.¹ Yen’s play is a blend of storytelling, music, projections of words and pictures, clowning and circus skills in which she takes her audience on a journey through China, Hong Kong and Australia.² Throughout this journey, Yen relates stories of her real and mythical

---

heroines who suffered from enslavement, racism and forced and planned marriages. The artistic hybridity and diversity of places and stories reflect the playwright’s personal life which is a ‘mixture of Western and Eastern influences’. The hybridity of the play can also be observed in its language: it contains English and Chinese, Romanised Cantonese. As a piece of Asian-Australian drama, it challenges the idea of identity as fixed and static, Lo proposes, because of its ‘hyphenated subjectivities’. Subverting dominant expectations of maintaining a fixed national identity is a recurring motif in migrant drama also seen in Janis Balodis’ No Going Back, as discussed in the previous chapter. Further, like Balodis’ play, Yen’s melodrama conveys that ‘straddling two cultures’ can be a fertile territory which writers from a migrant background can mine material to write their story and define their identity.

To define her identity, Yen delves into her family’s past to relate the stories of her foremothers whom I consider, as stated earlier, as subalterns. In her essay, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, Spivak asserts that ‘subalterns’ cannot speak for themselves and that they are condemned to be spoken for by others who are mainly outsiders. Spivak critiques the attempts by Indian scholars, the ‘Subaltern Studies’ scholars, to represent the oppressed people relying on colonial texts that explore their insurgency. The problem with those texts, Spivak states, is that ‘the subject’s itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual’. In this sense, there is no ‘real receiver’, she claims, of the subaltern’s voice that was muted in those texts. For Spivak, the issue of gender compounds the problems of representation. As she puts it, ‘[i]f in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow’. Spivak maintains that in order to represent the muted voices of the subaltern females, the ‘postcolonial intellectual’ has to ‘critique the postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply

---

6 Ibid., p. 287.
7 Ibid.
substituting the lost figure of the colonized’. Exploring the issue of the double marginalisation of female subalterns, Spivak casts light on the Hindu practice of widow sacrifice. According to Hindu tradition, the widow, as a good woman and in a ritual known as sati, ‘ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it’. This sacrifice was interpreted by Indian Hindus as the widow’s actual intention ‘to die’, but there is no recorded testimony of the widow’s ‘voice-consciousness’ to either assure this or produce ‘a countersentence’.

In an interview with Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, Spivak purports that she perceives ‘speaking’ as ‘a transaction between the speaker and the listener’. Such a transaction, she maintains, did not take place when the Hindu widow committed suicide and her action or deed, in this sense, ‘was inscribed in her body.’ Although admitting that some sati women did speak, Spivak insists that ‘even when the subaltern makes the effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act’. Despite being prompted by the interviewers to admit that women who committed suicide did indeed represent themselves, Spivak maintains that they tried hard to represent themselves but their attempts were mainly done through their bodies. Consequently, I argue that through this monodrama, when Yen plays the roles of several women on stage including her family and other mythical characters, Yen makes abundantly clear that the performing body can effectively play an active part in the transaction between the performer and the audience. Such a transaction is not limited to a speech act where we have a speaker and a listener but can include performances including the emergence of the warrior woman and Yen’s transformation, at the play’s finale, from a crying child into a warrior woman.

Performing those roles, especially that of the warrior woman, is part of Yen’s deployment of her Chinese heritage. Indeed, Yen is not the only writer with a Chinese background to employ the mythical figure of the warrior woman in her work. She is preceded by Maxine Hong Kingston, a Chinese-American writer, who dedicates chapter

---

8 Ibid., p. 295.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 292.
14 Ibid., p. 306.
two in her novel, *The Woman Warrior* (1976), to the story of a swordwoman, Fa Mu Lan, who, rather than striking at unseen enemies as happens in Yen’s play, becomes a leader of men, kills the emperor, defeats his army and takes the capital.\(^{15}\) Fa Mu Lan, Yunte Huang asserts, is a warrior woman whose legend is ‘known to every household’ in China and her ballad, the Fa Mulan Ballad, is ‘a folk song of a nomad tribe that lived to the north of China around the fifth century’.\(^{16}\) Thus, it is not surprising to find her legend employed in the works of writers with a Chinese background such as Yen and Kingston. Although Lo contends that Yen’s work is ‘partly inspired by the visibility of diasporic Asian women’s writing’ such as Kingston’s, I argue that the relationship between Yen’s play and Kingston’s novel goes beyond inspiration.\(^ {17}\) Both works depict the author’s mother as a storyteller, the minor role of fathers, stories of insanity and suicide of a relative as well as the personal growths of their own writers into warrior women.

In addition to the above, both works include a story about a woman whose father is called ‘Yen’. Kingston’s concluding chapter to her novel, entitled ‘A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe’, narrates the story of a poetess, ‘Ts’ai Yen’, who is captured by the barbarians with whom she stays and gives birth to two children who do not speak Chinese, the language of their mother. Likewise, in Yen’s play, a Chinese acrobatic dancer, ‘The Other Anna Yen’, travels to England with her father, marries an English man and gives birth to two children who are ‘not Oriental’. Furthermore, both authors cast light on the marginalisation of females in the country of origin: they are regarded as slaves (Kingston’s novel) or sold and raped (Yen’s play). Yet, while the poetess in Kingston’s novel sings a song about China, the dancer in Yen’s play feels happy to be in England and while the poetess is reclaimed by her father, the dancer’s father dies on the way home. The two works also vary in details and stories; while Kingston criticises Chinese men in America, Yen conveys the difficulty her father and mother face in Australia and the negative impact of the policy of White Australia on shaping their life and future. Finally, whereas the swordwoman in Kingston’s novel finishes her battles and returns to her


\(^{17}\) Lo, ‘Playing the Yellow Lady: Performing Gender and Race’, in *Siting the Other: Revisions of Marginality in Australia and English-Canadian Drama*, ed. by Marc Maufort and Franca Belarsi (Bruxelles: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 69-84 (p. 73).
husband and child to resume her work in the house and farm, Yen, the performer, growing to be a warrior woman, decides never to wed. Accordingly, Yen’s play, I argue, does more to challenge gender stereotypes.

*Chinese Take Away* is a play written for a solo performer. As Jeremy Ridgman observes, monodramas were acted on the Australian stage at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Their revival in the twentieth century, Ridgman further explains, was initiated by Jack Hibberd (1940- ) who wrote four monodramas. Hibberd attributes the prevalence of this genre to the lack of a ‘national culture’ and this is why he and other Australian dramatists, as ‘newcomers to an alien land’, are drawn to this form where solo characters ‘seek to create their own history [and] their legends’. Since Australian monodramas came into existence, they have not been intended to portray just one character. A striking example of this is Hibberd’s *A Stretch of the Imagination* (1972) whose single actor, Katharine Brisbane posits, ‘peoples the stage with a vivid population of lives and loves’. Like the single actor in Hibberd’s monodrama, Yen, in *Chinese Take Away*, plays various roles to depict herstory which is also that of her mother and grandmother.

Yen’s play is an autobiographical monodrama and in this sub-genre ‘the fragmentary nature of subjectivity’, Gilbert and Lo point out, is foregrounded to suggest that there is not ‘an essential and authentic self which is wholly integrated and unchanged through time’. In addition to asserting the non-authentic aspect of self, autobiographical narratives, Seyhan states, signify how modern cultural identities are forged from many ‘interrupted (hi)stories’. When the performer speaks through the persons whose histories s/he relates on stage, they free him/her, as Seyhan further puts it, ‘from the fixity of circumscribed positions and self-positions’. Furthermore, Elspeth Tilley assumes that in this technique of polycharacterisation, the multiple selves gathering in one body

---

19 Ibid., p. 135.
23 Seyhan, p. 68.
24 Ibid., p. 71.
subvert the fixity of the self and undermine attempts to contain it within one specific locality.25 Yen’s play evidences this notion when she plays the roles of her grandmother, mother, herself as well as mythical figures such as the warrior woman and the marriage resisters. In these performances, she moves beyond any single location and shifts between countries and continents. Such performances not only subvert the fixity of the performing body but also enable the performer who plays various roles on stage, Dee Heddon asserts, to ‘feel, invariably, the real impact’ of the selves s/he inhibits and whose ‘lived materiality’ s/he ‘render[s] visible.’26 Yen is aware of the selves she inhabits whose affinity with her is asserted years before this performance. Further, her resolve to portray them on stage renders them live, rather than stereotyped or invisible.

Yen’s autobiographical play conveys the collective memory of a diasporic family where the frontiers between the home left behind and the new home intersect. Diasporic works, Ien Ang claims, ‘have the potential to unsettle static, essential and totalitarian conceptions of “national culture”, or national identity which are firmly rooted in geography and history’.27 Unsettling those conceptions of national culture and identity is necessary for the inscription of new identities whose formation process is unfinished and ongoing. Inscribing hyphenated identities on stage is a means of portraying cultural hybridity. Gilbert and Lo have employed Bhabha’s notion of the ‘Third Space’ where the clash of cultures results in ambivalence. This enables them to argue that postcolonial monodramas have turned theatre into a ‘Third Space’ where cultural hybridity is dramatised.28 In Chinese Take Away, the borders between the two (hi)stories and localities of both Hong Kong and Australia are stretched both spatially and temporally. This is further portrayed on stage which becomes the site for cultural encounters between Asia and Australia. These encounters began with Yen’s father’s arrival in Australia in 1942 and her mother’s in 1956. Thus, both encounters happened under the White Australia policy and recur in the present time as Yen negotiates her cultural identity as an Asian-Australian playwright.

Bhabha asserts that hybridity is a site of contestation between two cultures and a means of destabilising the hegemony of the dominant culture since it ‘displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination’. The site of this process extends beyond cultural practices and performances to incorporate the bodies of performers. Elizabeth Grosz argues that being ‘a site of knowledge/power, the body is thus a site of resistance, for it exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counter-strategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways’. In *Chinese Take Away*, Yen enacts this resistance by playing various roles of women, including the warrior woman, and problematising mainstream viewers’ attempts to perceive her in terms of a fixed notion of Asian female identity which is often depicted, Gilbert and Lo propose, as a ‘lotus blossom, dragon lady or mail-order bride’. Moreover, by taking her audience on a journey which crosses the borders between China, Hong Kong and Australia, she resists not only the fixed identity of the performing body but also its confinement in a fixed locality. Accordingly, autobiographical monodramas become sites that dramatise how the performer’s body is vulnerable to what Gilbert and Tompkins call ‘multifarious inscriptions which produce it as a dialogic, ambivalent, and unstable signifier.’ In Yen’s play, the dialogical and ambivalent aspects of the performing body intersect effectively, destabilising attempts to label the characters as protagonists, antagonists, victims or oppressors. Ample examples are her father, a victim of the racial policies of White Australia, who deceives Yen’s mother by bringing her to Australia on a student visa, and Yen’s grandmother, who places her wedding ring, which symbolises in the play a yoke of captivity, in Yen’s mother’s hand. By performing her story on stage, Yen turns her biography into a dramatic construction. Sidonie Smith regards autobiographical performances or practices as claims for subjectivity and identity as well as ‘occasions for the staging of resistance’. This notion is foregrounded in the play by one performing body acting several roles on stage. This corporeality suggests a resistance not only to the stereotyping of Asian women but

29 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 112.
32 Gilbert and Tompkins, p. 205.
also to attempts to confine them to one static identity and locality. This feature subverts, I contend, Spivak’s notion of speech act in which she denies the ability of the female body to be a ‘dialogic’ signifier and send a message to a receiver (as in an audience watching a performance).

In *Chinese Take Away*, Yen proves to be both the ‘real receiver’ and representative of her foremothers’ voices. In an interview with Don Batchelor, Yen asserts that the play is ‘very much the story of my Grandmother, my Mother and me’. To retrieve the voices of her foremothers, Yen opens up a performative site where their stories can interweave. The significance of voice is brought to the fore by this projection of words in both Cantonese and English on the screen signifying the grandmother’s travel to Hong Kong. By employing the technique of polycharacterisation, Yen traces these ‘subaltern’ women’s itineraries and retrieves their voices by using the pronoun ‘I’ in relating their stories and reading their letters. Consequently, she appears to take on the additional role of Spivak’s ‘postcolonial intellectual’, tracing the subaltern’s itinerary to Hong Kong and listening to her grandmother. In Scene Five, entitled ‘stories’, Yen leans on a slackrope, her figurative means of moving from one location to another in relating her stories, and tells the audience that she went to Hong Kong to see her grandmother and hear stories about her and her mother. Talking about herself, the grandmother tells Yen that she was sold at the age of five to a rich man to be his servant. Then, in 1926, she got married which became a period of repeated rape and forced pregnancies. This is dramatised in Scene Seven entitled ‘The Rooster’ where Yen acts as a rooster to relate the story of her grandmother who gave birth to ten children. The rooster, in this scene, is transformed into ‘a delicate little Chicken’ which is ‘[s]uddenly’ and ‘violently raped from behind’ making its feathers fly (48).

The grandmother’s experience of violent rape finds resonance in that of her daughter’s, Yen’s mother. In Scene Nine, Yen’s mother arrives in Australia in 1956 anticipating ‘dreams of adventure and romance’ and posing several times for a camera expressing ‘her desire to be a film actress’ (50). However, these expectations are severed by the transfer of a ring from her mother’s finger to hers signifying a transfer of a shackle.

---

34 In her essay, Spivak, as stated earlier in this article, denies the presence of the real listener of the subaltern’s voice.
35 Batchelor, ‘An Interview with Anna Yen’, p. 33.
36 Anna Yen, ‘Chinese Take Away’, in *Three Plays by Asian Australian* (Brisbane: Playlab Press, 2000), pp. 40-70 (p. 46). All further references to the play are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses in the text.
and a sign of captivity. It is a legacy of enslavement which the daughter inherits from her mother who appears complicit even though being a victim. The story is completed in Scene 10 where Yen’s mother hands over her passport and tells an unseen person, supposedly Yen’s father: ‘Student Visa. Student. Seventeen’ (51). She, then, struggles and fights to ‘resist rape’ but her armour, her jacket, ‘is torn open’ (51). Later, the jacket suddenly becomes a bundle, a sign of pregnancy, which she rolls ‘down her belly’ and then scoops up as a new baby. This is repeated four times indicating giving birth to four children and the speed with which it is performed parallels the speed with which the rooster, Yen’s grandmother, was raped. In both scenes, it is done violently and repeatedly conveying how these women are subject to enslavement and rape in both Hong Kong and Australia.

To retrieve her female relatives’ voices, Yen not only tell their stories but also reads their letters. A notable instance is Scene 13, entitled ‘Dear Third Sister’, where Yen reads the letters her mother wrote to her sister in Hong Kong. These letters enable her mother to resist confinement by sending her stories and voice beyond the domain of her house and maintain ties with the home of origin. In one of these letters, Yen’s mother tells her sister about Ming, a school mate from Honk Kong who visited her in Australia, and then about her decision to work as a dressmaker and have money of her own to sue her husband – an expression of resistance to male patriarchy. She also recounts a story about one of her customers, Mrs Smith – in her performance on stage, Yen talks to two invisible characters, ‘Mrs Smith’ and the ‘Third Sister’. Mrs Smith is a white Australian who has put on some weight when she comes for the fitting. As a result, the Chinese newspaper pattern which her mother tries to adjust onto her body rips (56). This dramatic image critiques the forcible fitting together of diverse cultures or covering of one with another that is ready-made. As Bhabha puts it in an interview, ‘it is actually very difficult, even impossible or counterproductive, to try and fit together different forms of cultures and to pretend that they can easily coexist’.37 Within the Australian context, this rip can be read as a critique of the assimilationist policy applied to migrants. The policy of multiculturalism adopted since 1978, on the contrary, encourages Australian to express and share their cultural heritage and (hi)stories. It is this policy which enables Yen to

negotiate her identity as an Asian-Australian playwright and perform her story to a culturally diverse audience.

Yen dramatises the drastic influence of the policy of assimilation and the era of White Australia on her parents through two scenes in which she talks about her father’s arrival in Sydney in the 1940s and relates her mother’s nervous breakdown before committing suicide. Because of her nervous breakdown, Yen’s mother is haunted by Taunting Spirit which, in Scene 22, addresses her saying: ‘Ching Chong. Go home. Communist. We don’t want Yellow Peril Taking over this country’ (68). This racial discrimination echoes a previous instance of it, in Scene 21, which Yen’s father experienced on his arrival in Sydney in 1947 when he was mistakenly assumed to be Japanese:


The two scenes convey the hardships Asians faced in Australia during the era of White Australia. In addition to acknowledging racial discrimination against Asians, the above examples show that Asians are perceived as a threat to Australia. I argue that the reference to the ‘Yellow Peril’ as invading Australia is a critique of a recurrent wave of racial discrimination against Asians expressed by Pauline Hanson, the One Nation Party’s senator, who claimed in her maiden speech to Australian Federal Parliament in 1996 that Australia is ‘in danger of being swamped by Asians’.38

In addition to critiquing racial discrimination against Asians including her parents, Yen, through adopting the technique of polycharacterisation, problematises any fixed notion of the Asian woman. The sporadic emergence of the warrior woman on the stage, executing ‘a fierce Wushu Sword fight’ and attacking furiously ‘many invisible enemies’ (40), subverts a Western image of the Asian female as a ‘lotus blossom’, or ‘mail-order bride’.39 Although Asians are perceived as ‘hardworking’, ‘good academically’ and ‘good with money’, the Asian or Chinese’ women are often stereotyped by ‘Caucasian heritage

39 Gilbert and Lo, Performance and Cosmopolitics, p. 177.
Australians’, Yen proposes, as ‘sexually available’. Critiquing this image of the Asian woman is portrayed, I argue, through the story of ‘The Other Anna Yen’, an element of the play that has not been examined by extant criticism. Yen knows about this dancer from a woman she met during her visit to London. In this story, where Yen performs circus skills, she ‘picks up the umbrella and vanity, and steps onto the slackrope’ and addresses the audience with a ‘refined English accent’, saying: ‘I said goodbye to my mother and little brother at the docks in Guangzhou – Canton, and with my father, headed for London and the British Music Halls’ (58). While the screen projects ‘Lipstick Mouths, Grinning Faces’, Yen acts ‘a rather bawdy dance routine, thrusting out her breasts and flirtatiously flashing her ankles’ (57). Married to an English man and mother of two, the dancer expresses her pride at giving birth to non-Oriental Children – she was ‘so very proud’ of her sons (59) – as this testifies to the fact that her ‘Oriental’ body is meant only to attract and provide sexual joy and incapable of giving birth to ‘Oriental’ children.

In Orientalism, Edward Said observes that for Western writers ‘the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise […], untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies, [it] is something on which one could speculate’. This image is explored in Yen’s portrayal of the Chinese dancer, ‘The Other Anna Yen’, whom Yen heard from an English woman who had been ‘studying the British Music Halls of 100 years ago’ (58). By basing her knowledge of this Chinese female on the scholarship about the British Music Halls, the English woman acts as an ‘Orientalist’. Her relation as an ‘Orientalist’ with the ‘Orient’ female is exterior and makes the Orientalist, in Said’s terms, expresses his views on the Orient assuming ‘some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies’. Yen’s play is then an expression of her resolve to have her foremother’s stories performed on stage live rather than stereotyped and their voices evoked by a female family member rather than mediated decades later by another person, as is the case in this story of the Chinese dancer. This, however, does not present Yen as agreeing with Spivak; such an assumption is negated when it comes to the question of the performing body which the latter regards inadequate for the transaction between a sender and a recipient.

In addition to telling stories of her female relatives, asserting the dialogic aspect of the performing body and resisting the image of the Asian woman as a site of sexual

---

40 Yen, Personal Correspondence, 19 January 2018.
41 Said, p. 188.
42 Ibid., p. 20.
appeal, the play casts light on Yen’s embrace of her cultural hybrid identity. Communication between Yen and her grandmother is expressed in English and Cantonese but Yen’s use of the latter stops after her mother’s death. Commenting on the role of translation in communication, Brian Castro postulates that ‘to translate between languages is a border crossing’ and this is the case, I suggest, with Yen’s use of translation between English and Cantonese.\(^{43}\) Although Yen’s mother only speaks English when she arrives in Australia, she gradually starts using Cantonese, too, to relate stories to Yen and to write letters to her sister. However, no Cantonese is ever used in the play after her death. In other words, with her death, English becomes the sole language employed in the play, which then signifies an accomplished ‘border crossing’ where Yen fully embraces the Australian part of her identity. Commenting on the significance of a ‘poetics of space’ for contemporary Australian drama, Tompkins posits that ‘corporeality, language or action’ work as a setting to ‘map a space for women in Australia, literally and metaphorically.’\(^{44}\) For Yen’s female characters, mapping spaces is achieved by moving from the grandmother’s story to the mother’s and ending with Yen’s own story which coincides with her grandmother’s journey from China to Hong Kong and her mother’s from Hong Kong to Australia. By employing polycharacterisation, Yen manages to map those matrilineal spaces on stage literally and corporeally.

Having related her foremothers’ stories, Yen ends with her own story, predicted on an ‘inner conflict’ between her two fragmentary personalities, the warrior woman she intends to be and the child crying for the death of her mother. This representation of an individual character as fragmented and incorporating more than one identity is yet another example, I argue, of how the play challenges stereotyping of Asian women. It is a dramatisation of personal growth where the crying child rises as a warrior woman. This is further demonstrated on stage when she removes her mother’s ring from her finger and ‘begins to swing on the slackrope’ (70). Swinging on the slackrope, I suggest, is an indication of her personal growth and a decision to live life freely rather than a celebration, Maufort claims, ‘of Anna’s “in-betweeness”’.\(^{45}\) Through her decision to live


\(^{45}\) Maufort, p. 136.
freely and her refusal to put on the ring, Yen appears as a warrior woman who is on a mission rather than returning home to husband and child like the swordwoman in Kingston’s novel. Yen’s embrace of her Chinese roots is evident in the stories she relates, her employment of the warrior woman character and the reference to the silk industry in her grandmother’s region. This is depicted on stage when the ‘long bolt of blue silk tumbles out of the door to become the River of Silk’ colouring the Australian stage with a Chinese landscape (40). Yen’s monodrama, accordingly, becomes her means to perform her stories and those of her female relatives on stage and share them with the wider strata of the Australian audience that comprises Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. She explains where she is from and states what her locality is. Her stories begin in Hong Kong and end in Sydney, and as the language becomes solely English, as stated above, her embrace of the Australian part of her identity is celebrated in the same way as her embrace of the Chinese one.

In *Chinese Take Away*, Yen opens up her narrative to include the stories of her mother and grandmother, conveying the collective memory of one family. In so doing, she depicts the influence of diasporas in constructing identities forged from multiple histories. By acting the roles of her family members, she retrieves their voices and foregrounds the primacy of the performer’s body as a prime site of resistance to dominant stereotypes of the Asian woman as well as patriarchy and male violence in both Australia and Hong Kong. Another instance of resistance is evident in the story of ‘The Other Anna Yen’ where Yen critiques the perception of the ‘Oriental’ female as submissive and a site of sexual attraction. The use of characters sharing the same family name ‘Yen’ is another way of subverting stereotypes and confining the Asian and ‘Orient’ female within one fixed image and locality. While portraying Yen’s espousal of her Chinese heritage, the play demonstrates her personal growth as an Australian playwright and performer who enriches the Australian repertoire with new stories and techniques. Further, by incorporating storytelling, circus skills, languages and (hi)stories on the Australian stage, Yen, like other playwrights from migrant backgrounds, demonstrates the diversity of cultural practices on Australia’s national stage.
Chapter Three: Excavating Another Woman’s History in Donna Abela’s *Jump for Jordan*

In *Jump for Jordan* (2014), Donna Abela depicts the story of a woman with whom she shares experiences of diaspora and displacement. The play explores the attitudes of second-generation Australians of a migrant background who live with fragments of family history, culture and tradition. I read the play’s multilayered narratives and intersecting timelines as theatrical devices to highlight the protagonist’s attempts to trace family history. Through a cast of characters who are mainly from Middle East backgrounds, Abela critiques their representation in mass media as violent and dangerous and conveys a commitment to portray the diversity of cultures which, during the last two decades, becomes underrepresented in Australian theatres. Moreover, through a cast of female characters of migrant and Anglo-Australian backgrounds, I argue that Abela presents a third wave feminist play in which she resists assumptions that generalise women’s experiences and gloss over the diversity of their backgrounds.

Donna Abela is a founding member of Fairfield Powerhouse Youth Theatre in 1987 in Fairfield, a suburb in western Sydney, and the 7-On Playwrights’ group with six other Australian playwrights. She studied at the NIDA Playwright’s Studio and the University of Technology in Sydney. She received her MA from the University of New South Wales and her PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Wollongong in 2016 for her thesis ‘Dialogic Interplay: a Strategy for Representing Difference and Cultural Diversity on Stage and *Jump for Jordan*, a Play’. She has written over thirty adapted and original stage and radio plays in which she explores cross-cultural narratives and opens space for ‘people and stories overlooked by the dominant culture’. An instance of this is her latest play, *Jump for Jordan*, that won the 2013 Griffin Playwriting prize and the 2015 Australian Writers’ Guild AWGIE. This play premiered at the SWB Stables Theatre in Kings Cross in Sydney by the Griffin Company on 13 February 2014. The development of *Jump for Jordan* was supported by various bodies such as ‘Playwriting Australia, the University of Wollongong and the Department of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney’. Abela notes that without ‘the support of the Griffin board and community, and the calculated risk they were prepared to take, one may wonder whether *Jump for

---

Jordan would have found mainstream favour or been able to reach its intended audience’.567

Jump for Jordan is sparked by the real story of one of Abela’s friends in western Sydney who is of a Palestinian-Jordanian background. In addition to portraying that friend’s story, the play casts light on Abela’s:

I also drew upon my personal and social experience. My cultural background is not homogenous nor cohesive. I was born in Australia to an Australian mother of Irish descent, and a Maltese father whose family had migrated to Australia to escape Malta’s post-war devastation and mass unemployment. My hybrid cultural background, oblique exposure to the Maltese language and culture, and my upbringing in a middle-class suburb in western Sydney settled by numerous migrant groups, had predisposed me to themes concerned with diaspora and displacement, and no doubt explains the affinity I felt with my Palestinian-Jordanian friend and my instant imaginative engagement with her plight.568

Moreover, both the playwright and the play’s protagonist, Sophie, share a willingness to visit the home of origin; Sophie, in the play, wants to go to Jordan to see Petra after finishing her studies and Abela hopes to visit Malta after finishing her PhD thesis.569 Similar to her friend and Sophie, Abela ‘grew up with a divide, without the full story’ since she has only ‘scattered facts’ about Malta, her father’s homeland, and ‘fragments of [his] family history’.570 Indeed, Abela asserts that she cannot claim to be Maltese ‘because I was not born there and the tradition and language were not passed on.’571 Accordingly, she has not yet written a play about Malta and this is why she hopes to visit Malta and return with a play.572

Although she has never been to Malta, Abela does not regard it as an alien land: ‘I suspect that once I’m on land, there will be some gestures.’573 This finds resonance in the play where Sophie tells her girlfriend Sam: ‘If I could walk on the land mum and dad

568 Ibid., p. 95.
569 Dona Abela, Personal Interview, 21 December 2016.
571 Abela, Personal Interview.
572 Ibid.
573 Ibid.
came from, I might discover deeper connections.' Moreover, Abela has cousins in Malta and thus she asserts ‘I will not be a stranger’ simply because there are ‘some doors [which] I can open.’ Talking about her father, Abela notes that he ‘pushed away his Maltese identity […] because he is a wog so his strategy for survival is to lose his accent and not to use the language to [assimilate] as quick as possible.’ The same strategy is portrayed in the play when Sahir, Sophie’s father, decides to speak English even at home and refuses to teach Arabic to his two daughters who grow up ignorant of their parents’ cultural heritage. Even the reference to war trauma in the play echoes Abela’s family experience; Abela’s father, she notes, was born in a cave during a period of bombardment in Malta during World War II and so ‘fear and terror was part of the family daily life.’ Another instance of drawing on family experiences is the murder of Layla, Sahir’s sister, which Abela added to her friend’s story to represent her brother’s death at an early age. In so doing, the play becomes a means to reflect on both persons’ family history and fill its voids. This is metaphorically demonstrated on stage through the ‘disturbed archaeological site’ Abela chooses as a setting for this play where narratives of present, imagination and fictive past intersect (2). As well as being Sophie’s future job, archaeology becomes a theatrical metaphor where Sophie, the student of archaeology, excavates her family’s history and, in the process, defines her identity. Ultimately, I argue that Abela turns her play into, quoting Toni Morrison’s term, a ‘literary archeology’ where both playwright and protagonist search for remains of their family history and try to ‘reconstruct the world that these remains imply.’

In addition to portraying a friend’s story and reflecting on key autobiographical elements, the play demonstrates a commitment to depict the diversity of cultures and resist stereotyping in Australian main theatres:

I wanted to undertake this project because culturally diverse characters had become remarkably absent from main stage, and I wanted to make a diversity

---

574 Dona Abela, Jump for Jordan – Final Draft – 2014, p. 18. All further references to the play are from this edition and will be marked in parentheses in the text. It is important to draw the reader’s attention that my reading of the play is based on this final draft which was performed on stage in 2014 not on the rehearsal draft which was published by Currency Press, Sydney.

575 Abela, Personal Interview.

576 Ibid.

577 Ibid.


579 Morrison, p. 192.
impact upon the Australian theatre repertoire. More specifically, however, I wanted to respond to the racism that had been directed towards Arab-speaking or Middle Eastern people […]. The times called for a play about Arab-speaking or Middle Eastern characters which challenged the notion that they were the enemy within, the reason Australian[s] needed to live on high alert, and which critiqued the attendant moral panic. To this end, I decided to write a play for general or predominantly white audiences which examined the fear of the ‘mad Arab’ stereotype, but from the perspective of a young woman from an Arabic-speaking background.\(^{580}\)

Abela’s commitment to addressing the diversity of cultures in Australia did not start with this play but years before. It coincided with the heyday of the policy of multiculturalism when Abela co-founded Powerhouse Youth Theatre (PYT) in western Sydney in 1987. When the support for multicultural projects, especially in the arts sector, reduced during Howard’s Government (1996-2007), Abela responded with plays that ‘explored cultural negotiation and clash [and] created space for a female subjectivity and people under-represented in society.’\(^{581}\) Notable examples are Spirit (2007) and Aurora’s Lament (2010) which engage with experiences of migrants and asylum seekers.

In resisting the stereotyping of marginalised groups in Australia, especially those from Middle Eastern or Arab-speaking backgrounds, Abela displays a different procedure from that implemented in other plays such as Futcher and Howard’s A Beautiful Life (2000) which I tackle in Part Two of this study. Instead of a direct engagement with this issue through dramatising the attitudes of Australian officials or Anglo Australians towards migrants or refugees, Abela implicates Sophie, a young woman from a Palestinian-Jordanian background, in this process. Fear generated by ‘the “made Arab” stereotype’, as Abela puts it above, is demonstrated on stage from Sophie’s perspective when she imagines her aunt arriving in Sydney as an ‘Avenging Azza’ equipped with arms to punish her for leaving the family home and engaging in a lesbian relationship. In addition to scenes taking place in Sophie’s imagination such as this one, Abela juxtaposes past and present timelines. In these multilayered narratives, Abela makes the boundaries between scenes porous and events ‘collapse in on each other’ (2) to provide Sophie with the opportunity to excavate her family’s history, piece together fragments of memories and come to terms with her cultural background. When the play was first produced by Griffin Theatre Company, there was a huge mound of sand spilling from the window over the kitchen table uniting the Jordanian sand with the Australian and subverting, thereby,\(^{580}\) Abela, ‘Dialogic Interplay’, pp. 93-94.\(^{581}\) Ibid., p. 94.
any attempt to forget the past or ignore it. This setting remains the same throughout the play to represent, Irina Duann claims, ‘the overwhelming pressure of memories and family history rooted in Jordan.’

The mounting pressures of the past are evident in the play through the opposing attitudes Sahir and Mara have regarding their migration to Australia. In the play’s fictive past, Mara was disappointed when she joined her husband, Sahir. She saw in Campbelltown, where their house is situated, a town whose standard of living is inferior to that of Amman in Jordan. Later, their divergence is most pronounced when they no longer speak one language:

Young Mara: Speak Arabic to me!
Young Sahir: I can’t. It cuts my tongue. I choke on the blood. It digs up the dead.

English is our home now, our future. (25) [21]

Sahir’s rejection of the past and abandoning of his Arabic culture finds resonance not only in the language he speaks but also the names he chose for his two daughters. The reason for this is that Like Sophia Loren, Sahir sees himself as a survivor of war who wants to start anew. While the past for Mara is the family home in Jordan’s capital, the past for Sahir means memories of displacement from the family home in Palestine and the loss of his sister, Layla. In this sense, speaking Arabic means digging up all those memories. Digging up the past is a job left for Sophie, the archaeologist, who appears in some scenes in the play digging in other cultures’ sites and assessing their artefacts until the end of the play where her aunt, Azza, fills the voids in her family history and hands her a valuable cultural artefact, the key of her grandparents’ house.

Mara’s clinging to the past and the home left behind has a negative impact on the way she brings up her daughters. Her attempts to make them comply with her rigid notions of gender roles as a woman from a Jordanian background force Sophie to perceive all Arab women as having the same conservative views. Once her daughters grow up, however, Mara’s grip wanes. When the play opens, we see Mara accusing Sophie of bringing shame upon the whole family by leaving the family home before marriage. This incident incurs her mother’s wrath because it breaks with her Middle Eastern tradition. This, however, is not the only incident that worries Mara; her second daughter, Loren, is

---

about to marry and her sister, Aunt Azza, is coming from Jordan to attend the wedding. Mara is afraid that Azza will find out about Sophie’s sexuality and that she no longer lives in the family house. Thus, after three years of disowning Sophie, Mara asks her to come home to be measured for a dress as one of Loren’s bridesmaids. When Sophie tells her mother that leaving home before marriage is an ordinary thing done by almost all young Australians, Mara turns the trajectory of discussion into another direction saying: ‘In Jordan, the law would let us tie you up and drop you down a well’ (11). Indeed, it echoes a previous warning when Sophie blames her mother for not responding to Aunt Azza’s letters and postcards and Mara threatens her: ‘Sophie. In Jordan, you could have been killed. Had your ears cut for not listening’ (5).

Compared to Loren who, almost until the end, prefers to stay in her mother’s nest and yield to her patriarchal hegemony, Sophie is a rebel. In one of the scenes taking place in the past timeline, Student Sophie tells Student Sam ‘I’m always in the wrong because I don’t prop up the patriarchy in the ways she wants me’ (26). For Mara, Sophie is an ‘odd’ daughter whom she finds difficult to tolerate. This is metaphorically portrayed when Sophie comes to be measured as one of her sister’s five bridesmaids. Mara tells Sophie that she has ‘an odd shape’ that she might not ‘have enough fabric’ to fix (11). Exploring relationships between mothers and daughters through reference to dressmaking is not a new theme in Australian drama. In contrast to Suzanne Spunner’s Running Up a Dress where the daughter admits the role her mother, the dressmaker, plays in shaping not only her dress but also her identity and behaviour: ‘My mother made me what I am’, Abela’s play, in this scene, conveys the futility of the mother’s trials. Indeed, in critiquing Sophie’s ‘odd’ behaviour, Mara goes beyond comparing Sophie with Loren to telling her that she lacks the qualities other young women, such as Loren’s fiancé’s sisters, have: ‘Vince’s sisters, all beautiful, all the same size. But you, look at you. Thick legs, long waist, no bust.’ (7). In addition to being literally a different shape to other Australians, Sophie’s shape, as her mother perceives her, is not good enough to be a ‘proper’ Arabic daughter either. Indeed, Sophie’s decision to leave the family home and her romantic and

cohabiting relationship with Sam, a young woman from a Scottish-Irish background, challenge assumptions around women’s roles and identities which Mara imposes on her.

Although the play critiques both parents’ attitude regarding the issue of passing on their cultural tradition, Mara is the main target. In sharp contrast to the forward-looking and assimilating attitude Sahir follows, Mara torments her daughters, McCallum posits, ‘by the oppressive weight of cultural tradition’ which backfires on her when Sophie stereotypes her aunt as a violent and ‘avenging’ relative.\(^5\)\(^8\)\(^4\) Abela asserts that in writing Jump for Jordan she intends to do the following:

I would oppose the categorisations promulgated by the dominant cultural paradigm, and perpetuated by monologic and monocultural forms of representation; I would disturb the processes which institutionalise Anglo-realism and the ‘inevitability’ of ‘white-centric theatre’, and I would activate […] an imaginative engagement with the other which sees the Other not as a threat but as not-yet-known.\(^5\)\(^8\)\(^5\)

Through Sophie’s stereotyping of Aunt Azza before meeting her, the play parodies the stereotyping of migrants in Australian mainstage theatres. I read the play’s depiction of Aunt Azza as a theatrical device to critique the stereotyping of people from Middle Eastern countries as ‘violent’ and ‘criminal’ regardless of their gender, cultural background and religion.\(^5\)\(^8\)\(^6\) Mara plays a significant role in initiating such a negative image of her sister through her continuous reference to Azza’s ‘disciplinary beating’ of a car driver who cut her way in Amman 15 years before. It is this memory coupled with Mara’s references to a very conservative way of bringing up girls in Jordan and Mara’s fear that Azza might know about Sophie’s sexuality and her departure from the family home before marriage which make Sophie describe her aunt to Sam as a woman who is ‘stuck in the dark ages’ (6). If Sophie perceives her aunt as living in this era, she will presumably do the same with the people in Jordan, especially women. In this sense, according to Rima Sabina Aouf’s claim, Mara conveys how ‘the conservatism of diaspora’ and ‘the psychology and sociology of the migrant experience’ might force


\(^{585}\) Abela, ‘Dialogic Interplay’, p. 133.

\(^{586}\) Sophie’s family, as indicated in the play, are Christians.
others, such as Sophie, to construct ‘a make-believe version of their homeland’.

At first, Sophie intends to flee from meeting Azza. When she meets her later, she notices that her mother’s conservative views of the Jordanian culture and tradition are no longer valid. She tells Sam that Azza ‘didn’t see [in me] the tantrum-throwing addicted bad person that mum probably said I was … She could see that I’m actually really humble and quiet’ (21). Accordingly, Azza’s visit seems necessary to oppose Mara’s version of Jordan and its culture and tradition, and rectify Sophie’s assumptions. As this is demonstrated on stage, it is meant to oppose and rectify similar assumptions represented in Australian theatre.

In addition to making female characters take centre stage, Abela ‘[overlaps] female, Arabic and lesbian identities’ to ‘[disrupt] the paradigm which traditionally placed the Anglo-white-masculine subject at the centre of Australian theatre’. Through the character of Azza, the university teacher, she resists ‘the Western perception that Middle Eastern women are universally uneducated and oppressed.’ Moreover, through her comparison of the two sisters, Mara and Azza, Abela critiques the generalisation of women’s experiences by depicting differences between women from the same cultural background. In this sense, Abela presents a feminist play that echoes the aims of third-wave feminism. June Hannam describes feminism as:

a set of ideas that recognize in an explicit way that women are subordinate to men and seek to address imbalances of power between the sexes. Central to feminism is the view that women’s condition is socially constructed, and therefore open to change. At its heart is the belief that women’s voices should be heard – that they should represent themselves, put forward their own view of the world and achieve autonomy in their lives.

Abela’s play goes beyond the exploration of ‘the imbalances of power between sexes’ to explore the diversity of women’s experiences. R. Claire Snyder enlists three main aims for the third wavers: ‘foreground[ing] personal narratives that illustrate an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism’, ‘embrac[ing] multivocality over synthesis and action over theoretical justification’, and emphasising a ‘more inclusive and racially

---

588 Abela, ‘Dialogic Interplay’, p. 133.
589 Ibid.
diverse’ approach.® Considering Abela’s portrayal of diverse women’s stories, I read Jump for Jordan as a third-wave feminist play. Further, the play conveys an interplay between feminism and postcolonial discourse since ‘both patriarchy and imperialism’, Ashcroft et al point out, ‘can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate.’®

Abela’s play, as stated above, is a third wave feminist play that critiques the assumptions that women share common characteristics and life experiences. Such claims, Alison Stone asserts, ‘are always false, and function oppressively to normalise particular – socially and culturally privileged – forms of feminine experience.’® In addition to making such ‘false’ assumptions, Western feminism is accused of ‘making generalisations’, Reina Lewis and Sara Mills note, ‘about “third-world” women, assuming a homogeneity amongst very diverse groups of women’.® Reflecting on this notion of the diversity of experiences, Ang compares feminism to the policy of multiculturalism because the latter ‘does not absorb difference within a pre-given and predefined space [like assimilation] but leaves room for ambivalence and ambiguity.’® Ang appears to echo Chandra Talpade Mohanty who does not regard difference in women’s experiences as ‘merely acknowledging difference’ but as ‘a cultural sphere’ which provides spaces for ‘conflict’ and ‘struggle’.® I argue that through Sam’s voice in the play, Abela depicts how Western feminism conflates women’s experiences regardless of their locality and perceives gender as overriding differences and cultural backgrounds. An example of this is when Sam seems amazed to see Sophie unwilling to tell her aunt Azza about their lesbian relationship, saying: ‘I love you, wouldn’t your family be thrilled to know that’ (31)? Moreover, she does not understand why Sophie clings to a family who disowns her and even implies that such a family is not ‘worth

---

having’ (31). Sam is not aware that living in a Western country does not make her and Sophie similar and does not homogenise their beliefs and attitudes. In this sense, she appears as one of the white feminists critiqued by Gloria Anzaldua because they had a specific notion of feminism and ‘wanted to apply [it] […] across all cultures’.

Where Sophie asserts her affinity with her family and its history of ‘war, occupation and poverty’ (31) Sam does not mind lacking such sense of family relationships: ‘I have a mother-in-law I haven’t met, a sister-in-law whose wedding I wasn’t invited to, an aunt-in-law who don’t even know that I exist!’ (32) She tells Sophie that they can live their lives without their parents and reminds Sophie of the fact that she is living in a Western state, saying: ‘[y]ou don’t live in Jordan’ (31). In addition to suggesting that Sophie’s clinging to her family and cultural background does not suit her status as a young woman living in the West, Sam ‘devise[s] a plan’ to help her survive the meeting with Azza and listens to a ‘rehearsal’ to which she expects Sophie will ‘stick’ (12). In so doing, I argue that Sam’s attitude illustrates a Western discourse which perceives ‘the Third World woman’, Denise deCaires Narain posits, as ‘victimised by (traditional) patriarchal cultures and in need of rescue by Western feminism.’

In addition to asserting the diversity of women’s experiences among women of Western and Third World or Middle Eastern backgrounds such as Sam and Sophie, who differ in their cultural backgrounds, the play draws attention to such diversity and difference among women from the same cultural background. McLeod regards categorising feminism according to ‘First World’ and ‘Third World’ feminism as an ‘unhappy generalisation which glosses over the variety of feminisms’ and ‘conflates the[ir] experiences and representations’ not only among women in general but also among those of each category. I argue that Abela foregrounds this issue, as stated earlier, through her depiction of the two sisters, Mara and Azza. Further, through the character of Sophie, Abela explores the influence of Western feminism on second-generation Australians from migrant backgrounds who appear implicated in the process of generalising women’s experiences; when Aunt Azza waxes her and Loren as a preparation for the latter’s marriage, Sophie comments on this saying: ‘The way the

599 McLeod, p. 200.
Arabic women care for each other’s bodies and get naked together [...] [is] a liberating thing to have, and yet they’re not so liberated in their mindset.’ (44) Azza’s visit, thus, enables Sophie to notice the fallacy of generalising women’s experiences and basing her perception of Jordanian women, or Arabic women in general, on her mother’s conservative attitudes and notions.

*Jump for Jordan* demonstrates Abela’s commitment to addressing cultural diversity in Australia and the hardships faced by migrants and their children. It is a task which she and others undertake, Abela states, ‘to represent their own lives and communities’ and oppose ‘the hegemonic hold on history and national narratives.’ Abela is cognizant of the limitations of telling or writing others’ stories, but limiting this task to writers from the same group or community means, Abela maintains, ‘severely restrict[ing] writers to their literal milieu, and render[ing] the representation of composite narratives and multicultural communities impossible.’ If a story or narrative belongs to its protagonist, her Arabic-Australian friend, Abela asserts, ‘had gifted it to me almost without condition’ other than not using the real names of its people. Unlike her friend, Abela is not from an Arab-speaking community, but she is ‘a fellow second-generation Australian’ from the same western Sydney community and the same ‘friendship network’, and, consequently, privileged, Abela claims, ‘to reuse and transform the story’ and ‘fuse it with [her] own family history’.

Writing or using another’s story is often required, Lauren Marino posits, when a group or a community needs a person ‘who comes from the oppressed but has knowledge of the language game of the centre.’ If the oppressed might mean the minority or those on the margin, Abela can easily be seen as such a person who is endowed with the ability to speak and write the language of the centre. Moreover, since both Abela and her friend are from a migrant background, there are no concerns of inscribing what Linda Alcoff call ‘hierarchy of civilizations’ when an ‘empowered’ person from First World writes about or speaks for a ‘disempowered’ one from the Third. Furthermore, when the script

---

600 Abela, ‘Dialogic Interplay’, p. 103.
601 Ibid.
602 Ibid., p. 105.
603 Ibid.
reached the Griffin Theatre Company, Abela’s concerns of cultural appropriation were reduced since the whole group, from director to cast, has a similar story to that of her Arabic friend and hers; they are all from a migrant background with the majority from Arab-speaking countries. Reflecting on this, Lain Sinclair, the director of the play, purports that the journey Sophie intends to make is ‘a common journey for many new Australians’ and regards the Jordan that Sophie is jumping for as ‘the Malta of Donna’s own family immigrant experience, or, for that matter, the Syria of Sheridan’s, the Lebanon of Alice, Sal, Camilla and Doris, the Scotland of Anna’s or the Uganda/England of my own.’ Sinclair’s notion of a cast sharing one journey or life experience resonates with that of Ryan Claycomb who believes that the ‘subjectivity’ of the person whose story the play relates and that of the playwright are ‘fragmented by the presence of other contributors to the dramatic process’ such as ‘the director, dramaturge, actress’ and any other contributor who participate in the dramatic work to bring that subject on stage.

Sinclair’s reference to the diversity of cultures in the cast of the play whose journeys to Australia are the same as ‘many new Australians’ includes even Anna Houston who is from a Scottish background and, consequently, as Dianna Simmonds points out, ‘the only non-wog’ character in this ‘classic wog play.’ Indeed, Sinclair’s ideas are echoed in Sam’s words when she tells Sophie that her ‘Irish-Scottish Aussie’ parents came to Australia as ‘potato famine refugees’ (33). Moreover, she tells Sophie that they share their subject of study, interest in visiting Petra, and having ‘dads [who] both crossed deserts’ (34). Prompted by Sam’s words, Sophie replies: ‘[i]magine if they’d met. They might’ve found something in common’ (34). However, instead of such a meeting between the two fathers, a meeting happens between Sophie’s father, Sahir, and her friend Sam. This scene, which takes place in Sophie’s imagination, is set at a roadhouse where we see Sam giving kebab to Sahir and telling him that ‘[t]he cook’s granddad was Turkish’ (53). When Sahir asks about the name of the place, Sam responds that it is called Maree but people like to call it ‘Little Afghanistan […] because cameleers

606 Lain Sinclair, ‘Director’s Note’, in Jump for Jordan, p.71. It is necessary to draw attention that the names Sinclair mentions are the names of the cast who played the characters of the play: Sheridan Harbridge (Loren), Alice Ansara (Sophie), Sal Sharah (Sahir), Camilla Ah Kin (Azza), Doris Younane (Mara) and Anne Houston (Samantha).
crossing the desert would stop here to rest … until trucks made them redundant’ (53). This meeting between Sahir and Sam and the reference to people from diverse cultures make the roadhouse an inclusive site where all people are welcomed regardless of their cultural background. Moreover, this place, which can be called Maree and Little Afghanistan at the same time, becomes a text where all narratives, regardless of who are their protagonists, are inscribed and preserved. In the history of the colony, Gilbert and Tompkins posit, ‘any events prior to contact with Europeans were irrelevant to the official record which became the history, a closed narrative designed to remove traces of alternative histories.’ In addition to asserting the presence of people from other cultures, such as the Afghans, whose presence or arrival in Australia predated or coincided with white settlement, setting the above scene at a roadhouse where Australians from different cultural backgrounds meet and share food and stories highlights how all Australians are travellers.

Scenes set in the past or in Sophie’s imagination, such as those depicting Sophie’s meetings with her father and those featuring her father and mother evidence her continuous digging for an identity and family history. Her attempt, however, requires a living family member who knows this history and Aunt Azza, the university teacher, becomes that person who guides her excavation. In contrast to Mara, Aunt Azza enables Sophie to see herself as ‘a good Arabic girl’ even though she ‘doesn’t live at home’ (21). She is depicted as a person who is willing to learn about others’ cultures as well as interested in artefacts, their value and even their classification into eras (23). Using simple English words, Aunt Azza does her best to communicate directly with Sophie to fill her cultural vacuum with factual information. She tells Sophie the story of her aunt Layla who was killed in Jenin Camp in the West Bank while teaching Palestinian children. Then, she tells Sophie about her grandparents who were displaced from their house in Palestine after the Nakba, the catastrophe, in 1948. She culminates her cultural lesson in giving Sophie, the family’s heiress, a precious family artefact, the key of her grandparents’ house, which Sophie, later, hangs on the wall of her room. Sophie’s response to this cultural enrichment is demonstrated on stage by taking the key and ‘thank[ing] Azza by kissing her on both cheeks according to Jordanian custom’ (60). In this sense, Azza is depicted, Glenn Saunders notes, as ‘a catalyst for change and for

---

609 Gilbert and Tompkins, p. 106.
Azza ends the process of bringing Sophie to terms with her cultural heritage by offering to sponsor her trip to Jordan, which Sophie welcomes by beginning to learn Arabic. Interestingly, the first Arabic words she begins to learn are: ‘ahlan wa sahlan … marhaba’ (65), which mean ‘welcome’ and ‘hello’ or ‘greetings’, expressions of Arabic hospitality that symbolise her espousal of her cultural heritage.

In *Jump for Jordan*, Abela presents a third wave feminist play that critiques the generalisation of women’s experiences and the homogenising of their goals and perceptions. She explores the impact of parents’ diasporic experiences on their children which influences, as is the case with Sophie, their espousal of their cultural background. With its cast of female characters from Arab-speaking backgrounds, the play resists preconceived notions of Arab women as uneducated and oppressed. Moreover, by juxtaposing past and present scenes, Abela not only disturbs the linear trajectory of her narrative but opens spaces where narratives of other cultures are told and inscribed. Finally, through the scene at a roadhouse, Abela depicts Australian characters from both migrant and settler backgrounds as travellers who share not only food and stories but also the space where they tread or reside.

---

Conclusion

Although Janis Balodis’ *No Going Back*, Anna Yen’s *Chinese Take Away* and Donna Abela’s *Jump for Jordan* vary in their setting, characters and portrayal of diasporic experiences, they effectively depict the impact of parents’ migration history on their descendants. They dramatise the playwrights’ attempts to revisit the broken images or the scattered remains of a past set elsewhere and fuse them with a present taking place in a different place and time. As delineated in the three plays, attempts to unravel the code of identity and belonging are initiated by the parents. However, their impact oppresses their children because they either feel that the constituting parts of identity are in split and ‘drifting further and further apart’, as is the case with Armand in Balodis’ play, or are in a state of an ‘inner conflict’ where Yen, the ‘crying child’ in *Chinese Take Away*, has to witness and experience the suffering and slavery of her foremothers before being transformed into a warrior woman, or have to engage in a process of dramatic archaeology, as in *Jump for Jordan*, where Sophie, through scenes set in the past, the present and her imagination, excavates the huge mound of sand overwhelming the stage of the play searching for artefacts of her family history to fuse with those of the present.

The employment of intersecting timelines and narratives and the doubling of characters is evident in the three plays and I read it as theatrical technique which subverts the fixity of identity. Instances of this are the Latvian migrant characters who play the roles of Leichhardt and his group in Balodis’ play, the ‘Other Anna Yen’ in Yen’s play and the ‘Avenging Azza’ in Abela’s. However, in Yen’s and Abela’s plays, this device is also employed to critique the stereotyping of the cultural other on Australian stages. In addition to depicting the fluidity of identity, the three plays, through references to the home of origin and stories of the past, assert that identities have histories and, consequently, cannot be confined in one specific locality. References to the home of origin are not only indicated through the stories parents relate but also delineated on stage through having a character as a visitor from that homeland to interrogate their affinity with it and trigger their quest for identity. In Balodis’ *No Going Back*, Lauma becomes a constant reminder of the past which the Latvian migrant characters cannot relinquish no matter how different it appears from the one they know. Moreover, through encouraging Armand to speak Latvian, she enables him to recognise that his identity is forged of both Latvian and Australian components. The same happens in Abela’s play when Aunt Azza fills the vacuums in Sophie’s memory of her family history and provides her with the key
to her Jordanian-Palestinian culture and tradition. It is portrayed in *Chinese Take Away* through Ming’s short visit which intensifies Yen’s mother feelings of loss and alienation. Through these diverse narratives and characters, diasporic drama not only portrays the diversity of cultures the Australia population has come to have and the diversity of their narratives but also effectively conveys that the Australian cultural landscape extends beyond its geographical one. Further, it demonstrates how the Australian identity, like that of its inhabitants, is not fixed or homogenous. These plays are examples of cultural expression which opposes policies that encourage the total integration of Australians from migrant backgrounds. ‘Full integration’, Ang asserts, ‘is an illusion’ because ‘there is always a residue that cannot be assimilated’. 611

To conclude, I argue that that the term ‘diasporic drama’, which I employed to describe the works in this part of my thesis, is more appropriate than the term ‘multicultural drama’ which scholars, including Tompkins, use to refer to the works of Australian writers from non-English-speaking backgrounds and which attributes the emergence of such writing to the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism. Further, I argue that ‘multicultural drama’ is a term which describes Australian writing where cross-cultural relations are negotiated in two types of multicultural theatre, small ‘m’ and Big ‘M’. 612 Such cross-cultural relations are not solely interrogated in the works of Australians from migrant backgrounds but also in the works of settler and Aboriginal writers.

---

611 Ien Ang, Personal Interview, 05 April 2017.
612 Lo and Gilbert, ‘Towards a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis’, p. 34.
Thesis Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis, I draw attention to the existence of two assumptions about Australian identity where the first endorses a unitary idea of this identity while the other asserts that Australian identity is heterogenous and evolving. From 1977 to 2017 governmental reports and statements proclaim that Australians are free to retain and share their cultural heritage and that multiculturalism is a defining element of Australia as a nation of diverse cultures. However, references to Australians from non-English-speaking backgrounds in the 1977 and 1982 reports indicate a major limitation in the policy which makes this category of Australian population appear to deviate from the dominant norm, the Anglo Australians. Moreover, when the ambit of the policy of multiculturalism was broadened in 1989 to include migrants, Anglo and Aboriginal Australians, this was done without achieving a reconciliation with the Aboriginal people in Australia. Further, there is also a recurring assumption that Australians’ expression of their cultural heritage is not infinite but done ‘within carefully defined limits’ as stated in the 1989 report of the policy of multiculturalism, National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, or ‘within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy’ in the 1999 report, Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness. In addition to this, the Howard government’s 2003 report, Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity, reshapes multiculturalism according to a neo-assimilationist trajectory because its vision of ‘multicultural Australia’ has come to mean a nation which is ‘united by a shared future, an overriding commitment to our nation and its democratic institutions and values, and support for the rule of law, with English as a common language.’

In addition to the above, the 2003 report interprets multiculturalism as a pledge of citizenship: ‘[t]he freedom of all Australians to express and share their cultural values is dependent on their abiding by mutual civic obligations […] [which] reflect the unifying values of Australian citizenship’. Among those ‘unifying’ civic obligations are English, the rule of law, and freedom of speech and religion. In this sense, Australians’ right to maintain and share their cultural heritage is modified to signify conformity rather than asserting individuality. Further, notions of conformity reduce the ability of individuals,

613 See pages 6 and 7 in the introduction.
615 Ibid., p. 9.
especially those from non-English-speaking backgrounds, to maintain ties with more than one culture and language within a prevailing dominant culture that is white and English-speaking. Claiming that the policy of multiculturalism aims to achieve unity in diversity gives the impression that its aim is to fossilise cultural differences and identity formation. Such a problem is identified by Jon Stratton and Ien Ang who suggest that ‘[t]he problem with official multiculturalism is that it tends precisely to freeze the fluidity of identity by the very fact that it is concerned with the synthesising of unruly and unpredictable cultural identities and differences into a harmonious unity-in-diversity’.\(^{616}\)

Stratton and Ang’s notion echoes Homi K. Bhabha’s critique of theorising perceptions of equality and cultural diversity in a homogenising frame. Bhabha asserts that cultural diversity ‘gives rise to anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity.’\(^{617}\) Still, he remarks that liberal discourses on multiculturalism which claim that cultures receive ‘equal respect’ forget that cultures are not competing on the same standing in the national imaginary:

> In addressing the multicultural demand, they encounter the limit of their enshrined notion of “equal respect”; and they anxiously acknowledge the attenuation in the authority of the Ideal Observer, an authority that oversees the ethical rights (and insights) of the liberal perspective from the top deck of the Clapham omnibus.\(^{618}\)

In addition to the problem of ‘normalis[ing] cultural respect’, a liberal ‘notion of equality’, Bhabha maintains, ‘contains a nondifferential concept of cultural time’.\(^{619}\) As such, the recognition of cultural diversity in liberal states does not ‘represent the historical genealogies, often postcolonial, that constitute the partial cultures of minorities’. Consequently, the shortcoming of such liberal discourse lies in its perception that cultures, dominant and minor, share a common time and space wherein they can be equalised. Such a premise freezes cultural differences because minor cultures will resist


\(^{618}\) Homi Bhabha, ‘Culture’s in Between’, in Multicultural States: Rethinking Difference and identity, pp. 29-36 (p. 30).

\(^{619}\) Ibid., p. 32.
attempts to contain them, he adds, when the spaces and temporalities of development between the dominant and marginalised cultures remain ‘uneven and unequal’. 620

In this thesis, I have examined the works of eleven Australian playwrights to consider how their plays and the theatrical techniques employed in them enable their playwrights to depict a diversity of narratives and voices. Although this study is limited to nine plays, they cover a wide distance from north to south and from east to west and the settings vary with the topic to include urban, desert and the suburban settings. These works respond to their political contexts, and in particular the shift from the policy of assimilation and white Australia to that of multiculturalism. They effectively convey the fluidity of Australian identity and resist the fixity of policy documents. In so doing, they show how diversity is continually evolving. Further, through the medium of theatre, the eleven playwrights resist mass media narratives and portray alternative representations in which the characters attempt to be in charge of their identity construction. In Part One which addresses Aboriginal drama, Chi’s Bran Nue Dae critiques assimilationism and racism and celebrates Australia’s diversity of cultures through a journey where he takes the audience on a tour from Perth to Broome. In addition to casting light on the acts of injustice inflicted on Aboriginal Australians, the play becomes a journey from a racist territory, Perth, where the Aboriginal, Willie, is expelled, to Broome, a multicultural territory. In Broome, the diversity of cultures is celebrated through songs and dances in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples jointly participate after all stories of injustice are related. Those stories become a process of both sharing histories and identity construction. This discursive process, which is watched by the audience, shows that Australian citizens have various cultural backgrounds, speak more than one language, and have more than one narrative.

The same premise is portrayed in Enoch and Mailman’s The 7 Stages of Grieving where divergent forms of expressions are employed by the two groups, the Aboriginal and white Australians. As in Chi’s play, the issues of land rights, the death of Aboriginal peoples in police custody, the Stolen Generations and the erosion of culture are key issues. Resisting assimilation and identity construction based on unifying values is conveyed in this play through the Woman, an Aboriginal performer, who takes off her dress to avoid the imposition of white culture symbolised by the appearance of English letters on her dress. By relating her stories, the Woman responds to the white coloniser’s order to be

620 Ibid., p. 33.
silent. Storytelling, in this sense, is employed by the two playwrights to recuperate Aboriginal oral tradition and subvert white authority. Further, it becomes a means of upsetting the roles assigned for Aboriginal peoples as minor and submissive participants in the national space. Milroy’s play, *Waltzing the Wilarra*, tackles the same issues and shares the same rejection of assigned roles when Elsa problematises Fay’s narrative that the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their parents is meant to civilise them.

The journey motif is apparent in the above plays where the journey takes place either spatially and temporally, as is the case in *Bran Nue Dae* and *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, or only temporally between past and present timelines as is the case in *Waltzing the Wilarra*. In all three plays, issues of displacement, alienation and belonging are prevalent. In this sense, the three plays, along with Parsons’ *Dead Heart* where similar feelings are experienced by white characters, problematise the notion that these themes are restricted to the works of writers from migrant backgrounds which are often labelled as ‘multicultural’. While the three plays share in resisting the official narrative of *terra nullius* which regards Australia as an uninhabited land predating white settlement, they also end with a call for reconciliation, an aspect of the plays which I read as depicting Australian society closer to a state of fusion than enmity. The failure to achieve reconciliation is, as stated earlier, a major limitation in the policy of multiculturalism and an indicator of Australia’s difficulty coming to terms with its past.

In Part Two of the thesis, which focused on settler drama, I looked at the significance of storytelling and the call for a reconciliation and understanding of cultural differences. In the three plays analysed in this part, settler playwrights portray the cultural diversity of Australian population and critique the inclusion of minority cultures in a way which buttresses their marginalisation. In addition to drawing attention to the issue of reconciliation, Parsons, in *Dead Heart*, opens space for Aboriginal peoples to tell their stories when he begins and ends his play with an Aboriginal character. Further, he shows the influence of the conflict between the two cultures and the two laws, white law and Aboriginal customary law, on both white and Aboriginal Australians. Critiquing the assumption that Australian identity is unitary is accomplished in the play by depicting characters as fluctuating between two cultures. We find Constable Ray, the white policeman, caught between forcing white law or tolerating Aboriginal customary law. Furthermore, the boundaries separating the two groups become blurred, to the extent that he sees himself affiliated with Aboriginal rather than white Australians.
Presenting characters fluctuating between or belonging to two cultures asserts the fluidity of Australian identity, resists unitary assumptions of Australian identity and problematises the fixity of Australian identity which is often presented in the policy reports as conforming with that of the dominant culture. Indeed, conveying the fluidity of identity is a key issue in Part Three in this thesis which shows that a sense of belonging is achieved after the characters combine the two components of their identity. In Balodis’ *No Going Back*, Armand does not regard Australia as his home until he fills the jigsaw of belonging and realises that he is both Latvian and Australian. The same search for identity and belonging is portrayed in Yen’s *Chinese Take Away*, where she covers the Australian stage with a long bolt of Chinese silk, turning it into a Chinese landscape, and populates the theatre with the characters of her relatives whom she plays on stage using a technique of polycharacterisation. Yen’s journey between Australia and Hong Kong parallels that of Armand’s between Australia and England and ends when she recognises herself as Chinese-Australian. Abela’s *Jump for Jordan* traces Sophie’s resolve as a student of archaeology to piece together shards of the past and the present to form her Jordanian-Australian identity. The three characters’ attempts to construct their identity, like those of Hamid and Jhila in *A Beautiful Life*, the Woman in *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, and Elsa and Charlie in *Waltzing the Wilarra*, are done on stage and observed by the audience. In addition to asserting the fluidity of identity, these plays depict these characters in charge of forming their own identities rather than adapting to ready-made ones.

While drawing attention to the importance of these instances of identity construction on stage, the plays analysed in this thesis envisage new national models of multiculturalism as well as a new national identity that is heterogenous and not fixed. By presenting diverse narratives and characters on stage, the plays in this study convey how Australia’s diversity is greater than is suggested in the reports of multiculturalism through its emphasis on ‘unity in diversity’. Further, they reflect how Australians speak diverse languages rather than being restricted to one ‘general’ language. In addition to this, sharing and expressing one’s cultural heritage cannot be, as the policy report asserts, ‘subject to the law’. As depicted in most of the plays in this study, there are no defining limits for one’s expression of cultural heritage. Drawing attention to the relation between the past and cultural identity, Hall asserts that cultural identity has a history which

---

‘belongs to the future as much to the past.’ The past, as conveyed in most of the plays in this thesis, is part of the character’s present and relating it is part of relating the present.

While conveying the diversity of the Australian population, these plays resist perceiving cultural minorities as monolithic groups. To accomplish this, the playwrights adopt various dramatic techniques that help them portray the diversity within each cultural group. Enoch, for instance, states the importance of telling various stories to depict the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their narratives. While his and Mailman’s play employs the technique of storytelling, Chi’s turns his play into a musical where he adapts a European popular form to portray an Aboriginal tradition of songs and dances. A similar emphasis on diversity is apparent in Part Two where settler playwrights draw attention to Iranian migrants and a Nigerian priest. The plays discussed in Part Three draw attention to the diversity of Australians from migrant backgrounds by including Latvians, Chinese and Jordanian-Palestinian characters and reinforce the notion of multiple or hyphenated identities. By taking the audience on a journey in most of these plays where borders between Australia and other countries or locations such as Iran, Latvia, China and Jordan are crossed, these plays resist not only the fixed identity of the performing body but also confining it in a fixed locality.

My thesis is drama-focused, and I chose this genre for several reasons. Firstly, contemporary Australian drama has not received the critical attention it deserves. Secondly, it is the space where an interplay is achieved between oral and written forms. Thirdly, as plays are written with the aim to have them performed on stage, they open space where ‘an exchange’, according to Enoch’s claim, is made between the performer and the audience. Fourthly, I have chosen drama because as a literary genre it involves the use of various dramatic techniques which playwrights might employ to portray multiculturalism. There is a close relationship between form and content in these plays. Polycharacterisation, for instance, helps to convey hybrid identities and the use of doubling indicates the ambiguity or fluctuation between two cultures. The juxtaposition of past and present timelines invites these plays’ audiences to think about diasporic identities and how they exceed beyond the nation’s geographical national boundaries.

In addition to destabilising notions of a fixed or unitary image of Australian identity, these plays often upset the Self/Other binary separating characters of distinct and

---

623 Enoch, “‘We Want Hope”, pp. 10-11.
diverse cultures. A good example is the white hippy, Slippery, in *Bran Nue Dae*. As a member of the Stolen Generations, Slippery is revealed to be the son of Father Benedictus, a German-Australian, and Theresa, an Aboriginal Australian. In *A Beautiful Life*, the playwrights imply that Brendan, the white Australian lawyer, and Amir, an Iranian Australian, might share an ancestor. In *Waltzing the Wilarra*, Fay, a white Australian, and Elsa, an Aboriginal Australian, are not blood sisters but their love for Mrs Cray, Elsa’s mother, bring them together to the extent that Athena, Fay’s granddaughter, feels happy to have Elsa as a second nanny. Other instances of relations which problematise this binary are Kate and Tony in *Dead Heart*, Jack and Elsa in *Waltzing the Wilarra*, Daniel and Father Ezekiel in *Gwen in Purgatory*, Sophie and Sam in *Jump for Jordan*, and Brown and the Latvian migrant characters in *No Going Back*. Portraying these cross-cultural relations on the dramatic stage paves the way for fostering them on the national stage.

Problematising this Self/Other binary upsets stereotypical or assigned identities and opens up space for developing new identities which are evolving. Accordingly, these plays and the stages where they were and are performed become, I argue, what Bhabha calls the “‘in-between’ spaces’ where these new identities are developed or presented:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond the narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity.624

Performing the fluid identity or the ‘new signs of identity’ on stage is likely to have an impact on members of the audience observing this process on stage. Theatres are able to achieve this for they are ‘the constructor[s]’, Lewis proposes, ‘of future race relations’, a ‘future national identity’ and a ‘multicultural community’.625 In addition to interrupting a unitary image of national identity that aligns with the dominant culture and its norm, the plays in this thesis portray characters who map their (his)stories and cultural heritage on stage without abiding by definite behavioural norms or roles. The more these cultural practices appear on stage, the more they help in reducing stereotyping and opening up space where Australian identity is rendered live and dynamic.

---

624 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 1.
625 Lewis, p. 22.
My study contributes to scholarship on multicultural drama, and Australian multicultural drama in particular, by arguing that multicultural writing is not limited to works by Australian playwrights from migrant backgrounds or those that deal with issues of migration but include works by Australian playwrights from other cultures as well. Building on works by scholars including Tompkins and McCallum which restrict multicultural writing to the works of one category of the Australian population, migrants and their descendants, my analysis extends more widely and beyond to include the works of Aboriginal and settler playwrights and develops a broader cultural understanding and argument. My thesis demonstrates that settler drama and Aboriginal drama are as positively engaged with multiculturalism as migrant drama is. Bearing in mind Verdecchia’s critique of the mainstream perception of multiculturalism and multicultural writing in Canada and Hopton’s thesis about multicultural writing in both Australia and Canada which limits it to works on migration or by playwrights from migrant backgrounds, when beginning work on this project I expected to be more critical of settler drama. As shown in this study, playwrights from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds seem to be investing in this term and negotiating and reenvisaging the concept of multiculturalism. My thesis intervenes in scholarship on multicultural writing by broadening its scope to incorporate the works of writers from the three groups of the Australian population.

Through my exploration of these nine plays, I have discovered that style and generic mode of these plays is very closely related to the subject matter in the sense that the playwrights develop techniques that are very much in tune with what they are saying about multiculturalism. In most of the plays examined in the study, the playwrights borrow theatrical techniques from other cultural traditions to create something new. In his musical, Bran Nue Dae, Chi adapts this European popular genre to portray the inclusive aspect of Aboriginal culture and the role music and songs play in the Aboriginal cultural heritage. Further, he juxtaposes past and present incidents to draws on an Aboriginal world view of the Dreamtime where the past is believed to be part of both present and the future. Storytelling, a dramatic technique which is often employed in Aboriginal drama, as seen in The 7 Stages of Grieving, has been borrowed in both settler and migrant drama. Notable instances are A Beautiful Life and Chinese Take Away. A prime instance of Aboriginal and diasporic playwrights’ adoption of European dramatic techniques is the projection of pictures and script on a screen in The 7 Stages of Grieving and Chinese Take Away. Further, the juxtaposition of past and present timelines in
Balodis’ *No Going Back* can also be identified in Futcher and Howard’s *A Beautiful Life*. These playwrights’ techniques, drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds, reflect their engagement with multiculturalism.

Overall, through my exploration of Australian governments’ reports and statements defining and elaborating the policy of multiculturalism, I have conveyed the impact of the political context on Australia’s literary and (multi)cultural production. The representation of Australia’s cultural diversity in these nine plays varies according to whether they critique what they consider dysfunctional models of inclusion within the national space or present alternative ones. Further, while casting light on conflicts among the three groups of the Australian population in the first part of their plays, the playwrights envisage possible alternatives or ways to work through the tension. In this sense, they tend to present the society closer to a state of fusion than enmity. By problematising the inclusion of minority cultures according to assigned notions of identity where they are supposed to adapt to the ways of the dominant culture and shed their cultural heritage, these plays challenge the official discourse of multiculturalism. Moreover, through their critique of stereotyping of cultural minorities and by upsetting notions of a fixed identity aligning with that of the dominant culture and English-speaking, the plays in this study show, I contend, that resistant postcolonial writing is not solely limited to Aboriginal writing, as scholars including Hodge and Mishra purport, but can include works by white Australians as well as those from migrant backgrounds.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Murphy, Tommy, *Gwen in Purgatory* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2010).


Secondary Sources


---, ‘Playwright’s Note’, in *Jump for Jordan*, p. 70.


Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin, After Multiculturalism (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2000).


Anzaldua, Gloria, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (Boston: South End, 1984).


--- (eds), The Post-Colonial Studies Reader (London: Routledge, 1995).


Batchelor, Don (ed.), ‘An Interview with Anna Yen’, in Three Plays by Asian Australians


---, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995[1994]).


Brouke, Colin, Eleanor Brouke and Bill Edwards (eds), *Aboriginal Australia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2009 [2004]).


Commonwealth of Australia, *A History of the Department of Immigration: Managing
Migration to Australia (Department of Immigration and Border Protection: Belconnen, 2017 [2015]).


Cox, Emma, Performing Noncitizenship: Asylum Seekers in Australian Theatre, Film and Activism (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2015).


Dawson, Carrie, ‘Never Cry Fraud: Remembering Grey Owl, Rethinking Imposture’, Essays on Canadian Writing, 56 (Fall 1998), 120-40 (p. 121).

DeBurger, Steven Michael, ‘Within the city dwelling, there is no room for daydreams: Bachelard’s phenomenology of imagination and the poetics of space’, <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~pesaconf/zpdfs/60deburger.pdf> [Accessed 22 April 15].


Gilbert, Helen and Joanna Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*


Hamilton, Margaret, Transfigured Stages: Major Practitioners and Theatre Aesthetics in Australia (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011).

Hannam, June, Feminism (Pearson: Harlow, 2007).


---, ‘Projecting the Inner World Onto an Existing Landscape: an Interview with Janis Balodis’, *Australasian Drama Studies*, 17 (1990), 5-39.


---, ‘Playing the Yellow Lady: Performing Gender and Race’, in *Siting the Other: Re-visions of Marginality in Australian and English-Canadian Drama*, ed. by Marc Maufort and Franca Belarsi (Bruxelles: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 69-84.


McKay, Hugh, *Reinventing Australia* (North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1993).


210


Sheridan, Susan, *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race, and Nation in Australian Women’s Writing, 1880s-1930s* (St. Leonards, Allen and Unwin, 1995).


Sinclair, Lain, ‘Director’s Note’, in *Jump For Jordan*, p.71.


213


White, Patrick, Voss (Victoria: Penguin, 1974).


