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Reimagining Australia:
reading the nation in literature after 2007

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Abstract

Despite three decades of intensifying conservatism regarding immigration and race in Australia, a new multicultural literature has emerged to challenge the hegemony of settler-colonial subjectivity. These works give voice to migrants and asylum seekers, examine the tensions of multiculturalism, interrogate xenophobic stereotypes, and question the ongoing presence of settlers on Indigenous lands. Abundant criticism in Australia and elsewhere discusses the status of national literatures in the context of globalisation. Vilashini Cooppan has usefully suggested that, "[m]ore than entombing the nation, the present enjoins on us the task of reanimating it" (2009, *xvi*). I argue that the eleven texts analysed here, published between 2007 and 2018, can be seen to do exactly this: they reanimate the idea of the nation in ways that are assertive and provocative, opening space to challenge and resist a dominant discourse based on settler-colonial subjectivity.

My argument proceeds from an understanding of the close relationship between national identity and literature (Anderson 1983; Bhabha 1990). Bill Ashcroft's concept of the "transnation" (2011) provides a useful spatial metaphor for understanding the operation of Australian national identity through literature. The myth of national identity, according to Ashcroft, must "displace the exorbitant proliferation of actual subject positions within the state" (19). It is this proliferation that constitutes the space of the "transnation." This model effectively characterises the continual displacement of non-hegemonic subjectivities by Australian national identity. But it does not offer the same clarity for understanding how writers within this "proliferation" can specifically write back against a "white imaginary" that has been consolidated since the early 1990s (Moreton-Robinson 2004).

In this thesis, I build on Ashcroft's transnation metaphor to more explicitly interrogate how these writers – almost all of them from migrant or refugee backgrounds – "reanimate" and reimagine Australia through their work. I propose to read these works as counter-discursive examples of "state-of-the-nation" texts that interrogate and subvert the dominant discourse of Australian identity through their focus on concepts such as representation, race, class, marginality and migration. I posit that these state-of-the-nation texts – the majority of which have so far received minimal critical attention – can be seen to represent the conditions of contemporary Australia in a way that has not yet been theorised.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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1. Introduction

Despite three decades of intensifying conservatism regarding immigration and race in Australia, a new crop of writers has emerged to challenge the hegemony of white settler-colonial subjectivity. Their works imagine an Australia that includes the voices of migrants and asylum seekers, examine the tensions of multiculturalism, interrogate xenophobic stereotypes, and question the ongoing presence of settlers on Indigenous lands. In this thesis, I read eleven texts published between 2007 and 2018[1] in which these authors reimagine the dominant conception of the Australian nation.

I begin this Introduction by establishing the context of Australia's discourse of settler-colonial subjectivity and the central role of whiteness. I go on to analyse how the nation has been represented in recent Australian literature and outline the scholarly discourse surrounding the idea of the nation itself in the context of transnationalism and globalisation. Next, I turn to an example of an approach to understanding the relationship between the nation-state and the dominant discourse of the nation in literature, Bill Ashcroft's concept of the "transnation" (2011), and outline how my argument builds on it. I suggest that the concept of the "state-of-the-nation" text – a term adapted from British literary theory describing novels that "hold up a mirror" to contemporary society – may be productive, I and explore what it can offer as a tool for understanding how contemporary writers reimagine the nation. I articulate how this thesis offers a reading of these works as counter-discursive texts that interrogate and subvert the dominant discourse of Australian identity through their focus on concepts such as representation, race, class, marginality and migration. Finally, I outline how this argument will be advanced through the four textual analysis chapters to follow.

In taking up the idea of the state-of-the-nation text, I offer a new way of reading contemporary Australian literature. These texts are part of a critical literary multiculturalism, which, as I will demonstrate below, has flourished over the past decade. Multicultural literature

[1] This chronological range will be explained in more detail below, but to summarise: I have chosen 2007 as the starting date for this research project as it coincides with the end of the term of the Coalition government led by former Australian prime minister John Howard. That the project's chronological range extends to 2018 is not especially significant: it is simply a function of the fact that the primary textual research for this project was completed between 2016 and 2019.

has historically been viewed as a somewhat peripheral subset of Australian literature, characterised by modes of protest and life writing. The texts studied here are not bound by these limitations: they address and invoke the nation itself in authoritative and provocative ways. This thesis marks the first time that some of these texts are being substantively analysed, and I position them as part of a critical shift currently taking place in Australian literature.

1.1 Settler-colonial subjectivity in contemporary Australia

Australia's discourse of settler-colonial subjectivity continues to occupy a central position in literature, the media, and public life. While Australia has formally recognised the importance of multiculturalism in an official sense for almost five decades, the dominant narrative of Australian identity still privileges whiteness above all else. In this section, I establish the political, cultural and literary context in which non-white subjectivities are continually displaced by the settler-colonial subject in Australia.

While Australia has never been a monocultural society, the appearance of racial homogeneity became central to its identity during the pre-Federation period. Graham Huggan points to the emergence of a discourse of whiteness in Australia during the late nineteenth century "as a function of the need to rationalise the racialized division of labour, e.g. in the tropical north" (2007, 73). The mythology of Australian national identity was created and sustained through legislation such as the *Chinese Migration Act 1851*, the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1869* and the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, on which the White Australia Policy was built. This policy linked whiteness to national identity through a logic of purity and protectionism, specifically from Asia. Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes the constitutive role of this policy in the formation of the nation: "[t]he White Australia policy made Anglocentric whiteness the definitive marker of citizenship; and a form of property born of social status to which others were denied access including Indigenous people […] these devices of exclusion did not articulate who or what is white but rather who or what is not white" (2004, 79). The link forged between whiteness and citizenship was strong: Indigenous Australians were not granted citizenship until the referendum of 1967.

The concept of whiteness itself has remained pivotal to Australian identity. In the years after colonisation, "Australian" identity was explicitly an imperial outpost of Britishness, which later came to incorporate a Celtic element. Jon Stratton (2020) draws attention to the fact that

Irish Australians were once considered non-white, arguing that "a key part of the creation of the Australian nation-state in the last years of the nineteenth century was the whitening of the Irish, the largest non-English group in the evolving nation-state" (7), reinforcing the function of whiteness as the ultimate marker of Australianness. This Anglo-Celtic identity has come to stand for the "mainstream" in Australia, although, as Sneja Gunew points out, the term "Anglo-Celtic" requires an acknowledgement of the history of unequal power relations between the British and Irish, and between "Anglo" and "Celtic" Australians (1994). Further, Ien Ang and Jon Stratton also note that "the term "Anglo-Celtic" implicitly denies the existence of diversity within "'old Australia' itself" (2001, 99), obscuring the fact that prior to World War I, Australia was not only populated by the descendants of British and Irish people. From British and Irish identities, the dominant discourse of Australian identity grew to include northern Europeans, while southern Europeans, including Italians and Greeks, were racialised as "non-white" until the 1950s, and were prohibited from migrating to Australia until after World War II.[2] Whiteness, then, had less to do with skin colour, and more to do with national political and racial ideology: governing who to include in or exclude from the nation itself.

The White Australia Policy remained in place until 1973, when Gough Whitlam's Labor government oversaw the transition to an official policy of multiculturalism (Lopez 2000) and began accepting refugees fleeing the Vietnam War. In the subsequent five decades, Australia's population has grown to include migrants from a wider variety of nations, and has shifted into closer geopolitical and cultural proximity with its neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region, especially China. Yet despite these developments, the discourse of Australian identity continues to privilege whiteness. Summarising the significance of this centrality, Moreton-Robinson has explained: "[i]f Foucault is right and knowledge is intrinsically connected to power, which operates through discourse and is put into action by subjects, then whiteness and race must shape ways of knowing, acting and producing knowledge" (2004, 2). Whiteness and race shape the discourse of what it means to be Australian. As a consequence, although almost 30% of Australian residents were born overseas (ABS 2020), "the boundaries of the [national] imagination are […] Eurocentric, cemented together around a core of white traditions" (Schech and Haggis 2000, 236). Anglo-Celtic identity remains at the centre of Australian identity because

[2] See Chapter 4 for an in-depth examination of this idea as it relates to Felicity Castagna's novel *No More Boats* (2017).

whiteness functions as an "unmarked marker" (Frankenberg 1997, 1): simultaneously both invisible and universal, and able to push non-white identities to the margins.

Whiteness is not just a dominant discourse; it is an entire worldview and system of knowledge. Moreton-Robinson argues that "[w]hiteness establishes the limits of what can be known about the other through itself, disappearing beyond or behind the limits of this knowledge it creates in the other's name […] [w]hiteness is constitutive of the epistemology of the West; it is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effects in everyday life" (75). Whiteness is one of the most fundamental tools of Orientalism, which, as Edward Said says, is predicated on an ontological and epistemological distinction, dictating ways of being and ways of knowing (1978). Australia's existence as a settler colony is based on "the constitution of whiteness as an epistemological *a priori* that informs one's ontology" (Moreton-Robinson 75). In other words, it is not only that Anglocentric identities remain most prominent in media and public life: the nation of Australia is itself constructed on a foundation of whiteness.

A number of critics of Australian culture and literature have drawn attention to the role of whiteness in multicultural Australia (Hodge and Mishra 1991; Hage 1998; Stratton 1999; Ang 2001; Moreton-Robinson 2004; Huggan 2007; Stratton 2020). My focus on whiteness and the settler-colonial subject is not intended to "recentre" the dominant discourse, but to point to its status as an unmarked marker – to avoid leaving whiteness "unexamined – unqualified, essential, homogeneous, seemingly self-fashioned, and apparently unmarked by history or practice" (Frankenberg 1997, 1). I argue that Australia's critical multicultural literature interrogates the status of whiteness. I focus on texts published after 2007 because this year marks the end of the Howard era, during which the centrality of whiteness was re-consolidated.

The treatment of whiteness as a universal has enabled the development of particularly pernicious contradictions within Australian identity. Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos (2004) describe the operation of whiteness within Australian society as enabling the exercise of a Hegelian "criminal will":

> the perpetuation of white race privilege within a society that affirms the notions of equality and a fair go as national ideals depends upon a collective ability to exercise a rather high level of wilful blindness to the conflation of whiteness with Australianness. This is the ongoing work of a collective criminal will that characterises the white Australian national identity. (44)

This idea exposes, for example, the inconsistency in Australia's traditional commitment to egalitarianism and its increasingly punitive treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, especially

after 2001. It also reflects the contradiction inherent in the notion that, in the words of Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Australia is the "most successful multicultural country in the world" (2019), while Indigenous Australians are 12.5 times more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to be incarcerated (Australian Law Reform Commission 2017). Refocusing on how whiteness operates at the centre of national identity draws attention to the ways in which whiteness is conflated with "Australianness" in order to continually marginalise non-white Australian identities.

This conflation is the basis for the operation of a dominant discourse of settler-colonial subjectivity. Because settler-colonial subjectivity contains an inherent assumption of whiteness, it functions as the default position of identity. Huggan argues that, "[a]s a discourse of power, whiteness is less likely to be based on the perception of superiority than that of neutrality" (2007, 71). The invisibility and universality of the whiteness of Anglo-Celtic subjectivity is what perpetuates the divide between a "core culture" and a heterogeneous group of non-white "Others," which includes all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, migrants and refugees from over two hundred nation-states, as well as other ethnic and national groups. As Moreton-Robinson contends, "in the West, whiteness defines itself as the norm" (75), and "as a categorical object, race is deemed to belong to the other" (76). Australia's long commitment to multiculturalism has done relatively little to dismantle this dominant discourse. Instead, multiculturalism has created the conditions of what Ghassan Hage calls an "*internal* orientalism" (1998, 17, emphasis original): a landscape in which non-Anglo-Celtic people are othered by this dominant discursive position. In response to its normative status, Anne Brewster proposes the concept of "defamiliarising whiteness," using Waanyi Indigenous writer Alexis Wright's 2006 novel *Carpentaria* as an example of a text that "exposes the stress fractures of postcolonial whiteness" (2010, 93). In other words, this refers to making visible the structures of whiteness that have rendered it "universal." The texts I analyse in this thesis operate in fundamentally different ways to *Carpentaria* as they are not works of Indigenous literature. However, Brewster's metaphor of pushing at the "stress fractures" of whiteness is productive for how I perceive these works as challenging the primacy of settler-colonial subjectivity.

Not only has Australia's commitment to multiculturalism failed to displace a hegemonic white subjectivity, but preserving this structure might actually be the *purpose* of Australian multiculturalism. In his influential work *White Nation: Fantasies of Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (1998), Hage contends 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 or removed according to a White national will" (18). This view invokes the Foucauldian concept of governmentality: the centrality of whiteness to Australian identity instils in white Australians a sense of "managerial right over national space" (Hage 1998, 186). This sense of control, Hage argues, is fundamentally programmed into multiculturalism – it is not only the purview of those with extreme views, such as Pauline Hanson, leader of right-wing white nationalist One Nation Party. In fact, Hage argues that the ideas of "tolerance" and "acceptance" which underpin Australian multiculturalism actually serve to reinforce the power of this national will, because they are essentially conditional accommodations for non-white Australians, able to be retracted at any time. Similarly, Fazal Rizvi (1989) and Stratton (1999) argue that Australian multiculturalism is a conservative project designed to maintain an unequal distribution of power, while Ien Ang (2001) describes multicultural Australia as a place where "racially and ethnically marked people are no longer othered today through simple mechanisms of rejection and exclusion, but through an ambivalent and apparently contradictory process of *inclusion by virtue of othering*" (139). Australian multiculturalism, then, can be seen as an agent that *preserves* the epistemic privileging of whiteness, rather than displacing it.[3]

1.1.1 Contextualising Australian multiculturalism

The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a "symbolic retreat from multiculturalism" (Moran 2017, 110) under Liberal prime minister John Howard, while Moreton-Robinson argues that, since the 1990s, "conservative policies have reinvested white ownership of the nation" (2004, *vii*). Howard's focus on national unity above all else relegated discourse about multiculturalism to debates over the undue influence of "special interest groups" and so-called political correctness, while the treatment of Indigenous Australians by the state was characterised by renewed paternalism in the form of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response, or "the Intervention." Stratton contends that, during the Howard government's incumbency, "much of the formal apparatus of official multiculturalism was dismantled in favour of the individualist policies of neoliberalism" (2017, 250). This neoliberal shift is crucial, as it transferred focus

[3] See Chapter 3 for an analysis of Hage's "white cosmo-multiculturalism" as seen through the novels of Michelle de Kretser.

away from cultural and ethnic communities and towards individuals and their capacity to participate in the market. Multiculturalism remains a key element of Australia's social policy framework, but the Federal Government has shifted the way it is addressed. As argued by Geoffrey Brahm Levey (2019), under the Turnbull Coalition government (2015–2018), the project of multiculturalism was seen to be "complete": in other words, the responsibility for sustaining a multicultural society – once delivered primarily through social equity and access programs for new migrants – was considered the responsibility of individuals rather than government.

In the area of literature, multiculturalism has undergone a similar kind of transformation. It is a common view that the label "multicultural literature" has fallen out of favour alongside the demise of "official multiculturalism" (Raschke 2005; Jacklin 2009) and has been replaced with broader terms, such as transnational literature. Despite the greater focus on Australian literature's place in the world, Michelle Cahill argues that "[i]n its networks, establishments and canons, Australian literature operates as a white settler narrative. It claims a material and discursive space disproportionately over Aboriginal and other ethnicities, racialising their differences from the presumed universality of its own" (2015). The dominant position of whiteness in Australian culture is just as influential in Australia's literary infrastructure, which includes writers; the texts they produce; literary prizes; writers' festivals; publishers; reviewers and review publications; literary journals; funding bodies such as the Australia Council and Copyright Agency; government departments (particularly the federal Department of Communications and the Arts, which in December 2019 was rolled into a new Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, eliminating the word "arts" from the portfolio title entirely); universities, including academics (many of whom are also writers, reviewers and prize judges) and syllabi; primary and high school curricula; public libraries; film and television adaptations; translations; and not-for-profit bodies such as the Sydney Story Factory and Red Room Company, many of which benefit from government funding. The replication or subversion of the discourse of settler-colonial subjectivity takes place through each of these strands, many of which are interconnected.

In addition, the "settler colonial" and the "multicultural" are not separated along an easy boundary of "inside" and "outside." Multiculturalism is, of course, a component of settler-colonialism itself. The literary mainstream of "Anglo writing" and the minoritised stream of "multicultural writing" are not binary opposites. Some multicultural writers are more readily

accepted into the literary mainstream than others (for example, through institutional linkages and the awarding of prizes), and this occurs for a wide variety of reasons. Some writers do not readily fit in with, or embrace, identities that correspond to either Anglo or multicultural identities. When I say that the writers studied here challenge the dominant discourse of settler-colonial subjectivity, I do not necessarily mean that they do so from a purely oppositional or "outside" stance (for further discussion of terminology, refer to Section 1.1.2 below.)

The work of critics such as Hage, Gunew, Stratton and Ang effectively establishes the argument that multiculturalism is inherently conservative and ambivalent, limited by its design around an intact Anglo "core culture." It is perhaps this limitation that has led scholars and journalists from both the left and right to become increasingly critical of the concept, especially during the 1980s and the early-to-mid-1990s. Huggan cites an "increasing exasperation, registered at both ends of the political spectrum, with [multiculturalism's] conceptual inadequacies" (2007, 110). These inadequacies are often described as inevitable: Australia's model for multicultural policy is based on the Canadian example, which was aimed at facilitating cultural pluralism in the context of Canada's status as both an English and French settler-colony (Stratton 2020). Unlike in Canada, Australian multiculturalism has never been enshrined in legislation, instead relying on policy statements issued by successive governments: this may have contributed to the impression that multiculturalism in Australia is an "incoherent theoretical concept" (Huggan 2000, 223).

More recently, some have begun to consider whether Australia may in fact now be in a "post-multicultural" period (Ouyang 2011; Gunew 2017). The term "post-multicultural" usually refers to the period during or after the mid-1990s or following the election of the Howard Coalition government and the emergence of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, when Australia's commitment to the spirit of multiculturalism was perhaps at its lowest. The idea of a post-multicultural Australia recalls Charles Taylor's distinction between "official" and "everyday" multiculturalisms, where official multiculturalism refers to state and federal government policy and initiatives, while everyday multiculturalism refers to the experience of living in a culturally diverse society (Taylor 1992; Ang and Stratton 2001, 99). Of course, Australia remains a multicultural nation regardless of the government's commitment to enshrining principles of cultural diversity and inclusion in policy or legislation, but the retreat at a policy level has been significant: Stratton describes his most recent work, *Multiculturalism, Whiteness and Otherness in Australia,* as "pick[ing] over the rubble left by official

multiculturalism" (2020, 1). Indeed, the most recent federal multicultural policy (*The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy*) was issued in 2011 by Labor prime minister Julia Gillard. A multiculturalism "statement" (*Multicultural Australia – united, strong, successful*) issued by the Turnbull government in 2017 does not use the word "policy" at all, and appears to be more of a communications tool than an instrument for fostering inclusion. In 2018, then-Senator Richard di Natale introduced the Australian Multicultural Bill 2018, seeking to enshrine a commitment to multiculturalism in Australia's legislation for the first time. At the time of writing, the bill has not been passed.

While the Australian Government has not prioritised multicultural policy over the past decade, this has not affected the nation's demographic composition. As Stratton notes, "Australia in the second decade of the twenty-first century has a very different and more radically diverse population mix from that during the height of official multiculturalism in the 1980s" (2020, 3). Moreover, the function of Australian multiculturalism in a political and demographic sense is also distinct from its function within the literary ecosystem. Critics describing a "post-multicultural" Australia generally use the term to highlight the inadequacy of the concept of multiculturalism. Wenche Ommundsen attributes the use of the term "post-multicultural" as arising from the "barrage" of criticism multiculturalism received from "the left as well as the right" (2007, 83). Ouyang Yu adapts the term to refer to a "post-malticultural" [*sic*] Australia as one "where the idea of multiculturalism is being rendered increasingly obsolete, becoming almost 'mal' as in the sense of malfunctioning" (2011). Gunew uses the term to argue that multiculturalism can be recuperated through a renewed focus on what it has most overlooked: multilingual writing (2017). Brigid Rooney adopts Gunew's use of the term to describe how "writers trouble the assumed dominance of Anglo-settlers over multicultural others" (2018, 160). The term post-multicultural is useful for distinguishing the multiculturalism of the 1980s and 1990s from the present, but I question whether it signals too definitive a schism.

I see the texts studied in this thesis not as examples of post-multicultural literature but as a new and re-energised incarnation of multicultural literature, which can be seen as indicative of "critical multiculturalism," a concept developed by scholars such as Gunew (2004), Debra Dudek (2006) and Ommundsen (2007). Critical multiculturalisms acknowledge the limitations of earlier forms of multiculturalism, which have been widely regarded as overlooking issues of race in favour of ethnicity. Ommundsen notes that Australian multicultural writing "is as likely as not to be critical of multiculturalism in its many and varied guises," and that "the margins of the

national culture frequently produce the views, texts and arguments most likely to disturb and challenge" (2007, 83). The texts studied here directly confront the inadequacies of multiculturalism: the way it maintains Anglo Australians' cultural privilege, its focus on conditional inclusion, and the way it induces non-Anglo Australian writers to trade on their identities in order to achieve recognition.

The texts studied here also share a strong focus on the impact of a series of nationalist "flashpoint" events during the Howard era between 1996 and 2007. Most critical among these flashpoints is the public discourse about asylum seekers, which has an ongoing influence on constructions of Australian national identity, on immigration policy and notions of belonging, on racism and Islamophobia, and on the nation's physical and psychological borders. The change in attitudes to asylum seekers has invigorated critical multiculturalism in ways that both rebel against the socio-political conservatism of the early twenty-first century and explicitly target the limitations of multiculturalism itself. In light of this, I propose new readings of contemporary works by "minoritised" writers using the idea of the state-of-the-nation text. This perspective enables an interrogation of how these writers are *positioned* as peripheral by a white national hegemony through "inclusion by virtue of othering" (Ang 2001, 139), and how they resist, challenge and subvert this positioning.

I see these state-of-the-nation texts as examples of critical multiculturalism. They are works which both confront the nation's white national-cultural formation as well as critiquing the ideals and practices of multiculturalism. Ommundsen (2007) goes on to describe critical multiculturalisms as "models that bring out the most progressive, productive, and dynamic aspects of multicultural writing in Australia today, those authors and texts that challenge established literary or cultural conventions to propose new, perhaps uncomfortable but frequently both aesthetically and ideologically pathbreaking ways of reading the contemporary world" (2007, 83). The texts studied here, I argue, embody these characteristics of progressivism, productivity and dynamism.

1.1.2 Notes on terminology

Before moving on to this analysis, I will clarify some terminological questions: namely, how to refer to those who occupy a mainstream positionality and how to refer to those who are working outside this mainstream. It is important to set out the nuances of the term "settler-colonial

subjectivity." All non-Indigenous Australians (that is, all non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians) can be seen to fit within the category of "settler," as members or descendants of groups that have migrated to Australia within the last 250 years or so. The term "settler-colonial," meanwhile, reflects the fact that Australia remains under a system that denies the unceded sovereignty of its original inhabitants and privileges whiteness. The idea of a dominant settler-colonial subjectivity, then, refers to the privileging of a discursive position that is built both on the subjugation of Indigenous Australians and those migrant groups whose exclusion was key to its establishment.

To refer to this dominant group, Hage prefers to use the term "Anglo-White," arguing that "Anglo" or "Anglo-Celtic" are "far from being a dominant mode of self-categorisation by White people whether at a conscious or unconscious level" and that "'White' is a far more dominant mode of self-perception, although largely an unconscious one" (1998, 20). Hage's formulation retains its currency for the contemporary moment. It is important both to acknowledge the pervasive and wide-reaching influence of the white settler subject and also to avoid the reductive lens of envisioning "the white settler subject" at the centre and all others – including all Indigenous, migrant, refugee and in-between subjectivities – in a heterogeneous group positioned irrevocably at the periphery.

Writers working outside this hegemony are usually referred to in two groups. The first is Indigenous writers, which refers to those from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. The second have been referred to as multicultural writers, "ethnic" writers (Gunew 1994), non-Anglo writers, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)[4] writers, non-white writers, or migrant writers, although many were born in Australia. Hage uses the term "Third World-looking people" (1998, 18), arguing that the distinction is not made between white and non-white migrants, but instead between migrants who appear to be from the "Third World" and those who do not. Hage's interpretation reflects Huggan's assertion that "the White Australia Policy didn't designate specifically who was considered to be white, but discriminated rather on

[4] The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) offers a definition of CALD as follows: "[c]ulturally and linguistically diverse is a broad and inclusive descriptor for communities with diverse language, ethnic background, nationality, dress, traditions, food, societal structures, art and religion characteristics. This term is used broadly and often synonymously with the term 'ethnic communities'. CALD is the preferred term for many government and community agencies as a contemporary descriptor for ethnic communities. CALD people are generally defined as those people born overseas, in countries other than those classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as "main English speaking countries". The set of main English speaking countries other than Australia used by the ABS comprises: Canada, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) and the United States of America" (2012).

the basis of desirable and undesirable national migrant groups – a practice arguably revisited in current refugee policy" (2007, 74). More recently, non-white writers are likely to be referred to as writers of colour, writers who are people of colour (POC), or BIPOC, a term not unproblematically borrowed from North America, which refers to "Black, Indigenous and people of colour." Some Indigenous Australians also use the term "blak" to "reclaim historical, representational, symbolical, stereotypical and romanticised notions of Black or Blackness" (Deacon 2004).

In this thesis, I use "settler-colonial" as a term that inherently implies whiteness but also acknowledges that whiteness is not necessarily "governed by an either/or logic" (Hage 20); that is, Australian identities do not exist in a binary of "Anglo" or "non-white." In addition, the usage of "settler-colonial" retains a focus on the fact that, as Evelyn Araluen (2017) points out, Australia is the only Commonwealth nation that does not have a treaty with its Indigenous peoples. I also use the term "white Australian," "Anglo Australian" or "Anglo-Celtic Australian" when referring to those within this group, although I acknowledge that these terms are also imperfect. I acknowledge that using the term "white Australian" also necessarily conjures the category of "non-white Australian," which is not always productive, due to its inherent constitution as a negation. I use this term because it foregrounds the specifically racial power dynamics on which the settler-colony is founded. Similarly, "Anglo-Celtic Australian" can be interpreted as referring only to Australians of specifically British and Irish origin; I acknowledge this inconsistency, but use this term because although the hegemonic category of Australian whiteness now includes a variety of (mostly) European identities, it is still fundamentally Anglocentric.

I do not use one specific term to refer to the collective identities of the writers of the works analysed here, because they come from such a wide variety of identity frameworks, although I do refer to their works as examples of a critical multicultural literature, which I explain further below.[5] Instead, I explore the nuances of relevant terms, such as Asian Australian, in more detail throughout the four textual analysis chapters. I do not hyphenate identity

[5] These include Asian Australian (including Vietnamese, Indian and Sri Lankan Australian), Afro-Caribbean Australian, Lebanese Australian, Greek Australian, Italian Australian, Anglo Australian, and also not Australian, in the case of Behrouz Boochani.

categories such as “Asian Australian,” “Anglo Australian” or “Arab Australian” throughout this thesis.[6]

1.2 The nation in contemporary Australian literature

Having established the context of Australia’s dominant discourse of settler-colonial subjectivity, I analyse in this section how “the nation” has been recently understood and interpreted by those working within the Australian literary landscape. These understandings can be broadly grouped into two main subsections: texts (i.e. what kinds of narratives about the nation are circulating within the literary field?) and contexts (i.e. how do contemporary literary and cultural scholars understand the nation?). In this section, I will focus on these two areas in order to establish the field in which I intervene: one that is characterised both by a critical multicultural literature, as well as by a quest to place these narratives in wider transnational frames. In organising this section in this way, I acknowledge that these two categories – texts and context – are deeply intertwined, and that they are mediated by structures such as the academic institution and the media.

1.2.1 Texts and literary infrastructure

As explored briefly above, “Australian literature” is a diffuse field involving a multitude of actants across a wide range of public and private networks – from the personal, informal and relational to the organisational, formal and governmental. Its components should not be understood as a monolith but as a complex web of interrelated items and forces including the aggregation of individual readers’ preferences; the networks that exist between writers; what is reported on in the media; how publishers operate; the functions of academic management; political policies and social practices. All of these can be seen as parts of what is called

[6] In choosing not to hyphenate these terms, I acknowledge that “[t]he hyphenated identity is a term that implies a dual identity, an ethnocultural one, and evokes questions and debates regarding which side of the hyphen the person belongs to” (Sharobeem 2003, 60). I acknowledge that terms such as “Asian Australian” are problematic in the way that they conjoin a continent with a national identity, and that “Asian Australian” can also serve as a useful identity category in itself, not only as one that fuses “Asianness” with a normative “Australianness.” As Michelle Law states, “No one is born hyphenated” (Chung 2017). I also follow the example of Wilson and Lokugé (2018) and the Asian Australian Studies Research Network (AASRN), who do not use a hyphen for terms such as these.

"Australian literature," but they should not all be conflated. At the same time, they cannot be neatly demarcated (for example, into functions of government and non-government), because these categories are too closely interrelated. What follows, then, is not intended to be an exhaustive map of all of the aspects of the Australian literary establishment, but to provide an overview of the public aspects of the field that evidence the flowering of critical multiculturalism since the early 2000s.

An important index of Australian literature is the Miles Franklin Literary Award, which is Australia's most prestigious literary prize, awarded each year to "a novel which is of the highest literary merit and presents Australian life in any of its phases" (Perpetual 2019). This descriptor invites consideration of how writers represent this "Australian life." The list of winners in the two decades from 1990 to 2010 is a litany of familiar names – Peter Carey, Tim Winton, Alex Miller and Christopher Koch have won between two and four times each.[7] Since 2007, however, four Indigenous writers have won the award: Alexis Wright in 2007, Kim Scott in 2011 (his second award, following a joint win in 2000), Melissa Lucashenko in 2019 and Tara June Winch in 2020. Michelle de Kretser is the most successful author of the past decade, having won in 2013 and 2018 for her novels *Questions of Travel* and *The Life to Come*. Evie Wyld, who has spent most of her adult life in London, was a controversial winner in 2014 for her novel *All the Birds, Singing*, which was only partially set in Australia.

At its core, the Miles Franklin remains an inherently nationalist institution, but it can be seen to have expanded its purview, especially over the past decade or so. In fact, the ongoing discussions around the texts admissible for consideration of the prize, themselves are a critical indicator of the ways in which a national Australian literature is continually re-imagined and re-invented. Despite this, its purpose as a vehicle for consecrating aspects of "Australian life" is counterbalanced by its role in shaping a "canon" of Australian literature – which has been marked by conflict over the literary value of Australian texts, especially compared to literatures from Europe. While the "canon" debate is perhaps less relevant now than during the twentieth century, the tension of choosing "representative" texts can be seen to persist in the institution of the Miles Franklin. As Julieanne Lamond argues:

[7] This is not to suggest that these authors' works unquestioningly reflect an Anglo view of the nation, merely that there is a stable of writers whose work has been seen to be representative of "Australian life," perhaps at the expense of other views.

> We need to be wary of this emphasis on our literary descriptions as representative of 'Australian life'. Nation as 'brand' will never be able to adequately reflect Australians in all their diversity. Concepts of our 'national character' have often been exclusionary, unable to adequately account for Australians who are, for example, urban, non-Anglo, or women. In the same way, 'national identity' is no longer a useful or desirable way of talking about our common interests, precisely because it is seen to attempt some cheery synthesis of diverse communities. (2007, 90)

Further to this point, Cahill argues that literary prize culture remains beholden to a mainstream culture and locates the influence of this dominant discourse in the infrastructure of literary prizes. In a 2015 article, she writes:

> Lucrative literary prizes are governed by a handful of adjudicators appointed from elite coteries who all too often reinforce the superior status of white readings. It is extremely rare that a culturally diverse writer or Aboriginal writer is recognised within one of the mainstream categories. This kind of collective evaluation of literary texts invariably turns those who are not privileged by whiteness into passive subjects.

The rendering of non-white authors as "passive subjects" recalls Gunew's recent assertion that "diasporic, immigrant, multicultural and ethnic minority writers are situated in a kind of *cordon sanitaire* around settler-colonial national cultural formations" (2017, 5). This exclusionary structure is powerful, but it does not operate uniformly: some non-Anglo writers and texts are more integrated into the systems of power governing Australian literature than others.

As Gunew goes on to state, this acceptance is usually offered only on the terms of the white hegemony, and in a contradictory cultural system of exchange which encourages multicultural writers to trade on their identities while, at the same time, "consign[ing] them to the margins in perpetuity with the exception of a few token figures (often interchangeable) who tend to function as emblematic of neoliberal cultural difference" (5). An example of this might be seen in responses to the work of Michael Mohammed Ahmad, author of recent novels *The Tribe* and *The Lebs* (which is analysed in Chapter 2). Pointing out that responses to Ahmad's most recent novel most often call it "edgy" and "confronting" instead of discussing it as a coming-of-age novel, Ruby Hamad writes: "[t]hat Ahmad is battling racism as well as the usual travails of writing screams out not only from the pages of his own work but also from the lines of those reviewers who appeared to rate his novel not on its literary merits but on how much of him they thought they saw in its more contentious words" (2019). Ahmad, who has been explicit about his mission to destabilise the white supremacist foundation of Australian culture, is a clear example of a multicultural writer challenging this dynamic.

Despite these conditions, as Mridula Nath Chakraborty argues, "since the start of the '90s, Australian writing has come a long way between camouflaging its essentially migrant roots

of settler colonialism, and entering into a full-blown case of multicultural literary ferment by the 2010s" (2019, 100). This proliferation can be witnessed in the ever-expanding number of anthologies, collections, publishers and groups focusing on marginalised Australian experiences. These include *Growing Up Asian in Australia* (2008), edited by Alice Pung, *Growing up Aboriginal in Australia* (2018), edited by Anita Heiss, and *Growing Up African in Australia* (2019), edited by Maxine Beneba Clarke, all released by Black Inc as part of the "Growing Up" series. *Growing Up Muslim in Australia* (2014), edited by Amra Pajalic and Demet Divaronen, is published by Allen and Unwin, while *Growing Up Queer in Australia* (2019), another Black Inc. publication edited by Benjamin Law, includes narratives of queer migrant experience, destabilising the assumption that queerness will only be refracted though whiteness.

Adding to this proliferation of anthologies are works such as Paul Sharrad and Meeta Chatterjee Padmanabhan's *Of Indian Origin: Writings from Australia* (2018), Randa Abdel-Fattah and Sara Saleh's *Arab, Australian, Other: Stories of Race and Identity* (2019) and Sharon Rundle and Meenakshi Bharat's *Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia* (2019). *Collisions: Fictions of the Future* (2020) is an anthology "featuring emerging and established Indigenous writers and writers of colour" (Liminal Mag 2020) published by Pantera Press. A new collection edited by Ahmad, *After Australia* (2020) is subtitled "After empire, after colony, after white supremacy … twelve eclectic writers imagine an alternative Australia." The cover design features a 1950s-style cartoon of a white nuclear family heading to the beach, with their faces scribbled out by black ink, offering a powerful paratextual metaphor for the text's rejection of white supremacy.

In recent years and despite diminishing support from government funding agencies and within the publishing industry itself, publishers dedicated to diversity have also flourished. Brow Books, established in 2016, expands the mission of literary journal *The Lifted Brow* into a print publisher dedicated to "working with authors from the margins: writing that sits in the literary margins, and/or by authors who write from demographic margins" (n.d). Djed Press is an online publication "that exclusively works with and publishes people of colour (POC)" (n.d), while Kara Sevda Press, established in 2019, focuses on publishing the work of women of colour. Other publications focusing on non-Anglocentric narratives include literary journal *Mascara Literary Review* (established 2006), and magazines *Peril* (established 2006) and *Liminal*, both of which publish content focusing on the experience of being Asian Australian.

These publications are joined by other literary and media organisations such as the West Writers Group and Footscray Community Arts Centre based in Melbourne's western suburbs, and Sweatshop – also founded by Ahmad – which is a creative and advocacy network for writers of Indigenous and migrant heritage based in Western Sydney. Sweatshop's project is explicitly aimed at challenging the settler-colonial hegemony of Australian literature, giving writers from Western Sydney the tools and opportunities to tell their own stories. The advent of social media has also facilitated the production of new forms of media, such as podcasts. *Margin Notes* is an "intersectional literary podcast" (Kanapathippillai 2020) established in 2020 and hosted by Zoya Patel and Yen Eriksen. Literary festivals in Australia have also grown exponentially over the past several decades. Hosted by Bankstown Arts Centre in Western Sydney, the Boundless festival established in 2017 is described on its website as "the festival of Indigenous and culturally diverse writers" (n.d). The proliferation of these publications, publishers and organisations evidences the flourishing of a multicultural Australian literary scene.

Criticism, too, has a key role to play in shaping and influencing the literary field. Melinda Harvey and Julieanne Lamond (2016) have recently investigated gender disparity in the field of Australian book reviewing, noting the impact of book reviewing on "authors' careers, book sales and publishers' commissions as well as on the determinations of literary value that underlie the discipline of Literary Studies," and arguing that "reviewers play an important role in setting the agenda in terms of the way an individual text is engaged with and understood" (1). These considerations are equally applicable to the cultural diversity of reviewers and authors of books reviewed. In response to such concerns, Diversity Arts Australia, in conjunction with Sweatshop and other partners, are currently undertaking the StoryCasters initiative to provide training in digital media (including journalism, writing, podcasting, filmmaking and music production) to young people from non–English speaking, migrant and refugee backgrounds. Criticising the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*'s decision to award a $150,000 development grant to five white emerging cultural critics, Shirley Le writes in literary journal *Overland*, "as the Australian arts landscape grows increasingly diverse, it is only fitting that the arts critique space also welcomes new voices" (2020). Le also points to a series of recent "criticism-on-criticism" pieces scrutinising "white critics' capacity to review people of colour's art," including Hamad's (2019) commentary on the reception of Ahmad (as mentioned above). Pieces such as Hamad's, Le argues, should serve as "growing pains" for Australia's reviewing culture, evidencing the need for greater cultural diversity among critics, a wider number of texts being reviewed, and greater

numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse Australians holding leadership positions in arts and media organisations (2020).

The arts industry in Australia has been deeply impacted by the global novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) or COVID-19 pandemic. Jo Caust (2020) cites research from the Grattan Institute estimating that 75% of those working in the creative and performing arts are likely to lose their jobs due to restrictions caused by the pandemic, such as event cancellations and border closures. In addition, universities – which play a key role in the literary ecosystem – are experiencing a similarly unprecedented contraction in the wake of COVID-19 and lack of government support. The full impact of these closures, and of the coincidental withdrawal of government funding for numerous arts organisations and publications, such as Writing NSW, *Australian Book Review* and the *Sydney Review of Books*, is unable to be determined at the time of writing.

This thesis focuses mostly on works written by Australian authors with migrant or refugee experience or heritage. Writing by Indigenous Australians is outside of the scope of this thesis. Separate from but paralleled by the resurgence of multicultural literature in Australia is the emergence of a growing body of literature written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians that engages with aspects of the idea of reimagining the nation. These works include such celebrated contemporary works as Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006) and *The Swan Book* (2013), Melissa Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby* (2013) and *Too Much Lip* (2018), Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu* (2014), Ellen van Neerven's *Heat and Light* (2014), Claire G. Coleman's *Terra Nullius* (2018) and Tara June Winch's *The Yield* (2019).

1.2.2 Theoretical and scholarly context

The flourishing of these multicultural publications, initiatives and advocacy groups can be viewed alongside recent theory on the topic of the nation in Australian literature. These scholarly undertakings are marked by a focus on how to understand Australia with respect to its position in larger networks, such as Oceania, the Asia-Pacific, other settler colonies (such as New Zealand and Canada), and other literatures of the southern hemisphere (for example, the "Literatures of the South" seminar directed by JM Coetzee, which links Australia, South Africa and Argentina). Writing in an introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of the European Association for Studies of Australia*, Ann Curthoys characterises the current state of Australian Studies as marked by "[t]he desire to rise to new challenges" (2019, 6). In this section, I set out the context

of some of these challenges. In addition, I will be returning to theoretical discussion of critics such as Hage, Ashcroft, Gunew, Cooppan, Françoise Lionnet, Shu-Mei Shih and Walter D. Mignolo in each of the chapters below.

As Robert Dixon and Brigid Rooney have argued, theoretical approaches to Australian literature since 2000 have been united by their focus on seeking "new theoretical vocabularies that would allow Australian literature – as both an academic discipline and a field of cultural production – to be 'worlded', or located in relation to world literary space" (2013, *xv*). This search for new "theoretical vocabularies" is unfolding in the wider context of the emergence of the field of world literature studies from the discipline of comparative literature in the United States (Damrosch 2003; Kadir 2004; Casanova 2004). While world literature scholars in the US and Europe were recalling Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's proclamation that "national literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach" (1827), Australian critics, too, were debating the demise of the national literature, but in a markedly different spirit: during the early 2000s, several scholars and journalists decried the "death" of Australian publishing (Wilding 2000; Neill 2006). Despite these grim predictions, Australian publishing (and Australian literature) have, of course, not been decimated.

The impact of globalisation and neoliberal capitalism have opened up Australia to the world in new ways, while "global economic forces and their magnetic draw of cultural energies towards the world's financial centres" (Birns 2015, 13) produce simultaneous contractions in other ways. Geordie Williamson (2012) links these forecasts of doom to the rise of a focus on transnationalism in Australian literature: a focus which continues to dominate scholarly discussion today. Australian literary studies' turn toward transnationalism can also be seen as a consequence of the move away from multiculturalism. The transnational is currently the dominant critical lens animating the study of Australian literature. Many Australian literary studies scholars have addressed the concept of transnationalism and/or the idea of the "transnational turn" within literary studies (Sharrad 2010; Giles 2015; Olubas and Simoes da Silva 2016; Morgan 2017). Others have used different terms: for example, Dixon has argued for the value of a situated cosmopolitanism as a lens through which to approach Australian literature, an approach based on "imagining new types of cultural history that are concerned with the traffic of people, capital, practices, ideas and institutions within but also beyond the conceptual space of the nation" (2004, 69). As Huggan argues, extreme approaches are

unnecessary: scholars neither need to return to Australian literature's cultural-nationalist heritage nor attempt to abandon the nation altogether, and too much generalisation, especially along the lines that Australian literature is either "dying" or "booming," presents the danger of moving into the realms of "globaloney" (2009, 1).

One reason for the prominence of the transnational as a frame for literary analysis can perhaps be traced to the corporatisation of the university. At the end of 2019, the University of Sydney's Robert Dixon retired from his position as Chair of Australian Literature. The university's decision not to replace him has prompted criticism from several organisations dedicated to the study of Australian literature, and received coverage in major national newspapers (Baker 2019; Neill 2019; Osborne 2019; Riseman and Johnston 2019). As Lamond argues in an article in the *Guardian*, however, the failure to reappoint a Chair in Australian Literature is not only linked to the cultural cringe: it has also been induced by the neoliberalisation of universities, which encourages a re-orientation of research priorities towards disciplines which maximise funding (2019). Australian literature is not one of these areas and, as a result, has been vulnerable to absorption into general "cultural studies" research and education. The Australia Council for the Arts grants for literary projects form a very small proportion of the total number of grants awarded:[8] in 2019, only three Australian Research Council (ARC) grants were awarded for literary studies nationwide.

In addition, the performance of academics is measured in terms of a model designed for those working in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, equating research success with publication in high-profile international journals. As Susan Lever notes, this model for academic research "doesn't suit anyone who works on subjects with a national rather than international focus" (2019), and instead encourages the design of research projects that have a more transnational or global outlook. As a result, Lever argues, "Australian literature academics have no incentive to engage with new writing, to take risks on new ideas, or to write for their own communities" (2019). This is not to say that the field of Australian literature should not continue to engage with transnational and/or cross-disciplinary perspectives. But as Tony Simoes da Silva warns, too much focus on the worlding of Australian literature risks "eliding the violent and protracted histories of dispossession, of oppression, of dislocation that undergird the

[8] According to the Australia Council's Annual Report 2018–2019, literature grants accounted for 7% of all grants and initiative funding. In contrast, theatre grants accounted for 20%, visual arts for 18% and music for 15% (2019).

national" (2014, 1). Similarly, as Sharrad argues, "putting Australian literature out into a global context could have the negative effect of permitting neglect of work yet to be done within our borders" (2013, 27). First of the tasks among this work is Australia's ongoing occupation of unceded Indigenous lands, and the system on which this occupation continues – the same system that marginalises non-Anglo Australians from Aboriginal, migrant and refugee backgrounds.

In challenging the dominance of Australia's settler-colonial subjectivity, the texts studied in this thesis can also be interpreted through the lens of postcolonial or decolonial criticism. Australian literature has always had an uneasy relationship with postcolonialism, because as a settler-colony, it is both postcolonial and neocolonial. Although postcolonial theory has influenced critical work in Australia since the 1980s (Moreton-Robinson 2004, 80), Ashcroft writes in 2010 that "there is no more vexed question in post-colonial studies than the status of the settler colonies" (15). One aspect of this vexation is illustrated by the tension between two factors: that on one hand, the postcolonial is often viewed as exhausted or out of date (Wilson, Sandru and Welsh 2010), while on the other – and in the same year – Nathanael O'Reilly's 2010 collection *Postcolonial Issues in Australian Literature* claims to be "the first collection to focus exclusively on Australian literature as postcolonial literature" (2), an assertion which would suggest that there is more research to be done. Moreover, O'Reilly's collection's essays focus on "works by Indigenous authors and writers of European descent" (1), and do not include any essays on texts by non-European migrants or refugees.

The postcolonial has given rise to discourses of decolonisation, of globalisation, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, and more recent research on works of Australian literature has been built along these lines, as will be illustrated throughout the body of this thesis. But each of these, with the exception of the decolonial, has the potential to overlook the impact of "the active, the current and the ongoing nature of the colonising relationship" in what Moreton-Robinson calls the "postcolonizing nation" (2003, 30). This relationship is not only – as O'Reilly's text may imply – a relationship between Anglo Australians and Indigenous Australians. Non-European migrants and refugees occupy a fundamentally ambivalent position in this structure, at once colonisers living on Indigenous land, as well as being subject to racism and xenophobia in a culture that privileges whiteness above all else. Of course, the idea that non-European migrants and refugees occupy an ambivalent position in the settler-colony is not new: Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2000) discusses the pressures of commodification and exoticism that multicultural writers face, while Gunew's *Haunted Nations*

(2004) is explicitly concerned with the postcolonial dimensions of multiculturalism. More recently, Anne Collett and Leigh Dale's *Postcolonial Past & Present: Negotiating Literary and Cultural Geographies* (2018) evidences the continuing debates about the postcolonial with reference to Australian literature. The writers studied in this thesis engage with these ambivalences in their critiques of Australia's (post)colonial power structures. As stated by Walter D. Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova, "[k]nowledge and subjectivities have been and continue to be shaped by the colonial and imperial differences that structured the modern/colonial world" (2006, 207). Settler colonies, such as Australia, provide tangible examples of the persistence of colonial structures in shaping contemporary realities.

One fruitful research approach that has emerged over the past two decades includes attending more critically to transnational identity frameworks within Australian literature. Asian Australian studies, emerging from the late 1990s onward (Ang 2001; Lo 2006) is perhaps the most significant field focused on a specific transnational configuration, which is considered crucial given Australia's historically vexed relationship with Asia, and its more recent, primarily economic, turn toward the region.[9] But it is still quite new: in 2012, Chakraborty argued that Asian Australian literature was still an "incipient field," given the underdeveloped nature of critical discourse around diaspora in Australia. In 2016, Wilson and Lokugé introduced a special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* on Asian Australian literature, characterising the essays within as questioning "the ideology of Australian multiculturalism, the core/periphery hierarchy, the perpetuation of Orientalist attitudes and stereotypes, and white Australian claims to belong as seen in its myths of cultural authenticity and authority" (1).[10] Meanwhile, an emerging focus on Arab Australian identities and narratives can be seen in Hage's *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging* (2002), Ahmad's doctoral thesis "Writing the Arab-Australian narrative" (2016),[11] Jumana Bayeh's recent article "Arab-Australian Fiction: National Stories, Transnational Connections" (2017), and critical work by scholars such as Paula Abood (2017), Ruby Hamad (2019) and Keyvan Allahyari (2019).

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[9] In 2012, then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard released a policy white paper entitled *Australia in the Asian Century*, which set out a plan for Australia to become more culturally and economically linked to its neighbours in the Asian region, particularly China, Indonesia, Japan and India. Successive Coalition governments since 2013 have, however, retreated from the term "Asian Century."

[10] See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth consideration of Asian Australian literary subjectivities.

[11] See Chapter 2 for a more in-depth analysis of Ahmad's work.

These scholarly interventions that take a transnational approach to contemporary Australian literature serve as valuable groundwork for this thesis. While the writers included in this thesis are not bound by a common ethnic, racial, national or literary heritage, they are linked by their contemporaneity: all of the texts studied here were published between 2007 and 2018, a period during which the structure of the nation has become resurgent in new and unexpected ways. With regard to its chronological parameters, too, this thesis takes up where several other recent scholarly interventions have left off, contributing further to these ongoing debates about contemporary texts. For example, Jo Jones' *Falling Backwards: Australian Historical Fiction and the History Wars* (2018), in its focus on the "aggressive, at times acrimonious, debate about the nature of Australia's colonial past" (3), shares some commonalities with this thesis in its focus on the context of Howard-era Australia. As suggested by its title, however, Jones' text is focused on historical fiction, while my study exclusively considers texts that are both written in and set in contemporary Australia. Another study, Rooney's *Suburban Space, the Novel and Australian Modernity* (2018), includes some of the same texts as this study, but has a different focus: on the spatial and psychogeographic. Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer's *A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900* (2007) extends its purview up until 2005. Birns and McNeer note that "Australian writing since 2001 […] has had to feel the reverberations of global catastrophe, not just global marketing possibilities" (12), but do not engage with how any specific texts might depict or respond to events such as the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York. This thesis, then, picks up where Birns and McNeer end, focusing on how Australian writers since 2007 have dealt with this "darker, more unjust, and more uncertain world." Tanya Dalziell (2017) provides a thorough review of the changing relationship between Australian literature and national identity over time, referring to a range of works published within the last decade, but stops short of addressing the ways in which nationalism has been revitalised over the past three decades, nor does she examine literary responses to this revitalisation.

In addition to the works by Jones, Birns, McNeer and Dalziell, Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman's *After the Celebration: Australian Fiction 1989–2007* (2009) provides a literary history stretching from the aftermath of the Australian bicentenary in 1988 until the end of the Howard government's incumbency.[12] Contrasting the Keating Labor government of the early

[12] As Gelder and Salzman note in the introduction to their text, *After the Celebration* also follows an earlier collection, *The New Diversity: Australian Fiction 1970–1988* (1989).

1990s with the Howard Coalition government of the late 1990s, Gelder and Salzman assign key themes to each: "reconciliation" for the former, "assimilation" for the latter. Pointing to the heightened importance of national unity and national security under Howard, Gelder and Salzman assert that this cultural climate produced a number of literary works that were primarily concerned with themes of belonging. They write, "[c]ontemporary Australian fiction often responded to these predicaments by taking itself into the home and its environs, giving us a sense of what homeliness – settlement, domestic life and property ownership – might mean during this time" (19). The examples that they cite – Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*, Murray Bail's *Eucalyptus* and Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth* – each negotiate issues of settler belonging. Picking up where Gelder and Salzman leave off, I argue that literary explorations of this theme have continued to blossom and evolve in more recent fiction, and that the explorations of settlement and belonging depicted in the novels analysed in this thesis continue to ask pressing questions about the concept of belonging. Notably, many of the novels I examine negotiate issues of belonging from the perspective of more recent non-European migrants.

Following the example of these scholarly interventions, and others who have noted the influence of the Howard era on Australian culture and literature, I propose that there is the need within the critical field for a close consideration of texts published from 2007 onwards. This thesis presents a new way of reading contemporary narratives. I focus on how Australian writers have represented the post-Howard period[13] and challenged, as Gelder and Salzman say, the re-emergence of assimilationist ideas during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Instead of providing a broad literary history, as Gelder and Salzman have done, the body of this thesis is designed as a series of case studies focusing on formally and thematically resonant groupings of texts. In this thesis, I acknowledge the variety of critical discourses currently at work in the field of Australian literary studies – including the transnational, the cosmopolitan, the postcolonial and so on – and seek to combine elements of each of these in order to put forward a new theoretical perspective from which to analyse the re-figuring of the nation by Australian writers with migrant or refugee experience or heritage in the post-Howard period.

In developing this new theoretical perspective, I have sought a critical lens which neither rejects nor reclaims "the nation," but offers a more nuanced dynamic with the potential to enable

[13] I do not use this term to denote a specific span of time, nor do I intend to "periodise" this era, as it is still ongoing. In general, I perceive "post-Howard" Australia as beginning around 1996 and continuing into the present.

an examination of texts that are very much *about* the nation. I have taken up postcolonial literary theorist Vilashini Cooppan's assertion that "[m]ore than entombing the nation, the present enjoins on us the task of reanimating it" (2009, *xvi*). Cooppan's call for scholars to reanimate the nation is drawn from her 2009 text *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing*. In this text, Cooppan configures the nation as being impacted by myriad international, supranational and non-national forces. She writes:

> The rapid flows of capital, persons, goods, information cultures, and languages across national borders, coupled with the increasing power of various stateless actors, from the transnational corporation to the regional economic market to the diasporic community to the terrorist cell, have undeniably reshaped the political and imaginative construct of the nation. But just because the global international has altered the nation does not mean it has rendered it obsolete, a mere analytical archaism withering away before our eyes. (xvi)

It is not that nations and nationalism are no longer relevant, Cooppan argues: she suggests instead that the nation-state is "perhaps inescapable," but that the idea of nationalism "stands arrested" (xvi) – that it is unclear how scholars can or should engage with nationalisms in the context of the "global international". In the context of this arrest, Cooppan encourages the project of "reanimating" the nation, which she describes further as "learning to see nations in more places and in more ways, as less bounded by their borders and more inextricably connected to all that seems to lie outside them, as well as all that lies inside: the alien, the *unheimlich* (uncanny), the other within" (xvi). Cooppan's terms – "arrest" and "reanimation" – hinge on the concepts of paralysis and movement.

Cooppan is not writing here specifically about Australia – although she has elsewhere (2016) – but provides concepts that are useful for examining Australian literature. The nation is certainly inescapable in the context of the settler-colony, where it plays a key role in papering over the fundamental illegitimacy of the Australian state. This raises the question of how the nation, as a product of the settler-colony, can be challenged by the process of *reanimating* it. In a context where, as outlined earlier, the Australian nation is based on the ontological and epistemological privileging of whiteness (Moreton-Robinson 2004), it is difficult to envision in literature a contemporary Australia that is completely outside this lens.[14] Instead, as Cooppan suggests, these texts can be seen as more pragmatic attempts to "see nations" – in this case, Australia – "in more places and in more ways," such as in places that have been excluded from

[14] The 2020 publication of the anthology *After Australia*, as mentioned above, may hint at the increasing viability of this alternative imaginative worldview.

literature (such as Western Sydney), or through the eyes of marginalised groups (such as Muslim Australians); as "less bounded by [its] borders" (for example, as reaching into Australia's offshore detention camps); and with attention to the "other within," namely non-white and non-Anglo Australians, who are subject to an "*internal* orientalism" (Hage 1998).

I suggest that the eleven texts analysed here can be seen to do exactly this: to reanimate the idea of the nation in ways that are assertive and provocative, opening space to challenge and resist a dominant discourse based on whiteness and settler-colonial identity. The task of reanimating the nation demands an engagement with how the discourse of settler-colonial subjectivity has been able to suppress and sideline non-white voices in all the ways outlined above. One theoretical lens that goes some way toward explicating this relationship is Bill Ashcroft's concept of the "transnation" (2010; 2011; 2017; 2019). Ashcroft describes the way that the myth of national identity must "displace the exorbitant proliferation of actual subject positions within the state" (2011, 19), referring to this proliferation as the space of the "transnation." This model effectively illustrates the way that Australian national identity continually marginalises and minoritises non-white subjectivities.

The idea of the transnation, in Ashcroft's view, enables an understanding of how the nation and the state interact with one another. The nation, he argues, is "held to be a fixed entity, a pole of attraction or repulsion orienting transnational relationships at state level" (18), but when the nation is considered separately from the state, "we discover that mobility and border crossing are already features of the phenomenon we call the nation" (18). By de-linking the nation from the state, Ashcroft conjures the space of the transnation:

> Transnation appears at first to be a familiar term based on the idea of the transnational. But I coin the term to refer to much more than 'the international' or 'the transnational,' which might more properly be conceived as a relation between states, a crossing of national borders or a cultural or political interplay between national cultures. Transnation is the fluid, migrating *outside* of the state that begins *within* the nation. (19)

In Ashcroft's model, then, it is possible to be outside the state while remaining in the nation, whether this "outside" refers to a "geographical, cultural [or] conceptual" (19) positioning. The state is metaphorically described as a woven textile, a "delimited and organised structure," while the transnation is described as being like felt, an "entanglement of fibres" (20). This metaphor, which Ashcroft borrows from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, is an evocative description of the "excess of subject positions swirling within, around and beyond the state" (19), which must remain displaced in order for the state to be supported by a stable national identity. Ashcroft argues that "[t]he transnation occupies the space we might refer to as 'the nation,' distinct from

the political structure of the state, which interpellates subjects as citizens" (19). Using Ashcroft's model, it is possible to view the texts analysed in this thesis as "text[s] of the transnation" (27): they are concerned with how the nation-state marginalises non-Anglo identities by maintaining a hegemonic discourse that is focused on settler-colonial identities, with its metanarratives specifically drawing on whiteness, masculinity, and a purported egalitarianism.

While Ashcroft's model offers a valuable perspective on several key issues of the relationship between mainstream and marginalised expressions of Australian identity with respect to the nation, it does not offer the same clarity as a model for understanding how writers within this "proliferation" can specifically write back to a "white imaginary," which has been consolidated since the early 1990s (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). While discussing Alex Miller's *Landscape of Farewell*, Ashcroft writes that Indigenous literature is "critical to the idea of the transnation because it so manifestly *dis-identifies* with the nation" (26). The word missing from this assertion is "white" – Indigenous literature is able to so effectively dis-identify with the *white* nation because Indigenous writers are able to engage instead with alternative knowledge frameworks, such as sovereignty and care for Country. How, then, can works by non-Anglo migrant, refugee and diasporic writers be read as texts of the transnation? With their diverse viewpoints, these texts may not be able to draw on the same kinds of unified alternative discourses of knowledge, and they may not necessarily be focused on challenging this discourse at all, instead forging new imaginaries and narratives that are not predicated only on resistance to whiteness.

In addition, Ashcroft's examples of textual analysis are focused primarily on the past. The primary texts used as examples include David Malouf's *Harland's Half Acre* (1984), Kim Mahood's *Craft for a Dry Lake* (2000), Arnold Zable's *Café Scheherazade* (2001) and Alex Miller's *Landscape of Farewell* (2007). Through these textual analyses, Ashcroft examines concepts of belonging, with a common focus on what he calls the transnation's "borderless utopian possibilities" (24). For Ashcroft, this focus manifests in these texts' power to create "a vision of the future grounded in memories that exist outside the 'memory' – some might say the institutionalised forgetting – of history" (21). The texts he analyses are united by their thematic concerns with the past, and the potential to engage with issues of belonging through the "re-visioning" of history. This thesis considers how these ideas might play out in texts with contemporary settings.

Ashcroft acknowledges that the texts he analyses provide a far from exhaustive model of the operation of the transnation (39). In this thesis, I take up Ashcroft's concept and seek to extend this metaphor into a more explicit interrogation of how these writers – almost all of them from migrant or refugee backgrounds – are able to "reanimate" and reimagine Australia through their work. I offer a reading of these works as counter-discursive examples of state-of-the-nation texts that interrogate and subvert the dominant discourse of Australian identity through their focus on concepts such as representation, race, class, marginality and migration. In the next section, I explore this term and why it has the potential to enable more productive analysis of these contemporary texts.

1.3 Reimagining state-of-the-nation literature

In this thesis, I propose an alternative lens through which to view contemporary multicultural Australian literary works: as examples of state-of-the-nation texts. This term captures the spirit of Cooppan's call to "reanimate" the nation (2009), rather than reconsolidating existing ideas about the nation, or attempting to move on from it altogether. Moreover, it is a term that facilitates an exploration of the issues governing which texts are seen to have the authority to be considered as texts that address the nation, and from where that authority flows or is withheld.

The concept of the state-of-the-nation novel derives from the Victorian genre of "condition-of-England" novels characterised by works such as Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854). The term "condition of England" can be traced to Thomas Carlyle's *Chartism* (1839), in which he wrote on the growing divide between rich and poor, expressing sympathy for poor people in light of the impact of the Industrial Revolution on their working conditions. In this usage, the "condition-of-England" novel generally refers to a panoramic depiction of social stratification: they have also been called "social problem novels" or simply "social novels." In general, these terms refer to novels that can be seen to "hold up a mirror" to contemporary society.

While the term still appears in recent scholarship on Victorian novels, it has also been used to refer to contemporary British and American works alongside the term "state-of-the-nation" novel (Piggott 2010; Coe 2012). The term "condition of England" implies a British context, whereas the term "state-of-the-nation" is more commonly used in the US and elsewhere. In a recent study of British writer Maggie Gee, Mine Öyzurt Kiliç presents Gee's work as a set

of examples of the contemporary "condition-of-England" novel. Öyzurt Kiliç writes that "Gee's version of 'England' is […] a richer, thus a more truthful portrait of Britain, mixing the voices from the margin with the mainstream" (2014, 2). The term is usually reserved for novels, but, as Toby Litt argues, "there's no reason why you can't have a state-of-the-nation short story" (cited in Piggott 2010) – an idea that I will take up in Chapter 1. Writing on the concept of British state-of-the-nation novels in 2010, Piggott contends that "it sometimes seems that the task of holding up a mirror to British society has become the preserve of the 'new arrivals.'" Piggott also notes that, while novels by first-generation migrants may "brilliantly describe the state of the nation[,] they would not necessarily be described as state-of-the-nation novels." These issues resonate strongly within Australian literature.

In his 2003 Colin Simpson Lecture, prominent Australian journalist and cultural critic David Marr entreated Australian writers to "start focusing on what is happening in this country, looking Australia in the face, not flinching, coming to grips with the fact that we have been on a long loop through time that has brought us back almost – but not quite – to where we were [in 1950]" … "to shake off the new philistinism of John Howard's Australia." As Lamond (2007) has argued, however, there are in fact an abundance of texts engaging with contemporary Australian life. They are perhaps just not the kind of literature Marr was envisioning: so-called "serious" social realist fiction about middle-class white Australians. Rather, as Lamond contends, it is important to examine other works, such as popular fiction, other literary genres, and works by non-Anglo writers.

Marr's lecture was ostensibly focused on the proliferation of historical fiction novels that had recently dominated literary awards. But when read in consideration of Piggott's point that novels by writers with migrant experience or heritage are generally not considered state-of-the-nation novels, some connections emerge. The question raised is: which writers are seen to have the agency to write authoritative novels about the state of Australia, and which writers are not? While the specific novels analysed in this thesis were all published in the years after Marr delivered his 2003 address, Lamond's point about novels by "multicultural" writers being overlooked still applies today.

My thesis proposes that considering the texts I have chosen as state-of-the-nation novels enables an examination of how each text contends with and challenges these conditions in order to reimagine the nation. In doing so, I also propose a reconfiguration of how we use the term "state-of-the-nation" novel. Litt argues that if a text is described as being a state-of-the-nation

novel, "it's likely to be an attempt to redo the Victorian panoramic whopper with a contemporary setting and representative characters […] Often, calling a text a 'state of the nation' novel has been an implicit term of abuse, meaning that a writer has attempted to do something beyond them" (quoted in Piggott, 2010). My adaptation of the state-of-the-nation novel departs from both the idea of the "panoramic whopper" and the pejorative use of the term, but maintains the close focus on the contemporary nation. Reading these texts specifically as state-of-the-nation texts draws attention to the "refusal of the mainstream to admit the myriad histories that migrant writers arrive with, stories that seem to have no space in the Australian literary imaginary, unless always already qualified as those of the outside, and therefore suspect and not proper to the national field" (Chakraborty 2012, 3). Ashcroft describes the space of the transnation in dynamic, fluid terms: as a "proliferation" (19) and an "excess" (19), a "swirling whirlpool" (20). It is useful that Ashcroft distinguishes between the state and the nation, but using such dynamic terms, I suggest, obscures rather than elucidates the relationship between them. By reading these texts as state-of-the-nation works, I read them as texts that *constitute* the national field – not as waiting outside it, and not as "swirling" around in the ill-defined space of the transnation.

In addition, the concept does not appear to have entered into critical discourses about Australian literature. While scholars and journalists have debated the idea of the "great Australian novel" (White 1991; Dixon 2005; Sharrad 2009; Govinnage 2014; Vernay 2016) – and it shows up on popular reviewing sites such as Booktopia and Goodreads, where top choices include Patrick White's *Voss*, Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* and Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*[15] – the concept of the state-of-the-nation novel or text remains unexplored territory in Australia.[16] During the early and mid-twentieth century, this may have been attributable to the cultural cringe: the sense that Australian literature remained in its infancy. As Mark Piggott states in his 2010 article, the decline in the number of state-of-the-nation novels in Britain has been attributed to the US eclipsing it as the major superpower of the West. Perhaps part of the explanation for the lack of attention to the idea of the state-of-the-nation novel in Australia derives from historical anxiety over Australia's perceived distance from metropolitan centres

[15] Writing about the 1998 theatre adaptation of *Cloudstreet*, Jack Teiwes notes that Australian reviews of the production were characterised by a sense of cultural nationalism. Teiwes points to several instances in which reviewers state that the production showed Australians "as we are" rather than "as we were," overlooking the fact that the story is a period piece focused on a white family in Perth between the 1940s and 1960s (2006).

[16] I include these examples with the acknowledgement that the "great Australian novel" and the state-of-the-nation novel are not necessarily the same thing, but that ongoing debate about the idea of the great Australian novel reflects the fact that novels' ability to authoritatively reflect "the nation" remains a live question.

such as London, followed by an embrace of frames other than the nation in more recent decades. In an article published in the *Adelaide Review*, Andrew Hunter points to Australia's reticence to embrace the idea of the great Australian novel, writing: "We should start talking about the Great Australian Novel, or accept smallness as our destiny" (2019). Hunter proposes Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, and Christos Tsiolkas' *Barracuda* as contenders.

These ideas prompt consideration of how a novel may represent the state of the nation. The link between literature and national identity is well-established: Benedict Anderson conceives of the nation as an imagined community that is both limited and sovereign[17] (1983). The role of imagination is key, Anderson argues, because the existence of the nation is based on the idea that even in relatively small national communities, most members will never meet one another or even become aware of their existence, yet "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Critically, the imagination of this community is enabled by literature: Anderson attributes the birth of the imagined community of the nation to the emergence of the novel and the newspaper. Both mediums enable the apprehension of simultaneity through the use of multiple plotlines,[18] with the dimension of simultaneity intensified through the experience of reading the newspaper, a calendrically determined exercise performed by sometimes millions of unconnected people on the same day.

This – admittedly pre-internet – vision of the nation is complicated in a settler-colonial society such as Australia by the partitioning of certain subjectivities from the mainstream imagined "communion" (Anderson 1983, 6). As Gunew summarises, "multicultural writers have always spoken *to* the nation but have often been heard (if heard at all) as speaking from outside the nation" (2017, 11). Novels by migrants or people with migrant heritage are in this way locked into a "representational logic" (Heinze 2013, 257): an expectation that they will represent their personal experiences of migration or speak for the experiences of all migrants

[17] The nation is limited, Anderson argues, because of its finite nature: all nations have (sometimes contested) boundaries beyond which other nations exist. Anderson attributes the sovereignty of the nation to the fact that the concept emerged "in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm" (1983, 7).

[18] Anderson uses the example of a novel in which persons A and B, A and C and C and D are in a series of respective relationships, noting that in this configuration, persons A and D never meet. The only things that A and D have in common, Anderson argues, are that they are 'embedded in "societies"' and that they exist in the mind of the omniscient reader (who witnesses the actions of all four characters). Anderson also argues that the newspaper is fictive in the way it juxtaposes unrelated narratives only in the mind of the reader (1983, 47).

from the same ethnic or cultural background, rather than accessing the same quintessential "Australianness" as their white counterparts. By purposefully reading these texts as state-of-the-nation narratives, I seek to re-locate them *as* national narratives: to read them specifically through a national lens.

It may seem counter-intuitive to adapt a historically British concept to illustrate how Australian writers resist cultural hegemony. It may also seem strange to use a concept that could move so readily into nationalism in order to read these texts that challenge an exclusionary nationalism. But I argue that these texts can be seen as state-of-the-nation works that function as what Cahill calls "interceptions" (2015; 2018). Conceived as a catachrestic interpretation – a kind of "mishearing" – of Kimberlé Crenshaw's influential concept of intersectionality (1989), Cahill applies the idea of interceptionality[19] directly to the position of minoritised writers in Australian literature. In an essay entitled "Who is lobbying for migrant writers?" (2015), she writes:

> Cultural belonging is often supplementary, provisional and conditional for writers of colour. It needs to be constantly negotiated. Interceptions help us bend the cultural frame to actively re-position ourselves as readers and writers. By doing this we become subjects in the cultural narratives that would otherwise reduce us, tokenising or domesticating our differences.

This concept of "bending the frame," with its focus on active self-subjectification, is useful for envisioning how the texts analysed in this thesis reimagine the nation. Seven of the eleven texts studied here are defined to some extent by their use of autobiographical elements, although they are all distinctly fictional.[20] In addition, nine of the eleven texts feature narrators or characters who are either writers, aspiring writers, lovers of literature, or otherwise engaged in Australia's literary and/or academic industries.[21] As state-of-the-nation texts, these works engage with contemporary Australia and especially with the events that have defined the past two decades. All of them depict flashpoints of nationalist sentiment, none more so than the

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[19] In 2015, Cahill described interceptions as "social media posts, newsletters and letters to the organisers of events, fellowships and prizes." In a later essay, Cahill uses the concept to describe a slightly more generalised strategy for intervening in the hegemony of settler-colonial subjectivity (2018).

[20] Including *The Boat, Foreign Soil, The Permanent Resident, An Elegant Young Man, Down the Hume, The Lebs,* and *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Island.* In particular, while Boochani's text contains elements of autobiography, as Allahyari notes, "he has consistently referred to *No Friend but the Mountains* as a work of fiction and to the narratorial voice as 'the writer'. Boochani's insistence on the literary value of his work is an act of political resistance" (2019).

[21] Including *The Boat, Foreign Soil, The Permanent Resident, An Elegant Young Man, The Lebs, The Lost Dog, The Life to Come, No More Boats* and *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Island.*

controversy generated over the MV *Tampa*. In August 2001, a sinking boat carrying refugees was intercepted by a Norwegian container ship off the coast of Indonesia. The captain intended to transport the rescued asylum seekers to Australia, but was refused permission, and the boat was towed out of Australian waters. In October, another vessel was intercepted from Indonesia, and several adult passengers fell or jumped overboard. Following this incident, it was erroneously claimed by conservative politicians and journalists (following a miscommunication within the armed forces) that asylum seekers had been seen to throw their own children overboard in order to be rescued. These two events enabled the Howard government to introduce the "Pacific Solution," under which asylum seekers would be processed in Nauru and, later, on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea.[22]

In addition to the *Tampa* affair, many of these novels also refer directly to the influence of the 9/11 attacks on New York, and the 2005 Cronulla riots,[23] as well as with the policies and rhetoric of the Howard government: of the eleven texts analysed here, five are set in 2001. Although the attacks on the World Trade Centre took place in the US, their effect was felt strongly in Australia, where their timing, mere weeks after the *Tampa* affair, significantly intensified anti-refugee and anti-Muslim sentiment. The twin events of *Tampa* and 9/11 both intensified Australia's xenophobic focus on "border control" and solidified the increasingly conservative rhetoric of the preceding decade. As Bronwyn Winter argues, "by the time 9/11 happened, half of the post-9/11 damage had, in fact, already been done" (2016). Many of the texts analysed here examine the consequences of these events.

As well as depicting these key events occurring during the early twenty-first century, many of these works also represent place in innovative ways. Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 analyse texts that bring together myriad global settings; Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 engage with the emerging literature of suburban Western Sydney; Chapter 4 also locates Manus Island as a location of "not-Australia" (Perera 2002). Referring to the depiction of "post-suburbia" in Australian literature, Rooney contends that "[p]ost-suburban Australian cities are heterogeneous cultural mosaics that may entail multiple types of estrangement for established and newly arrived

[22] See Chapter 4 for more detail.

[23] The Cronulla riots were a racially charged riot involving Anglo-Celtic Australians from Cronulla, a beachside suburb in southern Sydney, protesting the presence of primarily Lebanese Muslim residents from Western Sydney on the beaches of the Sutherland Shire. They took place during December 2005. The race riot was facilitated by the demonisation of Lebanese Muslims in Australia and encouraged by public figures such as radio "shock jock" Alan Jones. See Chapter 2 for more detail.

residents" (2017, 160). Post-suburbia, according to Rooney, "signals not only the impact of urban transformation – both expansion and densification – on built space but also sociocultural changes resulting from demographic diversification," which Rooney argues is relevant to "contemporary novels of suburbia by non-Anglo Australian writers in novels that map and encode suburban geographies through the double consciousness of diasporic experience and hyphenated belonging" (2018, 160). For many of the novels studied here, such as those by Michael Mohammed Ahmad, Peter Polites, Michelle de Kretser and Felicity Castagna, the depiction of suburban place is key to the representation of their protagonists' experience of in-betweenness or marginalisation. In addition, and especially in the case of the novels set in Western Sydney, the portrayal of these "post-suburban" places serves to remedy popular stereotypes about overlooked or disenfranchised suburban communities.

The texts studied here can be seen as models of what Homi K. Bhabha calls "[c]ounter-narratives of the nation" (2004, 213). Bhabha argues that counter-narratives of the nation "evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – [and] disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (213). The texts studied in this thesis can be seen to disturb the "ideological manoeuvres" through which the imagined community of Australia is endowed with essentialist identities, such as the privileging of Anglo-Celtic identity. The potentiality of fiction in this process is emphasised by Chantal Mouffe, who contends that "envisaged as counter-hegemonic interventions, critical artistic practices can contribute to the creation of a multiplicity of sites where the dominant hegemony can be questioned" (2013, 104). The use of a spatial metaphor to understand the creation of this multiplicity of sites is useful here. I conceive of each of these texts as constituting one among this multiplicity, wherein these authors are able to create space to challenge, subvert and reimagine contemporary Australia.

1.3.1 Methodology

As outlined above, I read the texts studied in this thesis as state-of-the-nation novels. As this is not a concept that has been used to study Australian literature previously, I include this Methodology section to clarify my theoretical approach. The idea of state-of-the-nation novels has traditionally been used in the study of Victorian era and other British texts, and I have adapted the term into the context of postcolonial and multicultural literary theory, drawing on the

work of Cooppan and Ashcroft. Because I am focused on the nation of Australia, I underpin these ideas with theory that relates to critical multiculturalism, specifically in the context of settler colonies, such as the work of Hage, Gunew, Ang and Moreton-Robinson. The four chapters of this thesis function as case studies, with each focusing on a different set of texts and using a different theoretical apparatus, but all similarly underpinned by the shared focus on multicultural and postcolonial theory. This structural arrangement is due to the large number and variety of texts under consideration and will be explained in more detail in each chapter.

With reference to the methodology for selection of texts for this thesis, the texts that I have selected here are not an exhaustive catalogue of examples of critical multiculturalism published by Australian writers between 2007 and 2018. I have not chosen the texts programmatically; rather, during the course of my research, I hypothesised that a new crop of multicultural writers may be emerging in Australia. I selected a sample of recent texts in order to test whether they addressed similar themes (such as migration and xenophobia), and these texts ultimately became the subject of this thesis. I acknowledge that there are a significant number of other Australian writers who have produced recent examples of what might be called critical multicultural writing, including Michelle Cahill, Christos Tsiolkas, Alice Pung, Tom Cho, Merlinda Bobis, Randa Abdel-Fattah, Hsu-Ming Teo, and others. Further, the selection of prose fiction texts is not intended to suggest that there are no other examples of similar texts in other genres such as poetry (for example, a study of recent Australian multicultural poetry might focus on the work of Omar Sakr, Eileen Chong, Ouyang Yu or Kim Cheng Boey, among others) or performance. My focus on prose fiction texts is merely a result of my own research interests. The findings of this thesis suggest that these texts may be broadly representative of a wider field of work; however, this will require further research beyond the scope of this thesis.

1.4 Outline of chapter structure

In Chapter 1, I analyse representation and narrative form in Nam Le's *The Boat* (2007), Maxine Beneba Clarke's *Foreign Soil* (2014) and Roanna Gonsalves' *The Permanent Resident* (2016). I read short stories by Le, Clarke and Gonsalves as interventions in the so-called "representational logic" of multicultural literature (Heinze 2013; see also Hall 1996; Hage 1998; Gunew 2017). By using this term, I refer to the persistent expectation that literature by migrant or diasporic writers will be representative of their experience of migration, the expectation that this representation

will be "authentic," and that it will speak for the experiences of all people from the same heritage or diasporic group. Le, Clarke and Gonsalves intervene in these ideas through the use of autofictional narratives that interrogate and subvert the demands placed on "multicultural" writers. I read the interrelationships between these stories at both a thematic and structural level, and as evidence of formal innovation in the Australian short story.

In Chapter 2, I focus on marginality and masculinity in Luke Carman's *An Elegant Young Man* (2013), Peter Polites' *Down the Hume* (2017) and Michael Mohammed Ahmad's *The Lebs* (2018). Each of these three novels is set in Western Sydney, and emerges from Sweatshop, a collective founded by Ahmad to empower culturally and economically marginalised writers (Ahmad 2018). In this chapter, I focus on the deeply intertwined relationship between Australian national identity and hegemonic masculinity. I contextualise these novels deploying Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih's concept of "minor transnationalism" (2005), which describes the potential for advocacy groups such as Sweatshop to produce "creative interventions" and forge "networks of minoritized cultures […] within and across national boundaries" (2005), and to use these networks to challenge literary and cultural power structures. By foregrounding this relationship, I argue that these three texts interrogate the marginalisation of Western Sydney, and that they resist normative versions of both masculinity and national identity through the depiction of what R. W. Connell calls "peripheral masculinities" (2005) articulated through ideas of race, sexuality and class respectively.

In Chapter 3, I analyse representations of cosmopolitanism and anxiety in Michelle de Kretser's *The Lost Dog* (2007), *Questions of Travel* (2013) and *The Life to Come* (2017). This chapter focuses on how de Kretser's recent novels have grappled with contemporary Australian culture and literature, offering a reading of how the texts exceed the boundaries of the nation through the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism (Bhabha 1996; Gunew 2017). I argue that de Kretser's three most recent novels can be seen as a kind of multicultural "trilogy," and examine how the novels evolve a confrontation with the tensions of multiculturalism over time. This is articulated through the novels' depiction of "white cosmo-multiculturalism" (Hage 1998, 198), the ethics of travel and voluntary and involuntary migration, with a particular focus on representing Asian Australian identities, refugee and mixed-race subjectivities (Dickens 2014). The novels also underscore the precarity of the settler-colonial project through a particular focus on the idea of the (post)colonial city.

In Chapter 4, I analyse themes of liminality and abjection in Felicity Castagna's *No More Boats* (2017) and Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (2018). This chapter focuses on refugee subjectivity, and how it is mediated through the structure of the Australian nation. I argue that these texts problematise the in/out dichotomy of the border; they are narratives set within the border's zone of contestation. In Castagna's novel, I read protagonist Antonio through the liminal frame of his identity as a migrant from Calabria. Southern Europeans were designated as non-white under the White Australia Policy and white thereafter, and have subsequently been seen as "marginal white" or "not-white-enough" (Stratton 1999; Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos 2004). I read Boochani's semi-fictionalised memoir through the lens of "abjectivity": a variation of subjectivity which emphasises the condition of being indefinitely imprisoned in a location that is simultaneously excised from Australia and under Australian jurisdiction: the place that Suvendrini Perera calls "not-Australia" (2002).

These state-of-the-nation texts represent the conditions of contemporary Australia in a way that has not yet been theorised elsewhere. As detailed in each of the chapters, the majority of these texts have so far received minimal critical attention. By highlighting their capacity for reimagining the nation, however, I suggest that these authors create spaces of potentiality in which to imagine versions of Australia that confront the tensions inherent in multiculturalism.

2. Chapter 1
Representation and narrative form: Nam Le's *The Boat*, Maxine Beneba Clarke's *Foreign Soil* and Roanna Gonsalves' *The Permanent Resident*

2.1 Introduction to Chapter 1

In this chapter, I turn to the first of four case studies in which I read contemporary works of Australian fiction as state-of-the-nation texts. As outlined in the Introduction, I take this approach in order to re-figure the nation in literary analysis. This act of re-examining is not intended as a nationalist project; instead, it highlights how contemporary Australian writers are reimagining the nation by challenging settler-colonial power structures, or expanding Australian literature to accommodate more stories of migration, displacement and the search for belonging. In this chapter, I focus on three short story collections: Nam Le's *The Boat* (2008), Maxine Beneba Clarke's *Foreign Soil* (2014) and Roanna Gonsalves' *The Permanent Resident* (2016).

This analysis draws on theory that addresses how writers of multicultural literature can seek meaningful representation in a landscape that induces them to participate in or rehearse particular scripts (such as assimilation, outrage or gratitude) in order to gain literary recognition. The problem of the transactional nature of literary representation has been a key issue in scholarship on multicultural writing since its original discussion in the 1980s. The same problems persist today, and can be seen in what I refer to as works of critical multiculturalism: Le, Clarke and Gonsalves creatively engage with this problem in their texts. Each of the three works grapples with the pressure on non-Anglo authors to write narratives that treat their positionalities as multicultural writers in ways that are optimistic and conciliatory, or that trade on the idea of authenticity. These pressures derive from the ongoing presence of a logic of assimilation at the heart of Australian multiculturalism.

While the term "state-of-the-nation" text in a literary studies context is most often used to refer to novels, in this chapter I apply it to single-author short fiction collections. Notably, these collections (in particular, *The Boat* and *Foreign Soil*) are characterised by the fact that they are mostly *not* set in Australia: instead, they roam across the globe and occasionally through time. This does not detract from their eligibility as state-of-the-nation texts. Instead, it points to both

Australian literature's capacity to function as a global form, as well as writers' and readers' capacity to expand the category of Australian literature to include narratives that do not centre on historically common tropes of Australianness. It also enables a critical discussion of what, if anything, might make a narrative "Australian." Instead, the texts bring these global narratives into a "local" space through the parallel use of framing which ultimately brings these wide-ranging stories into the diegetic realm of an Australian protagonist.

I argue that these three texts can be seen as instances of critical autofiction, and that they serve as examples of a wider emerging genre that I term translocal short fiction. These works unite a wide variety of narrative settings in texts that use semi-autobiographical elements, drawn from the lives of their authors, in order to critique the expectation that multicultural writers will write "authentic" narratives about their experiences or heritage (Heinze 2013). I argue that these texts speak to one another, and that they can be seen as examples of "creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries," examples of what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih describe as "cultural transversalism" (2005, 7). By writing back to one another in this way, I envision these texts as part of a network that subverts the power structures of Australian literature and culture.

Nam Le's *The Boat* travels to a different geographical setting in each story: from Iowa City, to Cartagena, Colombia; New York; regional Victoria; Hiroshima in August 1945, prior to the dropping of the atomic bomb; to Tehran; and to the open ocean, where a boat carries a group of Vietnamese refugees. The stories are marked by their diversity of setting and the specificity of detail that Le captures in each one. Donald C. Goellnicht (2012) notes that most of Le's stories are set in "hubs or transfer points for major events of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (208). Certainly, they balance significant historical narratives with attention to individual experience and narrative: among the most poignant examples of this is the narrator of the story "Hiroshima," a young girl living in the days immediately prior to the bombing of the city. Only the story "Halflead Bay" is set in Australia.

Maxine Beneba Clarke's *Foreign Soil* traverses similarly diverse terrain. Its stories move between Melbourne; London; St Thomas, Jamaica; Sydney/Uganda; Western Sydney; London; New Orleans/Mississippi; Kingston, Jamaica; Sri Lanka/Sydney, and back to Footscray in Melbourne. As Fiona Wright notes in her review of the collection, many of the stories in *Foreign Soil* are linked through their focus on characters from the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, which she calls "something of a blind-spot in [Australian] literature" (2014). *Foreign Soil* contains several

stories set in Australia and is bookended by narratives centered on African Australian characters in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

Roanna Gonsalves' *The Permanent Resident* is not quite as diverse in setting as the texts by Le and Clarke. Its protagonists are primarily Indian migrants to Australia belonging to the Goan Catholic community from Bombay/Mumbai, and its focus is primarily trained on this diasporic group. What several of the characters have in common is that they are seeking to obtain Australian permanent residency visas: in a story entitled "Curry Muncher 2.0," a young woman witnesses the bashing of her co-worker, Vincent, on a metropolitan train. Both international students from Bombay, they take the same train home after their evening shifts in an Indian restaurant. After the man's presumably white attackers have left, she offers to call the police, but he refuses: "This is my last semester. They will do a police check for PR applications, no? Why simply get a bad name?" (Gonsalves 2016, 61). That permanent residency is featured in the title of the collection invokes the importance of Australia's retreat from official multiculturalism, as described in the thesis Introduction, and the subsequent intensification of punitive immigration measures and growing fixation on border control during the 2000s (Koleth 2010).

The critical reception of these texts is varied. *The Boat* has been received very extensive critical engagement, more than any other text studied in this thesis. This criticism comes from within Australia as well as internationally. The text has been read as refugee literature (Goellnicht 2012), Asian-American literature (Lee 2010; Hampsey 2015), and of course as Australian literature (Jose 2012; Jacklin 2012). As detailed below, some have engaged with the frame structure of the text (Brown 2015; Griffiths 2017), and my analysis builds primarily on these works. Brown and Griffiths also mention *Foreign Soil* in their examination of transnational "frame" narratives. Elsewhere, critics have discussed voice and dialect in *Foreign Soil:* Angelucci (2019) examines the usage of *"*Australian urban youth vernacular" (86) in contextualising her English–Italian translation of Clarke's story "David," while McHugh-Dillon (2018) analyses the use of *patois*-inflected English as a strategy of postcolonial resistance in the story "Big Islan." As explored below, other critics have specifically addressed the texts' themes of migration and refugee experience (Britten 2016; Edwards and Hogarth 2016), focusing on the stories "Shu Yi" and "The Stilt Fisherman of Kathaluwa." Most critical engagements with *Foreign Soil* are characterised by a focus on one or two short stories within the volume. In contrast, my analysis focuses on the structural composition of the text. Due to the recency of its publication, there are very few critical engagements with *The Permanent Resident*: Brewster

(2018), which focuses on the theme of precarity in the text, is the only example of criticism beyond book reviews available at this time.

This chapter begins by establishing the theoretical relationship between multicultural literatures and narrative representation. It then turns to an analysis of the emergence of what I term the "translocal short story collection" in contemporary Australian literature over the past decade. Following this, I move on to a specific analysis of the ways in which Le, Clarke and Gonsalves engage with the assimilationist logic of Australian multiculturalism through the deployment of a form of critical autofiction. By centralising marginalised experiences of migration and displacement in their narratives, the authors can be seen to contest the dominance of mainstream Anglo Australian identity, creating space for multicultural narratives to exist on their own terms and, importantly, in conversation with other works by culturally and linguistically diverse writers.

2.2 Multiculturalism, authenticity and representation

Although multicultural literatures have played a role in Australia's cultural landscape since the early 1970s, as outlined in my Introduction, they have remained constrained by a hierarchy in which they are marginalised, and the term declined in popularity during the 1990s, gradually eclipsed by the "transnational turn" in literary studies. As previously foregrounded, Australian multiculturalism can be seen as a fundamentally conservative concept, designed to preserve the position of Anglo-Celtic Australians (Hage 1998; Stratton 1999; Ang 2001). This structural imbalance means that multicultural writing has tended to be judged through the lens of this dominant subjectivity. Although Australian immigration policy moved away from a logic of assimilation during the 1960s – shifting to a focus on migrant integration, before instituting the policy of multiculturalism – non-Anglo writers continue to be marginalised, tokenised or othered by this white gaze. As Bobuq Sayed writes in a review of a more recent novel, Michael Mohammed Ahmad's *The Lebs*,[24] "[t]o participate in the Australian literary economy as anything other than white typically involves trading in the currency of palatable assimilation" (2018). The idea of "palatability" is key here, as it evidences the conditionality of multicultural tolerance.

[24] See Chapter 2 for more detail.

The heart of this issue is that the terms of success continue to be defined by "good behaviour." This echoes the idea that Australian multiculturalism operates through a logic of "national spatial control" (Hage 1998, 186), in which Anglo Australians retain authority over how much space non-Anglo Australians are allowed to occupy in the national imaginary. As Ghassan Hage notes, this logic of control is systemic; it applies regardless of Australians' personal views on multiculturalism. Hage articulates the idea of a "discourse of Anglo decline" (182) to describe the way in which anti-multiculturalists perceive the erosion of a traditional national identity, lamenting the loss of an "old" Australia or of a "balanced" approach to immigration and cultural diversity. Hage contends that pro-multiculturalists are also inclined to engage with the idea of balance. He argues that "[w]hite multiculturalists talk about the balance and they position themselves as the guardians of this balance. They do not, however, speak of restoring the balance; they speak of *maintaining* it" (Hage 1998, 189). Both examples evidence a focus on Anglo Australians' structural authority over national space.

These are the ideas that animate the inherently assimilationist logic of Australian multiculturalism. Summarising Robert Dessaix's dismissive attitude toward multicultural literatures, as expressed in his inflammatory 1991 essay "Nice Work if You Can Get It," Jessica Raschke writes: "[c]ooperative, English-speaking, and quintessentially deserving writers will indeed be published and granted permission to participate in literary dialogues. Those whingeing 'multicultural professionals' are trying to hoodwink the lot of us" (2005, 22). These ideas trade on the notion that even in a diverse nation, migrants and refugees who seek to assimilate with normative national identities are promised acceptance and belonging on settler Australia's terms. This is, of course, often a false promise.[25]

These conditions work to create a context in which the "cordon sanitaire" (Gunew 2017, 5) separating settler-colonial literature and multicultural literature can be breached only by multicultural writers trading on their experience. This structural inequality draws multicultural writers into a situation of "compulsory representation" in which they are impelled to act as "informants about the collectivities they were believed to embody" (Sollors 2008, 420). This structure necessarily renders often traumatic narratives of migrant experience into currency to be exchanged. As argued by Rüdiger Heinze, "[o]ne of the basic and most frequent assumptions about multicultural and ethnic literature is that it is an authentic expression or representation of a

[25] This idea is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, with reference to Felicity Castagna's novel *No More Boats*.

special experience, where 'authentic' means 'true' and 'special' means non-majority or non-hegemonic" (2013, 256). This assumption, too, preserves the inequality between Anglo and non-Anglo writing. It begs the question: what do we mean when we say that a fictional narrative is "authentic"? Does authenticity imply sincerity or earnestness? A certain level of detail? Does a measure of authenticity presume that a narrative is true, or based in truth? The three texts analysed in this chapter engage with these questions.

Australian multiculturalism has been animated by these tensions for decades, with critics from across the political spectrum taking up these problems in different ways. Conservative critics envisioned multiculturalism as eroding national unity and privileging non-Anglo and Indigenous voices in the name of political correctness. In 1995, these tensions flared with the success of Helen Demidenko's novel *The Hand that Signed the Paper*.[26] Although the Demidenko controversy was specifically a flashpoint of the "culture wars" of the 1990s and early 2000s,

> the text itself continues to raise pertinent questions about the authenticity attributed to ethnic authorship and the market value of multiculturalism; it points, that is, to multiculturalism's availability as a conceptual mechanism through which ethnicity is turned into a commodity, made subject to the changing rules that govern global cultural exchange. (Huggan 2007, 109)

As Graham Huggan argues, the transactional logic of multicultural authenticity remains relevant, and the commodification of "authenticity" in narrative continues to marginalise multicultural writers today. Moreover, Mridula Nath Chakraborty contends that "these 'newcomers' are to be forever tarred with the brush of exotic remove, never mind that their own experience of their writing might not be exotic to them at all" (2012, 3). Each of these writers thematises the burden of this commodification in their works.

These pressures continue to impact writers from non-Anglo backgrounds, and the field remains structurally unequal. As Michelle Cahill writes, "[a]t present, migrant writers work hard for recognition but rarely benefit from the rewards offered by literary institutions to their white counterparts" (2015). These inequalities persist in the context of the current incarnation of Australian multiculturalism, which as noted in my Introduction, is premised on the idea that the government's role in instituting multiculturalism is complete; as Jon Stratton argues, "it is

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[26] Demidenko received the 1993 *Australian*/Vogel Award and the 1995 Miles Franklin Literary Awards for her novel, which told the story of a Ukrainian family's experience in the USSR under Stalin. Demidenko was later revealed to in fact be the pseudonym of Helen Darville (now known as Helen Dale), who had falsely claimed to have Ukrainian heritage.

remarkable how little the fundamental assumptions of government have changed since the advent of the policy of multiculturalism, how little ground has been given by those who have traditionally held power in Australia (1999, 11). Raschke contends that this damaging logic also remains at work in the literary world, writing:

> After years of growing pluralism in certain areas of Australian society and culture, and with optimists believing that the white or Anglo face of Australia is no longer sustainable or tenable, there does remain an imbalance towards white or Anglo tradition in Australia's realms of power and influence, including in Australian publishing and literature. Gatekeepers not only continue to keep watch at the gates, they knock out anyone who goes near them. (2005, 26)

Despite the ongoing structural inequality in the field, the past decade has witnessed the emergence of a wider variety of voices in Australian literature. More than ever before, culturally and linguistically diverse writers are engaging with these conditions through their writing and advocacy in the public sphere, partly enabled by the internet and social media, which have made it easier for writers to create their own publications. There are also a greater number of publishing organisations led by and devoted to amplifying the voices of multicultural and Indigenous writers. This chapter focuses on three texts that have emerged as part of this movement.

2.2.1 "There's no place that's not strange to us": translocal short fiction

A renewed literary multiculturalism is currently blossoming in Australia. This is evidenced by an increase in publications, organisations and prizes focused on work by non-white Australians, as demonstrated in the thesis Introduction. It is also evidenced by the large number of texts available for inclusion in this thesis, as well as many others that could not be included here due to the scope limitations of the thesis format. One significant sub-genre that has emerged as part of this renewal is the single-author short story collection. As argued by Emmett Stinson, the Australian short story was revitalised in the 1970s and 80s by writers such as Helen Garner, Murray Bail and Peter Carey, followed by the form reaching its "nadir" in the early 2000s (2013, 93). Its re-emergence over the past decade has produced a large number of collections, many of them the first major publication for each writer. Significantly, many of the single-author collections published over the past decade have been written by minoritised writers. Apart from *The Boat*, *Foreign Soil* and *The Permanent Resident*, other examples include Ali Alizadeh's *Transactions* (2013), Maria Takolander's *The Double* (2013), Aashish Kaul's *A Dream of Horses & Other Stories* (2014), Michelle Cahill's *Letters to Pessoa* (2016), Tara June Winch's

After the Carnage (2016), Tony Birch's *Common People* (2017), and Melanie Cheng's *Australia Day* (2017). In this section, I discuss the popularity of this form as a new sub-genre in Australian literature: one that enables a dissection of both contemporary Australia and its place in the world.

A discussion of these texts must begin with an acknowledgement of the significant influence of Le's collection on Australian literature. *The Boat*, published in 2008, has been widely celebrated by reviewers and extensively discussed by scholars. This is extremely unusual for a short fiction collection by a debut Australian writer and speaks to the text's commercial and critical success. Le's collection garnered near-universal praise in reviews both in Australia and abroad. It received numerous literary prizes.[27] Reviewers describe the work variously as "extraordinarily impressive" (Cunningham 2009, 134), "remarkably accomplished" (Ley 2008), "a revelation: a bright light in the dim sky of modern short-story writing" (Johnston 2008), "one of the most impressive short story collections published during the past decade" (Cole 2013), and as a work that "raises the bar for Australian writing" (Craven 2008, 63). As Peter Craven goes on to note, "no book in recent literary memory by a young Australian writer has created the same kind of impact as Nam Le's *The Boat*" (65). Reviewers were almost uniformly impressed by Le's ability to inhabit a wide variety of protagonists and to evocatively depict distant places. Indeed, Le's success is credited with helping to re-energise the short story form in Australia. In a survey of recent Australian fiction, Tony Birch notes that: "[i]n the wake of *The Boat* (sorry, couldn't resist the pun), short fiction collections began to appear more regularly in the independent bookshops of Australia. While it is doubtful that this was a direct result of Le's success, some influence, or at least optimism was likely" (n.d.). While Birch may doubt the direct influence of Le's achievement on the Australian publishing industry, other critics tie them together more strongly. Jo Case (2010) argues that Cate Kennedy's 2006 collection *Dark Roots* proved that "it was possible to become a household name on the back of stories," which set the stage for *The Boat* in 2008. By 2010, Case argues, there was "a comparative flood in locally published collections" (29). This is a mechanism of the publishing market above all else: Le did not "invent" the form of the global short story collection, but his success likely made Australian publishers more receptive to the idea that collections such as these could sell well.

[27] Including the Dylan Thomas Prize, the Pushcart Prize, the Australian Prime Minister's Literary Award, the Melbourne Prize for Literature, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and the PEN/Malamud Award.

Le's success outside Australia is also a key part of this story. Le, who arrived in Australia with his Vietnamese parents as an infant, has gone on to lead a highly cosmopolitan life. After working as a lawyer in Melbourne, he left Australia to study at the renowned Iowa Writers' Workshop; he also became fiction editor of the *Harvard Review*. Upon its publication, *The Boat* was widely reviewed in US publications, as well as those in Australia. As a result of the trajectory of his life before *The Boat*, Le was entangled with powerful centres of literary hegemony before the publication of his debut. In any case, the success of Le's collection has likely opened the doors for other writers – whether Anglo or non-Anglo – to have short fiction collections released by major publishers. Regardless of exactly how influential *The Boat* has been, what has followed it is the proliferation of a large number of single-author collections written by Australian authors and possessing a shared focus on the global. Some of these collections follow the same pattern of each story being set in an entirely new location – for example, Kyra Giorgi's *The Circle and the Equator* (2017) and Winch's *After the Carnage*, while others follow a more consistent internal theme or logic, such as Alizadeh's *Transactions*, which is organised around the tarot structure of the Major Arcana, and Cahill's *Letters to Pessoa,* which mixes short stories with letters to notable figures such as Vladimir Nabokov and JM Coetzee.

Critics and reviewers of *The Boat* have commented on Le's choices of narrative and setting. This diverse canvas is often attributed more generally to migrant writers' resistance to the marginalising impact of occupying a minoritised positionality; a rejection of the expectation upon them as writers with migrant or refugee experience or heritage to write about their journeys or their cultural backgrounds. Goellnicht reads the diversity of Le's narratives as an attempt to prove "that he can imagine and convincingly create […] diverse protagonists of any age, gender, religion, ethnic or racial or national origin, and plots set anywhere in the world" (2012, 206). In an interview with Cate Kennedy, Le himself addresses his varied settings: "[l]ooking back now, I will say that by switching from place to place (as well as time to time) I was in some way formalising the idea that there's no place that's not strange to us. Fiction makes strange even the places we think we know" (2008). In other words, Le's stories are not "centered" in Australia,

where he grew up – if anything, they are centered in the US, which is the setting of the collection's anchor story.[28]

Reviews of *Foreign Soil* have focused on its diversity, too, and particularly on Clarke's ability to inhabit a wide variety of voices, which is often attributed to her background as a performance poet. Reviewing *Foreign Soil*, Wright highlights Clarke's proficiency in capturing voice, and argues that "between stories, huge shifts in voice and rhythm occur, and as each new pattern begins to unfurl the reader is forced to adjust, and quickly" (2014). In another interview, Lou Heinrich asks: "Is this a collection of writing that, like Nam Le's *The Boat*, seeks to tell the stories of marginalised people in a society that privileges white, middle-class male voices?" (2014). Referencing the cosmopolitanism of the text, Clarke says, "Australian readers are hungry for new voices, and they realise that the 'new Australian' has local grounding and a global perspective" (2014). *Foreign Soil* is more grounded in Australia – its first and final stories are both set in Footscray, in Melbourne's west.

The Permanent Resident is less oriented at the same kind of "global" optic as the texts by Le and Clarke: instead, its narratives are mostly focused on the diasporic Goan Catholic community in Australia. Anne Brewster (2019) contends that "this targeted focus allows Gonsalves to drill down into the racialised, gendered, class, religious and historical specificities of this community as it negotiates its position(s) within the post-settler white nation" (102). Brewster reads Gonsalves' text through the lens of diaspora, and positions this reading as a response to Jumana Bayeh's 2017 call for Australian minoritised literatures to be read specifically through this lens to "counteract and challenge the operations of racism in the public sphere" (Brewster 103). Bayeh's call can be seen as an echo of Chakraborty's earlier assessment of diasporic discourse in Australian literary studies as being underdeveloped (2012).

What these three collections have in common is their attention to frameworks of transnational identity and belonging: Lachlan Brown describes both *The Boat* and *Foreign Soil* as "self-consciously and explicitly transnational" (2015, 1). They include stories about people seeking asylum (for example, *The Boat*'s eponymous story, and Clarke's "The Stilt Fishermen of Kathaluwa," which are examined in more detail from section 2.3.3 of this chapter onwards) and about migration (for example, Clarke's "Foreign Soil" and "Shu Yi," and Gonsalves' stories

[28] This structural characteristic, and the fact that Le was living in the US at the time of the collection's publication, has led to several scholars and critics claiming Le as an Asian-American writer, and *The Boat* as an example of American literature (Lee 2010; Hampsey 2015).

"Full face" and "Curry muncher 2.0"). This focus on migration necessarily underscores the precarity of many of the texts' characters (Brewster 2019 examines this precarity in *The Permanent Resident*, in particular) – a focus shared by other examples of translocal short fiction, such as Winch's *After the Carnage* (Kossew 2019).

In light of the sheer number of these collections that have been published over the past twelve years, I suggest that they can be seen as an emergent sub-genre of Australian literary writing, which I propose to call "translocal short fiction." By deploying this term, I refer to writing that brings together disparate localities into a space that highlights the resonances and dissonances between them. Many of the examples listed here are focused broadly on issues of globalisation, such as migration, inequality, precarity and belonging. The idea of the translocal "describes phenomena involving mobility, migration, circulation and spatial interconnectedness not necessarily limited to national boundaries" (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013, 373). The term has been deployed across a variety of fields including geography, anthropology and history. Arjun Appadurai (1996) argues for the idea of "the production of locality as a structure of feeling" (181), asserting that locality, in an anthropological sense, is not merely a concept but a complex process of ritual, performance and knowledge. In this chapter, I focus on a kind of *textual* locality that arises when diverse geographical places are drawn together into a single diegetic space.

The idea of the translocal has emerged as a variation on the transnational. Katherine Bricknell and Ayona Datta (2011) contend that "[t]ranslocality is now widely seen to be a form of 'grounded transnationalism'" (2011, 3). In other words, the transnational and the translocal are not drastically different concepts, but the idea of the translocal is especially committed to specificity and situatedness. As noted by Clemens Greiner and Patrick Sakdapolrak, internal migration outpaces international migration the world over (374). The idea of the "translocal" can also be applied to literature: Jahan Ramazani (2009) puts forward a theory of translocal poetics, which he envisions as "[n]either localist or universalist, neither nationalist nor vacantly globalist, a translocal poetics highlights the dialogic intersections – sometimes tense and resistant, sometimes openly assimilative – of specific discourses, genres, techniques, and forms of diverse origins" (2009, 350). I propose that these single-author short story collections can be seen through this lens, with a focus on how they bring together diverse "localities" through the short story form.

I use the term "translocal short fiction" because it emphasises the fact that these works bring diverse localities and stories into the space of the Australian national imaginary. Many of the narratives that are included in these works represent stories and experiences that have not been commonly represented in Australian literature. In so doing, they present a new way to situate the nation. These works by Le, Clarke and Gonsalves each respond to specific flashpoints of nationalism in Australia's history, such as the arrival of Vietnamese refugees by boat during the 1970s, the increase of racism against African Australians in the twenty-first century, and the spate of violent attacks on international university students from India, which spiked in 2009. It is important that these events are "written into" Australian literature, and that they are read as part of its national history. In reading these texts as having something to say regarding the state of the nation, it is critical to acknowledge the role that they play in bringing these events into literary representation.

The texts also include a large number of stories which are set outside Australia. This does not detract from their usefulness as a lens through which to reimagine Australia. As Huggan argues, "[i]f Australian multiculturalism is a national project, its effectiveness has always depended on wider, transnational understandings – of population movements and (un)stated immigrant preferences; of international markets and global cultural/economic flows" (2007, 113). These narratives, some of which appear to be quite remote to Australia, are connected because Le, Clarke and Gonsalves understand and acknowledge the impact of these transnational flows on the national imaginary.

2.3 Bending the (narrative) frame: critical autofictions

As well as drawing together diverse settings, these three collections in particular are defined by a specific commonality: they can each be seen as examples of autofiction. Autofiction is defined as "a form of autobiographical writing that permits a degree of experimentation with the definition and limits of the self, rather than the slavish recapitulation of known biographical facts" (Dix 2018, 3). The term, which was coined in 1977 by French novelist and theorist Serge Doubrovsky, has more recently been taken up to discuss Anglophone literature, and is often used to refer to essayistic, confessional and digital forms of literature.

In contrast to autobiography, autofiction enables more creativity and demands less faithfulness to the documentation of real events. The role of autobiographical narrative in

multicultural literature is well-established, and in its earliest incarnations during the mid-twentieth century, multicultural writing in Australia often took the form of migrants writing about their experiences arriving in their adopted country (Gunew 1994). The idea of "ethnic autobiography," Huggan writes, "flourishes under the watchful eye of the dominant culture […] caught in the dual processes of commodification and surveillance" (2001, 273). Although Huggan uses the concept of ethnic autobiography here mostly to refer to Aboriginal life writing, he notes that the same pressures – of the consumption-oriented ideas of exoticism and "authenticity" – can be seen in multicultural writing.

I suggest that these writers take up an autofictional form in order to subvert the expectations of ethnic autobiography.[29] Each text is built on a semi-autobiographical and in fact autofictional element which becomes part of a metafictional structure anchoring each of the respective collections. The "centres" of these narratives are focused on Le's "Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice" (hereafter referred to as "Love and Honour"), Clarke's "The Sukiyaki Book Club" and Gonsalves' "The teller in the tale." I argue that Le, Clarke and Gonsalves challenge Australia's epistemic privileging of whiteness through the use of a structure which hinges on an autofictional narrative, but subverts the expectations that accompany autobiographical writing by multicultural writers. Because they necessarily include this dynamic of subversion, I refer to these texts as examples of critical autofiction.

Further, I argue that these texts can productively be framed as examples of what Lionnet and Shih's describe as "minor transnationalism" (2005). As Lionnet and Shih write, "[m]ore often than not, minority subjects identify themselves in opposition to a dominant discourse rather than vis-à-vis each other and other minority groups. We study the centre and the margin but rarely examine the relationships among different margins" (2). I argue that not only do Le, Clarke and Gonsalves subvert the assimilationist logic of Australian multiculturalism, but that the way they do so enables them to be seen within an agentive web of "lateral networks" (1) of solidarity, focusing on the idea of "cultural transversalism" (8) rather than defining those in minoritised positions only in terms of their proximity to, or distance from, the centre.[30] In other

[29] Le, Clarke and Gonsalves are not the only Australian writers to do this – another example can be found in Tom Cho's short story collection *Look Who's Morphing* (2009).

[30] See Chapter 2 for additional discussion of minor transnationalism as it relates to the work of writers in Western Sydney's Sweatshop literary community.

words, by reading them as texts that speak to one another, they can be seen not only as works that challenge the literary hegemony but also as works that are in conversation with one another.

In the first subsection, I focus on the structural parallels between the three works. I argue that the narratives, which have been viewed as paratactical – or in other words, unconnected – can in fact be read metadiegetically. By this I mean that they can be read as "stories within stories," and that this structure means that the narratives' diverse settings are co-located into a single diegetic space. I argue that reading each of these narratives as being contained within a singular and translocal textual space facilitates their interpretation as state-of-the-nation texts. In the second subsection, I read the endings of two stories from Le and Gonsalves' collections using the concept of "citational reading" (Gelder 2010). Gonsalves' story is a deliberate act of "writing-back" to Le's story, and when read together, they evidence the different ways in which the texts respond to the problems of multicultural representation. The third section compares two stories, one Le's and one Clarke's, that focus on the experience of refugees undertaking boat journeys. This section focuses on the crucial role that "boat narratives" play in reimagining Australia and expanding the national literary imagination. I read these narratives as *national* narratives, underlining their importance in creating space for the stories of marginalised individuals.

In reading these narratives alongside one another, I return to Cahill's concept of "interceptionality" (2015; 2018) and its role in multicultural writers' cultivation of self-subjectification. The importance of "bending the cultural frame" to "become subjects" (2015) and remediate the impact of othering and tokenisation by the hegemonic discourse is illustrated in the ways in which these texts reinscribe the subject positions of their authors – Vietnamese Australian, Afro-Caribbean Australian and Indian Australian – within the national field. While Cahill discusses the concept of the frame as a metaphor, referring to how authors can assert their own subjectivity, in this chapter I apply Cahill's idea quite literally, referring to Le, Clarke and Gonsalves' use of narrative frames.

2.3.1 Writing the "ethnic story": parataxis and metadiegesis

I read the structural parallels between these three texts as examples of a metadiegetic structure or, in other words, a series of textual frames. This analysis draws primarily from narrative theory. Historically, short stories have been overlooked within the broader field of narrative theory (Copland 2014). This argument brings a narrative theory lens to the structural parallels between the three collections. In both *Foreign Soil* and *The Boat*, each story is set in a different time and place. This structure might be seen as the opposite of the sort of short story collection that revolves around a single location, such as Tim Winton's *The Turning* (2004), which tells a series of stories about people in a fictional Western Australian fishing town. Notably, Le's story "Halflead Bay" has been read as an inhabitation of Winton's distinctly Anglo Australian narrative voice (Craven 2008; O'Reilly 2009), and Le as "the perfect counterfeiter of the Australian vernacular" (Brown 2013, 571). Elsewhere, Brown also describes *The Boat* as a "virtuosic challenge to the requirement for authenticity that is often seen in aphorisms like 'write what you know'" (2014, 4).[31] In a way, many of the texts that form the emerging genre of what I have here termed "translocal short fiction" appear to play with this directive. This has produced a series of texts that are defined by the diversity of their settings, which change drastically from story to story.

With reference to this structural characteristic, several critics have remarked upon Le's use of the literary technique of parataxis (Gelder 2010; Brown 2015), which refers originally to the "co-ordination of clauses without conjunctions" (Cuddon 2013, 512). In this context, it refers to the way that the narratives in *The Boat* are presented alongside one another with no obvious governing structure. Ken Gelder cites the stories as inhabiting "a series of otherwise unconnected, remote places," with an "apparent lack of any connection between each story – with the partial exception of the first and the last" (2010, 11), while Brown states that "Le's book shifts settings and characters without further comment or stated reason" (4). Parataxis can also be seen in the other texts analysed here: referring to *The Permanent Resident*, Eugen Bacon writes that "while there are no recurring characters or places, stories have the dominant motif of characters being in two worlds" (2017). While it is true that the stories in *The Boat*, *Foreign Soil* and *The Permanent Resident* present narratives that appear to be unrelated, I assert that these

[31] A vast majority of reviewers have praised Le's work, although Stinson argues that "Le's stories often feel like a set of genre exercises that precisely imitate their sources without transcending them" (2013, 101).

views overlook subtle details in the three works that knit all of the narrative "frames" into one diegetic space.

In each text, the first level refers to the level at which the autofictional element is placed. The protagonist of Le's story is Nam, a graduate student in creative writing, living in Iowa City while he attends the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop. Nam is awakened from a dream about a poem, "perhaps the best [he'd] ever written" (1), by the arrival of his father. Nam is on a deadline to complete his graduate coursework, and under pressure to write one final story. He is plagued by writer's block, caught in a vicious cycle of forcing himself to meet deadlines, and languishing in front of a "vacant screen" with his "slowly sludging mind" (7). As the narrative progresses, the reader learns that Nam has been estranged from his father. After leaving home at sixteen, he developed a drug habit and commenced a relationship with a girl of whom his father disapproved. He was eventually welcomed back home and went on to become a lawyer but gave up his legal career at the age of twenty-five to move to Iowa. When his father arrives at his house, Nam says, "I had not seen him in three years" (3). Their reunion is fraught with past difficulties and complications.

Gonsalves' story is narrated by Rita, also a doctoral student in creative writing, who lives in Sydney with her mother and her two sons. Rita is alternately impatient with and thankful for her mother, who assists her with childcare while she is working hard to write the final short story she needs in order to complete the creative component of her PhD submission. Rita's relationship with her mother is occasionally fractious; the reader learns that Rita's mother hoped that she would study medicine, and was deeply disappointed when Rita followed her father into aviation, working as a flight attendant. She eventually married a pilot and migrated to Australia, where she gave birth to two sons and later separated from her husband. Following the separation, Rita's mother encourages her to return to university to complete her education, and then moves to Australia to live with Rita and her sons. The story "The teller in the tale" is set toward the end of Rita's enrolment as a graduate research student in creative writing.

The protagonist of Clarke's story is also an aspiring writer, this time a single mother of two young children living in Footscray in Melbourne's western suburbs, writing short stories and submitting them for publication. In the story, the unnamed author receives rejection slips from publishers with comments such as "Your writing is genuinely astonishing, but I'd like to read something you've written that deals with everyday themes […] think book club material […] [w]e feel Australian readers are not ready for characters like these" (257). The author balances

her writing aspirations with caring for her two children. They live in precarity, in an apartment rented through Gumtree for an indeterminate amount of time, very close to a metropolitan train line.

Each of these narratives can be seen as autofiction. They should not be interpreted as factual or autobiographical, but they do display, as Hywel Dix says, "experimentation with the definition and limits of the self" (2018, 3). Just like Nam, Le travelled from Vietnam to Australia on a boat with his parents as a refugee, and later gave up a career in law to attend the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Just like Rita, Gonsalves earned a PhD in creative writing, graduating from UNSW in 2016. Just like the unnamed author in "The Sukiyaki Book Club," Clarke lived in Footscray with her young children while writing the stories that came to be known as *Foreign Soil*. Clarke has confirmed that this narrative is based on her life, stating: "I do often write semi-autobiographical fiction: for example, the final story *Sukiyaki Book Club* [sic] in *Foreign Soil"* (Britten 2016). What is critical is that each of these protagonists has had the experience of living under the pressures of Australia's "filter of whiteness" (Gonsalves 2017): each of them has had the experience of being either a migrant, a refugee, or being othered by a dominant Anglo culture due to their ethnic or racial background. In addition, there is a gendered element at work: both Clarke and Gonsalves' narratives feature protagonists who are single mothers, facing the challenges of balancing writing with domestic work and parenting: Gonsalves' Rita writes in a rush before her sons finish school (150), while Clarke's protagonist balances her laptop on her knees in the hallway while her children shower (262).

The second metadiegetic parallel between these three narratives comes in the implication that the protagonists of each primary narrative – "Love and Honour," "The teller in the tale" and "The Sukiyaki Book Club" – are also the authors of each of the remaining narratives in each of the collections. In "Love and Honour," Nam recalls a visiting literary agent imploring him to mine his "*background* and *life experience"* (8, emphasis original) for inspiration, while other friends say "I'm sick of ethnic lit […] it's full of descriptions of exotic food" and "You can't tell if the language is spare because the author intended it that way, or because he didn't have the vocab" (8). It is also implied that in this fictional world, Nam has already written the short story "The Boat," which is positioned at the end of Le's collection. On their walk home together, a friend explains that he enjoys Nam's work more because it is not about his experience as a refugee: "that's why I don't mind your work, Nam. Because you could just write about Vietnamese boat people all the time. Like in your third story" (9). Nam's father also tells the

homeless man they meet under a bridge, "I read his story […] about Vietnamese boat people" (13). "Love and Honour" is the only story in the collection that explicitly references the other stories, and it is not possible to presume necessarily that "The Boat" is the Vietnamese boat people story referenced in "Love and Honour," although the relationship between the narratives is implied. The relationship between the first and last stories in the collection ensures the reader is aware of the fictionality of each story; of the choices that were made – either by Nam or by Nam Le – to construct them. Nam's friend goes on to tell him, "You could *totally* exploit the Vietnamese thing. But instead, you choose to write about lesbian vampires and Colombian assassins, and Hiroshima orphans – and New York painters with haemorrhoids" (Le 10). Goellnicht notes that "there is apparently a lesbian vampire story that didn't make it into the collection" (2012, 222), but Colombian child assassins, Hiroshima orphans and New York painters are protagonists of other stories in the collection: "Cartagena," "Hiroshima" and "Meeting Elise," respectively.

In "The teller in the tale," Rita says, "AK Ramanujan had once said that a story is cathartic for the teller in the tale. I'd been trying different ways to work these two ideas into my story about a couple that wanted a child" (Gonsalves 126). In the physical arrangement of stories in the collection, "The teller in the tale" is immediately preceded by the story "Friending and Trending," in which a married couple, Nitin and Nalini, do not yet know of the difficulty they will face in trying to conceive a child. In Clarke's story, the unnamed author receives feedback on other parts of the collection. She receives a rejection from a publisher for the story "Harlem Jones," about a black teenager in London who becomes caught up in a protest against police brutality, which is also published within the collection *Foreign Soil*. The rejection slip reads: "[t]he title character in 'Harlem Jones'. What can I say? He's intriguing – so raw. But what if he didn't hurl the Molotov in the closing paragraphs? Imagine if that day of the Tottenham riots was ultimately a wake-up call that got an angry black kid back on the straight and narrow?" (258). From this wry metafictional comment, the reader is able to extrapolate that the protagonist of "The Sukiyaki Book Club" is a representation of the author of "Harlem Jones" and of the remainder of the collection. When asked about the protagonist receiving this feedback from their publisher, Clarke states:

> I do think that Australians are very nervous, on the whole, about talking about race. I think it comes from our inability to fully accept our history of dispossession and colonisation; our isolated geography. At the same time, I also believe Australian readers are hugely underestimated. A lot of the time, we don't have the opportunity to experience different voices because of decisions made in the publishing room. (Britten 2016, 25)

Clarke's statement emphasises the influence of literary gatekeeping, as described by Cahill and Raschke above, on which kinds of narratives make it into the Australian literary sphere. Within the diegetic world of each text, at least, it is the fictional Nam, Rita, and the unnamed Melbourne author who are making choices regarding the stories. Each protagonist self-reflexively addresses the choices they must make as writers.

The third common metadiegetic frame among these three stories is that the protagonist in each story is also in the process of trying to write a new story. Each author is under pressure, coming from figures of hegemonic power, to write a specific sort of narrative. In "Love and Honour," Nam is struggling with writer's block. He is resistant to the idea of writing "refugee" literature, despite a writing instructor telling him, "[e]thnic literature's hot" (8). Eventually, frustrated by his lack of inspiration and sick of procrastinating, Nam decides to write the story of his father's survival of the My Lai massacre, which involved the killing of hundreds of unarmed South Vietnamese civilians by US Army troops on March 16, 1968. Nam writes the narrative as he recalls it from his father's retelling around a bonfire a decade earlier. He completes the story, which he titles "ETHNIC STORY," its capitalisation somewhat wryly advertising Nam's self-conscious intention to embrace the tropes of refugee writing. Nam's father reads the story and tells him, "There are mistakes in it" (24). When Nam shows his surprise that his father has read the story, his father responds, "There were mistakes in your last story too" (24). Nam reveals that he had sent the "refugee story" (which may or may not be the story "The Boat") to his father, who "hadn't responded" (24). It is unclear whether Nam ever corrected the mistakes that his father claims are present in the refugee story, as they only discuss the story of his father's experience at My Lai; the family's experience as refugees is only touched upon briefly: "[h]e told me how, upon his release after three years' incarceration, he organised our family's escape from Vietnam" (29). As a result of this conversation, Nam convinces his father to tell him the story of his experience at My Lai directly, giving Nam a chance to correct his mistakes in a second draft of the story.

In "The teller in the tale" Rita meets a fellow PhD student at her university, a woman named Ros who is "solid Sydney" (137), who denigrates the rigour of Rita's creative writing PhD at the expense of her own research focus on Gilles Deleuze: she claims to envy Rita's "freedom from academic strictures," and wishes that she could "just write […] a story" (138). Ros introduces Rita to her friend Sue-Ellen as her "*new* friend" (emphasis original), and Sue-Ellen can only respond with enthusiastic comments about the food she enjoyed so much on

holiday in Goa and Kerala. In her conversation with Ros and Sue-Ellen, Rita understands that "a map was being drawn and a border being created beyond which I would never traverse. I was being shown my place" (140). Later, when Rita decides to interview her mother for her story, she tells Ros, who responds, "So it's going to be about your culture?" (141). Ros and Sue-Ellen exclude Rita through their pointed essentialisms, showing her clearly that she will remain excluded from their circle, which is predicated on their common whiteness and affluence.

Both Nam and Rita discover the extent of hidden traumas in their parents' lives: Nam learns the extent of his father's suffering at the hands of the US Army and later his conscription into the South Vietnamese Army, where he was forced to fight alongside the Americans who had massacred his family; his experience of torture in a re-education camp, and organising his family's escape to Australia on a refugee boat. Rita learns that her mother suffered a traumatic miscarriage when Rita herself was ten years old. They each come to understand in new ways how their parents have moulded themselves around the sacrifices they have made for their children. Each narrative involves a parallel moment when, at the end of these respective interviews, Nam and Rita experience a revelation about their parents' sacrifice. Nam watches his father sleeping, and Le writes, "I became my father, watching his sleeping son, reminded of what – for his son's sake – he had tried, unceasingly, to forget" (29). Gonsalves, meanwhile, writes of Rita's mother: "Her sense of identity had been whittled away until all she had left was my future. That's how I saw it. That's how I saw what she saw, now, for the first time" (148). These parallels are continued in the ending of both Le and Gonsalves' narratives; these endings are analysed in more detail in section 2.3.2 below.

The unnamed author in "The Sukiyaki Book Club" is writing a story about a little girl called Avery. In this narrative, Avery hangs upside down from a set of monkey bars in the school playground. Throughout the story, the author reveals more information about Avery's fictional life through vignettes, interspersed with the author performing the daily duties of caring for her son and daughter, and considering various narrative choices regarding how Avery will get down from the monkey bars. The author hears a song coming through the window from the street below: Sakamoto Kyū's "Ue O Muite Arukou," or "I Shall Walk Looking Up," a Japanese song about "ignoring the tears welling in your eyes, raising your head high and walking on" (249). Clarke makes the point that the protagonist's son Markie has learned to sing the same song recently at school, although his schoolteacher referred to the song as "Sukiyaki": the "easier name the song was given when it reached Western shores" (249). When Sakamoto – a rockabilly

singer – gained popularity in the US, the song was re-titled (given the name of a beef dish recognisable to Americans), although the lyrics remained untranslated. Michael K. Bourdaghs argues that "Sukiyaki" became a major international hit song both because of and despite its "being in the exotic language of Japanese" (2005, 254). The song, "Sukiyaki," then becomes a metaphor for the oversimplification and commodification of othered cultural forms – or narratives – for the benefit of white audiences.

Avery's narrative, therefore, becomes a symbol of the pressure on the author. Clarke uses language which makes clear the stress that the character is under: "Avery's head feels heavy and swollen. The sweaty backs of her knees are sore where they're hooked around the shiny yellow rung of the monkey bars" (245). Immediately after the list of excerpts from publisher rejection slips, Clarke returns again to the reference to "Ue O Muite Arukou," and then back to the narrative about Avery: "I have hung Avery wrong side up, alone and afraid. I was not going to do this again. When I first started writing, hers was going to be a story about love" (258). A connecting line is drawn, then, from "Ue O Muite Arukou" to the story about Avery and to the author's choices regarding what to write about and how to write about it: whether to cater to the publishing industry, dominated by the "filter of whiteness" that Gonsalves describes, or whether to preserve the spirit of more authentic narratives which are less easily sold to a mass-market audience. Clarke, the daughter of British immigrants of Afro-Caribbean descent, has described the deep impact of racism on her life; how as a child subject to racist bullying, she wished to become white (Clarke quoted in Lu 2016). The impulse to cater to whiteness, and then to resist this impulse, is visible in this narrative.

To summarise, each text contains several "levels" of diegesis: the first level belongs to the "real" protagonists (each of whom bears resemblance to the text's author): Nam in *The Boat*, Rita in *The Permanent Resident*, the unnamed author in *Foreign Soil*. Each of their stories frames a second level: the stories they are each in the process of writing (Nam's "ETHNIC STORY," Rita's story about her mother, and the author's story about schoolgirl Avery). From the first level of diegesis in each text, the reader learns that these protagonists – Nam, Rita, and the author – have also authored the remaining stories in each collection. These other stories therefore form a third level of diegesis – stories that have already been completed, in the past, within the first diegetic world. This analysis builds on the work of other scholars who have remarked upon the use of textual frames in these texts. Writing about *The Boat* and *Foreign Soil*, Michael Griffiths (2017) argues that "[m]etalepsis is used comically by these authors to call

attention to the difficult pressures that authors from non-Anglo backgrounds face on the Australian literary scene and more broadly" (101). Brown (2016) notes that *The Boat, Foreign Soil* and Alizadeh's *Transactions* "are accompanied by metafictive frames which foreground the idea of writing as a creative and urgent act in a globalised world" (1). These texts bring together geographically and temporally disparate stories through levels of diegesis, illuminating the "the histories of local-to-global networks of power and worldly interdependence and interconnectedness" (Goellnicht 2012, 208) created under the conditions of globalisation. Other critics have also commented on the resurrection of the Australian short story form but have not specifically tied together the rapid proliferation of collections authored by culturally and linguistically diverse authors (Stinson 2013).

The addition of *The Permanent Resident* to this genre, however, solidifies a more striking parallel between these three texts, as outlined by this analysis. The reader is aware that the disparate locations of the subsequent stories are actually settings created by the writer in the first-level story. By flattening these settings into diegetic frames, *The Boat, Foreign Soil* and *The Permanent Resident* are able to draw attention to "the tectonic shifts of displacement that create surprising closeness between historical event-horizons distant in space and/or time" (Cooppan 2016, 17). In this way, they bring the world into Australia, and into the space of the Australian national imaginary. They present a view of the state of the nation from the perspective of writers from migrant backgrounds or with migrant heritage, working to carve out a place for themselves and their stories on their own terms, without having to submit fully to the demands of the book publishing industry.

Each protagonist is under pressure from figures who represent the operation of hegemonic power. Rita's work is questioned and minimised by Ros; Nam is advised by publishing industry representatives to stick to writing refugee stories; the author in Clarke's text is told by publishers to make her narratives more palatable and to add uplifting, uncomplicated endings. Gelder's concept of "proximate reading" is helpful here. Developed as a median between the traditional method of close reading and Franco Moretti's idea of distant reading (which refers to a methodology of studying, for example, a particular genre of novel over a long time span), proximate reading can be seen as a scale of reading that enables the recognition of relationships between texts, or "literary sociality," which Gelder describes as "relations between readers, texts and the meaning that bind these relations together" (2010, 1). As Gelder goes on to note, Le's "Love and Honour" "self-consciously puts author and narrator into proximity with one

another" (10). In what might be another example of literary sociality, both Clarke's and Gonsalves' texts do the same. In putting their respective authors and narrators in proximity with one another, they are also drawn into proximity with Le and the fictional Nam. Their intra-textual *and* intertextual parallels mark them as examples of the emergent genre of translocal short fiction.

2.3.2 Intertextuality in "Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice" and "The teller in the tale"

As noted above, while there are critical parallels in structure between the three texts, there are two examples of parallelism that go even further: into the realm of intertext. In this section, I focus on the final scenes in "Love and Honour" and "The teller in the tale," in which Gonsalves re-stages and subverts the ending of Le's narrative. This analysis continues to draw on Gelder's framework of proximity, including the concept of citation. As Gelder argues, "[c]itations are themselves an expression of proximity, of literary sociality, where texts are put into relationships with other texts" (2010, 5). Gelder uses *The Boat* to illustrate his theory of proximate reading, interrogating Le's collection as an example of a text which "cites" Australia, and "in which Australia is a kind of trace woven into a larger, often incongruous transnational fabric" (9). In this analysis, I take this interrogation in a slightly different direction, reading Gonsalves' narrative as a citation of Le's.

Gonsalves' narrative does not refer explicitly to Le's narrative in any way, but the parallels between them are extremely striking. The productiveness of reading these authors alongside one another is summarised by Gonsalves in an article published in literary journal *Overland*. Gonsalves, writing about Sri Lankan Australian author Michelle de Kretser (whose work is analysed in depth in Chapter 3), describes the latter's 2013 novel *Questions of Travel* as a "literary selfie" of Australia. Gonsalves writes: "[f]rom my position as an Indian immigrant in Australia, a writer and scholar, *Questions of Travel* provided a selfie of a country that I and people like me could retweet[32] and circulate, contributing to the flow of the literary selfie. In this book I saw a Sri Lankan Australian author writing about Sri Lanka and Australia and our larger

[32] On social media network Twitter, users post "tweets" to their "followers." The "retweet" function allows a user to share another user's original "tweet" to their own followers.

world. A self enacting self" (2017). Gonsalves' description elegantly describes the process of self-subjectification that each of these authors can be seen to perform within their texts, and in how they reimagine Australia. To use Gonsalves' social media discourse, then, "The teller in the tale" can be seen as a "literary retweet" (2017) of Le's work – a representation of an Indian Australian experience that refers back, through both robust and subtle references, to an earlier portrayal of a Vietnamese Australian experience.

At the end of Le's story, Nam wakes to find that his father has taken the typed version of his re-written manuscript down to the river, where a homeless man warms himself by a gasoline drum. Earlier in the story, Nam and his father have a brief conversation with the man and offer him some money. In this story, Nam's father destroys the manuscript: Nam wakes from sleep to find that his father is not in the house, and Nam cycles through town searching for him. He discovers that his father has been under the bridge with the homeless man. Le writes:

> If I had known then what I knew later, I wouldn't have said the things I did. I wouldn't have told him he didn't understand, for clearly, he did. I wouldn't have told him that what he had done was unforgivable. That I wished he had never come, or that he was no father to me. But I hadn't known, and, as I waited, feeling the wind change, all I saw was a man coming toward me in a ridiculously oversized jacket, rubbing his black-sooted hands, stepping through the smoke with its flecks and flame-tinged eddies, who had destroyed himself, yet again, in my name. (32)

The ending of Le's story is characterised by deep regret at the misapprehension of his father's intentions, but is related through a proleptic movement, which reveals that Nam did not have the advantage of this perspective at the time when he discovered his father's actions. Nam's father's burning of the manuscript comes to symbolise a repetition of all of the sacrifices that he has made for Nam, stretching back to their evacuation from Vietnam.

In Gonsalves' story, Rita returns home from a walk to find her own manuscript missing – and immediately fears that her mother has destroyed it. Frantic, Rita searches for her mother, and sees her in the backyard, bent over the family worm farm. Rather than destroy the manuscript, however, Rita's mother instructs her to type up the document. "Make sure you don't put apostrophes on the wrong 'its'. All those expensive tuitions for nothing" (152). Rita realises how badly she has misjudged her mother's intentions, "retch[ing] with shame for doubting her purpose" (153). Le places the revelation of the manuscript's destruction at the end of a long paragraph. The distance between the moment when Nam sees his father coming toward him and the moment in which the reader realises that his father has burned the manuscript creates an elongated space in the narrative. In contrast, Rita's experience of realising that she has

misunderstood her mother's intentions is related in present tense: "I gulp with pride at the seeds from which I was sprung" (152). This tense but ultimately positive ending stands in potent contrast to the final paragraph of Le's narrative.

Furthermore, both narratives end with their protagonists' symbolic interaction with rivers, and through these interactions can be read in terms of contrasting matrilineal and patrilineal relationships between migrant parents and children. In Gonsalves' text, the powerful image of the "amniotic" river has been developed throughout the narrative, most powerfully through the story of when Rita's mother suffered a miscarriage when Rita was a child. The miscarried baby was "eased into the river" to be "with her great grandmothers" (148). The story ends with a final description of the river:

> The wind carries the smell of the amniotic river to the space between my mother and me. Her arms are so close to me now. So, so close. They are as wide as the river that held her grandmothers, that held a daughter who was yet to be. All is liquid air and rich composted soil. From this, newness will be fashioned. I am sure of it. (153)

The river is a symbol of matrilineal connection between Rita and her foremothers, a metaphor of fecundity linked to the worm farm: "liquid air and rich composted soil." It is also a symbol of cyclical life, both an "amniotic" space where "newness will be fashioned," as well as a resting place for the baby who did not survive. In addition, Gonsalves' choice to end the story with the phrase "I am sure of it" signals an optimism and confidence in the future, and in the recurrence of familiar patterns. The symbolism of the river is powerfully used in Le's story as well as Gonsalves'. Its final paragraph reads:

> The river was behind him. The wind was full of acid. In the slow float of light I looked away, down the river. On the brink of freezing, it gleamed in large, bulging blisters. The water, where it still moved, was black and braided. And it occurred to me then how it took hours, sometimes days, for the surface of a river to freeze over – to hold in its skin the perfect and crystalline world – and how that world could be shattered by a small stone dropped like a single syllable. (32)

The paragraph's progressively lengthening sentences capture the slow process of freezing, invoking the coldness and precarity of Nam's relationship with his father at the end of the narrative, which forms a striking contrast to the warmth, earthiness and fruitfulness promised by Gonsalves' final lines. The disconnection between Nam and his father has already been articulated in the paragraph analysed above ("If I had known then what I knew later"), and it is illustrated further here by the parallel between the water being sealed away under the ice, and Nam's father's story being sealed into silence through the symbolic burning of the manuscript.

In addition, there are many small parallels to be found throughout the two narratives. In "The teller in the tale," Rita says "I read a lot of poetry that summer to take me back to those days before India became too small to hold my aspirations" (125). Nam, meanwhile, says that while trying to write his story, "I read absurdly formal Victorian poetry and drank Scotch neat" (7). In Gonsalves' narrative, Rita recalls fighting with her mother as a teenager: "I grabbed her arm and pushed her back with all the weight of the Seven Virtues – prudence, justice, temperance, courage, faith, hope and charity" (132). The invocation of Catholic virtues is specific to Rita's context, but the listing of the virtues echoes the title of Le's narrative. Le draws this title from William Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, in which Faulkner states: "It is [the writer's] privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past" (1950). Parallels in the structural and diegetic construction of these narratives are consolidated by these subtle resonances between the fabula of each story.

When asked about the parallels between the ending of "The teller in the tale" and Le's narrative, Gonsalves writes: "I was building up to the point where the mother could destroy the manuscript, but doesn't, because the effort of getting to this point cannot be wasted even if the manuscript holds her most traumatic memories. She doesn't want to forget. Or the benefit to her child is more important than the erasure of traumatic memory" (Roanna Gonsalves, email message to author, May 17, 2017). Writing about "Love and Honour," Gelder contends that "this complicated story opens up the possibility of writing an authentic (and harrowing) 'ethnic literature', only to utterly refuse that possibility at the end, in a final scene that severs the narrator's proximity to what another character in the story calls 'Your *background* and *life experience*'" (2010, 10). Gonsalves' narrative, then, can be seen as a reversal of Le's text.[33] Rather than Rita's mother destroying the record of her traumatic memory, she encourages Rita to do the best work she can in writing about it. When viewed within the wider context of the narratives in *The Permanent Resident* all having been authored by Rita, the inversion of *The Boat* is consolidated. While Nam rejects the advice to write "ethnic literature," Rita demonstrates that writing about one's background does not limit the depth or variety of stories that can be told.

[33] The influence of Le's text is again emphasised by the fact that Gonsalves is not the first to draw it into a textual conversation. Brown (2015) argues that about Alizadeh's *Transactions* can also be read as a rejoinder to *The Boat*, reading it as "an inversion of the paratactic politeness of *The Boat* with its liberal humanist underpinnings" (5).

2.3.3 Traumatic journeys: "The Boat" and "The Stilt Fisherman of Kathaluwa"

One of the common factors between these collections is their shared focus on experiences of migration. In this final section, I turn to an analysis of two examples of narratives that focus on the experience of refugees taking dangerous boat journeys in order to seek asylum: Le's "The Boat" and Clarke's "The Stilt Fisherman of Kathaluwa." Le's narrative focuses on Mai, who leaves behind her family to meet an "uncle" who organises for her to leave Vietnam on a boat after the war. She recalls being put on a bus and made to hide in the roof of a house, "lay[ing] with the corrugated aluminium roof just a few thumbs above her head, and in the middle of the day the heat was unbearable" (2008, 299). Clarke's narrative tells the story of Asanka, a young Sri Lankan boy and former child soldier kidnapped by the Tamil Tigers. Asanka relives his traumatic memories of his time on a boat run by people smugglers, and his experiences suffering from dysentery, malnutrition and delusion. These flashbacks are interspersed with the present, where he is detained in Villawood Detention Centre and subject to the interminable oppression of indefinite detention.

These narratives are compared here in order to draw attention to their importance as Australian stories. As Nicholas Birns writes, "Australian space contains even within its domestic borders many plural national imaginaries stemming from worldwide hybrid and diasporic identities, not to mention the potential permeability of Australia's seacoast, as recent refugee flows have epitomised" (2015, 1). Reading these texts as state-of-the-nation narratives highlights the critical role that asylum seekers play in constituting the contours of contemporary Australia, with its fixation on border politics and journeys by sea. Le's narrative takes place mostly aboard the vessel. After Mai is ushered through a tense journey to board a small boat, the passengers are caught in a storm, where "[i]n the swaying half-dark, people pitched forward and back, one by one, adding to the slosh of saltwater and urine in the bilge. People threw up in plastic bags, which they then passed on, hand to hand, until the parcel reached someone next to a scupper" (282). The boat is extremely crowded and dirty, carrying "at least two hundred people, squashed into a space meant for fifteen" (303), while "[i]nside the hold, the stench was incredible, almost-eye watering," filled with "[t]he smell of urine and human waste, sweat and vomit" (302). The storm passes, but the passengers' fortunes only disintegrate further. The ship's stores of food are spoiled in the storm. The passengers grow thirsty, and Mai is rebuked by her new friend Quyen after drinking seawater. Others drink their own urine. Mai falls into a fever dream about her father; she is awoken by Quyen two days later. The passengers begin to starve

and succumb to sickness; Mai watches a teenage girl throw herself overboard "in a motion like a bow that didn't stop" (313). When Quyen's son Truong falls ill, Mai supplies him with a trickle of water from a flask, and a man attacks her for stealing his water (316). Several days later, the passengers sight land, although Truong dies before the ship is able to dock. Quyen and Mai "swing [his] small body one, twice, three times before letting go, tossing him as far behind the boat as possible so he would be out of sight when the sharks attacked" (333). Goellnicht argues that "the end [of *The Boat*] undermines the beginning's seemingly cynical and perhaps disingenuous avowal of ethnic literature" (200). Its tragic ending certainly undercuts the earlier dismissiveness of Nam's friends who believe that ethnic literature is a "licence to bore" (Le 2008, 8).

Although Mai's boat is located somewhere in the South China Sea, its narrative forms part of a longer chain of journeys that have conveyed many Vietnamese Australians to their adopted home. As Wenche Ommunsden writes, "boats have haunted the cultural imagination of the island continent, and stories about boats have traced the history of the nation from far-flung colony to independence, and from European outpost to precarious relations with its closer neighbours to the north" (2011, 507). Despite not being set on a boat headed directly to Australia, then, this journey is also one that can be read as part of the Australian literary imagination.

Clarke's narrative "The Stilt Fisherman of Kathaluwa" moves back and forth between Asanka's boat journey and the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre in Western Sydney. Asanka's story intersects with that of Loretta, a lawyer who volunteers at Villawood through the Asylum Seekers Support Centre. Loretta is described as having a "big heart" (203), living in what she considers to be a "soulless, monochrome Escher-print display home" (203) and driving a year-old "zippy black Mazda" (215). She is married to Sam, a business lawyer. Loretta is unhappy in her marriage, and this tension drives the sections of the narrative that focus on her: Sam wants Loretta to stop volunteering at Villawood, and she is upset that he no longer seems enthusiastic about having children. Loretta is portrayed as someone who is disillusioned with the choices she has made in life, who has strayed from her aspiration to help refugees by becoming caught in the trappings of her affluence. She has recently left behind a paid job with the Asylum Seekers Support Centre, convinced by Sam to "ditch the job" (203) with the promise of finding more steady hours and starting a family together, but she continues to volunteer on Saturdays.

Loretta's story intersects with Asanka's when she visits him at the immigration detention centre. Asanka asks Loretta to help him leave the detention centre, but Loretta does not respond to his question, knowing that as a volunteer she can no longer help: "[s]he can't get him out of here. She can't even try. It's not her job anymore. He wouldn't understand, even if she explains it. He's just a kid. He *is* a kid" (235). Asanka's sections of the narrative, however, reveal horrific past experiences that stand in contrast to the idea of his character being "just a kid." A former child soldier taken by the militant Tamil Tigers, Asanka remembers "[i]n Gonagala […] he cut up three people in the time he now has to make stretch till breakfast. He cut them up alive, while they were still screaming" (208). When he does eventually escape, he is on a boat run by people smugglers when one of their leaders, referred to only metonymically as Moustache, "walks over to the open fish hold, scans the group of men for Asanka's rescuer. Holding the sheathed blade of the knife, he swings the long handle at the man's face. Crack. Asanka's new friend clutches at his forehead. A thin trickle of blood dribbles slowly through his fingers" (197). On the boat journey, Asanka survives on fish blood and contracts dysentery, and is tied behind the boat in the water so as not to infect the other passengers. He remembers waves that "break against [his] back at even intervals … the centre of the rope is looped under [his] arms, knotted to him. When his bowels open, his whole body buckles against the pain and he can no longer hold on to the rope with his hands" (221). Later, in the detention centre, he describes to Loretta how the Tamil Tigers amputated his left thumb when he refused to rape a young girl, and cut off his index finger when he was caught attempting to escape (236). As a volunteer, Loretta can only talk to Asanka, and is powerless to help free him from detention.

These contrasting narratives – the horrific violence of Asanka's journey and the comparative mundanity of Loretta's problems – come together at the conclusion of the story, when Asanka uses a sharpened hairpin and a string of dental floss, stolen from Loretta's handbag, to sew his lips together in protest against the Australian Government. While Asanka is preparing for his protest, Loretta returns to her car in the parking lot, frustrated at her inability to assist him in a meaningful way. "She doesn't know what will become of him if he has to stay there much longer, or even if he's sent back. She should get out of the car, turn back around, talk to the kid some more" (243). Instead, she drives out of the parking lot. As she leaves, "[c]ameramen scramble across the gravel […] shouting, sprinting, pointing at a figure moving slowly and steadily toward the fence, across the asphalt of the visitors' yard" (243). These are the final lines of the story.

The narrative is structured in these intersecting pieces throughout, moving backward and forward through time to Asanka's experience on the boat, the formation of his friendship with the older Chaminda; later, the suicide of Chaminda (who was a client of Loretta) in the detention centre, and in the second-by-second retelling of how Asanka passes his interminable mornings in the centre. "08.06.21. Asanka deserves to die"; "08.06.32. Asanka knows why they are keeping him here. They have found out that he is a monster" (208). The narrative is alternately focalised through Asanka and Loretta throughout. Natalie Edwards and Christopher Hogarth (2016) argue that the use of this narrative style "undercuts the legitimized, chronological and teleological narrative of the nation through its emphasis on the complex layering of time and space that becomes the fabric of alternative narratives" (9). Both Asanka and Loretta "form part of the tapestry that constitutes the contemporary Australian nation" (9), Edwards and Hogarth argue, and the unresolved nature of their encounter invites the reader to consider their own ethical position with regard to Australia's ongoing indefinite detention of asylum seekers (9).

Both Clarke and Le's narratives underscore the importance to Australian national history of boat journeys. As Ommundsen argues: "[b]oat stories tell of the personal and national past, they negotiate between past and present, they serve to illustrate cultural conflict as successive waves of immigrants encounter established populations, and they highlight questions of identity (personal, national, cultural) in the evolving narrative around continuity and change which characterizes [*sic*] the nation's brief history" (2011, 507). By reading these boat narratives purposefully through a national lens, it is possible to witness how these authors create space outside the dominant settler-colonial subjectivity for marginalised narratives to become part of Australia's literary imagination.

2.4 Conclusion to Chapter 1

This chapter has presented the first of four case studies that read examples of contemporary Australian literature as state-of-the-nation texts. In this chapter, I have focused on what I characterise as a burgeoning genre of Australian writing: single-author collections by culturally and linguistically diverse writers, which unite a multiplicity of global settings. I call these works examples of translocal fiction. They enable these authors to grapple with the structural inequalities inherent in Australian multiculturalism, which functions to maintain the privileged position of white Australians. In addition, this system continues to operate on a transactional

basis, wherein multicultural writers are pushed to commodify their experiences and heritage in order to gain recognition from the literary establishment.

Within this genre, I have read three examples of translocal short fiction – Nam Le's *The Boat*, Maxine Beneba Clarke's *Foreign Soil* and Roanna Gonsalves' *The Permanent Resident* – as examples of autofiction which subvert this transactional logic. They use a common structural strategy – the use of metadiegetic levels – to "bend the cultural frame" (Cahill 2015), and to draw attention to the ways in which they resist the commodification of their identities as multicultural writers. This chapter has also read the ending of Gonsalves' narrative as a "literary retweet" of Le's "Love and Honour." Finally, it has juxtaposed the boat narratives of Le and Clarke in order to draw attention to these narratives' location within the landscape of Australian national history.

These texts are part of a larger pattern of critical multicultural literature in Australia. They draw attention to the fact that "Australian literature has been constitutive, rather than merely reflective, of the history of social relations in Australia, and that this constitutive role is perhaps most visible in the discourse it has produced, and continues to produce, about race, both within the national context and beyond" (Huggan 2007, *vi*). Increasing cultural diversity within the Australian literary landscape reflects an effort by writers, publishers and advocates to accrue meaningful agency in a context that remains dominated by a hegemonic settler-colonial subjectivity. As Clarke states in an interview, "The reception of *Foreign Soil* has demonstrated how hungry Australian readers are for voices which reflect the reality of contemporary Australia" (Britten 2016, 25). The importance of this increased diversity is reflected in the commercial and critical success of these texts. Clarke's statement summarises something key about what can be gained from reading these texts as state-of-the-nation texts: their critical engagement with minority writers' refusal to cater to the expectations of the mainstream has struck a chord with Australian readers and writers.

This analysis has presented these examples of translocal short fiction as works that locate Australia in the world, as well as the world within Australia. Focusing on these texts as national narratives enables texts such as Le's, which have often been read outside the context of Australian literature (e.g. as Asian American literature, as noted above), to be linked back to more recent publications such as Clarke's and Gonsalves'. By reading them in conjunction with one another, it is possible to envision linkages between these texts that evidence the presence of "relational discourses among different minority groups," a resistance to the settler-colonial

landscape in which "the minor *appears* always mediated by the major" (Lionnet and Shih 2005, 2). My approach in this chapter, which reads these three texts together for the first time, can be seen as a variation on Susan Stanford Friedman's strategy of cultural parataxis, which she describes as "a juxtaposition of texts from different times and places for the new light this geopolitical conjuncture sheds on each" (2005, 245-6). Critically, rather than placing these texts into a comparative framework that juxtaposes very different works, or only emphasises the "global" dimensions of these collections, this chapter places the texts into a comparative framework that foregrounds their engagement with the pressures on multicultural writers in Australia. The next chapter continues with a focus on how culturally and linguistically diverse writers are able to reimagine the nation through narratives that focus on migrant experience and heritage. Moving on from short stories, Chapter 2 shifts its focus to a series of novels written by young male writers living and working in Western Sydney.

3. Chapter 2

Marginality and masculinity: Luke Carman's *An Elegant Young Man*, Peter Polites' *Down the Hume* and Michael Mohammed Ahmad's *The Lebs*

3.1 Introduction to Chapter 2

In this chapter, I focus on three novels set in the suburbs of Western Sydney within the years following 2000: Luke Carman's *An Elegant Young Man* (2013), Peter Polites' *Down the Hume* (2017) and Michael Mohammed Ahmad's *The Lebs* (2018). As one of the most ethnically diverse areas in Australia, Western Sydney is a critical backdrop for narratives around multiculturalism. The region's importance as a locus for these concepts was intensified during the early 2000s. A series of "flashpoints" of Australian nationalism occurred during this time, including the rape trial of Bilal Skaf and the racially motivated riots at Cronulla in 2005, which specifically targeted Lebanese Muslims from the western suburbs. The intensity and impact of these incidents were both facilitated and compounded by a sharp rise in Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslim Australians following the *MV* Tampa controversy, the fabricated "Children Overboard" scandal, and the September 11 attacks on New York City.

These events are foregrounded in the novels, and so I read them – especially *An Elegant Young Man* and *The Lebs* – as works that arise explicitly from this context. The election of the Coalition government led by John Howard in 1996, the emergence of conservative politician Pauline Hanson's white nationalist party, One Nation, at the Queensland state election in 1998, and the intensification of anti–"boat people" rhetoric[34] all contributed to a climate of anti-multiculturalism. The period between 1996 and 2007 was marked by a reinvestment in normative forms of Australian nationalism, such as Anglo-Celtic identity, mateship and individualism. The key events of the years between 2000 and 2005 were both drivers and symptoms of neo-nationalism and Islamophobia. They unfolded in a context in which the Howard government enacted more punitive border protection policies, while at the same time

[34] Phillip Ruddock, who was then Immigration Minister, spoke in 1998 of a "national emergency" and suggested that "whole villages are packing up" to travel to Australia (McNevin 2007, 620)

enabling record immigration levels.[35] Western Sydney can be seen as a key cross-section of events relating to nationalism and multiculturalism during the early part of the 2000s.

In the last twenty years, Western Sydney has become fertile ground for the resurgence of Australian multicultural literatures. As described in the Introduction, the past decade or so in particular has witnessed the revitalisation of writing that engages with themes of race, marginalisation, migration and diversity. A large number of established and emerging writers have come from Western Sydney, with significant publications including poetry collections such as Fiona Wright's *Knuckled* (2011) and Lachlan Brown's *Limited Cities* (2012), and novels including Felicity Castagna's *The Incredible Here and Now* (2013),[36] these works by Carman, Polites, and Ahmad (as well as Ahmad's 2014 novel *The Tribe*) and Vivian Pham's *The Coconut Children* (2020). In Western Sydney, this resurgence has been rapid. Madeleine Watts writes that "[d]espite being Australia's fastest growing and most multicultural region, and for all the attention during the last election, Western Sydney doesn't loom large in Australia's literary landscape" (2014). Just a year later, Western Sydney is referred to as "the new Australian literary frontier" (McGuire 2015) and "the capital of Australian literature" (Twyford-Moore quoted in Carman 2015). In this chapter, I propose that these works are important examples of texts that reimagine the nation, with a specific focus on the texts by Carman, Polites, and Ahmad.

Luke Carman's *An Elegant Young Man* comprises a series of vignettes of varying lengths set around Sydney's western suburbs. Its narratives form a kind of assemblage: some feature recurring characters, while other characters appear only briefly. It is semi-autobiographical, with a protagonist also named Luke Carman. The character of Luke is threaded through the narrative as he drifts around the western suburbs, working in a casual job, attending parties and driving around with friends. He trains as an amateur wrestler and travels around New South Wales performing in promotional events for an organisation called Australian Wrestling Powerhouse; he moves from the western suburbs to the Inner West; he finds a girlfriend and embarks on a cross-country driving trip with her. Luke's voice moves ambivalently between bravado and self-loathing throughout the novel, as he meditates on topics such as *Seinfeld*, his family, and the racial politics of Western Sydney. Luke has been described as a "bogan flâneur" (Williamson 2013; Castagna 2014), one who moves through the landscapes of Western Sydney, cataloguing

[35] Notably, a large proportion of these arrivals were issued subclass 785 Temporary Protection Visas, which had been introduced by the Howard government in October 1999 (Mansouri and Leach 2009).

[36] See Chapter 4 for an analysis of Castagna's 2017 novel *No More Boats*.

encounters, emotions and experiences. Luke is highly literate but insecure, both keen to fit in with his inner-city friends and critical of their pretentiousness, and embarrassed by his "bogan beginnings" (114) in Western Sydney.

Peter Polites' *Down the Hume* is a novel telling the story of Bux, a young queer man with Greek heritage, living in Western Sydney and working part-time in an aged care facility. The novel, which has been described as "neoliberal noir" (Kagan 2018), focuses on Bux's relationship with his boyfriend (who is referred to only as Nice Arms Pete), and his addiction to painkillers. His addiction worsens over the course of the novel, to the point that he begins stealing Syrinapx from his workplace, and at the end of the novel, he is imprisoned. The novel's action is also foregrounded against Bux's difficult relationship with his parents, and with anecdotes about growing up in Western Sydney and discovering his sexuality.

Michael Mohammed Ahmad's novel *The Lebs* forms the second instalment in a series of works (following *The Tribe*, as mentioned above) focusing on protagonist Bani Adam, a Lebanese Australian boy from an Alawite Muslim family, and an aspiring writer and boxer. The story follows Bani as he negotiates life as a "Leb" at Punchbowl Boys High School, begins a relationship with a girl named Banika, and later, becomes involved with the development of a theatre production at Bankstown Arts Service. Amongst the "Punchbowl Boys" who are overwhelmingly Muslim, Bani wavers between wanting to blend in and wanting to stand out. He hates "being a Lebo" (5) and aspires to become a great writer.

These writers have been linked to the Sweatshop Western Sydney Literacy Collective (hereafter referred to as Sweatshop). This collective was formed by Ahmad in 2012 and has grown into a creative community dedicated to fostering literary talent among writers from Western Sydney who are Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse, and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged. Sweatshop's mission – which is contextualised further beginning in section 3.2 below – is premised on the act of reimagining the nation. As argued by Polites, "Sweatshop aims to give young people from Western Sydney the tools to publish and tell their own stories, in contrast to the stories that are told *about* them by the hegemony" (2013). In this climate, Sweatshop – and other collectives like it[37] – are taking up the call of advocates for

[37] Such as the West Writers Group, based at Footscray Community Arts Centre in Melbourne.

multicultural representation, such as Gunew (2017) and Cahill (2015; 2018), for the creation of space for more diverse narratives in the Australian literary landscape.[38]

The theoretical context of this critical multiculturalism can also be situated with reference to the texts' temporal settings around 2001. Following the federal election of 1996, the Howard government advanced a policy agenda that both retreated from multiculturalism and continued to strengthen the neoliberal conditions established under the Hawke and Keating Labor governments. This policy agenda worked to establish a "citizen norm" (Johnson 2007), a specific version of Australian identity articulated through nationalist discourse. A key element of this normative identity is the idea of atomisation. From a cultural standpoint, Australians were encouraged to prioritise their national identity above other identity markers, such as culture or ethnicity. From an economic standpoint, in a climate of intensifying neoliberalism, Australians were encouraged to embrace individualism and aspirational entrepreneurialism. The citizen norm is therefore characterised by a focus on identities only at the scale of the individual, the family and the nation.

If the Howard government perpetuated a citizen norm based on an atomising impulse, writers of this new multicultural literature can be seen to subvert this impulse by resisting rhetoric which promotes national identity as the most important structure of cultural belonging, and instead telling stories that complicate their relation to this prescribed identity. The Sweatshop writers can also be seen to resist this norm by fostering links between writers who occupy various marginalised positions. In the case of these three texts, I argue that the authors can also be seen to refuse a normative national identity by resisting the idea of hegemonic masculinity, a social theory concept developed originally by R. W. Connell in 1982 to refer to the idea that masculinities are plural, hierarchical and mutable, and that a hegemonic form of masculinity dominates non-hegemonic masculinities, as well as dominating women and those of other genders (2005). The normative concept of Australian national identity relies heavily on images of masculine experience (Connell 2005; Dyrenfurth 2007). This identity is strongly informed by the "conventional privileging of ideas of Australian masculinity as white, confident, courageous, able-bodied, athletic, virile and heterosexual" (Waitt and Warren 2008, 354). For

[38] Sweatshop's project has, so far, been quite successful: Carman's novel was awarded the 2014 NSW Premier's New Writing Award and was shortlisted for the ALS Gold Medal. Polites' novel was shortlisted for the 2018 NSW Premier's Literary Award – Multicultural NSW Award. Ahmad's novel received the 2019 NSW Premier's Literary Award – Multicultural NSW Award and was shortlisted for the 2019 Miles Franklin Literary Award.

Australian men, then, part of choosing how to relate to Howard's concept of national identity means choosing how to relate to normative masculinity. Deviations from this version of masculinity in terms of race, class and sexuality are therefore closely linked to resistant forms of Australian identity. In these examples, Ahmad, Carman and Polites depict experiences of young men in Western Sydney that are complicated and contradictory, and in doing so, highlight the extent to which metanarratives of masculinity intersect with national identity in Australia.

In terms of existing critical discussion of these texts, there are very few scholarly interventions outside book reviews. This is primarily due to the fact that each of these novels is fairly recently published. Carman's novel, which appeared first, has received the most critical engagement of the three. Mel Dixon (2017) tracks examples of intertextual references to literary figures such as Dante, Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg, while Lachlan Brown (2019) reads Christian themes in the book (as explored further below). Carman's text also features in *Suburban Space, the Novel and Australian Modernity* (2018), where Rooney tracks the depiction of outer suburban Sydney and the presence of the themes of the *Bildungsroman*. Outside of reviews such as those by Veronica Sullivan (2017), Dion Kagan (2018) and Harold Legaspi (2019), *Down the Hume* has been the subject of only one article thus far. Nicholas Manganas (2018) compares the representation of class and queer sexuality in the suburban contexts of *Down the Hume* and Christos Tsiolkas' *Loaded* (1995), describing Polites' novel as a "reimagining of queer suburbia" (360). Polites' novel is also briefly mentioned by Rooney (2018) in discussing the flowering of representations of suburban Western Sydney. *The Lebs*, published most recently, has at this stage mainly been the subject of book reviews, such as those by James Ley (2018) and Ruby Hamad (2019) discussed below. The only other work available at this time is Jumana Bayeh's 2019 article "Australian Literature and the Arab-Australian Migrant Novel," which places *The Lebs* in a context of Arab-Australian migrant writing.

In reading these texts as state-of-the-nation novels, I draw attention to the ways in which they interrogate and subvert the dominant discourse of Australian identity. In the first half of this chapter, I focus on the emergence of narratives of Western Sydney as interventions in the dominant discourse of Australian literature. I briefly read the texts' commitment to depicting the suburbs of Western Sydney by deploying Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih's theory of "minor transnationalism" (2005), which I used to compare examples of translocal short fiction in Chapter 1. In this chapter, I touch on the concept to describe Sweatshop as a mechanism for marginalised groups to build creative networks among themselves in order to resist domination

by the mainstream. This analysis focuses on the representation of place; the texts' treatment of whiteness, and the role of class in the narratives. In the second half of this chapter, I focus on the relationship between this dominant Anglo-Celtic subjectivity and masculinity. These narratives emerge from a context in which hegemonic nationalism was reinvesting in discourses of masculinity. I read Carman's depiction of white masculinity, and Ahmad's depiction of Lebanese Muslim masculinity, as strategies of resistance against these interrelated concepts of normative masculinity and national identity.

3.2 Writing Western Sydney: Sweatshop Western Sydney Literacy Collective

Western Sydney is a very large and highly diverse area of greater Sydney. In 2017, the Greater Western Sydney region had an estimated population of 2.28 million people (ABS 2018),[39] a number larger than any capital city apart from Brisbane, Melbourne, or, of course, Sydney itself. 37.8% of people in the Greater Western Sydney region were born overseas (ABS 2016), while Western Sydney University's Centre for Western Sydney (CWS) describes the region as "the migration centre of Australia" (2018). The CWS' research reflects that local government areas (LGAs) in Western Sydney receive a proportionally much higher number of refugee families for settlement compared to other councils in Sydney:

> For the 2009 to 2014 period, refugees were taken in by Western Sydney LGAs in the following numbers: Auburn 1669, Blacktown 1365, Fairfield 5130, Holroyd 745, Liverpool 2720 and Parramatta 1243. In contrast, better-off parts of Sydney played a much less significant role in refugee resettlement. Warringah LGA, for instance, in this five year period settled just 83 humanitarian migrants from language groups 3 and 4, with Manly receiving 12, North Sydney 32, and the Sutherland Shire just 14.

The numbers of humanitarian and family reunion migrants who settled in LGAs in Western Sydney similarly reflected a very high proportional number: between 1 January 2009 and 4 May 2014, Fairfield LGA received 10,434 humanitarian and family reunion migrants, which CWS states is equal to 5.3% of the LGA's total population (2018). Notably, the thousands of refugees who settled in councils in Western Sydney can be compared with just 14 refugees who settled in the Sutherland Shire in Sydney's southeast – where the suburb of Cronulla is located – during the same period of time. There is, then, a sharp contrast in immigration between Western Sydney

[39] The exact figure provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Estimated Resident Population (ERP) measure is 2,288,554.

and the other areas of the city, which also reflects a differential in the proportional diversity of suburbs in Western Sydney compared to the city's more affluent eastern suburbs. Consistent with this divide, Greater Western Sydney also reflects broader socioeconomic disadvantage in the areas of income, employment and education (Lodewijks 2013).[40] This socioeconomic disadvantage has been commensurate with a lack of representational agency within Australia's cultural field.

When Western Sydney is featured in popular culture, it is often subject to negative and stereotypical portrayals. As residents of Western Sydney, the writers involved in the Sweatshop collective have lived this marginalisation. Sweatshop is a creative collective, a "literacy movement […] devoted to empowering cultural and linguistically diverse communities through reading, writing and critical thinking" (n.d). The organisation "provides research, training, mentoring and employment opportunities for emerging and established writers and arts practitioners from Indigenous and non-English speaking backgrounds" (n.d). The Sweatshop authors' stated mission is to remediate the exclusion of meaningful representations of Western Sydney from Australian literature and media. They address this issue directly on the "Movement" page of their website:

> The communities of Western Sydney have much to contribute to Australia's cultural landscape. However, they are consistently portrayed in media, film and literature through imagery that is one-dimensional, violent and dangerous. These negative and limited representations assist in positioning Western Sydney communities outside of Australia's dominant groups and identities. There are limited avenues for these communities to tell their own stories and create their own, alternative representations. (n.d)

Sweatshop's mission to counteract these one-dimensional representations is an example of "reimagining the nation" in action. Demographically, the communities of Western Sydney feature proportionally high numbers of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and Indigenous people. Their transnational connections are multi-scalar: from the international (for example, in the case of migrant communities who maintain their cultural or religious traditions and communities) to the local–national (for example, Indigenous people, especially those with connections to the Darug, Eora and Kuring-gai nations). As Bill Ashcroft argues, in the model of the transnation, culture escapes the "bounded nation state society," and "*exceed[s]* the

[40] The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Census of Population and Housing 2016 lists the councils of Liverpool City, Campbelltown City, former Bankstown City, Cumberland Council and Fairfield City as each at the 25th percentile or lower in terms of advantage, as measured by the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) (Centre for Western Sydney, 2018).

boundaries of the nation state […] operating beyond its political strictures through the medium of the local" (19). The Sweatshop collective, by focusing on the "medium of the local," works to remedy the marginalisation of their communities through their portrayal in media, film and television.

As novels produced from within a collective aimed explicitly at facilitating self-representation by writers from Western Sydney, it is perhaps unsurprising that the texts' settings – and even characters – overlap. Carman and Ahmad, for example, have taken part in collaborative writing and revision, a process they discussed in a joint interview with Lucy Neave (2016).[41] Versions of characters, too, cross over: Polites implies in the "Acknowledgments" section of *Down the Hume* that Bux is a version of himself. In describing how the book came about, Polites says, "This paper baby will show everyone the worst aspects of me" (266). In the "Acknowledgements" section of *The Lebs*, Ahmad writes, "*Shukraan* is how we say 'thank you' in Arabic […] *Shukraan* to my dearest friend, Peter Polites, whom I asked, 'What should I name the character based on you in this book?' And he said, 'Bucky'" (2018, 265). The protagonist of *Down the Hume* is named Lambraki, with nicknames including "Baki, Bucky, Bux" (260). In *The Lebs*, Bucky is an arts worker who befriends the protagonist, Bani, who is a semi-autobiographical representation of Ahmad.

This semi-autobiographical construction extends, too, to *An Elegant Young Man*, which is narrated by a fictionalised Luke Francis Carman. Of course, it is important to maintain a critical separation between the three authors and their protagonists, as the authors work to bring representative agency to a part of the city that has been overlooked, stereotyped, and excluded from Australia's literary and cultural establishment. But what unites the three protagonists is their experiences as young men in Western Sydney. Commonalities such as these, produced within a collaborative, cooperative creative environment, invoke the concept of minor transnationalism. Lionnet and Shih argue that the dominant model of understanding transnationalism assumes that minorities engage only with majority cultures in a mechanism of either aspiration or rejection. This dynamic, they argue, overlooks "[a]n awareness and

[41] This interview focused on Carman's *An Elegant Young Man* and Ahmad's previous novel, *The Tribe* (2013). Carman and Ahmad's relationship reportedly deteriorated following the 2015 awarding of the UTS Glenda Adams Award for New Writing, for which both authors were nominated (as described by Ahmad during an event at the 2018 Emerging Writers' Festival in Melbourne). Apart from Ahmad, the field of finalists included a range of authors from migrant, refugee and Indigenous backgrounds, such as Ellen van Neerven, Maxine Beneba Clarke and Omar Musa (as well as Emily Bitto), but the award was given to Carman. It is unclear when exactly this collaborative relationship ended. Carman is no longer listed as a Sweatshop writer on the group's website.

recognition of the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries (2005, 7). The collaborative workshop model of Sweatshop can, in some ways, be seen as an example of how these "networks" are facilitated. The organisation itself provides an avenue for marginalised writers to develop work that draws on transnational and diasporic connections and a creative environment that prioritises writers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Sweatshop's explicit focus on giving writers the tools to foster representational agency also means these "creative interventions" – the texts they produce – are not trapped into a binary of aspiration to, or rejection from, the literary centre.

The Sweatshop writers have published numerous anthologies of narratives about Western Sydney, including *On Western Sydney* (2012), *The Big Black Thing* Chapters 1 (2017) and 2 (2018), *Bent Not Broken* (2018), *Sweatshop Women* Volume 1 (2019) and Volume 2 (2020), and *After Australia* (2020). They have also collaborated together on other projects.[42] These "creative interventions" accrue cultural capital which is localised to the area by exclusively publishing young people from marginalised backgrounds. The group is now based at Western Sydney University. In focusing on and fostering a "relationship between different margins" (Lionnet and Shih, 2), Sweatshop aggregates agency among these communities, rather than measuring them only in comparison to Anglocentric Australian narratives.

All three novels are set within the multicultural landscape of Western Sydney. Protagonists Luke,[43] Bani and Bux have each grown up in Western Sydney, and each protagonist is a young man struggling to find their place in the world. The novels' settings in Western Sydney invariably place the texts in opposition to a hegemonic national Australian cultural and literary establishment: these texts feature diverse characters and sometimes divisive sentiments; they give time and space to characters who are typically overlooked in mainstream literature. In terms of literary infrastructure, Western Sydney has been seen as marginal within the culture of Australian literature: in a review of *An Elegant Young Man*, Geordie Williamson somewhat condescendingly describes the book as "bring[ing] a vast suburban emptiness to brilliant life"

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[42] In 2014, Ahmad, Polites and Carman performed a staged reading called *#ThreeJerks* at both the Sydney Writers' Festival and the Emerging Writers' Festival in Melbourne. The play, in which Ahmad, Polites and Carman star as "a leb, a wog and a bogan" (Clarke 2014), was a rehearsed reading in which each writer acted as an autobiographical version of themselves. *#ThreeJerks* is set within the context of the trial of Bilal Skaf. In a review, Clarke writes: "The gang rapes that took place in western Sydney are very much a framing device. The event is ever-present, but on the periphery of the three protagonists' very different but intersecting lives."

[43] Luke Carman is the author of *An Elegant Young Man*. Luke Francis Carman is the novel's protagonist. For clarity, I refer to the author by their surname, Carman, and to the character by the name Luke.

(2013). While this perception persists, it is being eroded through initiatives such as Western Sydney University's Writing and Society Research Centre, which houses publisher Giramondo as well as the Sweatshop collective, and also funds the *Sydney Review of Books*. This is not so much a subversion of a centre-periphery dynamic as an assertion by writers, publishers and critics that there are plentiful narratives of Western Sydney that are worth reading, writing and disseminating. As Ahmad states in a promotional video featured on the Writing and Society Research Centre's website, "If we're not focused on literature from and about the western suburbs of Sydney, then we're not really talking about Australian literature" (n.d). Making a similar point, Polites explains in an interview with literary journal *Kill Your Darlings:*

> Our personal desires are just as important as any national myth that's going on about the construction of Australia. And that's the prominence I want to give to people in the book. That's why I chose to write about a wog boy who's only obsessed with white boys, because those desires are just as important as the Anzac myth, or the way we construct our identities. (2017)

Polites' act of claiming representational space for queer Australians with migrant heritage can be seen as an example of Ashcroft's transnation in action. Ashcroft describes the space of the transnation in terms of the metaphor of felt or "smooth space," in which many fibres are pressed together in a chaotic assembly. "It is the possibility for the emergence of new and different kinds of subjects and spaces," Ashcroft writes, "that makes smooth space a space of potentiality" (20). By emphasising the "smoothness" of felt as a textile, Ashcroft establishes a contrast with woven fabric, which is created by strands being ordered and organised into a set pattern. The metaphor is useful for envisioning the initiative of Sweatshop as a project that resists the narratives of Black, Muslim, queer, Asian, and Indigenous Australians being organised and ordered in terms of how they are perceived by mainstream audiences: they resist telling stories that conform to the transactional logic of multicultural writing. Polites and the other Sweatshop authors are keenly aware of the need to articulate the experiences of "new and different subjects" in the Australian literary landscape. In addition to this, *Down the Hume* is a noir novel featuring a gay protagonist: genre texts, too, have been overlooked in Australia's national canon in favour of social realist texts, which are often perceived to be more "literary." Speaking with Veronica Sullivan, Polites explains, "[m]y own experience […] might be hard for some people to access. We're at the cusp of gay people inhabiting genre texts" (2017). The fact that a noir novel with a gay protagonist might be inaccessible for readers reinforces the importance of Sweatshop in working against the marginalisation of peripheral narratives and in accruing greater representative agency for writers from migrant, refugee and Indigenous backgrounds.

The novels – especially through their depiction of the arts industries – comment on the tensions and ambivalences that arise from Western Sydney's "discovery" by the literary establishment. Felicity Castagna, another writer based in Western Sydney (and whose work is examined in more detail in Chapter 4) has characterised "the proliferation of panels on western Sydney writing at writers festivals" as "a move that both indicates that we are part of the mainstream while emphasising that we aren't at the same time" (2019). Brigid Rooney comments on a similar tension, noting that novels from Western Sydney both strategically deploy and subvert stereotypes around the area, arguing that "[y]oung and emerging writers are drawing on their lived experience within and explicit commitment to their region in conscious engagement with existing representations of outer suburbia" (2018, 149). Castagna and Rooney's descriptions of this tension emphasise the relative swiftness with which writing from Western Sydney has assumed a centre-stage position in Australian writing, and its perception as an energetic, youthful and politically engaged thread of Australian literature.

In the novels by Carman, Polites and Ahmad, the three protagonists' relationships to nationalism can be characterised by a sense of anxiety. Australian nationalist discourse is structured by anxiety: from the anxiety of illegitimacy to the cultural cringe, Australianness has always been marked by angst. These doubts, however, form part of the dominant identity: what of those people who live under the domination of this hegemonic nationalism? It is this kind of anxiety that makes Bani Adam aspire to be white; it is the same kind of anxiety that prompts Bux to put up with how badly Nice Arms Pete treats him. But the anxieties experienced by Bani and Bux are not necessarily shared by Ahmad and Polites, who have very clear views on the role of their organisation. In a 2013 article, written in conversation with Stephanie Convery on the topic of "speaking for the other," Polites says:

> Sweatshop is a group that acts in unity but also places importance on the diverse identities of its members, which include queers, Muslims, people with disability, feminists, single white fathers (think the kind *A Current Affair* love), people from commission housing, Indigenous Australians, people in exile and so on. Identity politics is not a fixed project with an end goal but rather a complex and ever-evolving need to identify collective and intersecting oppressions and strategies to combat them. (2013, 57)

These "collective and intersecting oppressions" include the marginalisation of queer, working-class and Muslim identities such as those depicted in the three novels. The value of viewing social power dynamics through the prism of identity politics was denigrated under Howard as the project of "special interest groups." This "anti-PC" logic still features in conservative politics in Australia, most recently embodied by the Morrison government's Senate inquiry into

nationhood, national identity and democracy, which remains underway as of 2020. The discussion paper specifically mentions "adherents of identity politics" as example of extreme movements who, alongside "eco-fundamentalists," may "hold perspectives that would inhibit free speech" (2019). In this instance – where Australia's Federal Government is openly hostile to explorations of oppression through an examination of identity politics – the Sweatshop authors can be seen to challenge these conditions in order to reimagine the nation. In other words, these texts openly contend with the conditions under which multicultural writing continues to be marginalised.

3.2.1 "A plain of precious stones immune to the dark": writing place and agency

A key act of reimagining the nation can be seen in the depiction of places, landscapes and settings that have been previously overlooked in literature, such as the suburbs of Western Sydney. This neglect is associated with a lack of self-representational agency in public discourse: media representations of Greater Western Sydney are often negative, stereotypical and over-simplified, such as the 2015 SBS docu-series *Struggle Street*, which followed several residents from Mt Druitt, a suburb in the City of Blacktown. The series, which focused on a number of interviewees living in precarious situations or dealing with addiction, was criticised as "publicly-funded poverty porn" by Blacktown City Mayor, Stephen Bali (Kerin and Ong 2015). These novels, however, represent the suburbs of Western Sydney in ways that are by turns detailed, irreverent, and committed. The representation of marginalised localities is key to expanding the purview of Australian literature.

Ashcroft suggests that "the idea of a 'national' literature might rely on a disregard for the wide range of literary works themselves, which constitute the life of the nation in a plethora of local and individual experiences" (19). As described in the Introduction, Ashcroft argues that the concept of a national literature pushes aside all the narratives which do not fit within its mythic boundaries in order to sustain a single story. The transnation, then, represents all of the displaced narratives that are involved in this process. Ashcroft's particular attention to the "plethora of local and individual experiences" that constitute the "life of the nation" is key here. The western suburbs of Sydney occupy a peripheral space in images of the city, as well as in Australian culture more broadly. In fact, the representation of Sydney could be considered a microcosmic metaphor for the operation of the transnation. Representations of Sydney used in tourism

advertising, for example, almost universally feature some combination of the Sydney Opera House, the Harbour Bridge, and Bondi Beach in their imagery. These landmarks *stand for* Sydney. In this metaphor, these representative images of Sydney are equivalent to the "national identity"; they are stable and recognisable. The transnation, then, is represented by all the parts of Sydney that are not included in tourist advertising, but that are just as constitutive of the city as its iconic landmarks.

Both *Down the Hume* and *An Elegant Young Man* are structured in terms of their depictions of local places. Polites' chapters are each named after streets: "Auburn Road," "Caldwell Parade," often without much contextual information, a choice which enables readers who are familiar with the area to more readily identify the locations it represents. Carman's first chapter is named after the Whitlam Centre in Blacktown, while the second chapter is entitled "In Granville." The texts draw the suburbs into evocative psychogeographic metaphors. In *Down the Hume*, Bux explicitly conceives of Sydney's eastern and western suburbs as being "good" and "bad," respectively: "If I was taking the train towards the city from Belmore, moving closer and closer to the centre, I knew that I was moving in the right direction. But if I was heading west, towards Bankstown and Liverpool, I knew that my life was getting worse" (Polites, 243). Polites specifically invokes the metaphor of the centre and by implication, the periphery. In *The Lebs*, Bani returns again and again to the line, "I've got all of Western Sydney in my rear-view mirror," a reference to Tupac Shakur's song "Starin' Through My Rear View." In the song, Tupac sings of being "raised as a young black male" amongst gun violence, drug use and gang activity. Bani locates Western Sydney as something he is attempting to leave behind, along with his identity as a so-called Leb.

Western Sydney's suburban context is thematised in the texts, where it is described as oppressive and dull. In *Down the Hume*, Bux is "held ransom to sienna roofs and red, yellow, green wheelie bins. This place, it's purgatory, it's shit" (3). In *An Elegant Young Man*, Luke describes how there "wasn't much to see" from Mount Pritchard to Liverpool, just "shuttered-up Asian supermarkets and squash centres and brick unit blocks with TV flickering a phantasmic blue through the windows" (39). In Australian literature, as Robin Gerster argues, "suburbia is not only attacked by the pedlars of the bush mythology, but is habitually dismissed with cosmopolitan contempt by urban-oriented writers as a place fit solely for satire, if indeed it is worth writing about at all" (1990, 565). Polites' and Carman's focus on the suburban can be read as a resistance against the kind of dichotomy that Gerster characterises. More recently, Rooney

(2018) has described the flowering of literary representations of "outer suburbia," which "seems at once antithetical or inimical to literary fiction and a spur to its wild reinvention, a space that both resists and provokes inscription" (143). All three of these novels are set in suburbia, and while the characters may not enjoy living there or celebrate it, they emphasise its legitimacy as a literary setting. The suburban landscape may oppress Bux – but at least it has the agency to do so.

Both Carman's and Polites' texts are characterised by their "wandering" qualities. Luke's narrative moves more from place to place – in one vignette he embarks on a wrestling trip through regional NSW, while on another he takes a cross-country camping trip with a girlfriend, ending up in Western Australia. Other sections remain closer to home, whether moving through Sydney's west or visiting Cronulla with a friend. This structure has been described as "both peripatetic and locational" (Brown 2019, 42), sometimes lingering on suburban street corners in great detail, other times sweeping from the Great Ocean Road to Esperance, Western Australia, in the space of one sentence.

When Carman does describe the western suburbs, it is often in a way that combines grimness with beauty in unexpected ways. Throughout the text, Carman counterbalances images that seem to reach for a greater meaning, constantly undercutting these images with reversals and ambivalent textual "shrugs," moments in which he embodies a self-conscious uncertainty or indifference. Describing a visit to his friend Josh's house, near Warwick Farm racecourse, the narrator says: "I used to hop off at the station where the junkies waited around to roll you, and walk up the long road of the cul-de-sac, watching the horses in the yards as I went; their big black eyes blinkered, necks tethered to customised clothes lines, clopping in circles in the afternoon light like living merry-go-rounds" (104). The "blinkered" and "tethered" horses present an image of containment, a metaphor consolidated a few pages later, when Luke's friend Josh is trying to convince him that they should learn wrestling from a man named Trent, who Josh thinks is "a fucking wanker, but he knows the business." Luke is doubtful, but Josh has "a wet light in his eyes which made him look desperate, like […] the horses tied to clotheslines across from the track" (106). Trying to convince Luke, Josh argues:

> 'You wanna end up like every other piece-a-shit around here? Or do you wanna be something electric?' I didn't know what he meant about being electric but the air was cold and the drizzle kept coming and some boys in a Camira called us fags as they drove by, so I just said 'Whatever' and left it at that. (106)

Luke's reaction here continues a motif of being lost for words and a pattern of textual "shrugs" throughout the novel, where passages end with Luke struggling to know what to say, or saying nothing. These moments characterise Luke as being unsure of himself (for example, when speaking to his new middle-class, inner-city dwelling friends) (121), unwilling to participate when interpellated into racist conversations with other Anglo Australians (38), or when confronted with the threat of violence (43; 50). His silence often reads as symptomatic of his lack of confidence (which might be taken as indicative of his working-class background), but it is also a conscious choice, not entirely borne of his inability to express himself. Carman often "doubles back" on this lack of confidence, so that it becomes a self-reflexive joke about normative Anglo Australian masculinity, as I demonstrate below.

In reading the themes of faith and doubt in *An Elegant Young Man,* Brown argues that the text offers "suburban epiphanies or anti-epiphanies, the closest thing to transcendence that the book can offer, and this is precisely because of the various transactions with violence and disappointment that run across the background" (2019, 49). The tethered horses, Josh's desperation to transcend the limitations of his environment, and the suggestion of being "something electric" all lead toward a greater realisation, but Luke's shrugging "whatever" returns them to reality. This passage can be seen as a sort of "suburban anti-epiphany," with its ambivalent movements between meaning and mundanity.

Down the Hume's depiction of suburban spaces can be interpreted through the lens of its construction as a "queer, working-class noir" novel (Sullivan 2017; Pieper 2017). Polites' narrative is focused mostly on Bux's everyday experiences of working at the aged care home, his interactions with his boyfriend, and his constantly bubbling need for more prescription pills. The novel shares many characteristics of the noir genre of crime fiction, including Bux's status as an outsider, Nice Arms Pete's characterisation as a shady petty criminal, the novel's "gritty" urban setting, its fast pace and sharp, vernacular dialogue. As Dion Kagan argues, "*Down the Hume*'s intersectional noir is a uniquely contemporary Australian inhabitation of the genre, foregrounding both hardboiled and literary noir's street poet sensibilities and its melodrama of the everyday, and overlaying these with elements of a critically queer sensibility and a working-class wog political critique" (2018). This "street poet sensibility" can be seen in the way that Polites renders descriptions of the suburban landscape:

> Then I was on Burwood Road. Cafes hosting players from the Sydney Bulldogs. Pure muscle hulks posing for camera phones with plus-size pre-teen woglets. Passed the leagues club with its fake rock three-tiered waterfall that spewed flames hourly at night, attracting high-roller

> Asian gamblers. A new smoothie bar had just opened. Glammas in Lorna Jane, full face of make-up, living the dream and working off excess pregnancy weight between cigarettes. (62)

This passage presents a stream of images one after another, separated by full stops rather than commas. Its "street poet" sensibility is bolstered by the passage's alliterative rhythm, found in the "pure hulks" / "posing" / "with plus-size" / "pre-teens." Kagan describes this as a "clipped prose style that is poetic, vernacular and intensely masculine" (2018). Polites' style of narration eliminates any unnecessary prepositional information (is the leagues club next-door to the new smoothie bar?) to create the impression that Bux is driving down Burwood Road, snatching images as they pass.

I suggest that these representations of place, which are ambivalent, irreverent and evocative, contribute to how the novels reimagine the nation. They re-locate Australian literature into the landscapes of Western Sydney in new ways. As Maxine Beneba Clarke writes in her review of *#ThreeJerks*, recalling Carman, Polites and Ahmad on stage, "shoulder to shoulder, turning pages together. Buckle in tight, 'cause we're heading for the Hume" (2014). Indeed, in the Acknowledgements section of *Down the Hume*, Polites states that Clarke's review served as the inspiration for the novel's title.

3.2.2 What makes an Aussie?: the role of whiteness

One of the ways in which these texts create space for narratives outside a dominant settler-colonial subjectivity is by explicitly pointing to the power of whiteness within constructions of Australian identity. Each of these three protagonists displays an ambivalent relationship to whiteness. Luke is self-conscious and self-reflexive about his identity as a white working-class Australian. Bani "aspires" to be white yet is denigrated by a white culture which essentialises him as a "Leb." Bux is "obsessed with white boys" (Polites 2017) and his connection to mainstream Australian national culture is complicated by his family's cultural liminality. What emerges through the examination of these interactions is that Luke, Bani and Bux each approach whiteness from varying positions of agency.

In all three of the novels, the descriptor "Aussie" is used as a synonym for white. This is exemplified early on in *The Lebs*, when a surgeon visits Punchbowl Boys High to deliver a talk to the students. One of the students, Mahmoud, asks Dr Muhammad if his wife is Aussie, followed by the exchange below:

> ‘No, she’s American,’ says Dr Muhammad.
> ‘Yeah, but I mean, like, an Aussie; like, you know, Aussie, is she Aussie?’
> […]
> ‘Oh yeah, you mean she’s Caucasian.’ (Ahmad 26)

It does not matter to the students that Dr Muhammad has explicitly told them that his wife is not Australian: Mahmoud is asking the doctor whether his wife is white. As discussed earlier, metanarratives of Australian identity are built on whiteness, but this scenario takes the equivalence further, rendering one term *as* the other. Whiteness is a “normative structure, a discourse of power, and a form of [racialized] identity” (Ware and Back 2002, 13) in Australia: whiteness is not only a racial identity, but it is a structuring tool for governing relations between all identities, whether Anglo, Indigenous, or migrant. The role of whiteness as a normative structure is emphasised by its contradictory nature as “both a colour and the absence of colour, both an assertion of ordinariness and a claim to extraordinary achievement” (Huggan 2007, 71). This double-sidedness means that in *An Elegant Young Man*, Luke’s whiteness on one hand renders him without a “tribe” (Watts 2014), but also protects him from discrimination.

Luke’s identity as an “Aussie” affords him the ability to move through the world mostly without the threat of violence. In Western Sydney, however, this freedom is not without limitations. As Ahmad states in an interview, “Anglo-Australians see themselves as the dominant cultural group in Australia, but not in the western suburbs. They’re a minority here” (Abdul Khalik 2014). When Luke and his friend Niki visit Cronulla, Niki says, “It’s such a cool feeling [...] to be close to the surf; like you’re a real Aussie again; an Aussie in your own space. Away from all that complexity and culture and shit” (46). Niki’s equation of being “close to the surf” with being a “real Aussie” highlights the operation of the racialised discourse of locality that plays such a critical role in surf culture and nationalism (as described further in section 3.3). Niki is not described as a surfer; she has no other particular association with the beach other than the imagined belonging she feels as an “Aussie’ in [her] own space.” Being away from “complexity and culture and shit” means being surrounded by other white people: the Sutherland Shire is among the least ethnically diverse areas of Sydney. It is also close to the location of the landing of the First Fleet and the site of the Cronulla riots.

Bani is not afforded the same freedoms as Luke, although he dreams of being able to move between racial categories. Bani is one of 285 Muslim boys out of a total of 301 students

enrolled at Punchbowl Boys High School,[44] but he feels deeply separate from them. "I hate Maths like I hate being a Lebo," he says, "I am above it" (5). During his time at school, Bani is caught between embracing and resisting his identity as a "Leb." He is a good student, interested in writing and literature, and he feels that his teachers see him as a success – which he equates directly with being white. In contrast to Fatala, a schoolmate who is less committed to his education, he writes:

> In here Fatala [another student] is Black and I am White […] But then, when we're on the outside, Fatala and I are the same – we are sand niggers, rejected and hated and feared. Cops and transit officers target us and chicks and Skips avoid us. There's nothing I can do about it. Fatala and I look like the gang rapist Bilal Skaf, who is on the front page of every newspaper today. (2018, 5)

Bani understands that his position in the racial hierarchy is contingent upon both the context of his interactions and his performative engagement with whiteness. He is powerless to contend with the discrimination against Lebanese Australians that is perpetuated by media outlets, especially News Corp publications, which published the most inflammatory material about youth of Middle Eastern descent during this time. *The Lebs* takes place in the aftermath of the conviction of Bilal Skaf, a young Lebanese Australian man who received a record prison sentence for his role in a series of gang rapes across Sydney in 2000.[45] Bani is conscious of rising tensions between "Lebs," Anglo Australians and law enforcement: referring to his friend Shaky, who is half-Lebanese and half-Anglo and able to pass for one or the other, he says: "I wonder what he will say when the lowies[46] ask him about his nasho [nationality] at the beach tomorrow. I wonder what he'll say when the coppers ask him for ID at Cronulla train station" (53). Shaky's ability to fashion and re-fashion his identity grants him many more choices than the boys who "look like the gang rapist."

Although Bani and Bux have both grown up in Australia, they are acutely aware of the existence of a hierarchy of identities within the concept of being "Australian," governed by their proximity to whiteness. In *Down the Hume*, Bux compares himself to Nice Arms Pete, whom he describes as "wheat-fed […] [t]he kind of Australian I could never be" (145). When Bani meets his future girlfriend Banika at the Sydney Royal Easter Show, he thinks, "this girl is an Aussie –

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[44] Bani states writes that the school principal expelled 399 of the school's formerly 700 students (4). Ahmad relates an almost identical anecdote when writing about his own experience at Punchbowl Boys High School (2016).

[45] For more detail, refer to section 3.3 below.

[46] The Punchbowl Boys use the term "lowies" to refer to young women whom they expect will have low self-esteem and be more willing to engage in sexual activity.

not an Aussie like me, an Aussie like Pauline Hanson" (96). Notably, Bani co-opts the identification strategy that has been projected on to Lebanese Australian youth, collapsing the category of "Aussie" to refer to an extreme example: the racist politician, Pauline Hanson.

What these examples demonstrate is that the characters' relative proximity to whiteness determines their ability to inhabit a wider range of roles. Luke can feel like a "real Aussie" while in Cronulla, one of the "Livo boys" (43) while closer to home near Liverpool, and can ingratiate himself into a "cultured crowd" (113) when he moves to Summer Hill, in the trendy Inner West of Sydney. Bani, who joins a local theatre group after high school, realises that his white theatre collaborators will only ever see him as a "dirty Arab" (260). When Bani tells Bucky how he was treated by the white theatre artists, Bani breaks down in tears, and they embrace. Ahmad writes, "[a]ll this time I wanted to be White, but Bucky loved me, from the moment he met me, because I was Leb, because I couldn't be anything but Leb" (263). The novel's ending is a reminder of Ashcroft's discussions of the utopian possibility of literature within the transnation (2010, 81). Bani is unable to find a sense of meaningful belonging among the arts workers, who want him to participate in a transactional process in which he performs a "Leb" identity for a white audience, but Bucky accepts him unconditionally. The novel's ending is also an affirmation of the value of Sweatshop: a community where the members can build representational agency and collaborative resistance.

3.2.3 "Westie-come-good": irony and self-reflexivity in representations of class

These narratives of Western Sydney are mediated by issues of class just as much as they are by race. In terms of socioeconomic status, *Down the Hume's* Bux is perhaps the most precarious of the texts' three protagonists. He inhabits a world defined by his drug addiction, his volatile relationship, his part-time job and his unstable housing situation; he describes himself as "Semi drug-addled. Limited money. Housing insecurity" (29). To a greater extent than either *An Elegant Young Man* or *The Lebs*, *Down the Hume* explicitly describes Bux's pathological anxiety, which most often derives from his lack of access to prescription painkiller Syrinapx: "I puffed on my cigarette mechanically; it decreased my anxiety" (24). Bux is also queer, and a first-generation Australian, the son of Greek immigrants. The text also implies – through a recurring description of brown soup thrown at a wall (Polites 75; 154); that he is caught in a cycle of domestic violence which repeats the pattern of his parents' relationship.

Bani and Luke are in less intensely precarious situations than Bux, but both of them evince a distinctly working-class sensibility. Bani questions whether the teachers at his school sympathise with the migrant and refugee children who were born overseas, and who the students refer to as "Fobs" – short for "fresh off the boat" – because "they're even poorer than us [the "Lebs"] and stand out the front of the school in the morning sharing a two-litre bottle of Coke" (7). Luke spends every second weekend at his father's house in Granville, where "[f]or a while, Clyde Street went to war with itself. Houses were firebombed, and a charcoal chicken too. It didn't make the news, or if it did, I didn't see it" (19). Despite depicting some of the realities of living in a disadvantaged area, the texts do not fetishise the experience of precarity.

An Elegant Young Man and *The Lebs* present an ironic and self-reflexive critique of Luke and Bani's interactions with Sydney's cultural and literary scenes. Both Luke and Bani are interested in literature and writing. There is an inherent tension in the way that they are both attracted to, and repulsed by, their interactions with the literary and cultural spheres. Luke moves to the Inner West where he falls in with a white crowd of middle- and upper-class friends, one of whom describes him as a "Westie-come-good" (115). Luke feels vulnerable and inferior to his new friends: "it was a time of promise for me, though at first I felt like a blushing debutante and constantly feared being exposed and shamed for my bogan beginnings" (114). Toward the end of the novel, he attends a poetry reading in the trendy and gentrified suburb of Newtown. The event is organised by Luke's friend Nell; during the reading, a homeless Indigenous man emerges from a hole in the side of the building adjacent to the stage and tells the audience to leave, and no one in the audience knows how to respond. Carman writes:

> Nell looked defeated and shaken. I wondered if she was thinking how unfair the world is for a woman from the North Shore who believes in poetry and wants to get up on a stage and not be pressed and flattened into a fixture or a faucet of someone else's machine, and y'know I would have cried for her. I really would have but because of my working-class background I just get angry when things are complex. (152)

This passage can be read as another example of Carman's ambivalent textual "shrugs." The sentence beginning "I wondered," with its increasingly impassioned tone and lack of punctuation, is undercut by the reversal of momentum signalled by the word "y'know." Carman attributes a deep irony to Nell's wish to not be "pressed and flattened" into "a faucet of someone else's machine" while literally staging a production using the structure of someone else's home against their will. The passage is a satirical critique of performative white literary cultures which highlights literary communities' discomfort with race and historical lack of meaningful engagement with and activism on Indigenous rights. Luke's final sentence, about getting angry

"when things are complex," is both a send-up of the type of working-class masculine subjectivity exemplified by Australian writers such as Tim Winton and a satirical gesture at artists for whom a working-class identity becomes a marker of "outsider" status, enabling the accumulation of cultural capital. This example plays out the moment of "doubling back," as I describe above, in which Luke empathises with Nell, then becomes self-consciously aloof ("I really would have but…"), and then makes his ambivalence into a joke about his working-class background that extends to being a joke about a normative Australian masculinity, in the assertion that "I just get angry when things are complex" (152).

In *The Lebs*, Bani's determination to leave behind his "Leb" identity propels him to join the Bankstown Arts theatre development. Guy Law offers to find Bani some community arts work: "I accept this offer without hesitation, seeing it as the first real opportunity in my life to associate with a different race and class of people than Lebs: White writers and actors – artists – who are progressive and civilised like me!" (179). Ahmad's prose – narrated retroactively by the adult Bani – is laden with sarcasm. Bani sends through a headshot and biography, reading "Bani Adam has been published in 'Thug Life' and is an amateur boxer with the Belmore PCYC." Law edits the bio to read, "Bani Adam is a Lebanese Muslim writer who recently graduated from Punchbowl Boys High School. He has been published in 'Thug Life' and he is a boxer" (179). The rewriting of Bani's biography rehearses a moment of strategic essentialism in which Law initiates Bani into a system where non-Anglo artists and writers are encouraged to essentialise elements of their identities in order to gain cultural capital in the context of a white-dominated arts scene.

After leaving school, Bani becomes involved in a theatrical development with Bankstown Arts Service. As the development progresses, it becomes clear that Bani is being asked to play the stereotypical role of a "Leb." The group plans a show and Jo, one of the theatre-makers, uses graffiti "collected" from the local area to decorate the stage. One of the set decorations includes an offensive statement about the Prophet Muhammad. Jo tries to reassure Bani, telling him that the graffiti is from the street; that he should not take it personally. Bani realises that, in the eyes of the white theatre-makers, he can never "rise above" his Lebanese identity: "The past three days I tried so hard to be an artist, to be White, to be one of them" (260). Bani realises that he was mistaken to think that his willingness to trade on his identity would give him meaningful access to cultural agency, and he is devastated to learn that theatre-makers' performative progressivism does not diminish their ability to essentialise him.

In the context of Bani's experience with Bankstown Arts, Guy Law – who enabled Bani's entry into the arts by publishing him in *Thug Life* – is revealed, over the course of the novel, to be a predatory figure. The rewriting of Bani's autobiography seems relatively benign, but Bucky intimates that it forms a larger pattern of essentialism and exoticism on the part of Guy Law. Bucky becomes Bani's guide in how to see clearly through these structures. Unprompted, Bucky asks Bani, "Are you aware that the White people in your development are exploiting *you*?" (239). Bani's experience with the theatre makers, and with Guy Law, recalls Ghassan Hage's assertion that white multiculturalism is characterised by a simultaneous dialectic of inclusion and exclusion (1999, 19): the theatre-makers are pleased to have Bani in their show, but only to an extent that serves to reinscribe existing stereotypes about Lebanese Muslim Australians.

Ahmad states in an interview that this part of the novel is about Bani "reconciling his 'underprivileged, marginalised working class community with the white left arts community that enacts crazy, racist, hypocritical white supremacist nonsense that they don't even know they're enacting'" (Stanton 2018). These ironic and self-reflexive engagements with the Australian literary and cultural sphere reiterate the representational problems inherent in multicultural literature. As addressed in Chapter 1, multicultural writers are often drawn into a transactional mode wherein they are encouraged to write "authentic" and/or optimistic narratives about their experience or heritage of migration, while writers who refuse to write only conciliatory narratives are labelled as provocateurs. Some of the same representational tensions can be seen in the emergence of Western Sydney as a kind of "hotspot" of Australian literature.

3.3 West Suburbia Boys: masculinity and national identity

As set out in the Introduction, Australia's mainstream national culture is predicated on the maintenance of a settler-colonial subjectivity, which is supported by structures of colonialism and whiteness. It is also densely populated with images of men: in Australia, as in many nations, hegemonic nationalism and masculinities are deeply intertwined. Joane Nagel argues that "the culture and ideology of hegemonic masculinity go[es] hand in hand with the culture and ideology of hegemonic nationalism" (1998, 249). The first half of this chapter has established the critical role of narratives focused on Western Sydney in reimagining the Australian nation. This section of the chapter now turns to a specific focus on the depiction of masculinity in the novels, with a focus on *An Elegant Young Man* and *The Lebs*. I argue that the novels' resistance to

hegemonic nationalism can be read through the prism of Luke's ambivalent white male subjectivity and Bani's marginalised Arab Australian male subjectivity.

As explained above, normative concepts of Australian masculinity are based on the assumption of whiteness, confidence, athleticism and heterosexuality. The concept of mateship also plays a key role in this version of masculinity. Mateship, which "embodies what is seen to be morally correct about postcolonial Australian culture" (Butera 2008, 265), is predicated exclusively on the operation of friendship between men. Australian mateship evolved from the labour movement: Nick Dyrenfurth argues that "a politicised mateship appeared as a powerful tool employed by late nineteenth-century radical and labour intellectuals" (2007, 211), and that the figure of the "mate" came to be seen as the counterpart to the "scab."[47] "Mateship" therefore evolves from a relationship of solidarity, but when subsumed into nationalist discourse, it becomes a tool for exclusion.

The specifically racialised element of mateship is critical. It invokes the appeal to egalitarianism that forms the heart of an Australian identity in opposition to an imperial British identity. This national identity is so strongly predicated on the primacy of whiteness that its resistance is rendered somewhat hollow. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues, "Australian cultural representations of mateship, egalitarianism, individualism and citizenship are reproduced through disciplinary knowledges that are presented and taught as though they do not have an epistemological connection to whiteness" (2004, 87). While the centrality of egalitarianism in hegemonic understandings of Australian national identity may be attributed more to the influence of Irish culture, these factors remain within the realm of a dominant Anglo-Celtism. Australia's purported egalitarianism, in its form as a cornerstone of national identity, includes a presumptive whiteness. As Hage argues with regard to mateship:

> [T]here is nothing specifically Australian about this almost universal idealisation of male bonding and friendship. What is specifically Anglo-Celtic Australian is its elevation into a national ideal precisely because it represented an antithesis of the image of the upper-class British national aristocrat that it historically aimed to dethrone. This is why it can only be understood as an opposition *within* a wider field of Britishness. (1998, 199)

Hage's description of mateship as an opposition within a "wider field of Britishness" is key. Although mateship evolved from a rejection of class-consciousness, it continues to serve the discourse of Anglo-Celtic national identity. Although the link between hegemonic forms of

[47] Meaning one who crosses a picket line to take work made available by a strike.

nationalism and mateship emerged in pre-Federation Australia (and was consolidated by the emergence of the trade union movement) (Dyrenfurth 2007, 212), it remains a key political tool. Significantly, John Howard sought to consolidate the importance of mateship to national identity during his time in office.

Howard's concept of "mateship" was closely linked to a rhetoric of nationalism which drew on metanarratives of British heritage, so-called "Western" values, and a purportedly egalitarian spirit which leveraged neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency and individualism. In 1999, the Coalition government drafted a new preamble to be added to the Australian Constitution. The preamble was put forward alongside the proposal for Australia to transition from a constitutional monarchy to a republican nation. Howard co-wrote the draft, which specifically invoked mateship, saying, "We value excellence as well as fairness, independence as dearly as mateship." The preamble was later re-drafted and the term "mateship" removed; the referendum failed to pass. But its significance was cemented at that time: as Dyrenfurth argues, "mateship has always existed as a tool for reproducing and legitimating dominant masculinities amid the wider structure of power relations" (2007, 213), and the suggestion that it be enshrined in the Constitution reflects its potency. There is nothing specifically Australian about friendships between men, and yet in Australia mateship is routinely deployed as a means of maintaining a heteropatriarchal power structure.

Metanarratives of masculinity work to support and uphold Australia's normative national culture. Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). This formulation of masculinity aligns broadly with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in its focus on action and social practice: Jack S. Kahn contends that hegemonic masculinity is a theory that "asserts that people will act in ways that reinforce male privilege by supporting conformity to an idealized version of masculinity, even when it may not be in their best interest, in order to maintain the system of patriarchy" (2009, 31). This means that hegemonic masculinity is not a static structure, but one that has the potential to change over time.

Hegemonic masculinities are both plural and hierarchical. Demetrakis Z. Demetriou (2001) distinguishes between an internal hegemony – the dominance of a specific type of masculinity over other masculinities – and external hegemony, which refers to the

institutionalised dominance of men over women and those of other genders. Expressions of masculinity are also communicated at different scalar levels, including local, regional (including national) and global. Within these stratifications there are also many plural manifestations of masculinities informed by factors such as class, race, sexuality and religion. For example, while there might be a specific type of "regional" Australian masculinity sustained by nationalist discourse, there are multifarious other regional and local hegemonic masculinities at play within communities in Western Sydney and across the nation.

Working-class masculinity occupies an interesting position in the regional hierarchy of Australian masculinities, because it is glorified in both myths of nationalism and masculinity. In the sense that mateship underpins the fabric of relationships between Australian men, for example, working-class masculinity is the model for a hegemonic type. This is clear in the ongoing social capital of the concept of mateship, which Karina J. Butera notes "represents a particular type of loyal bond between members of a struggling, or under-class" (2008, 269). From a literary perspective, working-class positionality implies distance from centres of prestige. Its power depends, then, on who defines the presentation of working-class experiences or stories, and for what end they are deployed. Indeed, the authors discussed here are more likely to appear on ABC panel program *Q&A* than *Struggle Street:*[48] both Ahmad and Carman hold doctoral degrees, and all three of these authors are necessarily privileged by their access to literary infrastructure, by virtue of being represented by highly regarded mainstream publishers such as Giramondo and Hachette. But this by no means makes them "sell-outs." By writing novels about the complexities and contradictions of life in Western Sydney, they and others (such as Felicity Castagna, whose work is discussed in Chapter 4) make critical contributions to Australia's literary landscape.

In the next sections, I contextualise the key "flashpoints" of nationalism – the Skaf case, 9/11 and the Cronulla riots – in terms of their relationship to expressions of both national identity and masculinity. I then examine Luke and Bani as inhabiting peripheral masculinities.

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[48] *Q&A* is a weekly panel show inviting politicians, journalists, writers and other public figures to answer audience questions and debate current affairs. Michael Mohammed Ahmad did, in fact, appear as a panellist on *Q&A* on 20 August 2018. On the program, he stated, "It makes no difference what kind of Muslim you are – good Muslim, bad Muslim, ignorant Muslim, educated Muslim, moderate Muslim, radical Muslim – (you are) still Muslim. At this point I'm not interested anymore in reassuring bigots not to be afraid of me" (Malik 2018). As explained above, *Struggle Street* is a docu-series focusing on disadvantaged people living in Mount Druitt, a suburb of Western Sydney.

3.3.1 Writing the Howard years: Skaf, 9/11 and the Cronulla riots

The way that Australian nationalisms and masculinities support one another is extremely significant to the temporal setting of these three novels. Each of them is set within the milieu of the Howard government's incumbency. In this section, I analyse the texts' depiction of historical events including the Sydney gang rapes of 2000 and the subsequent trial of Bilal Skaf, the September 11 attacks on New York City in 2001, and the Cronulla riots of 2005. These events – particularly the Skaf trial and the Cronulla riots – are key to the resurgence of multicultural literature in Australia. The narratives that these authors represent – for example, the Lebanese Australian students' experiences of racism – are a critical part of Australian cultural history of this period. Despite the fact that *The Lebs* is a fictional novel, Ahmad has acknowledged that it is based on his adolescent experiences: he was a student at Punchbowl Boys High during the same years that Bani attends the school.

The figure of Bilal Skaf looms large over Punchbowl Boys High School in *The Lebs*. In 2000, Skaf was convicted as the leader of a gang of Lebanese Australian youths in a series of gang rapes targeted at white women and girls in Western Sydney. Skaf, who was aged 20 at the time of his conviction, was sentenced to 55 years' imprisonment for the crimes; this sentence was later reduced to 31 years following an appeal. In total, nine of the men were sentenced for their roles in the crimes, including Skaf's younger brother. The crimes received extensive media attention, and prompted the creation of the offence of "aggravated sexual assault in company" by the NSW Parliament. This was the latest in a series of crimes perpetrated by Muslim youths which contributed to the intensification of Islamophobic public rhetoric.[49] Ahmad describes the way in which the term "Lebanese Australian" came to be a stand-in term for violence:

> between the Sydney gang rapes in 2000, the attacks on New York City in 2001, and the Cronulla Riots in 2005, as well as any mention of drug-dealings and drive-by shootings in Sydney which involved any Australian-born citizens of Arab and or Muslim background and or appearance, the terms 'Muslim,' 'Arab,' 'Middle Eastern,' and 'Middle Eastern appearance' were used interchangeably with the term 'Lebanese' as a way of identifying the threat. (2016)

The first section of *The Lebs* is set in 2001, amidst the fallout from the Skaf case and then the 9/11 attacks in New York, which increased discrimination against not only Lebanese Australians but also against Muslim Australians more generally. The events of September 11, 2001 form a

[49] Kate Gleeson (2004) lists a drive-by shooting at Lakemba police station in November 1998 and another gang rape involving three Lebanese Australian men in September 2000. Michael Humphrey (2007) describes another series of gang rapes in Ashfield in Sydney in 2002, which were perpetrated by a group of four Pakistani Muslim brothers.

prominent thematic in both *The Lebs* and *An Elegant Young Man*. In Carman's text, Luke stays up late on the evening of September 11. At approximately 2:00AM, he hears on the television that the attacks had occurred in New York City. The next morning, Luke attends school where a group of boys are dancing and celebrating. Luke asks what is happening, and a boy named Dominick responds, "Why should my mumma cry in Croatia? Now some American mumma has her turn!" (139). The principal, Mr White, tries to intervene, saying, "Silence! Silence boys! You're making ghouls of yourselves! You don't know what you're saying – enough of this!" (139). There are significant parallels between these scenes in Ahmad and Carman's novels – in *The Lebs*, the boys "march through the front office […] in a collective orgasm" (5). The Punchbowl Boys also dance and celebrate; even the two school principals have similar racially designated names: Mr White (*An Elegant Young Man*) and Mr Whitechurch (*The Lebs*). In Carman's text, the boys who argue that America is deserving of violence refer to the Yugoslav War, while in *The Lebs* they refer to the Arab–Israeli conflict and the Gulf War. Isa Musa, whom Bani refers to throughout the text as the "Black Palestinian," speaks up at a meeting with the teachers and says:

> I've been at this school since 1998 and throughout that time a million Arabs like us have been murdered by America and Israel and you never cared, then this morning some Americans die and you put the flag at half-mast. (75)

In both texts, the protagonists display an awareness of the significance of this event: Luke says, "I sensed a great phantom of history was awake and visible for the first time, shadowing my town, looming over the Western Suburbs like an oncoming colossus" (Carman 140). Bani is one of the few students who feels ambivalent about celebrating, and this ambivalence is partly bound up in his aspiration to leave behind his identity as a "Leb": "How will I ever be more than a Leb while I'm surrounded by terrorists? I am no longer above this place. I am in the rubble, surrounded by the carcasses of suicide bombers" (58). The difference in their responses to the event are notable in the direction of their focus. Carman is focused on the western suburbs, while Bani is conscious of the impact that the event will have on him personally, and on the way he is viewed as a Lebanese Australian youth keen to move away from his identity as a "Leb." Michael Humphrey argues that previous to September 11, 2001, the "culturalising" of the behaviour of Muslim immigrants was framed in terms of "cultural compatibility," whereas after September 11th, it has been framed in terms of risk, meaning that any Muslims displaying an "Islamic signifier" (such as the hijab) are "readily politicised as suspected signs of religious fundamentalism and hostility towards secular culture" (2007, 11). Both the Skaf case and the

September 11 attacks compounded the demonisation of Muslim Australians in the public discourse.

The third significant event to be depicted in these novels is the race riot that took place at Cronulla beach in Sydney's south-east on 11 December 2005. The riot's beachside location is critical, as surf culture is a locus of expressions of masculinity and nationalism. Surf culture is also an expression of Australian hegemonic masculinity more specifically: it is a discourse located in coastal spaces and predicated on the authority of "locals." It is no coincidence that the Cronulla riots were motivated, as Nicole Asquith and Scott Poynting argue, by a logic of ethnic cleansing deployed by the Anglo Australian rioters: of "show[ing] them [non-Anglo Australians] that this is our beach and they are never welcome back."[50] This racial violence was enacted specifically against youths of Middle Eastern descent from the western suburbs of Sydney. As Asquith and Poynting write:

> Cronulla is the only beachside suburb of Sydney with a direct train line from the inland western suburbs. As such, this beach has long been frequented by diverse populations who travel from the western suburbs, and this has long been resented by the local residents who regard this space as their own. In recent decades, this once very apparently class-based conflict has been racialised, in the context of moral panic over the Arab or Muslim Other, and the quite commonplace clashes between groups of young men on weekends has been much represented as a problem of "Lebanese gangs." (2011, 99)

Asquith and Poynting identify a critical transition: the shift from a "class-based conflict" – i.e. of poor or working-class residents of Western Sydney visiting the beaches at Cronulla – to a racialised conflict. The racial element of the violence was emphasised by the prevalence of national symbols such as the Australian flag among the Anglo rioters, and the usage of racist epithets such as "Aussie pride," recalling the above analysis of "Aussie" as a stand-in term for "white."

The riots are not depicted directly in any of the three novels, but they are referenced in *An Elegant Young Man* and again briefly in *Down the Hume*. When Luke visits Cronulla with other boys from Western Sydney, he remembers them chanting, occasionally in Arabic, and all of the young men becoming agitated and rowdy. Although he is a "Westie," Luke also sympathises with the Anglo Australian men who perpetrated the Cronulla riots, saying "When I think about those songs, and the way the ocean air made us feel, I'm not surprised the local

[50] Asquith and Poynting here cite an SMS text message which was circulated among the population of the Sutherland Shire as well as read aloud on Alan Jones' talkback radio program, inciting "Aussies" to attend North Cronulla beach to "help support Leb and wog bashing day" (2011, 100).

Aussie boys went on a riot and everything got so violent" (44). In this sentence, Luke is aligned with both the men from Western Sydney – the way the air "made us feel" – as well as the men from Cronulla. His status as an Anglo Australian once again enables him to slip between categories.

3.3.2 Peripheral masculinities in An Elegant Young Man *and* The Lebs

The idea of hegemonic masculinity proposes a changing set of characteristics that are context-specific; more useful as a set of ideas than a reality. As Chris Haywood et al summarise: "hegemonic masculinity is never entirely harmonious or even identical with itself. It relies on the 'outside' and could be considered impossible for any man or group of men to perfectly embody" (2017, 40). The scalar nature of masculinities means that hegemonic types may be contradictory: for example, a regional identity may not occupy a hegemonic position at a local level. To account for these complexities, Connell proposes three primary "types" of peripheral, or non-hegemonic, masculinities, but emphasises that these types – just like hegemonic masculinities – are as individual as the people who play them out. Connell's three subtypes include complicit, subordinated and marginalised masculinities.

These types are also related to the concept of protest masculinity. While complicit, subordinated and marginalised masculinities seem to inhabit a more general category of resistance, protest masculinity is linked specifically to working-class men. In a study of grain plant workers in the United States, Gregory Wayne Walker argues that "among working-class men […] protest masculinity emerges as simply a masculinity that rejects and/or challenges hegemonic masculinity" (2006, 7). R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt define protest masculinity as "a pattern of masculinity constructed in local working-class settings, sometimes among ethnically marginalised men, which embodies the claim to power typical of regional or hegemonic masculinities in Western countries, but which lacks the economic resources and institutional authority that underpins the regional and global patterns" (2005, 848). In an ethnographic study of young Lebanese Muslim men in Western Sydney, Scott Poynting, Greg Noble and Paul Tabar (1999) note the way that their subjects delineate aspects of race and masculinity and attribute varying social status to groups at different times. For example, Asian students at the boys' school (in this case primarily, Chinese Australians and Vietnamese Australians) are described in terms of an "anomaly of macho toughness and nerdish

studiousness" (70). One student notes that Lebanese Australians both exhibited particularly racist tendencies against Asian Australians because "in all areas, Asians are on top" (70), but that Asian Australians were also respected for the same reasons. The "Aussies" (Anglo Australian) students were "held in little respect at all" because of their lack of respect for Lebanese Australians (here used to refer to all Arab Australians).

The authors contend that "[t]his withdrawal of respect, or actively and deliberately behaving disrespectfully toward Anglo authorities, restores a *feeling* of power to a less powerful social group" (74). In *The Lebs*, Ahmad reiterates the fact that just because Punchbowl Boys High School is a highly patriarchal world, this does not mean that the Punchbowl Boys themselves are acting out hegemonic masculinity, because their identities as "Lebs" preclude their access to hegemonic power in Australia. Outside of the environment of the school, the boys are lumped together, despite the fact that many of their families are not actually Lebanese. In this section, then, I analyse the representation of peripheral masculinities and their interaction with race, class, sexuality and religion in the novels. Connell's typology is a useful lens through which to view these novels' characterisation of masculinity.

Connell's first type is complicit masculinity, which refers to men who benefit from the dominance of hegemonic masculinity without meeting all of its specifications. As Connell writes: "If a large number of men have some connection with the hegemonic project but do not embody hegemonic masculinity, we need a way of theorising their specific situation […] Masculinities constructed in ways that realise the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense" (2005, 79). Critically, complicit masculinity sustains and benefits from the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinities. Luke can be read as an example of complicit masculinity. Luke's position as an Anglo male is tempered by his "mode of bafflement" (Brown 2019, 45): the way he functions as an "ambiguous configuration: bursting with ecstatic exuberance on one hand, painfully self-conscious and shamefaced on the other" (Carman 2016, *ii*). Luke is characterised by his insecurity and ambivalence. While he passively benefits from patriarchal structures in several key ways, Luke's behaviour marks him out as someone who is not representative of a hegemonic masculinity: while he is occasionally confident and outgoing, he is more often insecure and self-conscious. He is often socially awkward; on several occasions he references his lack of social aptitude: "My name's Luke and sometimes at parties when people ask me what it is that I do I say, 'I'm a professional fraud how 'bout you?' Nobody ever laughs. To be honest I don't go to a

lot of parties" (2013, 6). He does not align with typical expectations that men enacting hegemonic behaviour be confident, courageous and virile. He does, however, benefit from the hegemonic standard in many other ways: he is white, able-bodied, athletic, and heterosexual, and he does display occasional flashes of confidence, usually expressed through bravado or violence.

Luke benefits from the hegemony of Anglo Australian culture: in the Western Sydney of the novel, other characters often appeal to him on the basis of their shared whiteness. At the same time, "Aussies" in Western Sydney do not occupy the same privileged position as "Aussies" in Cronulla. As Ahmad explains, "Luke grew up in a space where Arab-Australians were the dominant cultural group, and they were being rejected. It was a conflicting situation; this is a group that he, in some ways, knows are not villains, but he also does know that there is villainy within that community. He also sees it from the outside. He's the Wog. He's the Leb in that situation. He's the Other" (2014). Luke is therefore in a position to benefit from both hegemonic nationalism and hegemonic masculinity, but his ambivalence perhaps echoes his own experience of otherness.

Carman completed a Doctor of Creative Arts degree at Western Sydney University in 2016. His doctoral work comprises the text of *An Elegant Young Man* as well as an exegetical element which explores and explains some of the thematic choices he made in composing the work. In this exegesis, he writes that the character of Luke "might be seen as a reflection of the schizoid nature of Australian white male subjectivity," which is amplified by "the influence of western Sydney itself, a place in which the incoherencies of the colonial past are intensified by its literary and cultural distance from the metropolitan centre" (2016, *ii*). These incoherencies and ambivalences are expressed in the text through Luke's constant wavering between bravado and doubt.

The second type of peripheral masculinity described by Connell is subordinated masculinity, primarily expressed by queer men: the mechanism of subordination derives from the domination of heterosexual masculinity over homosexual masculinity. Kahn notes that: "[s]ubordinate masculinities refer to experiences that are not only marginalized but also subjugated" (2009, 37). Bux, the protagonist of Polites' *Down the Hume,* can be read as an example of subordinated masculinity: while he is comfortable with his own sexuality, his queerness is subject to marginalisation by those around him. Bux's relationship with his own father has deteriorated significantly since Bux came out to his family. In the novel, Bux describes himself as a "wog fag way out west" (29); his father is referred to by others in the

Greek diaspora community as the "King of His Country with a Faggot for a Son" (131). Although Bux's queer masculinity demonstrates the function of Connell's typology, my focus here is primarily on the novels by Carman and Ahmad.

Connell's third form of peripheral masculinity is marginalised masculinity, which is typically represented by the experiences of black and brown men. Kahn summarises marginalised masculinities as those which "refer to groups that are on the outskirts of dominant masculinities as a function of identifying with a social grouping that is not dominant" (2009, 36). *The Lebs* can be seen to present an example of marginalised masculinity. The Punchbowl Boys are victims of a racist and Islamophobic discourse that emerged particularly in response to the Skaf case, 9/11 and the Cronulla riots. This discourse depicts both young Lebanese Muslim men – and other black and brown men, as Ahmad notes, who are not Lebanese yet who are still "Lebs" – as violent, misogynistic and homophobic.

The persistent Othering of "Leb" masculinities can be witnessed in reviewers' responses to the text. In an audio interview with Australian literary journal *Kill Your Darlings,* interviewer Meaghan Dew asks Ahmad about the hypermasculinity portrayed in *The Lebs*. Ahmad takes issue with Dew's characterisation of hypermasculinity in his text, and responds by articulating how he perceives that the young men and boys in *The Lebs* are representatives of marginalised masculinities. Ahmad explains:

> I strongly believe that we shouldn't mix up patriarchy and masculinity. If we mean patriarchy, we should say patriarchy. And I'll tell you why: because there's a particular type of masculinity that brown bodies and black bodies have that we can't, as Arab men or black men, escape. And it's a way in which the body of the non-white other has been constructed as demonic and something to be feared in western culture. (*Kill Your Darlings* 2018)

The school environment of Punchbowl Boys High *is* extremely patriarchal: the boys constantly speak about young women they know as "sluts" and "hoes," and use them to gain social leverage over one another. But some reviewers of the text have become preoccupied with the texts' depiction of these attitudes. In a critique of James Ley's review of the novel, Ruby Hamad argues that Ley attributes the unsavoury attitudes of the Punchbowl Boys to Ahmad himself. Criticising Ley's review, Hamad writes, "Ley was not the only reviewer who couldn't seem to accept he was reading a dramatised critique of misogyny, not a documentary account of it. Even the positive reviews seemed fixated on the misogyny of the characters as if books and films about Western toxic masculinity were unheard of" (2019). As Ahmad states pithily in an interview with *Neighbourhood Paper*, "the problem is some people think the dumb Leb in the book is the dumb Leb who wrote it" (Stanton 2018).

The school environment is imperative to the formulation and expression of masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). A hierarchy of masculinities exists within the school environment and Australian culture more broadly, and ultimately, the way that the Punchbowl Boys and other black and brown men, especially those who are seen as "Lebs" (and more recently, African Australians) are represented as violent and hypersexualised perpetuates the othering of these groups. As the "non-white other" that Ahmad describes in the interview with Dew, they are denied the agency that typically accompanies behaviours of hegemonic hypermasculinity. As Rinaldo Walcott writes: "[t]he masks black men wear are many and varied and might be understood as congruent with the difficult history of the agency or lack thereof of black masculine self-fashioning that is autonomous and wholly self-interested" (2009, 75). The lack of autonomous self-fashioning is strongly resonant with the context of Lebanese Australians, especially during the period from 2000 onwards, when the trial of the Skaf brothers dominated media headlines and generated significant backlash against Muslim communities, and particularly again Lebanese Australians (Baird 2009). A more recent incarnation of this marginalisation can be seen in the vilification of African Australian youths in Melbourne, and the perpetuation of the fear of "African gangs" by parliamentarians such as Peter Dutton and Pauline Hanson (Majavu 2020).

At Punchbowl High in the aftermath of Skaf's arrest, the boys study Nick Enright's play *Blackrock* (1995) at school, in which a group of teenage Anglo Australian surfers from a coastal surf town rape and murder a 15-year-old girl. In *The Lebs*, Bani is suspicious that the play has been assigned to teach the boys about sexism in the context of the Skaf case. Ahmad writes:

> The problem is that the Punchbowl Boys aren't going to learn about misogyny and patriarchy from Australian literature, because even when Aussies are being sexist they sound like faggots to us. I read out Jared's line, 'Girls can't surf.' Bassam scoffs and says, 'Surfing is for pussies.' Then he steps in close and whispers to Shaky and me, 'Ay, boys, you think Bilal Skaf is guilty?' (15)

The boys' denigration of Aussies as "faggots" and surfing as "for pussies" recalls the dynamic illustrated in the study by Poynting et al (1999), in which the Lebanese Australian students constructed a discourse in which Lebanese Australians are simultaneously superior to, and victimised by, Anglo Australians. The phrase "Lebs Rule," an assertion of Lebanese Australian superiority, supported the idea that the "Aussies" were least deserving of respect because they did not "stick together." At the same time, however, the students perceived that their teachers discriminated against them in class, choosing to call on the Anglo students over the Lebanese Australian students because of a perceived racial bias (1999). The impulse to denigrate Anglo

Australian culture in this scene, then, can be seen as a way to create a feeling of power among the Punchbowl Boys. This scene also points specifically to the intersections between Australian identity (as a surfing scene), hegemonic masculinity (in the line "Girls can't surf"), and a marginalised protest masculinity (in the students' reactions that "Aussies […] sound like faggots," and "Surfing is for pussies") (15).[51]

Notably, in both *The Lebs* and *An Elegant Young Man*, young women also contribute to the discussion about gang rape. Bani's girlfriend Banika, who is "half-Aussie, half-Serb" (100), says: "I'm not saying those guys were innocent, but those girls were the biggest sluts" (131). In *An Elegant Young Man*, Luke's friend Niki states: "Those girls that get raped by footy players are just hypocrite skanks" (66). Interestingly, both girls are "Aussie" teenagers: the target demographic for the 2000 gang rapes. Their comments illuminate the role of women in the operation of hegemonic masculinities. As noted by Connell and Messerschmidt, "women are central in many of the processes constructing masculinities" (2005, 848): in a patriarchal society, victim-blaming by women can be characterised as a defence mechanism for women to distinguish or distance themselves from the victims, and/or a method of appealing to their male counterparts. Regardless of the girls' intentions, their statements serve to sustain a dominant sexist Australian worldview.

The treatment of young women in the novels, and particularly in *The Lebs,* raises the question of whether or not the novels themselves are sexist. Ahmad seems to anticipate this reading, and to counter it with the introduction of a narrative device in which the novel is narrated by an adult Bani looking back on his teenage years. Ahmad writes, "It's hard for me now to admit that at times the sexist attitudes of the Punchbowl Boys appealed to me" (107). The characters in the novel are undoubtedly sexist, but that does not mean that the text is sexist. The demonisation of Lebanese Australians does not excuse the behaviour of the Punchbowl Boys, but it does explain it. Seen within the broader context of the construction of hegemonic masculinities, the sexism of the Punchbowl Boys reads as an attempt to reclaim social power from a marginalised position. The same can be said for Banika and Niki, who are both speaking within a sexist milieu. Speaking about *#ThreeJerks* in an interview, Ahmad contends, "We know

[51] In *Down the Hume*, Bux only alludes to the gang rapes when describing a parking lot in Bankstown, which although it was not under cover, "didn't stop the Skaf brothers parking their white windowless van there" (195). The event haunts all three texts, but particularly *The Lebs*, as the incident that incited the demonisation and racial vilification of Lebanese Muslims in Australia.

we're jerks, we know what we're saying is offensive, we know that the work is problematic, so now that we've admitted it, now that we've said we know, don't judge us. Just come in and listen to what we have to say" (Abdul Khalik 2014).

3.4 Conclusion to Chapter 2

This chapter has presented an analysis of *An Elegant Young Man*, *Down the Hume* and *The Lebs* as key works of Australian critical multicultural literature. This analysis contends that these works, produced from within the Sweatshop collective, serve as examples of contemporary state-of-the-nation texts. They reimagine Australia by representing communities that have been previously overlooked in Australian literature: the suburbs of Western Sydney. Their attention to place, whiteness and the role of class each enable an interrogation of the dominant discourse of settler-colonial subjectivity and of Australia's literary cultures. They are each key texts in the emergence of contemporary literatures of Western Sydney, which is growing exponentially, and which challenges the assumptions of both the literary mainstream and the epistemic privileging of whiteness.

Additionally, this chapter has explored the mutually constitutive relationship between dominant forms of Australian national identity and normative masculinity, especially in the context of the Howard years. Taking up Connell's theory of peripheral masculinities, this chapter has read the works by Carman, Polites and Ahmad as examples of complicit, subordinated and marginalised masculinities respectively. This analysis focuses specifically on Carman's inhabitation of a self-consciously uncertain white male subjectivity and Ahmad's depiction of a demonised Arab Australian masculinity. In the next chapter, I will turn to an examination of Michelle de Kretser's novels *The Lost Dog*, *Questions of Travel* and *The Life to Come*, focusing on how de Kretser presents a series of reimaginings of Australia, which I read through the theory of vernacular cosmopolitanism.

4. Chapter 3
Cosmopolitanism and anxiety: Michelle de Kretser's *The Lost Dog*, *Questions of Travel* and *The Life to Come*

4.1 Introduction to Chapter 3

This chapter is the third of four case studies in which I examine contemporary works of Australian literature as state-of-the-nation texts. In this chapter, I analyse three of Michelle de Kretser's recent novels in terms of their depictions of Australian multiculturalism and diasporic Asian Australian subjectivities. These novels include *The Lost Dog* (2007), *Questions of Travel* (2012) and *The Life to Come* (2017). Over the past twenty years or so, de Kretser has become one of Australia's most critically acclaimed writers. De Kretser's earlier works include 1999 historical fiction novel *The Rose Grower* (set in France) and 2003 postcolonial Gothic novel *The Hamilton Case* (set in Sri Lanka), while her more recent works focus closely on contemporary Australia, combining stories of Sydney and Melbourne with wide-ranging global settings including India, Sri Lanka, Paris and London.[52]

De Kretser's narratives are diasporic, as well as very deeply situated Australian narratives. Throughout these three novels, de Kretser displays unparalleled incisiveness when it comes to the subtleties of Australian culture. She engages explicitly and extensively with the idea of the nation, with its colonial history; its landscapes (both rural and urban); its cultures of literature, food and art; its beauty and wealth, as well as its narrow-mindedness, shallowness and xenophobia. Upon receiving the Miles Franklin Literary Award for the first time in 2013, de Kretser stated in an interview that "[t]his award makes me feel that there is a place for me in Australian literature" (Watkins 2016, 579). Having won again in 2018, de Kretser's position as a key figure in contemporary Australian literature is assured. Since 2000, only two others have received the prize more than once: Kim Scott (2000; 2011) and Tim Winton (2002; 2009).[53]

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[52] In addition to these five novels, de Kretser is also the author of the novella *Springtime* (2014) and non-fiction work *On Shirley Hazzard* (2019), published as part of the "Writers On Writers" series released by Black Inc.

[53] As noted in the thesis Introduction, other writers have won multiple awards (Tim Winton has won four times in total), but only Scott, Winton and de Kretser have won more than once between 2000 and 2020.

De Kretser is unquestionably among the great literary chroniclers of contemporary Australia. In addition to her double Miles Franklin wins, de Kretser has received a large number of other significant literary prizes (including the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2004, the Christina Stead Prize for fiction in 2008, 2014 and 2019; and the ALS Gold Medal in 2008 and 2013). Her writing is characterised by a sustained engagement with the state of the nation. As Australians, Anglo and non-Anglo migrants, refugees and travellers often inhabiting identities defined by multiplicity, de Kretser's protagonists participate in processes of self-fashioning and renewal: they re-shape their identities as they migrate, travel, and seek asylum; they cross cultures and language barriers; they are exposed to difference, within themselves and in those around them. Due to her status as a celebrated contemporary writer, de Kretser occupies a markedly different position in the literary field to some of the other authors studied here. While de Kretser's work is well and truly part of the Australian literary mainstream, her texts themselves engage with the phenomenon of gatekeeping that impacts minoritised writers.

In this thesis' previous chapters, I have focused on groupings of texts united by their engagements with form (the translocal short story collection) and place (writing narratives of Western Sydney). In this chapter, I adopt a different approach, examining the work of one writer over time. I argue that an examination of de Kretser's *oeuvre* reveals an evolving confrontation with the issues at the heart of Australian multiculturalism; namely: de Kretser's books interrogate the preservation of a white mainstream in the face of a multicultural resurgence. In her work, the continual marginalisation of non-white, migrant and Indigenous Australians is made possible not only via institutionalised gate-keeping and entrenched mechanisms that preserve the status quo, but also through the more pervasive and insidious presumptions of "special interest" and "tokenism" that are mired in public sphere and private space discussions of artistic merit and talent. Indeed, de Kretser addresses the state of the nation more directly perhaps than any other contemporary Australian novelist.

While some of de Kretser's novels have received more scholarly attention than others, overall, I would contend that de Kretser's work has so far been overlooked in critical discourse. Of the three novels studied here, *The Lost Dog* has received the most scholarly engagement, likely due to its earlier publication. Scholarly engagements with *The Lost Dog* include examinations of urban space (Denger 2016), Gothic themes and haunting (Herbillon 2018) and modernity and identity politics (Mirza 2020), while Lyn Dickens (2015) positions the novel in relation to the concept of (post)multiculturalism. *Questions of Travel* has received some critical

engagement: Rooney (2018) examines the text's representation of metropolitan and suburban Sydney and the "backward gaze" of its structure (172), while Chandani Lokugé (2016) examines the novel's failed cosmopolitanism. Wilson (2016) reads the novel though the theme of belonging, alongside Hsu-Ming Teo's novel *Behind the Moon*. At the time of writing, there are almost no scholarly engagements with *The Life to Come* available, with the exception of Chakraborty (2019), who examines the novel's attention to the "prevailing crises of our millennial times" (99).

In this chapter, I build on this other scholarly work in three key ways. Firstly, while critics have made valuable contributions that examine de Kretser's work as Sri Lankan Australian literature, often comparing it with the work of other contemporary Asian and South Asian Australian writers, this chapter marks the first attempt to track the themes emerging across de Kretser's *oeuvre* over time. Secondly, others have discussed the cosmopolitan themes in de Kretser's work (Harvey 2012; Lokugé 2016), and I contend that the specific lens of vernacular cosmopolitanism enables a clearer focus on the anxieties inherent in the idea of what it means to "be" cosmopolitan, regardless of whether this identity is associated with privilege or displacement. Thirdly, I build on earlier work that considers the theme of anxiety in the novels. Maryam Mirza (2020) writes of *The Lost Dog's* Tom as being "characterised by feelings of anxiousness and a profound sense of loss" (191). I argue that similar anxieties are to be found in de Kretser's more recent novels as well, and that it is productive to read these texts through a theoretical lens that has its focus on the everyday and the local.

In undertaking this analysis, this chapter also builds on recent work by other scholars using vernacular cosmopolitanism for literary analysis (Luo 2013; Xu 2016). I contend that de Kretser's confrontation with the tensions inherent in Australian multiculturalism is most clearly elucidated by a diachronic approach, which enables an appreciation of how de Kretser represents both mainstream and minoritised characters in various novels over time. In fact, I conceive of these three novels as a "trilogy" thematising multiculturalism: a series of novels that focuses directly on Australia and Australians, and on how hegemonic settler-colonial subjectivities continually marginalise non-white Australians and those from non-European backgrounds.

The Lost Dog tells the story of Indian Australian academic Tom Loxley, and his relationship with Nelly Zhang, an artist, whom he meets in their shared neighbourhood of Richmond in Melbourne's inner east. Tom, who is working on a monograph about Henry James, rents Nelly's rural cabin in order to work on his book. While out for a walk, Tom's unnamed dog

disappears. The narrative is loosely structured around Tom's search for the dog, but is interspersed with flashbacks from Tom's childhood in Mangalore, Nelly's mysterious past and her marriage to Felix Atwood, Tom and Nelly's developing relationship, and Tom's relationship with his ageing mother, Iris. Woven in with these stories are meditations on belonging, modernity, art, and on Melbourne's status as a (post)colonial or, to use Aileen Moreton-Robinson's term, "postcolonizing" city (2003), built on unceded Indigenous land.

Questions of Travel follows two parallel narratives through alternating chapters. One is focused on Anglo Australian Laura Fraser, who inherits money from her aunt, and decides to use it to travel the world. Laura lives in London for several years before returning home to Sydney to work at a *Lonely Planet*–style travel publication. The other tells the story of Ravi Mendis, a Sri Lankan academic and computer programmer who is forced to seek asylum in Australia following the brutal murder of his son and his wife, a political activist defending the rights of women. Ravi arrives in Sydney where he works first in an aged care home, and later at the same travel company as Laura, where he works as a web developer. The novel is focused on themes of connection and isolation; it covers a timespan of over 40 years, ending with Ravi and Laura separately travelling to Sri Lanka. Ravi decides to return home, despite the danger to his life, while Laura is holidaying on the beach when the Boxing Day tsunami hits on December 26, 2004.

The Life to Come, de Kretser's most recent novel, is divided into five parts entitled "The Fictive Self," "The Ashfield Tamil," "The Museum of Romantic Life," "Pippa Passes," and "Olly Faithful." These parts focus on a rolling cast of characters, some of whom feature in multiple parts, while others appear only briefly. The novel takes an ironic and often satirical look at Australian multiculturalism, literary and publishing cultures, middle-class progressive culture, academia, travel and migration. The character who appears most often is Pippa, an Anglo Australian writer who aspires to greatness. Among the novel's other protagonists are Scottish–Sri Lankan academic Ashok (known as Ash) and his one-time girlfriend Cassie, a PhD student studying Shirley Hazzard; Céleste, an Australian translator living in Paris; George Meshaw, a university creative writing tutor and author; and Christabel and Bunty, two older Sri Lankan women who migrate to Sydney together and end up as neighbours to Pippa. De Kretser examines each of her protagonists as though under a microscope, constructing multidimensional characters who are neither completely sympathetic nor irredeemable. Mridula Nath Chakraborty (2019) describes the novel as an exploration of the "reigning compulsions of the fascinating set of

characters whose failures and foibles de Kretser holds up to unpitying scrutiny, and whose inner workings and governing passions we come to understand the better precisely for the unflattering light cast upon them" (2019, 99). *The Life to Come* is very much a novel of contemporary Australia, set during the mining boom of the early-mid 2000s (Trapè 2020).

These three novels are united by their shared attunement to difference, with themes including travel, migration, and the re-fashioning of identities, which invites consideration of whether they might be called cosmopolitan texts. De Kretser is explicitly concerned with migration and population movement. In a recent interview, she states: "[t]he twentieth century saw mass movements of people in unprecedented numbers: tourists, refugees, guest workers, migrants, students, troops deployed in war and peace. These movements continue apace today. I'm interested in exploring this phenomenon because I'm interested in how the world works and trying to figure out how we have ended up here" (Trapè 2020, 29). The scale of these population movements has prompted the proliferation of theoretical considerations regarding what it might mean to be cosmopolitan, and whether openness to difference is inherently contradicted by the frames through which we define our identities – the most critical of these being national identity. The growth of international migration has been accompanied by the resurgence of nationalist ideology in many parts of the world, Australia included. Chandani Lokugé (2016) argues that "although Australian public culture is becoming less Anglocentric and more cosmopolitan with the acceleration of migrant, refugee and asylum flows in recent years, monoculturalism continues to flourish, inciting racism leading to hostility and violence" (595). This summary serves as a useful point of departure for this chapter.

Cosmopolitanism is a philosophical concept based on the idea that it might be possible to be a "citizen of the world," or at least a part of a global community in which people have obligations to those they have never met beyond common national and cultural ties. As Kwame Anthony Appiah argues in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), cosmopolitanism is based on two main ideas:

> One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. (2006, *xv*)

I argue that de Kretser's representations of contemporary Australia are not so much cosmopolitan *narratives* as they are characterised by cosmopolitan *anxieties*. De Kretser's novels engage explicitly with the problems inherent in the idea of cosmopolitanism: for example, how

might we act out an obligation to others? Can we truly take a meaningful interest in the lives of those we do not and never will know? De Kretser engages with the stark divide in how privileged and disenfranchised populations move around the world, and the enormous obstacles of racism and xenophobia. Ultimately, these cosmopolitan anxieties point to the fact that the structural inequalities perpetuated by Australian multiculturalism – such as the "*internal* orientalism" (Hage 1998, 17) of Asian Australians and other non-Anglo groups at the expense of a dominant Anglo-settler subjectivity – are not designed to foster openness to difference, but instead to limit and control difference.

The three novels analysed here are expressly concerned with what it means to be Australian; with what it means to live in a settler (post)colony. De Kretser often deploys a satirical and ironic voice that underscores Australians' privilege and narrowmindedness. For example, in an email before his trip to Australia, Ash's Scottish mother warns him: "Australians are […] suspicious of their success and resent it. They are winners who prefer to see themselves as victims" (de Kretser 2017, 34). In *The Life to Come*, James Ley argues, Australia is depicted as "insular, entitled, coddled, condescending, anti-intellectual, money obsessed, morally vain, culturally vapid and historically naive" (2017). All three novels are distinguished by de Kretser's unmatched skills as an ironist, which she uses, sometimes gently and sometimes savagely, to skewer diverse elements of contemporary Australia, from suburban dwellers to corporate culture, academics and artists.

The theory of vernacular cosmopolitanism emphasises the everyday aspects of exposure to difference, and creates space for the consideration of the problems outlined above. These readings draw attention to a central tension: at its heart, cosmopolitanism is predicated on openness to difference and otherness, while multiculturalism is predicated on the consumption and control of difference and otherness. Australian literature has witnessed the emergence of a new literary multiculturalism over the past decade, which is characterised by a confrontation of multiculturalism's fundamental impulse toward control: in a review essay, Chakraborty refers to de Kretser's characters in *The Life to Come* as "newly-cosmopolitan, now-multicultural-again" (2019, 101). These contemporary engagements with multiculturalism – which Appiah characterises as a "shape-shifter, which so often designates the disease it purports to cure" (2006, *xiii*) – are, critically, approaching multiculturalism from a piercingly critical perspective. As set out in my Introduction, Australian multiculturalism is motivated by a fundamentally conservative impulse. With this in mind, I analyse a series of Anglo Australian characters from

the novels, focusing on how they consume and appropriate otherness, as well as highlighting how non-Anglo characters within the novels negotiate, evade and adapt to this consumption.

These novels depict several of the flashpoints of nationalism that are present in many of the other texts analysed in this thesis: *The Lost Dog* is set in 2001 and, while *Questions of Travel* is set over a period of four decades, it also takes in the *Tampa* controversy and the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York. As noted above, *The Life to Come* is set during Australia's resources boom around 2010, a time of "mining money, big mansions, swimming pools, restaurants, and overseas holidays" (Trapè 30). Douglas Lorman (2014) characterises the change in the international political climate since 9/11 as "a retreat from cosmopolitanism and a return to parochialism and nationalism accompanied by the adoption of harsher attitudes towards immigrants and refugees" (214). These attitudes can be seen to play out in the novels, unfolding in what de Kretser has characterised as "a mean-spirited nation," citing Australia's treatment of Indigenous people and asylum seekers, the government's long-held refusal to raise the rate of unemployment benefit Newstart, and the nation's poor record on climate change policy. As de Kretser argues, "the dominant story in Australia today seems to be indifference to suffering and lack of solidarity with the vulnerable" (Trapè 2020, 32). This indifference and lack of solidarity is illustrated across all three texts.

With these very contemporary novels, de Kretser's novels can be seen to depict what Paul Sharrad has characterised as Australians' "self-conscious late/post/colonial condition" (2010, 21). As has been remarked upon by others (Harvey 2012; Chakraborty 2019), de Kretser's earlier novels were drawn into the debate over Australian literature's perceived neglect of the nation's present. As explained in my Introduction, the most recent incarnation of this debate was ignited by David Marr's comments in 2003 regarding writers' perceived lack of engagement with the present and with contemporary Australian society. Ken Gelder singles out *The Rose Grower* in 2006 as an example of this apparent crisis in Australian literature (quoted in Harvey 2012). As Melinda Harvey notes, the earlier novel's "foreign and historical setting, horticultural fetish, focus on private manners and primped prose" gives way in *Questions of Travel* to themes that are "less arch, more cosmopolitan, and more seriously engaged with the larger events and problems of our times" (2012). As Julieanne Lamond argues in response to Marr's comments, "We do need to be able to think and talk about the nation […] that means thinking about what constitutes our national culture in a much wider sense, both in terms of genre and subject matter" (2007, 91). These novels address Australia's contemporary national culture, and they do so by

broadening its subject matter. For example, de Kretser's construction of a three-dimensional character like Ravi Mendis intervenes in popular stereotypes about asylum seekers, while refusing to present Ravi only as a passive or tragic figure.

In the Introduction, I suggested that Bill Ashcroft's concept of the transnation provides a valuable model for understanding how non-white subjectivities are continually marginalised by a discourse that remains focused on a dominant settler-colonial subjectivity and its attendant metanarratives. In this thesis, I both read texts through the lens of the transnation and also propose to extend the metaphor of the transnation – or of "texts of the transnation" – into one that is more attuned to considering the impacts and consequences of this displacement on narratives written by and about non-Anglo Australians. I take up the concept of the state-of-the-nation novel in order to focus on how these writers challenge dominant Australian identities through literature. I do this by outlining the theoretical context of Asian Australian literature and literary representations of diaspora and defining the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism before analysing the texts with a focus on three primary themes: the idea of "white cosmo-multiculturalism" (Hage 1998, 198); the depictions of migrant and refugee cosmopolitanisms, in relation to the characters' strategies for evading appropriation and consumption; and de Kretser's representation of the settler-colonial nation of Australia itself, with a focus on its provisionality as a postcolonial entity.

4.2 Writing South Asian Australian literary subjectivities

As addressed briefly in my Introduction, Asian Australian literature has emerged as a key field of inquiry within contemporary Australian and transnational literatures. In this section, I situate the work of de Kretser, who arrived in Melbourne from Sri Lanka at the age of 14, among contemporary theoretical conversations regarding the writing of Asian Australian, diasporic, and Sri Lankan Australian literatures. Asian Australian writing crystallised into a theoretical discipline during the 1990s and early 2000s, but Australia's relationship with Asia has long been particularly contentious: as Graham Huggan states, Asia has historically been viewed as Australia's "utterly distrusted Other" (2007, 131). Victoria's *Chinese Immigration Act 1855* – attempting to limit the presence of Chinese miners on the state's goldfields – was first in a line of racially exclusionary pieces of legislation, and racism against Asian people continues to be a defining characteristic of contemporary Australia.

In the past decade or so, argue Janet Wilson and Chandani Lokugé, Asian Australian literature has "burgeoned into an influential area of cultural production, known for its ethnic diversity and stylistic innovativeness, and demanding new forms of critical engagement involving transnational and transcultural frameworks" (2018, 1). Of course, within the term "Asian Australian," there are many diverse and heterogeneous national, ethnic and cultural formations. Indeed, Wenche Ommundsen and Zhong Huang (2018) note that the term "Asian Australian" does not fully account for "the diversity of national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds it was designed to accommodate" (8). Further, as Sharrad (2010) argues, the label "Asian Australian" has been viewed by some as a "neo-colonial homogenising of ethnicities and cultural differences" (11), and is characterised by an over-emphasis on Chinese Australian writing at the expense of other Asian and South Asian cultures.[54] Of course, there are demographic and historical factors to explain this disproportionate representation. One of the primary consequences of this imbalance, Sharrad contends, is that South Asian Australian writing has been overlooked within the wider field of Asian Australian literature. Furthermore, in 2012, Chakraborty calls for a deeper exploration of South Asian Australian literature, recognising the potential to "map out a field […] that might actually revitalise the entire field of Australian literature itself" (9). Within the past several years, there has been a proliferation of new theoretical considerations of South Asian Australian writing.

In one of very few specific studies of Sri Lankan Australian writing, Lokugé argues that Sri Lankan Australian fiction assumes an "intermediary role" in "developing intercultural conversations in Australia as a conduit to national harmony" (2016, 560). Alexandra Watkins' 2015 monograph, *Problematic Identities in Women's Fiction of the Sri Lankan Diaspora*, while not focused specifically on Australia, analyses works by writers including de Kretser, Lokugé and Yasmine Gooneratne. Wilson and Lokugé's 2016 special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* has since been released as a book – 2018's *Mediating Literary Borders: Asian Australian Writing* – which also includes multiple studies of works by de Kretser, Lokugé and Gooneratne. That these theoretical discussions are recent and ongoing evidences the critical role of Asian Australian writing – and in this case, South Asian Australian writing more specifically – within the maturation of a renewed literary multiculturalism in Australia.

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[54] As noted by Alejandra Moreno Álvarez (2017), "Most researchers coincide [*sic*] that India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are an intrinsic part of South Asia, while Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar are both included and excluded from it" (86).

Of course, de Kretser is also attuned to the experience of diaspora, and the label "South Asian Australian" contains within it an enormous variety of national, sub-national, ethnic and cultural histories and contexts. As argued by Watkins, "th[e] broad diasporic 'Asian' classification downplays the unique context of diasporic Sri Lankan fiction, which relates to the various aspects of Sri Lanka's three-tiered colonial experience, with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the Dutch in the seventeenth century, and the British from the end of the eighteenth century" (2015, 2). This context usually hovers in the background of de Kretser's novels, rather than taking centre stage as in some other texts of the Sri Lankan diaspora. Lokugé argues that Sri Lankan Australian novels such as *Questions of Travel* "illuminate the inexpressible heartbreak of the individual caught between home and hostlands, and envision roads not yet travelled" (570). I argue that all three of the novels analysed here illuminate this "inexpressible heartbreak" in different ways. Moreover, writing on *The Life to Come*, Chakraborty argues that "[w]hile most Sri Lankan writers in the diaspora are inflected with identity markers, the result of decades of civil war, de Kretser has escaped such an affiliation for a long time. This book is both an attempt at reclamation of that history as well as an abandonment of the project of identity that marks so much of postcolonial diasporic work" (2019, 105). The double movement of de Kretser's latest novel both situates it more firmly among other Sri Lankan Australian writing and also reflects its incisive dissection of the state of the Australian nation. In the next section, I will turn to the theory of cosmopolitanism to contextualise de Kretser's depiction of diasporic experience.

4.3 Australia in the world, the world in Australia: vernacular cosmopolitanisms

As described above, cosmopolitanism refers to the aspiration to be a "citizen of the world." The term has a long history,[55] and after functionally disappearing from critical discourse around the time of World War II, it has re-emerged more recently alongside renewed critique of world literatures within the context of globalisation. Scholars engaging with the idea of the cosmopolitan within the past several decades have become increasingly aware of its problematic

[55] The term dates back to its use by Greek philosopher Diogenes the Cynic around 350BCE, who is credited with first using the term following his exile from the ancient Turkish city of Sinope. It was also addressed by Immanuel Kant in the essays "Perpetual Peace" and "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View," in which Kant envisions an international league of nations predicated on the rest of the world aligning with his vision for Europe (1784; 1795).

nature. Namely, the idea of being cosmopolitan – of being at home in the world – has historically been available only to the wealthy and those who are able to travel by choice, and the term has had strong Eurocentric and neocolonial implications, though also available to privileged subjects of colonial modernity.

Greater critical engagement with these problematic elements of the concept has prompted a wide-spread theoretical reconsideration of what it means to be cosmopolitan, precipitating the development of so-called "cosmopolitanisms from below": a variety of concepts united by their focus on the validity of cosmopolitan experience among refugees, guest workers, economic migrants, asylum seekers, temporary workers and displaced persons (Clifford 1992; Nyers 2003). One among these is Homi K. Bhabha's concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism, which combines a focus on migrant and diasporic subjectivities with an emphasis on the localised and quotidian aspects of the experience of uprooting oneself or being uprooted, whether by choice or necessity, and the precarity of living in an insecure, temporary, or dangerous situation.

Bhabha describes vernacular cosmopolitanism as something "that emerges from the world of migrant boarding-houses and the habitations of national and diasporic minorities ... a vernacular cosmopolitanism which measures global progress from the minoritarian perspective" (1996, 191). The key term "vernacular" emphasises the concept's focus on the everyday, which contrasts with metanarratives of difference, migration and travel. Emphasising the apparent contrast between the "vernacular" and "cosmopolitan," Pnina Werbner (2006) describes the concept as an "oxymoron that joins contradictory notions of local specificity and universal enlightenment" (496). Sneja Gunew (2017) has also recently taken up the term in her analysis of recent writing through the frame of the post-multicultural, suggesting that "[b]ecause it draws attention to the singular within the plural […] and to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism is […] a useful approach in this transnational, globalized age" (33). These concepts, with their focus on diasporic experience and on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, are a useful lens through which to evaluate de Kretser's depictions of travel, migration and belonging.

I propose that vernacular cosmopolitanism is a useful lens through which to view these three novels. They feature characters from across the spectrum of cosmopolitanism – travellers, tourists, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – and engage deeply with the dislocations and disorientations of moving between cultures and continents. As Thomas Bender contends:

> [t]he cosmopolitan is not, as in popular usage, a person who is easy moving around the world, never uncomfortable. My notion of cosmopolitanism is at odds with the long-standing commonplace that 'cosmopolitan people' are those who are 'able to feel at home anywhere.' Cosmopolitanism, as I understand it, is challenging, even hard work. (2017, 116)

Bender's interpretation reinforces the idea that de Kretser's characters do not need to openly embrace a cosmopolitan identity in order to be read through the lens of cosmopolitanism. De Kretser's writing is flooded with extremely specific and evocative detail invoking places all over the world, and yet her characters are also very often in in-between states, in discomfort or uncertainty. The characters are often not in a condition that enables openness to difference or an ethical commitment to strangers, as has characterised the cosmopolitan vision of scholars such as Appiah (2006). Even when they do inhabit a condition of openness to difference – as Laura Fraser does on her world trip in *Questions of Travel* – the point is often that an attempted embrace of cosmopolitanism is undermined by the inherently shallow and self-serving nature of tourism.

In fact, I argue that de Kretser's confrontations with these problems are precisely what make her novels so interesting to read through the lens of vernacular cosmopolitanism. Reading de Kretser's novels with attention to characters' openness to difference highlights the impacts of Australian multiculturalism. As argued by Huggan:

> multiculturalism continues to operate as a form of wilfully aestheticising exoticist discourse – a discourse which inadvertently serves to disguise persistent racial tensions within the nation; and one which, in affecting a respect for the other as a reified object of cultural difference, deflects attention away from social issues – discrimination, unequal access, hierarchies of ethnic privilege – that are very far from being resolved. (2001, 225)

The key point here is that multiculturalism affects "a respect for the other as a reified object of cultural difference." Multiculturalism maintains a structural separation between an Anglo hegemony and non-Anglo and Indigenous "others," which perpetuates the reification of cultural difference. Within this structure, is it possible to embody a meaningful cosmopolitan outlook? As Lokugé notes, with reference to *Questions of Travel*, "de Kretser's scepticism with regard to Australia's well-meant but ineffectual effort to celebrate multiculturalism is visible everywhere in the novel" (2016, 563; also see Dickens 2014). As I will show, the same scepticism is equally clear in *The Lost Dog* and *The Life to Come*.

All three of these novels confront the tensions between the multicultural and the cosmopolitan. In some ways, *The Lost Dog* can be seen as an extended metaphor for the impact of Australian multiculturalism on a non-Anglo Australian character. Protagonist Tom migrates to Australia as a boy with his British father, Arthur, and Indian mother, Iris. After being subjected

to racism in the schoolyard, Tom becomes dedicated to blending in as best he can, anticipating and evading discrimination before it can impact him. *Questions of Travel* is explicitly structured in a way that draws out the tensions of cosmopolitanism. As the author has stated in an interview regarding the novel's alternating focus on Laura and Ravi, "[t]he structure of a double narrative that tells parallel stories was crucial. It's a formal expression of a thematic concern: namely, the division of the world into the global rich and the local poor" (de Kretser quoted in Hanke 2012, 24). *The Life to Come* brings together a large number of narrative perspectives throughout its five sections, addressing themes of travel, migration, and displacement. One of the novel's characters, political scientist Ash, even writes a book called *The Global Subaltern: Mobility and Modernity in a Transnational Age* (30). Regarding the form of these two novels, de Kretser states: "[t]hey are both novels about the contemporary world, and that is a world in which many if not all the old certainties and continuities have been ruptured. The 'broken' form of those novels reflects widespread psychological, social, and historical rupture" (Trapè 31). De Kretser's choices of structure and focalisation also draw attention to the wealthy and (usually) white characters' obliviousness regarding non-white characters' experiences of immigration and racism.

De Kretser structures her novels to unsettle the reader. *The Lost Dog* jumps back and forth in time, to Iris' childhood in Mangalore, Tom's childhood, the months before Tom's dog went missing, and finally the one-week stretch in which Tom searches for the dog. The writer A. S. Byatt, writing a review of *Questions of Travel*, describes it as "a story without a plot but with changing locations in both history and geography," and one that "seems to proceed with an uncanny lightness, in glimpses and sudden shifts" (2013). This apprehension is not only limited to the reception of *Questions of Travel*. Commenting on *The Life to Come*, Marcel Theroux contends that "[i]t doesn't offer the conventional integrity of a novel: the life of a central character or characters unfolding through time" (2018). Instead, both novels are full of constant interruptions – *Questions of Travel* switches back and forth between Ravi and Laura's lives; while the five-part structure of *The Life to Come* continually interrupts itself. In both of the more recent novels, omniscient narration delves into the mind of suddenly introduced characters who occasionally disappear soon after. De Kretser has described the "concrete" nature of her novels' structures using a spatial metaphor, stating, "I like three-dimensional novels that are like walking down a corridor and you find a niche in the wall or a door might be open and you can go into a room or peer in, and sometimes the door is closed but you know there is a space in there" (de Kretser quoted in Wyndham 2012). This "concreteness" supports de Kretser's use of structure as

tool for replicating complexity: some characters' motivations are never explained; some key mysteries remain unresolved.

Vernacular cosmopolitanism can be seen as a version of the idea "that speaks to the anxieties, contradictions and disparities in power that give rise to – and arise from – cosmopolitan projects and claims" (Glick Schiller and Irving 2017, 2). In this section, I analyse the cosmopolitan vernacular through three primary themes: white cosmo-multiculturalism (with a focus on the characters Laura and Pippa from *Questions of Travel* and *The Life to Come* respectively); migrant and refugee cosmopolitanisms (with a focus on *The Lost Dog*'s Tom and Nelly and *Questions of Travel*'s Ravi), and the depiction of the settler-colonial nation itself.

4.3.1 White cosmo-multiculturalism and conditional inclusion

At one end of the spectrum of cosmopolitan experience is the traditional idea of what is required in order to feel "at home in the world": wealth, travel and, above all, choice. While writing *Questions of Travel*, de Kretser states that she was "preoccupied with the questions *Who travels? Who doesn't? Why?*" (Trapè 2020, 29). Some of de Kretser's characters do fit the traditional mould of the cosmopolitan – or at least they seek to appear to others as cosmopolitan – but their aspirations are continually undercut by posturing, performativity and affectation. In this chapter, I read the characters of Pippa Reynolds and the Elkinson family from *The Life to Come*, and Laura Fraser from *Questions of Travel*, using Ghassan Hage's concept of "white cosmo-multiculturalism" (1998, 198). Lyn Dickens (2014) detects the theme of white cosmo-multiculturalism at work in *The Lost Dog*, specifically with reference to Tom Loxley's ex-wife Karen, who marries Tom to "satisf[y] her need to rebel and her social conscience" (de Kretser 2007, 91), and whose attitude, Dickens argues, "involves the acquisition, conditional inclusion and containment of racial difference – interactions that are all based on a firm discrepancy in power relations" (169). In this chapter, I pick up where Dickens leaves off, expanding this analysis of white cosmo-multiculturalism to de Kretser's two most recent novels.

Hage theorises that cosmopolitanism is easily accommodated by the structures of Australian multiculturalism. After explaining his concept of the "discourse of Anglo decline," in which nationalists decry the presence of migrants from non-European countries as some kind of "invasion," Hage suggests that pro-multicultural white Australians also operate within the same space. He writes, "[w]hite multiculturalists have easily denounced the discourse of decline as

hopelessly racist, Anglophile, out of touch and old-fashioned. In turn they have posited their multiculturalism as clearly urbane, anti-racist, cosmopolitan and non-Anglocentric" (182). Hage describes this cosmo-multiculturalism as a "new national ideal" (201), one that was consolidated during the early 1990s under the Labor leadership of former prime minister Paul Keating, whose love of opera and luxury tailoring, keenness to locate Australia within Asia, and progressive stance on Indigenous reconciliation, positioned him as an especially cosmopolitan figure.

As Hage explains, while white cosmo-multiculturalism stands in opposition to its "archaic and unsophisticated Australo-British opponent" (202), both positions remain part of a structure that seeks to preserve the structure of mainstream Australian identity. The key differential is that cosmo-multiculturalism re-incorporates a class-based element eschewed by the Australo-British understanding of the nation, which is predicated on egalitarianism above all else. As Hage goes on to say, "[j]ust as important as his or her urban nature, the cosmopolite is a *class* figure *and* a White person, capable of appreciating and consuming 'high-quality' commodities and cultures, including 'ethnic' culture" (201). This dynamic of consumption can be seen among Laura, Pippa, and the Elkinson family, who each embody aspects of white cosmo-multiculturalism.

Of all de Kretser's recent protagonists, Pippa Reynolds in *The Life to Come* perhaps displays the strongest impulses to craft an identity of liberal progressivism: in a review of the novel, Ley refers to Pippa's "affected cosmopolitanism," which disguises her past as a "small town girl whose real name is Narelle" (2017). Pippa's affectations are most clearly illustrated through her devotion to her blog, "Pippa Passes," and her Twitter and Facebook profiles, where she constantly shares support for marginalised groups, anticipating that "the self she had curated" (183) will be well received by her followers. Céleste recognises her as someone who "would always need to demonstrate her solidarity with the oppressed" (128). Offline, however, Pippa is the model of white cosmo-multiculturalism.

While Pippa is a prime target for de Kretser's ironic depiction of middle-class white liberal progressives, she almost seems sympathetic when compared to her in-laws, the wealthy Elkinson family of Bellevue Hill. Pippa's mother-in-law Eva fled Poland in the aftermath of World War II, is tinted with "the glamour of oppression" (219), and has a faultless dedication to progressive causes, which is "the most annoying thing about her […] [s]he circulated petitions protesting against Indigenous deaths in custody, Australia's treatment of asylum-seekers, the live export of sheep" (201). Eva serves canapés made by refugee women at parties and seeks out

strategic relationships with Australians from marginalised groups to demonstrate her empathy and worldliness. De Kretser writes:

> At one time or another, her collection of ethnically diverse people included a Balinese interior decorator, an Aboriginal photographer, a Timorese nurse, an Iraqi house-painter, a Korean cardiologist. The Jesuit brought her some of these specimens; others, Eva fossicked out for herself. They were deployed at parties, like her tribal jewellery, and served to impress in conversation. (213)

The consumption of otherness is refined into a detached, archaeological process of "fossicking" for "specimens" who can be "served" like jewellery, in which Eva's friends and associates become objects to be curated and displayed. In a discussion over dinner one night, Pippa's father-in-law Keith remarks that "there are plenty of fascists in this country who think only Anglos have the right to be here" (199). Elsewhere in the text, however, de Kretser writes about how Keith never visits Western Sydney,[56] and has lived his whole life within a few suburbs in Sydney's affluent east. As Ley explains, the novel's scorn is aimed "not at the overt racism of people like Pippa's father, whose bigotry is of the 'laid-back Australian kind', but at the very people who pride themselves on not being racist. It teases out the subtle and insinuating manifestations of prejudice that result from the unthinking tendency to assume the naturalness of one's own perspective" (2017). This is a clear illustration of the concept of white cosmo-multiculturalism. The Elkinsons demonstrate the re-activation of class as a defining characteristic of Australian identity. As Hage argues, "[i]t is something of a paradox […] that with White cosmo-multiculturalism there is a reverting to include class identity as a necessary component of the ruling national culture, as in the days when colonial Britishness dominated" (204). Because the Elkinsons are rich, their appropriation of other cultures is seen as tasteful, "served to impress" (213), but it remains an objectification of difference.

The performativity of Pippa's solidarity with marginalised groups is most effectively demonstrated by her relationship with Rashida, an osteopath and practitioner of the Alexander Technique. Rashida is introduced as a friend of Eva's. Pippa's husband Matt begins seeing Rashida for osteopathic treatment, and Pippa becomes convinced that Matt will betray her with Rashida. She suspects Eva of colluding to bring Matt and Rashida together, anticipating that Eva would enjoy having a daughter-in-law who was Muslim and Indian Australian, and who could be added to her "collection." Eva begins inviting Rashida to Sunday lunch, and to Pippa's chagrin,

[56] As explored in Chapter 2, Western Sydney is among Australia's most multicultural communities.

Rashida gets along well with the entire family (220). Pippa's insecurity over Rashida's relationship with Matt emphasises the striking "disjunction between her private insecurity and the confident self she projects" (Ley 2017). At its core, Pippa's distaste for Rashida is based on Rashida's self-assurance; the fact that she does not seek the approval of those around her. De Kretser writes:

> There was a whisper in Pippa's brain, like a subdued, left-hand accompaniment to her thoughts, and this whisper was of the opinion that Rashida should be grateful that white people overlooked the double handicap of her religion and her race. The whisper said that Rashida should be a little bit sort of humble. It lived in a folded, reptilian corner of Pippa's brain, and she was scarcely aware of its existence. She was always for the underdog and would leap to protect. What caused turmoil were underdogs who failed to respect their allotted rank. (221)

For all her performative cosmopolitanism, it does not take much for Pippa's true feelings to become clear. The idea that "white people" are owed Rashida's gratitude is linked directly to the concept that the discourse of Anglo decline is connected to the "logic of national-spatial disintegration" (Hage 1998, 186). Hage argues that proponents of the discourse of decline, such as white nationalist Pauline Hanson, see themselves as having a "unique managerial right over national space" (186). Proponents of this discourse often focus on the need to restore a "balance" that they perceive as having been lost (usually due to a perceived influx of migrants). This claim to the management over national space is not limited to nationalists and those who oppose multiculturalism: in contrast to those who seek to restore a balance that has been lost, Hage argues, white multiculturalists also take responsibility for the management of national space. He contends that "[w]hite multiculturalists talk about the balance and they position themselves as the guardians of this balance. They do not, however, speak of restoring the balance; they speak of *maintaining* it" (189). The certainty with which Pippa considers herself a supporter of "underdogs" while simultaneously thinking of Rashida an underdog who "fails to respect [her] allotted rank" betrays Pippa's willingness to assert her role as a "guardian" of national space. The use of animalistic language in the "folded, reptilian" location of Pippa's thoughts in her brain and the phrase "leap to protect" underscores the animal element in the word "underdog." The implication is that in this animal relationship, the "underdog" who "fail[s] to respect their allotted rank" will be punished – but the implication of violence is cloaked by the idea that it "caused turmoil," rather than giving Pippa the impulse to lash out.

If Pippa's thoughts are only a "subdued, left-hand accompaniment" at this point in the text, they soon blossom into fully-fledged violent fantasies. Later in the text, convinced her husband is having an affair, Pippa takes to calling Rashida's osteopathy clinic and driving past

her house. Pippa even imagines storming into Rashida's apartment and finding her with Matt. De Kretser writes, "[g]rasping her by a hank of hair, Pippa slammed her head into the wall: once, twice. The repeated thwack of Rashida's skull against the bricks, the sludge of her blood and brains on the plaster – how satisfying!" (262). The extravagance of Pippa's fantasy underscores the fact that it is based on an imagined infidelity in which she is explicitly replaced in her marriage by a brown woman. The intensity of her violent fantasy evidences the racial dimension of her willingness to project her fears onto Rashida rather than Matt.

In a recent interview, de Kretser has addressed the self-deception of "progressive" white Australians. She explains: "[w]hat these white liberals revel in is a scenario in which people of color are in need of assistance of one kind of another, so that they can provide it and confirm their image of themselves as 'good people'. That kind of goodness is basically patronage, and it's predicated on inequality" (Trapè 2020, 30). De Kretser's statement echoes Ien Ang's phrase, cited earlier, regarding the "ambivalent and apparently contradictory process of *inclusion by virtue of othering*" (2001, 139) which defines the conditions under which minoritised people are permitted entry to the mainstream. *The Life to Come* illustrates this process through characters like Pippa, who celebrates her own progressivism and inclusivity while jealously policing Rashida's words and actions. Indeed, Pippa personifies this self-deception. A few months later, once Pippa has become pregnant, she re-visits Rashida's apartment, intending to drop off a large bunch of flowers. Disappointed when Rashida is not home to receive them, Pippa thinks of the social media post she would have made: "Seeing it in their Twitter feeds, people would think: Pippa Reynolds is such a warm, generous person!" (263). Pippa's attitude of patronage is illuminated by the fact that she does not think of Rashida at all, only anticipates the admiration of her online followers.

The same self-deceptions characterise Laura Fraser's experience of tourism in de Kretser's previous novel *Questions of Travel*. After attending art school, Laura inherits wealth from her aunt Hester and sets off to see the world. She settles in London and gains the opportunity to write for a travel magazine, filing dispatches from across Europe. After several years in London, she returns voluntarily to Sydney. Wherever she travels, she is haunted by the phrase "what are you doing here?". In her first destination, Bali, she is visiting a waterfall when she first "hears" it: "A waterfall in a forest was mourning its lost life as a cloud. Under the lament, a whisper reached Laura: *What are you doing here?"* (47). A few nights later, Laura wakes to hear a fellow Australian vomiting outside her window, and the phrase recurs; Laura

thinks it must "pursue everyone who left home" (49). In Lisbon, Laura emerges from a cinema surrounded by her fellow audience members to the phrase, "*What are you doing here?* This was travel, marvellous and sad" (78). In India, Laura plans an itinerary, and is shocked when a waiter predicts it exactly, telling her, "All the tourists are going there" (53), and in doing so shatters her illusions of herself as an intrepid lone traveller.

The novel thematises the tensions between the concepts of travel and tourism. De Kretser, who for part of her career worked for travel publisher Lonely Planet, has commented on the way that referring to oneself as a "traveller" elides the privileges that enable it. During her time working at Lonely Planet, de Kretser remarks, "tourism, masquerading as 'travel,' was presented as something akin to a spiritual practice that widens horizons, increases knowledge, opens the self to otherness, and generally ennobles the tourist. I hoped to show the materiality in which tourism is always embedded as well as to question the claim that it changes tourists for the better" (Trapè 29). The key phrase here is perhaps the assumption that tourism "opens the self to otherness" – or in other words, that it encourages and enables a cosmopolitan outlook.

De Kretser challenges this assumption through the representation of Laura's travel experiences. After leaving a Balinese family at their *losmen*[57] in Ubud, Laura is "light-headed with schemes" (51) to help them: she entertains the possibility of paying for the youngest child's education; she takes their photographs and promises to mail copies, but never sends the prints. Laura later feels a vague sense of shame at having never sent the photographs, redoubling her intentions and writing a three-page letter to the family, but it remains unsent. Through her depiction of Laura's experiences, de Kretser subverts the conventional wisdom that travel makes people "better." Laura sets out seeking growth and change, but as Harvey argues, "one could hardly say she [Laura] blossoms or grows wiser; this is no novel of self-development" (2012). One of these "big things" is questioning the foundational metanarrative of the travel industry: that it is based on a moral good. In fact, later in the novel, Ravi is on the receiving end of a similar situation: after meeting a Swedish tourist named Mikael, Ravi awaits a letter or phone call with a "spurt of hope," anticipating that Mikael will invite him to Silicon Valley to work as a software engineer alongside him (122–3). In the split structure of the novel, this example

[57] The term "losmen" refers to a home-stay accommodation option, in which tourists stay with a Balinese family rather than at a larger commercial hotel.

emphasises the brutality of inequality: Laura and Mikael go on their way, while Ravi (and through him, the spectre of the Balinese family), awaits Mikael's word for months.

Laura spends several years living itinerantly; in London as a house-sitter and as a travel writer, paid for her dispatches from foreign places. The frequency with which she travels renders this section of the novel into a sort of picaresque wandering. In a review of the novel, Evelyn Juers (2013) notes that the picaresque "draws on our heightened sensitivity to likeness and difference – us and them – while we are *en route* in foreign places, or experiencing alienation or wonder in places we call home. Questions of travel, then, are questions of authenticity: of consanguinity and camouflage, of mimesis and alterity." Laura confronts these ideas as she comes to see Australia as part of a larger framework of colonisation and migration. In London, Laura embodies the performativity of cosmopolitanism. She considers her journey to be more authentic than the tourists she encounters in London. For example, observing groups of tourists from "the former Eastern bloc," Laura envisions them derisively:

> Middle-aged, with thick waists and packed lunches, they brought to mind long, hard winters enlivened by only a really tremendous new variety of turnip and the latest steel production figures – so Laura mocked silently, unnerved by their effect. In fact, these strangers made her think of pilgrims – of journeys that begin in yearning and end in bliss. They were serious, appreciative and archaic: travellers for whom the link between travel and holiness still held. (84)

By mocking the Eastern European tourists, Laura marks herself, in her own mind, as a local, a "real" Londoner. Although Laura is an expat, she has learned the customs of her adopted hometown (she takes notice of the "fur-clad Russians" and "bristles with the native-born at their rudeness in queues" (85)). Laura's ingratiation with the locals ends up resembling a contemporary incarnation of the cultural cringe, recalling A. A. Phillips' description of "a certain type of Australian intellectual" who is "forever sidling up to the cultivated Englishman, insinuating '*I*, of course, am not like these other crude Australians; *I* understand how you must feel about them; *I* should be spiritually more at home in Oxford or Bloomsbury" (1950, 300). The superficiality of her judgements of the Eastern European tourists is undermined on the very next page, when she can conjure only "limited" interest in news from war-torn Sarajevo: "the conflict was too tangled, the country too obscure, its heroes elusive, its villains possessed of forbidding names" (85). Although the tourists are Russian, and the news from Bosnia, Laura's condescension for the tourists is emphasised by her ignorance of the context of the war in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – one of the former Eastern bloc countries. The

self-serving nature of Laura's cosmopolitanism, and its impulse to consume difference, is emphasised by the contrast between the two scenes.

4.3.2 "Bodies are always local": migrant and refugee cosmopolitanisms

This section turns to the depiction of migrant, refugee and diasporic experiences within the three novels, building on my argument that these three novels grapple with multiculturalism's impulse to limit and control difference. Reading the novels through the lens of the cosmopolitan vernacular enables a confrontation with these impulses and the anxieties they produce. The first section focuses on the characters of Tom and Nelly in *The Lost Dog*, and their contrasting approaches to belonging. The second section turns its focus to *Questions of Travel's* Ravi, who arrives in Sydney as an asylum seeker.

None of these narratives is straightforward; none of these characters aligns with stereotypes about migrants or refugees. As de Kretser argues, "I'm interested in complexity. Travel is a large phenomenon, and some of its facets are directly contradictory" (Trapè 29). In this chapter, I draw attention to these complexities and ambivalences as they are expressed in diasporic narratives. Following Bender (2017), as mentioned above, I read the idea of cosmopolitanism as an experience of continual unsettling. Elaborating on Bhabha's concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism, Werbner argues, "it may be said that cosmopolitanism is always, in some sense at least, vernacular, historically and spatially positional, and hence also necessarily political, contested, dialectical" (2008, 13). In other words, in reading these narratives through the lens of the cosmopolitan vernacular, it is important to situate them in context. Writing about Sri Lankan Australian fiction by de Kretser and Channa Wickremesekera (author of 2014's *Asylum* and 2015's *Tracks*), Lokugé argues that:

> These authors are the products of [their] histories, as well as of evolving contemporary Australian migrant realities. At the intersection of social activism and psychological realism, their fiction empathises with characters damaged or alienated, marginalised or inconsequential – the ever-increasing cohort of refugees and asylum seekers, families, professionals and students. (2016, 561)

Lokugé's summary emphasises the wide range of experiences inherent in representing the cosmopolitan vernacular. It also underscores the fact that these experiences of damage, alienation, marginalisation and inconsequentiality are far from monolithic. By empathising with these characters, Lokugé goes on to argue, *Questions of Travel* (and arguably de Kretser's other

novels too), is able to "challenge Australia's malfunctioning multiculturalism with humanist alternatives leading to constructive cosmopolitan cultural interchange" (561). Writing about Italian-Hungarian Australian writer Inez Baranay, Sharrad characterises Baranay as "a 'multicultural writer' who argues with multiculturalism" (2010, 18): I see de Kretser as operating in a similar way. By this, I do not mean that de Kretser argues against the *idea* of multiculturalism, but instead that she interrogates the structure and function of multiculturalism as it operates today. In this section, I focus on how the novels go about challenging this function by drawing attention to the way that migrant and diasporic experiences are limited and controlled by a white settler-colonial hegemony.

The Lost Dog is set in the inner suburbs of Melbourne in the year 2001. The novel's protagonists, Tom and Nelly, are characterised by their contrasting approaches to belonging in Australia. Tom, who migrated to Australia in 1972 (coincidentally, the same year that de Kretser herself arrived in Melbourne), is defined by his quest to blend in. Arriving in Australia with his British father and Indian mother, Tom was subject to racism: he remembers being told at school to "fuck off back to the other black bastards" (31). In response, Tom evolves a defence mechanism based on learning the "rules" of how to belong and following them relentlessly. For Tom, these rules come to embody more than just social customs and conventions, expanding to include the delineation of his past and present, India and Australia, the body and the mind, the ancient and the modern. Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman summarise Tom as "an almost archetypical academic who has built up defences against the incursions of the body – indeed, of Otherness" (2009, 124). In this section, I contrast Tom's arsenal of defences against Otherness with Nelly's open and transformative embrace of Otherness.

Reading Tom and Nelly's contrasting attitudes to Otherness through the lens of vernacular cosmopolitanism draws attention to de Kretser's depiction of "malfunctioning multiculturalism," to use Lokugé's term. On the surface, Tom himself is a textbook cosmopolitan character – a well-educated Anglo-Indian professional, with a prestigious job as an academic in a major world city. Internally, however, he is crippled by insecurity and doubt, which stems directly from the loss of his homeland and the fact that he has been forced into a position of Otherness by his adopted home country. The structure of Australian multiculturalism is shown to preclude Tom from accessing a meaningful cosmopolitan outlook.

Tom and Nelly first meet at the beginning of the novel at an art show where she is exhibiting a painting. Tom is immediately established as an outsider: while wandering around

the exhibition, he thinks, "I don't belong here. The adverb having a wide application" (8). Tom's characterisation as a solitary person is explicitly linked to his aspiration to blend in, which he equates with being "modern." Recently divorced from his wife and with no children, Tom's life is an "airless, perfect circle of autobiography" (101), he has "no continuity with the dead; and being childless, no connection to the future" (101). Tom's "airless" life invokes the sense that he is purposefully sealing himself off from others. This sense develops more fully throughout the novel. De Kretser writes, "Tom Loxley, drinking whisky on his bed, wished to lead a modern life. By which he meant a life that was free to be trivial, that had filtered out the dull sediment of tradition and inherited responsibilities; a life shiny as invention, that floated and gleamed. In that respect he was an exemplary Australian" (176). His aspiration for a life that is "shiny," one that "floats" and "gleams," is contrasted with his childhood in India:

> In Mangalore, when he walked down a street his neighbours had beheld Sebastian who begat Iris who begat Thomas. He trailed genealogies. The air around him swarmed with incident and knowledge […] In Australia, he was free-floating. Architecture expressed the difference in material form, the bricks and beaten earth of childhood exchanged for superstructures of glass and airy steel. (266)

The association of Tom's disconnections with the physical cityscape of Melbourne holds a double meaning: while Tom is glad to be "free-floating" and exempt from immediate association with several generations of his ancestors, the phrasing also captures his rootlessness; his lack of a stable sense of home. As a first-generation migrant, he occupies a liminal position of in-betweenness. Throughout the novel, Tom exhibits a dual pleasure and anxiety in being "free-floating." Tom seems to believe that if he can just perform a convincing rendition of "Australianness," he will be able to blend in. He works to understand the customs of Australia and refashion his behaviour to align with them and to avoid standing out or attracting suspicion. When Tom and Nelly visit Camberwell market, he refuses to haggle with the stallholders, "not wishing to appear *typically Asian"* (89, emphasis original). Having learned to chew with his mouth closed is an "Australian rule clever Tom Loxley had absorbed" (275). Again and again, Tom performs a refashioning of the self in order to make himself more invisible.

Nelly Zhang, in contrast, occupies a far more ambiguous and ambivalent space. While Tom seems to believe that if he can "pass" for a native Australian, he will be accepted, Nelly knows that she will always be marked an outsider, despite being born in Australia. When Tom asks her, '"You're, like, what? Third, fourth generation? Why do you pretend you're Chinese?"' she responds, '"The Australions [*sic*] won't let me, for one thing. Want to know how many weeks I can go without getting asked where I'm from?"' Referring to Anglo Australians as

"Australions," Nelly clarifies that she means "the ones who think they own the place" (54). Nelly's portmanteau has multiple connotations: the predatory and consumption-based aspect of racism as performed by the "lions" who are of course, at the top of the food chain, as well as the double meaning in the phrase "think they own the place," invoking both nationalism and the settler-colonial state.

In response to being pigeonholed, Nelly – who is of mixed Chinese, Scottish and Polish heritage and is "not for the taxonomy-minded" (55) – freely adapts and deploys cultural accents that emphasise her part-Chinese heritage:

> The cast of her adulterated features was only vaguely Asiatic. She exploited it to the hilt, exaggerating the slant of her eyes with kohl, powdering her face into an expressionless mask. Stilettos and a slit skirt, and she might have stepped from a Shanghai den. A sashed tunic over wide trousers impersonated a woman warrior. She wore her hair cut blunt across her forehead, and drew attention to what she called her "thick Chinese calves." (55)

Nelly does not limit her choices to traditionally Chinese accoutrements, occasionally sporting a rosary as a necklace; a red bindi; intricate henna, or geometric tattoos on her chin (55). Occasionally she adopts the persona, Tom thinks, of an elderly Chinese woman selling vegetables at the market (55). Tom sees Nelly's dress choices "as a parody, as a defensive flaunting of caricature" (55). Yelena, an artist who rents studio space from Nelly, warns Tom against interpreting the intention behind Nelly's choices, telling him, "She is not some kind of sign for you to study" (55). Nelly protects herself against those who might exoticise or exploit her – first the "Australions" and later her Anglo Australian husband, Felix – by embodying an ambiguous mix of identities. In part, she is performing as she is expected to by her 'viewers' – "exaggerating the slant of her eyes" – but she subverts these images by appropriating them on her own terms. B. De Kretser acknowledges the performativity of her shape-shifting: "Nelly Atwood was also Nelly Zhang. She was A and Z, twin poles […] [s]he was double: a rich man's wife and an artist; native yet foreign. Duplicity was inscribed in her face" (151). De Kretser's use of the word "duplicity" notably implies trickery, intention; as Nelly is half-Chinese, de Kretser's use of the word serves as an ironic reappropriation of racist stereotypes. Addressing the significance of clothing in her works, de Kretser states:

> Clothes interest me because they're bound up with ideas of character. They're the interface between the self and the world. They conceal and proclaim. They play with mutability and identity. They hold out the promise of transformation. In that sense, they're not unconnected to migration, which also enables the discarding of former selves and the piecing together of new ones. (Trapè 2020, 33)

Nelly's choice to combine various incongruous cultural references in her choices of clothing and jewellery signal her refusal to relinquish her agency. They can also be interpreted as a strategic self-exoticisation designed to confuse those who would seek to exoticise her. Her comfort with inhabiting mutable identities and her anticipation of the question "Where are you from?" recalls Ien Ang's (2001) consideration of the same question. When a white Australian asks an Asian Australian this question, Ang argues, it is on one hand a "denaturalization of our status as coinhabitants of this country" and a "curiosity about otherness – a curiosity which is implicated in our very construction and positioning as other" (145). Posing the question, "wouldn't a lack of genuine interest in our 'difference' be just as frustrating and annoying?", Ang concludes that white Australians asking Asian Australians "where are you from?" ultimately "points to a semiotic realm beyond the simple binaries of acceptance and rejection, tolerance and intolerance, racism and anti-racism" (145), and reinforces the fundamentally ambivalent nature of multiculturalism. Nelly can be seen to inhabit this semiotic realm, to move within spaces of hybridity and liminality.

The relationship between Tom and Nelly remains ambiguous throughout much of the novel. Early in the text, de Kretser states that "[t]he web of their relations was shot through with these ambivalences, shade and bright twined with such cunning that their pattern never settled" (4). The ambivalence of their relationship continues after Tom, who falls in love with Nelly, spends much of the novel trying to untangle Nelly's unexplained affiliations with her son Rory, her art dealer Carson, and her role in the disappearance of her husband Felix. Their relationship is shown to be characterised by "misunderstandings" (37). The fundamental ambivalence of Nelly's character reinforces the text's overriding atmosphere of menace.

This sense of menace recalls the presence within the text of hauntings and Gothic images. Jerrold E. Hogle describes the figures which populate Gothic narratives as:

> ghostly or monstrous figures, intermixing life and death as well as other incompatibilities, that loom forth in or invade these settings, usually because of secrets from the past buried deep in memories or archives, and may be either supernatural or psychological in origin, at times even hinting as a personal or cultural unconscious" (2002, 4).

This description – particularly the idea of mixing incompatibilities and the presence of long-buried secrets – echoes both Tom's repression of his Indianness, as well as the depiction of Nelly. She is also described throughout the text in terms of her strong animal odour. Driving her home in his car, Tom is described as being "disturbed – aroused, intrigued, repelled – by her spoor of spice and sweat" (33). Later, when they are talking inside Nelly's building: "Nelly was

standing near him, close enough for him to smell her scalp," with her "not entirely appetising" grubby hands and dirty parka provoking "[a]ll Tom's Indian fastidiousness [to rise] against her musk, even as he was stirred" (56). Later, Tom notes that "[t]he dark, confined space seemed to concentrate her odour" (96). Nelly's strong smell is in direct contrast with Tom's cleanliness, which he associates with "modernity." Tom is never quite sure how to relate to her, and other characters (such as Mick, her neighbour at the cabin) warn Tom against Nelly (31). She occupies contradictory cultural identities and may hold a disturbing secret about the death of her husband Felix. Throughout the text, Nelly's ambiguity has a disturbing impact on Tom.

Toward the end of the novel, Tom and Nelly return one last time to the rural cabin. On their last night, Nelly tells Tom the truth about her theory regarding what happened to her husband Felix, who Nelly believes faked his own death, and they sleep together (303). The next morning, they are sitting together in the sun. Tom "sniffed himself discreetly. Everything that leaked from the body's wrapping, emanations the city defeated in brisk, hygienic bouts, was triumphant here" (299). Notably, this description comes after Nelly has told Tom the whole story of her past with Felix; when Nelly's past is most alive. Soon after, de Kretser writes: "Slowly Tom realised that Nelly neither shunned nor welcomed the past. She merely allowed it space. It was a question of accommodation. He saw that sometimes she was afraid of the shape it took" (300). Nelly ultimately demonstrates to Tom the potentiality of inhabiting ambivalence through her approach to cultural identity and her attitude to the past as inscribed on her body. In allowing himself to open up to Nelly, and understanding her accommodation of the past, the text intimates through the metaphor of the body that Tom may be able to incorporate the Anglo and Indian elements of his identity in a way that does not force him to choose between them so drastically.

Of all the protagonists in the three novels studied here, it is *Questions of Travel's* Ravi who fits most clearly into the role of the involuntary or vernacular cosmopolitan. Ravi's life in Colombo is upended when his wife Malini and his young son Hiran are gruesomely murdered as retaliation for Malini's political activism. Ravi, who has always wanted to travel, is forced to seek asylum in Australia, where he must adjust to a foreign culture amidst the high anti-refugee sentiment of 2001. Ravi is traumatised by his ordeal and becomes emotionally detached from it, not knowing how to process the violence and upheaval that comes to impact his life. As de Kretser explains, "I wanted Ravi to be an individual, because so often we speak of refugees as a mass" (Wyndham 2012). Lokugé argues that Ravi is "an introvert who is also unable to claim support from any one culture or religion in a time of crisis due to his diffused Burgher-Sinhalese,

Christian-Buddhist mixed race/religion parentage" (2016, 561). Ravi's story – both in Sri Lanka and in Australia – is defined by themes of disconnection and isolation.

While still in Colombo after the murder of Malini and Hiran, Ravi is moved from hotel to hotel for his safety, but he continues receiving anonymous, threatening notes containing sketches of flowerpots – a reference to the mutilation of his wife's body. The menacing notes follow him, eventually prompting Freda Hobson, Malini's former colleague, to seek the assistance of a corrupt Australian official. In order to gain an asylum seeker visa, Ravi has to visit the official twenty-four times, and submit to sexual exploitation and whippings. Ravi thinks of the man as "the devil," who is "a tall, two-legged figure with Hiran's Mickey Mouse pack for a head" (232). Ravi imagines that under the mask is the face of a fox (233). This element of Ravi's story takes up only one page in the novel, yet it underscores the horror, exploitation and uncertainty to which many hopeful refugees must submit in order to escape precarity and danger. Ravi's terrifying experience with the Australian official is his only means of obtaining a refugee visa for Australia. Later, when Ravi thinks back to a story he heard, of a girl whose father was killed in front of her, he begins to think about a faceless figure who commits these sort of crimes, de Kretser writes, "[h]ow could Ravi be sure of anything? Not knowing whose face the mask concealed: *that was the meaning of fear"* (360). Fear continues to follow Ravi as he adjusts to life in Australia: "[f]ear found Ravi swaying on a bus, entering a supermarket, taking a shower. It was ungovernable but was it well founded?" (360). In Australia, the idea of fear, when used in the same sentence as "asylum seeker," usually refers to the role of fear in xenophobic opposition to refugees. De Kretser upends this situation in this scene: Ravi, who has been repeatedly sexually assaulted by an anonymous Australian, must now live among Australians, with no way to know the identity of his attacker.

De Kretser's depiction of Ravi as an asylum seeker in Australia during 2001 means that his narrative inevitably unfolds in the foreground to a political climate becoming increasingly hostile to refugees. Ravi, who works in a nursing home while adjusting to life in Australia before later commencing work at the same travel publishing company as Laura, is subject to suspicion and questioning by white Australians. This rhetoric of suspicion re-casts asylum seekers who arrive in Australia by boat as "queue jumpers" and "economic migrants," delegitimising their reasons for seeking asylum. In Sydney, Ravi lives with an elderly woman named Hazel. Hazel's sons Russ and Kev are suspicious of Ravi's freedom. Over dinner, Russ asks his family, "Any of youse see that thing about queue-jumpers on Channel 7? […] Yeah, I know Howard's a slimy

turd. I'm just saying, if this Lankan bloke's a refugee, why isn't he locked up?" (256). While working at the aged care home, Ravi is subject to the same suspicion from a co-worker, Mandy, who does not directly accuse Ravi but espouses her opinions in front of him. De Kretser writes, "[i]n the courtyard, Mandy said, 'I'm not racist but I'm against queue-jumpers. Fair go for everyone.' She settled her uniform, plucking at it under her bust. 'That's the Australian way?'" (291). Later, when Ravi starts work as a web developer for Ramsay, he faces further questioning. A colleague suspects that he may not be a "genuine" asylum seeker, as he has not spent time in a detention centre (378). As Lokugé argues, "[c]ontrary to the stereotypical category of Sri Lankan refugees and asylum seekers – the 'boat people' from the subaltern classes – Ravi is an educated middle-class Sinhalese, speaks fluent English, lives free of a detention centre, is a wage earner and wears expensive Reeboks" (2016, 562). Ravi's circumstances form a critical part of de Kretser's stated intention to represent him as both a refugee and an individual.

The figure of the "queue-jumper" has come to occupy a central place in the discourse around Australian immigration. The term is used to refer to asylum seekers who circumvent a perceived official system, and most commonly denotes asylum seekers who travel from Indonesia by boat: a "*queue jumper* is understood as an individual who makes a choice to subvert appropriate procedures and hence colludes in their own illegality" (Pickering and Lambert 2003, 65). As Matthew Cameron notes, "this portrayal positions asylum seekers as the aggressor, and never the victim in their journey to Australia" (2013, 243). When Kev and other characters imply that Ravi may be a queue jumper, they question the validity of his claim to asylum and cast aspersions on his motivations for coming to Australia. Their suspicion is deeply ironic: those who subscribe to the idea that "queue jumpers" are a threat typically claim that asylum seekers ought to arrive through the "proper channels," i.e. air travel, and with documentation. Ravi, of course, arrives through and with both, and yet his status is questioned precisely because he *hasn't* spent time in indefinite detention.

Ravi's experience of becoming settled in Australia emphasises the tensions and anxieties inherent in the experience of involuntary cosmopolitanism. Ravi is disoriented, displaced, with no meaningful connections in his new city. At the aged care home, he is subject to racist treatment by the home's residents. Lokugé (2016) envisions the novel's depiction of Ravi's experience as a sort of failed cosmopolitanism. Recalling a scene in which Ravi attends a picnic with his co-workers from the aged care home, Lokugé writes: "[t]he picnic is a failed attempt at transitive dialogues between people thrown together by their peripheral status […] [t]here is no

recognition or space in the hostland for heterogeneity or diversity" (564). Lokugé concludes that de Kretser's vision for Ravi's life in Sydney is "plainly dystopian"; that Ravi is condemned to "live peripherally" (564), suggesting that there is hope only for the next generation, exemplified by Hanna, the niece of Ravi's Ethiopian co-worker. Lokugé's interpretation of this scene, which attributes "a sense of defeat" to the picnic, raises the question of whether the fact that the characters need to *feel* a sense of cosmopolitan connection in order to be seen as cosmopolitan. The assertion that "the picnic is a failed attempt at transitive dialogues" (564) overstates the importance of an idealised, and perhaps unrealistic, expectation of openness between acquaintances. This association invokes Galin Tihanov's assertion that "forced" cosmopolitanisms cannot be unproblematically assumed to produce cosmopolitan sentiment (2012). Tihanov advocates de-linking the concept of cosmopolitanism from the focus on individuals enabled by the late twentieth-century liberal consensus. Rather, when viewed through the lens of vernacular cosmopolitanism, with its focus on the everyday, the picnic can be interpreted as something more pedestrian – yet not necessarily as a failure.

The internet functions as a contradictory metaphor for the cosmopolitan in *Questions of Travel*. While working as a lecturer in mathematics at the university in Colombo, Ravi frequents many of the early internet's popular sites: the Trojan Room coffeepot live feed at the University of Cambridge, the world's first webcam (used to signal coffee availability to the building's employees); and JenniCam, a website run by Jennifer Ringley, known as the internet's first ever "lifecaster," who is credited with inventing the basis for reality television. Asked about the novel's engagement with the internet, de Kretser states, "I was interested in the digital revolution because it feeds into the novel's preoccupation with connection and isolation. For instance, the internet can connect us to the whole world but draw us away from our immediate surroundings" (quoted in Hanke 2012, 24). Ravi, who dreams of becoming a tourist, is enthralled by the internet's potential to free him from the trappings of his daily life. In her review of the novel, Harvey remarks that de Kretser wants to "make the Internet more comprehensible by applying the metaphor of travel to it, but she also wants to show us how it permits a new kind of travel" (2012). Demonstrating the internet to Malini, Ravi says, "You're you and anyone you can imagine. There is the same as here […] soon everyone will be a tourist" (138). Ravi envisions a cosmopolitan potential in the internet, in the idea of becoming anyone, anywhere. Malini, focused on the erosion of human rights taking place as part of the escalating conflict around them, immediately uses Ravi's search engine to look up "*human rights sri lanka*" (138). Malini clarifies her opposition to Ravi's vision through her commitment to activism: discussing the

recent identification of remains found in a nearby wildlife park, Malini states, “bodies are always local” (139). In other words, the cosmopolitan potential of the internet is appealing, but the realities of the mounting violence around them serve as a reminder of its impracticality. Of course, the weight of Malini’s words are emphasised darkly when she and Hiran are murdered soon after, and Malini’s mutilated body left in the lobby of the rooming house where the family lives.

4.3.3 Wild objects: the settler-colonial nation

De Kretser’s depictions of the city as an historical palimpsest papering over the dispossession of Indigenous peoples allows us to see her novels as not just “ethnic minority” or “multicultural” stories, but as state-of-the-nation novels. Having examined examples of Anglo Australian cosmo-multiculturalism and migrant and refugee cosmopolitanisms, this chapter turns finally to an analysis of de Kretser’s treatment of the settler-colonial nation of Australia itself. De Kretser is renowned for her detailed and evocative depictions of both Melbourne and Sydney: upon Laura’s return to the city in *Questions of Travel*, she is overcome by “the familiar summer scents of frangipani and barbecued lamb,” (245) while Ravi is struck by “the fast, baleful traffic, the pavements where the only rubbish was fallen blooms” (248). *The Lost Dog* trains an equally keen eye on the streets of Melbourne, where “[i]n Swan Street golden-eyed tramfish glided through tinsel rain” (32). This attunement to smells and impressions grounds each of these novels in the everyday, the vernacular. Citing Marr’s criticism of the “exaltation of the average” (2003), Chakraborty argues that in *The Life to Come*, de Kretser “seizes ‘the exaltation of the average’ with both hands, not in the condescending way Marr rails against, but by raising the ‘average’ into something of a hallmark of contemporary Australian life” (2019, 100). This focus on everyday experience enables de Kretser to interrogate the nation itself: its postcoloniality, its inherent mutability.

In *The Lost Dog*, the city of Melbourne is represented explicitly as a “postcolonizing” city (Moreton-Robinson 2003), characterised by impermanence and insecurity. Throughout the novel, Melbourne is shown to be a provisional place: the text pays attention to Indigenous places that have been plastered over by urban infrastructure; Nelly, in particular, has a detailed knowledge of how gentrification continues to alter the face of the city. De Kretser writes, “a stand of eucalypts in a park or the graffiti on an overpass might call up a vision of what malls

and rotary mowers had displaced. Australia was LA, it was London; and then it was not" (124). Inherent in this changeability is also the idea of precarity: the idea that one day, perhaps soon, the malls and rotary mowers themselves might be displaced. Throughout the text, the layered nature of the city asserts itself again and again. Notably, Nelly is the one who demonstrates this layering effect to Tom. Tom prefers to focus on the "glassily new" elements of the city, while Nelly is able to remember previous incarnations of place. On one of their walks, she says to Tom, "[s]ee that driveway? There used to be freesias there, the kind with the fabulous smell, before they pulled the old place down. I think of them every spring, trying to push through the concrete. Like a hundred little murders" (266). In the context of the city, and the violent imagery employed, this can be read as a sort of haunting, a palimpsestic construction of layered time. Nelly, who has lived in the neighbourhood for a long time, is able to resist this gentrification through her memories of the inner suburban space. Indeed, the text's sense of haunting is centred on the figure of Nelly, who is represented as a city herself. When Tom thinks of Nelly, he thinks of "a great city: anomalous, layered, not exempt from reproach: magnificent" (240). In a similar way to their contrasting approaches to clothing and identity, Nelly is portrayed as being comfortable with ambivalence, with history, and with change, a comfort that Tom does not share.

The significance of the landscape of Melbourne as a palimpsest invokes the concept of the postcolonial Gothic (Gelder 2014). De Kretser depicts Melbourne as haunted, illuminating the mechanics of domination that created that metropolis. Its violence is reflected in de Kretser's concept of "municipal mythmaking":

> It produced the inscriptions in parks that signalled a site pregnant with meaning for the people who had lived here first: a tree where corroborees had been held, or one whose bark had served to fashion boats. Cloaked in virtuous intention, these signs functioned insidiously. They displayed history with heritage, plastering over trauma with a picturesque frieze. (93)

By commemorating Indigenous cultural sites without acknowledging the violence inherent in colonisation, the modern nation-state profits, through its "virtuous intention," from the creation of a false narrative. Marijke Denger calls this phenomenon a "specific process of gentrification" whereby "the uncomfortable foundations of the contemporary postcolonial city, conceptualized as representative of the nation as a whole, are ignored in order to construct a picturesque sense of the past" (2016, 297). The obscuring of history is referenced again when de Kretser writes: "[f]orward motion: it was the engine of settler nations, where there was no past and a limitless future, and pioneers were depicted gazing out across distant expanses" (123). The idea of

Australia as a place with "no past" resonates with the dynamics of colonial belatedness, as well as with the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. Finally, the idea of "plastering over trauma" lends a further menacing dimension to the idea of the city as a palimpsest, recalling Patrick Wolfe's idea that "settler colonialism destroys to replace" (quoted in Rooney 2018, 1).

The Lost Dog is one of very few novels by non-Indigenous writers that addresses the role of Australia's cities in the continual marginalisation of Aboriginal people. Libby Porter and Janice Barry note that legislative mechanisms for acknowledging Indigenous ownership of colonised land generally only extends to rural and remote places. They write: "[c]ities are not generally seen as places 'with' or 'for' Indigenous peoples. Beyond some important yet tokenistic gestures of acknowledgement, there has been little 'coming to terms' with a simple ontological fact of settler colonialism: that its cities are built on Indigenous lands" (2015, 23). Australia – and Melbourne specifically – are shown throughout *The Lost Dog* to be part of a provisional entity: one hiding its history of colonial dispossession. This idea recalls Moreton-Robinson's articulation of whiteness as the governing epistemic and ontological foundation of the postcolonising nation (2004): by thinking of Indigenous country as only being within rural spaces, settler-colonial Australians continue the process of erasing Indigenous cultures every day.

This provisionality is characterised as a scenario in which Australia's violent history could re-erupt at any given moment. De Kretser likens the country to "a house acquired for its clean angles and gleaming appliances; and discovering a bricked-up door at which, faint but insistent, the sound of knocking could be heard" (2007, 125). The metaphor of the house with the bricked-up door again refers back to the idea of "municipal mythmaking" – the idea that Australia has something to hide. This image invokes Australia's violent colonial history, hidden away inside the façade of Australia as a wealthy, developed, Western liberal democracy. This violence is referred to with reference to Australia's modern constitution: "He [Tom] was a citizen of a country that had entered the modern age with a practical demonstration of the superiority of gunpowder over stone. To be impractical on these shores – tender, visionary – was to question the core of that enterprise" (124). De Kretser continues to expound on these "marvels," using words associated with magic: the country "shimmers," the platypus is an example of "cosmic abracadabra," the people's minds "sumptuous with dreaming" – all, also, metaphors of temporariness. Elsewhere, Australia and the West are repeatedly associated with childhood, another fundamentally temporary dimension: "Tom would never be able to shake off

the notion that the West was a childish place, where life was based on elaborate play" (142). Earlier, de Kretser states that "so much that was native to Australia seemed to be the invention of a child or a genius" (124). The association of Australia with the concept of play further cements the idea of its mutability and insecurity.

Elsewhere in *The Lost Dog*, Tom notes that Nelly's paintings render the city as liquid: her photographs of an overpass or high-rise are "dreamily vaporous under her hand," concrete and steel "ectoplasmic" (187). Terms like "vaporous" and "ectoplasmic" are each associated with fluidity – vapour is inherently changeable; an ectoplasm has the quality of a gel. Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* opens with an extended metaphor on the nature of fluidity as representative of modernity. Bauman writes: "Fluids travel easily. They 'flow', 'spill', 'splash', 'pour over', 'leak', 'flood', 'spray', 'drip', 'seep', 'ooze'; unlike solids, they are not easily stopped – they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still" (2000, 2). The mobility and lightness of fluids, Bauman argues, is what renders them an appropriate metaphor for modernity. In describing the postcolonial city using metaphors of fluidity, then, de Kretser captures the temporary nature of the city as a provisional, colonial entity. As Dickens argues, "Within Australian attitudes towards racialised difference, there is a colonial desire to take pleasure in and appropriate 'safe' and controlled forms of exoticism […] and a fear of porous, fluid and uncontrolled interminglings between whiteness and colour, 'East' and 'West'" (2014, 171–172). Nelly's vision of the city as mutable or liquid is metaphorically consistent with her blending of cultural identities, with the comfort she finds in complexity. Tom, on the other hand, has internalised the colonial desire for safety and control.

As mentioned above, the novel is studded with references to Australia's "modern" nature. Tom's aspiration to "lead a modern life" forms a significant part of his quest to belong. Significantly, "Tom's taste for modernity is indistinguishable from a wish to master his environment through a reliance on the characteristically (post)modern trope of irony" (Herbillon 2018, 45). De Kretser's invocation of modernity necessarily foregrounds the tension over whether Australia is "only almost modern" or "always already modern" (Carter 2013). This, in turn, invites a consideration of how Australia is colonised by the idea of modernity through its inescapable comparison with Europe. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) argues, the concept of a political modernity arising from post-Enlightenment values has come to be considered universal, but must be re-contextualised as only one way of understanding history. Tom works hard to internalise and adhere to the "rules" of the Australian settler colony, and as an academic, "he

embraces the rational, analytical, language-based, distanced and controlled frame of mind that can be regarded as typical of post-Enlightenment Western cultures" (45). Moreover, as Walter D. Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova write, "[t]he rhetoric of modernity and the logic of colonialism are mutually constituted and are the two sides of the same coin. Today the shaping of subjectivity, the coloniality of being/knowledge is often described within the so-called globalization of culture, a phrase, which in the rhetoric of modernity reproduces the logic of coloniality of knowledge and being" (2006, 208). The Australian settler-colony rests on the same ontological framework as this European-derived concept of modernity – the primacy of whiteness – and in turn creates the conditions under which Tom comes to occupy a position of Otherness. Tom's commitment to this version of modernity therefore unavoidably traps him into a position of marginalisation.

Similarly, in *Questions of Travel*, the relative recency of Australia's colonisation is emphasised by the characterisation of Australians as "modern." While living in London, Laura is invited to visit the family home of her friend Bea Morley in Berkshire. She is struck by the presence of an old blue-black brick, purportedly used as a doorstop for at least fifty years, and potentially dating to the incineration of an Elizabethan manor house in 1698. With reference to the brick, de Kretser writes: "[i]ts neglected presence pointed to the persistence of Morleys in that one place. Her own people struck Laura, by comparison, as a vigorous, shallow-rooted plant still adapting itself to alien soil. The Frasers were undeniably modern, however. What was the modern age if not movement, travel, change?" (125). This conception of the Frasers illustrates the tension over whether Australia is "too modern" or "not modern enough." In this example, the Frasers are necessarily modern due to their status as citizens of a settler-colonial nation, although the phrase "vigorous, shallow-rooted plant" suggests that this necessarily implicates their fundamental immaturity.

In addition to the novel's depiction of the postcolonising city as fundamentally provisional, *The Lost Dog* also thematises the role of waste and rubbish in shaping and sustaining the postcolonial nation. Describing *The Lost Dog*, Chakraborty writes: "De Kretser's work is a meditation upon modern cities and technology, in bodies and their disgusting smells, in histories and their irretrievabilities; she is interested first and foremost in what people throw away and what they hold on to. In this, she is definitely a voice of modern Australia, which awakens anew on the refuse of history and haunting" (2012, 8). Moreover, Marie Herbillon describes the novel's focus on waste as also serving as "a way of denouncing a given society's

racist and consumerist tendencies [which] recurs in a text that teems with physiological, even scatological metaphors" (2018, 48). These metaphors link the body with the nation. They recall the logic of consumption which characterises both white Australians' entitlement to control and appropriate difference, as well as the idea of Australia as an increasingly super-wealthy nation: the novel is filled with references to discarded objects, they punctuate Tom and Nelly's walks around their neighbourhood. On his way to a protest against the Australian Government's participation in the Coalition of the Willing and the war in Afghanistan, Tom encounters a hard-rubbish collection filled with broken and discarded objects: "disemboweled futons," a divan "stripped of cushions," "a backless TV" – de Krester writes that it "was like leafing through a civilization's unconsciousness" (252). The key characteristic of each of these items is that they have been mined for usefulness and discarded, presumably replaced with new items; it is as though they have been picked over by vultures.

Tom's disgust for the physiological and scatological is a part of the fastidiousness that sees him "recoil[ing] from dishes accumulating in the sink; from the clotted handkerchief his fingers encountered under a pillow" (202). His fastidiousness is governed by the impulse that things should remain in their rightful place. From childhood, Tom recalls seeing his mother eating with her mouth open. De Kretser writes: "The sight of food that was neither inside nor outside the body, food that had broken down into an indistinct, glutinous mass, was disgusting: an Australian rule clever Tom Loxley had absorbed" (275). Learning the rules of the Australian settler colony, Tom comes to understand that ambiguities should be hidden away. The text's scatological themes are also concentrated on Tom's "elderly, utterly unmodern and unironic" mother, Iris, who "emerges as the most obvious antithesis of his modernity" (Herbillon 2018, 45). After finding her unable to use the bathroom, he thinks back on the process of cleaning her up: "[h]e thought of his mother surrounded by shit. Was excrement part of the world or part of the body? It blurred the distinction between inside and outside. Among other things it offended was the human need for order" (225). The link between the body and the nation is cemented after *Tampa* and the attacks on the World Trade Centre. "Fear put out live shoots in Tom. Instantly identifiable as foreign matter, he feared being labelled waste. He feared expulsion from the body of the nation" (252). Being labelled as "foreign matter" is Tom's worst fear: it undermines all of the work he has done to belong in his adopted homeland.

Tom's fear of being labelled as waste himself connotes his fear of "desolation, pointlessness, and uselessness, but also excess and surplus; both extremes have been viewed as

problematic, void of meaning, and immoral […] Waste necessarily implicates history" (Morrison 2015, 1). In fearing this, Tom is afraid that Australia will reassert its history as an explicitly white settler nation and that he will be forced into a state of abjection. As Judith Butler explains, "[t]he "abject" designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered 'Other'. This appears as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion" (2010, 2546).[58] Tom, who has long been cognisant of the fact that his inclusion in Australia is conditional on his following the rules, is conscious of how swiftly this conditional inclusion can be withdrawn.

The contrast between Tom and Nelly's strategies for negotiating their identities as Australians are further contrasted by their attitudes to the nation's past and to their bodies. Tom's attitude toward the past represents the convergence of his wish to be "modern" and his experience as an immigrant to Australia. He loves the urban architecture of Melbourne, which he experiences as "glassily new" (266). Prior to the September 11 attacks, Tom thinks of "the lucky country as a place where history happened to other people" (250). In other words, Australia's very nature as a settler-colonial state, one which denies its violent history, aligns with Tom's aspiration to move on from his personal history. Nelly, who is far more comfortable with the past, demonstrates to Tom throughout the novel that Melbourne is drenched in the presence of history.

As part of her artistic practice, Nelly collects rubbish from the streets to incorporate into her creations: she exhibits a wooden printer's tray filled with "banal found objects, one to a niche in reverent display: a pineapple-topped swizzle stick, a hairslide, a condom wrapper, two dead matches, a doll's dismembered arm" (240). While Nelly assumes a transformative agency over these objects, shepherding them from the gutter to the art gallery, Tom is worried about *becoming* the rubbish – being expelled from the nation, for example, in the way that refugees on Manus Island and Nauru have been expelled. As an immigrant, he feels this sense of precarity more strongly. This sense of threat – along with the threat that the provisional, colonised Australia could disappear at any time – comes to characterise the novel. The threat of abjectivity remains present for Tom, and is intensified after the events of August and September 2001.

[58] See Chapter 4 for a more detailed consideration of the role of the abject with reference to the state of being a refugee.

4.4 Conclusion to Chapter 3

This chapter has set out the third of four case studies in which I read contemporary works of literature which reanimate and reimagine Australia as state-of-the-nation novels. In this chapter, I have examined Michelle de Kretser's novels *The Lost Dog*, *Questions of Travel* and *The Life to Come* through the lens of vernacular cosmopolitanism, arguing that de Kretser's novels confront the issues at the heart of Australia's "malfunctioning multiculturalism" (Lokugé 2016, 561). In other words, while the concept of cosmopolitanism is based on an openness to difference and an ethical responsibility to others, Australian multiculturalism is at heart based on an impulse of control that extends only conditional inclusivity to those outside its hegemonic group, i.e. non-white Australians. These texts also specifically depict the experiences of South Asian Australian characters, whose conditional inclusion is mediated by Asia's particularly vexed role within the mainstream Australian imaginary.

In this chapter, I have offered an original reading of these texts by deploying the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism, asserting that placing all three of these texts in critical proximity enables the apprehension of an evolving confrontation with the tensions of Australian multiculturalism. By reading these three novels together, I contend that they can be seen as multicultural trilogy: *The Lost Dog* begins by examining migrant and mixed-race subjectivities in the crucial year of 2001; *Questions of Travel* juxtaposes voluntary and involuntary experiences of migration over a forty-year timespan, and *The Life to Come* locates the complex dynamics of multiculturalism – consumption and appropriation of otherness – in a contemporary, post-Howard moment. By figuring these explicitly as state-of-the-nation novels, I foreground both de Kretser's critical treatment of whiteness, the way she "bends the frame" of subjectivity (Cahill 2015) for Sri Lankan and South Asian migrants in Australia, and her engagement with the provisionality of the settler-colony.

The next chapter, Chapter 4, will present this thesis' final case study of contemporary texts as state-of-the-nation narratives. This chapter will turn to Felicity Castagna's 2017 novel *No More Boats* and Behrouz Boochani's 2018 text *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* and, by reading refugee narratives through the concepts of liminality and the abject, will expand my analysis of the space of the nation.

5. Chapter 4
Liminality and abjectivity: Felicity Castagna's *No More Boats* and Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*

5.1 Introduction to Chapter 4

In this chapter, I read two contemporary works that deal with migration to Australia specifically in the context of boat arrivals: Felicity Castagna's novel *No More Boats* (2017) and Behrouz Boochani's creative non-fiction/memoir testimonial *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (2018). These two texts approach the same issue from opposite sides: *No More Boats* from within Australia, looking out; and *No Friend but the Mountains* from outside Australia, looking in. Keeping this inside/outside contrast in mind, I read these novels with a focus on the idea of the border.

Each of these texts foregrounds key nationalist "flashpoints" related to Australian immigration policy: Castagna's novel is set in the period of time between the *Tampa* controversy in August 2001 and the events of September 11, 2001. The asylum seekers aboard the *Tampa* form a spectral presence that hangs over the entire novel, waiting offshore, their fates undecided. Soon after these real-life events, the Howard government introduced its Pacific Solution, a policy designed to intercept refugee boats and redirect them to offshore detention. In Boochani's text, Behrouz arrives in Australian waters just four days after a major immigration policy change introduced by the Labor government under Kevin Rudd, which prohibits refugees arriving by boat from ever settling in Australia. This policy continued as part of Operation Sovereign Borders, which commenced on 18 September 2013, following the election of the Coalition government under Tony Abbott. Under this policy, the Australian Government commits to transferring "illegal" arrivals to Manus Island or Nauru within 48 hours of being intercepted. This policy remains in place at the time of writing. Similarly to the previous chapters, the novels' depiction of these flashpoints, or their consequences, is a key element in my contention that they can be read as state-of-the-nation novels. In different ways, they each implicate the reader as complicit in the maintenance of these systems.

As narratives characterised by their shared focus on boat migration, the idea of the border is key to both novels. During the years of the Howard government's incumbency, xenophobic rhetoric towards asylum seekers arriving by boat rose sharply. As has been explained in the Introduction to this thesis, the interception of the *Tampa* and the "Children Overboard" scandal intensified a growing Islamophobia that was compounded by the 9/11 attacks on New York City. Concerns about the arrival of so-called "boat people" played out a continuation of earlier anxieties, such as conservative politician Pauline Hanson's concern that Australia would be "swamped" by Asian people (1996). The creation of the Australian Border Force in 2015 through the merger of two previously existing departments[59] evidences the continuation of elevated anxieties about invasion in the twenty-first century. Australia's invasion anxiety is a foundational element of the settler-colony itself: those who steal land remain perpetually conscious that the land is illegitimately possessed, and indeed that it can be stolen from them (Vassilacopolous and Nicolacopolous 2004).

In this chapter, I utilise Walter D. Mignolo's concept of "border thinking" (2000; Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006; Mignolo and Welsh 2018),[60] which refers to "the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside" (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006, 206). The concept of an "epistemology of the exteriority" is extremely useful for understanding the relationship between "inside" and "outside" as these terms relate to both the physical and conceptual spaces of the nation, as I will show in this chapter. The concept of border thinking animates an understanding of the border not merely as a line on a map, but as a zone of contestation. As Walter D. Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova go on to write, "'[b]orders' are not only geographic but also political, subjective, (e.g. cultural) and epistemic, and contrary to frontiers, the very concept of 'border' implies the existence of people, languages, religions and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the coloniality of power (e.g. structured by the imperial and colonial differences)" (2006, 208). In this chapter, I argue that *No More Boats* and *No Friend but the Mountains* challenge the settler-colonial formation of Australia by troubling the nation's geographic, conceptual and subjective borders, and by extending the conceptual space of the nation to include international spaces such as Manus

[59] The Australian Border Force is the law enforcement arm of the Department of Home Affairs. It was formed through a merger of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. The addition of the word "force" in its name invokes militaristic connotations.

[60] Mignolo's use of this concept builds on Gloria Anzaldúa's usage of the term in her semi-autobiographical critical work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987).

Island. These texts problematise the in/out dichotomy of the border: they are narratives *set*, in some way, within the zone of contestation. Boochani's text takes place entirely within this zone: it instantiates the border's complexity and componentry – defying the imagined simple dichotomy of in versus out by showing the elaborate systems and hierarchies that must be put in place to support it. Castagna's text negotiates the in/out tensions at play *within* the space of Australia, focusing on the pressures of assimilation, the conditional inclusion of migrants, and the role of onshore detention centres in creating spaces of exclusion.

As recently published texts, neither Boochani nor Castagna's work has yet been subject to substantial scholarly discourse; however, this is almost certainly set to change. *No More Boats* has been reviewed in publications such as *Sydney Review of Books* and *Westerly* (Jamison 2017; Bowden 2017), and is also included in Rooney's 2018 monograph on suburban space, as addressed below. Brigitta Olubas (2019) writes on Boochani and the Australian literary border, working toward an engagement with the "idea of [Boochani] as an Australian writer, and with the cognate locution of Australian Literature" (1). Jeff Sparrow places Boochani's text in the context of other carceral narratives (2018), while Ruth McHugh-Dillon productively tests the usefulness of comparing Manus with Guantánamo (2019). This chapter is the first scholarly intervention to examine these texts alongside one another. I do this for two primary reasons: firstly, because they each represent marginalised migrant and refugee subjectivities, which have long been excluded from Australian literature, and secondly, because they depict the consequences of two major phases in recent Australian refugee policy: the Pacific Solution and Operation Sovereign Borders.

I contend that these factors place the texts in a fertile space for considering how contemporary novels can be seen to represent the state of the nation. Each text approaches the nation from a different position of marginalisation. Castagna's work is a novel set in Western Sydney, engaging with many of the same issues of representation that I have addressed in Chapter 2. Its protagonist, Antonio, is a character not often encountered in Australian literature: an older, well-settled Australian citizen reflecting on his decades-long experience of assimilation. Boochani's text, while also narrating an experience of migration, approaches the nation from a dramatically different perspective – in the midst of an indefinite incarceration by the Australian Government, on a remote island thousands of kilometres from Australia itself.

In Castagna's novel, Antonio is an Italian Australian immigrant who arrives on a boat in the 1950s after escaping his Calabrian village, which was destroyed by landslides that claimed

his parents' lives. Upon arrival, he lives at Villawood Migrant Hostel (now an immigration detention centre, as examined below) where he meets his wife, Rose, who is employed there as a cook. Arriving in Australia under the White Australia Policy and the framework of assimilation, Antonio works hard over the ensuing decades: to learn English, to leave behind his Italian identity, and to embrace his new life in Australia. Having laboured as a construction worker, Antonio is forced into retirement after a workplace accident that takes the life of his best friend, Nico. Throughout the novel, Antonio's mental health is in decline, and he becomes increasingly paranoid and xenophobic, ironically taking on the anti-migrant discourse to which he had earlier been subjected.

Boochani's text is a fictionalised account[61] of his experience of detainment on Manus Island after attempting to reach Australia by boat from Indonesia after fleeing Iran. The reader receives an incomplete picture of the circumstances that bring Behrouz to his situation at the beginning of *No Friend but the Mountains*, but the text begins with his hiding in a basement in Kendari, a city on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. Despite a failed first attempt to sail from Indonesia to Australia, Behrouz[62] tries again. He boards a small fishing boat with a group of other refugees – "mainly Iranian, Kurdish, Iraqi" (6) as well as one Sri Lankan couple with a young child. The journey is very rough: the boat's motor fails to pump water out of the engine room (17), forcing the passengers to bail water out by hand, while the waves rise around them as they venture out of Indonesian waters. It seems that the ship will sink; Behrouz worries that he and the other passengers will die. Instead, the vessel is intercepted by a rescue boat and the refugees are taken first to Christmas Island, and then Manus Island. On Manus, the refugees endure crowded conditions, a lack of physical and mental healthcare, heat and insects, isolation, lack of access to information and representation, and complete uncertainty about the length of their incarceration. Boochani's narratives about life in the detention centre and his fellow prisoners are interspersed with short poems and philosophical reflections on the situation of indefinite confinement.

The two texts are thematically representative of different points on the same trajectory. Antonio and Behrouz begin their journeys in the same way. They both leave their home

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[61] In the translator's essay accompanying the text, Omid Tofighian writes that "no detainee or refugee in this book is based on a specific individual, no matter how detailed their stories" (2018a, *xxxv*).

[62] In order to maintain a separation between author and protagonist, I refer to the author as "Boochani" and to the protagonist of the text as "Behrouz."

countries and travel to Australia by boat, but this is where their paths diverge. Antonio reaches Australia, and goes on to build a family, wealth (including a house on an acre block, and three investment properties), and a career in construction in the Western Sydney suburb of Parramatta. In contrast, Behrouz is intercepted by the Australian Navy and exiled to a remote prison off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Boochani, who did not have access to a computer in the detention centre, composed *No Friend but the Mountains* entirely on a mobile phone, sending it in small increments via the communication application WhatsApp to his translator, Omid Tofighian, who in turn worked with a team of translators to convert the text from Farsi into English.[63]

Despite the different endings to their respective journeys, stranded refugees figure prominently in each novel. In *No More Boats*, Antonio becomes obsessed with the asylum seekers on the *Tampa*, painting a large sign on the concrete paving in his front yard which reads "No More Boats." The power of the cultural hegemony that pressures Antonio into assimilation is evidenced in the disconnection between himself and the refugees stranded on board. Castagna emphasises this disconnection throughout the text by contrasting the attitudes of successive generations of refugees from Europe (who arrived in the 1950s) and Vietnam (1970s and 1980s). The asylum seekers stranded on the MV *Tampa* form a spectral presence in *No More Boats*: although they are never seen, they are referred to by then-Prime Minister John Howard, and Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs at the time, Philip Ruddock, through excerpts from historical speeches (77–80; 162). Antonio sees John Howard, who appears on television, making his notorious 2001 pronouncement: "We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come" (77), and this sentence is repeated, sometimes in full and sometimes in fragments, throughout the text (82; 219). Moreover, other former refugees distance themselves from the asylum seekers: a Vietnamese Australian describes his own cohort of "boat people" as being "not *like them*" (189).

[63] After more than six years of detention on Manus Island, Boochani travelled to Christchurch for a writers' festival in November 2019, and was granted asylum in New Zealand in 2020. Despite his total exclusion from the nation, however, Boochani has come to play an important role in the Australian literary sphere, speaking via mobile phone and videolink at various seminars to agitate for the freedom of the refugees on Manus Island. He was the subject of a recent episode of the ABC program *Australian Story*, which told the story of his escape from Manus Island (air date 7 September 2020).

If the individual experiences of the stranded refugees are unknown in *No More Boats*, they are made real in Boochani's text. Behrouz is on an Indonesian fishing boat which is intercepted by an Australian Navy vessel; he is taken to Christmas Island, where he is gawked at by journalists; finally, he is flown to Manus Island on a small plane with the other asylum seekers. Boochani's book forms a counterpoint to Castagna's. If Antonio is concerned with what he perceives as the threat of asylum seekers waiting offshore to "invade" Australia, then Behrouz dispels this chimera through his narrative of desperation and confusion. This opposition is clearly and poignantly summarised in the following two examples. In *No More Boats*, the narrator writes of Antonio: "[h]e imagined people, slick like eels, being carried up on the white froth of turbulent water. He imagined them crashing down around him. He thought too of that boat sitting off the shore with its 438 people, just waiting there. Waiting for the moment when they could invade" (148). Antonio's description of the asylum seekers at first appears to be sympathetic: the refugees "being carried" on the water and "crashing down," phrases that emphasise their lack of control or agency in the situation. This sympathy is quickly undermined by the sentence that follows, which characterises the asylum seekers as "waiting for the moment" to "invade" Australia.

Antonio's ironically anti-immigrant attitudes, as expressed above, are contrasted in *No Friend but the Mountains*. Behrouz's reaction to being exiled to Manus Island is one of confusion: Boochani writes, "We are hostages – we are being made examples to strike fear into others, to scare people so they won't come to Australia. What do other people's plans to come to Australia have to do with me? Why do I have to be punished for what others might do?" (107). Behrouz's desperation is deeply affecting. His pain at being taken to Manus instead of Australia embodies the consequences of Antonio's bigoted stereotyping of migrants. In contrast to Antonio, who consigns to a single category 438 people from different countries, who speak different languages and are fleeing different types of persecution, Behrouz differentiates himself from his companions. While the portrayal of asylum seekers in Australian public discourse stereotypes those seeking refuge through the pejorative term "queue-jumpers,"[64] Boochani's text – similarly to Michelle de Kretser's novel *Questions of Travel*, as discussed in Chapter 3 – seeks to avoid representing refugees as a mass group.

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[64] Tania Penovic and Azadeh Dastyari (2016) note that since 1996, the quota for the number of refugees arriving from overseas refugee camps and those arriving "spontaneously" – for example, by boat – have been consolidated into one list. This means that spontaneous arrivals generate a "commensurate reduction in resettlement places granted" (143). This phenomenon is what engendered the spread of the pejorative colloquialism "queue-jumper."

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I used theories of vernacular cosmopolitanism to understand how characters in recent novels by Michelle de Kretser represent the experience of seeking refuge. This chapter is focused on the concepts of the border, or liminality and abjectivity, and less on the idea of cosmopolitanism; however, these ideas – especially the idea of being abject – have also been used in critical discourse relating to cosmopolitanism. For example, Peter Nyers uses the term "abject cosmopolitans" to refer to "asylum seekers, refugees, non-status residents, undocumented workers, so called 'over-stayers' and 'illegals,'" arguing that they "have come to constitute a kind of 'abject class' of global migrants" (2003, 1070). The concept stands in contrast to universalist/idealist Kantian forms of cosmopolitanism through the dichotomy of belonging: "[w]hile the cosmopolitan is at home everywhere, the abject have been jettisoned, forced out into a life of displacement" (1073). This focus on *rejection* – which is so central to Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject body, in particular – has strong resonances with the origins of the concept of cosmopolitanism,[65] providing a link between cosmopolitan theory and abjection as it relates to the situation of asylum seekers.

These two texts approach the experience of occupying the identity of "boat person" – generally considered to be a pejorative term for those seeking asylum by sea – from differing perspectives. They perform the function of granting subjectivity to categories of people whose narratives have been suppressed in Australian public discourse. Boochani grants subjectivity to a series of Others: not only asylum seekers but also Kurdish people, as well as the local Manusian people[66] who are employed in the offshore processing centre. Castagna's novel grants subjectivity to a generation of immigrants who were required – at least performatively – to reject their previous national identities in favour of adopting an assimilationist model of "Australianness" based on a white identity. Both of these texts work to reimagine and reanimate notions of Australia by telling stories that have been historically overlooked.

In this chapter, I contextualise Castagna and Boochani's texts as examples of migrant and refugee writing, positioning them as examples of critical multicultural writing. I then turn to an examination of how each text negotiates the theme of borders. In the first section below, I argue

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[65] Diogenes the Cynic, who claimed to be a "citizen of the world," did so only following his exile from ancient Sinope (now known as Sinop, a city on the Black Sea coast in northern Turkey).

[66] I acknowledge the presenters at the seminar entitled "Re-treating Literature and Politics through *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing From Manus Prison* by Behrouz Boochani" on 22 May 2019, including Omid Tofighian, Behrouz Boochani, Mediya Rangi, Mahnaz Alimardanian, Mammad Aidani and Tania Penovic for their thoughtful discussion of this issue. Elham Jalali Karveh organised the seminar.

that the texts figure zones of contestation through the ocean, the "state of exception" under which, as Giorgio Agamben argues, the state creates the conditions for the camp (1997), and the abject body. In the second section, I read *No More Boats'* protagonist Antonio Martone as an example of what Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopolous refer to as a "perpetual foreigner-within," (2004, 46) a Southern European migrant who was classed as non-white prior to the introduction of official multiculturalism, and designated as white after the end of the White Australia Policy. Finally, I read Boochani's representation of Behrouz – whose story is semi-autobiographical, but as Boochani has noted, not a work of non-fiction (Allahyari 2019) – as inhabiting a condition of bodily and conceptual "abjectivity," an alternate category of subjectivity that refers to the exclusion of refugees from not only one specific country but from the system of national belonging (Willen 2007; Gonzalez and Chavez 2012; Ellis et al 2019).

5.2 Refugee writing: assimilation and exclusion in settler-colonial Australia

In analysing these texts, I locate them both among the literary multiculturalism that has become resurgent within Australian writing over the past decade or so. *No More Boats* is a narrative about migrant subjectivity, joining the ranks of emergent literature from Western Sydney, as discussed in Chapter 2. Brigid Rooney describes Castagna's text as a "second-generation novel that mediates [the] post-suburban, post-multicultural nation and that boldly inhabits settler-suburban terrain" (2017, 161). While Rooney uses the term "post-multicultural" to refer to the text's setting in the midst of the Howard government's incumbency, this could be misleading. Antonio's experience – working tirelessly to adapt to his new home, and being rewarded only with indignity – is an *entirely* multicultural experience. Viewing the novel's depiction of the nation as multicultural draws attention to the fact that the demands of assimilation are not necessarily rewarded with a straightforward sense of belonging, and that the function of multiculturalism may in fact be to perpetuate the marginalisation of people like Antonio. The novel is set mostly in Parramatta, the central hub of Western Sydney, where Antonio has recently been forced to retire from his work building low-quality "McMansions" to house newcomers in the rapidly expanding urban area.

Castagna has written about the representational issues involved in contributing to the literature of Western Sydney, and the process of negotiating the tension over what readers expect from such narratives. Recalling an instance in which a reviewer termed *No More Boats* an

example of "working class fiction," Castagna contends that it is "more complicated than that: the protagonist owns a home on acreage in Parramatta and three investment properties despite starting out with nothing" (2019). *No More Boats* draws on Castagna's family history of immigration, similarly characterised by dispossession and dislocation: the history of her father's family includes experiences in Greece, Egypt, Ethiopia, and in a British internment camp. In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Castagna's family is described as landing "in the semi-rural outskirts of Newcastle where they were treated as foreigners but did their best to disguise their difference" (Morris 2017). Castagna, who was born in Australia but lived overseas with her family as a child, has since moved back to Australia and currently lives in Parramatta, where her novel is set. The novel's setting in Parramatta shows the community in its fullness, defying stereotypical one-dimensional representations of Western Sydney that emphasise poverty and disenfranchisement. Antonio's support for John Howard in the novel is partly based on Howard's rhetoric explicitly targeting "aspirationals": working and middle-class Australians keen to build their individual wealth through property ownership and economic self-sufficiency (Dyrenfurth 2007), which recalls Jon Stratton's notion that Australia's "official multiculturalism" was replaced under Howard with a neoliberal logic of individualism (2020). Castagna has written of the importance of representing "people who don't fit easily into *A Current Affair*'s latest program on dole bludgers in western Sydney" (2019), in order to prevent narratives from Western Sydney becoming a tool for stereotyping.

Australia's confinement of refugees in Nauru, on Manus and Christmas Islands, and in onshore detention facilities, has prompted a consideration of these themes in art and literature. Boochani, a journalist, has written a large number of articles during his detention for outlets and journals such as *Overland*, the *Guardian*, the *Saturday Paper* and, most recently, the *New York Times* (2020). In 2017, Boochani released a film, *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*, in conjunction with Arash Kamali Sarvestani, an Iranian filmmaker based in the Netherlands. The film was shot on Boochani's mobile phone inside the prison. Aside from Boochani, other refugees in indefinite detention have written of the experience, including JN Joniad and Shamindan Kanapathi, who remain in Indonesia and PNG respectively. A recently published anthology, *They Cannot Take the Sky* (2017), brings together first-person accounts from people within detention centres on Manus and Nauru, as well as from those who have been released into the community, with a foreword written by Christos Tsiolkas. Describing the anthology, Alexis Wright writes, "I welcome *They Cannot Take the Sky* as an urgent and much needed addition to the canon of Australian literature" (Behind the Wire 2016). The anthology is published by

Behind the Wire, an organisation that works with people who have sought asylum in Australia. Similarly, Writing Through Fences is an organisation of writers and artists currently or formerly incarcerated within Australian detention facilities. Its members produce artworks, writing, translations and music, much of which engages with their journeys to seek refuge and their treatment at the hands of Australia's detention regime. Describing works such as these, Clare Millar (2019) uses the term "Manus and Nauru literature," contending that "the literature of Manus and Nauru is necessary in order to comprehend Australia." These narratives play a key role in challenging the boundaries of Australian literature.

These texts draw attention to the centrality of refugee literature to understandings of Australia while remaining removed from it. In strict terms, Boochani's text is not a work of Australian literature at all. Boochani has never visited Australia and it is entirely possible that he never will, unless he enters from New Zealand. Nor is his book set in Australia. Despite these facts, Boochani's text has been critically successful in Australia, winning a number of high-profile literary awards while he remained imprisoned on Manus. Boochani was awarded the 2019 Victorian Prize for Literature as well as the Victorian Prize for Non-Fiction at the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. These accolades, totalling $AU125,000 in prize money, represent an acknowledgement by Australia's literary community of the value of Boochani's work. Boochani is the first non-Australian to win this award. As Keyvan Allahyari and Paul Rae write, "[t]he specific challenge this poses to the definition of 'Australian writing' can be seen as an intervention by the literary community into the field of politics. If a non-citizen who has never set foot on mainland Australia can win, who counts as an Australian author?" (2019). Similarly, in the introduction to *No Friend but the Mountains*, Australian writer and Man Booker Prize recipient Richard Flanagan writes, "I hope one day to welcome Behrouz Boochani to Australia as what I believe he has shown himself to be in these pages […] [a] great Australian writer" (2018, *x*). Boochani has stated on his personal Twitter account that he is not interested in settling in Australia (Boochani 2019); on his arrival to New Zealand in 2019, he also stated that he *is* Australian: "I am Australian […] I tried to make Australia a better place" (Doherty quoted in Olubas 2019, 1). As Allahyari and Rae conclude, "[f]or now, at least, Boochani is an 'Australian writer' because Australia is morally implicated in what he wrote and how he wrote it" (2019). For these reasons, and for the purposes of examining the continuing impact of Australia's immigration policies on asylum seekers, *No Friend but the Mountains* is included in this thesis among other contemporary works of Australian literature.

5.3 Border thinking: drawing lines in the ocean

The emergence of Australian "refugee literature" or "Manus and Nauru literature" has prompted a re-examination of how these narratives challenge the idea of Australian literature and indeed representations of the settler-colonial nation itself. The ways in which refugees and asylum seekers are excluded both from and within the national space is consistent with the many other exclusionary impulses of the settler colony. As outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, the exclusionary basis of Australia's immigration policies is well-documented. This exclusionary impulse has, especially during the twenty-first century, created an excessive focus on Australia's unprotected coastal borders and their vulnerability to migrants arriving by boat. Recalling the "Children Overboard" scandal, Ghassan Hage asks, "[w]hat kind of people believe that a parent […] could actually throw their child overboard? Perhaps only those who are unconsciously worried about being thrown overboard themselves by their own motherland?" (Hage 2003, 30). This paranoia is concomitant with the excessive attention paid to the assimilation of migrants in the past. Under settler-colonialism, migrant and refugee subjectivities can only ever be constituted in relation to a mainstream white culture. In relation to this mainstream, Castagna's Antonio is liminal, while Boochani's Behrouz – denied the opportunity to even enter the country – becomes abject.

In light of this focus on the border, I suggest that the framework of "border thinking" holds productive potential for an examination of how these two texts configure migrants arriving by boat. The title of this subsection, "drawing lines in the ocean," recalls Suvendrini Perera's concept of the excised Australian border as "a line in the sea" (2002). As Bill Ashcroft has written recently, "a border is not a thing but a *practice,* a practice that produces power relationships and establishes inequalities between those who are in and those who are not […] [b]orders are both a consequence and a production of power relationships. And the process of othering on which they are based is fundamental to the fiction of identity produced within those borders" (2019, 6). Thinking through borders then enables a consideration of how the novels disrupt and problematise power relationships in the novels, not only through characters' categoric exclusion from national space (in the case of Behrouz), but also how irreconcilable inside/outside power structures define Antonio's identity as a migrant to Australia.

5.3.1 Neo-colonial borders and invasion anxieties

The Australian "border-industrial complex," as Boochani and Tofighian term it (2018, *xxvii*), is the direct consequence of a governing logic of control and containment, symptomatic of the anxiety of illegitimacy arising from the fact of colonisation. This awareness that contemporary national structures derive from imperial history is key: as Mignolo and Tlostanova write, border thinking is "always a decolonial project" (2006, 206). As has been established throughout this thesis, Australianness is fundamentally based on whiteness, which inscribes itself as the norm, to the exclusion of all other identity categories. In this section, I examine the key role of the Australian (post)colony and its systems in the texts' depiction of asylum seekers.

One of the fundamental ideas underpinning this exclusion is the failure to admit white colonisation itself as a process of migration. As Vassilacopoulos and Nicolacopoulos contend, "[i]n practice, the dominant white Australian subject position does not typically represent itself in terms of the categories 'immigrant' and 'migrant'. Instead, a presumptive association of migrancy with (some element of) non-whiteness reinforces the illusion that those who occupy the white Australian subject position have somehow always been here" (2004, 45). The elision of white Australians' migrant status is both a characteristic and a direct result of the violent displacement and attempted erasure of Australia's Indigenous people. This erasure is also directly linked to white Australians' perceived "managerial right over national space" (Hage 1998, 186). As has been discussed throughout this thesis, the logic of limitation and control has characterised white Australians' relation to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Others since colonisation. The introduction of multiculturalism has re-cast this logic of control through the prism of tolerance, but its foundation as a tool for domination remains unchanged. The fundamental centrality of whiteness in Australian identity enables the continued existence of what Vassilacopoulos and Nicolacopoulos describe as the "self-generated 'onto-pathology'" (2004, 42) of white Australia.

Through the process of colonisation, white Australians laid claim to the entire continent simultaneously, an act through which "in conformity with the structure of modern Western subjectivity, possession had to be conceived in terms of the exclusive right of British Australia […] to the whole and entire use of appropriated land" (Vassilacopoulos and Nicolacopoulos 2004, 41). The survival and endurance of Australia's Indigenous people disturbs this exclusivity. Therefore, "the violence associated with the murder and forced removal of Indigenous peoples became a constitutive aspect of what it means for the colonisers to be or to become Australian"

(42). To this day, the idea of *being* or *becoming* Australian is fundamentally based on the continual dispossession of Australia's Indigenous people, and the maintenance of a stable Australian identity is based on this violence being hidden.

Although the policy of multiculturalism was introduced in 1973, Australia's policy on refugee arrivals by boat has become increasingly punitive in the years since 1975, when Vietnamese refugees fleeing the war began arriving on boats. Mandatory detention (as opposed to discretionary detention) was introduction 1992, with bipartisan support under Paul Keating's Labor government following an increase in arrivals, mostly from Cambodia (Zannettino 2012; Phillips and Spinks 2013). As well as becoming increasingly punitive, Australia's approach to extraterritorial detention is based on a fundamentally neocolonial enterprise. The economic relationship between Australia, PNG and Nauru is unequal: Penovic and Dastyari (2016) describe PNG and Nauru as Australia's "economically struggling former protectorates" (144). Nauru was an overseas dependent territory of Australia between 1920 and 1968 (McAdam 2017), while PNG was under various forms of Australian rule between 1906 and 1975 (O'Donoghue 2009). Australia's policy of outsourcing the detention of refugees to these nations, therefore, represents a former ruling power's incursion into the sovereign territory of its Pacific neighbours, with "payment" supplied through the provision of foreign aid.[67] In *No Friend but the Mountains*, there is a distinct hierarchical structure in place within Manus Prison: the Australian Border Force guards at the top, followed by the local guards (whom the prisoners refer to as "Papus"), and the prisoners at the bottom. The Australians manipulate the Papus against the prisoners: they "gossip to them that this prison […] is for dangerous criminals and terrorists" (167). These power structures play into what Boochani conceives of as "The Kyriarchal System." In the essay accompanying *No Friend but the Mountains*, translator Omid Tofighian describes Boochani's use of the concept of kyriarchy as encompassing:

> multiple, interlocking kinds of stigmatisation and oppression, including racism, heteronormativity, economic discrimination, class-based violence, faith-based discrimination, coloniality, Indigenous genocide, anti-Blackness, militarism and xenophobia … The term also captures the way that the intersecting systems are perpetually reinforced and replicated. (2018b, 370)

[67] According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), in 2019–20, Australia will provide an estimated AU$607.5 million in Official Development Assistance (ODA) to PNG. In the same period, Australia will provide an estimated AU$25.8 million in ODA to Nauru. Australian ODA contributions are equal to 25% of Nauru's gross domestic product.

The concept of kyriarchy was developed by feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1992). Natalie Osborne (2015) summarises the concept as being closely related to Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality. Osborne characterises intersectionality as "a concept for understanding multiple, co-constituting axes of difference and identity," and kyriarchy as "a theory of power that describes the power structures intersectionality produces" (130). In other words, an intersectional perspective on Behrouz's positionality includes understanding the relationship between his identities as a displaced person, an Indigenous Kurd, an asylum seeker and a prisoner. Boochani's identity as an Indigenous person is a critical aspect within this nexus. In the text's accompanying essay, Tofighian asserts that "Behrouz's book is a decolonial text, representing a decolonial way of thinking and doing" (2018a, *xxv*).

The kyriarchal system, which as Tofighian notes "is not a single superstructure of power" (370), is related to these intersectional identities but refers instead to the power structures that these intersectional identities – and those of all the detainees – produce. As Tofighian states, the reinforcement and replication of many intersecting systems of oppression "connects the prison with Australian colonial history and fundamental factors plaguing contemporary Australian society, culture and politics" (370). Further, the term is capitalised within the text – stylised as The Kyriarchal System – in order to "personalise the system and give the impression that it exercises agency" (124). Under this kyriarchal system, the onto-pathology of settler Australia is fundamentally linked to the disenfranchisement of Indigenous Australians, which in turn is fundamentally linked to the maintenance of these neocolonial outposts on Manus and Nauru, as well as the onshore detention centres at Villawood and Woomera, which are addressed in more detail in the following section.

Neocolonial and decolonising impulses are also at work in *No More Boats*. The novel pays significant attention to the Parramatta River, described throughout the novel as "the point where the salt water meets fresh" (Castagna 2017, 3). This estuarine environment is conceived as a kind of aquatic border, a semi-permeable line in the water. At the beginning of the novel, an analeptic movement transports the reader back to when Antonio and Rose have just moved in to the house that Antonio has built. Settling into his new environment, Antonio thinks of the river, planning to "take his line and hook out there later, to see if he can catch a fish with the other men who sit by the pier" (3). In this early part of the novel, the river is envisioned as a generative space, providing food, and offering Antonio the chance to socialise with his new neighbours, as he settles into the community and to a life of stability.

As the novel progresses, the reader learns that the river is a key space of anti-colonial resistance, where the Bidjigal warrior Pemulwuy led Indigenous soldiers in the Battle of Parramatta against the British colonisers in March 1797 and where "those early explorers could take their boats no further" (Castagna, 187). The estuarine environment becomes not a space of exchange, but one of invasion and contamination. In an essay, Anne Jamison (2017) writes that "the Parramatta River is a place of transition and movement, both richly fertile and ecologically damaged. Castagna's novel delves into these generative but also traumatised in-between spaces as it probes the lives and anxieties of people who reside in the interstices of different cultures, languages, nationalities and racial origins." Earlier in the text, Clare and Paul walk through mist along the Parramatta River, and Clare thinks "that mist was Parramatta and why Parramatta was the nation, because there were so many things hidden out there on the water" (187). The novel's setting in Parramatta forms a layered metaphor – for colonisation, history, and multiculturalism – that is consolidated by the novel's conclusion. The metaphor of the Parramatta River is a "place of transition and movement," as Jamison argues, but it is also a border, a last line of defence. The novel's ending interpellates Antonio into simultaneously contradictory roles. Antonio, who has been spending more and more time among right-wing neonationalists, grows increasingly paranoid and detached from reality. His paranoia eventually coalesces into action, and he boards a ferry with a group of tourists and attempts to hold up the ferry captain with a plastic gun. In this scene, Antonio seems to be propelled by some outside force – Castagna writes that "his body had been moving without him" (216). Antonio's hijacking of the ship reads as a somewhat absurd re-enactment of Pemulwuy defending the river: Antonio's impotence is signified by his plastic gun. Critically, in this scene he metaphorically inhabits the role of Pemulwuy, defending the river from the oncoming boats, while simultaneously acting out white Australian anxieties over invasion by so-called "boat people."

The novel's ending sets up the key question: is the reader meant to interpret Antonio's actions as a repetition of Pemulwuy's defence of the river, or as a neocolonial act of violence intended as a warning for the asylum seekers stranded offshore? I argue that it is both – and that this confusion represents the fundamentally ambivalent position that settler-colonialism forces upon more recent migrants, who are both pressured to assimilate with Anglo Australian identities (and therefore assume a neocolonial role), as well as being subject to racism and exclusion in a system that privileges whiteness (and therefore allied, in some ways, with Indigenous Australians). Ultimately, the novel's ending rehearses not an act of violence but one of impotence: Antonio is unable to escape this fraught position, just as his hijacking is undermined

by the fact that he is holding a plastic gun. The absurdity of the hijacking emphasises the dissonance inherent in Antonio, a migrant, being whipped into an anti-immigrant frenzy by the descendants of other migrants – white Australians – and arrogating to himself the authority to deny entry to newcomers, in a mockery of an Indigenous person seeking to repel invaders to their land. The scene highlights the hypocrisy of settler-colonial logic, perpetuating itself in a xenophobic *mise-en-abyme* in which each new generation of trespassers on Indigenous land scorns and rejects the next, while claiming legitimacy for themselves.

5.3.2 "Not-Australia": writing the nation through Tampa, Manus and Villawood

To an extent, both Antonio and the character Behrouz can be read within the framework of the abject. Antonio, while technically a migrant and not a refugee, is a "boat person," a category which has come to constitute a category of abjection in Australian political discourse, evidenced by the fact that Antonio and his friends, all former residents of Villawood Migrant Hostel, seek to distance themselves from the refugees aboard the *Tampa* (53; 169). Behrouz and the other asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru have not only been forced to leave their home countries, but they have also been expelled from the system of sovereign citizenship altogether: held in Australian facilities in PNG and Nauru, they are prohibited from gaining the privilege of citizenship in their temporary, yet indefinite, host countries. This section contextualises the detention camp as a state of exception in both its current and historical incarnations in Australia and the South Pacific, and applies this notion to both writers' representations of "outsiders" to the Australian nation.

In 2001, following the interception of the *Tampa* and the "Children Overboard" controversy, the Howard government moved swiftly to enact new legislation that would effectively relocate Australia's maritime borders, and would see asylum seekers processed in offshore facilities. According to Anthony Pastore, "[a]fter a successful appeal through the Australian court system, government officials arranged for the migrants to be processed on Nauru, a small island in Micronesia, and the Howard government set about to legitimize its actions through legislation" (2013, 620). The temporal proximity of these events meant that the threat of terrorism became conflated with the arrival of asylum seekers (McKay 2013). Following these events, and despite criticism from other nations, the Howard government enacted an immigration reform scheme which, as Perera notes, "apparently without an ear for

inauspicious resonances," (2002) came to be known (ironically, given its violent underpinning) as the "Pacific Solution."

The Pacific Solution operated as "a third country immigration processing scheme, wherein asylum seekers who arrive in Australian territory by boat are detained by Australian authorities and shipped to other Pacific nations to have their refugee claims processed and reviewed under the receiving nations' laws" (Lacertosa 2014, 322). These third countries – PNG and Nauru – came to house the Manus Island and Nauru detention camps. A key element of the Pacific Solution also involved the creation of "excised offshore places": namely, Australia's overseas territories, such as Christmas Island. Writing about the Pacific Solution, Perera describes a place, or non-place, "not-Australia," as having been created by this excision. Not-Australia, Perera writes: "expands from the mainland camps to swallow Christmas Island, the Cocos Islands and Ashmore Reef […] outside our national borders not-Australia establishes neo-colonial outposts on Nauru and Papua New Guinea" (2002). This initial round of "excisions" was extended in 2005 following the legislation of the *Migration Amendments Regulations 2005 (No. 6) SLI 171*. The excision of offshore places expanded to include all islands off the Australian coastline to the north of Mackay on the eastern coast and north of Exmouth on the western coast. The excision of these places from within Australia's "migration zone" was intended to stop any passengers on refugee boats arriving there from accessing assistance to gain an Australian visa. Instead:

> An alien arriving within the migration zone without a valid visa is designated as an unlawful non-citizen and must be detained. An alien arriving unlawfully at an excised offshore place is also an offshore entry person and is prevented from making a valid visa application and can be removed to a declared country. (Coombs 2005)

The excision of parts of Australian territory can be seen as a process of deterritorialisation: these places are rendered as "outside" Australia specifically so that refugees arriving there by boat have not actually arrived in Australia and are therefore denied access to refugee processing services and recourse under the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The most critical feature of Manus and Nauru literature, then, is that it speaks directly to Australia from both within and outside the nation: the refugees are both detained by Australia and prevented from ever having entered it.

The "both/and" logic that both imprisons and excludes asylum seekers is not only visible in the creation of states of exception. It can also be seen in the rhetoric that has been used to characterise asylum seekers themselves. The language used to refer to those on the *Tampa* and in

the "Children Overboard" scandal sought to characterise them simultaneously as "the objects *and* the agents of criminality": as Perera describes, "criminal *and* passive, inanimate *and* violent, wretched *and* millionaires, cargo *and* pirates, contraband *and* hijackers, traffickers *and* traffic, victims of 'people smugglers' *and* invaders of Australian sovereignty" (2002, 28). The narrative of the Australian Government (including both Coalition and Labor governments) has long focused on curbing the activities of "people smugglers," rather than explicitly on diverting the flow of people seeking asylum. The ambivalent contradiction that keeps Boochani in the crisis of indefinite detention can also be seen in the character of Antonio, who is trapped in a liminal space between past and present, and between his identity as a Southern European migrant and as an Australian, never fully permitted to assimilate, despite his best efforts.

In *No Friend but the Mountains*, Boochani describes his frustration and disappointment at having arrived in Australian waters only four days after commencement of the new policy under which asylum seekers arriving by boat are prohibited from ever settling in Australia. The Pacific Solution was dismantled by Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008, and the detention camps on Manus Island and Nauru were closed. The camps were re-opened five years later, however, following an increase in boat arrivals. In the intervening time, the Rudd and Gillard governments sought alternative arrangements, including a failed deal with East Timor to process refugees there.[68] A year later, the Labor government was defeated at the federal election, and replaced by the Liberal–National Coalition led by Tony Abbott, whose unofficial campaign slogan – "stop the boats" – was translated into policy and enacted just days after his election triumph.

The new policy, known as Operation Sovereign Borders, claims that "Australia's borders are closed to illegal maritime migration" (Department of Home Affairs website, 2019). Both the Pacific Solution and Operation Sovereign Borders place Australia in breach of its commitments

[68] Under the leadership of Julia Gillard, the Australian Government then attempted to reach a deal with Malaysia for cooperative transfer. Under this deal, Australia would transfer 800 boat arrivals to Malaysia and, in return, resettle 4,000 refugees living in camps in Malaysia. This deal was ultimately rejected by the High Court of Australia because it contravened Australia's obligations under the *Migration Act 1958*. Malaysia was not signatory to the UNHCR Refugee Convention and had no domestic laws in place protecting the rights of refugees. Following the High Court's rejection of the "Malaysia Solution" (formally known as the *Arrangement between the Government of Australia and the Government of Malaysia on Transfer and Resettlement* (2011)), the government brought together an expert panel who recommended that Australia commit to greater engagement with nations in the Asia-Pacific in order to resolve the issue, but ceded that regional processing in PNG and Nauru could serve as a short-term solution to curb the flow of people smuggling from Indonesia (Penovic and Dastyari 2016). As a result, offshore processing in Nauru and PNG was resumed, but "the longer-term goal of a regional cooperation framework faded into insignificance" (Penovic and Dastyari 145).

under the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.[69] Olivia Khoo has described Australia's offshore processing and indefinite detention policies as part of a "carceral regime" characteristic of Australia's "post-apology" period. Khoo conceptualises this period not in terms of being *after* former prime minister Kevin Rudd's National Apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008, but instead in terms of Australia's increasingly unapologetic approach to boat arrivals. Khoo characterises Australia as a place that "regards itself as no longer having to apologise for wrongs done or continuing to be done to refugees or those seeking asylum in Australia" (2017, 96). Despite an offer from the New Zealand government to accept the refugees on Nauru and Manus Island, 180 asylum seekers remain on Nauru and 181 asylum seekers are now in PNG, having been moved from Manus Island to Port Moresby (as at 31 July 2020) following the October 2019 closure of the Manus Island detention facility (Refugee Council of Australia 2020a). While they have been moved to the mainland, however, asylum seekers claim that they remain "in limbo" (Bolger 2019). In addition, 1,458 people remain in mandatory detention in Australia as at 31 May 2020 (Refugee Council of Australia 2020b).

Australia's detention centres, Lara Palombo argues, are a central tool in the colonising practice of the white nation of Australia, a "foundational territorial border that produces, maintains and controls other borders – internal, external, political, economic, racial, heteropatriarchal and gendered – that are constitutive of white sovereignty" (2009, 614). Detention centres feature prominently in both novels. In *No More Boats*, protagonist Antonio lives in Sydney's Villawood Migrant Hostel upon his arrival from Italy. During his time there, Antonio meets his wife Rose and his best friend Nico, who is also a resident in the hostel. Rose and Antonio also meet Lucy, a recent migrant from Poland, who goes on to become their long-term neighbour and friend. Villawood Migrant Hostel, opened in 1949, formed part of a wider network of immigrant hostels across New South Wales which were constructed to receive post-war migrants from Europe.

The former Villawood Migrant Hostel was re-established as Villawood Immigration Detention Centre in 1976. Since that time, it has hosted a mixture of newly arrived asylum

[69] Otherwise known as the 1951 Refugee Convention. Under international law, refugee status is decided by the reason for which a person is driven to leave their home country, not by their manner of entering the receiving country.

seekers, people who have overstayed their visas, and others awaiting deportation.[70] Villawood, in its form as the migrant hostel, is present throughout much of the novel as a place that the characters recall often. Antonio recalls "straight rows of Nissen huts" (91), while Rose remembers it as "the opposite of a nightclub […] endless and green, rural almost, a calm blue-green whirl" (170). Rose's idealisation of the hostel is highlighted when she and Lucy watch a news report about protests in the detention centre. Rose "looked at the people behind the razor wire and knew that everything had been different back then" (171), but Lucy corrects her, saying "you weren't there. Not really. Not *in* there" (172). Rose's fond recollections of a place that was quiet, bucolic and well-organised are undermined by Lucy's reminders that migrants in the hostel also held protests over their treatment. Towards the end of the novel, Rose watches coverage of a protest by detainees in the Villawood centre, who sewed their lips together in 2001. Rose remarks to Lucy that it's hard to believe that Villawood is the same place that they worked in, and that it is different now. By way of reminding Rose that things were not so different, Lucy says:

> There were protests back then too. Remember the residents went on hunger strikes, same as they do now. They had the same strategy as the government does today, you tell people where they can and can't go, you don't let them cook their own food, you take away their choices, you make it difficult for them to find their own home somewhere, you don't allow them any responsibility, you just tell them to wait for something that you won't explain or define and you don't tell them how long that waiting will be. And then you make them wait and wait some more until they start to break down and go mad and they sew their lips together because there's nothing else they have left and then we put them on TV knowing they look a bit like Frankenstein and that lets everyone turn away because they don't look quite human and we allow ourselves to forget that people from other places are human too. (171)

In enumerating the ways in which mandatory detention limits the freedoms of asylum seekers, Lucy's comment knits together these experiences across decades, drawing a web of actants – "they," "we," "you" – into complicity, emphasising the fact that each successive community of refugees is vulnerable to forgetting their own marginalisation once they have integrated into their adopted community. Through Lucy's description of the activities of the government – especially the line "they start to break down and go mad" – the reader is reminded of Antonio, whose

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[70] In 2001, a group of 40 asylum seekers escaped from the detention centre, and attention was brought to the centre through an episode of documentary program *Four Corners*, which focused on the plight of an Iranian child who had retreated into a severely traumatised state following his family's detention first in South Australia's Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre (IRPC) and then at Villawood. Australia has run offshore processing centres and remote detention centres within Australia (such as the Woomera and Baxter IRPCs near Port Augusta, both in rural South Australia) for decades.

forced assimilation has made him bitter and vengeful. The use of two long, unbroken sentences formally echoes the drawn-out and disorienting experience of detention. The first sentence, beginning "Remember," is composed of a series of phrases each beginning with "you," in which each "you" is ostensibly the government, underscoring the fact that the refugees are actively being deprived, rather than supported. The second sentence, in particular, becomes a reminder that Lucy, too, has experienced this confinement: her rising emotion is emphasised by a long string of almost entirely one-syllable words: "then you make them wait and wait some more until they start to break down and go mad and they sew their lips." The image of the detainees in Villawood serves as a reminder of the character Asanka, who sews his lips together and causes a media frenzy at Villawood in Maxine Beneba Clarke's story "The Stilt Fisherman of Kathaluwa," as discussed in Chapter 1. Through Lucy's reminder to Rose that things have not really changed for those subject to Australia's carceral regime of immigration, Castagna emphasises the fact that the oppression of successive refugee communities ultimately serves to maintain the authority of the settler-colonial state.

In *No More Boats*, it is critical that in Australia, who occupies the position of "Other" changes over time. Castagna's novel sets up a disconnection in contemporary Australia between successive generations of immigrants and refugees who, rather than finding commonality in their shared experience, participate in and contribute to the Othering of the new incarnation of the figure of the refugee. The character Paul, who travelled to Australia on a boat from Vietnam with his parents, articulates this phenomenon to Antonio's daughter Clare, with an exchange characterised by the same "pronoun confusion" as the passage above:

> 'We don't say anything.' It sounded like a statement he'd been considering for a long time.
> 'What do you want me to say?'
> 'No not you. Us. Our generation of boat people, about these boat people. Actually you too, everyone. You don't say anything either. I'm not even sure if you care at all, other than finding the whole thing a nuisance. You know my community, we were refugees too. But, you know, not *like them*, as my mother would say.' (189)

As each successive group of refugees becomes established in their lives in Australia, they wish to differentiate themselves from the group who are currently being demonised by the government. For Antonio, who was expected to assimilate into a culture dominated by Anglo Australians, the work he did to blend in becomes a point of pride that he uses to set himself apart from later arrivals. As Clare says to Paul: "He's always had a thing about migrants these days not working as hard, not trying to fit in as much as he did, but you know, it's nothing extreme, just the usual racism, I guess" (135). Clare, who has grown up in Australia, recognises this

attitude as racism, rather than Antonio signalling his commonality with newer migrants. In the twenty-first century, one of the cultural groups subject to the most vociferous xenophobia in Australian are Muslim people, specifically Muslim people from Middle Eastern nations. This disconnection between successive "generations" is highlighted in the following passage, when Antonio and Rose's son Francis is compelled to help out at a party held by his parents:

> They were talking Tampa. Suddenly everyone is an expert on boat people. Everyone. Pass the plate. Of course we came by boats too. Can I have one of those toothpicks? But it was a different kind of boat. A serviette? On account of what they did to John Newman[71] we shouldn't let any more in. But they're not Asian anymore. They're Arabs. Can you go get me a beer son? They're Muslims this time. Like the ones on the news who raped the white girl, just like them. (53)

This passage makes clear the influence of the media on the Othering of specific cultural groups: the "ones on the news who raped the white girl" are the group of young men led by Bilal Skaf, who in 2001 was given the longest prison sentence ever imposed in Australia for sexual assault crimes, as discussed in Chapter 2.[72] In addition, the style of the paragraph – conversation interspersed with practical directives – stands out, because it is not used anywhere else in the text. Critically, from "pass the plate" onwards, the action-oriented phrases disappear, and the paragraph becomes an assemblage of fragmentary dialogue. This passage is focalised through the perspective of Francis, who is assisting his parents with the party, and overhearing former migrants saying racist things. The key phrase in this long passage is perhaps the idea that the asylum seekers are arriving on "a different kind of boat," which of course is irrelevant: the only difference is that they are unwelcome refugees, which stems almost entirely from the fact that they are non-white, mostly South Asian and Middle Eastern refugees.

This dynamic evidences how Australian cultural discourse works to isolate specific groups over time. While Muslims are still among the most vilified cultural groups in Australia, African Australians, too, receive vastly disproportionate negative media coverage stemming

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[71] John Newman was an Australian politician and a migrant from Austria who was murdered outside his home in Cabramatta in 1994. His killing was ordered by Phuong Ngo, a recent political opponent and former refugee from Vietnam.

[72] This case gained intense media attention because of the group's Lebanese Muslim background and the racially motivated element of the crimes. This media attention tended toward anti-multicultural sentiment. As Kate Gleeson argues, the intensity of the media coverage served to portray the Lebanese Muslim identity of the men as key to the crime, which obscures "the reality that gang rape is common across cultures […] [t]he media fixation on ethnicity and multiculturalism also obscures the fact that gang rape has been a part of the Sydney landscape since white conquest. It is neither a new nor a Lebanese phenomenon" (2004, 184).

from the presence of so-called African gangs in Melbourne.[73] As Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos contend, "[f]oreigner communities are now more readily positioned in the spaces made available by the detention centre asylum seekers whose current reception bears some remarkable similarities to the treatment of Southern European migrant communities prior to the adoption of multiculturalism" (2004, 46). Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos' statement echoes Lucy's reminder to Rose that the mechanisms of oppression remain mostly unchanged across decades.

The detention camps form the latest in a long line of camps which define significant events in Australian history. Palombo argues that camps play a critical role in constituting "white diasporic sovereignty." The camp has functioned through colonial history, Palombo argues, and through "its usurpation of Indigenous sovereignty, and its various historical incarnations as embodied in such forms as the colony, the plantation camps based on indentured labour, the Second World War internment camps and the detention centres for asylum seekers" (2009, 614). These camps can be seen as a symptom of settler-colonial onto-pathology, evidencing the continual need for white Australians to justify their occupation of the land through domination and control. The function of camps such as these has been described most notably by Agamben,[74] who argues that the phenomenon of the camp "is produced at the point at which the political system of the modern nation-state […] enters in a lasting crisis, and the State decides to assume directly the care of the nation's biological life as one of its tasks" (1998, 175). The consequence of the state assuming direct care for the nation's biological life is the opening of a condition in which a camp can be created. Agamben argues that the camps were "born not out of ordinary law (even less, as one might have supposed, from a transformation and development of criminal law), but out of a state of exception and martial law" (1997, 106). The phrase "state of exception" becomes key here, as the existence of the camp – just as the existence of Australia's detention centres – is predicated on the idea of the state of exception.

Boochani's text addresses the contradiction of being both imprisoned by and excluded from Australia. Writing of a space in Manus Prison previously used for teaching the children of

[73] In a report from the Victorian Government's Crime Statistics Agency, it was confirmed that in the state of Victoria, Sudanese immigrants are responsible for just 1.1% of all crimes (2018).

[74] Agamben's writings about the Nazi concentration camps have become deeply influential on post-9/11 scholarship in the context of the securitisation of immigration and with regards to other immigration detention facilities such as the US-run military prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

detainees, Boochani says: "[t]his space is part of Australia's legacy and a central feature of its history – this place is Australia itself – this right here is Australia" (158). Successive governments have worked to excise asylum seekers arriving by boat – as well as the offshore processing centres where they are held – not only from Australia's migration zones but also from its public imagination. Boochani reiterates that, on Manus, what is being done in the name of Australia means that this space *is* part of Australia. Several scholars have theorised the Australian detention camp through the lens of Agamben's works; my analysis of the depiction of the camp in Boochani and Castagna's texts builds on their criticism (Perera 2002; Palombo 2009; Boochani 2016; Khoo 2017). As Lana Zannettino writes:

> With the setting up of Australian-run camps on the small Pacific island state of Nauru and on the island of Manus in Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Solution represented the government's most blatant attempt to create the purest space of exception – the designation of camps in Third World countries where detainees would have absolutely no access to the Australian legal system and no possibility of ever being able to seek asylum in Australia. (2012, 1102)

The fact that the prisoners are held in a state of exception is emphasised by the complete lack of common humanity between those who are detained and those who enforce their detainment. On Manus Island, the proxy of the sovereign is embodied by the Australian Border Force (ABF) guards, who are the employees of a private contractor, many of whom, Boochani writes, are "ex-servicemen who have served for years in Afghanistan and Iraq […] [t]hey have killed humans" (142–143). Behrouz describes the guards using a series of non-human metaphors. Firstly, they are likened to "hostile animals"; they "seem much bigger when their shadows emerge in the darkness" (142). Second, they are seen as disembodied parts, as Behrouz isolates specific images describing the guards' bodies in grotesque ways: the guards are characterised by violence that "oozes out through their blurred, dilated pupils" (143); one guard has such a huge stomach "that it is disproportionate to the other parts of his body […] his skinny legs are just hanging off his massive gut, a disgusting pair of limbs stuck onto his body" (143). Finally, they are described as non-human again, as "robots following orders" (144). These descriptions can be seen as both a purposeful dehumanisation that emphasises the guards' lack of empathy for the prisoners, as well as an attempt to reclaim some agency by dissecting the guards' mannerisms and bodies, turning the guards' constant surveillance of the prisoners back onto the guards themselves.

The neocolonial aspects of Manus Prison are again reinforced through Boochani's description of the relationship between the Australian guards, the Manus guards, and the prisoners. The Manus guards are described by Boochani as being kinder to the asylum seekers, more lenient, less willing to impose punitive measures. The Australians, on the other hand, are

depicted as being violent and needlessly cruel. The ABF guards act as the representative will of Australia, despite the fact that Behrouz is in PNG, not Australia. Boochani himself has engaged with the idea of Manus Island as a state of exception. In an article published in *Overland*, Boochani writes, "It's a blurry place, and something that we see in our situation incarcerated on Manus, where we are both bound to, and at the same time abandoned by, Australian law" (2016). This paradoxical idea refers back to Agamben's concept of bare life, life "that is without rights and excluded from the juridico-political order, while being at the same time subject to its sovereign power" (Palombo 2009, 615). The excision of Australia's migration zone, and its agreements with Nauru and PNG, have enabled the creation of these states of exception that allow the conditions for the perpetuation of bare life.

Boochani's text can be seen to narrate the state of bare life especially through its nature as a contemporary example of carceral literature. *No Friend but the Mountains* was written in tiny fragments, typed as text messages and sent out of Manus Prison using WhatsApp on a contraband mobile phone to Boochani's translator. The "smuggled-out" quality of Boochani's work is extremely distinctive; the fact that *No Friend but the Mountains* exists at all is a triumph. The text joins other significant examples of carceral literature such as Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* and Antonio Gramsci's *The Prison Notebooks*. Marc Lamont Hill defines confinement literature as "any work of fiction or nonfiction that deals with the fundamental issue of human captivity. While this often refers to the writing of individuals living within the modern-day prison system, it also encompasses other sites of containment such as slave plantations and concentration camps, as well as allegorical and fictive spaces" (2013, 19). The Australian Government's direct interference with the asylum seekers' boat journeys reflects the detention camps' function as a biopolitical space.[75] In the specific context of Australia, "[t]he camp is a biopolitical formation that operates both within and outside the law to immunize white colonial sovereignty from challenges to the validity of its own authority" (Palombo 2009, 614). The prison works to perpetuate the kyriarchal system and the hegemony of the settler-colonial state.

[75] This interpretation is drawn from Michel Foucault's development of the concept of biopolitics, based on the idea that "the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death" (1976, 138). Biopolitics operates through all of the mechanisms of power which enable the state to foster or disallow life. Scholars agree that the camp functions as a biopolitical exercise of sovereignty. According to Achille Mbembe, "[t]o exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power" (2003, 12).

In Boochani's text, Behrouz describes the experience of captivity in often visceral detail: the routine yet dehumanising nature of queueing for food and basic items such as razors, the punitive and oppressive tactics of the ABF guards, the experience of living under surveillance, and the toll taken on the prisoners by the lack of available information regarding their futures. Furthermore, Behrouz's experience is, in many critical ways, *more* oppressive than being held in a prison. In a seminar held at Monash University in May 2019, Boochani's translator Omid Tofighian contacted Boochani on Manus Island by phone. In the seminar "Re-treating Literature and Politics through *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* by Behrouz Boochani," Boochani noted that, were the prisoners incarcerated in a regular prison, they would be entitled to scheduled recreational time (2019). The chaos of Manus Prison, Boochani claimed, means that the inmates on the island do not receive scheduled recreation time, just as they have been denied legal due process, and therefore have no certainty of when their incarceration will end.

5.3.3 Floods, fluids and bodies out of place

In their shared focus on refugee subjectivities, both *No More Boats* and *No Friend but the Mountains* depict the abject body. They not only represent refugees as bodies beyond a border, bodies out of place, but they also emphasise the abject body's adjacency to death. Critically, the abject is that which is cast out when there is a perceived threat to the dichotomy of subject and object; the border between self and other. Kristeva describes the abject as caused not by: "the lack of cleanliness or health […] but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). The abject is what is cast out when the subject reacts to the threatened breakdown of the border between self and other. In a bodily sense, the abject is vomit, it is excrement. But the abject is also the refugee, who disturbs the border between national belonging and exclusion.

Kristeva argues that the corpse is representative of the endpoint of this breakdown: a corpse represents the triumph of the object over the subject. The delineation between subject and object is necessary for the operation of the body. As Kristeva asks, "how can I be without border?" (1982, 4). Communities are defined by those who are included in them (the self) as much as by who is excluded from them (the other). This idea is also elaborated by Judith Butler, who writes that "[t]he construction of the 'not-me' as the abject establishes the boundaries of the

body which are also the first contours of the abject" (1990, 2546). The abject is fundamentally linked to both body and nation. I briefly engaged with this idea in Chapter 3, when discussing Tom Loxley's concerns over becoming abject, being expelled "from the body of the nation" (de Kretser 2007, 252). If Tom's fears in de Kretser's *The Lost Dog* were ultimately unfounded, then Boochani's text can be seen as playing them out in full.

In *No More Boats*, Antonio's growing xenophobia throughout the text is based not explicitly on racial intolerance but instead on a concern about gentrification and overpopulation, although it is often expressed through references to the refugees on the *Tampa*. The metaphor of flooding – of water being where it is not supposed to be, of water breaching bulwarks – is threaded throughout the text. The centrality of this metaphor is established from the text's beginning, where "at this moment […] where the story begins and ends, there was flooding too" (5). It appears for the first time in the opening pages:

> On the TV talk of inundation and floods, rising tides, tsunamis of human beings coming across the ocean, all headed here. A watery invasion threatening to drag us under. Too many boats. Same thing they've been anxious about since yesterday, the day before that, two hundred years ago. (5)

This passage is particularly interesting due to the shifting pronouns used. At first, the threat of invasion is threatening to "drag us under" – aligning Antonio with settler Australian anxieties about immigration – but is also the thing "they've been anxious about since […] two hundred years ago," evoking Indigenous Australia's invasion by the British. The threat of invasion is both something that Antonio feels, as well as that which defines the colonial project of Australia, and in which, as a recent migrant, he had no part. As Anthony Burke argues, "security is imagined on the basis of a bounded and vulnerable identity in perpetual opposition to an outside – an *Other* – whose character and claims threaten its integrity and safety" (2008, 4). Non-Anglo migrants to Australia, however, may have an ambivalent relation to the idea of a "bounded" and "perpetual opposition to an outsider," instead occupying a "contradictory colonial location" (Hage 2003, 96) with regard to their relationship to colonisation. As Hage explains, on one hand, "migration is […] in an important sense, a continuation of the colonisation process," while on the other hand, "migrants have shared some important realities with Indigenous people too. Enduring the racist 'White Australia Policy' for example" (96). Further, Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos argue that this contradictory location is also complicated by the fact that "by recognising white Australian authority, the Southern European becomes fully complicit in the ongoing violent dispossession of the Indigenous peoples and the nation-building processes that manifest our

collective criminal will" (2004, 46). In his relation to anxieties over invasion, then, Antonio's liminal position is emphasised once again.

Gradually, as the novel progresses, Castagna reveals the circumstances of Antonio's departure from Calabria and contextualises his preoccupation with floods and overpopulation. The homes in his village in Italy became vulnerable due to their low-quality construction and the land being excavated to accommodate more buildings. Antonio transfers the traumatic experience of losing his parents suddenly and at a young age into these anxieties about flooding and overpopulation. In Australia, these anxieties are transferred onto the asylum seekers aboard the *Tampa*. Antonio is haunted by water because he lost his parents in a landslide caused by rain that "came and then came some more;" the mountainside homes in his village "turned to mud;" they "became bloated and collapsed and the people went with them" (81). Antonio's experience of the landslide that killed his parents is what sends him on his own journey to board a boat to Australia.

In a key moment of remembrance, Antonio recalls seeing the corpse of a victim of the landslides: he envisions "that woman, back in the big flood of '53" whose face he "remembered more than his own mother's" (82). The long-lasting impression of this unidentified woman is underscored by the specific details that Antonio recalls: her blue dress "twisted above her knees," the "dirt caught in the lines around her eyes […] the way her limp arms hung around the base of a tree in his parent's orchard" (82). The image of the woman returns to haunt Antonio in 2001: "he saw the woman in the blue dress everywhere that winter, she was the woman screaming for her son in the main street, she was the woman who jumped the bread queue, she was the reflection in the window from his parents' house, the remnants of which he'd found in the dirt at the base of the mountain" (82). By juxtaposing this succession of images against one another, Castagna draws together the victim of the landslide, a woman on the street, the figure of the "queue-jumper" (this time seeking bread, rather than safety), and Antonio himself, who is presumably shown in the reflection of the broken window from his parents' house. As though to underscore this point, Castagna concludes the chapter with a fragment of Howard's speech, broken over three lines, like a poem: "*The circumstances / in which / they come*" (82). The enjambment of Howard's phrases in this way transforms them into a sort of lament. It also invokes the lyrics of the Australian national anthem, especially the lines which Howard's xenophobic words directly contradict: "*For those who've come across the seas / We've boundless plains to share*."

Boochani's text emphasises that the abjection of bodies is key to their oppression inside Manus Prison. Throughout *No Friend but the Mountains*, Boochani repeatedly pays attention to the appearance, smell, and function of the bodies of the prisoners as well as those of their captors. The prisoners' bodies are oppressed through confinement, regulation, subjection to filthy places, and withholding of personal hygiene items. Boochani returns to these corporeal details again and again, creating a visceral impression. Describing the prisoners, he writes, "all together they stink like a fast-rotting corpse" (150), he conjures "the affliction of the awful smell of bad breath, circulating the room" (151), and "the stench of hairy men's foul breath and sweat, sleeping alongside each other – this is more disgusting than the sewage gathered outside the tunnel. Like the smell of a dead dog, this stench sometimes combines with the smell of shit" (152). The text describes the prisoners as living corpses, beginning to break down while they are still alive. The oppressive heat not only affects the prisoners, but also the Border Force guards: the "faces of the Australians: bright-red faces … blood-red faces. Australians with fat asses … sweaty ass cracks flowing like rivers" (153). Boochani's focus on the bodily fluids of sweat and blood underscores the oppressive environment's impact on all those who inhabit it illegitimately. While the prisoners and guards start to melt and decompose, the heat does not affect the local guards in the same way.

The primacy of the theme of death and the breakdown of bodies in the text emphasises the idea of Australia's offshore processing facilities as a thanatopolitical or necropolitical regime. If biopolitics is related to how states manage and preserve some lives, thanatopolitics is expressed in how states limit, disallow and extinguish other lives. What is key here is the zero-sum game of how and why states choose which lives will be preserved and which will be disallowed. As François Debrix explains, "[f]or some populations' lives to be maintained or expanded, other populations (and individual bodies) must be sacrificed and their lives must be rendered pointless or obsolete" (2016, 4). According to this argument, on Manus Island, the Australian Government is administering not a biopolitical regime, but a thanatopolitical regime. Behrouz echoes this notion when he describes his feeling of being discarded; of being rendered pointless:

> I am a piece of meat thrown into an unknown land; a prison of filth and heat. I dwell among a sea of people with faces stained and shaped by anger, faces scarred with hostility. Every week, one or two planes land in the island's wreck of an airport and throngs of people disembark. Hours later, they are tossed into the prison among the deafening ruckus of displaced people, like sheep to a slaughterhouse. (121)

Boochani's figurative language illuminates the experience of dehumanisation. He is "a piece of meat;" the refugees are tossed like "sheep to a slaughterhouse." The metaphor of the abattoir is particularly potent: the asylum seekers are on Manus Island specifically to be "processed," a euphemism often used in the production of meat. The refugees are left in this state indefinitely; they have no purpose there other than to deter other refugees from attempting to reach Australia by boat.

The prison's toilet block becomes a central metaphor for the subjugation of the asylum seekers: as Boochani writes, "the toilets are a cache for all the suffering spawned from other parts of the prison" (170). What the toilet block signifies within the prison, as a place where the border of the physical body is reinscribed through the process of expelling waste, is central to Kristeva's work on abjection. She writes of excrement and the abject body, "[s]uch wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere* [fall], cadaver" (3). In the toilet block, the prisoners are granted some mental reprieve, "if only for a few minutes" (169), although the toilet block is filthy, with "piss up to the ankle" (160). It is also the place that represents the control of the ABF guards, who are "seated just outside […] as if their gaze has the power to penetrate the wooden doors and pollute the space" (170). In some ways, their power is lessened here, as the prisoners are granted temporary privacy. But the guards' location outside the block reminds the prisoners that they are under the control of this regime. Boochani describes it as "a chamber that encapsulates history" (170), a place where "someone takes hold of one of those razors with the blue handles, chooses the most appropriate toilet, and over there, in the moments that follow, warm blood flows on the cement floor" (171). The toilet block becomes the locus of all the suffering and desperation expressed under the conditions of indefinite detention. It is "a location of the clash between terror, hopelessness and outbursts of deep anguish. For this reason, the location embodies an uncanny sense of awe, an eerie spirit" (171). The moments of privacy that the space grants the prisoners enables them to express emotion, momentarily, outside the gaze of the prison. The idea of the space as being defined by a "sense of awe" and an "eerie spirit," where prisoners attempt to take their own lives, reinforces its location as a liminal zone, a space between life and death. In locating the toilet block as the centre of suffering in the prison, Boochani refocuses on the visceral reality of the regulated and surveilled body as the victim of Australia's fantasies of insecurity.

5.4 Liminality and disconnection: writing refugee subjectivities

Having established that the texts complicate the idea of the border as it relates to themes of invasion and the body, I turn in this section to an examination of how the texts thematise identity as similarly subverting an inside/outside relationship between belonging and exclusion. In *No More Boats*, Antonio internalises the logic of assimilation, which makes him vulnerable to anti-immigration rhetoric about balance and control. Despite this, however, his identity as a Southern European migrant marks him as an "inside-outsider" (Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos 2004, 45). In *No Friend but the Mountains*, Boochani describes the asylum seekers' existence within the border zone as one beyond the system of national belonging, and in which the prisoners evolve their own systems of identity and commonality. I read Behrouz's negotiation of belonging through the anthropological idea of abjectivity, developed to refer to the state of being of "illegitimate" migrants in the US and Israel.

5.4.1 Whiteness, liminality and the "perpetual-foreigner-within"

Castagna's novel illustrates how demanding and damaging the policy of assimilation can be. Although he is from Europe, Antonio fits within the category of migrants who were not accepted into Australia prior to the 1960s. As Stratton writes:

> 'white' is a culturally constructed category. By the 1960s in Australia, it had shifted its meaning from 'British' and 'northern European' to include, first, northern Italians, and subsequently southern Italians, Greeks, Maltese and people from the Levant, most importantly Lebanese and Turkish people. In other words, there had been a shift from the highly restrictive definition of white which characterised pre-World War II Australian usage, to the more usual European usage which equated 'European' with 'white', with the inclusion of a very few groups from geographically just outside Europe. (1998, 46)

As a migrant from Southern Europe, on his arrival to Australia, Antonio's sense of belonging is accompanied by a heightened awareness of its conditionality. In Italy, after leaving behind the wreckage of his parents' house, Antonio boards a ship with the knowledge, gained from a friend in the village, that "you needed to be two-thirds white to get into Australia but no one seemed to know what that meant" (Castagna 215). From the beginning of his time in Australia, after doing the "populate-or-perish thing in the late '50s" (135), Antonio has an ambiguous understanding of what is expected of him and what exactly he should do in order to fit in. Once he arrives at Villawood Migrant Hostel and meets Nico, he finds a point of entry into the culture of his adopted home. Although Nico himself has not long arrived in Australia, he knows "where to

look for a job and what land to build on and how you talk to Australians" (25). Antonio is less able to clearly understand the cultural practices to which he must adapt, although he does his best to learn from Nico.

This ambiguity, and Antonio's subsequent confusion, are indicative of Antonio's location in a position of perpetual liminality. He works hard to assimilate, but cannot escape the perpetually foreign positionality of "southern and/or eastern European migrants, who occupied the discursive position of 'marginal whites'" (Stratton 1999, 177). Antonio marries and has a family, and remains committed to adopting his new nationality. When his daughter Clare makes a collage of Italy for "multicultural day" at school, Castagna writes, Antonio "just stared blankly at it and said, 'We're Australian. I'm Australian'" (99). In embracing a mainstream Australian identity, Antonio attempts to erase both his Italian identity as well as his experience as a migrant. Despite his efforts and sacrifices, however, Antonio never fully achieves the belonging he seeks. At night, Antonio drinks whisky while driving around a gated community he helped to build, stopping outside the house where Nico died. Suddenly, Nico appears beside him, "light, unbroken" (26). Antonio says to him: "'You know, I was everything they told me to be, I did the jobs they told me to do, never complained, worked hard, stopped speaking my own language, looked the other way when they called me names. Now, everything is different, what a waste. They laugh at me when I speak'" (27). Castagna points to the falsely transactional nature of assimilation. Antonio has willingly and fundamentally re-moulded himself – "stopped speaking my own language" – on the promise of achieving a sense of belonging in his adopted homeland. Instead, he finds that his efforts are being denied; his version of Australianness is shown to be a joke. His inclusion in Australia remains conditional, despite the fact that he has worked for decades to belong. This conditionality reiterates the idea that:

> On the one hand, from Federation official White Australia policy identified Southern Europeans, unlike other categories of immigrants, as having the potential to be white enough for naturalisation purposes. On the other hand, Anglophone official and public discourses have systematically constructed the Southern European communities as sites that the foreigners inhabit conditionally. That is, quite apart from migrant community members' legal status and self-understandings, through the familiar markers of racialisation, their place in the country has been made dependent on conformity to a certain inside-outsider status (Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos 2004, 45)

This "inside-outsider" status is fundamentally linked to the idea that the category of whiteness was "expanded" to include Southern European migrants who, prior to the 1960s, were considered non-white (Haggis 2004). As has been established in the Introduction to this thesis, Australian national identity centres on whiteness above all other discourses of belonging.

Southern European migrants come to occupy a particularly liminal position relative to the discourse of whiteness, having crossed from "non-white" to "white enough."

As Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos go on to explain, however, belonging to the category of whiteness is not an either/or; instead, Southern European migrants end up occupying a category of "white-non-white" or "white-but-not-white-enough." This position of liminality is necessary to maintain the settler-colonial system, they argue, because Indigenous Australians never ceded their sovereignty to the colonisers. "White-non-white" Southern European migrants therefore come to occupy this role. Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos contend that "[t]he foreigner who is positioned to give recognition must also remain distinguishable from the dominant white Australian. This is because the white anxiety that derives from the criminality harboured in the national imaginary needs the migrant to remain forever dependent on the dominant white Australians who grant us permission to stay on" (2004, 46). The process of assimilation then becomes an act of recognition. Although Antonio arrives while the policy of assimilation is in place, *No More Boats* is set decades later, in 2001. By this time, Australian conservatives have moved away from multiculturalism: as discussed in Chapter 2, then-Prime Minister John Howard enacted a "symbolic retreat from multiculturalism" (Moran 2017, 110) under the guise of promoting national unity. The novel's setting in 2001 means that like many of the other novels studied in this thesis, it foregrounds key flashpoints of nationalism such as the *Tampa* controversy and the attacks on the World Trade Centre.

Antonio's turn toward anti-immigration rhetoric can therefore be seen as an attempt to overcome his perpetual "inside-outsider" status. John Howard discouraged public debate over national identity, or what he characterised in the 1996 Sir Robert Menzies Lecture as "endless and agonised navel-gazing about who we are or, as seems to have happened over recent years, as part of a 'perpetual seminar' for elite opinion about our national identity" (1996). In characterising the culture under the previous Keating government as having been dictated by "elite opinion," Howard was referring to Labor's support for multiculturalism and Indigenous rights (the latter through the passing of the historic *Native Title Act 1993*). In a notable strategic move, Howard oriented his leadership at stepping away from difficult conversations about national identity, while criticising Keating for what he saw as an "attempted heist of Australian identity" (Johnson 2007, 195). As someone who has been unable to assimilate with Australian culture in a way that generates a feeling of authentic belonging, Antonio is vulnerable to Howard's calls to move away from evaluative discourse around what it means to be Australian.

This dynamic recalls Hage's argument, reiterated throughout this thesis, that multiculturalism in Australia has served to perpetuate the dominant position of white Australians through a logic of control and domination. Antonio is seen to become vulnerable to the populist logic of anti-multiculturalism. In the novel, he attends a presentation by Phillip Ruddock, then-Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, at his local RSL club. As part of the presentation, Ruddock displays a graph with red, green and blue lines to signify three different approaches to immigration in the future: the green line "edged up surely and steadily" across the graph, which Ruddock explains represents "balance in migration." "'What we want,' he said, 'what the ordinary everyday Australian wants to see is for us to achieve that green line.' *The green line*" (91, emphasis original). This focus on the idea of balance recalls Hage's argument that anti-multicultural sentiment is often predicated on the idea of "national spatial control" and "maintaining the balance" (1998, 186). The key to this mechanism – as has also been explored in Chapter 3 – is that both white nationalists and white multiculturalists feel entitled to assume the role of deciding what this balance should look like. Ruddock's rhetoric appeals to Antonio: he is "a man that understood about lines" (91). The narrator continues, "he thought about the places that had shaped him as different patterns of lines: the erratic contours of the hills in Calabria, the straight, straight rows of Nissen huts at the Villawood Migrant Hostel, the squares within squares of the family home he had built" (91). To Antonio, the "green line" of slow and steady migration reflects his perception that he has done the right thing; he considers himself a part of that green line. After leaving behind the "erratic" hills of his home, he follows a conformist path, staying within the "straight rows" of huts, building a sturdy home assembled from squares. By following the rules of migration and assimilation, he distinguishes himself from those he perceives as attempting to "jump the queue," or to do the wrong thing. As Rooney argues, "Castagna […] works with the unease and alienation attending settler-migrant experience and its potential to coalesce with reactionary populism" (Rooney 161). At the beginning of the novel, Francis witnesses coverage of the Tampa incident on television:

> On the news was a big ship and a big ocean. The only small things were the tiny dots of people sitting around shipping containers on the deck. Then there was John Howard and his eyebrows and he was saying, 'ordinary, average Australians,' over and over again, and it was all very serious and Francis couldn't get at the words. (10)

This phrase – "ordinary, average Australians" – is repeated several other times throughout the text. Howard himself is described as an "average, ordinary type of Australian man" (77); Phillip Ruddock uses the phrase with reference to his green line. The phrase "ordinary, average Australians" has several functions. It reifies a normative and singular category of Australian

identity. It enables the projection of an identity which has the implied quality of being moderate and reasonable. It has the double effect of enticing people who want to be considered as ordinary and average – for example, migrants who occupy an "inside-outsider" identity – as well as casting anyone opposed to Howard's approach as being not ordinary. The rhetoric of this government betrays the motivations of its politics: by appealing endlessly to the "average" Australian, Howard both creates a normative category of aspiration, as well as implicitly criticising "elites."

5.4.2 Inhabiting the border: the condition of abjectivity

By reading Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* as an example of a state-of-the-nation text, I purposefully expand the space of the Australian nation to include its excised spaces and offshore prisons, the places that are designated as "not-Australia." As argued throughout this thesis, my exploration of state-of-the-nation literature has focused on texts that challenge and resist the dominant discourse of white settler-colonial subjectivity. In this section, I examine Boochani's text through the lens of the abject. Not only does Boochani's text represent a refugee subjectivity that has been excluded from Australian public discourse, but this text goes beyond the duality of subjectivity and objectivity in order to present a condition of abjection. In this section, I turn to how the asylum seekers are forced to live their lives within the border's zone of contestation, and how this liminality impacts their interpersonal relationships.

The concept of abjection as it relates to the experience of asylum seekers and refugees has been adopted by scholars of "cosmopolitanisms from below," as mentioned briefly in the introduction to this chapter. At first glance, the term "abject cosmopolitan" reads as an oxymoron: how can a person who is made "abject" also be cosmopolitan? Peter Nyers deals with this apparent contradiction, writing that "[t]he abject is not just an adjective qualifying the noun 'cosmopolitan'. Instead, the abject-subject has an important constitutive role in self/other encounters and relationships – including those of the cosmopolitan variety" (2003, 1073). In other words, in the same way that the subject "casts out" the abject, and in doing so, defines the boundaries of the subject, those who are "at home in the world" could not exist without those who are "at home nowhere." This formulation is germane not only to the abject–subject dynamic within the idea of the cosmopolitan but also as it applies to the asylum seekers' expulsion from the system of national belonging.

Butler's concept of the "not-me" is evocative of Perera's concept of "not-Australia": territory which has been cast out from Australia's migration zone despite being within its maritime borders (as in the example of a place such as Christmas Island) or in fact despite being part of the Australian mainland (as in the example of Villawood IIRC). While a cosmopolitan, in the traditional sense, is defined by their ability to belong anywhere, the abject cosmopolitan is cast out from their home nation, and the asylum seeker is cast out from the system of nation-states altogether. Butler summarises the importance of the border in constituting a stable subject: "'[i]nner' and 'outer' make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability. And this stability, this coherence, is determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject. Hence, 'inner' and 'outer' constitute a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject" (1990, 2547). This metaphor can be applied equally to the bodily subject and to the idea of national or community identity.

Part of the radical importance of Boochani's text derives from its singularity in Australian public discourse. In Australia, refugees and asylum seekers are very often spoken about, but they rarely have a chance to speak. When asylum seekers are spoken about in Australian public discourse, for example, by parliamentarians or journalists, their individual identities are usually elided from the conversation. Instead, public discourse in Australia around asylum seekers often focuses on boats. Boats are perceived to be the carriers of "queue-jumpers" or "illegals"; while scant media coverage is dedicated to refugees arriving by aeroplane. Boat arrivals seem to trigger anti-refugee discourse in a powerful way in Australia. The sheer size of Australia means that there are many thousands of kilometres of unpatrolled land border available for settlement. This is, at any rate, the narrative advanced by anti-immigration advocates. Politicians exploit the idea of "anti-human smuggling backlash" (Taras 2018, 31) to advance a narrative in which "turn-back" policies are aimed at saving the lives of asylum seekers from Indonesian boat operators, while de-emphasising the fact that the asylum seekers face dehumanisation in crowded, dirty and prolonged confinement.

The effect of this discourse is that there has been very little space in Australian public discourse for the expression of refugee subjectivity. In light of the lack of this subjectivity, I utilise the concept of abjectivity, a portmanteau word incorporating both abjection and subjectivity, as it applies to the condition of migrants. Several other scholars have contributed to the study of this concept of abjectivity as a state of being, primarily through anthropological

frameworks. Sarah S. Willen is credited with the first use of the term as it relates to migrant "illegality" in an ethnographic study of undocumented workers in Tel Aviv, Israel (2007). Willen's argument is based around expanding the category of what it means to "be illegal" to include not only a migrant's juridical status and socio-political condition, but also the dimension of being illegal as a mode of "being-in-the-world" (9). Roberto G. Gonzalez and Leo R. Chavez (2012) take up Willen's theorisation and apply it to undocumented "1.5 generation" Latino migrants in the United States. Gonzalez and Chavez focus on the experience of living in a state of abjectivity.[76] They also elaborate on the link between the condition of abjectivity and the work of Foucault and Agamben on biopolitics and governmentality. Gonzalez and Chavez describe how through a process of Othering, particular subjects are marked as different, dangerous, or otherwise stigmatised, which allows them to be marginalised into states of exception. "When taken to its extreme," they write, "the state can target such exceptions, physically separate them from society, isolate them into 'zones of social abandonment,' and even engage in practices of genocide, extermination, or ethnic cleansing" (257). The Australian Government can be seen to treat asylum seekers in this way. Asylum seekers are othered by public discourse in Australia, and are subsequently kept physically separate from society, driven by stereotypes around "queue-jumping," welfare dependency, and the threat of terrorism. They also face the threat of *refoulement*.[77]

The work of Gonzalez and Chavez has been extended more recently by Basia D. Ellis et al (2019) who study migrants in the United States who have received protection from deportation under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program introduced in 2012. Ellis et al use the concept of abjectivity as a category of identity which captures how undocumented

[76] Gonzalez and Chavez argue that "[a]bjectivity is the effect of social forces, but we must also ask about the causes of that condition. We argue that the practices of the biopolitics of citizenship and governmentality – surveillance, immigration documents, employment forms, birth certificates, tax forms, drivers' licenses, credit card applications, bank accounts, medical insurance, and mandatory car insurance – may frustrate anyone, citizen and noncitizen alike, because they enclose, penetrate, define, and limit one's life and actions. But for undocumented 1.5 generation Latino immigrants (and others in a similar status), these practices of governmental contact and surveillance can create enormous distress, detention, and even deportation" (256).

[77] *Refoulement* refers to the forced return of asylum seekers either to their country of origin or to another country where they will be vulnerable to persecution. The principle of non-*refoulement* is protected under international human rights law.

migrants are both "formally excluded [from] yet socially included" (4) in US society (2019).[78] My analysis builds on the previous work of these scholars, bringing it to a narrative and representational framework and applying it, for the first time, to these particular Australian texts. In addition, while these sociological research projects have their focus on undocumented migrant workers and undocumented minors respectively, this chapter has as its focus the figure of the asylum seeker. Undocumented migrants, while denied the security of permanent residency or citizenship privilege, are at least settled within their respective receiving countries. Asylum seekers – particularly those on Manus Island and Nauru – are not only denied security and settlement, but they are prohibited from entering their intended receiving country in the first place, and are subject to indefinite detainment without due process. The asylum seekers' condition of abjectivity means that they are excluded from the system of nations, and instead are forced to live *within* the border itself. This condition is vividly represented in Boochani's text, where all relationships are rendered contingent.

In *No Friend but the Mountains*, Boochani represents the asylum seekers who find themselves on the people smugglers' boat – and then on Christmas Island and Manus Island – as, in some perverse way, a community of people who inhabit the contestation zone of the border. They are thrown together by circumstance with other people from all over the world. But the fact that they have been forced into exile does not necessarily precipitate any kind of commonality with their fellow refugees. As asylum seekers, they have been cast or driven out of their home nations by persecution or danger, and while on their journey to Australia, they are extremely unsafe: the Australian Border Deaths Database has recorded a total of 2,017 deaths since 2000.[79]

Over the course of the text, Boochani pays attention to how the bonds between strangers shift and change dependent on their situation. In some circumstances, the strangers share food and accommodate one another; at other times, an individualistic desperation takes over. Upon boarding the boat that will attempt to take the group to Australia, Boochani writes, no one will

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[78] Their study involved conducting interviews with undocumented migrants who had received protection under DACA, and found that this protection significantly improved their lives; however, the migrants remained acutely aware that this protection did not provide them with a path to residency or citizenship (2019, 8).

[79] This database seeks to record "all reported deaths associated with Australian border controls" since 2000. The authors of this report utilise a definition of border-related death that includes people who died while "en route to Australia (both inside and outside Australia's border surveillance zone), while in onshore or offshore detention, during border enforcement operations, in community contexts where there is direct evidence of a link to border control (for example, suicides following receipt of rejection letters or in protest against border policies) and following return to countries of origin or transit (in the rare cases where this is reported)" (Weber et al 2019).

make a space for a Sri Lankan family to sit together. He describes a struggle that "reeks of violence and bloodshed […] over a location the size of one body" (13). As large waves batter the boat, and Behrouz works with the captain's assistants – those whom he ironically titles The Blue Eyed Boy and The Friend of the Blue Eyed Boy – to bail water out of the engine room, the infighting subsides: "we are tired and burned out but I think we feel a sense of solidarity, a common cause" (21). After they have been rescued from the fishing boat, Behrouz writes that "[a]part from the obvious differences and degrees of kindness and cruelty, and regardless of whatever lay underneath the layers of their personalities, these people have one thing in common […] [t]hey have withstood the kinds of torment that are akin to death" (69). Boochani shows, in this scene, how the life-threatening experience of seeking asylum enables the refugees to build a sense of fellow-feeling despite the fact they have come from different continents and do not speak the same language.

In one instance, Behrouz encounters someone from the same region as him and who *does* speak his language. While preparing to board a plane from Christmas Island to Manus Island, he encounters a Kurdish interpreter at the airport and feels bonded to her through their shared presence so far from Kurdistan. He imagines a kind of kinship between them, which he also extends to her thoughts and memories: "[h]er fate is like mine; she has left everything behind and come to Australia. It doesn't matter on what vessel she has travelled to get to this land: whether on a rotting boat or by plane. I feel that when she looks at me, she recollects her pain" (98). They do not interact, however; Behrouz is made to board the airplane to Manus Island. Behrouz's brief feeling of kinship is undermined by the presence of photojournalists, clamouring for pictures of the asylum seekers. Interpellated into the role of asylum seeker, Behrouz is already separated from the Kurdish interpreter: he is banished to not-Australia. Behrouz becomes cognisant of the fact that he is being made an example of: "[t]hey gaze at me, witnessing […] the two officers dragging me like a dangerous criminal" (99). Behrouz is conscious of being drawn into a role without agency, without the opportunity to connect. This journey to the plane marks Behrouz's transition into abjectivity.

Once the refugees are on Manus Island, they slowly begin to form social bonds, but these bonds are fundamentally unstable. Boochani writes, "[t]his is particular to prison: one can't harbour animosity towards another for a long time. This principle is also true when it comes to friendship" (163). The contingency of all relationships under an oppressive regime is clear: despite the fact that each boat journey has forged a collective identity, the interpersonal

relationships between prisoners remain fractious. The stress of living under the carceral regime taints even the most mundane interactions, to the point where "the very act of saying 'hi' is transformed into a source of affliction," (164) that prisoners pretend not to see one another, "like shadows, just passing each other" (165). The metaphor of "affliction" underscores the prisoners' total domination, where "[h]atred runs through every prisoner" (165) like a virus, or a poison in the blood. Moreover, the description of prisoners as "shadows" represents their transformation by this poison: the way that they become almost spiritually hollowed-out or insubstantial as a result of their incarceration. As well as metaphors of sickness, the crowds of men are also described in animalistic metaphors: "a wild aggression runs through their blood" (124), "a prisoner notices the tiniest change like a blind mouse that only has its sense of smell" (125), "we are bats in a dark cave that react to the slightest vibrations" (125), "the prison is like a zoo full of animals of different colours and scents" (122), they are a "jungle full of people who band together in peculiar ways" (123). Both sets of metaphors indicate that the affinities and conflicts among the men are the result of instinctual or natural phenomena, beyond their control. Dehumanised by the system and deprived of freedom, they come to rely on their senses.

This animal nature is linked to the ways the prisoners form relationships: Boochani writes "time will be necessary, a long time, before all these male bodies, all rooted in their particular homelands and cultures, can get along together" (122). As time goes on, however, the prisoners begin creating their own systems of belonging within the detention facility. Boochani writes:

> The simplest way to gain status is to identify with a group. That is, to affiliate yourself with other individuals you think share your identity; people who are going through the same set of circumstances as you […] A kind of internal migration takes place in our tiny prison. Slowly, gradually, the significance of the shared boat experience gives way to the importance of shared language. (However, in all the years in the prison, people who experienced the boat journey together will insist on their bond. They constantly remind each other not to forget the brotherhood created by the experience: "remember that we are GDD, MEG or KNS". The collective trauma from the journey is in our veins – each of those boat odysseys founded a new imagined nation.) (123–124)

In this passage, Manus Prison becomes a microcosm of the world beyond. Denied access to any actually existing nations, the prisoners are forced to create their own systems of belonging. Upon their arrival, the asylum seekers are bonded primarily by their shared experience of the boat journey; this commonality is superseded by commonality of language in an "internal migration." The idea that each of the journeys "founded a new imagined nation" based on "collective trauma" is key here. The prisoners not only carry a national and/or ethnic identity from their place of origin, but are also indelibly marked by their belonging to a new nation corresponding to their boat journey: GDD, MEG or KNS. The text does not explain the meaning of these

acronyms, but they presumably refer to either the boats on which the asylum seekers travelled or the groups in which they were intercepted by the navy. The prisoners are denied agency and freedom: their only options are to accept *refoulement* or to remain on the island. They are banished to live beyond the border, and yet they create their own set of imagined communities within this abject zone, where their imagined nations are based on a shared near-death experience. In some ways, they create their own means of becoming "outside-insiders" within the prison.

5.5 Conclusion to Chapter 4

This chapter has argued that refugee narratives play a key role among critical multicultural literatures by disturbing the idea of the border, as well as by questioning the physical location of Australia itself and the futility of "excising" places from Australian nationhood. By contextualising the role of Australia's onshore and offshore detention facilities through theories of the camp, I have read Felicity Castagna's *No More Boats* with particular attention to Antonio's positionality as a liminal subject, unable to fully assimilate despite his best efforts, due to the "inside-outsider" status he occupies as a Southern European migrant. My reading of Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* has paid particular attention to the protagonist's inhabitation of the condition of abjectivity: his involuntary migration, his interception by the Australian Government, and his long-term imprisonment in Australia's detention facility on Manus Island. These readings draw attention to the ways in which a state-sponsored settler-colonial subjectivity erases and excludes migrant experience.

In positioning these texts as state-of-the-nation narratives, I point to how they represent these liminal and abject identities and spaces as definitively Australian. For example, Antonio's staunch commitment to assimilation, evidenced in his statement, "We're Australian. I'm Australian" (99), and Behrouz's description of the former schoolroom within Manus Prison: "this place is Australia itself – this right here is Australia" (158). These examples highlight the idea that Antonio's experience of being a migrant seeking a sense of belonging, and feeling the pressure to leave behind his Italian heritage, is an inherently Australian experience – just as Behrouz's experience of being indefinitely detained, without reason, is also an inherently Australian experience. Their experiences inhabiting these border zones, these zones of contestation, are just as central to the representation of the nation as any other narrative.

This chapter has offered the final case study of contemporary texts as state-of-the-nation novels. In the Conclusion of this thesis, I reiterate my argument that each of these eleven texts can be read as an example of literature that reimagines and reanimates the nation in ways that challenge and subvert the hegemonic discourse of white settler-colonial subjectivity.

6. Thesis Conclusion

In this thesis, I have read eleven contemporary works of Australian literature as examples of texts that challenge and subvert the dominant discourse of settler-colonial subjectivity. I have presented a series of four case studies in which I read these works as state-of-the-nation texts. In taking up this concept, I set out to intervene in a field witnessing the striking revitalisation and growth of critical multicultural writing, evidenced by the large number of publications, publishing entities, literary events, and contributions to critical discourse focusing on narratives and themes relating to the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse Australians, including migrants, refugees, and those with migrant or refugee heritage.

These literary and scholarly interventions have flourished both despite and in reaction to the "withering away of official multiculturalism" (Stratton 2020), which at a policy level has taken the form of erosion of the commitment to cultural pluralism, inclusion and acceptance, as well as a re-invigoration of nationalist discourse and intensification of punitive border protection and immigration policies. On a scholarly front, this new multicultural writing has emerged from a context in which Australian literary studies has been attempting to negotiate a balance between the increasing influence of "world literature" discourses and the fact that, as Paul Sharrad says, "Australian literature is that produced by Australians, mostly consumed by Australians, and critically evaluated predominantly (though not exclusively) in relation to its national context" (2013, 16). Amidst a theoretical field populated by diverse approaches including the transnational, cosmopolitan and postcolonial, I have sought a critical perspective that would enable my research to refocus on the nation without re-inscribing nationalist discourse.

In Chapter 1, I examined the recent proliferation of short story collections collectively characterised by their "global" settings and themes, suggesting that we might view these as the emergence of a new genre of Australian short fiction, which I propose to call translocal. Within this genre, I argue, are a series of examples of short fiction collections which use elements of autofiction in order to interrogate the pressures on multicultural writers to write about their cultural or ethnic heritage, and to do so in ways that are appealing and unchallenging to a mainstream readership. By reading the structural, thematic and conceptual resonances and relationships between these three texts by Nam Le, Maxine Beneba Clarke and Roanna Gonsalves, I propose these three texts as manifestations of what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih have called cultural transversalism – enabling these authors to build networks of

representational agency among themselves, and not only in an aspirational or resistant relationship with the hegemonic discourse.

In Chapter 2, I combined an analysis of the emerging literature of Western Sydney with a focus on how novels by Luke Carman, Michael Mohammed Ahmad and Peter Polites resist hegemonic versions of both Australian nationalism and masculinity. Through the depiction of place, of whiteness and of Australianness, these texts present narratives that challenge the dominant version of settler-colonial subjectivity and represent suburban Western Sydney in new and innovative ways. These interventions are aligned with the writers' involvement in the Sweatshop literary movement. In addition, by reading these texts through the lens of R. W. Connell's concept of peripheral masculinities, I suggest that these texts can be seen as examples of complicit, subordinated and marginalised masculinities, which subvert a version of Australian masculinity which is typically constructed as confident, heterosexual and white.

Chapters 1 and 2 share a few important commonalities. Firstly, all of these texts (with the exception of Carman's, which is the only text studied here that is written by an Anglo Australian author) were written by first- or second-generation Australians. Secondly, as I have mentioned briefly in both chapters, these texts can be seen as part of "lateral networks," as Lionnet and Shih have described (2005, 1): cultural interventions that speak to and build on one another, accumulating representative and cultural agency among themselves rather than only in relation to the literary and cultural hegemony.

In Chapter 3, I analysed Michelle de Kretser's three most recent novels, *The Lost Dog*, *Questions of Travel* and *The Life to Come* through the lens of vernacular cosmopolitanism. Through this reading, I propose that these three works can be seen as a trilogy thematising multiculturalism: each novel representing an evolving engagement, over time, with the tensions and limitations of Australian multiculturalism. In applying the theory of vernacular cosmopolitanism, I build on scholarly approaches which have previously characterised de Kretser's works as cosmopolitan, or noted its cosmopolitan themes, extending a focus on everyday, local and national dimensions. Through this analysis, I interrogate the texts' depiction of white Australian characters, by my application of Ghassan Hage's concept of "white cosmo-multiculturalism," (1998, 198) emphasising how the characters seek to appropriate, limit and control difference. I focus, too, on how characters with migrant and refugee experience and heritage seek to evade this appropriation. I also analyse the representation of the settler-colonial

nation, with a focus on place, the depiction of Australian modernity, and on the provisional nature of Australia itself.

Finally, I turned to an analysis of recent texts depicting migrants travelling to Australia by boat. In Chapter 4, I argue that Felicity Castagna's *No More Boats* and Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* subvert the in/out logic of the nation by representing characters who inhabit the border itself. Viewing the novels' protagonists through Walter D. Mignolo's theory of border thinking, I argue that the inhabitation of the border as a zone of contestation can be seen through the novels' focus on neocolonial and decolonial themes, through a focus on the detention camps of Villawood and Manus Island, and through the thematisation of bodies and bodily borders. I also characterise the protagonists of these texts, Antonio and Behrouz, as inhabiting conditions of liminality and abjectivity respectively. Through these analyses, I position these texts as examples of an emergent literature focusing on the experiences of those who have been detained in Australia's onshore and offshore detention centres.

Just as Chapters 1 and 2 share similarities, Chapters 3 and 4 share a common focus on representing characters who are involuntary migrants, forced to leave behind their homes due to violence. These texts grant subjectivity to an entire category of people whose experiences have been stereotyped in Australian media and culture as "queue-jumpers." Several of these texts – most notably *Questions of Travel* and *No Friend but the Mountains* – represent the trauma that can result from experiences of involuntary migration. Narratives that focus on refugee or asylum seeker experiences are found in some of the short story collections discussed in the first two chapters, too, such as Le's story "The Boat" and Clarke's "The Stilt Fisherman of Kathaluwa."

Narratives such as these serve as a reminder of why Michelle Cahill's concept of "bending the frame" is so critical – these texts claim space for the representation of Australians who come from migrant and/or refugee backgrounds, who are queer, Muslim, Black, and Asian Australian. In adopting the term "state-of-the-nation" text from primarily British and US literary studies, I have applied it to the field of Australian literary studies. I speculate that it has not previously been applied in this way perhaps due to a misalignment between the current state of literary writing and a persistent view of national identity which still prioritises Anglo-Celtic Australian subjectivities as "mainstream" while, at the same time, considering multicultural writing to be "minoritised," relevant only to Australians from migrant and refugee backgrounds. In concluding this research, I now ask: what can we achieve by bringing the idea of the state of

the nation into literary analysis in Australia, and by purposefully reading these works as state-of-the-nation texts?

Firstly, these texts create space for the representation of Australians who have been excluded from literature and from meaningful inclusion in media and public life. Broadly, by this I refer to non-European migrants and those with non-European migrant or refugee heritage, such as those I have listed briefly above. But more precisely, this also includes specific groups. For example, the use of critical autofiction by Le, Clarke and Gonsalves not only draws attention to the "translocal" narratives they write, but also to the pressures on non-Anglo writers that materially influence the *experience* of writing and publishing itself. The representation of a character like Ravi Mendis in Michelle de Kretser's *Questions of Travel* is a reminder that asylum seekers are far from a homogeneous group. Further, these novels represent spaces and places that are underrepresented in Australian literature: for example, the outer suburbs of Western Sydney, or the inside of Villawood and Manus Immigration Detention Centres.

Considering these works as state-of-the-nation texts recalls Aileen Moreton-Robinson's assertion that "[a]s an ontological and epistemological *a priori*, whiteness is defined by what it is not (animal or liminal), thereby staking an exclusive claim to the truly human" (77–78). Whiteness is the governing force of Australian settler-colonialism: it is active and has agency. This means that these texts, written, as most of them are, from a perspective that critically evaluates the hegemony of whiteness in Australian society, each plays out this sense of animal (e.g. Otherness) or liminal (e.g. in-betweenness). The short stories analysed in Chapter 1 anticipate and subvert the "gaze" of whiteness; in Chapter 2, Carman's Luke is liminal and Ahmad's Bani is othered; in Chapter 3, de Kretser's white characters appropriate the difference of non-white characters, while the novels' non-white characters seek to evade appropriation; in Chapter 4, Antonio attempts to negotiate his liminality, while Behrouz is othered: he perceives the literal "gaze" of whiteness upon him when he and the other asylum seekers are accosted by photojournalists at Christmas Island airport.

In terms of future directions for this research, I suggest two primary paths. The first is based on the fact that this thesis analyses a relatively broad corpus of works: a total of eleven texts across four chapters. Indeed, throughout the process of research and writing, I felt that each chapter of this thesis could theoretically be expanded into a larger-scale research project: one focused on the emergence of translocal short fiction, one on the literature of Western Sydney, one on the works of Michelle de Kretser, and one on the representation of migrants and refugees

in Villawood and on Manus Island. I believe that this flourishing literary critical multiculturalism is still only in its infancy, and that even as writers continue to emerge with original, progressive and subversive narratives to challenge Australia's dominant power structures, a deeper and more nuanced idea of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism will animate its literature.

The second future path is based on the idea that Australia's renewed literary multiculturalism has emerged partly in response to the revitalisation of nationalist discourses from the mid-1990s onwards. This phenomenon is not limited to Australia: in recent years, a greater number of nationalist and populist world leaders have emerged, part of a wider revival of neo-nationalism worldwide, one that swiftly undermined the apprehension that a globalising democratic world order might triumph after the end of the Cold War. Stuart Hall describes the revitalisation of nationalism as a "remarkable reversal, a most unexpected turn of events" (1992, 314). This surprising turn has become a central feature of twenty-first century globalisation, with populist leaders emerging in both developing and developed nations in response to mass migration and neoliberal economic policy. The ongoing impact of this influence on literature remains to be seen, and will likely play out over the coming decades. While most of the texts studied here respond quite directly to the events of 2001 and the Howard era, I envision that there will be research potential in relation to this resurgent nationalism over the next few years, both within Australia and internationally. For example, writers in the US are beginning to grapple with Donald Trump's presidency in fiction: Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House* (2017) and Barbara Kingsolver's *Unsheltered* (2018) are both set partly within the milieu of the 2016 US federal election.

My confidence in the continuing strength of Australia's critical literary multiculturalism is based on two factors. The first is the pace with which new texts continue to appear. For example, Peter Polites, whose novel *Down the Hume* I analyse in Chapter 3, has now released a second novel, *The Pillars*, which has recently been awarded the 2020 NSW Premier's Literary Awards – Multicultural NSW Award. In addition, Behrouz Boochani has recently settled in New Zealand, and is only just beginning to publish writing from the other side of his six-year confinement: the opinion piece "'White Australia' Policy Lives On in Immigration Detention" appeared in *The New York Times* on September 20, 2020. The second factor is the strength of programs such as those run by Sweatshop. The novels examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis by Carman, Ahmad and Polites are just a few among a rapidly expanding network of publications continuing to emerge from Sweatshop. For example, Ahmad is the editor of the recently released

anthology *After Australia*, as mentioned in the Introduction. In an interview on literary podcast *The Garret*, Ahmad describes *After Australia* as "a book that looks at our future as a nation from the perspective of Indigenous people and people of colour" (2020). Based on the current trends visible within Australian publishing, it seems likely that this future will continue to push against exclusionary literary and cultural hierarchies.

There are two key principles which I see as animating the texts studied here, and which I envision will continue to shape the field in the future. As addressed above, Sweatshop continues to flourish and grow, and I believe that literary community, especially when it is locally grounded and particularly in underrepresented, disadvantaged or regional communities, will be critical to the future of critical multiculturalism in Australia. This community need not be as immediate as Sweatshop – it can also be seen in another form in the short stories analysed in Chapter 1 – but literary community such as this can be seen as a live example of fulfilling Cooppan's call to see the nation "in more places and in more ways" (2009, *xvi*). Secondly, these texts' depiction of asylum seekers (for example, Maxine Beneba Clarke's story of a former child soldier detained in Villawood; Michelle de Kretser's characterisation of asylum seeker Ravi Mendis; Felicity Castagna's examination of the radicalisation of Antonio Martone, and Behrouz Boochani's narration of the inhumane oppression of asylum seekers in Manus Prison) points to a reckoning with Australia's ongoing treatment of refugees. Offshore detention is a crucial dimension of the state of the nation, and of novels that seek to represent it.

In considering the potential limitations of this study, a couple of possibilities arise. Many of these works have been published quite recently: six of the eleven texts under consideration have been published within the past four years. While I have articulated thematic resonances between many of them in the process of advancing my arguments, the currency of this work means that it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the field of this critical literary multiculturalism. This issue has been addressed by Castagna with reference to the representation and interpretation of Western Sydney's emerging literary scene. Castagna writes in the *Sydney Review of Books*:

> We must consider the damage that certainty about identity does to this community of Western Sydney writers, to any emerging community, in fact, struggling to find its voice in the mainstream: Certainty enacts a form of violence through silencing the kind of complex narratives that happen when we do the harder work of getting out of the images and arguments about western Sydney that we feel comfortable in. (2019)

While Castagna in this example is focused on the act of writing, this concern about certainty can also be applied to research and analysis. The emergence of this new literary multiculturalism is

ongoing and cannot be “nailed down” into certainty. It is also critical to consider issues of positionality. In this thesis, I have written almost exclusively about texts by non-white Australians. As an Anglo-Celtic Australian researcher, I have sought to exercise care when writing about experiences with which I am not personally familiar, such as migration, exclusion, and subjection to racism.

Australia’s literary multiculturalism is sure to continue flourishing. Many of the writers studied here are debut authors, these works their first, and despite this, many have already been nominated for, or won, major literary awards in Australia. Having spent the last several years studying these works, I am confident that these writers will continue interrogating the structures of power that govern Australian culture and literature, and that their work will continue to represent the state of the nation in ways that encourage a more inclusive, more equal and more empathetic outlook. It is to be hoped that readers, critics, publishers and researchers will continue to engage actively with narratives such as these.

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Note: this thesis uses Chicago 17th Author-Date style.

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