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Migrant Woman as 'Undecidable' : Migrant Subjectivity, The Crocodile Fury by Beth Yahp and The Mule's Foal by Fontini Epanomitis

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Edith Cowan University (Mount Lawley Campus)

July 5, 1996

Supervisor: Dr Susan Ash

**Migrant Woman as 'Undecidable':
Migrant Subjectivity, *The Crocodile Fury* by Beth
Yahp and *The Mule's Foal* by Fotini Epanomitis.**

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BA (Honours) English

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract.

In this thesis I demonstrate how a notion of decentred subjectivity better describes marginal subject positions than the concept of unified subjectivity which depends on a discriminatory binary conceptualisation. I identify the migrant position as an aporia from which to deconstruct such concepts as unified subjectivity, as the migrant refuses classification according to dichotomous structures. I use Derridean metaphors to show the falseness and unexamined essentialism inherent in binary oppositions. I use a combination of theorists, and especially Hélène Cixous, to augment my primarily Derridean reading of migrant subjectivity within the texts: *The Crocodile Fury* by Beth Yahp and *The Mule's Foal* by Fotini Epanomitis.

Cixous' model genders the decentred subject, and situates subjectivity as a discursive process. This theory also helps account for the notion of movement integral to migrant identity evident in the texts' characters. I examine the importance of cultural effects on migrant subjectivity and the vital role that a recognition of the past plays for migrants, both in terms of identity construction and as a strategy of resistance to the phallogentric and Eurocentric bias of the dominant culture. Lastly, I look at the way the novels transcend binary categorisation and present a more fluid, multiple way of viewing the world. This ideal of a more equitable system for marginalised people is the goal of my feminist and postcolonial project of resistance.

Declaration:

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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July 5, 1996.

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Introduction.

That's the place to begin. (The Crocodile Fury, 1, 4, 7, 14)

Australians take pride in their reputation for egalitarianism. Russell Ward (1958) and Graeme Turner (1986), for instance, have pointed out that it is considered part of our national identity. But as Ward and Turner add, the concept of a national character is a fiction. The white, male larrikin figure does not take into account those who don't fit this 'norm' - at *least* the fifty per cent that are female, and then the many men who do not fit this stereotype: the majority of Australians, in fact.

Australian egalitarianism is also a myth. The dominant culture - male, anglo-celt, and middle class, homogenises, deletes, appropriates, exoticises and discriminates against those that do not fit their categories. These marginalised people include Aborigines, ethnic groups, the poor, and women. It is the working assumption of this thesis that we must strive for equity for all people. To do this, we must destabilise and destroy the old discriminatory systems, and search for new approaches that are more equitable.

This thesis will consider and reject the concept of a unified subjectivity that is central to the discriminatory system of the dominant culture. This notion of a unified subjectivity relies on an assumption of 'Being' as self-present, irreducible and knowable to the individual. To dismantle such notions, I offer a primarily Derridean reading of *The Crocodile Fury* by Beth Yahp and *The Mule's Foal* by Fotini Epanomitis as part of a feminist and postcolonial strategy of resistance. Although I use the two novels to explore the issue of

migrancy of both authors and characters, my emphasis is on the *theorising* of migrancy and its impact on an ideal of equity. I look at the ways a migrant position may traverse the space between the poles of binary oppositions - rendering such structures illogical, and opening a place for transgression of binary oppositions, where more agency may be possible for marginalised people.

In the first chapter I examine traditional binary thought and the power differentials within such structures that privilege the sovereign subject. I relate Jacques Derrida's model of the hymen to the space the migrant inhabits, in order to argue that the migrant position can destabilise binary oppositions. Derrida has used the trope of the hymen to figure an 'undecidable' space. I use this trope to subvert the traditional discourse of the sovereign subject. Both the hymen and the migrant are 'undecidables', that is: uncategorisable in a dichotomous system. For example, migrants in Australia are not the Aboriginal native, and neither are they the Anglo-celt settler, thus they do not fit the postcolonial native/ settler opposition. Instead, like the figure of the hymen, the migrant traverses a range of possibilities in the space of the middle ground, opening the potential for alternative models of subjectivity.

In chapter two I establish such an alternative model of subjectivity, which is fluid and in-motion. The theory I use is that of Hélène Cixous, but is complemented by other such theorists as Trinh, Butler, Hall and Van Herk. This model proposes a decentred subject which is always already gendered, and situates subjectivity as a discursive process, that is, as a series of interactions between the self and culture. The subject retains a certain amount of choice, or

agency, within these interactions, and this is crucial for marginalised people striving for equity. I then move from subjectivity in general to that of the migrant. I argue, using the migrant characters of the novels, that integral to migrant identity is the notion of movement. This movement mirrors both the movement within subject formation, and also the way the migrant position moves within and beyond binary oppositions. The migrant position traverses the space made up of the many positions on a continuum between two poles that are in themselves provisional and continually shifting.

In chapter three I focus more fully on the novels and the importance of the past in the formation of migrant identity. I trace the search for origins of the migrant characters to show that actively engaging in remembering provides a point of resistance for such migrants. This is because it forces 'otherness' to the attention of the dominant culture that wishes to repress difference. Consequently, the 'other' becomes more familiar and thus less feared and stereotyped.

In chapter four I come back to Derrida, this time using 'différance', which like the hymen is an 'undecidable'. Différance describes the play within the formative processes of the subjectivity of the two migrant characters in the novels. Différance describes the non-binary effect of the flows between self and other(s), and of how subjectivity is formed in this space. I use Derrida's linguistic model of a chain of supplements to help illustrate the multiple processes of subject formation demonstrated by the two migrant characters in the novels. Such a subjectivity defies dichotomous categorisation, and therefore transgresses binary conceptualisation.

Such transgression is empowering and important to emancipatory movements like feminism and postcolonialism which attempt to break out of rigid and discriminatory structures and representations. A Derridean approach might seem incompatible with feminist and postcolonial approaches, whose principal concern is with notions of agency and subjectivity. One such criticism comes from Kathleen Barry, who argues against deconstruction as a male theory that elides feminism and does not take into account material oppression (1996). However, I counter this criticism by not just relying on Derrida, but instead using other theorists (in particular, Hélène Cixous) to construct my conception of subjectivity which does take into account factors such as gender and material oppression.

I use Cixous' theory of subjectivity to augment Derrida's theory because she both *genders* the decentred subject and *situates* it within cultural experience. In Cixous' model, subjectivity is formed through a series of identifications with those of similar identities, and at the same time, a series of differences with which the person interacts. 'Meaningful' 'subjectivity'¹ is created (rather than found) in the play between identity and difference. Critics such as Sneja Gunew argue that the decentred subject has always been a condition of marginalised groups such as women and non-Western people (1992,

¹These concepts in Derrida's work, along with others such as 'being', 'is', 'truth', as well as 'différance' and 'trace', are *sous rature* or 'under erasure' as Spivak translates it, in an attempt to avoid master-words. Spivak notes that erasure was first used by Heidegger who wrote 'Being' with a cross through it (*Of Grammatology*, xv-xvi). Derrida, however, has modified the 'concept' of erasure to indicate that 'the presence of a transcendental signified is effaced while still remaining legible. Is ... destroyed while making visible the very idea of the sign' (ibid, p23). Spivak notes that the 'gesture of *sous rature* implies "both this and that" as well as "neither this nor that" (fn, p320). Simply erasing the word is not the answer - we cannot 'unthink' such structures without first thinking them.

37). If the white Western male is also subject to this sense of dislocation, then it seems to me that already there is greater equity, as everyone starts off in a similar position.

Like Derrida's privileging of writing over speech in *Of Grammatology*, which reverses the privilege that our philosophical tradition has always granted to speech, I will privilege marginalised groups in a play of difference between margin and centre. This reversal acts as a first step towards redressing the imbalance of power, and leaves a space at the centre for new speaking positions which may be filled (provisionally) by marginalised people.

The unequal power relations that we must redress arise from the oppositional binary thinking that sees people in terms of 'self' and 'other', and the subsequent fear of that other. Derrida points out that

Absolute fear would then be the first
encounter of the other as *other* : as other
than I and as other than itself. (1976, 277)

Discrimination is thus based on a fear and misrecognition of the other. Familiarity may lessen discrimination, but we must be careful not to appropriate or exoticise marginalised groups, as Sau-ling C. Wong says of American multiculturalism: 'the "culture" of a minority is typically commodified and promoted for consumption much like ethnic cuisine' (1994, 83). George Papaellinas agrees, noting that migrant texts are often praised on the basis of the writer's 'ethnic' origins rather than textual content (1992, 166)². A careful balance must instead be negotiated in the space between voice and silence, where

²In much the same way that the judges of the Miles Franklin award (1995) were accused over Helen Darville-Demidenko's controversial *The Hand That Signed The Paper*.

dominant subjectivities must be silent for a while in order to hear (and not speak for) marginalised groups. This would open up a place for multiple voices and multiple subject positions.

This thesis strives for such a plural approach in the hope of a more equitable society. It may be said that this sort of approach has been proposed many times in some feminist and postcolonial criticism³. My belief is that there is still a pressing need for continued debate and re-examination of our own subject positions. As Spivak says, it is not a matter of dealing with the problem once, but it needs to be continually maintained, like cleaning your teeth (1990, 41, also 105). This seems to me to be even more important as a swing of right-wing values sweeps Western nations as we head towards the twenty-first century. According to Elaine Showalter we typically project our existential anxieties onto the end of the century, investing it with greater symbolic and historical meaning⁴. As such, conservatism and fear of the other increase, leading to an anti-immigration stance in Australia that seems to be gaining popularity, if not media coverage. If we could staunch this flow, and work towards a nation that recognises and values difference, perhaps in the future we could legitimately take credit for an egalitarian Australian society.

³Bonnie Thornton-Dill (1983), Gillian Bottomley (1991), Sneja Gunew (1993), Caroline Whitbeck (1983), Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Jean Martin (1991), and Linda Hutcheon (1989), amongst others.

⁴*Sexual Anarchy* (1992, p2): 'In periods of cultural insecurity, when there are fears of regression and degeneration, the longing for strict border controls around the definition of gender, as well as race, class, and nationality, becomes especially intense. If the different races can be kept in their places, if the various classes can be held in their proper districts of the city, and if men and women can be fixed in their separate spheres, many hope, apocalypse can be prevented and we can preserve a comforting sense of identity and permanence in the face of that relentless specter of millennial change' (p4).

Chapter One.

'The Hymen Breaks: Penetrating the Essential Binary'.

There is always a place in the back of one's heart or a corner of one's house even for the things one fears most. (The Mule's Foal, 50)

A binary opposition consists of two terms that define each other by opposition. It carries an ideological weight which may not at first be apparent. In fact, the binary is a false opposition where one term defines itself by the other - by what it is *not* - and homogenises everything else into the second category. This second category is then denigrated, while the first term is valorised. According to Derrida, the Western philosophic tradition is based on a metaphysics of presence, always desiring a presence which is always already absent. Hence, the first term of a binary is valorised because it is perceived as a site of 'self', or presence, and the second term is devalued as the opposite: absence, or the 'other'. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida claims that our philosophic tradition is logocentric - that it locates presence in the word - and phonocentric because it (wrongly) perceives speech as fully present and thus privileges speech over writing. He argues that the

subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the gestures required by an onto-theology determining the archeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence. (1976, 71)

Derrida suggests that our philosophic tradition sets up presence as necessary to determine the transcendental signified 'being'; that 'being' is determined as consciousness being fully present to the subject. This tradition rests on an assumption that the spoken word is 'closer' to inner speech because the subject both speaks and hears himself speak at the same time, and is therefore closer to 'being'.

The power hierarchy that lies within each binary opposition, stemming from a desire for and privileging of presence, makes it a dangerous structure. Binary thinking marginalises certain people, for example, man/ woman, or coloniser/ colonised. In each example, the first term is perceived as superior to the second. For instance, men take the subject position and objectify women, and likewise, the colonisers take the subject position and objectify the colonised. Thus the sovereign subject recognises and valorises itself as white, Western and male, while it marginalises all its 'others'.

In *The Other Heading*, Derrida notes the phallogentric and Eurocentric bias of the sovereign subject. After much play on the words 'cap' and 'heading', he uses Valery's description and definition of Europe as a cape, or headland (20), as a site from which to deconstruct this bias:

Europe has also confused its image, its face, its figure and its very place, its taking-place, with that of an advanced point, the point of a phallus if you will, and thus, once again, with a heading for world civilization or human culture in general. (1992, 24)

Through the chain of signifiers; Europe, point, phallus, and culture, the first terms in a series of binaries, the white Western male

continues to equate himself with the present of presence ('its taking place'), and the self-presence of consciousness and subjectivity ('heading for world civilization'). The second term - the 'other' that is denigrated and feared - is absent from this conceptualisation.

Because binary thinking marginalises women and non-Westerners, both feminist and postcolonial theorists have been interested in deconstructing such structures. In the case of feminist theory, Cixous, like Derrida, has shown that the first term is valorised in such binaries as active/ passive, culture/ nature, and mind/ body, and that all of them equate with the master binary man/ woman (1986). Woman is equated with the second terms: passive, nature, and body, the opposite and 'inferior' of man, and is eventually elided by the father/ son couple. Man (subject) defines himself by what Woman (object) is not. Likewise, postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said (1985) have shown that binaries such as Occident/ Orient or West/ East also valorise the first term in a relationship of power. The second term is perceived as inferior, and systems of oppression are perpetuated. Thus through binary thinking, the marginalisation of women and non-Westerners becomes entrenched in our very language and ideology.

Because the nature of hegemony is that we are unable to stand outside it, that it is implicit in our language and thought, it often remains unrecognised and unquestioned. We are all constructed through hegemonic structures, so that the oppressed, as well as the oppressor absorbs and internalises the idea that the oppressed is different and therefore inferior. It is therefore important for

emancipatory discourses to question the way ideology and power work in an attempt to redress such imbalances.

Michel Foucault uses Bentham's Panopticon as an analogy to illustrate how power works automatically in society. It is a regulatory mechanism where the viewer can see but not be seen, the effect being that even with nobody in the control tower, the prisoners will regulate their own behaviour, having thus internalised hierarchies of power and regulation (1977, 85-6). This conception of power is explicitly represented in *The Crocodile Fury*. The novel represents the working of colonial power through the way the rich man runs his house, 'by division and an iron rule' (108). The Malaysian servants are kept in fear of the rich man's reprisals, each section of the domestic staff encouraged to be suspicious of each other, and to report only to him. Thus, the rich man's house ran smoothly:

like clockwork, each part oiled by his favour, and kept separate, gliding against each other in their separate duties, aware yet ignorant of each other, always suspicious; rubbing shoulders but never merging, coverting favour only for their separate parts, never the whole. This way the rich man kept tabs on everyone. Even in his absence he ran a tight ship. (ibid)

Like the Panopticon, the rich man keeps his colonised subjects separate and power hierarchies internalised, thus reducing the risk of an organised resistance to colonial power. His house is a metonym for the way a colonial society works to perpetuate unequal power relations that benefit such sovereign subjects as himself.

As the novel demonstrates then, it is necessary to deconstruct such structures as binaries if we are to achieve equality for

marginalised peoples. To do this, it is necessary to work from within to dismantle oppressive structures, to refashion existing tools to suit the purpose⁵ - not because we have a choice, but because, as Derrida has argued, 'we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest' (1987, 125). That is, we cannot step outside of language, and must therefore use language to deconstruct ideology-laden language structures such as binary oppositions.

Power imbalances in binary structures depend upon (unrecognised) essentialist assumptions. The sovereign subject defines itself as white, Western, heterosexual and male. Inherent in this construction is an unconscious (and need I add, false) essentialist assumption that whiteness and maleness equate with superiority. The other is constructed by the sovereign subject as essentially different and inferior to the self. The middle ground of such binaries is excluded because the sovereign subject needs a great divide to maintain its identity. This middle ground is often shifted to the second, devalued side, where it (they) are forced into strict stereotypes which limit the agency of marginalised people, such as migrant women.

Although essentialism is unconsciously used by the dominant culture as an alibi to oppress the 'other', it may still be a useful strategy for emancipatory groups in a 'scrupulously visible political interest' (Spivak, 'Strategy, Identity, Writing', 45). It must, however, be

⁵Both Jacques Derrida (*Of Grammatology*) and Pierre Macherey (*A Theory of Literary Production*) have used Levi-Strauss' idea of 'bricolage', where tools are not made but borrowed, and can never be free of ideology.

acknowledged as a constructed category which is only *perceived* as essentialism, and that where one draws the slash between essentialism and construction is arbitrary and always shifting depending on context. The famous quotation by Simone de Beauvoir, '[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (1976, 295), suggests the construction inherent in the essentialist concept of 'Woman'. Essentialism and construction are not discrete categories, but instead there is a continual interplay between the two, where boundaries are often blurred or transgressed.

Essentialism has been defended as a useful strategy of celebration for 'othered peoples', particularly by Black Americans such as bell hooks. She says that Black women use essentialism as a means of self-segregation to try to prevent being 'eaten' (appropriated) by whites (1992). For hooks, essentialism is necessary politically to emancipatory movements. For instance, a unified assumption of the concept 'Woman' is needed for feminists to fight against patriarchy. Thus, essentialist qualities can be used as a call to solidarity and to celebrate difference from those that oppress.

Feminists engaged in the construction/ essentialism debate may, however, be unknowingly serving the very phallogocentric structures they are trying to dismantle. Firstly, the debate may be a strategy of 'divide and conquer' (Thornton-Dill, 1983, 136). While the energy of feminists is being expended debating the issue of essentialism versus construction, patriarchal oppression continues. Secondly, the debate (being dichotomous) perpetuates the sovereign subject's construction of a great divide between self and other, which is maintained to privilege the sovereign subject. The other is then

stereotyped into an essential category. Stereotypes, and the 'essentialism' inherent in them, are actually socially-defined and maintained constructs. This becomes apparent when, for example, not all women fit the stereotype of 'Woman'. The concept 'Woman' assumes a universal essence common to all women. The arguments of Black feminists against white feminists illustrate that there are no (or few) common experiences among women, only differences⁶. The concept of an essential 'Woman' is as marginalising when it is expounded by women as when it is expounded by men.

Similarly, it may be dangerous for postcolonial people to identify themselves with essentialism. As with women, essentialism is premised on a universalism that seems incompatible with postcolonial objectives. Essentialism makes racial stereotypes difficult to avoid. There may seem little harm in stereotypes such as Blacks having 'natural' rhythm, for example, but this allows an opening for further stereotypical labels, which limit or deny subjectivity. As Homi Bhabha points out, essentialism is necessarily attributed to the colonised by the colonial powers to preserve authority (1985, 154), and '[i]ts discriminatory effects are visible in those split subjects of the racist stereotype - the simian Negro, the effeminate Asiatic male - which ambivalently fix identity as a fantasy of difference' (ibid, 150). This brings us back to answering the 'threat of the other as other'. As Derrida argues:

I can answer the threat of the other as
other (than I) only by transforming it into
another (than itself), through altering it in

⁶See, for instance, bell hooks (1992). Also Busia and James (eds) *Theorizing Black Feminisms* (1993).

my imagination, my fear, or my desire.
(1976, 277)

The dominant culture alters, constructs and stereotypes the other until it is as different as possible from the sovereign subject's own (constructed) identity, and no longer a threat to that sense of identity.

Both novels clearly make use of a strategic, political essentialism to disrupt such notions of a stable and unified subjectivity. Each novel celebrates essentialist stereotypes, in particular, by linking women to nature (at times)⁷. This is a strategic use of stereotype that suggests the 'undecidability' of the migrant position which oscillates between - both refusing and celebrating - stereotypes. Difference, the other, which has been devalued throughout Western history, is now privileged in a reversal of the binary. From there, the characters traverse the space between each pole of the binary - not stuck in a rigid stereotype, but simply visiting it occasionally, thus transgressing the boundaries of structures of oppression.

The figure I use for such transgression is Derrida's model of the hymen. As Derrida argues in *Dissemination*, the hymen is both inside and outside the body, both marriage and membrane, both virginity and consumation simultaneously (1981). The use of this model may seem counter-productive in a feminist project, for as Gayatri Spivak cautions in 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman' the figure of the hymen doubly displaces woman as 'always operated by a calculated dissymmetry rather than a mere contradiction or reconciliation' (1983, 172). She explains the

⁷I will discuss this further in chapter four.

dissymmetry as inherent in the concept of marriage, which in Derrida is the means of 'fulfilled identification' (ibid), and as male possession and appropriation of the woman, is always already privileged over virginity. However, I think the use of the hymen is justified in this case for three reasons. Firstly, whereas the subject (Mallarmé/ Derrida) in Derrida's account is the male observer and perpetrator in the sexual act that always already objectifies and appropriates the hymen (and by extension, Woman), the subject in my account is female. Both the characters and the authors of the novels are women. This means that the distinction between subject and object is blurred, because the hymen as object is also, as metonym for Woman, subject. This blurring is a major function of the hymen, and it seems to me that this function works fully only when the subject is female.

The second reason for using the model of the hymen is that it points to a particular feminine biological specificity which is appropriate to the female authors and characters within the texts I am examining. I recognise that these first two reasons could just as easily apply to other models such as Luce Irigaray's notion of fluidity. Irigaray's model suggests the properties of fluids that have generally been linked to the essential Woman, but Irigaray argues that these are only *some* of the properties of fluids. She argues that a fluid also

mixes with bodies of a like state,
sometimes dilutes itself in them in an
almost homogenous manner, which makes
the distinction between the one and the
other problematical; and furthermore that it
is already diffuse "in itself," which
disconcerts any attempt at static
identification... (1985, 111)

Thus fluids perform the first function of the hymen, that is, blurring the distinctions between self and other, which works to unsettle binary constructions and the power differentials that such a conceptualisation perpetuates.

I have, however, decided against using this model, and this brings me to the third reason for using the model of the hymen. Although both models have similar subversive qualities, the hymen suggests a barrier - something that must be broken. This fits better conceptually than a model of fluidity, because the hymen as membrane is reminiscent of the slash of the binary, which also must be broken through to create a space for the excluded middle.

The hymen is the space between desire and fulfillment (Derrida, 1981, 343-4), and as an analogy, it can serve to destabilize binaries and fixed 'meaning'. It does this because it continually negotiates the space of the slash or excluded middle of the binary. It replaces the inadequacy of the slash (/) which, as a single symbol (is it a coincidence that it so closely resembles the 'I' of the sovereign subject?) suggests a third term, by homogenising all those that make up the middle. The hymen represents all those points on the continuum between the bipolar terms. That space is not rigid, but moves and flows with contradiction and paradox. The hymen is located beyond the binary, thus exposing the rigidity of binary structures. As Derrida argues:

Thanks to the confusion and continuity of the hymen, and not in spite of it, a (pure and impure) difference inscribes itself without any decidable poles, without any independent, irreversible terms. (ibid, 210)

Since each term of the binary is complicit in the other's meaning, and thus in the exchange of difference between each term, the hymen is undecidable and uncategorisable. It therefore presents a transgression and an opportunity to deconstruct binaries.

Fotini Epanomitis and Beth Yahp, in their position as migrant writers, act as 'hymen', unable to be categorised as either native or settler, but are neither and both. This binary opposition, native/settler, is particularly problematic. Migrants, such as the authors, unsettle this binary by not fitting into either side of the 'slash'. As part of a non-aboriginal settler tradition, they can be seen as coloniser. However, that category does not fit them comfortably, because they are not of the dominant anglo-celt culture generally associated with the colonisation of Australia. Like Aborigines, migrants are often excluded from the dominant culture, and can be perceived as oppressed. However, that is not to assume that oppression is the same for both groups. Migrants are neither the Aboriginal colonised, nor the Anglo-celt coloniser. At the same time, as part of a Western philosophical tradition, they are complicit as colonisers of Aboriginal people, but are also subject to domination by Anglo-celt culture. Thus, they are neither, and yet both, coloniser and colonised.

Migrants are also in a position to destabilise another related binary opposition - ethnicity/ race. The terms of this binary, when examined, reveal their underlying (and false) assumptions of essentialism. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, the main difference seems to lie in the term 'race' referring to an irreducible essentialism that is the result of bloodlines and ancestry, whereas the emphasis of the term 'ethnicity' is more of similarity of

culture (particularly religion) within a group. Australian culture defines 'migrant' through an ethnicity lens, and 'Aborigine' through a race lens. Both are defined in opposition to the dominant anglo-celt culture. Both are at the bottom of hierarchies where the West is at the top. The reasons for this oppression are twofold. Firstly, they are othered by the dominant culture whose interests lie in keeping them excluded as they fear a blurring of boundaries between them will lead to a perceived loss of self and thus identity. The second reason for the oppression is the material benefits to the dominant culture which continues to exploit those they perceive as lesser than themselves.

Marie de Lepervance, in 'Race to Ethnicity', argues for the shifting nature of the terminology within the opposition: race/ ethnicity. She suggests that the constructed nature of these categories has a material basis. She points out that the nineteenth century notion of 'race' served colonial interests well, and has become the more benign (but still useful) term 'ethnicity'. The reason, she suggests, is that racism, as such, is not profitable anymore. In Australia, a programme of planned immigration was implemented to address the labour shortage, and eventually these immigrants and their children were numerous enough to affect elections (1980, 34). This is a reminder that discrimination occurs on the level of class, as well as those of gender, race, and ethnicity. Peter Li warns us not to conflate the terms ethnicity and class, but also recognises that the effects of discrimination can be similar (1988, 48). Often ethnic groups are constructed into certain (lower) classes, where the Eurocentric and phallogocentric systems of structure work to perpetuate their place there.

Thus, like the other binary constructions discussed, the ethnicity/ race binary contains power differentials. It is another false opposition, as both categories are constructed, and therefore needs to be rejected. As Wilson argues, 'racial groups are distinguished by socially selected physical traits, ethnic groups are distinguished by socially selected cultural traits' (cited in *Ethnic Inequality*, 1988, 23). In both cases, definition is dependent upon *society* - in this case, the dominant anglo-celt culture. This is a society in which the term 'cultures' is generally perceived as separate and potentially clashing entities, and is coupled with ethnicity through the development of nationalisms (Bottomley, 1991, 304). Meaning, or identity, is constructed by those of the dominant society, not by the actual person, or group, in question. In other words, the dominant culture objectifies on the basis of both race and ethnicity to retain its subject position and stable identity, but may objectify differently according to which category it is objectifying. The other, being objectified, is silenced, and only granted a limited identity - that which fits in the boundaries prescribed by the sovereign subject.

By questioning stereotypes and providing alternative subject positions, migrants such as Fotini Epanomitis and Beth Yahp can begin to redress the oppression that functions through binaries such as self/ other. This self is white, Western and male, but I would argue that the side of the other is constructed as a sliding scale with privilege granted to those perceived as closer to the sovereign subject. The self may define itself against a Greek, for instance, and against an Aborigine another time. But if he is defining himself against both at once, then the Greek, although not anglo-celt, is

shifted across to the self side - or at least *nearer* to the self, because Greece is a Western nation.

Oppression is not simply one group dominating another, but rather a series of vertical structures with white at the top and black at the bottom, and other positions on the ladder dependent upon degrees of colour or economic needs. On this ladder, a group may be oppressed by a white Western male, but may also oppress those 'below' him in this vertical structure - a black woman, for instance.

Floya Anthias notes that colour is often a racial marker of difference of the other, but it is a social construct, and not an essential difference.

When referring to the problem of shifting definitions, she remarks:

while Turks in London are 'white' they are 'black' in Germany. Some Cypriots are darker than some Asians and yet they may be regarded and regard themselves as a white or European group. (1992, 14)

Here the signifier slides and seems to have lost all reference to the signified. White may or may not be white, and black may or may not be black - definition depends upon the perceiver and the context. In terms of the authors, Greek-born Epanomitis would be perceived by the dominant Anglo-celt culture to be less other than Malaysian-born Yahp who remarks that Asians are always perceived as exotic: 'She always comes from somewhere else, even when she's born in Australia, even if she's a fourth-generation Australian' (1996, 65). However, Yahp would be less 'othered' than an Aboriginal woman.

Because the slash between the polarised values self and other shifts, definitions of purely self and purely other are difficult to justify. According to Derrida, there is never an absolute signified - in the place of the signified is always already another signifier. As in the

above quotation from Anthias, 'Turk' seems to signify 'white', but when the context shifts, it then signifies 'black'. Shifting definitions of the signifier 'ethnicity' which were contextual and shaky in the first place, are further subverted by patterns of migration and inter-breeding. These people are even less likely to fit into a binary category. For instance, is a Greek migrant like Fotini Epanomitis (who came to Australia as a baby) Greek or Australian? Or both? Or neither? Is Beth Yahp Malaysian or Chinese? Or is she Australian? These questions are impossible to answer using a binary model because each writer occupies a position beyond nationalistic binaries of settler/ native and the related self/ other binary of identity. If we think of both women, using the metaphor of the hymen, we see they unsettle such binary oppositions, traversing the space between each category - sometimes resting at each point, but mostly moving in a play of differences where each nationality contributes to a *series* of identities. In this way, both authors represent the migrant positions which resist the sovereign subject's categorising and homogenising of its other.

The dominant culture constructs an other which is as different from itself as possible, so that binary oppositions are maintained. In racial terms, the dominant culture calls this constructed other the 'authentic' native. The more 'other' a writer is, the more they are deemed to have the authority to speak as 'native' (Trinh, 1989, 88). To fit this category, the 'native' writer must fit Western expectations of the native, which are essentialist and nostalgic: a valorisation not of the present-day aborigine, but of the *prehistoric* Aborigine (Stasiulis, 1993, p44). The self creates a discourse of the other as object; exotic and stereotyped, without examining its own essentialist assumptions

of superiority, and links with culture and progress. The dominant culture's demand for authenticity only perpetuates binary structures like settler/ native and self/ other, which serve the white, Western male in two ways. Firstly, these binaries perpetuate existing inequalities from which the sovereign subject benefits, and secondly, they work to 'divide and conquer', thus keeping emancipatory groups small and less powerful. As Trinh suggests, 'questions of authenticity of others function as a diversionary tactic aimed at silencing those who interrogate unequal social relations of power' (1989, 88). But when binaries like settler/ native crumble because of positions outside those binaries - such as the ones Epanomitis and Yahp occupy because they are migrants - then the concept of 'authentic native' writing is also destabilised.

Migrants can thus counter existing inequalities by unsettling binaries. This threatens the stable definition of the identity of the self, as well as threatening the imposed definition of the other. The migrant, as both foreign *and* Australian, challenges the opposition self/ other, and provides a site for multiple tensions and meanings. Meaning is created not with the antagonistic binary opposition, but through the play of differences between a self-*others* relation. Fotini Epanomitis and Beth Yahp provide a speaking position for marginalised people by transgressing and unsettling the binaries self/ other and native/ oppressor. This transgression is continued through the characters in their books, *The Mule's Foal* and *The Crocodile Fury* which illustrate non-binary thinking and serve to give voice, subjectivity and power to marginalised people.

Chapter Two

'Imaginary Communities: Identity at the Juncture of Self and Other'.

She was thrilled by the contrast in their bodies. Hers so white, so smooth that it seemed to glow in the dark, and her child's so hairy and black. (The Mule's Foal, 25)

It is important to establish a notion of subjectivity in relation to marginalised people, whose identities have been either ignored or constructed in a limiting way by the dominant culture. The notion of subjectivity I use here is distilled from a number of postcolonial and feminist theorists including Trinh, Hall, and Van Herk, but is mostly based on the work of Hélène Cixous. In this model, subjectivity is fluid, continually moving, and open to change. It is a very different model from that of the unified subject which depends on discriminatory binary conceptualisation.

I use Cixous' theory to augment Derrida's theory of the decentred subject as its specific focus on external effects and gender⁸ allows the possibility of agency. Cixous argues that subjectivity is often confused with individualism ('stupid, egotistic, restrictive, exclusive behaviour which excludes the other'). She posits instead a subjectivity that is 'the wealth we have in common and, by definition, the subject is a non-closed mix of self/s and others' (1994, xvii). Thus the self and other coexist in a mutually enabling pleasure.

⁸Derrida, in his foreword to *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, recognises the importance of Cixous' work on sexual difference. He suggests that '[t]here is no asexual, a-sexed or meta-sexed reading of sexual difference because it is at once read and reading' (x). Derrida thus notes that sexual difference is always read by a gendered subject: 'it is always a *she* or a *he* who reads it' (ibid).

Cixous argues that categories of masculine and feminine are 'economies' of behaviour, which do not necessarily equate to biological categories of male and female. She argues that women have greater access to pleasure because of the 'cultural and political division of the sexes' (ibid, 135), that because of this societal sexual division, it is 'much easier to inflect on men than women the horror of the inside' (ibid). This horror of the inside is the horror of the hymen, which to men is a barrier that either must be maintained, or be penetrated, broken, and destroyed by them in order to possess. For women, the inside is a place of potential, a place of positive relations where the self and other mix without fear. As Cixous says:

After all women do all virtually or in fact
have an experience of the inside, an
experience of the capacity for other, an
experience of non-negative change
brought about by the other, of positive
receptivity. (ibid)

Thus Cixous locates feminine subjectivity in the maternal⁹, stressing it as a *positive* experience. The interuterine self/ other relation where the two interact without animosity, instead co-existing in difference, can translate to an external self/ other(s) relation. This kind of internal subjectivity where the boundaries between self and other are blurred, makes women more receptive than men to the relations between the self and an exterior other. Again, boundaries are blurred, so that the line between self and culture-as-other continually shifts.

⁹Lichtenberg-Ettinger also posits an interuterine theory of subjectivity, a model for 'processes of change and exchange, of *relations without relating*, in which the *non-I* is a *partner-in-difference* 1994, 41). This model theorises the development of girls and the role of the mother which Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis ignores.

Subjectivity is not a state, but an activity where the self interacts with the other. Trinh describes such a notion of subjectivity in a similar way to that of Cixous:

Not One, not two either. "I" is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face.
(1989, 94)

That is, there is no essence of a subject, instead, the subject is made up of discursive effects that inscribe their ideology onto us. As Trinh goes on to say, "'I' is, itself, *infinite layers*' (ibid). These infinite layers - a conglomeration of identities and differences - are a cacophony of different voices. According to Cixous, each person has a 'spokesperson I' which is a solid social identity that emerges from the cacophony to represent that person (1994, xvii-xviii). Subjectivity is thus in constant motion as the individual responds with their various internal layers to a variety of external effects. In 'Extreme Fidelity', Cixous discusses the influences that shape us in different ways. She argues that we can never escape from our 'individual and collective history' or the 'cultural schema', and that

the individual negotiates with these schema, with these data, adapts to them and reproduces them, or else gets around them, overcomes them, goes beyond them, gets through them (135).

Interaction and negotiation are the keys to this type of fluid subjectivity, and although subjectivity may be shaped by cultural ideologies, there are still various possibilities, potential choices, that are open to the subject, that enable her to 'adapt', 'get around',

'overcome', 'go beyond'. In other words, Cixous argues that the subject can *transgress* ideological structures, at least to some degree. On this point, Judith Butler agrees, arguing that discourse and culture constitute subjectivity, but do not necessarily *determine* agency, or the specific way a person will act (cited in Seyla Benhabib, 1994, 82).

This notion of subjectivity which is gendered, fluid, infinitely layered, in-process, and is formed at the juncture of self and other, obviously does not fit the stereotypes which the dominant culture thrusts on its other. 'Othering' occurs in a system that firstly, assumes subjectivity to be unified and essential, and secondly, in a society that thinks only in dichotomy. Thus, it is necessary to question and reject binary structures and notions of unified subjectivity, and, as I have argued, the migrant subject position is well placed to do this.

Migrant subjectivity is, of course, dependent upon a notion of movement, and so the concept of movement within subject formation is particularly appropriate here. I have therefore focused upon this property of motion in my usage of the term 'subject-in-process'¹⁰ as shorthand to describe my concept of subjectivity. The term indicates a continual living and interacting with life. 'In-process' suggests the movement inherent in subjectivity. 'To say "I am not what I was" locates identity on the move' (Gilmore, 1994, 238) The subject can never be 'finished' or whole. This concept is important for emancipatory groups for two reasons: firstly, if the sovereign subject is no longer unified, but decentred like everybody else, then there is no logic to support his privilege. Secondly, the more subject positions

¹⁰I am aware that this is a term used by Kristeva, but I use it not (as she does) to describe a kind of internal, psychoanalytic split between I/ me, but instead as the movement between the 'self' and an external, cultural 'other'.

that migrant women can inhabit, the more 'slippery' she is to define according to stereotypes. Consequently, migrant women would be less able to be controlled and objectified, and harder to categorise as other.

Migrant identity is formed at junctures - the juncture between (at least two) cultures, places, and times. As such, it can never be stable and unified. Trinh suggests that identity lies at the intersection of 'dwelling and travelling and is a claim of continuity within discontinuity (and vice versa)' (1994, 14). Migrant identity is both comforting - as a continuous identification with the past culture, and disruptive - as a discontinuity within the sameness of the dominant culture.

Migrant identity can never be stable as the relations between the migrant self and the culture-as-other are always changing. Stuart Hall argues that migrant identity lies at the juncture between the personal and the cultural, at the 'unstable point where the "unspeakable" stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture' (1987, 45). Thus, like Cixous, Hall argues that individual identity resides in the interaction between the self and the material conditions of culture, is unstable, and continually in-process. According to Hall, this dialogue between subjectivity and culture takes place in "'imaginary communities' [that] are not a bit the less real because they are also symbolic' (ibid). Displacement, exile, loss, as well as positive experiences of creation and imagination are both symbolic and real aspects of the migrant subject position.

Aritha Van Herk, a Dutch migrant to Canada, takes up the point of the positive aspect of migrancy, suggesting that the migrant

position offers an opportunity to re-write the self: '[t]o write the immigrant self is to engage in an active fiction, however physical and representative, to fiction a present and a future out of a self-censored past' (1991, 187). Thus the migrant, upon entry to a new culture, may create new identities. This is the point where I think the migrant subject position can be read positively, for the migrant can become the agent of her own creation. Often the migrant point of entry is perceived in negative terms because of its sense of loss, displacement and exile. Take, for example, Sarup's discussion of strangers (and all migrants are strangers, at least at first):

Strangers often seem to be suspended in the *empty* space between a tradition which they have already left and the mode of life which stubbornly denies them the right of entry. (1994, 101, emphasis mine)

Here the migrant experience is seen as a loss of the past and a refusal of the future, leaving no possibilities in an 'empty space'. My argument is that although there are undeniably negative aspects of migrancy, there are also positive ones where strong, empowered identities can be forged. This is where the 'undecidable' qualities of the migrant experience threaten to irrupt and destabilise the assumptions of the dominant culture.

Fotini Epanomitis also suggests the positive aspect of migrant experience:

The migrant experience of dislocation, however, holds out the possibility of belonging to more than one place at the same time and having more than one identity. And though this can be stressful when the different cultural identities come into conflict, it can also lead to a better understanding of both cultures. (1994, 3)

The emphasis here is on the migrant experience of straddling two cultures as a *positive* experience - a place of multiple identities and possibilities. A plural, *positive* sense of self results when people are not limited to stereotypes. Furthermore, it is harder to oppress a moving object on the hierarchical ladder; harder still to constrain a moving *subject*. A refusal to accept simplistic binary categorisation allows for different voices, and helps redress power imbalances.

As I've suggested above, the migrant position enables the subject to imagine and create new selves. She has control over which new self she chooses to be her 'spokesperson I' - an act of agency that transgresses those codes of the dominant culture which seek to restrict the other to an easily identifiable stereotype, and keep in place the strict binary opposition of self and other. Thus, the creation of a fictional self can be an empowering act of resistance for the migrant woman.

The concept of subjectivity in-process can be liberating to migrant women because it destabilises the limiting notion of unified subjectivity. In each novel is a key character which can be read as a paradigm for this sort of resistant migrant subjectivity. Both the characters of the lover and Meta are shown to be tirelessly moving between positions, resisting stereotypes, and thus transgressing oppressive binary conceptualisations. As Beth Yahp says about her work, 'in my stories the Other Asia [stereotypes of Asian Woman] can play seductress, or victim, or oppressed migrant, or schoolgirl swot, but she has to promise me one thing. Never to be just that' (1996, 70-71). Instead of being restricted to stereotypes, these migrant

characters traverse the 'uncontrollable', roaming the ambiguous middle ground of binaries.

The lover in *The Crocodile Fury* is an 'undecidable'. Instead of the antagonistic 'either/ or' of binary oppositions, she has a 'both/ and' relation to them. For instance, as a captured ghost, she is both alive and dead. She is both fish and human; both man and woman. She represents both jungle and sea. Yet she is also neither of these things. When she appears at the narrator's illness, Grandmother 'smelt salt and the open sea, then a cloudy smell of dark places, of jungle mud'. Her hand is 'like snatching burnt sticks', but is also 'as cold as ice' (87). She is a conglomeration of attributes that are usually in opposition. She is multi-faceted, and strong: unable to be stereotyped into a simplistic, limiting identity. Thus, she is transgressive. The rich man, who represents phallogocentric and Eurocentric colonialism, cannot hold or oppress her. The undecidability of her position; her 'otherness' threatens to irrupt and overflow with excess.

Meta, in *The Mule's Foal* is also an 'undecidable'. She is the 'other' - the migrant; the stranger; the woman - in a culture based on binary structures. She belongs to more than one culture, and more than one language. 'Home' to the stranger or the migrant means more than one place. But that is not to say that there are just two homes, two cultures and two languages. Rather, each is a series of shifting points that exposes the illogic of such dual structures of thought.

Meta is, at first, a stranger, and strangers are, in principle unclassifiable:

A stranger is someone who refuses to remain confined to the 'far away' land or go away from our own. S/he is physically close while remaining culturally remote. (Sarup, 1994, 101-2)

Strangers, like migrants, refuse to be bound by a rigid spatial model like that of binary structures, and instead can be both 'close' and 'remote'. Like migrants, the stranger blurs boundaries, and 'is an anomaly, standing between the inside and the outside, order and chaos, friend and enemy' (ibid). Therefore, the stranger and the migrant are 'undecidables' because they are uncategorisable according to a dominant culture that thinks only in dichotomy. They both blur boundaries and provide a point of resistance against an oppressive dominant culture.

In *The Mule's Foal*, transgression of binary structures illustrates, and is a result of, the subject-in-process. Meta further blurs the boundaries between categories of familiar/ stranger by not remaining a stranger when confronting the Priest, but instead oscillating between the two. She was: 'so familiar that the villagers were at the point of calling out his name, but then he changed again. And he was a total stranger to them' (p41). In this scene, Meta transgresses several other binary categories - young/ old, child/ adult, animal/ human. Her laughter begins like that of a child, and then becomes a song sung by someone very old. She changes from Greek to Turk, and appears to change into a goat as she skips away. Finally, her gender also changes:

The Blind Traveller moved towards the Priest and as he spoke his physical person changed before their very eyes. *This change did not just happen once, it was happening continuously. Just by lightly*

tilting his head, the old man's lips became full and his eyes softened so that the villagers could have sworn that they were actually looking at a woman. But then he would move his face up towards the sun and he was a man again, and at this point there was a defiance in his body which was certainly over one hundred years old.
(40, my emphasis)

This passage perfectly illustrates the movement of play within a conception of subjectivity in-process. A one-off change from man to woman (or vice-versa) would keep the binary opposition in place and with it, a unitary sense of subjectivity. But the *continuous* change represents the play of differences, as both absence and presence (as well as varying *degrees* of absence and presence) make their bid for the centre, but are constantly deferred. The concept of subject-in-process is inextricably bound up with a notion of experience. As Cixous argues, subjectivity is made up of a series of 'simultaneously single and collective often brutal experiences' (1994, xv), that for women may include the birth and loss of children, and in the migrant instance would include displacement, exile and loss. Experience - real or imagined - is ongoing rather than simply accumulative. As Gilmore argues, experience 'connotes a profoundly political, emotional, intellectual, and imaginative response, a series of alterations, differences, and repositionings in relation to sameness' (1994, 238). A person does not just gain a sense of subjectivity through one experience, but through the constantly changing series of experiences, large and small, that makes up their life. In the novels, migrant subjectivity is shown to be rich and complex as a result of abundant, momentous experiences. Both the lover and Meta undergo a dramatic series of alterations, differences and repositionings,

experiencing life in a bombardment of sensory, intellectual and spiritual responses.

Subject formation, then, relies on a series of experiences, both individual and collective. Integral to the specific migrant subject-in-process is the negotiation of the experience of the past within the present. The past is crucial for migrant subjectivity, and I will focus on this in the next chapter. I will also argue that remembering the past can be a strategy of resistance against the oppression of the dominant culture.

Chapter Three

'The Presence of the Past: In Search of Migrant Origins.'

The dark cracks and crevices of the swallowed past snaked out to snag her. (The Crocodile Fury, 274)

As migrant characters, the lover in *The Crocodile Fury* and Meta in *The Mule's Foal*, must negotiate a space between two separate sets of cultural experience; the old and the new. They are located beyond those cultures, in a constructed culture that is completely their own, being as it is made up of multiple interactions specific to the individual's own background. As migrants they cannot be 'either/ or' - their identity is not fully realised if they are one or the other. As Sneja Gunew points out, 'diasporic cultures are quite different from the culture that they came from originally' (interview question to Gayatri Spivak in *The Post-Colonial Critic*, 64). The migrant culture is in interaction between old and new cultures, as Beth Yahp in 'Place Perfect and the Other Asia' reflects:

We straddle two countries and cultures,
and maybe even more: this harbour
reminds us of another harbour or the lack
of it, a certain odd way of expressing
something leaks into our language to make
people from *both* before and after stare.
(68; my emphasis)

There can be no purely 'before' the date of arrival in Australia, neither can there be a purely 'after'. Rather, the interplay between cultures is mutual and oscillating, both seeking the presence of the now, but both always already relegated to a past, an absence, that refuses to stay put - that *leaks* out. This indicates a subject-in-process that consists of a set of experiences that shift and change, and memories that are

re-translated and re-inscribed in the light of subsequent experiences. To deny the past is to deny part of the process of migrant subjectivity.

Therefore, the search for one's origins is an important part of subjectivity for migrant women. Pure self-presence is unattainable, but always desired by the subject. Migrants must negotiate with a notion of their past, even though origin is just another signifier, which becomes a function, rather than a fixed point in space and time. As Derrida argues, origin is a 'function, indispensable but situated, inscribed, within the system of signification inaugurated by the interdict' (1976, 266). For migrants, therefore, it is not the teleological 'discovery' of a point of origin that is important, but rather the *process* of searching because it keeps the past with its subversive, disruptive potential active. Migrants must acknowledge and accept the old culture, their past, if they are to legitimate their sense of identity, because as Brewster notes, it is their past which the dominant culture wishes to repress (1995, 15).

The books themselves may be a search for origins for the authors. Certainly the characters are seeking to find where they fit into history and culture in order to find their own identity. Each small section in the first chapter of *The Crocodile Fury* starts with 'That's the place to begin' (1, 4, 7, 13), and the phrase is interspersed a little less frequently throughout the rest of the book. It historically and culturally grounds the story, but at the same time, indicates the impossibility of locating presence in a concept of origin - there is always already another signifier; always the trace of another 'place to begin'. The search for origins is important, too, in *The Mule's Foal*. Stella says 'that all men are from one town and sooner or later they return to that

town' (131) - a recognition that origins cannot be ignored. Both passages indicate that it is necessary for the migrant to come to terms with her past as it may be a position of strength for the migrant, and may have the potential to disrupt the ideology of the oppressor, which wishes not to acknowledge difference.

The lover and Meta are forced migrants, and are both victims of the dominant culture's desire for the exotic. They are exoticized while their past remains unacknowledged by their husbands so that they can be kept as a possession through marriage. We are told in *The Crocodile Fury* that the rich man collects exotica, that

nothing pleased him more than to lie on
one of his luxurious couches, holding an
invaluable object, a latest acquisition, in
the palm of his hand. (5)

The lover becomes his 'latest acquisition'. She is described like an object of art, beautiful, but lifeless as (an exotic) stone: 'A tear from her was a diamond, a smile like the rarest jade' (143). So when the rich man captures the lover and brings her home, she is seen by him as just another piece of exotica.

In *The Mule's Foal*, Meta, who 'kept a clove of garlic under her tongue to sweeten her breath' (15), is also seen as exotic. Being a Turk in Greece, she is desirable to the men of the town because she is the other:

And the more pious and righteous the men
claimed to be, and the louder they cursed
the Turkish beast, the greater was their
desire. (In fact, Mirella's house had a
scandalous cure for impotence. The
whores would enter the bed chamber
having rubbed garlic oil between their
legs.) (16-7)

It is Meta's desirability, her sexuality, that threatens her husband, Stephanos. She is neither, and yet both, the traditional stereotypes of whore/ madonna, and as such, he doesn't know how to treat her. From a phallogentric tradition that thinks only in dichotomy, he faces the confusion of the hymen. As a product of his tradition he doesn't understand the 'logic' of the hymen, which is paradoxical and unable to be categorised. As such, his identity as a sovereign subject is threatened, and so Stephanos reacts with fear and hostility when faced with the strength of the other. Thus, he betrays her; having her imprisoned, in an action that reproduces the eliding of the other by a dominant culture that wishes to repress such disturbing difference.

To resist being 'othered', the lover and Meta must construct their past through a search for origins. The lover's search for her origins is represented by the search for the scale and knife that were taken from her at the point of her capture. The rich man kept the lover's scale and knife, the only things linking her to her past. Thus the rich man denies the lover the aspect of her subjectivity which is formed by the memories and experiences of her past culture:

the lover was like glass to Grandmother,
reflecting only its image, its one layer. She
looked and looked but there was nothing
underneath. (197)

It appears that the lover has no subjectivity: 'nothing underneath', instead she is only an object to be admired, an 'image'. Later, however, Grandmother discovers the scale and knife, which are the key to the lover's identity. They signify her past - her link to the sea - and were taken from her at the moment she was taken from her culture. The rich man, a representative of the dominant culture,

effaces her past and culture which are represented by the scale and knife. They are the repository of the various layers of her subjectivity:

From the scale and the knife the lover's
smell came sharp and unrelenting. On
them the shadows she could not see when
she looked at the lover were layered soft
and thick. (199)

The scale and knife are a reminder that her past (although elided) is all still there as a formative part of her subjectivity, as well as in her memories, ready to rise up and disrupt the dominant culture.

Refusing to forget her past as the dominant culture wishes, Meta integrates her two nationalities, Greek and Turkish, through family. She marries Stephanos, who is Greek. Yiorgios the ape-face, her grandson, is the result of the Greek - Turk union and is symbolic of its richness. It is only while he is alive that the village flourishes. His household is fertile: the chickens lay twice a day, the ewes are milked three times a day, and the sterile mule has a foal. It is the integration of the two cultures that brings prosperity, life and equity to the village. Meta, however, chooses not to live with her Greek descendents, but instead lives at the whorehouse with her fellow women Turks, Mirella and Agape, to celebrate and validate her origins.

Memory is crucial in the search for origins, in the process of legitimating both the self and the old culture. The search for origins is conducted through memory, both collective and individual. Memory is a means of striving for presence, both in itself and as a perceived path to the subject's origin. As Derrida argues, 'a limitless memory would in any event be not memory but infinite self-presence' (1982, 109). Memory is finite and changeable. An example of this is

Grandmother in *The Crocodile Fury*, who constantly re-evaluates her past experiences in light of subsequent experiences, thus retranscribing her past. Grandmother fictionalises herself, which, as I argued in the last chapter, is an act of creation and transgression of oppressive powers - in this case, colonialism.

Memory is explored through oral stories and gossip. The books themselves are structured like a series of oral stories. Oral stories are shown to be rich, lively and changing, rather than the rigidity of traditional Western narrative patterns with their emphasis on problematic concepts of 'truth' and 'unity'. Within this narrative tradition, Derrida associates a link between the concept of time in terms of 'spatial movement or of the now' and a linearisation of writing and speech (1981, 72). This linearity reveals itself in the importance of the concepts of *arche* and *telos* inherent in Western thinking: 'it is always in the figure of the *Western* heading and of the *final* headland or point that Europe determines and cultivates itself' (1992, 25, emphasis in original). Europe seeks its identity in a solipsist positioning of itself as the beginning and end (and therefore as meaning) of Being/ everything. Consequently, the focus of Western narrative patterns is on *one* story and on *one* version of events; effectively effacing the other and other possible versions.

These Western narrative patterns are represented in *The Crocodile Fury* by the storytelling that the nuns teach. The bully does not understand the linearity of Western stories, despite how often the nuns tell her that stories 'must' have a beginning, middle and an end. These stories have a message, a moral, which dictates to the reader exactly what to think or how to behave. Grandmother's oral stories,

on the other hand, weave and repeat and change, but leave the listener to come to her own conclusions. As Trinh points out, clear and direct language is perceived by Westerners as correct and persuasive, but this concept of storytelling renders most Eastern writing incomprehensible:

The language of Taoism and Zen, for example, which is perfectly accessible but rife with paradox does not qualify as "clear" (paradox is "illogical" and "nonsensical" to many Westerners), for its intent lies outside the realm of persuasion.
(1989, 16)

Persuasion and instruction are properties of Western narrative patterns, and may be inappropriate to non-Westerners. This is made clear in *The Crocodile Fury* where the bully can't tell the difference between history and storytelling, because the history she is made to learn is that of foreign places and their royalty and wars. To her, Western history is fictional - it bears no resemblance to her lived experience. Thus, colonialism enforces inappropriate Western ideas on to the other. The nuns make the girls chant:

A stitch in time saves nine. As red as cherries, as white as snow. Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves. One bad apple spoils the whole barrel. (17)

These make no sense to Grandmother because words like 'snow', 'pound' and 'apple' have no meaning outside of their European context. As such, Western instruction effaces the other and other versions which may be equally (or more) valid than the Western one.

In *The Mule's Foal*, writing functions as a way of remembering and keeping intact the culture of the 'other'. It is a means to resist the

colonialism of the League of Good Men who are led by a 'pale millionaire' (88). The League of Good Men initiate the 'Days of Progress' (Humanist Enlightenment), thrusting their inappropriate Western values and concepts of 'progress' on the village. The village suffers as a result, for in these 'Days of Progress', although there was a doctor and a school, 'there was never enough food' (94). Stephanos resists such colonialism by documenting in his 'histories' the history of the village so that their culture is not forgotten and elided by colonial appropriation.

In both novels, the written word is portrayed as only one of many truths, suggesting that there is not just *one* truth, neither is there *no* truth, but rather, many versions dependent upon the position of the subject. The lizard boy in *The Crocodile Fury* sorts through piles of paper, attributing each with arbitrary truth values that change with each sorting. He has ingested Western 'othering' of his culture to the extent that he attributes 'truth' only to pieces of Western origin:

'This one's printed overseas, must be true story. This one local, aiya, can't even spell properly, so many mistakes! Can't be true.'
(84)

The lizard boy is here making a temporary play for a perceived centre by filling the place of a Westerner and taking on Western values. These are such that great importance is placed on truth, meaning, form, logocentrism, and linearity - in short, presence.

The lizard boy, who doesn't believe anything unless it is written, is asked by the narrator's mother if he remembers the night of the ghostchasing, as he was, after all, there:

'No,' said the Lizard Boy, whose greatest asset was his capacity for forgetting. The Lizard Boy tapped his head. 'No memory, no evidence inside here. No proof. You make your head go blank, then you can't be hurt. Then no more ache. (226)

Acknowledging one's origins can be painful and dangerous. As Aritha van Herk suggests, 'forgetfulness is shellshock, a strategy for unendurable war' (1992, 167). In the case of the lizard boy, the unendurable war is colonialism. However, forgetting painful experiences denies a vital part of the person's identity, which, as I have argued, has meaning only within the play of present and past, desire and (forever deferred) fulfilment. To regain their sense of subjectivity, the collective and personal memory that is available to migrants through an oral tradition must be utilised. Memory is a legitimisation of the self, and such a self resists othering by the dominant culture.

Like memory, naming is evidence and validation of existence. The bully in particular, is concerned with collecting 'evidence' because:

She says the nuns are going to kill her. To bury her in the jungle and rub out her name so no one will know. The bully takes pictures for evidence. (14)

She rightly fears Western oppression and denial of the native culture, subjectivity and existence. 'Counter-memories' are one way of preventing such appropriation. Gillian Bottomley cites Lipsitz, who argues that 'counter-memory acts within the limits of historical time while retaining and celebrating the divergent and even oppositional

practices of monumental time¹¹ (1991, 314). As such, countermemory is not restricted to the realm of Western notions of time as linear and teleological, and may be a means of subverting such limited and limiting notions of time. Thus, countermemories can form 'a base for resistance and a space defined across difference' (ibid). Memory therefore becomes an important means of validating and keeping alive the culture of the oppressed during and after colonialism. It is the part of migrant subjectivity (because it is of the past - that unknown and uncontrollable 'other' time) that most threatens the dominant culture. The dominant culture therefore represses and effaces a migrant past too threatening for it to acknowledge.

Stephanos in *The Mule's Foal* gives his grandson Yiorgos his 'inheritance' - a countermemory of that which the dominant culture wishes to repress: a mass grave of his people slaughtered by the League of Good Men. They are forgotten; nameless, like the Aboriginal and immigrant victims of violence that mainstream Australian culture represses with 'socially organised amnesia' (Brewster, 1995, 15). Stephanos ensures the continuation of resistance to colonialism when he gives his son the histories he wrote which documents the names of those slaughtered. As Trinh argues, 'naming is part of the human rituals of incorporation, and the unnamed remains less human than the inhuman or subhuman' (1989, p54). The naming of the slaughtered is therefore part of the countermemory process which personalises the violation that the dominant culture tries to depersonalise and repress. Stephanos' act of subversion

¹¹'Monumental time' is a term taken from Kristeva's 'Women's Time' (1986), and refers to time which is all-encompassing, infinite, eternal and cosmic.

triggers the leaving of the Colonialists. Thus naming is a call to solidarity with which to resist cultural oppression.

Naming is not just an indicator of collective, cultural identity, but is also an indicator of personal identity. When Meta is imprisoned in a nearby town, she turns into a man:

No one knows who he is. There is no name and no record of his crime. So he is set free. (p81)

Without a name she has no female subjectivity, and because her 'crime' was that of being a powerful woman - of being an other who refused to be 'othered' - there can be no crime if she is no longer exactly the other. As a man, she is invisible, the norm, no longer noticed and no longer a threat. So she is set free. Meta has been shown to traverse the binary man/ woman, and used namelessness for her own purposes. She is a character with choice and some sense of agency.

Memory preserves culture, and prevents the past from being repressed and effaced by the dominant culture. The native culture is remembered through stories and gossip that situate the characters in a social and historical cultural context. The novels lament the demise of memory: forgetfulness is equated with the loss of traditional culture. The grandmother in *The Crocodile Fury* is obsessed with telling the narrator and the bully stories of the past. It becomes more and more important to have them recorded as she gets older and her memory becomes weaker. Her stories are a countermemory which validates her existence, and that of her culture.

Forgetfulness, on the other hand, means that the old culture dies, and with it, identity, both collective and individual. In *The Mule's*

Foal, Mirella laments the sadness and gloom of the village brought about by people forgetting their past and their culture: '[t]his is the village of amnesiacs, whereas once it was the village of gossips' (4). Gossip and words are associated with remembering, with happiness and richness of life. When Yiorgos, both man and gorilla, dies, the village begins to lose its liveliness and prosperity:

Without the songs, the kafeneio of Yiorgos
the Apeface became a sad and lonely sort
of place. People did not talk about him.
People forgot about him, people were not
interested in talking about anything any
more. (146)

Here, sadness, lack of talk and forgetfulness are explicitly linked. The villagers begin to forget their cultural heritage. Without their past, they lack the vitality and richness that they had when the past and present were integrated.

In both novels, it is grandmothers that tell the story, although both are childless, rendering the label 'grandmother' technically incorrect. More apt would be the title 'wisewomen', which is used by the grandmother in *The Crocodile Fury* to describe herself. Although it is the fourteen year old granddaughter who narrates *Crocodile*, in fact, she tells her grandmother's story (or stories). This is acknowledged by the framing of the book. Before the first chapter is the epigram: *'This is a story my grandmother tells'*. The suggestion is that it is only one story of many, instead of the definitive one which would be suggested by the definite article. The effect of this, as well as the framing which attributes the story to the grandmother, is to deflect responsibility for reliability away from the narrator, thus problematising the concepts of narratorial truth and reliability. The

problem with such concepts is that they rest on assumptions by the dominant culture of exactly what narratorial truth and reliability are, thereby excluding any other versions.

The framing of the novels has a similar effect to the one Derrida attributes to the preface:

The *pre* of the preface makes the future present, represents it, draws it closer, breathes it in, and in going ahead of it puts it ahead. The *pre* reduces the future to the form of manifest presence. (1981, 7)

By situating the main body of the works in a 'now', and thereby investing them with a (false) presence, what is said by the texts has the illusion of being more authoritative and authentic. Thus they are more likely to be better received by the dominant culture¹² and have more influence.

The narrative framing within the novels has important implications for 'authenticity'. If presence is traditionally located in the spoken word, then autobiographical writing (as the 'next best thing' to speech) is more 'true', according to our phonocentric tradition (Gunew 1985, 148, also 1989, 111). However, as Sneja Gunew cautions, 'the use of the first-person mode is no guarantee of anything but that a convention has been mobilised' (1983, 17). Nevertheless, autobiographical writing often gives the *illusion* of authenticity. Migrant writing (and women's writing before it) has been constricted

¹²Both novels have won awards. *The Crocodile Fury* has won the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, Sheaffer Pen Prize for first fiction (1993) and the NSW Literary Awards, Ethnic Affairs Commission Award (1993). *The Mule's Foal* has won the Australian/ Vogel National Literary Award (for an unpublished Manuscript) (1992), the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, South-East Asia and South Pacific Region, Best First Book Award (1994), and the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, Sheaffer Pen Prize for First Fiction (1994).

by the dominant culture as 'confessional' writing in order to be 'authentic' (a category, as I have argued, constructed by the dominant culture to keep the other distinct from the self, and therefore inferior). The narrator in each of the novels is consciously objectified as a character, and this draws attention to the fictionality of the story, and its (as well as her) multiple meanings. A unified concept of 'truth' and of subjectivity is questioned and found lacking.

The books open up a space where individual difference is allowed free play, in the process, deconstructing the traditional concept of 'identity'. The women characters are inextricably linked with women's experiences - which colour their lives and their way of seeing: 'she gave herself back to the world, and the waters broke and colour ran through everything' (*The Mule's Foal*, 131). The feminine is linked to fertility - juxtaposed with the above quotation is: 'The harvest was remarkable' - to nature and to cycles. But the women are not confined to such traditional roles. The grandmother and Mirella, although childless, are nonetheless rich and complex characters. They each adopt a daughter and live in unconventional, manless, but successful families. Michèle Barrett has pointed out the oppression of the family and the social construction of categories of 'good' and 'bad' motherhood. The disapproval that accompanies unmarried motherhood 'relates precisely to a socially constructed category of femininity and maternal responsibility' (1988, 71). The grandmother and Mirella, as unmarried mothers, have subverted traditional categorisation. The adoption of Agape by Mirella, and the narrator's mother by the grandmother further subvert such constructed categories by gaining daughters, and thus a matrilineal descendency,

without the use of men at all. Instead of being defined as wife or daughter or mother as women traditionally are, their identities are in-process and built up slowly, of the many experiences that make them what they are, and what they will be, thereby transgressing the sovereign subject's oppressive structures, and providing a possible point of resistance.

Thus, the search for origins is a demonstrably crucial means of retaining a sense of past for migrants, whose past may otherwise be effaced by the dominant culture. This sense of past is in turn crucial for the formation of migrant subjectivity. Such a subjectivity provides a position of resistance to the oppressive culture because it is forced to acknowledge the feared other. This acknowledgement is the first step to dismantling oppressive power structures and creating a more equitable system for marginalised people.

Chapter Four.

'Neither One nor Two: The In-between Space of Migrant Subjectivity'.

Then there was Meta, neither man nor woman, and her grandson both man and animal. How was one to know anything in a world like this? (The Mule's Foal, p143)

Derrida's notion of 'différance' can be used to describe the play within subjectivity that enables migrants to transgress the conceptual model of the unified subject. Like the hymen, *différance* refers to the space or blank where absence and presence interact in a play of difference. As such, it suggests the 'undecidable' or uncontrollable within the novels' migrant characters: that which doesn't fit into binary structures and stereotypes. *Différance* is a Derridean neologism from the french root *différer*, and incorporates both the spatial (to differ), and temporal (to defer) aspects of this play of differences (1968, 112). As a homophone of the word 'difference' - the 'a' imperceptible to the hearer, but not to the reader, it has the effect of temporarily reversing the phonocentric privileging of speech. For, according to Derrida, Western culture privileges the spoken over the written in a binary opposition. This kind of reversal of binary structures is also evident in the novels, where the other - woman, animal, stranger, migrant - is temporarily privileged over the self.

Derrida writes that *différance* is the 'non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of difference' (ibid, 115) - yet it is not an origin. It is not transcendent, and exerceises no authority. 'It is not announced by any capital letter' (ibid, 123). It is conceived in negative terms so that it is not thought of as the master concept,

which it constantly subverts. Yet it is not necessarily negative in itself, as it is the effect of the play of differences which allows more speaking positions. In the case of the novels, *différance* suggests a way the characters may escape (sometimes) the dominant culture's oppressive binary structures. The characters do this by traversing the space in the binary that is represented by the slash, thus changing the function of the slash from one of antagonistic barrier, to a space of relation. This allows the characters more 'room to move', and therefore the possibility of more agency in their lives (albeit still with some constraints) than they would have within the stereotypical constructions made by a culture that continually others them.

There are three main devices in the novels where I note the effect of *différance*: firstly, objects that link people and events that would otherwise be seen in opposition; secondly, 'in-between' times and cycles that fit into *neither* side of a binary, and are generally connected to the feminine; and thirdly, characters that fluctuate between *both* sides of the binary opposition in a play of absence and presence. These three categories demonstrate a degree of movement within migrant subjectivity. This motion threatens the dominant culture by being unclassifiable according to dichotomous structures. Therefore, migrant subjectivity may be subversive and transgressive of dominant ideology.

The first linking object is the knife in *The Crocodile Fury* which materialises a symbolic link between the characters and, I will argue, prevents a simplistic 'us and them' binary. The knife is initially taken from the lover by the rich man in his colonial and patriarchal appropriation of her as an exotic object. The knife is then taken by

the grandmother, then by the narrator's mother who gives it to the lizard boy, who gives it to the priest who in turn gives it to the bully. It is an object that links what would otherwise be in opposition - not to unify those oppositions, but to link them in interaction. Like a chain of signification, each character is *both* separate *and* linked to the next. Each character in turn supplants/ supplements the last as the keeper of the knife. The grandmother becomes the lover and the rich man; the lover supplants the old man and becomes a bandit; the narrator becomes the lover, finding rough, scaly patches on her skin, as well as the lover's footprints attached to her feet. This supplanting threatens the sovereign subject by problematising fixed identity, which is why Derrida (borrowing from Rousseau) refers to the supplement as dangerous. This notion of supplement both adds and substitutes itself, but is always seen as exterior. Derrida argues that 'metaphysics consists of excluding non-presence by determining the supplement as *simple exteriority*, pure addition or pure absence' (1976, 167 emphasis in original). The dominant culture, which relies on a 'metaphysics of presence', perceives a second threat when the supplement reveals that 'presence' is actually absent, for if presence was fully present, there would be no need or room for a supplement. The supplement therefore dislodges notions of presence and identity as fixed and stable. Thus the supplement is a valuable tool or effect for the marginalised because it subverts traditional Humanist notions of the unified subject which form the basis of its oppressive systems of thought.

In *The Crocodile Fury*, the knife is a supplement to an absence in each person, adding a dimension of freedom and power to those

people. For instance, the Malaysian lizard boy is tethered by the Western nuns in chains symbolic of colonialism, to prevent the disruptiveness of his otherness from leaking out and 'contaminating' others. To break free of his physical and symbolic bonds and become the rebel bandit, 'King Crocodile', he needs a supplement - the love and trust of the narrator's mother, here represented by the knife she gives him which cuts the chain. At the same time as it adds a dimension of power, the knife also bonds each character to the owner of the knife - the lover. The lover's subjectivity is signified by the scale and the knife, hence her constant desire for the knife which, when she finally gets it on the second last page, turns out to be just another signifier. Presence does not come with the knife - the essence of the lover still eludes her, and the closest she can get to it is by supplanting other 'beings': the rich man, the old man, the narrator, the bully, the crocodile. Her presence is never still - an endless chain of signifiers that deludes itself by thinking her origin and telos lie in the sea.

The knife as a supplementary link draws attention to the specific relationships between Grandmother, the lover and the rich man, and the play of difference between them. Instead of a simple opposition between the rich man and the grandmother (as representatives of the West/ East binary), human elements of jealousy and other emotions make the relationship more complex. But most importantly, the knife highlights an ambiguity in the binary - a place from which to deconstruct that binary - that is, the position of the lover who is both oppressed and oppressor. As a woman she is oppressed by the rich man, but as a Westerner, is also complicit in the

oppression of the grandmother. However, oppression can go both ways - Grandmother holds the key to deferring the lover's desire by withholding the knife. The lover is an 'undecidable', representing the ambiguous figure of the white woman in postcolonial politics and discourse, both oppressor and oppressed. The slash in the binary (which is no longer a slash but a gaping space - as I argued in chapter one: a hymen) is shifting, dependent upon context.

The bones in *The Mule's Foal* also perform this linking function, signifying an essential race memory: 'Vaia's sadness came well before her lifetime. Vaia's sadness was the old sadness' (26). This race memory is exclusively available to women. The bones which symbolise this memory are those of Stella's parents who died in the 'blood-pissing epidemic' (26-7), and are passed matrilineally from Stella to her daughter Vaia. They not only link the women to each other, but also to a feminine history and a traditionally female domestic sphere of weaving, collecting berries and singing: 'She would sing at the top of her voice as if the past and the future were hers' (28). This is repeated twice more over the next two pages, until Vaia (the second one) is imprisoned and raped and comes to a realisation:

Locked up for five days without food, she came to understand that time is not as she had always imagined it to be. She lost sight of the past, of her mother the saint. She lost sight of the future, of her father the Eminent Citizen. She thought only of the woman who turned into a bear. So that is how it was. At any present moment one was a woman scrubbing wool by the river, with a woman's thoughts and a woman's

past and a woman's future. The next moment one was a bear. (32)

When confronted with the reality of her lived experience as a woman, of the unequal power relations between men and women, she comes to realise her own lack of presence - that the present is never present, that 'now' is simply a signifier defined against other 'not-nows'. She loses sight of masculine time - that which is linear and teleological - and instead falls into what Kristeva calls 'women's time', which is on the one hand localised and cyclical, 'cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock' (1986, 191), and on the other, all-encompassing and what Kristeva calls 'monumental'. It is in the junction of cyclical and monumental time 'experienced as extra-subjective time, cosmic time' (ibid), that the subject may experience 'vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*' (ibid). These visions and *jouissance* are the times in the novels when the migrant women have the potential for transgressing the constraining structures of the dominant culture.

The second device - in-between times and cycles - also destabilise binaries, thus questioning the dominant culture's oppressive assumptions. These times are important junctions where the order of things are disturbed, and life-changing, 'extra-subjective' events occur. In *The Crocodile Fury*, these junctions coincide explicitly with women's cycles:

At seven months a baby girl gets her first teeth which she loses when she is seven years old. At 2×7 years = 14 the *yin* path opens, that is, the onset of menstruation. At 7×7 years = 49 menopause ensues. (188)

It is between the first two cycles, at age seven, that the narrator suffers her life-threatening illness, and the grandmother wheedles another cycle from the spirits. However, it is at the end of the second cycle, when the character is 'no longer a child, not yet a young woman, at the in-between time given to general bouts of dizziness and reeling' (11) that so many important things happen. This 'women's time' - at the beginning of menstruation - is important because it is a specifically feminine physiological event that works as a symbol of the psychological gateway or boundary between child and adulthood. Grandmother's extra eye, for instance, opened with the onset of menstruation. This extra eye that opens and closes at important points in the narrative is in a sense an awakening and a reawakening as Grandmother is given the privileged gift of 'sight' (being able to see the 'other world'). Menstruation signifies the entry, or symbolic birth, into womanhood. If, as Derrida says, 'the determination of origin always has the form of presence. Birth is the birth (of) presence' (1976, 309), and rebirth, or reawakening is 'the plenitude of presence returning to itself' (ibid, 310), then one could read Grandmother as achieving moments of full presence. However, Grandmother as absence is emphasised by the connection of these times to very specific feminine biological events such as menstruation, which is the point at which women may be seen to be most different, or other, from men. This paradox of woman as both absence and presence is the site of *différance* where presence and absence are engaged in play, where moments of transgression can occur and the centre may be provisionally filled by the margin.

All the female characters in *The Crocodile Fury* experience something like Kristeva's notion of 'extra-subjective' events at this age, the beginning of menstruation. The bully grew until age fourteen and then stopped. The events of the story culminate, and are told at the end of the narrator's second cycle. This is the vulnerable time, when the character can no longer draw on the 'innocence' of childhood, but does not yet have the resources of adulthood on which to draw. Paradoxically, it can also represent a time of strength for women because it is unable to be neatly categorised into a binary - the character is *neither* and *both* child and adult. It is at the time when the women are most defined as absent (when they are at the strongest marker of womanhood), that they paradoxically come closest to presence.

Similarly, an in-between time in *The Mule's Foal*, is in 'that strange world that is neither of the sleeping world nor of the waking' (19) where Meta is trapped and imprisoned. It is in this vulnerable in-between time that she can be tricked. Normally, she is too clever and powerful. To render her powerless, Stephanos lets loose a black rooster upon her, thus transporting Meta back to her childhood when she had been terrified by a rooster 'ravishing' her. After her imprisonment and subsequent rapings, Meta comes back to the village even more powerful than before.

Like *The Crocodile Fury*, *The Mule's Foal* connects time and nature to the female body, perhaps, as Kristeva suggests, inscribing women with an essentialism¹³ - with a 'stereotyping [that] may shock', but this link is both celebrated and spotlighted as a different, less

¹³See my discussion in chapter one on the strategic use of essentialism.

linear way of measuring not just domestic events, but historical ones as well. As Gayatri Spivak notes in 'Explanation and Culture: Marginalia', categories of private and public can be not just reversed, but displaced, because, 'if the fabric of the so-called public sector is woven of the so-called private, the definition of the private is marked by a public potential, since it *is* the weave, or texture, of public activity' (1988, 103). In both novels, private, public and political spheres are interwoven so that women are present in all of them. The women are involved in the political resistance against Western colonialism - the lover becomes a rebel bandit; Meta and Mirella arrange for the deaths of the League of Good Men. In *The Mule's Foal*, this is a particularly feminine resistance - the League of Good Men die as a result of the services of Agape in the brothel. (The name 'Agape' suggests that in effect, they die of love.) Because the lover and Meta are involved in the traditionally male sphere of the political, they occupy strong subject positions outside of female stereotypes, and oscillate between each position of stereotype and non-stereotype.

The third device used to thwart binary oppositions are characters that inhabit *both* sides of the binary. In each book, there are numerous and central examples of the *différance* of characters: both male and female, or both animal and human. At the same time, they are *neither* male nor female, *neither* animal nor human. In *The Crocodile Fury*, the lover is both human and fish, reminiscent of a mermaid. The crocodile of the title is both a man and a crocodile, and also symbolic of each character's worst enemy, and therefore, its meaning is contextual. Meaning is created differently by each character in the movement along a chain of signifiers. The

grandmother's crocodile is hungry, and represents the promise she made to the lover. The bully's crocodile, on the other hand, is always full, and represents her envy of the power and privilege that goes with colonial capitalism. The nuns' crocodile, is 'everything outside the convent' (57), - which often means the Malaysian 'other', but always means anything that may potentially corrupt their theological beliefs, particularly about sex: 'Crocodiles are attracted by the smells of girls with their legs apart' (186). The meaning of the signifier 'crocodile' is contextual and dependent upon the perceiver. Likewise, Meta, in *The Mule's Foal*, is both man and woman and human and goat, Yiorgous is both man and gorilla, and yet at times he is simply described as 'hairy, but in a manly, handsome sort of a way' (117). 'Meaning' thus traverses the the middle ground of the binary, unstable, transgressive, and defying categorisation.

The categories man/ woman and human/ animal may seem mutually exclusive to those of us brought up in the humanist tradition which relies on binary thought. After all, there is no way to mistake a human for an animal, is there? But in this age of genetics where 99% of ape genes have been found to be the same as human ones, the difference between animals and humans is less and less clear. As I argued in the first chapter, such 'essentialist' categories as man/ woman and human/ animal are socially constructed, and the slash between them arbitrary. Although the novels sometimes use a strategic, liberating essentialism, they also point to the way society constructs an oppressive essentialism. For instance, in *The Crocodile Fury*, the lizard boy declares:

They think they got a crocodile, fine! They
 got one. They think they got a human,
 they got one. All depends what they think.
 (246)

The lizard boy's identity is dependent upon how others construct him into one of the two categories. Gillian Bottomley discusses this in terms of homogenising terms such as 'community', suggesting that the term may cover 'people with some shared values, but the status of these imagined communities often rests most firmly in the *homogenizing intentions of the observer*' (1991, 311, my emphasis). The lizard boy's identity is shifting and dependent upon the position of the people who perceive him - the priest who helps him escape (but is consequently considered a little senile by the nuns), and the nuns who see him as a disturbance, a disruption, as 'other'.

Likewise, in *The Mule's Foal*, after Meta is imprisoned, she is constructed by Stephanos, her husband, as being able to 'transform herself into any animal she wished'. Her son believed that 'he had been suckled by a goat with fourteen nipples' (21). Notice that in both books, the subject that perceives is male, and in *The Crocodile Fury*, he is also Western. So the Malaysian boy and the woman are othered into (constructed) essential categories, so that the perceiver can redefine his identity on the human and male and Western side of the binary, further perpetuating unequal power relations.

While the novels illustrate how society categorises people into binaries, they also question the bipolarity of these categories. They suggest that the slash between the categories moves; that the boundaries between them are blurred. The lizard boy's skin flakes and he grows a tail. He is not just a man mistakenly perceived as a crocodile, rather, he is *both* crocodile and human. From a distance,

Meta looks like a goat to the villagers (42), and when she returns, the first thing her son sees is 'her nipples pointing out from beneath her red dress'. He doesn't recognise her because he is 'still waiting for the goat with fourteen nipples' (83). The recurrent nipple imagery associates Meta with motherhood, and therefore nature, and yet she is not a 'natural' mother - one whose son would 'naturally' recognise her; one who would (surely?) 'naturally' be more interested in reuniting herself with her son than seeking vengeance on her husband. She is both mother and not mother, woman and goat. The categories of woman and animal are not discrete. The boundaries of each category can be transgressed by certain characters.

Transgression of boundaries gives those characters some choice, and therefore, power. By power I mean not just social and cultural value that is attributed to those that are 'successful' in the public sphere, but also, and more importantly, a psychological and emotional success that comes about with an integration and acceptance of the other as part of the self, and acceptance of difference. As Calle-Gruber states, '[s]trength does not come from preservation (of the same) but from the irruption of alterity' (Afterword, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, 1994, 218). Instead of being restricted to the marginalisation that occurs with being stereotyped into one category, these characters have access to more experiences, which works to free their potential for agency. Even when the transgression occurs between two marginalised categories, the character is still empowered. This is because the undefinable; the unknowable is also the uncontrollable. In *The Crocodile Fury*, the grandmother warns of the land crocodile - a 'creature who can't be controlled'. He 'lives on

the edges of the jungle so he gets the *best of both worlds*' (my emphasis). His body is 'hot but his knife is as cold as ice' (18). The description of the land crocodile is made up of binaries, but rather than being a series of descriptions from one side of the binary, the crocodile moves between *both* categories, thus empowering him to have the 'best of both worlds'. In *The Mule's Foal*, Meta is also powerful:

At some point Stefanos had lost control of her. She had grown and grown so that, it seemed to him, his house could not contain her any longer. (17)

She is uncontrollable because her sense of her own subjectivity has 'grown and grown', she has transgressed boundaries of human/ animal and man/ woman. She is more than a woman, and much more than a stereotype. To go hunting, she would 'put on her husband's black and grey striped breeches' (p16), thus 'wearing the pants' both literally and figuratively, as well as retaining some of those qualities generally perceived as 'feminine'. The name 'Meta' is the clue to her power and the reason for it, with its two-fold meaning: change or alternation, and transcendence. Meta is able to alter her identity, and go beyond the limits of being a woman and a Turk in a patriarchal and Greek society. She is 'undecidable' and uncontrollable, and as such is subversive. As I have argued, the uncontrollable, the undefinable, the continually moving subject refuses to have a stereotype pinned to it, thus offering the potential for greater agency and less 'othering' by the conglomeration of sovereign subjects that make up the oppressive dominant culture.

Conclusion:

I will breathe slowly, carefully, into the spaces that are left. I will make these spaces my own. (The Crocodile Fury, 313)

This thesis argues that, by their very nature, binary structures inevitably oppress marginalised peoples. It argues that a notion of a decentred subject is more equitable and empowering to the disenfranchised. This kind of dismantling in favour of a more fluid kind of subjectivity is, of course, a major goal of feminist and postcolonial discourse and politics. However, feminist and postcolonial theorists, are, like myself, not happy to leave the subject completely decentred and floating aimlessly, with no autonomy or agency, which would render political action impossible. Feminism and postcolonialism needs a theory that accounts for and allows political action. A 'robust' theory grounded in historical, and material specificity, rather than philosophy, as Fraser and Nicholson suggest (1993, 428).

It is in chapter one that I showed how the migrant position destabilises a series of binary structures through Derrida's model of the hymen. I suggested that a binary conceptualisation is informed by unacknowledged assumptions of essentialism which privileges the dominant culture. Through the 'undecidability' of the migrant position, I established the mobility of boundaries in order to make a political argument about the possibility of resistance for marginalised people, against the inadequate notion of a unified subjectivity. In chapter two, I proposed an alternative model of subjectivity which *can* account for the migrant position. This model is based largely on Cixous'

gendering of the decentred subject which includes an account of the external relations between self and other: between the self and its culture, particularly in terms of the discursive effects upon migrant subjectivity. In chapter three, I examined, through the novels' characters, the importance of a sense of past to migrants, as well as the interaction between past and present cultures. The fourth chapter demonstrated the way this migrant subjectivity works within the novels, and how it can resist structures of power such as colonialism. To describe the play of difference between self and other, I have here used Derrida's notion of *différance*. This notion suggests the continual negotiation at the site of the subject, thus constructing identity.

Although this thesis uses *The Crocodile Fury* and *The Mule's Foal* to explore the issue of migrancy of both the authors and the characters, my emphasis has been on the theorising of migrancy, and its impact on an ideal of equity. I believe theory needs to be used politically, and therefore my thesis is weighted towards the theoretical so that it may have a wider political applicability beyond the novels. Hence, I have used the novels, *The Crocodile Fury* and *The Mule's Foal* to demonstrate an alternative model of subjectivity to that of the unified subject. However, I believe we cannot stop our resistance to such power bases at the physical edges of the novels.

In reading the decentred subject in these novels, the migrant woman would be left lost, floundering in an endless chain of signifiers. Although Derrida shows us that we can't have full presence, or a 'complete' subjectivity, I don't think that should stop us searching for one. An illusion, or *sense* of subjectivity is important for people to

want to carry on living. Thus, I suggest that migrant women must be placed at the centre at least provisionally, and then that more equitable visiting rights be issued for all parties to visit the centre. That is, a subject-in-process, where part of that process includes a provisionally centred subjectivity.

I realise it may be said that I am part of the white, Western culture that I am critiquing, but that is only part of my subject position. I am also a woman, and as such, do not feel completely part of the privileged dominant culture. Like the migrant position, like the lover in *The Crocodile Fury*, I also am an 'undecidable' - the ambiguous figure of white woman, both complicit in the oppression of non-Westerners, and oppressed by my culture's phallocentrism. Always I am aware of the problems of appropriation of the 'other', but I feel that this thesis is part of the listening process. To arrest the eliding of marginalised people, it is necessary not only for them to speak, but also for someone to listen to them: to speak *with*, and not *for* them. This notion of conversation unsettles the dichotomous Western adversarial system with its hierarchies of power.

A migrant position, with its 'undecidable' properties, disturbs and disrupts the dominant culture's notion of a unified subjectivity, thus changing our conceptual thinking from a binary model to one of difference. As Kristeva says, 'We need multiple, plastic, polymorphous, and polyphonic identifications' (1990, 173). We need to be flexible, fluid, and open to different voices. We need to recognise and celebrate difference instead of discriminating, marginalising and fearing the other. This will create a more equitable society as we move into the next millennium - one which will benefit

us all as we learn new ways of seeing and experiencing life from those who have previously been ignored.

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