

2014

## **A stirring of cultures: The contest for place, belonging and identity in Australia**

Garry Stewart Henderson  
*Edith Cowan University*

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## USE OF THESIS

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

A Doctoral Thesis by Garry Stewart Henderson  
comprising a creative work,

*The Wounded Sinner*

and an accompanying exegesis,

**A STIRRING OF CULTURES: THE CONTEST FOR PLACE,  
BELONGING AND IDENTITY IN AUSTRALIA.**

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## Abstract

The creative work, *The Wounded Sinner*, and the accompanying exegesis, form a volume of writing that considers aspects of place and belonging in a contemporary Australian context through the agencies of Aboriginality, migration and homelessness. While these issues are present and, at times, contentious in the structure of modern Australian society they have roots in past eras of empire building, racism and the movement from agrarianism to industrialisation. The characters are drawn from my own experiences and, as such, validate both the creative work and give the exegesis substance.

Jeanie Bayona is an Aboriginal woman who was raised, from infancy, by an Anglo family in Perth. She and her partner, Matthew, a fellow teacher, move to Leonora in the eastern goldfields, the lands of the 'dingo dreamers,' her people. Jeanie is for many years content to exist on the edge of Aboriginal society, reluctant to leave the security of the 'white' life she had grown up with. However, her eldest daughter, Jaylene, already enmeshed in both worlds, challenges Jeanie to answer the spiritual calling to embrace her roots.

Matthew Andrews is chasing the elusive dream to become a writer while nursing his ailing father in the ancestral home, *The Wounded Sinner*, in Guildford. He lacks the ability to do either well. Still, it keeps him away from the responsibility of fatherhood three weeks out of four and for that he is secretly grateful. However, five years of commuting from Leonora to Perth has strained Jeanie and Matthew's relationship, though Matthew rarely sees anything outside of his ego-centric world.

Both Jeanie and Matthew engage in new relationships: she with the perverse Ben Poulson and he, the troubled Vince Romano and homeless ex-Vietnam veteran, Lazslo Smith. The central character of the creative work, however, is the old Guildford house, *The Wounded Sinner*, which symbolises the old establishment values that were, for better or worse, the values that built Australia. Australia is undergoing change which *The Wounded Sinner* is raggedly reluctant to accept. It remains a bastion of Anglo-Celtic ideals and is personified through Matthew's father, Archie, as he rails against what he sees as the 'problems' of contemporary Australia: the homeless, the Aboriginals and the non-Anglo Australians.

The exegesis, titled '*A stirring of cultures: the contest for place, belonging and identity in Australia*,' explains through the experiences of migrants, Aboriginal Australians and the homeless the problems and difficulties of those who don't meet the strict criteria of the core values representing Anglo-Celtic society. The contest for place, belonging and identity in Australia as expressed in my creative work, *The Wounded Sinner*, is exemplified in the exegesis around those aforementioned themes and corroborated throughout by a wide authorship, both present and past. Interspersed through the text, too, are personal reflections of relevant episodes that have contributed to my understanding of Australian society and how I am part of it.

## **Declaration**

*I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief*

- i. incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
- ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or*
- iii. contain any defamatory material.*

Garry Stewart Henderson

18 June 2014



## **Acknowledgement**

To my supervisors, Dr Donna Mazza and Dr Robyn Mundy, I owe so much. I wish to thank them for their encouragement and honest criticisms during the construction of this thesis. Thanks also to my many Wongai friends who have instructed me on matters of culture and country, elements essential to this work. Lastly, I am forever grateful to my longsuffering wife without whose assistance, patience and understanding this project would not have reached fulfilment. You, Jeni, are an inspiration.

## **Table of Contents**

### **A Stirring of Cultures**

Introduction	7
Indigenous Australians in a contemporary context	10
Migrants and belonging	30
The homeless: an underclass in a land of plenty	42
Conclusion	59
References	61

## Introduction

*The Wounded Sinner* (Henderson, 2014) is a creative work whose characters are drawn from Western Australia's vast and colourful collection of human difference. It portrays them in contests and conflicts, large and small, that some people may encounter, and explores through those characters issues of 'life' and 'death' that will be experienced by all. *The Wounded Sinner* is not only a story of Aboriginal people, homelessness and migrants but how Australia's Anglo-Celtic core, essential for maintaining social cohesion, responds to the perceived loss of its dominance. As much as Moreton-Robinson (2005, p.1) asserts that "the core values of Australian national identity are located within the house that Jack [Britain] built," *The Wounded Sinner*, the house and the novel, are like representative of those values and similarly threatened. While the three components of the exegesis feature examples of statuses least appreciated in contemporary postcolonialist society, they, for varying reasons, constitute a danger to the "values, beliefs, norms and social conventions" of Australian society (p. 1).

Watt and Watt (2000, p. 83) argue that racism and mistreatment are contemporary events despite populist stories that such things happened "generations ago" and "there is no reason for us to feel responsible or guilty." The telling of the stories of Jaylene, Jeanie and Auntie Peggy strengthens and gives credence to the narratives of the Goldfields Aboriginal people in particular and Indigenous Australians in general. Mining and agriculture, so much the mainstay of Australia's economic development, was also responsible for the dispossession and cultural upheaval of Aboriginal people that in the parlance of today would be seen as collateral damage. Again, the creative work relies on historical foundations to engage the reader in a dialogue that debates issues, however contentious, affecting contemporary Australians.

While the stolen generation, dispossession, disease and genocide may be viewed by some non-Aboriginal people as historical or even mythical events, the ramifications of those actions are felt today. Each Aboriginal person has a story, unique, qualified and lived. The stories of Auntie Peggy, Jeanie and Jaylene are important narratives. That very uniqueness of story, of life, from an Aboriginal perspective, makes a substantial and original contribution to knowledge.

I have written this exegesis from the perspective of one on the periphery of Anglo-life. Throughout the exegesis I have interspersed the text with episodes from my life, experiences which have inspired and given credence to my creative work and in turn reinforced this exegesis. These brief accounts are important, too, as they have shaped my world view and identity.

I was born in Sydney in 1950. My father was of Scottish heritage, his father having migrated sometime early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. My mother was born a Harradine, a large clan of Aboriginals with family groups throughout South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. Marriage to my father, and her paler skin, allowed her a friendless freedom; she would deny her Aboriginality till the day she died. The knowledge that she shared with me, though, helped me craft the character of Jeanie in my novel, and the theme of contemporary Aboriginality within this exegesis. I am indebted to her, my mother, in spite of her shame which was so typical of that era before the 1967 referendum, (the turning point in Indigenous affairs in Australia and the culmination of decades of legislative change) (Attwood & Markus, 2007, pp. v-vii) for I got an education and an upbringing away from the missions and the “ghettos” as referred to by Brock (1993). This should not be seen as some providential concession to a better life experience. Rather, it has allowed me to view Aboriginality, and, indeed, homelessness and migration, from an exclusive perspective as expressed in this exegesis.

I grew up at a time when Australia, according to Arthur Caldwell, had to “populate or perish” to rectify the falling national birth rate (Elder, 2007, p. 83). There was a shortage of labour in those early post-war years and successive governments, reliant for generations on British immigration, began to look further across Europe to boost the Australian population. This was a decision that didn’t hold great appeal for many of the Anglo-Celtic core of ‘native’ born Australians, my parents among them. As I got older I heard new words that came into common usages at home and school. I experienced new emotions and new fears as tangible expressions of ‘self’. Back then, for me and my family, it didn’t have a name. Later I would call it racism.

I attended the local Presbyterian Church. Most of the new Australians went to the Catholic Church. They began to be known to me as wogs, dagos, spaghetios, wops and many other names that were not said so much to denigrate them, but to alienate them, to accentuate their difference through verbally constructed segregation. Different things happened in their churches, I learned, and for thirty years I carried a fear and anxiety of all things Catholic. For

me, they were a significant ‘other’ to my righteous Anglo-Celtic ‘self’ for I had grown up, albeit confused, as an Anglo-Celtic. I know better now.

After all, Australia was populated in migrations from Asia that began at least 40,000 years ago and it continues today unabated. They come in boat and plane and most seek permanent residency and a new beginning. Baldwin and Quinn (2007, p. 17) assert that the immigrants arrive in large numbers and form into “tightly knit communities” that reflect their former homes with aspects of their adopted country. There is also the struggle of the adaption to the cultural differences of the new country and attachment to their homeland. In the postcolonial Australian environment all migrants, including those from Britain, are challenged by “[c]oncepts such as *home, belonging, personal identity, marginalization and hybridization.*”

The homeless, too, are subject to most of the aforementioned challenges. While migrants can become victims of homelessness, “the shadow people” (Wilcox, 1995, Foreword) are a predominantly home-grown sub-culture that have evolved from a more romantic time in Australia’s history. It is ironic that in the richness of contemporary Australia homelessness continues to prevail despite interventions to eradicate it and dramatic political statements made to that affect (Foley, 2009, p. 21). Like economic and social lepers those afflicted by the results of poverty and homelessness, symptomatic of modern society and usually always coupled together, inhabit the underworld of the unclean, the processes of separation governed as much by their situation as mainstream society’s perception of it (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 30).

The issues of Indigenous Australians, migrants and the homeless are problematic to the mainstream of contemporary Australia that is culturally bound around a core of Anglo-Celtic beliefs and values. My creative work, and this exegesis, is a response in support of those outside the inner sanctum of Australia’s conventional culture who struggle to adapt to the mythology of its beliefs and values.

## **Indigenous Australians in a contemporary context**

It was St Kilda versus Collingwood at Victoria Park in Melbourne during the 1993 AFL season. Nicky Winmar, in response to racist taunts from the spectators, lifted his jumper and pointed to an expanse of brown skin. “The gesture contained equal measures of dignity and contempt, but above all it was a symbol of the pride of a man in the colour of his skin” (Taylor, 2007, p. 26). Indeed, it was a poignant moment for both the footballing community and for those who supported the cause for racial harmony and equity within a wider cultural context. Superficially, at least, it was supposed that Mr Winmar, at that time, had struck a blow for a better understanding of intercultural relationships in Australia. It is true that the knowledge of their ‘self’ and where they fit in society is now more clearly understood by Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal Australians (Anderson, 2003, p. 43). Their acceptance into that society, however, is still largely governed by tenacious ideologies lying shallowly under the white skin of the Anglo-Celtic psyche and Indigenous Australians continue to contend with issues arising from the post-colonial era: identity, discrimination, place and the land, self and other and hybridity that daily impact their lives.

As late as 1935, Stephenson, an Australian cultural commentator (cited in Elder, 2007, p. 118), wrote that “[c]ulture in Australia if it ever develops indigenously, begins not from the Aboriginal, who has been suppressed and exterminated, but from British culture ... We inherit all that Britain has inherited, and from that point we go on—to what?” Most white Australians believed they had valuable cultural property to protect, and there was always a resurgent nationalistic fervour when ‘it’ was threatened. Colonial supremacy, regardless of the era, created an environment of ‘self’ and ‘other.’ Sheridan (cited in Huggan, 2007, p. 32) views the (Anglo-Celtic) Australian character of the post-Federation era as “an identity, a unity, whose meaning derives from its discursive displacement of the ‘other’ race, just as its power as a nation state derives from the appropriation of Aboriginal land. In that respect, Australian culture is still colonial.” Huggan, also, states that the concept of a definitive separation between colonialism and postcolonialism from a cultural perspective is debatable (2007, p. 27; Gandhi, 2009, pp. 168-169). Further, it is suggested by Curthoys (cited in Sheridan, 1995, p. 167) that Australia, culturally at least, is in an “undecided state” and that it “is a land, a society, a history neither colonial nor postcolonial.” For Australia, the spectre of the settler colony drapes itself over “the past, the present and the future” and its “vanishing endpoint that is continually pursued is, in effect, the moment of colonial completion”

(Strakosch & Macoun, 2012, p. 42). Strakosch and Macoun argue the ideology of colonialism is not extant and that the act of colonisation continues as a “reverberating aftermath” in current Australian political, economic and cultural processes (2012, p. 43). While the locating of a postcolonial period in Australia, remains problematic, perhaps Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define it best by stating “postcolonialism” in Australia “is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction ... [and] addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact” (1995, pp. 2-3).

It was always a strange experience going to La Perouse as a child. The irony of the location didn't reveal itself to me until I was a teenager: that the inglorious mission was built on the site of Cook's 1770 disembarkment on the shore of Botany Bay. As we drove through the narrow-laned collection of ramshackle huts my father told us curtly to “keep our heads down” and say nothing. Even though my mother had Nunga blood these people were mostly Eora and the Anglo-Celtic myth of a homogenous linking of all Aboriginal groups held no water here. But this was where ‘Yearlie’ lived. It means ‘grandfather’ in my mother's native tongue though I don't recollect how he was related to us, if at all. Of the visits my father said, “We were lucky and didn't have to live like those poor beggars,” though I knew our own circumstances were less than salubrious. “Just be grateful for everything you've got,” he would say and I began to learn what it was like not to be an ‘other’ who had to live like that. While I was still young we went to La Perouse no more and now in my enlightenment I picture it in those years before the 1967 Referendum as a place swimming beneath the waters of an Anglo-Celtic consciousness, never able to come up for breath.

Despite a raft of colonialist discourse theories, Said defines colonialist thought as a structure that “promote[s] the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (1977, p. 43). The determining of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in post-Federation Australia reveals a system of racial discrimination. Hubbard and Kitchin (2011, p. 496) state that othering is “the process through which the other is often defined in relation to the self in negative ways ...,” the simplicity of that quote drastically understating the depths and effects of that process. The contrasting relationships between “coloniser and colonised are characterised by a deep ambivalence.” The other is perceived conversely as desirable and enviable yet contemptible and an object of derision; the coloniser ‘self’ asserts authority without the subtleness to wield it and finds it “slipping away” (Hall, 1996, p. 70). In this way the identity of self is always “underpinned” by its relationship with the other. The

polemics of the culture of ‘us’ and ‘them’ as a basis of racism in Australia exist today as the often fractious and contentious result of colonialism. More expansively, Gandhi (2009, pp. 53-54) cites Heidegger’s concept of *Lichtung*, the illumination of a space, as the process that allows even “the most restrictive human consciousness” to experience “the humane and, equally, the barbaric.”

The Aboriginal characters of Auntie Peggy, Jeanie and Jaylene, in my creative work, *The Wounded Sinner*, each react differently to the outback. For Auntie Peggy, the threat felt by Jeanie and Jaylene of being lost and alone in the huge dark expanse of desert and within earshot of circling dingoes, was a natural circumstance. The inference here is that the settler culture has ‘bred out’ of Jeanie, by removal from her traditions, that which should have been familiar. It is noted by South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, Host and Owen (2009, pp. 5-8) that Aboriginal people retain their Aboriginality despite “civilisation” and even at the expense of traditions lost in the process of colonisation. I have expressed the loss of the traditional self as the fear of the unknown that draws contrasting reactions from mother and daughter while Auntie Peggy, within the mystery of the dark space, becomes healed. Heidegger, cited in Garbutt (2010, p. 36), expresses *Lichtung* simply: “In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing [in a forest, the bush], a lighting [*Lichtung*].” Garbutt (p. 36) states that this allows us, through the illumination of a space, to better understand “the specific circumstances, the situatedness, of our being in the world.” In the Foreword of Keneally’s book *Outback* he alludes to Heidegger’s *Lichtung* in describing the vastness of the interior of Australia as an “immensity of space” given over to “enchanted and unknown country” of mysterious “customs, secrets, ironies and landscapes” (Keneally, 1983. p. 8). I have included the following excerpt from my creative work as an example of the ‘illumed space’ within contemporary Australia:

It is a place largely unannounced and it isn’t signposted as other monuments of Australian culture are. Instead the campsite sits at the end of a rough dirt track tucked in by sad fencing, slack and slanted by the press of years, at the centre of an island of bush clinging to the edge of town. The campsite is bare, save for two small three-sided hovels, some empty 44 gallon drums and a fire pit. Smaller camps are dotted throughout the bush. People lie or sit and yabber back and forth in language, strange creatures risen up from the earth, made from the dust that still clings to them, five cent pieces in the money bag of a rich nation.



This is a drinking camp. The people here are unfettered by the restrictions of their home communities. They unwind the traditions and culture of their heritage; they are threads caught on the barbwire of a different civilisation, gradually coming apart till there is almost nothing left. They swim about in the captivation of the brown bottle. They all partake.

Auntie Peggy tells the driver not to stop. “We jus’ lookin’,” she says and the mini-bus coasts slowly over the rough and rutted track. Some think the taxi is bringing grog from Boulder and they rise like spirits, thin, dusty spectres craving the succour of pension day. A few stagger towards the cab, hoping it will stop and give them a ride to anywhere, which to them is as good as nowhere. Endlessly drifting, camp to camp, hanging on to the fringe of society’s best dress as it twirls in a dance of innovation and invention, imagination and utter neglect.

“Can’t cure the common cold.” The cabbie speaks and swings the cab to point back in the direction of town. “No hope of curing that, either.” In the rear vision mirror he watches as the people disperse back into the scrub. “As big a mess of hopelessness as I’ve ever seen. In fact, as big a mess anyone could ever imagine. And it hasn’t improved in the years I’ve been coming out here.” (Henderson, 2014, pp. 179-180).

The ‘otherness’ of the people within the campsite is maintained as a device to support the discourse of ‘self’ which “always contains a trace of ambivalence and anxiety about its own authority” and to authenticate the processes by which it continues its dominance (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1994, p. 103). Garbutt’s assertion (2010, p. 36) that the illumination of a space allows for a better understanding of “our being in the world” is expressed in the taxi ride through the Boulder camp: Auntie Peggy, Jeanie and the children are enclosed in a capsule of the white man’s making, unable to change the vista of pathetic humanity but impacted by its presence.

While the continuation of the ‘settler’ society is of major benefit to the non-Indigenous Australians (Peris, 2003, p. 198), to many Indigenous Australians, for so long disenfranchised and powerless within their own country, the political manoeuvrings around the status of colonisation mean very little (Strakosch & Macoun, 2012, p. 41). However,

Indigenous Australians, as the significant other in the socio-political landscape, “remain as an unavoidable ‘problem’ for Australian settler-nationalism.” The processes of decolonisation, simply the severing of ties to Britain for the non-Indigenous, is problematic for the Indigenous Australians, involving a “reclaiming of Aboriginal identities and an ongoing struggle and negotiation with the state over status, rights, and obligations” (Moran, 2002, p. 670). Short (2012, pp. 293-294) states that by the use of metaphoric and symbolic processes—“such as official apologies, commemoration memorials and the like” and “setting up truth commissions and reparations tribunals,” the rifts in society may be repaired. However, these events are often perceived by non-Indigenous Australians as fractious and pandering to the minority. William Deane, in a television interview concerning the 2008 National Apology to the Stolen Generations, stated:

I've got no doubt in the world that that's that. There are some people who can't see the need for an apology, there are some people who will say, "Well, I'm not sorry, I didn't do anything," and you can fully understand that (O'Brien, 2008).

The situating of Aboriginal people and Aboriginality within an Australian cultural/political structure is determined as much by their small representation as by non-Indigenous narrative and media “(rather than through face-to-face encounters)” (Attwood, 2011, p. 172). Coloniser and colonised have existed in different cultural spheres, the former exhibiting a sustained ignorance of the latter, for the most part excluding them from an historical contribution and denying them status as a First Nations people. Stanner (cited in Mulvaney, 1990, p. 155), in his delivery of the 1968 Boyer Lectures, spoke of a history that “presented ‘a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape.’” Being an Indigenous Australian means being acknowledged as an alarming statistic in health, crime and education reports and tabled in parliament as a problem without a satisfactory solution. For many years, survival in the system depended on white lies and a nurtured mythology: “‘Tell them you’re Indian.’ Or Maori, or Islander. Anything but Aboriginal” (Cowlshaw & Morris, 1997, p. 1). My mother spoke similar words to me as I left to join the army as a 17 year old: “Whatever you do, don’t tell them that you’re Aboriginal.” And as an afterthought as I was about to board the train: “If they ask about me, tell them there was another girl born at Quorn at the same time with the same name.” Her desperation was palpable. Sally Morgan had a similar experience, as described in her autobiographical *My Place*:

“You know we’re not Indian, don’t you?” Jill mumbled.

“Mum said we’re Indian.”

“You know what we are, don’t you? ... Boongs, we’re Boongs!” (1987, pp. 97-98).

Morris and Cowlshaw argue that culture is in an unchanging and fixed state, and in an Australian context “cultural identity can be equated with racial identity,” in essence manifesting as “Said’s ‘orientalism’” (1997, p. 6). The ‘us’ and ‘them’ reality still holds a prominent position in the rationale of cultural identity in Australia and is firmly entrenched in postcolonialist/neocolonialist thought (though Said himself says colonialism has not yet run its course) (Said, 2002, p. 2).

While the classification of ‘self’ and ‘other’ are maintained in contemporary times as supportive of the “cohesion within society,” (Economou, 2007, p. 42) the ‘others’ may experience feelings of alienation and dislocation that separate them from the national norm. These feelings and aspects of subjection may be exorcised to some extent by expressing formerly unspoken stories and addressing the prevailing dominant myths that continue as agents of suppression. The exploration of the lives of Indigenous people in contemporary society promotes, at times, “new versions of history” that might otherwise remain untold (Hills, 1997, pp. 102-104). Bourke (2003, pp. 1-6) cites the Mackay Report (1988) as establishing that “Australians” in their guise of ‘self’ were more amenable “about discussing the role, plight and future of Aboriginal Australians than a few years ago.” The report, titled *Being Australian* included a chapter called “The Aborigines [sic]: a dimension to the Australian identity,” acknowledging in their ‘otherness’ at least some attachment to other Australians. For Indigenous Australians this grudging acceptance into the fold of the greater Australian identity often necessitated “a search for self and home” to alleviate the feelings of detachment and to make whole once again the emotive and the spiritual (Hills, 1997, p. 104). Writing more recently Walter (2012, p. 29) argued that the relationship between non-Indigenous Australians and the Aboriginals, while central to the “contemporary Australian identity”, remains largely undiscussed, a contentious and conflicting issue that sits uneasily at most levels of society. This same society projects an image of a tolerant and egalitarian nation: the reality finds the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians “still socially and politically strained.” Also, the establishing of a national identity should not

be as restrictive as the Anglo-Celtic ‘we’ or ‘us’ of the past imaginings and fabrications but a progression, if that be the case, to a more inclusive ‘us’, where the ‘them’ of the othering consciousness is left behind.

I have tried to create that sense of the re-discovery of Indigenous identity in my character, Jeanie, who was taken as a child and assimilated into white society. Now, as an adult, the raw emotions of her indigenoussness rise to contest her assimilated ‘whiteness’ and drives her to establish her belonging.

“Why’d you come out here, Mamma? Was it the spirits calling you?”

“Yes...no. I suppose I wanted to come home. It’s where I belong.”

“Do you, Mamma? Do you really belong?”

“Why, I...Of course I do. I was born here.”

“Some people say you don’t belong” (Henderson, 2014, p. 37).

Young (2008, p. 44) describes the actions of assimilations of one culture into another “as the appropriation of either difference into identity, or of identities into a greater order”, the morality of that process “work[ing] simply as a form of ideological control.” Jeanie was called to question her belonging and her acceptance of her state of “being” which for so long satisfied her imputed “whiteness.” Jeanie’s character is symbolic of those Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families, some of whom, for innate reasons, begin to question their rightful place in society and seek out their history. Haskins’ (1998, p. 8) essay of feminist interracial relationships in the 1930s, highlights the difficulty of engendering understanding amid the paternalist and colonialist structures of that era. Hennessy, too, in her novel of the Stolen Generations, *The Heaven I Swallowed* (2013), describes the unchanging attitude of the 1950s, that one dominant culture needs by all practical reasoning to supersede all others. I have recreated that scenario in my creative work to accentuate that, despite the current cultural and social freedoms of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the uncertainty of societal place and identity remain.

They sat and talked about nothing in particular, skirting around the edges of smoky suppositions, wary lest they enter into places that required an honest response. They ate scones with jam and cream and drank tea in fine china mugs. It'll be alright, said Marie and she reached over to stroke Jeanie's hair. She imagined they looked good together, one black, one white, but for her, still a difficult concept to reconcile.

"What do you see when you look at me, Marie?"

"I see an Aboriginal girl made good. And one who is a friend." Marie licked cream off the ends of her fingers. "Matthew could look after you a bit better, but heck, you can't have everything." She wanted to say more, to talk about love and desire and the romance of things exotic. Of forbidden things. But they just talked around the edges. Outside, blackness pressed against the house and showed itself at the windows (Henderson, 2014, p. 45).

It always seemed incumbent upon Aboriginal people to make themselves fit into white society. Gilbert (1977, pp. 203-204) states that

[o]ver many generations many part-Aboriginals have dropped into white society, become 'respectable' and married into poor white and not so poor white families. Those who, for a variety of reasons, have not been able to obliterate themselves in the mainstream of white society have begun re-identifying as Aboriginals now that Aboriginality has become acceptable and at least potentially satisfying.

Jeanie's epiphany of realisation that she has a 'black' historical identity is engineered in part by her daughter, Jaylene, who questions her ethnic legitimacy, in as much asking, "Who are you?" The sage-like Auntie Peggy assists Jeanie in her discovery of cultural belonging and spirit of place.

"You thin' you unnerstan' our worl' but you nebber been pard of it."

"Yes, I understand, Auntie."

"You don' unnerstan'. You reckon we come here t' Kal an' buy me new clodes

from Vinnie's gonna change our worl's. Dat's bullshit!"

"That's a bit harsh, Auntie. I just..."

"...I tol' that girl Jaylene dat you only livin' in one world. Dat's the whiteman world eben if you still black like me. Your farder died fightin' for his peeble. You orda 'member dat" (Henderson, 2014, p. 175).

However, the Aboriginal peoples' search for their place within an Australian culture dominated by Anglo-Celtics is not confined to just recent history. A series of governmental decisions prior to the Second World War where policy concerning Aboriginals was driven by the determination of a dominant whiteness and that the processes of nature (Social Darwinism) and manufacture (the dilution of colour by selection) might reduce Aboriginality "to the point of invisibility" (McGregor, 2006, p. 72). Aboriginals, however, proved more durable than those pseudo-scientific beliefs. Assimilationist policy in the post-war era sought to drag the Aboriginals into the white bosom of "other Australians" (p. 77) at the cost of delivering up their culture. Smith (cited in McGregor, 2006, p. 77) states that dominant "civically-oriented nationalisms 'often demand, as the price for receiving citizenship and its benefits, the surrender of ethnic community and individuality,'" their rites, laws and customs and thus suit themselves for the "Australian way of life." It is out of those historic colonialisms that Aboriginals must claim their identity for those impositions were designed to strip away and denude the elements of their blackness and to destroy their heritage. The character of Jeanie, after a lifetime of 'cultural imposition', finally rejects those 'historic colonialisms' to search for her true identity. In citing Scott's novel, *Benang: From the Heart* (1999), Le Guellec (2010, pp. 43-44) asserts that the author

clearly resists the notion that modern Australia should just forget about the past, and 'move on' towards the future. For Scott as for other Indigenous writers, access to a valid future can only be gained after having resuscitated the past, and for him, fiction is a means to re-establish a dialogue in order to pave the way towards wider and more encompassing social and cultural horizons, and a more ethical definition of Australian identity.

The notions of Le Guellec towards “a more ethical definition of Australian identity” through a more balanced and equitable historical dialogue are noble gestures that nudge away at the doorway to full acceptance into the greater Australian society. Their impact is nullified, however, by spurious histories and myths built up by non-Indigenous Australians to somehow qualify their station as the cultural ‘self’. The former singular lineal address to colonial/postcolonial history still resonates and the past structured as heroic and romantic. Indigenous people struggle against contentions wrought of prejudices and injustices. Watt and Watt (2002, preface) provide an example from the 1950s:

As we grew up we were provided with a more ‘informed’ understanding of the world. We learned about the Aboriginal Problem. They were primitive people. They lived in humpies, had no jobs, were dirty, smelly, drunken, fought viciously with each other, and had criminal tendencies. The children had runny noses and rarely went to school, and when they did they were backward. This is because they were not advanced enough to cope with the modern world. They knew no better.

Watt and Watt’s descriptions of a non-Indigenous view of Indigenous people in the 1950s bestowed on those people a legacy drawn from a large pool of misunderstanding and ignorance that, despite a trend towards a more balanced presentation of Australia’s history, still lingers. Rachel Hennessy, in her novel *The Heaven I Swallowed*, writes objectively and realistically of the ‘other’ who is seemingly condemned to a continuing patronisation by a paternalistic ‘self.’ The character, Aunt Gracie, is trying not to imagine the mother of Mary, a child of the Stolen Generations, she has adopted.

When she did come, I tried to make her as ugly as possible, fat and yellow-eyed with missing teeth and sagging breasts. I did not really know what one of them would look like; I had only seen men in parks, and photos in the papers were of children or missionary girls, all in proper dress. It is hard to imagine how they would get along in normal life, how they would do their hair, what kind of house they would keep. This is what I had to keep in my mind: she could not be as good for Mary as I was. The clothes I could give her, the way of speaking, a chance to read and write, domestic knowledge, the reining in of her basic instincts (2013, p. 77).

Today, both non-Indigenous Australians and Indigenous Australians are participants in determining, within the country's increasingly multicultural population, an identity for a people still regarded as the 'significant other'. Huggan (2007, p. 24), when situating "otherness" in an Australian context, observes it as "a constitutive feature of identity construction" and acts reciprocally with self as a freely moving element unable to be fixed. Further, Hall (2002, p. 223) states that "identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past." Those narratives contribute to the formation of "a mythic connection between nationhood and personhood" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 47) and precipitate the story of a nation risen up upon the character of its people (Elder, 2007, p. 26). Indigenous identity, then, as the significant other in the Australian psyche since 1788, continues to evolve, striving for recognition as contributor in the country's cultural and historical tableau.

There is, of course, the question of equality for the Indigenous people. According to Jupp (2007, p. 9) "Australia is among the most cohesive and harmonious societies on earth" when viewed from the parapets of the Anglo-Celtic fortress preserving a "strong sense of national identity" that not so long ago saw itself as British. He states that the concept of social cohesion in multicultural Australia where tight-knit groups of free-radical ethnicity orbit the Anglo-Celtic core in cosmic precision is due as much to Australia's apathy at all levels of society as to its continued economic success. Poorer multicultural societies, such as South Africa, generally are more "divided and ... chaotic" leaving Jupp to consider that "[c]ultural uniformity seems less important in sustaining a cohesive society than does economic success." He sees the "relatively benign condition" of Australian society as illusionary and that the question of social cohesion and harmony causes "much anxiety," perhaps anticipating the day the multicultural society disintegrates, as Blainey (cited in Walsh, 2012, p. 7) suggests, into "a nation of warring tribes."

In 2007, while visiting Hermannsburg in the Northern Territory, the then Prime Minister John Howard "told residents that whilst respecting the 'special place of indigenous [sic] people in the history and life of this country, their future can only be as part of the mainstream of the Australian community'" (Dodson, 2008, p. iv). Rowse (2007, p. 90), though, argues that "[a] tough-minded approach to social cohesion between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians must consider the possibility that social distance and cultural difference continue to be valued by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians." While



Indigenous Australians are not one homogenous group following similar lifestyles and customs, their status as Indigene isolates them as an intense nucleus of humanity in an increasingly multicultural landscape. The concept of a globalised set of uniform “values spread across the planet” ushering in world peace and stability and universal social cohesion disregards ethnically diverse and volatile cultural differences. Unfortunately the encroaching web of globalisation is often coupled with “beliefs of racial supremacy and the inevitable extinction of the uncompetitive” (Nelson, 2007, p. 103). Australia has become one of the most successful socially cohered countries in the world with a “miraculous peaceful multicultural coexistence and inclusive spirit” purchased at the expense of the Aboriginal Australians (p. 104) such as Jeanie and her family. In my travels throughout Australia, I have encountered many Indigenous Australians for whom the “inclusive spirit” of “multicultural coexistence” remains an elusive dream. The referendum of 1967 gave Indigenous Australians citizenship, a political, grudging, token equality that they were expected to accept with good faith and gratitude to the inheritors of their own country. Despite this gift of citizenship most Indigenous Australians live lives restricted by racial persecution impacting all elements of their being.

I travelled widely in my youth, often hitch-hiking without care of direction or destination. At one time I came to the Gulf Country and sought unsuccessfully for work in Normanton, the biggest town. I slept rough the first night until I was taken in by an Indigenous man I came to know as Uncle Herbie. His home was in the middle of an Aboriginal reserve in the swampy part of town. It was a one room hovel made of tin and hessian held together with wire and propped up in the middle with a piece of red gum. There were no windows, no sewer, no running water, no electricity and a hard-packed dirt floor underfoot. Uncle Herbie ushered me in. I stayed for a week, yarning and drinking goons (flagons) until my money was almost gone. The publican told me straight-up he had no time for the ‘Abos’ and said so in no uncertain terms. Most of the town was the same and treated the Indigenous people with a practiced disdain. Equally, Uncle Herbie’s mob fostered a simmering contempt for the non-Indigenous townsfolk with whom they shared little. Four years past the referendum and seemingly nothing had changed for Uncle Herbie. Citizenship did not equate with understanding and compassion got lost somewhere in the long grass between the reserve and town.

Jupp's concept of "an anxious society" (2007, pp. 14-15) depicts an Anglo-Celtic stronghold, unique in the first world, manufactured through government policies and fed by a populace desirous of a society "that must remain united and homogenous if it is not to disintegrate ... Those who were not British were regarded as exceptional and as possible threats to social cohesion." The suggestion that Indigenous Australians be made to fit in a prescribed place within the greater Australian society, if even at the very edges, has been topical since the early 1960s when there was "a stronger emphasis on civic nationalism" (McGregor, 2006, p. 71). It became apparent with the introduction of the policy of assimilation that though the colour of Aboriginals would no longer be "bred out" through selective breeding their culture would be denied them as they were funnelled into compliance with the "Australian way of life" (p. 77). Now, thirteen years into the new millennium and with a history of failed policies in its wake, "Australia's performance as a 'good society' among the developed first world nations of the world is ordinary [and] its performance as the responsible host to a fourth world society within its borders is even worse" (McCalman, 2010, p. 96). When commenting on the development of a culture of human rights in Australia today, Einfield (2003, p. 13) writes such would "require patience, compassion and commonsense, elements of the human psyche that are remarkably uncommon today." Acceptance into that fabled "Australian way of life" is a 'bridge too far' for most Indigenous people.

That "Australian way of life" can be all consuming for some. Others seek out their own space within the growing multicultural realm, searching to establish their own cultural identity and to have it acknowledged. Sally Morgan (1987, p. 163) writes in *My Place* of a time in the late 70s when there was

almost nothing written from a personal point of view about Aboriginal people. All our history is about the white man. No one knows what it was like for us. A lot of our history has been lost, people have been too frightened to say anything.

When considering postcolonial writing of Aboriginal history Neumann (1992, p. 281) states that academic anti-colonialist histories did not fully emerge until the 1970s. These scholarly writings, he asserts, were accompanied by a growth of Indigenous literary forms of black history "that fit more or less into the parameters established by white" academia. The 1960s and 70s were foundation years where Indigenous Australians were strenuous in

establishing a greater voice politically and challenged the systems of a white majority. The questions of placing the Indigenous Australians into a white history became a debatable issue. Indigenous people spoke and wrote their histories in various means, using “texts that are often classified as novels, poems, lyrics, short stories or plays, employing and subverting conventional art forms and styles.” Earlier works by the poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal and poet and playwright Kevin Gilbert were demonstrative of a sense of rising indignation and anger at generational, institutionalised racist policies that had all but denuded the Aboriginal identity. Gilbert, in particular brought Aboriginal writing and activism to the world stage and was instrumental in the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra (Pilger, 1993, p. 14; Briscoe, 1994, pp.13-14). Forever the activist Gilbert was never restrained in his contempt for the non-Indigenous treatment of the country’s original inhabitants. His 1988 poem, *The Flowering* (1998, p. 22), written during the bicentennial year, describes his feelings of ‘freedom’ the referendum brought. He considers as insulting the denial of basic human rights to a suffering people and expresses this as a raw emotive hatred against the imposition of the European’s God which he views as a blatant hypocrisy (Butler-McIlwraith, 2006, An Indigenous reflection):

When the white man took his bloodied boot  
From the neck of the buggered Black  
Did you expect some gratitude  
His smile 'Good on you Jack?'  
When your psalmist sang  
Of a suffering Christ  
While you practice genocide  
Did you expect his hate would fade  
Out of sight with the ebbing tide?  
In another time, another age  
If fate had reversed the play  
And a hard black boot pressed on your white throat  
When released -- what would *you* say  
Friends and pals forever together in a new fair dawn?  
Or meet like you and I shall meet  
With flames and daggers drawn.

Playwright and poet Jack Davis, more subtle than Gilbert, was nonetheless an effective writer who brought the plight of his people and their histories to life as part of the growing cross-cultural dialogue (Carroll, 1997, p. 100). The emergence of a growing Aboriginal intelligentsia provided an Indigenous critique of Indigenous writing, scholarly and literary, whereby the colonial and non-Indigenous histories could be decolonised. Of a more recent work Le Guellec (2010, p. 35) asserts that in writing the novel *Benang*, Kim Scott subverts “the simplistic, destructive and ultimately self-defeating doctrine of progress championed by colonists whose eugenicist policies aimed at ‘breeding out’ the Aboriginal heritage.”

The importance of the story to Indigenous people is paramount. In my creative work, Jeanie, the Aboriginal girl taken as a baby by white missionaries, returns to her home country as an adult. She is reminded that she won’t find fulfilment or completeness until she knows her story. Like Sally Morgan, Jeanie has to learn to straddle two cultures and is forever part of both. With Auntie Peggy’s help the narrative structure is used to negotiate Jeanie’s “sense of self and other” and to determine her identity. This act of “recounting the tales” and attaching them to “features of the landscape” re-establishes Jeanie as a “legitimate” inhabitant of that area (Klapproth, 2004, p. 16).

For most Indigenous Australians, “[b]y relating their stories, they were relating themselves to the land, and the land to themselves” (Klapproth, 2004, p. 16). As original inhabitants of Australia, whether urbanised, transient or traditional people, “[c]ountry is centrally about identity” (Dodson, 2008, p. v) and country, as defined in an Indigenous context, is paramount in maintaining “communal bonds” (Morgan & Warren, 2010, p. 926). McKnight (cited in Kingsley, Townsend, Henderson-Wilson & Bolam, 2013, p. 682) states that the “loss of land is tantamount to loss of one’s self ... it bestows a degree of independence that cannot otherwise be obtained.” While it is true that the majority of Indigenous Australians are urbanised, it is a false assumption to think that they have assimilated and that there is a cultural ‘oneness’ with non-Indigenous Australians. In Aboriginal parlance

White man got no dreaming.

Him go ’nother way.

White man, him go different,

Him got road belong himself (Stanner, 2009, p. 57).

The Indigenous sense of belonging, either to land or culture, is for most non-Indigenous Australians, an inexpressible, complex and alien concept. It is no surprise that Rowse (1998, pp. 209-212) and Attwood and Markus (1999, pp. 5-8) observe that the denial of land rights maintains as it were the impotency of government policies and interventions and further erodes the structures of Indigenous society. The failure to understand the cultural mores of Australia's Indigenous societies, whether traditional or urbanised, colonial or postcolonial, has seen in the past the exploitation of both the land and its custodians as economic collateral damage. Davison (1998, p. 14) asserts that while white Australia has attempted to "sweep" the issues of human rights and land rights "under the rug for 200 years" the positive direction in legislation since the Mabo decision enhances the claim by stakeholders for their "cause to be of higher value to both themselves and the wider community." Often, though, the objective remains lost somewhere between the political process and acceptance by the non-Indigenous community.

Place is identified as a located 'space' diffused with meaning and that space has different values attributed to it by human perspective (Vanclay, 2008, p. 3). Most Indigenous Australians are aware of their status as First Nation's people and are acutely aware that they are to share the country with a multitude of other cultures. The spaces the Indigenous Australians occupy, however, are often challenged and have been an issue of contest since the arrival of the First Fleet. I have sought to portray the contestedness of space in my creative work as the area of Barren Hills, once an important ceremonial and meeting place for the Wongutha people that was taken over, forcibly, by mining and grazing. My character of Auntie Peggy explains a contested space and how circumstances influence meaning:

The old woman wiped her arm over the horizon. "Was special place, dis. Sacred for long time. Plenny water, plenny cer'mony. Singin'. Dancin'. Forrester come, old man Forrester dat is. 'e kick blackfullas out. Shoot some, too, I reckon. Sad place now for our peeble. Still, special for you" (Henderson, 2014, p. 110).

Also from my creative work the Hungry Jack's restaurant in Federal Road, Kalgoorlie, is seen as another contested space, again explained by Auntie Peggy:

"You see dis town. Before it was 'ere, was still a place." Then, looking Jeanie in the eye: "You unnerstan'?"

“What do you mean?”

“Was a place, 'ere. Red dirt, trees, plenny 'roo. Was a place. White man come, cover 'im up wid all building. All dis shit. But undernead is still a place. You part of that place, you part of d'earth. You jus' covered wid white man shit” (Henderson, 2014, p.165).

Since colonisation, Australia has been subject to “[c]onflicting land use needs” impacting differing arenas of human occupation and industry that have produced “contested landscapes and complex relations” (Gibbs, 2003, p. 18). A traditionalist Indigenous concept of place varies markedly from the colonialist/modernist non-Indigenous perspective and from the ecological perspective. James (2008, p. 110) asserts that “[p]lace is performed by storytelling, singing and dancing at each site along the creation ancestors’ travels that crisscross the continent.” The landscapes, though, are inscribed with “multiple meanings” and “are interpreted differently by numerous stakeholders” (Gibbs, 2003, p. 18). Aboriginal people believe that their existence within the landscape is determined by a given place and its associated cosmology which is both “practical and spiritual”, without separation and functioning as an integral element of daily life (Strang, 1997, p. 238). Their understanding of the spirit of place, that inherent belongingness to, and coexistence with, the geography and topography of their ancestral lands, is paramount to their holistic well-being. When describing the differential between the contrasting concepts of place Maddock (1975, p. 27) wrote that concerning the Aboriginals it was more “of the land possessing men [sic] as of men [sic] possessing the land.” Core values are diametrically opposed. Indigenous Australians, then, are most often viewed superficially, mythologically and suspiciously. Simply speaking, they are grossly misunderstood, largely ignored and greatly imperilled despite eras of paternalism, segregation, assimilation and integration, actions deemed for their own good. Since the latter half of the 1960s Indigenous people have agitated for land rights in various forms and with various degrees of success and it continues to be a contentious and vexatious issue that threatens Australia’s colonialist core. Many non-Indigenous Australians, fearing the loss of their ‘inheritance,’ fail to appreciate that the land, for Indigenous Australians, holds a greater significance than purely economic value. Indigenous poet, Lionel Fogarty (1998, p. 153), examines this and expresses a spirituality he believes lost to the non-Indigenous in his poem *Imarbara I Am—Generation of Existence*:

I am a living entity, you belong to me. I AM.  
I am of the earth and space  
I am a son of the world  
I am the religious law  
I am the kin to all creatures  
I am kin to this creation  
The world is my nation  
The earth is my mother  
The black man is of this earth  
The red man is of this earth  
And the yellow man is of this earth  
But where is the white mad man's home ... .

Where, indeed, is the “white mad man’s home”? Fogarty is speaking from a First National’s perspective and he delineates in simple language the difference of how place is perceived by non-Indigenous people. The elemental language of Fogarty’s poem, the Genesis-like creation of the earth by God (I AM)/man and man as drawn from the earth “my mother” alludes to a spiritual connectedness with the land and a unity with god/spirits that non-Indigenous people can’t realise. His words mock the relationship the non-Indigenous have with Australia, that their “home”, despite all its brick and mortar, is not grounded in the spiritual and therefore not part of the land and that they themselves, as humans, are spiritually bereft. In comparing aspects of spirituality the late prominent Nyungar Michael Hill (personal communication, March 5, 1999) said that “[W]e (Aboriginals) don’t climb all over the inside of St Paul’s cathedral, why do the wadjelas (whites) climb over Uluru? Are they trying to impose themselves on nature, conquering it in some way? Domination, it’s all about domination.”

In recent times the domination of Aboriginal Australians is often viewed in clinical, political terms and acceptance of expressions of “traditional culture” are “being embraced by the nation for its own redemption” (Cowlshaw, 2012, p. 398). Behrendt (2007, p. 167) argues that while there is, superficially, a layer of equality and fairness in the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationship that grew out of the 1967 referendum, the real-term human rights and social justice issues have not followed the constitutional change. It is noted by Anderson (2003, p. 51) that the “era of assimilation colonialism [that drew to a close after the referendum]... had tragic consequences for significant numbers of Aboriginal people” and he

questions the ethics and morality of the dominant white system still extant today. Further, Tacey (2000, p. 37) explores the notion of a complex deconstruction of Australian morality resulting unconsciously from the frontier experience, a process that is “rough and crude and insensitive to spiritual values ....” I have expressed this in my creative work through the interactions of my characters who inhabit the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia. Ben Poulson, and those of his ilk, still walk among us today, perhaps not in the same rough form, but with the same ‘culturally immoral’ thought processes and ideals of racial superiority. The Indigenous protagonists, Jeanie, Jaylene and Auntie Peggy, each differ culturally and spiritually and thus react differently to the impositions of the prevailing ‘white system’. For Jeanie, in particular, there is, as a member of the stolen generations, the theme of white male domination (which I have written as a sexual domination) by which she believes her quest for acceptance within white society will be vindicated, even if it is at the basest level. Jeanie has been manipulated throughout her life. Anderson (2003, p. 51) describes people like Jeanie who are “caught between two worlds” as becoming “conceptual prisons.” However, succour comes in the embodiment of Auntie Peggy as the sage-like traditional Aboriginal through whom Jeanie realises her story and finds her ‘spirit of place’ -- her belonging to the land. To the Aboriginal people of the Dreaming, the land has never been void.

The notion of *terra nullius* (empty land) is a powerful narrative for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and had, until the Mabo decision, validated the dispossession of the native people and reduced them to a status of *persona non grata* in their own land (Elder, 2007, pp. 150-151). Many non-Indigenous Australians contend that the coloniser narrative that land-clearing, farming and industry created modern Australia is the only sustainable story and “[y]et in 1788 the land of Australia was already totally inscribed with stories” (p. 150). Gammage (2011, p. 2) states that at the time of European settlement “[T]here was no wilderness. The Law—an ecological philosophy enforced by religious sanction—compelled people to care for all their country. People lived and died to ensure this.” Land is still a contentious issue. Gibbs (2003, p. 19) addresses the problem of contested space from a decolonising perspective that would “release former colonies from nineteenth-century colonial arrangements.” However, these “arrangements” have developed from the structure of imperialism into “new forms of exploitation and domination,” revealing itself as “neo-colonialism.” The progress to a state of decolonisation is restricted by an “embedded ...



imperialism” unwilling to concede “power over colonised territories” (Jacobs, 1996, p. 22). Today Indigenous people are more empowered to engage in the actions of decolonisation, viewed as a system of relationships involving many aspects outside their own communities and as a long term process (Gibbs, 2003, p. 19). Howitt (1998, pp. 32-33) states that

[W]e might understand the process of such a decolonisation as one of rebuilding Aboriginal autonomy—caring for people, caring for country and building Aboriginal economies in order to strengthen, and in some places re-establish, the web of relations between Aboriginal economies, Aboriginal people and Aboriginal country. We might also think of it as a process of genuinely decolonising these spaces.

The progress towards a more equitable solution to the utilisation of land in Australia is at times pathetically slow. Past injustices collide with current demands, each Australian, on occasion, a plaintiff, a litigant, or judge. Perhaps novelist Xavier Herbert (1992, p. 227) summed it up succinctly by stating that

[u]ntil we give back to the black man just a bit of the land which was his, and give it back without provisos ... we shall remain what we have always been so far: a people without integrity, not a nation but a community of thieves.

## Migrants and belonging

Rosa Cappiello arrived in Sydney from Naples, as an assisted migrant, in 1971. In the opening lines of her novel, *Oh Lucky Country*, she describes her first impressions of Australia: “—but for the moment it’s neither the realisation of one’s dreams nor the land of milk and honey. ... This land we had to conquer did not seem to stimulate our sense of the ridiculous or the poetic but rather our hope, the unforeseen and the unforeseeable” (1991, p. 3). Home for her now was a strange country far removed from the motherland she pictured only in myth and memory. Tummala-Narra (2009, p. 239) states that “[n]ostalgia may serve to recapture a component of one’s life in the home country and temporarily reunite one with the past in fantasy.” Typically, second-generation migrants are more likely to suffer “higher levels of distress” than do first-generation migrants: this conflict of the “mourning process” of separation and isolation is relieved through fantasy and nostalgia. In my creative work, Eddie Romano, a second-generation Italian, has constructed his life around the “memory trace” of the past, real or imagined, in turn impacting the life of his son, Vince.

Vince sensed it early as the twin-cab motored south on Albany Highway. It was carried on the gentle breeze of the past, a sweet scent of memory, part olfactory, part cerebral, that brought with it the smell of burning wood. Vince had never been to the ‘old country’. To him, it was a faraway place of his imaginings and his nonno’s stories, a long way from the seeming endlessness of suburban Perth rushing by. Here and there were what remained of market gardens, given over to rust and weeds and signs that told of pending subdivisions. Once the earth had been worked there into neat rows of cabbages and lettuce by men like his nonno. Vince drifted again, on the whiff of nostalgia, to another place and pictured his grandfather, sometime between the wars, in peasant dress, treading dusty lanes and milking fat cows. The smoke from hearth fires puffed out into the countryside, a pleasing savour to Benedict, the patron saint of most things agrarian. Vince smelled it now, the memories of Rottnest, when his nonno would sit like a king in the shade of the porch and talk with people as they sauntered past, and Nonna, in the kitchen with the girls, doing what they did best. Out the back the young men, Eddie and his brother, Carmello, worked the barbeque: much laughter and the smell of wood burning. (Henderson, 2014, p. 140).

Eddie Romano is drawn as a child of immigrants. He, too, is caught in the cultural divide between the imaginings and fantasies of a distant Italy and the ‘new’ country of his birth. His parents left behind them the ‘contadini’, the traditional village life that was the lot of many Southern Italian families, lives structured around ‘amoral familism’, defined by Lever-Tracy and Holton (2001, p. 81) as “a pattern of family life founded on ‘maximising the short term material advantages of the family nucleus’, such that this became the invariant norm of social life.” This may be interpreted “as a situational consequence of poverty and social marginality” that has impacted families, particularly in the southern half of Italy, for generations (p. 82). Eddie, then, hears stories of the ‘old country’ or ‘home’ and feels “attracted . . . [to] . . . this ancient, complex and in many ways, unfathomable country, by its people, its culture, its politics” (Cresciani, 2003, p. 1). Australia became Eddie’s home, Italy the place of his parent’s nostalgia. For better or worse, this is passed on to his children, particularly Vince.

They left behind a lot, Eddie’s parents, though in the globalised world of today it could be said they left behind little (Skrbis, Baldassar, & Poynting, 2007, p. 266). The concepts of home, ‘the old country’, were the sounds of a familiar language, the songs, the laughter expressed by his parents in a new land and in that way home in Australia was a contradiction of sorts. His parents built up fantasies of the home country and the past that provided, as a mourning process, a way of coping with the present (Tummala-Narra, 2009, pp. 237-238). Elizabeth Jolley (1989, p. 531), in her essay on memory and migration, *Cloisters of Memory*, writes that “[t]he impact of the new country does not obliterate the previous one but sharpens memory, thought and feeling by providing a contrasting theme or setting.” Eddie was nurtured in the spiritual and cultural values of the ‘old country’ while learning the “specificities and habits” of the new (Colombo & Rebughini, 2012, p. 16). Vince, then, clung to the “familism” offered up through memory as a means of processing his adaption (Lever-Tracy & Holton, 2001, p. 81).

“Yeah. My nonno, you know, my granddad, came out to work at Wittenoom, poor bastard. Died of that mesowhatchacallit. Shit, what a death.” He was quiet for a few moments. “Met and married my nonna in Perth and eventually settled in Baskerville. Grew bloody grapes and made his own vino” (Henderson, 2014, p. 9).

Tummala-Narra (2009, p. 240) asserts that unconscious fantasy is related through an “interaction between self and object.” For Eddie’s father the outward simplicity of growing

grapes and making wine in a foreign land was a complex psychological process. The tilling of the earth, the tending of the vines and enjoying the fruits of his labour was fulfilling an unconscious fantasy that moved him transcendently into his former homeland. So Eddie grew grapes, too.

Vince, Eddie's younger son, is a third generation Australian. In the multicultural climate most Australians now enjoy, he would be called an Australian of Italian heritage. He harbours no dream to visit Italy and wonders why. Unwittingly, he has seen those unconscious fantasies slip by, a generation at a time. "You want to know what I miss?" He glanced across at Matthew, then back to the road ahead. "I miss the whole Italian thing. Nonno, and then Dad. Everything changed" (Henderson, 2014, p. 9). Vince was experiencing the separation from 'home' and those tenuous cultural and familial ties that bound him to the imagery of those past generational experiences. Home to Vince, with his grandfather dead and his father dying, was something cut adrift in the cultural sea. He sought to construct his life around the Italian concept of family and marriage, once strong institutions in the homeland, that in Australia are eroded by cultural and moral differences (Parekh, 2006, pp. 359-360):

Vince's pudgy fingers squeezed the steering wheel a little tighter. "Who told you that shit? What I'm saying is that I do what has to be done! Just like my job. Marriage has to be done properly. Italians have been doing it good forever, maybe longer" (Henderson, 2014, p. 32).

Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier and Sheller (2003, p. 8) state the "need to rethink the assumption that 'home', in migration, is something we simply 'leave behind.'" Perhaps, as Jolley says, there is, for a migrant, a "need to re-create for himself the wholesomeness of this remembered landscape" (1989, p. 354). I believe Vince has always struggled with that impossible ideal and that at times those disappearing cultural and familial tangibles that held him in the goodness of the past, described by Brah (1999) as those "fragments that we process as knowledge," have left him to founder in an imperfect present.

As a child I never questioned my concept of belonging. My great-great-grandfather's family came to Sydney from Scotland in the early years of the colony, some of my mother's ancestors lived in the country in South Australia and Victoria before the Europeans thought of

sea travel. In that sense, without much consideration, I accepted that I belonged to the country and that the country belonged to me. A long list of Anglo-Australian relatives had gone to the wars and each Anzac Day we would catch the train into Sydney to watch Dad and the other ex-service people march. They all fought for the country, our country. Some had spilled blood and a great many others died: for the flag, the land, the ideals, the belonging. My belonging. The war ended and masses of migrants arrived and I don't recall my parents giving much thought to just how they were going to adapt, if at all. My mother just said, "Bloody I-ties!"

"These immigrants from continental Europe were labelled 'new Australians' and were officially welcomed on the basis that they would assimilate. Ethnic community cohesion and cultural difference was frowned upon" (Curthoys, 2000, p. 26). Further, Parekh (2006, p. 197) stated that the assimilationist lobby believed if the migrant group wished "to become part of society and be treated like the rest of their fellow-citizens, they should assimilate." The post war years brought hard times for many Italians. Those that migrated to Australia challenged the new country with a different set of cultural mores. John O'Grady's Italian migrant persona, Nino Culotta, from the book *They're a Weird Mob* (1957), is thrust headlong into what is a cultural minefield through which he must walk to achieve the ultimate goal of assimilation (Carter, 2004, p. 57). Despite the traumas associated with the complexities of migration, both Culotta, and Pino Bosi's character of Giovanni Carrano, from the novel *Australia Cane* (1971), overcome initial difficulties and reach a positive fulfilment as integrated citizens, finding an equitable niche within "the migrant group and the achievement of material well-being" (Rando, 1984, p. 343).

By the early 1970s, however, after years of protest demanding social change, government policies began to reflect the desires of the nation and its idea of creating a homogenous citizenry through assimilation was waning. "[C]ultural diversity ... [was seen as] ... desirable for society as a whole and represents a valuable collective asset" (Parekh, 2006, p. 196). Many conservative Australians argued that "immigration policy ... should pay more regard to maintaining homogeneity, common identity and culture" (Markus, 1994, p. 218). In my creative work, the character of Matthew Andrews, written as a typical Anglo-Celtic male still protective of his "isolationist" identity (Curthoys, 2000, p. 26), didn't always quite get it: "Bit of a stud, hey Vince? Must be true what they say about you Italians. You know, turn off the lights and all you can hear is the rattle of the gold chains and the moaning of the women" (Henderson, 2014, p. 103). Matthew Andrews and Vince Romano are

contrasting and often conflicting representations of racial interactions forty years after the introduction of multiculturalism. While Matthew is insensitive to the etiquette of cultural difference, Vince is an Italian of migrant heritage seeking out the fabled egalitarianism of the Australian legend. Where “[b]elonging is about full acceptance and feeling at home, and justice, which is about rights and interests ...” and the satisfaction of those elements (Parekh, 2006, p. 237), exclusion is characterised by the many elements of racism and imperialist behaviours, however subtle (Markus, 1994, pp. 1-3).

That sense of belonging, in the “broad egalitarian tradition,” comes of accepting a new culture and being accepted by it (Moran, 2004, p. 42; Parekh, 2006, p. 342). Migrants, in their search for belonging, are “bounded by [their] perception[s] of how other people perceive [them]” and, in Vince’s case, how they perceive themselves (Jacobs, 2010, p. 88):

It was his older brother, Leo, the gifted, golden boy who had gone to uni and once played for Swan Districts. Now he’s Romano and Partners Investment Consultants while Vince is still in market garden mode. Each step Vince took was weighed down with clods of dirt and manure and he still read very slowly (Henderson, 2014, p. 82).

I grew up in the belief that all Italians were concreters or greengrocers and that occupations were designated by ethnicity. Of course, my grandmother told me of her life in inner-city Balmain in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, of how the Chinese were the market gardeners, hawking their produce, amid a torrent of racial abuse, to make a living. Today it might be true to say that many Chinese operate Chinese restaurants; it might also be said that McDonald’s restaurants employ a lot of white teenagers but that is not indicative of all teenagers. I was guilty, in my youth, of categorising ethnicities by names and symbols and assigning to them roles to qualify their belonging. Conversely, the migrants played their part as well. Colombo and Rebughini (2012, p. 16) state that the

children of immigrants negotiate and create collective identities. They take their symbols and references for identification wherever they can, from the global cultural fluxes as well as from local specificities and habits, both from the country of their parents and the country where they live.

From either perspective belonging was a struggle for Italian immigrant families. They were

largely considered beneath “mainstream Australian culture and society” while trying to maintain an economic and social dignity within their own cultural group and battle “the myth of a welcoming Australia [which] implicitly suggest[ed] that Italians *deserved* [sic] to be welcomed (Ricatti, 2011, pp. 18-19).

“[While] practices of group identity are about manufacturing cultural and historical belongings that mark out terrains of commonality, through which the social dynamics and politics of ‘fitting in’ are delineated” (Fortier, 2000, p. 2), personal identities are determined further within that framework by, “for example, ... gender, class, age, sexual preference, ethnic heritage and national affiliation” (Elder, 2007, p. 26). A personal identity “orients [people] to the world around [them]” (Taylor, 2002, p. 37). Eddie’s world, in a sense, became Vince’s world as he positioned himself “within ... the narratives of the past” (Elder, 2007, p. 26) and attempted to emulate those things he saw as his father’s desirable assets. Where Eddie had grounded himself in that strange world between two cultures (between the cooking fires of traditional southern Italy and the barbeque of Australia), Vince struggled to reach that compromise of a personal identity. He constantly built himself up off the remnants of an old culture gleaned from the memories of his parents and grandparents and was afraid that once his father died he would have to stand alone. When he “smelled the wood burning” (Henderson, 2014, p. 142) Vince was transporting himself, or hoping to transport himself, to a place of myth and better times. In the novel I have identified a relationship between the land of origin and Rottnest Island as places of myth building. Fortier (2000, pp. 64-65) argues that “the ‘problem’ of immigration is one of statelessness” and that its resolution lies in the “national [Italian] mythology” that she considers the answer to the “state of endless wandering of the immigrant condition.” I imagined both Eddie and his father expressed a need for the consolidation of Italian “spirit” and “feeling,” that “national mythology,” within their communities, an education process of “‘inscribing practices’ ... [that were] necessary to the maintenance of collective identity.” However, with his grandfather dead and his father dying, Vince assumes, uncertainly and without guidance, the duty of keeping some Italian memory and identification alive, as Fortier asserts, against the threat of assimilation (p. 83). I found this ambivalence of citizenship best illustrated by Melina Marchetta’s Josephine Alibrandi, a young Australian of Italian heritage: “I think I had the worst of it. My mother was born here so as far as the Italians were concerned we weren’t completely one of them. Yet because my grandparents were born in Italy we weren’t completely Australian” (Marchetta, 1992, p. 6).

As a young Australian my grandmother introduced me to the work of the fictitious Professor Afferbeck Lauder (Alastair Morrison) whose interpretation of the Australian accent led me to believe that only Australians spoke like that and that it somehow legitimised citizenship. The story goes that Lauder (Morrison) was at a bookshop signing copies of his book. A lady placed a copy down in front of him and she said, “Emma Chizzet.” He dutifully signed the book before realising she was asking him, “How much is it?” Language binds the speaker to their particular culture. I, at that time, was bound to mine. Every other accent was foreign and didn’t really belong.

I have shaped Eddie and Vince’s personae from a composite of the many Italian males I have encountered throughout my life in and about the country. They were usually a garrulous lot, and spoke out about how great a country Australia was and I think it strange now that they spoke very little about their own. Perhaps I never asked. I remember, quite vividly, one particular man who I encountered while shopping with my mother, walking along Rowe Street in Eastwood, Sydney, now a vibrant Asian enclave. Then it was a quiet, middle class Anglo-Celtic suburb. In the middle of town was the greengrocer, (or perhaps greengrocers, for the whole family worked there) and at that time, the only Italians I had met. I hadn’t formed my personal identity, my world view, as yet. They were just people who spoke a heavily accented, patchwork Australian. Mr Perry was the boss and he spruiked in side-show fashion the bargains of the day. He always gesticulated wildly as he spoke. Often the ladies were victims of his jest. Mum would come away with her beans and peas and say with a smile, “He’s a cheeky basket!”

With assistance from Cresciani’s (2003) book, *The Italians in Australia*, I have composed a portrait of an immigrant who, in my childhood, I never understood. Then, he was always at the edge of my life, at arm’s length. Now, he has become part of my life and has cemented his ‘belongingness’ to the Australian cultural landscape:

Mr Perry always wore a felt hat slanted across his head, and a stained apron covering a work shirt. His face has been lost in time and I can only imagine he’s now selling vegetables in some distant ethereal place. But his personal identity--I can only imagine that, too. I think he would have been patriarchal (it seemed the whole world was then), proud of his heritage but accepting of the new, was anything but a Fascist, and certainly a Catholic (though he sent his son, Raymond, to Eastwood Primary, a state school). He was a southern Italian, probably



with basic literacy skills, though finding improving those a necessity in Australia, a country not embracing of his difference or background. He found friendship among the other Italians at the markets and he located the shops that stocked olives, cabanosi and parmesan cheese. On his kitchen table were recent editions of both *La Fiamma* and *The Daily Telegraph* which Raymond helped his father read, a benefit to them both. Having left the grinding poverty of post-war Italy behind he swore never to return to that condition again. He grew his own grapes, expected his woman to do her share and thought that Australia was the lucky country. But Mr Perry's identity, like the "history" I pulled him from, would have been under "constant transformation" (Hall cited in Duncan, 2002, p. 331).

Vince Romano's personal identity, then, has been formed from a remnant Italian culture as much as a reaction to a largely mobile Australian culture which allows him to "come to terms with the basic problems of human life" in his own particular way. Importantly, "since human beings are culture-creating and capable of creative self-transformation" they are "unique human creations" (Parekh, 2006, p. 122). In that way Vince, too, is unique yet for a long time Anglo-Celtic Australia has rejected or dismissed that "uniqueness". Marchetta's character, Josephine Alibrandi, questions the culture differences: "Well, I'm not sure whether everyone in this country will ever understand multiculturalism and that saddens me, because it's as much part of Australian life as football and meat-pies" (1992, p. 258). Historically migrants to Australia who were not of Anglo-Celtic stock found the transition to a radically different culture and society a complex one. Australia was traditionally a nation constructed around an Anglo-Celtic core and reinforced politically and culturally. As such non-British migrations prior to the end of the Second World War were relatively small in number and not perceived to threaten the concept of national identity or the "Australian way of life", migrants groups were largely ignored. Caldwell's demand to "populate or perish" saw the dismantling of the selective and racist White Australia Policy (Ricatti, 2011, pp. 20-21; Elder, 2007, p. 83). Ricatti further states that Australia was "caught in a great contradiction" that allowed for the recruitment of "migrants from many different countries and often from poor social circumstances" (De Lepervanche cited in Ricatti, 2011, p. 21) on one hand while "the majority of 'white' Anglo-Australians were still fantasising about a culturally and racially homogenous society." That "great contradiction" is still evident today. Elder (2007, p. 115-116) asserts that although multicultural Australia "posits Australian-ness in terms of difference and diversity," the form of a racist, white Australia

“still lingers in the shadows.” In the following extract from my creative work, the validity of Vince Romano’s Australian-ness is challenged by generational racism and exclusion in the form of Matthew’s father, Archie.

“Nah, Matthew has got confused. I’m Vince Romano. My nonno....”

“Actually, while you’re here, we’d prefer it if you were Vince Jones. You know, true-blue son of the Southern Cross from Western Australia somewhere. Old Mister Andrews, you understand, has a few problems with tolerance” (Henderson, 2014, p. 47).

Vince was written as a paradox. He wants to retain his heritage yet he also wants acceptance as an Australian which he rightly is. Ideally, in a multicultural society, Vince should achieve those aims. The spectre of ‘white Australia’, though, rises in the shape of Archie Andrews, representative of views both politically incorrect and racist, and the old house, The Wounded Sinner, too, “stands for so much” (Henderson, 2014, p. 188): values, customs and ideologies that belonged to a past era, malodorous vapours that just won’t go away. Because of this, Vince, like many others, experiences marginalisation within the framework of multiculturalism.

Marginalisation and social exclusion for many Australians may be illusionary terms. “There but for the grace of God go I,” my mother used to say as she steered me past yet another homeless wretch begging for pennies, wanting just enough for another drink. Somehow God’s grace never seemed to stretch that far; I grew up watching those marginalised and socially excluded misfits from the comfort of a fortunate life. They drifted around society’s brittle edge and thankfully they were always somebody else’s business. Despite the linking of marginalisation with poverty and the underclass the application is “contested.” (Weiss, 2003, pp. 12-13). Besides economically, the term ‘poverty’ can be used to describe lack socially, culturally and politically. Elder (2007, p. 28) sees “[t]he exclusion of particular ideas or people from national stories” as are necessary for the life of the community. The former belief that the children of migrants would “assimilate” automatically into the Australian way of life was displaced by another belief that multiculturalism, by the premise of maintaining independent cultural islands around an Anglo-Celtic core, would improve inclusion and cohesion (Dixson, 1999, pp. 3-5). “Yet”, states Weiss (2003, p. 16),

“there is widespread ambivalence concerning multiculturalism in Australian society, and assimilationist views are still far-reaching.”

My parents had long held the opinion that foreigners, those ‘new Australians’ as Caldwell called them, would always struggle to fit in. The Australian cultural and social processes for a long time kept immigrants, at least those not from the British Isles, at the end of Australia’s long white arm, a racist Canute at the water’s edge attempting to stop the tide from bringing change. It is no surprise then that prior to the multicultural era, it was migrants of the lower classes who found it hardest to adapt to a new cultural environment and had to contend with malicious and misinformed constructions of their own ethnicities. Ricatti (2011, p. 21) argues that while the ideology of the mythical “national character” became redundant with the post-war immigration policy, the concept of the “Australian way of life” that took its place did little to create a more harmonious society. Southern Europeans, in particular, already living in difficult conditions “could not embody such a way of life and in fact represented, together with Aborigines, a perceived major threat to it.” I have written Archie Andrews and, symbolically, his home, *The Wounded Sinner*, as defenders of a threatened system of beliefs:

Archie swore. “Don’t you know that a man’s home is his castle? Bloody foreigners running everywhere, multiplying unchecked. And Catholics, too, I bet. Gypsies, tramps and thieves, all of them. No, I’m safer in here” (Henderson, 2014, p. 74).

Typically, all migrants are subjects of marginalisation. In the following flashbacks from *The Wounded Sinner* I have woven history with hysteria and have used Matthew, his grandfather and Vince as I thought appropriate to express an area of contemporary thought on migration and multiculturalism. A young Matthew is worried by the boat arrivals from Vietnam that came following the end of the war. His grandfather tries to teach him the value of sharing. As an adult, Matthew still struggled with the concept.

*“What are you thinking about, Matty?”*

*“Oh, nothin’.”*

*“It’s a dull man who thinks about nothing.”*

*“Are we going to live on the streets?”*

*“Who’s we?”*

*“Me and Mum and Dad. Not you, ’cos Dad said you’re on their side.”*

*“Ah, the threat of migration. The boat people. It’s 1977. The world’s getting smaller, Matty.”*

*“Huh? Dad says there’s too many Chinamen.”*

*“What have you got in your pockets, Matty?”*

*“Five cents! I’m goin’ to buy a lolly.”*

*“You want to share it with me?”*

*“Okay, Grandad.”*

*“That’s great,” and he put his arm around Matthew’s shoulder, “but the test is sharing with people you don’t know.”*

*“Jeez, I don’t know Vince.”*

*“It’ll only be for a couple of days. Everything will sort itself out by then.” Shoulders slumped forward, sad brown eyes, cap in hand. “Please, mate” (Henderson, 2014, p. 72-73).*

Divisive attitudes rise with political platitudes and vote-catching rhetoric. Vasta (1993, p. 213), cited a speech by John Hewson given to the Liberal Party of Western Australia in 1992: “Multiculturalism—another classic example. The politics of division not the politics of one nation. Absolutely a fundamental mistake in this country. We are a multicultural society—yes. But we should never have multiculturalism.” The language of Hewson’s viewpoint is couched in assimilationist terms. There is no middle ground: it’s a hard road to acceptance into the body of the Anglo-Celtic nationalist core. Cappiello (1991, p. 51-52) expresses exclusion from a migrant perspective:

You should know that three-quarters of the inmates at Parramatta [gaol] are migrants. You could point out that they're already sick when they get here, fine, but the climate and the social structure do the rest of the job. ... You'll go through the mill same as everyone else and there's no amount of self-preservation instinct or skill which is going to spare you that experience. You've got everything going against you. The language, your own paesani [villagers], and if you say 'mamma' in that English of yours they'll all understand 'prick' and if you say 'papa' they'll understand something entirely different. That's what will happen.

O'Grady (1987, p. 204), in his 1957 novel *They're a Weird Mob*, wrote that "[t]here are far too many New Australians in this country who are still mentally living in their homelands, who mix with people of their own nationality, and try to retain their own languages and customs." He further paints an unrealistic, mythical identity of the typical Australian male and hoists it as a standard that all "New Australians" should aspire to if they were to gain acceptance at all. Unfortunately, either for cultural, political or economic gain, ethnic stereotypes still prevail (Cresciani, 2003, p. 149). Within the racist heartland of Australia there remains a subliminal process necessitating the Australianisation/hybridisation of migrants whereby the host demands the denouncing of homeland, culture and language as a quasi-religious purification ritual that allows them to "enter a world that you never dreamed existed" (O'Grady, 1987, p. 204).

## **The homeless: an underclass in a land of plenty**

It is interesting to note that one of the “ten plagues” described by Derrida (1994, pp. 81-84) as afflicting the global financial structure of the “New World Order” is homelessness. The term “plague”, though, is a misnomer, for a plague is self-limiting—you either die or you get well as it moves to other locations. This “plague,” however, is not a manifestation of postmodernism or even the modern age but has been firmly entrenched in recorded history, a hunch on the back of each successive generation that, despite various applications to its source, refuses to budge or go away. Housed humanity never fully understands homelessness and some attach to it a dismissive romanticism of the open road and eternal blue skies, bonhomie and tea out of tin mugs; others see the homeless as Karl Marx’s ‘lumpenproletariat’; and others as a means of dispensing pity or assuaging their guilt. It is ironic that homelessness, however it is viewed, is a reality that survives and thrives in our prosperous age and knows no barriers, gathering its numbers from all genders and ages and from all strata of society. Wilcox (1995, Foreword) refers to them as “the shadow people.”

In 1987, Bob Hawke, in an infamous prime ministerial gaffe, declared that “[B]y 1990 no Australian child will be living in poverty” (Foley, 2009, p. 21). At the time the statement was considered by some to be fanciful, as it indeed turned out to be, and others thought the speaker to possess messianic qualities, for despite much posturing and rhetoric on behalf of politicians, the silver bullet solution for poverty has not yet been found. Jesus of Nazareth said that “[Y]ou will always have the poor among you ...” (Mark 14:7, New Living Translation) and after 2000 years those words ring true today. Lotter (2011) asks “[A]re we one another’s keepers across the globe?” and broaches the question of poverty on a world scale and the wealthy nations’ response to it. Despite “impressive aid packages ... poverty persists” (p. 9). Australia alone contributes over three billion dollars annually in foreign aid (Aid Watch, 2013) and yet, in the richness of the nation, there is a fragment of society living on its very fringes in what might be perceived as third world conditions. The poverty of homelessness is felt by over 100,000 Australians each night, “10,000 of these children under the age of 12” which Plibersek (2007) states, given the nation’s economic circumstances, as “quite simply, unacceptable.”

Homelessness, and the homeless, evokes in most people a strongly emotive and

reactionary construct that they, the homeless, by their presence somehow interrupts the idealist image Australians have of their world. Most people are repulsed at the intrusion and conceptualise homelessness as a dissolute image of untouchable and corrupted humanity inhabiting a netherworld, lesser people either “smelly, dirty...(or)... hungry,” or ragged alcoholics, or both (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 30). This view, however, is not always an accurate perception. People, men, women and children, are homeless for a variety of reasons. They are bound together, though, under that cheap and shoddy banner that classifies them, perhaps unfairly, as a body of rejects excluded from society’s mainstream.

Poverty is a close associate of homelessness and there is never a shortage of clientele at the local pawnshop. I read a sign above the counter: “We buy gold, silver, jewellery.” Another lists the legal obligations of prospective sellers. At the bottom, in big letters: “Whatever it is, it better be yours!” A young man, about 25, stands beside me at the counter, stained tracksuit pants frayed at the bottoms, buttonless grey shirt, bare feet and bits of dried grass stuck in his dark hair. Whatever he had proffered the broker raised only \$5.00. He took it and left and I was moved with compassion for he could have been one of my sons. I supposed I could have offered him money but, well, what would he have spent it on? Guilt hounded me for days. In retrospect, though, he may not have been homeless. I allowed myself, to my shame, to make an emotive, value judgment based on his dress, appearance and patronage of a pawnbroker shop. Besides, I was there as well, another victim of ‘hard times’ though not as Dickens might have imagined. Not all homeless can be identified by appearance and as such the very nature of contemporary ‘hard times’ makes homelessness difficult to define (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 30). However, Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992, pp. 274-297) categorise it best as a three tiered construct subsequently adopted for the 1996 census. The three different levels indicate not only the depth of homelessness, but include people from outside the realms of the homeless stereotype. “Primary homeless” are those who sleep rough on the streets and in makeshift shelters. “Secondary homeless” are those living in temporary accommodation such as youth refuges, men’s and women’s hostels and intermittent residences such as hotels and boarding houses. The third classification are those people living for extended periods in accommodation that is not self-contained. These include boarding houses that “do not have a separate bedroom and living room,” without their own kitchen or bathroom, and without the security of a lease (Rubbo, 2001, pp. 167-168).

In his consideration of the modern urban landscape, Relph (1987, pp. 264-265) argues that “economic and social inequalities”, rather than diminishing with modern planning and development, have persisted in a different form. The paradox of homelessness and poverty amid affluence “is resolved either by hiding it or imagining it away.” Gans, cited in Kilmartin, Thorns, and Burke (1985, p. 9), states that lifestyles are impacted more by class and participation in social processes than by location though urban planners continue in the belief that “good ... environments make good societies”, thus abrogating their obligation to resolve or improve “social and economic injustices” (Relph, 1987, pp. 264-265). Homelessness remains in most modern cities a residue of humanity, “a by-product of social disorganisation or isolation within the city system,” that is not always visible yet has proven through time to be intractable and resolute (Burnley, 1985, p. 250).

Marx, writing at the time of Europe’s growing industrialisation in 1843, thought that the underclass was “*artificially impoverished*” as a result of “the *drastic dissolution of society*” (Marx & Engels, 2002, p. 33). The underclass, Marx’s lumpenproletariat, is described as being the “refuse of all classes” and includes “vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds” whom Marx contemptibly dismisses as enemies of the state (Bottomore, 1991, p. 327). He viewed the development of social decline as attributable to the change from the agrarian to the industrial and as the useless residue of capitalism. To Marx, they were a people who “lacked a country” (Marx & Engels, 2002, p. 38). The image of the impoverished, hopeless and homeless of Marx’s description seems dated and incongruous in the vibrancy of modern city life but it is the city that sustains them as it did in Marx’s time. He found the lumpenproletariat to be beneath contempt and the modern homeless are largely similarly viewed. A more contemporary definition of the homeless given by Barh (cited in Malone, 1981, p. 749) is that of a person afflicted with “a condition of detachment from society characterized by the absence or attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures.” That definition presses the homeless down beneath the realm of more ordinary people, into a place of intrigues, sufferings, privations and struggles. The city is both provident and oppressor, allowing the homeless to feed from the scraps of its table but holding them captive within its concrete walls, for most of the homeless are bound by the economics of poverty, trolls of their inner-city caves and lairs.



There has been much written by philosophers, geographers and social theorists concerning modernisation and the “rampant social change[s]” it wrought on industrialised nations. The Americans Mead and Berger were concerned that with the march into modernism, the traditional society, its accompanying security, and the sense of self so characteristic of former times, was disappearing forever. Where once the “traditional social order” was emotive based, the growth of the city was becoming characterised by impersonality and “callous” mechanisms of production (Jones, 1980, p. 17). Among the impacts on social life was the growth of the state of homelessness viewed for the first time as an effect of the mechanics of progress that saw institutions and a unified self as a disruption to “modern life” (p. 18). Mead, the earlier theorist, argued that “[T]he individual’s uniqueness must not ... be alien from the rest of society. He [sic] must remain an organic part of society in order to retain a self” (p. 20). The answer, according to Mead, lay in the value of communication and in structuring it as the dominant organisational communal force, reminiscent of traditional society. Berger, writing in the 1960s, constructed his theories around the emerging “technology of the mass media” and an era where the individual “constantly interacts with and takes society into himself [sic] ... [so that] he [sic] can understand himself [sic] as being a reflection of that ordered society, the generalised other” (p. 21). However, while Berger, Mead and others offered up complex theories that defined the formation of roles within institutionalised spheres of social life and the utilisation of communication to circumvent a developing caste system in a metropolis, the quest for the values of former, traditional times remain as cerebral concepts. Writing of the contemporary era, Marcuse (1996, p. 3) highlights the growing influence of globalisation in establishing a “new urban poverty” in Australia that is redefining and requalifying homelessness. He argues that trends indicate an emerging “sameness” between industrialised nations “in social separation, in spatial segregation, in racism, in homelessness, crime, drug use, more generally in everyday perceptions of the quality of urban life” (p. 75). Despite continuing rhetoric, homelessness is entrenched in contemporary Australian society.

Contemporary homelessness, that collective of people withdrawn from all but the basics of social and welfare services, is viewed as a condition of the cities and larger towns and often tainted with misconceptions and historical values. In my creative work, *The Wounded Sinner*, I have compared the swaggie/sundowner of the formerly agrarian Australia with the homeless of the current industrialised nation:

“You know,” Archie spoke his words with some effort, as if the brain was battling to bring together the forces of the mental with the physical and gradually losing, “I remember when there were swaggies roaming about. We’d be out in the bush for the Department of Lands and Survey. That was in, er, the late 40s, early 50s I think, before Rosie and I got married. Always cadging food and smokes. Worse than the blacks, they were. God, they were pests then and they’re still bloody pests!”

“But they’re not swaggies now, Dad.”

“No, that’s right. Bastards are bloody homeless now. Wouldn’t know one end of a shovel from the other. It was the only thing I agreed on with Marx, you know. The homeless are beyond contempt.” He spat the last words out in a fine spray of tea and vitriol (Henderson, 2014, p. 74).

Historically, the value of the poor and homeless was often determined amid misconceptions and prevailing social structures. Generally, there was minimal contact with the poverty-stricken and “ignorance of the total story,” whereby such criticisms were made against a “deeply ingrained belief in such virtues as work, saving, planning and insurance” (Connell & Irving, 1992, p. 467). Homelessness, in the mind of Archie Andrews, conjured up visions of an ill-kempt laziness, cunning and criminality. His opinion of the homeless was built around his experiences with itinerant and seasonal workers in the post-war years, and he held a far less romantic image of those outback roamers than idealised in national myth of the swaggie. The notion of an almost carefree existence, traversing the countryside from station to station, working when needed and enjoying a pipe and billy of tea at day’s end was often tainted, however, by the more indolent sundowner. As the name suggests he would arrive at the homestead on sunset when work for the day had ceased, expecting a free meal. For a long time the protocol of the day ensured such but with the gradual shift towards a more industrialised, urbanised Australia and accountable economics in struggling rural regions such practices ceased. By the end of the Great Depression, which again had seen a re-emergence of unemployed men with “swag and billycan” tramping bush roads, most of the swaggies, and their shady counterparts, the sundowners, as depicted by Paterson, Lawson and others, had become memories, immortalised as national folklore (Ward, 1967, p. 139; Waterhouse, 1999, p. 25).

Waterhouse (2005, pp. 206-208) describes this idealisation of pastoral Australia and its inhabitants as “the culture of nostalgia”, notions still entrenched in the Australian psyche late into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ward (1978, p. 7) concurs by stating that this “national *mystique*” influenced “the whole Australian community” and calling it “the Australian legend.” While employment became more stable and static in the post-Depression years it robbed men of their “romantic character” and, as Lake (cited in Waterhouse, 2005, p. 207) suggests, of their “masculinity and ... independence. ... [N]ationalist writers ... portrayed the pastoral workers as heroes because they had escaped the shackles of domesticity.” D’arcy Niland, in his novel set during the Depression years, *The Shiralee*, when describing his character Macauley, one of the last of the swaggies, writes that “[s]ome men are like a wheel. They are made to go round. They rust if they lie still, and they fall apart. You’re like that. Some men, they can live in a box, but you’re not one of them” (Niland, 1958, p. 15). It is easy to appreciate the outback noblesse that Niland has created in the character, Macauley, who roves the country, his little daughter in tow, picking up odd jobs here and there, an occasional sexual encounter and often a punch-up (Niland, 1958). The fact, though, was that the swaggie’s lifestyle became untenable. Motorised itinerants accessed jobs more quickly and the trudge between stations became obsolete. Hungry men moved back towards the larger cities and towns (Ward, 1967, p. 139). Somewhere along the way the romance dropped off homelessness (Waterhouse, 2005, pp. 220-221).

Some did not, however, escape the reality of life on the city streets. Henry Lawson, himself, whose nationalist/realist written works inspired the growth and prolongation of the mythical Australian character, was unable to establish the romantic mystique in his own life. “He had long periods of homelessness, became a beggar on Sydney’s streets ... and spent time in asylums and hospitals for mental illness” (Australian Poetry Library, 2). There is a sad irony in the death of Lawson, a champion of the romantic idealisation of the Australian bush life, dying destitute after bouts of mental illness and homelessness on the city streets, being awarded a state funeral, as if that somehow became an atonement for a national shame. Farrugia (2010, p. 2) states that the homeless are often seen as a “symbolic burden” of the greater society and, like the lepers of earlier history, are hidden away because society has never been able to accept or deal properly with them. “[H]omelessness,” he argues, “is often seen as an identity, reducing structural inequality to a static characteristic of individuals” whereby the homeless are relegated to a position of inferiority in daily life. In my creative

work, the character of Laszlo Smith is constructed around this premise, in reality an unknown quantity yet perceived to be “morally suspect, irresponsible, dangerous, dirty, obscene or lacking active subjectivity and people experiencing homelessness are acutely aware of this” (p. 2). As the novel progresses the character of Laszlo develops from the ignorant construct of popular representations to one of social value who has independent means, experiences higher emotions and is finally seen as a positive addition to the coterie of The Wounded Sinner. I have manipulated my characters to suit the structure of a work of fiction. In the real world the consequences of homelessness are more often “described in terms of stigmatization, low self-worth and shame” that have resulted from a collective articulation of denigrative dialogues subjecting the homeless to lives of abject “personal failure” (p. 2).

Sociology and similar disciplines, also, by their nature dehumanise the homeless. Giddens (1995, p. 117) allocates to the homeless the status of “a deviant subculture,” many of whom “manage to eke out only a miserable existence on the fringes of the wider society.” It is stated by Farrugia that the homeless are acutely aware of the “symbolic burden” they carry, and argues that they should engage “different symbolic and discursive resources” to deconstruct the burden and to normalise their existence. He views that “symbolic burden ...[of]...homelessness as a cultural trope,” a theme of life, a parallel companion to the lives lived in greater society (2010, p. 4). Ravenhill (2008, p. 145) understands homelessness as a subcultural component of “intensity, vibrancy and attraction” whose marginalised and powerless members “serve specific needs that mainstream society does not cater for.” As typical of a subculture the homeless are identifiable by criteria such as “language, dress, demeanour and behaviour” that those outside the sect may readily distinguish them. Yet on a personal level, those within the homeless culture may be isolated within that group, or not identify with it. Ravenhill asserts that it is important for the homeless to have access to a “discourse that accurately portrays their lifestyle” yet there is a dearth of understanding from without the homeless sector resulting from an aversion to things mainstream society considers unsavoury (p. 145; Silver, 2010, pp. 184-185).

When considering recent Australian rhetoric concerning social inclusion, Falzon (cited in Silver, 2010, p. 184) writes that every Australian citizen should “feel valued” and that social inclusion “is really about ‘us’, not about some kind of imaginary ‘them’.” In the Wesley Mission report, *The Faces of Homelessness* (2002, p. 2-3), the writer argues that while we “have become ‘immune’ to a certain extent to the plight of the alcoholic on the park

bench,” we are unprepared in any way to accept “the changing face” of homelessness. Moyes, in a foreword to the same report, defines that “changing face,” where once our focus was the untouchable shame of the park bench wino, to now include

“younger men, unemployed and hopeless... the confused and mentally ill frightened by the pace of activity surrounding them... women and children desperate to escape violent and destructive domestic situations... young people cast off by families who can’t cope or don’t care.”

The character of Archie Andrews in my novel is an opinionated man of limited understanding of the real workings of the world including the homeless who he, like many Australians, typifies as shiftless no-hopers to be kept at arm’s length and, where possible, completely ignored (Farrugia, 2010, p. 2). Despite the Australian Human Rights Commission (2012) requesting that the homeless be viewed and treated by the community in accordance to basic human rights, the ‘Archies’ of Australia are dismissive of homelessness and relegate it to the black hole of their consciousness. Hombs (2011, p. 5) writes that “[p]ublic policy for homeless adults (not families) was largely based on stereotypes of visibly homeless individuals on the streets as unreachable, isolated, and untreatable. These individuals, viewed as the majority of homeless adults, were often seen as a nuisance, asking for change on the streets or publicly suffering the effects of alcohol, drugs, and/or mental illness.” And yet the visible homeless, those that we avoid and ignore as they threaten to intrude within our personal space, become more acceptable in some works of literature.

Ross (2006, p. 75), when discussing Beckett’s play, *Waiting for Godot*, observes that the relationship between the two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, and the audience is that of ‘self’ and ‘other’, the latter being the theatre audience who listen as Estragon asks the question, “Where do we come in?” Indeed, the audience accepts the separation between stage and the stalls as a barrier to everything but sight and sound. They listen as the two tramps wring out a dialogue imbued with Beckett’s experiences as a hospital orderly at the end of the Second World War in which he discovers amid the ruins of Europe “shared human values” (p. 77). Coates (cited in Ravenhill, 2008, p. 25) states a Weberian view of homelessness as “an example of the western world’s profound evil, stemming from its ignorance, from its insistence on not being shown tragedy, pain, illness, death.” Beckett (cited in Ross, 2006, p. 77) states that “I suspect that our pains were those inherent in the simple and necessary and

yet so unattainable proposition that their way of being we, was not our way and that our way of being they, was not their way.” To the tramps is imputed Beckett’s understanding of the human condition and in their despondency, we, as the audience are drawn to them, despite their afflictions. “The experience of tragedy, pain, illness and death is fine in the theatre or cinema. It is unacceptable, however, to leave expensive seats in the theatre, only to be confronted with the fact that it is not fantasy but real” (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 25). Beckett creates in his homeless characters a sense of the absurd that Ionesco (cited in Harris, 1999, p. 103) describes as “[c]ut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.” In the creation of the tramps Beckett evokes a longing for sense of order and stability, some certainty and a logical process missing from their world. I remember Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* from my undergraduate days. In class we debated the absurdist elements of the play, seeking out reason and logic. The tramps and I touched for a moment, a cerebral connection of sorts, but not really contact at all.

Twain, too, explored homelessness in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (2009) through four characters: Huckleberry Finn, Jim, the runaway slave, the duke and the dauphin, or king as he sometimes called himself. Like Australian colonial representations of the swaggie, Twain’s characters are figures of romance and adventure; escapist literature is at home along the muddy stretches of the Murray-Darling as it is along the Mississippi River. Nissen (2005, p. 58) states the status of Twain’s characters “as individuals ... in flux—undefined and, maybe, undefinable.” Homeless people in the current era are similarly predisposed towards that description and we outside that group still view them as absurd figures from the literature or theatre of life.

Twain did not write directly about homelessness, or the homeless, per se. The homeless, whether hobos or swagmen, were a necessary adjunct to the growth of their particular country (Vexliard, 1956, pp. 60-61) and their vagabond behaviour identified them a certain status in the working class (Ward, 1978, p. 30). His characters, like those of Henry Lawson, D’arcy Niland and other similar writers, were constructed as elemental to the agrarian landscape, essential and pivotal to its operation. Like some pieces of period furniture, however, the images of Huckleberry Finn, swaggies, and their vagabond contemporaries seem a little dated now. O’Connor (cited in Worthington, 2012, p. 187) describes Huck as “a rugged Peter Pan who lives eternally” yet Twain himself, prophetically, “viewed Huck’s end as somewhat pathetic, if not tragic” (Worthington, 2012, p. 187). That

tragedy is played out mostly now within the cosmopolitan theatres of concrete and glass, the actors no longer have leading roles, just bit-parts. They stumble over their lines. The tramps of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* reflect on their existences: "Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. ... Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which cruel fate has consigned us" (1985, p. 79) But in the real world, the homeless hold little value. We are no longer "talking about romanticised mid-twentieth-century small-town America," or Australia, of that period but of a contemporary "urban underclass trying to survive in desperate economic times" (Mitchell, 2012, p. 467). The Christian God (Romans 2:11), and Bill Gates (2013), believe all persons are of equal worth. Archie Andrews, however, found them "beyond contempt" (Henderson, 2014, p. 73). Beyond contempt, perhaps, but most are good at what they do. Giddens (1995, p. 117) observes that "the homeless manage to eke out only a miserable existence on the fringes of the wider society" yet they survive by developing "a complex range of street skills ...and many have an extensive practical knowledge of the welfare system" (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1998, p. 57).

When writing about organisations working with the homeless, Lemos and Bacon (2006, pp. 29-30) urge the identification of their clients "interests and gifts" that will enhance their sociability and "self-confidence". The authors argue that "by striving for their social and emotional aspirations" the homeless will be better equipped to "take charge of their future" housing and employment needs. Novotny (2000, p. 382) believes the concept of empowering the homeless to a state of autonomy would facilitate a progression out of their present circumstances. However, not every homeless person wants to be rescued from their predicament on the streets. For some it is a choice (Rubbo, 2001, p. 164). My homeless character, Laszlo Smith, is among those who prefer to find their own way through life:

Mostly, though, he steered clear of people except for what he considered bartering for the necessities, offering up goods from his trolley in return for cigarettes. Usually no one wanted the old broken wheel trim, black comb or assorted nuts and bolts he had collected as he shuffled along; they either felt pity for him or told him to "Bugger off!" It never worried him, the life he led, as much as it worried other people who always seemed to marvel at his ability to exist at a level below their understanding (Henderson, 2014, p.21).

I am old enough to remember a few of the ‘identities’ of the Sydney city streets from a time when being odd and homeless elevated one to celebrity status. There was the man who would ride the buses reciting Shakespeare. Such was the entertainment value the conductors would let him ride for free. And just as quickly he was gone, onto another bus to another destination. Bea Miles, a homeless woman, was the bane of Sydney taxi-drivers and a serial pest but such was her notorious ‘value’ she was taken in, near the end of her life, by the Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged in Randwick. Against the drabness of the city, Bea had added vitality and character. Kate Grenville’s *Lilian’s Story*, published in 1985, was based loosely on her life (Livett, 2011). These examples from the post-World War II era, romanticise “homelessness as a positive state” (Parsell & Parsell, 2012, p. 422). Parsell and Parsell contend that for those who choose homelessness through logical thought processes ascribe to it “a peculiar ethical claim” by which they endeavour to maintain “an unconstrained and leisurely” existence (p. 422). The activities that constitute normality in mainstream society or conformity to it are surrendered by those choosing homelessness. They don’t seek work or engage in activities within the wider community that would sustain, maintain or progress it in any way. “Taking this further, the chosen state of homelessness has been seen as rebellion against, or at least, testing the parameters of society” (p. 422). Again, this may be seen as a reflection of the romanticism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries where the image of the swaggies and hobos has been cultivated to represent “having achieved independence, political freedom and rugged individualism” (p. 422). Choosing homelessness also creates an avenue to a life of contemplation and “personal freedom” (Wasserman & Clair cited in Parsell & Parsell, 2012, p. 422) as exemplified by Henry Lawson:

And I’ve carried swag for months out-back in Australia—and it was life, in spite of its ‘squalidness’ and meanness and wretchedness and hardship, and in spite of the fact that the world would have regarded us as ‘tramps’—and a free life amongst *men* from all the world! (Lawson, 1974, p. 16)

More prevalent among the homeless demographic are those for whom the choice of homelessness was an irrational one. Or, as Parsell and Parsell suggest, it is rather a consequence of “deviant life choices” (2012, p. 423), a model that portrays the homeless as unwilling participants “in what is expected of them and these immoral choices lead to homelessness.” There is some debate by academics in the field of homelessness concerning the appropriate terminology to describe the procession through the stages of homelessness.



Snow and Anderson (1993, pp. 272-273) used the metaphor of a career to describe that progress rather than the metaphor of a pathway. Hutson and Liddiard (cited in Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011, p. 61) typified career homelessness as a model of various stages set in a “downward spiral” and “progressive decline” to a “destination [which may be interpreted as] chronic homelessness” (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011, pp. 60-6; Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1998, p. 70). The analogy of a pathway alludes to a more systematic profile of homelessness that draws “attention to changes in the biographical identity and material circumstances of homeless people” (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011, pp. 60-61). Chamberlain and Johnson identify, “within the diversity and complexity of homeless people’s lives,” a system of five “typical pathways into adult homelessness” (p. 61): ... “housing crisis, family breakdown, substance abuse, mental health, and youth to adult” (Johnson cited in Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011, p.61.) My character of Vietnam veteran, Laszlo Smith, is typified in the research of Ray (2011, p. 9-10) who describes the “long journey from the military home to homeless” and identifies ([a]lcoholism ... and mental health problems” as major contributing factors to that event. Whatever the reasons for their actions and choices the homeless are not an homogenous collective and homelessness “should be seen as the result of the choices of a problematic and deviant individual” (p. 424).

Novotny (2000, p. 382) describes the homeless as being “[e]xperts in their own lives.” She cites Rogers (p. 386) who states that

the individual has within himself or herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes, and self-directed behaviour ... these resources can be tapped only if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided.

The objective, according to Roger’s approach, is that the homeless, with guidance, can make significant changes to their lifestyles (p. 387). However, it is argued by Ravenhill (2008, p. 27) that “[t]here is an enigmatic power” created by the homeless that invokes emotive responses from the public at street level yet none “strong enough to prevent it.” This failure to accept commonplace and “uncomfortable realities” of life absolves the more fortunate of society of any responsibility for them. Some homeless, however, are content within their situation and are unwilling or unlikely to alter their circumstances to suit the philanthropic desires of people in more elevated positions. Rubbo (2001, p. 164) describes an interaction

between a benevolent woman and a homeless man, on a Sydney street. Seeing his piteous position the woman told him she would help him find accommodation. His reaction surprised her: “I don’t want any help. I choose to live like this. Bugger off.” In the same vein, Matthew Andrews is lectured by Laszlo Smith and attempts to educate him about choices in life and the presumption that those on the streets are on all levels inferior:

“You comfortable?” Matthew had walked into the shed and over Laszlo’s bedding to drag out another chair.

“How do you define comfort? I’ve always thought that a man’s greatest comfort is freedom.”

“Who said that?”

“What?” Laszlo gave Matthew a withering glare. “I said it just then! Don’t you think I’m capable of deeper thought?”

“Of course I do. It’s just that I...”

“I did go to school, you know. Homeless people aren’t born to it in Australia. A lot of us do ‘normal’ things first.” He raised his hands and gave his index fingers a wiggle up and down to accentuate the word ‘normal’. (Henderson, 2014, p. 88).

‘Normal’ society views the homeless as “stereotypical conceptions” rather than stratified groups of individuals drifting the streets for many different reasons (Parsell & Parsell, 2012, p. 423). Orwell (1969, p. 7), though, in his autobiographical *Down and Out in Paris and London*, explains that the effects of homelessness leave some people to “give up trying to be normal or decent. Poverty frees them from ordinary standards of behaviour, just as money frees people from work.” They, despite, or in spite, of their former lives, eke out existences on the streets as caricatures estranged from the rest of the world yet attached to it via the umbilical of humanity. Ravenhill (2008, pp. 147-149) suggests the homeless are bound to certain identities: the street drinkers, the drug addicts, the depressives, the clowns and others. The alcoholics of the street drinker sect in London place themselves above the drunks and for them it is vitally important, almost a point of honour. An alcoholic explained that “we are alcoholics because we drink: because we drink too much. But a drunk is

someone who beats up on his wife. ...None of us are drunks, none of us are like that.” In my creative work I have attempted to portray Laszlo Smith as having honour and respect within the world of the homeless yet receiving little from the outside world. Even when he has established his former identity, and is seen as possessing latent value, he is ultimately dismissed as just a homeless man:

“Don’t you get it? He’s got so many stories to tell. He’s been everywhere, done everything and he’s a war hero to boot. It’s perfect research for my novel.”

“Shit, Matthew, what if he’s dangerous?”

“Two or three days and I’ll get rid of him. I’ll tell the police he just came in uninvited.”

“But that would be lying, wouldn’t it?” Vince had been quietly listening, sipping away at his second stubby which was growing warmer by the minute.

“Yeah, but he’s only a homeless guy. They get moved on all the time.”  
(Henderson, 2014, pp. 50-51)

Thus, his current identity is suppressed amid fear and ignorance.

My work for Mission Australia as a ‘cultural consultant’ among the Wongutha people in the Eastern Goldfields area of Western Australia took me to many different places to service the needs of my clients. More than once I sought out people who lived, for various reasons, outside the perimeter of what white Australians might call normal or acceptable standards of housing. For my clients, though, living rough in the bush was natural for them. Any move on my part to relocate them was met with a questioning look. I realised that for them the land where they sat, amid a half-circle of plastic bags and a few blankets, was their home. The language of bureaucrats hadn’t been written to include such a description of habitat and that family became another homeless statistic.

Ravenhill (2008, pp. 27-29) asserts that our failure to react or be outraged by

situations of homelessness could be explained by our acceptance of them as a normal part of our whole existence. This functionalist approach understands homelessness as part of the “social order and social systems” that constitute society, and those systems continue “through the shared norms and values of its participants.” It also conceptualises the home, as a structure or container, as having a significant stabilising affect in the make-up of a society. While this determination of “home has biological and psychological functions as well as legal, economic and social functions”, it lacks the element of the “‘lived experience’ that is part of memories, ontological identity, emotions and mental well-being.” While the physical structure of a home does not guarantee an holistic state of well-being, the absence of that structure “can cause severe physical and mental harm.”

Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998, p. 20), utilising the theory of structuralism, state that “it is a cultural construct” that establishes the criterion for identifying acceptable housing within a certain “cultural domain.” That domain, according to Ravenhill (2008, p. 29), contains other elements that work together as structures that “organize or regulate life” thus enabling society to function. Fawcett (2008, p. 835) expands this to stress that the “underlying processes and systems ... determine individual action.” The major flaw with a structuralism-based philosophy applied to homelessness is that by concentrating on the social structures it voids the “individuals’ ability to be independent of these structures” (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 30)

It is arguable, in the postmodernism of the western world, that the concepts of vast and unwieldy social structures and processes are imaginary, the ‘self’ all-consuming. Identities are impacted by the prevailing cultural environment; there is little requirement for “logical consistency” or an empirical evidence base since they, too, are illusionary. This does not bode well for those who live beneath the layers of the “upmarket” individualism of postmodernism. Neither, Payne stresses, do the structuralist and functionalist theories, by accepting society’s “status quo”, claim to deliver the homeless from “undesirable social inequalities and injustices.” Rather, “a social divisions perspective” rejects “the constraining power of institutions and the ordered way in which identities are socially created” and invalidates the “hyper-individualism and relativism of post-structuralism and post-modernism” (Payne, 2006, pp. 355-356).

Homelessness attaches to it a bland sterility when couched in formal, academic terms

that seem incongruent with the problem, and that is stated plainly by Rauschenbusch (2007, p. 1) as “[t]he welfare of the mass is always at odds with the selfish force of the strong.” ‘Normal’ society strives to detach itself from suffering of any kind (Giddens, 1995, p. 117) yet that chasm of misunderstanding, ignorance, indifference and shame is bridged at the coalface daily by people operating outside of bureaucracy. Soup kitchens and vans, church support and other humanitarian agencies work tirelessly to bring relief if only temporary, to the homeless. Often, though, the chasm has opposing values on either sides: the gap is huge. The human touch of those compassionate people is served out in small daily doses with soup- filled polystyrene cups and in the complexity of that ritual it remains limited and constrained by economics as much as social status. Thus, “the street homeless ... occupy a contradictory position in simultaneously experiencing an extreme lack of supportive attention while attracting a disproportionate amount of unwanted attention from agents of social control and regulation” (Smith, 2011, 363).

This is not a new phenomenon. Vexliard (1956, p. 61), when describing the personality of the homeless person, states that often “[h]e [sic] has been deprived not only of food and shelter but of justice and of affection as well, not merely deprived, but actually rejected.” There comes a time, in the privations of the homeless when these “values” become redundant: “He has felt the void around him, the absence of friendship, of compassion” to the point where “any adaptive effort ... [would] ... be futile.” The presumption is often made that those people caught in the grip of extreme poverty and/or homelessness are victims of their own “moral failing[s]” (Falzon & Cowling, 2011, p. 42). After many years working both directly and indirectly with the homeless, I am amazed at the persistence of the fable of homelessness “as a product of personal problems” rather than seen in economic terms.

That is not to say some instances of sustained homelessness are purely economic. I have contact with a man, aged now in his early forties, who has for the last twenty years, lived in his small car, sleeping cramped up in the front, moving about to avoid the patrolling rangers and police. He says he has a state housing flat in Perth, in a complex stocked with shady characters who had at some time threatened him with violence, causing him to flee. When he was twelve he suffered brain trauma in a car accident. His constant fear is that his pension will be revoked and he fabricates scenarios of government collapse, various conspiracies and the new world order taking away his allowances. He equates Perth with his collective bad experiences and is pained to return. Yet he does, to check on his unit, to collect

his mail and to visit his aged mother who may have thrown up her hands in despair years before. He eats, whenever possible, at country soup kitchens and is quite familiar with most of the charity outlets in most towns. While his homelessness was borne of personal problems (the fear of his neighbours), it might have been avoided had he the means to enter the private housing sector and move to a safer location. “[P]eople who are mentally ill and homeless are particularly disadvantaged. They have a multitude of needs that are generally inadequately met by our community’s current response” (Hanover Stats & Facts, 1997, p. 10). It is a sad irony for this man to rent a house and still be homeless.

Stephens (2002, p. 25) quotes a mother speaking, at a public meeting, about the death of her daughter: “Jo did not belong on the streets; nobody belongs on the streets. Homelessness is a condition, not an identity.” Jo was a schizophrenic, formerly a brilliant student, artist, songwriter and musician. She was beaten to death in an alley while sleeping.

My character of Laszlo Smith, too, has poor mental health, is frequently in and out of Graylands Hospital, and struggles to find “his place” (Henderson, 2014, p. 20), in a society geared against him. Like most homeless he searches for somewhere he will fit in. Homeless writer, K. T. Hayward, expresses the reality of his own plight:

“You would like to get a job. Who is going to give a person with no address or phone number a job?

You say to yourself, ‘I’m a decent person, can’t they see that?’ but you can see their point of view and you hate it. It is going to be much harder than you thought to get out of this mess.” (Hayward, 2002, p. 25)

## Conclusion

Place, belonging and identity in Australia are complex elements of its social and cultural structure, each interrelated and connected by threads of the human and the spiritual. The three aspects of this exegesis express the difficulties of those outside the bounds of mainstream Australia, who struggle to fit within the idealised Anglo-Celtic mould. For most of those outside the parameters of Australian social and cultural inclusion exists the aging conundrum of whether to shed one culture or social status to seek out another.

Aboriginal Australians were impacted by colonialism and postcolonialism in various ways, at different times and in different parts of Australia. However, racism, in pseudo-scientific thought, social interaction and government policy, formed the backbone of the European thrust into Australia resulting in dispossession, genocide, sickness and the breakdown of the Aboriginal social structures. That the policy of removing some Aboriginal children from their homes continued into the 70s is a sad indictment of a paternalistic, racist system dragging its feet into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In my creative work, the characters of Auntie Peggy, Jeanie and Jaylene, reflect different arenas of the Aboriginal/European conflict from different times in post-1788 history. It is important that they, as Aboriginal components of the Australian cultural landscape, are seen to find resolution to their problems by self-determination.

Perhaps more topical than that of the original Australians is the current discourse on migrant issues. I have argued that we all, arriving in one wave or another, are migrants or come from migrant stock and with the world in a constant warring flux, refugees and migrants are no longer uncommon. Many Australians, though, consider the nation hard-won land built upon the blood and sweat of fearless pioneers and by such pedigree, rightfully theirs. The socio-cultural-political structures are wrapped around Anglo-Celtic core values. Like Indigenous Australians, the migrants from countries outside the United Kingdom face exclusion from that coterie of the settler gene pool. The mythic Australian identity eludes them. They strive hard against an ingrained distaste for anything but authentic and 'true-blue'. Their adaption to the social and cultural rigours of the new country comes at a price, that being separation from the ancestral home. They seek belonging, yet they are tethered to the former in a quasi-spiritual remembrance. Eddie Romano, a character from my creative

work, grew grapes and made his own wine in the Swan Valley. Memories from the old transposed in the new. It was his way to belong.

The search for belonging and place is epitomised through the life of my character, Laszlo Smith, an ex-serviceman beset with issues of mental health and homelessness. In reality there are many and various reasons for the problems associated with life without the permanence and security others take for granted. I have described the development of homelessness, once held in rural communities at great value, now largely citified and kept at arm's length lest we somehow become infected with its seeming hopelessness. While there is conjecture within the academic ranks as to best prescribe solutions to the problem of homelessness, most argue that those living beneath the floorboards of the towns and cities crave acceptance and value from the greater community, much like anyone else.

For those on the periphery of the conventional societal bosom, whether migrant, Indigenous or homeless, their status is dependent as much upon their strivings as to the responses of the greater body of established Australian society who hold close the mythologies and beliefs of their own creation.



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