Convivial multiculture and the perplication of race: the dynamics of becoming African Australian

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that the writing that follows is all my own work, except where acknowledged as the words or ideas of other scholars, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signed.

Kirk Ndabaningi Zwangobani
March 2016
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Abstract

This thesis explores the intertwined problems of belonging and becoming as seen through the lens of the African Australian experience. What is at stake is the question of what it would mean to think through and represent the specific and non-generalisable experiences of being ‘African Australian’, without preventing the becoming that, I will argue, is proper to all social experience. This problem is explored through a qualitative study of African Australian youth, involving in-depth interviews and participant observation. While I highlight some of the peculiarities of the Australian experience, my aim is to use the empirical material to productively reinflect the problems of belonging and becoming as they play out in an always emergent sociality.

An analysis of the empirical material suggests that there are two clearly identifiable modes by which African Australian youth negotiate the sense of their difference, which I refer to as ascriptive and affiliative negotiations of difference. I suggest that such negotiations of difference play an important role in enabling those for whom racial difference has a negative status to actively and productively engage that difference. Yet such negotiations of difference risk remaining constrained by the epidermal reflex and the manner in which race folds back into – or, to use the term that I develop in the thesis, perplicates in – social experience. Yet the empirical material also points to the more open and indeterminate aspects of everyday encounters, which I theorise through the lens of affect theory. I argue for the significance of a Deleuzian reading of affect, which distinguishes itself from more subjective understandings of affect by insisting on a shift away from identity as the ground of social experience, towards an ontology of differentiation, process and becoming. I conclude that convivial multiculture is best understood in both its micropolitical and macropolitical aspects. Convivial multiculture, seen from the point of view of an ontology of difference and becoming, is an emergent social field that is always already in play; yet, it requires convivial practices to enable its expression in social reality. While I argue for the significance of this more indeterminate and excessive aspect of the African Australian experience, I also stress that experience cannot be understood without grasping the way that race perplicates within it.

The novelty of my argument is to offer new ways of conceptualising the complex relationship between belonging and becoming within the context of the problem of race. For all the ways that race folds back into social experience, if we take the question ‘how do I belong?’ as a productive impetus rather than a problem to be solved, we may be able to better attune to the openness and unpredictability of what is to come.
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Are we a priori African Australian?

In a consideration of the status of feminism in the early 1990s, Elizabeth Grosz (1994: 163) highlights the importance of women ‘exploring and interrogating their own specific, and non-generalisable forms of becoming, desiring-production and being.’ Grosz articulates well a problem that is central to this thesis, though here the question concerns what it would mean to enable the being, the belonging and the becoming, specific to the diasporic identity I am calling ‘African-Australianness.’ What would it mean to think through and represent the specific and non-generalisable experiences of being ‘African Australian’, without preventing the becoming that, I will argue, is proper to all social experience?

We must be wary that the commonly used term African Australian does not become a tool of the exclusionary politics of belonging. Whether the term is appropriated by those of black African descent who seek an identification as such, or by those who seek to denote the individual and collective identity of ‘others’, the use of the identification ‘African Australian’ risks producing a discursive representation, an a priori social category that may not be readily understood or accepted by those thus designated. Such identification may overplay the discontinuities, or indeed underplay the links, between the individual identities, collective representations and the political transformations that may characterise and constitute the collective sense of Africans in Australia. Adopting the notion of ‘African Australian’ as an authentic social or cultural identity also runs the risk of assuming the characteristic of ‘race’ as its centre. My concern is that if race is assumed to be the central tenet of such identification, it may not be possible to disrupt “racially inflected expressions” that, as Garret Duncan (2005: 101) asserts, ‘give enduring forms of oppression and inequality their appearance of normalcy and naturalness.’ What matters, he argues, is that we can move beyond the ‘reproduction of received ‘realities’’, such as those that racial discourses offer, in order to ‘explore the epistemology and interplay of different ontologies that may create this reproduction.’

While Duncan argues for a ‘counternarrative or counterstory’ as an antidote to these racially inflected expressions, I am especially interested in the possibility of exploring different ontologies in order to challenge the way in which ‘race’ is problematized to begin with. The language of racial or ethnic identity for example, requires taking identity as the ontological basis of our experience, and this involves ontological

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1 I would like the reader to bear in mind that the identification ‘African Australian’ is merely used to denote the emergence of the community. It is not, as the argument throughout the thesis illustrates, an a priori identification.
commitments, which this thesis seeks to problematise and indeed to displace from centre-field. This is not to say that the question of what it would mean to be identified as, or even to identify with, African Australianness is not important, and that the question of one’s belonging to such an identity can only be asked through an attention to the more phenomenological problem of the experience of identification. Yet the question of the becoming of those tentatively identifying as African Australian requires that an ontology that puts difference at the fore be given its due place in our thinking. This is a task that, for a tradition as representational as the Western one is, requires some effort, and it is this effort of negotiating the thought and experience of identity and difference as such, that this thesis seeks to take on.

In this context, ‘African Australianness’ presents an especially interesting problem. An identity that has formed out of a relatively recent series of migrations, African Australianness does not have the history of the more researched African migrations to Britain, famously described by Paul Gilroy (1993) in his work on the Black Atlantic. Yet this does not make it any the less complex and my claim is that its relative newness might be seen as an opportunity. How might our appreciation of African Australianness exploit the shifts in social theory in recent decades, towards grasping identities not as the ground of social experience but as the product of a more primary and ongoing process of differentiation and becoming? In considering this question, the thesis will trace through diverse conceptual approaches that have emerged since the discourses of identity politics first came on the scene: the linguistic or discursive, materialist and affective turns come immediately to mind. In drawing on these strands of social theory as they inflect on my empirical studies, my overall aim, then, is to give vitality to the complex relationship between being and becoming in the context of the difficulty African Australianness presents in a country such as Australia.

Stuart Hall’s (1996a) early work on the analysis of identity still represents one of the more sustained articulations of the limitations of common sense assumptions of early identity politics discourse. Situated very much within the linguistic or discursive turn in social theory, Hall (1996a) rigorously challenged the more Enlightenment inspired politics of identity, which naturalised the political defence of essentialised identities. He nevertheless insisted on the importance of a ‘strategic and positional’, as opposed to an ‘essentialist’ deployment of identity, a framing of identity that demands that we acknowledge discourse as the starting point. For Hall (1996c: 5), then, identity is:

...the meeting point, the point of suture, between ...the discourses and practices, which 'attempt to' "interpellate", “speak to us” or "hail” us into
place as the social subjects of particular discourses and... the processes which...construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.

Undoubtedly, Hall’s work was deeply embedded in the discursive approach to the analysis of the subject, which for his discipline, Cultural Studies, was foundational. While this is an approach that the thesis will, to some extent at least, move beyond, his reflections on the formation of black subjectivity remain highly instructive. In particular, in his essay ‘Who needs identity?’ Hall offers an insightful exploration into the social aspects of identity, race and the racialised subject, but especially into their psychic traits. He points out that the racialised subject must have a degree of investment in the subject position that he or she takes up and that this investment occurs via the psychic drives. If not for these psychic desires, the subject would not attach to the social representations or identity that discourse constructs for them. Hall stresses, then, that the process of racialisation is only possible because there is a social and psychic investment in a racialised subject position. This is possible, in part, due to the structures ‘out there’ that coerce us to invest in our own racialisation. As Avtar Brah (cited in Hall 1996c) puts it, in attempting to understand the psychic dimensions of a social phenomena such as racism:

Fanon notwithstanding, much work is yet to be undertaken on the subject of how the racialised ‘other’ is constituted in the psychic domain... In other words, how is the link between social and psychic reality to be theorized?

While I do not pursue the psychoanalytic reading that this notion of the psychic drives might suggest, the question of the often ambiguous investments that characterise racial identity is a point of focus in the thesis. In exploring this problem, however, I find that the emerging focus in social theory on the question of embodiment, which in Hall’s work remains secondary to that of discourse, is a crucial starting point for understanding the phenomenological processes through which race materialises. More precisely, what interests me in this shift toward questions of materiality and embodiment is the displacement of identity – even in its strategic and positional forms – in favour of an attention to more primary processes of differentiation. Hall’s (1990: 225) well cited argument, that it is critical points of deep and significant difference that constitute what we really are, already alludes to the importance of difference in critical analyses of racialised ‘identity’ and ‘community’. For difference in this instance holds an important stake as the site at which race may also be articulated. There remains however, an ontological question concerning race as difference; here, in exploring the formation of this community, I would push the importance of the ontological shift from identity per se to identity as an effect of
difference. As Gilles Deleuze (1994) has pointed out, we have only ever thought of difference as an effect of identity. That is to say, our representational tradition has only ever conceived of difference in a secondary and negative sense; difference is merely the difference between identities. If we are to move beyond some of the very real limitations of identity politics and its essentialising claims, I suggest that it is necessary for us to take seriously this notion that identity is not the ground of being, nor of social experience, but an effect of more primary differences. Identity, we could say, is an effect of our becoming. This claim certainly does not make discourses on identity redundant. Yet by giving a degree of autonomy to processes of becoming and differentiation, we may be able to articulate the problem of becoming or transformation as distinct from, yet interrelated to, the problem of belonging.

In light of these caveats, I should note that throughout the thesis my deployment of the concept of identity departs sharply from the image of the more modernist individual whose rational consciousness ensures his or her relative stasis across time. Nor do I mean to imply an identity imposed by a collective with a shared history or ancestry. Rather, I employ identity as emerging antagonistically as the movement between those discourses that position us as certain subjects and those drives and desires through which we consciously or unconsciously seek identification. More than this, I am concerned to think through the always tenuous patterns between embodied subjectivity and consciousness, which rely on the development of a practical sense of the body ‘living and acting in the world’ and on the ‘phenomenological body image’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962) or ‘corporeal schema’ (Fanon 1967a).

The implication to consider here when speaking of a phenomenological consciousness is that the body (as with the subject) has an ‘active agency with its own memories, habits and horizons of significance’ (Weiss 1999: 3). During intercorporeal exchanges, that is encounters with other bodies, the corporeal schema appears to consciousness as a result of its own endeavours to will it into existence (Bloul, 2013). It is here that a kind of agency is realised. It is this instinctive and habitual realisation of the body via the corporeal schema that has a tendency, as it were, to stay with the body, even as the subject slides from one identity position to the next. Through exploring this embodied subjectivity, we are able to begin to diverge from the dualist separation of body and mind often associated with identity, and instead link consciousness more complexly with corporeality. This is fundamental to understanding how race plays out in and on the body, and further still how bodies may aggregate into racial formations outside of the discursive realm of representation.
1.2 The Perplication of Race

Registering the significance of the turn toward embodiment and materiality in social theory, Arun Saldanha (2006) insists that representation alone cannot account for the phenomena of race and its effect on consciousness. For focussing on the discursive production of race alone, he suggests, conveniently sidesteps a crucial question: ‘what is race?’ (13). Saldanha’s main argument here is that rather than refusing an ontology of race as is commonplace in Cultural Studies, we need to attempt to explain the effect of the process of race on bodies, though not through ‘classical notions of identity’, nor *cogito*, representation, or race’s reducibility to culture or biology. So in pursuing phenomenologically inspired questions of racialisation, in the name of a pluralist ontology of race, I take on board Saldanha’s suggestion that what is necessary is a ‘focus on embodied social interaction in which an ethics of responsibility follows from sensing the intensities between oneself and others, however distant’ (Saldanha 2006: 22).

Saldanha’s own discipline of human geography has been especially sensitive to the need to look beyond representation in order to open up different ways of thinking about the determining effects of difference and identity (see also Thrift 2007; Thrift 2000, Anderson and Harrison 2003, Dewsbury 2003; McCormack 2003). Such non- and post-representational approaches stress the need to go beyond the attempt ‘to found accounts of race in the relational construction of identities’ (Tolia-Kelly and Crang 2010: 2309), stressing rather the primacy of differential force with respect to identities and, indeed, relations between identities. What is at issue here is how a more differential ontology refugues, and potentially opens, the question of determination. In her Deleuzo-Spinozian ontology, Hasana Sharp (2011), for example, argues that social theory needs to move beyond the very question of identities and their relations, toward the determination of enabling relations, joyful passions and increased capacities, on the one hand, and disabling relations, sad passions and decreased capacities, on the other. This requires ultimately that we move beyond the social (and of course race) as merely produced under historically determined conditions. Sharp is signalling a decisive political shift here that I seek to embrace in elucidating the formation of the African Australian community, away from a politics anchored in the personal and problematic world of identity to what she considers an impersonal or socio-affective politics. So, as important as social discursive analyses are to understand how solidarities, for example, may shape our engagement with race, this should not preclude us from going further to understand how the ‘myriad of impersonal factors in one’s environment over which one cannot exercise sovereign control’ or ‘that generally fly below the radar of theoretical or even conscious scrutiny’ (Sharp 2011: 14) may affect our social relations. The notion that I seek to draw out here is that there are autonomous affective forces or affects
that occur outside the body’s consciousness that have a determining effect on our relations. This suggests that forces beyond our consciousness or given range of faculties – memory, thoughts, feelings and emotions – can move us to sensually and politically coalesce in a perceptually ‘unified’ collective in which differences between us, rather than identity positions, are the primary qualities. In exploring a coming together in which differential encounters and relations rather than identities are primary, we must still contend with a thorny problem; namely, that, as autonomous as such differential and affective relations may be, we may still be marked by race’s materiality. That is to say, while there inheres in encounters a potential that exceeds their determination by representation, there is still the possibility that, phenomenologically speaking, our ‘memories’ or ‘histories of association’ (Ahmed 2004a) based on our experience of race may still prejudice present and future relations and encounters.

It is apt at this point to signal the practical implications of the theoretical shifts I have been tracing. For the more discursively oriented theorists of race (Hall 1996c, Gilroy 2005b, Yuval-Davis 2011a; 2011b), the struggle to produce identities that could both negotiate and exceed the discursive construction of race was the crucial point upon which the problem of political belonging was to be articulated. It is, however, the engagement with difference and the implication this has for the abstract potential of ‘political belonging’, rather than identity, that I would like to explore here as creating the conditions for race’s emergence from an immanent field of relations. In doing so, I contribute to existing debates an exploration of the complex and potentially productive interarticulation of the notions of belonging and becoming. Exploring the productive emergence of race through the dual tropes of becoming and belonging provides two necessary lines of inquiry, given the complexity of the social field put forth thus far. Firstly, I seek to understand political belonging as that process through which youth resist the kind of a priori identification that would, through representations of African-Australianness, produce a passively racialised subject position. Secondly, a focus on becoming fosters openness to processes of differentiation, while remaining cognisant of how the structures of thought that determine race may make such openness difficult to achieve.

The principal and empirical focus of my exploration is the problem of African Australian youth. As with the category of race, my emphasis is not on ‘youth’ as a predetermined category, but on the way that those categorised as young embody the transformations and struggles around belonging and becoming that are my point of interest. Youth is often defined as a transitional stage between infancy and adulthood. However, it is the ontology of transformation and the actuality of struggles around belonging that interest me more than the identities at either end of the process – where they have come from and where they are going to. Under what
conditions can we think such transformation? How might we recognise struggles to belong as, always already, expressions of becoming? And under what empirical conditions might such struggles find a more positive actualisation? In asking these questions, I am raising the question of conviviality (Gilroy 2005b, Massumi 2011), or what I call convivial multiculture, as a social practice through which the productive engagement with difference is possible. In putting forward a case for the potential of this kind of convivial multiculture to affect social change, I borrow an idea from Brian Massumi (2002b); namely, that multiculture requires practices through which people can pursue or defend rights based on identification with a certain categorised social group, without being pinned into particular identities or positions. This requires that we are able to think of belonging as an indeterminate or emergent sociality. As Massumi puts it, it is a question of attuning to the more micropolitical dimensions of our experience. Further still, it provides the opportunity to conceptualise how engagement with belonging shapes the emergence of the African Australian community in Australia. On such an occasion it is, I will suggest, vital to prioritise an engagement with political belonging over the problem of race, in order to conjure a convivial multiculture and elicit its enactment through ‘prosaic negotiations with difference’ (Amin 2002a, Harris 2009; 2013).

Thus in considering such debates I treat ‘becoming African Australian’ as something more than a realisation of a racialised identity. It is a question, then, of keeping both the representational and non-representational, the macropolitical and micropolitical aspects of social reality, in view. While I am arguing for the need to attend to the micropolitical dimensions of becoming, I am well aware that the problem of race cannot be grasped without engagement with macropolitical structures and discourses. As Ash Amin (cited in Swanton 2010: 2347) suggests:

...[f]ocussing on the everyday interaction and negotiation of difference ...is no simple privileging of the ‘view from below’, but... everyday interactions take form through the intermingling of processes from ‘above’ (e.g. national debates about citizenship, belonging and membership) with local histories of getting along.

To finish this section I would like to highlight that throughout the discussion that I will undertake, and the problematic field that I will elaborate on, I would like to keep in mind what I call ‘the perplication of race’. Perplication is a useful concept that I borrow from Deleuze’s (1994) Difference and Repetition, to capture the way in which race is differentiated from, yet re-sutures itself into, the complex relations that I am negotiating throughout the thesis. Perplication also has a medical sense, indicating a surgical procedure; namely ‘the operation of drawing the cut end of an artery
through a slit in the wall of the same artery just above, in order to arrest bleeding (Medical-dictionary n.d.).

Race is not a singular essence attributable to bodies and beings, but rather, it is, always differentiated from, yet necessarily connected to them in the bifurcation of social experience. It can be considered, then, that race perplicates between, the expression and representation of bodies in relation, and the visceral, virtual sensation of ‘something more’ to social reality. Tracing the etymology of the word, *pli* (to through) and *plicate* (to fold), I am suggesting that indeed, race folds back into, and within, the becoming of social experience. Be it, through the unconscious corporeality of the body memory, the phenomenological reflex of an epidermal schema, the discursive representations of difference, or implicit in desire, I put forward the idea, then, that in a racialised society, race is manifold; it folds differentially into and within social relations and experience. So as I attempt to avert our attention away from the *a priori* suggestion of race as essence, predetermined characteristics or behaviours, I will also suggest that attempts by young people to enter into relations that are not reducible to race, often result in race perplicating differentially into and within such open relations and expressions. Race, I will illustrate, never works alone; it is always in relation to other ideas, other potentials and other objects of thought.

**1.3 Trajectory Statement**

To comprehend becoming ‘African Australian’ as an event demands that we recognise it, not as a linear process but one of constant and ongoing change that transverses both broad structural factors and the minute encounters of the everyday. This event of becoming clearly transcends the time period captured in the fieldwork conducted for this research. For analytical purposes, however, I suggest that we might frame the trajectory of my participants’ becoming over distinct dynamics – reflexive negotiation of difference, political collectivism, and forced homogenisation. I refer to these as dynamics of becoming to indicate that, while these show signs of forming an historical-developmental trajectory, they are also characterised by a real individuality and unpredictability; in short, a dynamism.

To this end, Chapter 2 sketches the emergence of the African diaspora in Australia. A principal concern of this chapter is to highlight the peculiarities of the Australian experience. While I indicate the importance of the literature stemming from the Black Atlantic and the more popular theoretical approaches used in framing the African diaspora, I show the significance of the specifically Australian context with respect to African diasporic formations. Here the appropriation of the term ‘black’ had a distinct character arising from the historical circumstances surrounding African
migrations and the singular meaning that ‘black’ had in light of the existing Indigenous population. The chapter also outlines how the shifting fortunes of the discourse of multiculturalism impact on the emerging African populations in the Australian diaspora. I suggest that more work needs to be done to grasp the current experience of Africans in Australia and the manner with which we may sociologically conceptualise the community’s emergence. To that end these socio-historical accounts and early theorising on the African diaspora provide a point of departure to begin to grasp belonging, not so much as racially determined by historical discourse but as phenomenon bought to life by in a contemporary and multicultural context.

In Chapter 3 I turn to what I call *convivial multicultural* to conceptualise how youth may attune to the potential openness and diverse belongings that becoming African Australian offers as an emergent sociality. I begin by exploring Gilroy’s (2005b) notions of conviviality, suggesting that, while his work on counter-histories is important, it risks reducing difference to the negative of the dominant history. Instead I provide my own inflection on what I call convivial multicultural that takes the interplay between belonging, becoming and difference as its starting point. In making my claim for convivial multicultural to be both the practice and emergent social field that holds the potential for a more self-determining collective as African Australian, I suggest that the complex and multifaceted character of belonging, in the broadest sense is always more than a negotiation of identities, even intersecting ones. In conceptualising a more convivial form of multicultural practice, I first outline how everyday notions of multicultural, which advocate for both local and global appropriations of identity, are implicit to the everyday encounters between young people. As, it is such practices, as I show in Chapter 5 and 6, which shed light on how my participants appropriate various racialised identifications. On this point, I also take up the call by scholars to address multicultural’s more emotional and felt dimensions as they occur in social experience. In contrast to these more representational qualities to multicultural practice however, I discuss the need to engage with the visceral and affective qualities to everyday life that provide the productive impetus for a multicultural in which becoming and belonging are primary. My argument is, that if we start with an ontology of affect as the ground to social experience, then we may be better placed to remain open to materiality of race within prosaic encounters with difference (the theme of Chapter 7).

In Chapter 4 I look towards the ethnographic inquiry as the best equipped methodology to capture the complexity of social reality, particularly when faced with the task of exploring social experience and the complexities of race, belonging and becoming as they emerge in the social field. I take up ethnography, then, as the means to reconstruct a picture of my participants’ (African Australian youth) social world. Following a brief overview of my methods, I take up mapping the shift from
traditional ethnography to George Marcus’s (1995) theorising on multi-sited ethnography as the best approach to capture the diasporic nature of the social field. Following which I highlight how poststructural and postmodern approaches to reflexivity shed light on how the researchers personal and political positioning can no longer be seen as separate to the social field and the research problem. To this end autoethnography also provides a point of inflection on how best to biographically position the researcher, this is particularly vital when the researcher’s own experience of ‘race’ may perplicate into social, and for that matter, ethnographic experience. With a view to the limits that the representational may have on tracing social experience I attempt to remain open to what cannot be represented in ethnographic encounters, and finish the chapter with a brief look at how the non representational inflections in ethnography push us to remain open to ethnography, and ethnographic encounters, as becoming and unfolding in their own right.

In Chapter 5, Reflexive negotiation of difference: the epidermal reflex, I begin to outline the first of my dynamics of becoming. Drawing immediately on the fieldwork, and Frantz Fanon’s thinking on the corporeal schema, I open the chapter to theorise on an ‘epidermal reflex’ as a reflexive, phenomenological response to one’s racialisation. In associating this reflexive process with my participants’ sense of their black subjectivity and the social representations of an emerging consciousness, I identify from the fieldwork observations and interview transcripts, two dominant themes that surface in my participants’ negotiation of their difference; ascriptive and affiliative identifications. The first theme ascriptive identification provides the basis to the remainder of this chapter. Ascriptive identity, I argue, best describes the identifications that are ascribed to, or appropriated by my locally born participants, from non-local diasporic or global sources in response to their being black. Integral to these ascriptive associations that my participants foster is a process of mimesis, that I suggest is also important here, in so far as youth’s strategy to replicate black popular culture has bearing on the collective sense they bring to this emergent African Australian community. I conclude that the reflexive process the epidermal schema produces however, demands that black youth negotiate belonging on different terms to non-black youth, and risks perplicating race habitually into social experience.

To further explore this first dynamic of becoming in Chapter 6, Affiliative negotiations and the search for solidarity, I continue with examining the reflexive processes that stem from the epidermal schema. Here, however, I give attention to the affiliative identifications that my newly migrated participants adopt in relation to the ‘shock’ of migration. That is, both the displacement migration brings, and the emotional and embodied experience of alterity that emerges from being black in a
racialised society. My main focus in this chapter, is how as newly arriving migrants, my participants reflexively negotiate their belonging and becoming as African Australian. Through exploring the literature on migration and diaspora I identify as particular to my participants’ social experience, what I describe as a ‘diasporic sensibility’. Such sensibility highlights how as Africans in Australia they are caught between a priori assumptions about their identity as black Africans ‘fresh off the boat’, and their own sense of what it means to align with diasporic, pan African or pan ethnic associations. The interplay of these associations, that form the basis of affiliative identifications, initially provide a means for my participants to counter any sense of displacement, and acculturate to the new country and what I note as its hegemonic schooling. As with ascriptive identifications, my overall concern is that these affiliative identifications, especially those that rely on more ‘rooted’ forms of identification, remain susceptible to hypostatised forms of racial difference and articulations of community in which difference, in ontological terms, remains negative.

Locating an identification and embodied sense of becoming African Australian as I have explored thus far, examines the intersection of the reflexive and discursive dimensions of experience. There is still work to be done, however, to understand becoming African Australian as a collective political process that occurs prior to the actualisation of identities that constitute it. So in continuing my argument for convivial multiculture as social practice, I turn to these processes as the basis of the next dynamic of becoming, and the theme of Chapter 7, political collectivism. Here, I move beyond the methodological individualism of phenomenology and reconfigure the problematic of belonging – ‘How do I belong?’ – through exploring the micropolitical and pre personal forces in a social field. Micropolitics best capture the more contingent mixing of bodies and ongoing affective processes that inhere in becoming African Australian, and to that end, I explore how youth may respond to certain signs, or unfelt feelings, that are in excess of representations, emotions, and indeed social experience that this identification suggests. If we take an ontology of affect, difference and becoming as our starting point in the relations between bodies, then we may be better able to affectively attune (Stern 1985) to difference, rather than race’s perplication. This process reflects that convivial multiculture is always and already ‘going on’. And, it is such a process that illustrates how the emergence of race and associated identifications, such as ascriptive and affiliative identifications, within our social relations, are indeed secondary to this primary process of attunement.

Yet, the very idea of being ‘African’ or indeed ‘African Australian’ involves problematic assumptions about the homogeneity of these identities and my particular concern in this chapter is with this problem of forced homogenisation, my
next dynamic of becoming. Here, I explore the influence migration of African refugees en masse into Australia throughout the last decade has on the emergent community. My main concern is how this ‘arrival’ affects the ongoing conviviality as described in Chapter 7. In particular I scrutinise those discourses that surface in an attempt to depict Africans as unable to integrate into Australian society and my participants attempt to resist the collective racialisation and process of homogenisation this creates, by distancing themselves from newly arriving refugee youth. The result is that open and excessive qualities to affective attunement (becoming and belonging) are ‘hijacked’ by the State through fostering an environment of anxiety and fear. At the structural level we might see this as a rite of passage into hegemonic relations, while at the experiential subjective level this creates emotional and embodied anxieties within youth. The ensuing emotions and dialogue that emerge with my participants is a catalyst through which convivial multiculture slides into an everyday racism that diminishes the potential for a productive engagement with race.

In the final chapter I flesh out some of the broader debates concerning my core arguments in light of future theoretical and empirical directions. My aim has been to think through the various processes through which race, becoming and belonging are bought into being. While I have contributed to those debates on how their interarticulation can lead to more productive ways to think about the emergence of race in social encounters, as a final question I ask how we evaluate which encounters may increase our capacities and which may diminish them. This is particularly important when our personal and social histories, and indeed relations, are peripliecated by race. In closing, I gesture toward the ethico-political implications for this way of thinking about our everyday encounters.
2 AFRICANS IN AUSTRALIA

Race relations in Australia continue to be a defining feature of the way in which the formation of the nation is imagined, yet such imagining often treats the historicity of blacks as tenuous and insubstantial. The genocidal origins of settler relations with the indigenous population (Tatz 2001) and the exclusion of this population from the federation of Australia, for example, gives a dramatic sense of the dominant white culture’s efforts to expunge the idea of the ‘other’ from the historical memory of the country. And so too, as Gilroy (2005b) points out in the case of the United Kingdom, does tracing the contribution of black history reveals how antagonistic relationships with the supra-national and imperial world were integral to ideas of race, nationality and national culture, becoming the primary indices of nationalism. It highlights how the discourses and imagery of race appear in the political and cultural life of England and its colonies, as the means against which the nation was defined. Gilroy’s (1993: 4) canonical work, The Black Atlantic, on the other hand, describes the form of ‘transcultural, international formation’ that was foundational to the development of contemporary black culture in Europe. This diasporic formation, based on movement between Africa, North America and Europe has, to some extent, monopolised the global literature on both diasporic and Pan-African movements.

Yet while Australia now shares with Europe a contested space in which nationalism, articulated together with racism (Gilroy 2003: 31) and citizenship compete with the liminal space, that since the turn of the century, has been afforded multicultural policy and discourse (Ang 2001, Hage 1998), it also has its own peculiar form of urban multiculture. Within this urban multiculture we can discern distinct attempts to create a more modest national identity, which might attempt to overcome barriers of race and xenophobia (Gilroy 2005b: 96). In an increasingly global context, Ien Ang (2001) suggests, such foundational works as Gilroy’s study of the black Atlantic, but also Kobena Mercer’s (1994) and Henry Louis Gates’ (1986) American based studies, constitute requisite reference points for engagements with race in other geo-cultural and political-historical contexts, such as Australia. Yet, in her study of identity formation among Chinese Australians, Ang also outlines struggles that must be seen as peculiar to the Australian context. Certainly, Ang’s descriptions of the tensions and tasks involved in becoming ‘Chinese Australian’ speak as readily to the problems facing the emerging black African culture in Australia as Gilroy’s more Europe-centred descriptions do. There are, for example, tensions in the process of creating a black vernacular and the associated attempt to be at once African and Australian, which the better known studies of international diasporic formations might not adequately capture.
With this in mind, this chapter seeks, firstly, to trace the outlines of a distinctly African Australian history, focusing on the alternative history it represents vis-à-vis the dominant narrative of white Australia. The appropriation of the term black for racial or political purposes in postcolonial Australia is significant to the discussion of this alternative history. Thus, secondly, through a review of the scarce literature on Africans in Australia, I look more closely at the conflict that ‘black’ as a signifier creates when Africans and other non-whites begin to seek representation as a means to determine belonging and political agency.² It is not until Lawrence Udo-Ekpo’s writing in the late 1990s and Greg Gow’s work on the Oromo in exile in the early 2000s, that we are able to begin to conceptualise the formation of a black African subjectivity or glimpse the possibility of an emergent collective identifying as African Australian. These works provide vital, albeit brief, sociological insight into the struggle that occurs with the racialisation of this emergent sociality, an ethnic minority frequently touted as unable to integrate. Through briefly analysing such arguments about African integration in Australia, and particularly the work of Graeme Hugo (2004; 2009), I, thirdly, attempt to give a sense of the contestation that surrounded the history of African migrations up until the beginning of the 21st century, when African migration increased significantly. I contextualise this latter migration in a time in which Australia was attempting to shed its racial history through adopting an official policy of Multiculturalism. I discuss the emergence of this social policy and its implications for Africans’ political, cultural, and social significance in Australia’s multiculture. Finally, then, I explore the notion of multicultural in the post 9/11 culture. As a way of providing context for my own fieldwork, which was carried out within this period, I consider the way that the immanent questions of being and belonging might be figured in the wake of the demise of multiculturalism as an official discourse, but also in light of calls to re-politicise multicultural in order to grasp the variability of quotidian encounters with difference and the question of belonging.

2.1 Towards an African Australian History

It was not until Ian Duffield (1999) first alluded to the presence of black Africans, or what he calls ‘Afro-Blacks’, in Australia’s colonial history that the historical account of the African diaspora in Australia began to emerge in contradistinction to the ‘white’ narratives of Australia’s history. Cassandra Pybus (2001, 2006) went to similar lengths to capture the history of African migration in the early colony. In her book, Black Founders, she offers provocative narratives of Australia’s early African presence and the racial encounters between white Australians and early African

² As Roberta Sykes (1989) argues, even Aboriginal Australia must wrestle with the use of the term ‘black’, as it seeks political and existential affirmation within a dominant white culture, sometimes through appropriating forms of resistance from black African American struggles for independence.
migrants. Together, these trace the beginnings of a counter narrative of Australian history and the inception of an ‘African Australian’ history as it collides with, and diverges from, the Atlantic movement of blacks elsewhere in the West. In outlining key moments in this history, my point is not to produce a comprehensive history of the African Australian experience, but to indicate some of the distinctive features of a history that better recognized renderings of African diasporic history might not encapsulate.

Official historical records document the arrival of black Africans in Australia with the first fleet in 1788. These ‘black founders’ (Pybus 2006) made a significant contribution to the founding of the early colonial settlement of Australia whilst coexisting with the larger Anglo population of convicts, soldiers and administrators. Records also indicate arrivals throughout the 19th century of black African seamen who would take advantage of the trade routes travelled between England and America. Such seamen would at times disembark on the east coast of Australia, disappearing into the various communities then forming in the colony, only to surface in memory over a century later in various genealogical records (Pybus 2001).

These narratives of African migrations to Australia during penal times constitute a point of departure for exploring contemporary relations in Australia. Firstly, they displace a White Australia narrative with more colourful and contemporary thinking, which mobilises, as a productive problem, the question of what it is to be ‘African Australian’. Secondly, their history demands that we think through the complexity of notions such as racial identity and belonging, beyond the processes of identification that would render populations black or white, Australian, Aborigine or simply African. There is little doubt that anxieties persisted over the presence of black Africans at the time in Australia, as elsewhere. Following a report by the British colonial office in 1838, the intake of black Africans into the colony slowed dramatically. It was determined by the British office that blacks (ex-slaves) arriving in Australia from the West Indies represented 'a population injurious to the best interests of the rising Settlement' (Pybus 2001: 15), a theme to be repeated more than one and a half centuries later in Australia’s 21st Century immigration debate, as I will discuss shortly. As Pybus (2006) has remarked, stemming the number of black settlers was a decision based on anxieties about race. Much anxiety existed over whether black convict/settlers blurred the lines between black and white and hence interfered with the colonial administration’s attempts to eliminate black Aborigines

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3 While a number of black Africans in Australia were free settlers, in the Americas and Caribbean the institution of slavery was still in the force. In this new world of the North Atlantic insurgency and insurrection by black slaves was commonplace (see Hall and Shcwarz 1998; Manning 2009; Segal 1995; Fick 1998). To this end, Pybus (2001) claims that such was the mood amongst whites, given the increasing resistance by blacks to their enslavement, that shipping blacks to Australia became a viable option.
from the colony in order to mask the brutality of its colonisation. Nevertheless, it was not long afterwards in the latter half of the 19th century that the white population began in earnest to fear a loss of autonomy for the non-white population and instigated exclusionist policies against the coloured population. This exclusionism reached a climax in 1901 with an Act of Parliament. The 1901 Immigration Act, otherwise known as the White Australia Policy, excluded non-whites from the colony and refused citizenship to those that remained in the then emerging nation; Aboriginal, Chinese and African (Curthoys 2003). Pybus (2001) suggests that during this period of exclusionism much of the African lineage disappeared into mixed marriages or integrated into indigenous communities.

While Pybus emphasises the differences between white treatment of Indigenous Australians and displaced Africans, Duffield makes much of the strategy of mimicry, analysed in some detail by Homi Bhabha (cited in Duffield 1999: 8), which, at least superficially, aligned the African settlers with white colonial power. Mimicry was adopted by the early African settlers as a means of reproducing colonial power and knowledge, and reflects an ambivalent desire on the side of those considered to be positively reformed, to access and reproduce colonial power. What necessitates effective mimicry, according to Bhabha (1994: 86), is that the ‘other’ must ‘produce its slippage, its excess, its difference’ as a means to maintain that power. In this case, it was not merely a matter of replicating colonial discourse, but of working in excess to it and thus differentiating from it, in such a way as to subtly disrupt its authority. In any case, early black settlers, as with other non-whites, were responding to the dilemma that they must ‘turn white or disappear’ (Fanon cited in Nayak 2006: 419). On this, Duffield’s (1999: 9) analysis of colonial representations of the well known African settler, William Blue, is instructive, indicating that the image of the African Australian subject varied according to the associations he kept:

A low mimetic effect can be seen in many of the early nineteenth-century representations... distorting the man into either a low villainous black or a harmless old "darkie." From the late nineteenth-century, some press accounts fail to mention that he was a convict, some fail to mention that he was a black African-American, and some assert that he was scarcely a black man at all. All these later accounts make him a mere protégé of Macquarie's and all stress eccentricity and whimsicality...

Such textual representations of those that are ‘almost the same, but not quite’ allowed black African colonial subjects only partial historical presence, and positioned them at arm’s length from white European settlement.
Were the ‘black founders’, in being thus caught up in the process of colonization, participating in the oppression of the black indigenous population? As Fanon (1967b: 200) has stated, colonisation was ‘the systemic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity’ to the extent that ‘colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: “In reality, who am I?”’. Given black Africans’ recent experiences of slavery in particular, Aboriginal relations certainly would have added a complexity to the African settler’s self-reflexivity, relationships with whites (and other settlers) and ambivalent attempts at reproducing colonial power through mimesis.\(^4\) Paradoxically, the original Aboriginal lineage of Mudrooroo (baptised Colin Thomas), one of Australia’s best known ‘Aboriginal’ authors and activists, has been challenged and determined as African. Amongst his more notable works is his first, *Wild Cat Falling*, which depicts a young black man’s struggle with his identity and racism in 1960s Australia. That Mudrooroo, the Aboriginal author and activist, was recently ‘outed’ as an African, raises instructive questions about racial identity and belonging. According to Maureen Clark (2004), Mudrooroo himself has acknowledged his indigeneity as ‘a textualisation of identity,’ since he ‘was born black and raised as an Aborigine’. This begs the question: surely Mudrooroo’s long term connection and attachment to the Aboriginal community demanded more than his colour to be that which determined his belonging. His ability and commitment to express and actualise the collective sentiment of Aboriginal Australia through his writing and poetry suggest a ‘deep’ and significant attunement to the community and its collective political sense.

I raise the contestation around Mudrooroo’s identity in order to indicate the complexity of questions of belonging for early Africans in Australia, a complexity which, while not measurable in quantitative terms as more or less complex than in African diasporas elsewhere, certainly had its own peculiar character. With respect to later waves of immigration, it is notable that restrictive immigration policy for some time deterred potential African migrants to Australia while, in the UK, the reception of blacks from the former colonies in the Caribbean and the African continent had been underway since the end of WWII Gilroy (2005b). This immigration was the source of much conflict in England as the colonised began staking a claim to citizenship in the land of the coloniser. Australia, while itself a

\(^4\) When one reads about the lives of Black Caesar and Billy Blue in detail one cannot help but be reminded of the resistive strategies that slaves adopted in the Americas and Caribbean to overcome the oppressive nature of servitude. Caesar, an ex-slave himself, presented an endless difficulty to the governor of the colony for his repetitive thieving, running away and basic insubordination. William Blue also appears to have had a certain mastery over a complex array of mimetic gestures appeasing his colonial masters while mocking them at the same time. These are just an example of a number of resistive strategies slaves adopted which James Scott (1985) addresses in his excellent work *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. 

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former colony, was considered an untouchable white enclave in the South Pacific for
the better part of the last century prior to the late 1960s. Unlike the former colonies
in Africa, the Caribbean or India, this peculiar sense of itself as a nation arose from
the white population’s declaration, on arrival, of the land as ‘Terra Nullius’, a land
without owners. This founding disenfranchisement by the white population of the
indigenous population (see Reynolds 1989) was further affirmed by the White
Australia Policy or Immigration Restriction Act (1901), which gave legislative force to
historical determinations of which ethnicities, were and were not, welcome in the
nation.

Despite the antagonistic and ambivalent production of race in Australia’s history and
isolation of the Aboriginal people, in 1967 the indigenous population was recognised
in the constitution following a referendum and was subsequently considered as part
of the Australian population with a right to vote. In the early 1970s under the
Whitlam government a ‘non-white’ migrant intake was to begin in earnest and
Australia bore witness to what I consider to be a polarising moment in Australia’s
history, namely, the implementation of Multiculturalism. This policy was the State
imposed solution for the inclusion of the various ethnicities finding their way to
Australia (Ang 2001: 95) to be contributing to the well-being and development of the
nation.

Such attempts at inclusivity, however, were not persuasive enough for many Africans
who formed part of this early community in the 1960s and 70s to remain. By way of
a brief auto-ethnographic turn in the analysis, I would note that my father, although
the first black nuclear physics doctorate in Australia, only remained in the country
the length of time it took to complete his degree. His need to return to Africa to
further the process of decolonisation, coupled with the feeling of isolation or
estrangement from an African community, was stronger than the opportunity a new
Australia offered. My father, and other African graduates who returned to ‘their own
countries’ in the early 1970s, left behind a new generation of children, now referred
to as African Australian. This was the sparse African community of my childhood, a
number of mixed race, formerly known as ‘half-caste’, children, dotted along the
east coast of Australia. Social policy of the time determined these children as part of
the multicultural order and yet mainstream Australia was still influenced by the
legacies of racial hierarchy and hegemonic white Australia discourse. As Henry
Reynolds (2005) suggests, miscegenation, for example, was still fresh in the mind of
postcolonial Australia throughout much of the last century.\(^5\) No doubt this was

\(^5\) It was only in 2008 that the government apologised to the Aboriginal people for its policies that
specifically targeted the removal of ‘half caste’ children, now known as the stolen generation, from
their communities. And difficulties continue for many indigenous people in determining the
legitimacy of their Aboriginality (see Reynolds 2005: 11).
especially pronounced for Indigenous Australians who, despite the gains made during the 60s and 70s, remained unable to access the same degree of social mobility of other non-whites.

As Roberta Sykes (1989: 14) suggests, speaking from the perspective of Aboriginal Australians following two decades of black suffrage:

Blacks feel that migrant groups also suffer from racism and discrimination...however, ...all new migrant groups, after suffering a period of intense victimization on arrival in Australia, manage then to find a place for themselves in the fabric – or, more appropriately, on the ladder – of Australian society. Only Aboriginal people, for the entire period of white settlement in Australia, have remained steadfastly glued to the bottom rung of this social and economic ladder.

In terms of grasping the character of the African experience in Australia, what is important here is that a rite of passage into hegemonic relations was available to the African immigrant population, which, relative to the indigenous population, allowed at least some degree of social advantage.

One thing that we can discern in this very potted history is the complex nature of the epithet ‘black’ in Australian culture. The increasing influence of genetic science has only increased the contested nature of how the authenticity of one’s claim to blackness ought to be determined, with some Indigenous leaders suggesting that proof of ‘genetic authenticity’ or ‘way of life’ is paramount. Michelle Wright (2004: 2) has argued that black subjectivity is often negotiated between two extremes. At one end, collective, essentialist notions of blackness provide comfort in the ability to coexist with sameness, yet risk a loss of self. At the other extreme, blackness is mobilised as a more arbitrary or transitional position. Common to both identifications however, and the plethora of possibilities in between, is the problematic discursive field through which race is produced and unequally distributed.

Clark (2004: 22-24) offers an excellent discussion on the debate between Indigenous leaders over the status of ‘black’ in contemporary Australian life, suggesting that the signifier of indigeneity may prove a more valuable indicator of Aboriginality than skin colour. To this end, the brief example of Mudrooroo’s life challenges the determination of Aboriginality and questions to what extent it may be, as with race, produced in the juncture of the psychic and discursive life in a postcolonial context, rather than via genetic determination.
2.2 Africans as...?

The chequered migration pattern of Africans to Australia was scantly researched until the turn of the last century; arguably, it was not until the 2000s that ‘African Australians’ emerged as a potential, if not exactly political, demographic. One of the first studies on African migration surfaced through the demography of Trevor Bartrouney (1991). Bartrouney was concerned with the general characteristics of African communities in Melbourne and their ‘settlement’ needs. He also made general observations on African migration patterns during the 1980s. A more substantial endeavour to trace African migration was undertaken by Hugo over a decade later. Hugo (2004: 28), in analysing African migration to Australia, makes the observation that:

... the (other) very fast growing region of birth of recent immigrants between the 1996 and 2001 censuses was Sub-Saharan Africa whose numbers doubled, although as a proportion of all recent migrants increased from only 3.5% to 6.8%.... Nevertheless a recent feature of Australian immigration has been the substantial movement of refugee/humanitarian immigrants into Australia from other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa especially Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Somalia. In fact, recent migrants made up over half of Australian residents in these groups. The increase in the Sub-Saharan non-South Africa, African-born population has added another dimension to Australian multiculturalism in the last decade.

Although the numbers of African migrants was not proportionally substantial, it is certainly possible to trace an emergent diaspora that, as Hugo points out, began ‘adding another dimension to Australian Multiculturalism.’ It is at this point in the migration history that the literature on the African population in Australia began to surface. As Liz Dimock (2008: 133) observes, early publications often only made passing reference to Africans in Australia until the 1990s and 2000s, when the focus shifted to specifically include African migration and settlement. This was, she suggests, part of a trend to critique policy as well as to address societal attitudes, race, racism and whiteness, with which Africans were inevitably caught up.

Since the migration began in earnest, only two major publications of a sociological nature on Africans in Australia have been published. Udo-Ekpo’s (1999) concern was with the dynamics of African migration to Australia and the emergence of an African
While Udo-Ekpo’s book does not involve extensive theoretical analysis, his examination of the socio-political context of Australia in the late 80s and early 1990s provides insight into the socio-psychological realities of Africans in Australia, or, to cite his book title, their ‘expectations and shattered dreams.’ Udo-Ekpo portrays a country that was reasoning with its xenophobic reaction to the ‘other’. Hence, in documenting ‘the migration experiences of Africans… and their struggle against racial discrimination, unemployment, poverty and welfare dependency’, Udo-Ekpo is faced with ongoing debate and contested media representations surrounding their migration.

In this debate, the voice of Australia’s early anti-immigration spokesperson, Bruce Ruxton, is notable. In 1987 Ruxton boldly conveyed the political message that the migration of black South Africans to Australia contravened ‘the wishes of the majority of Australians’ (Udo-Ekpo 1999: 150). Udo-Ekpo (1999: 152) suggests that Ruxton’s ideologically tainted call for an end to African migration served to underline that ‘racial prejudice and stereotyping, and scapegoating have confronted African migrants and refugees continuously throughout their brief settlement in Australia’. To that end, Udo-Ekpo argues that binary thinking along black / white divides is a key determinant in the media’s manipulation of the facts and its ability to create a conservative discourse on African migration based on notions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. The general perception of Africans or blacks throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, Udo-Ekpo insists, is one of five categories: Africans as unwanted migrants; Africans as victims; Africans as remarkable people; Africans as refugees and Africans as fraudsters, themes that, as I later outline, began to surface again less than two decades later.

Several years after Udo-Ekpo’s publication, Greg Gow (2002) provided a postcolonial perspective to African migration to Australia. His ethnographic work examines the processes of identity formation with the exiled Oromo community, a stateless people from the nation of Ethiopia now resettled in Melbourne. Gow’s aim was to translate Oromo experience in a postcolonial setting, but not ‘attempt to reshape Oromo culture into a Western frame’ (xiii), with the effect that his observations of how the Oromo ‘perform home’ are, in Bethaney Turner’s (2002) words, ‘admirable and ambitious.’ In portraying the attempts of later African migrants to deal with their displacement and forge a collective sense of independence, Gow provides important insight into Australia’s historically unique socio-political environment. He notes that the term ‘black African’ is commonly used by mainstream Australians and the media as a homogenous, derogatory representation of these diverse peoples,

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7 In an attempt to capture the concerns of African migrants to Australia during this time Udo-Ekpo adopted a qualitative methodology in his study interviewing a sample population living in South Australia in the mid 1990s.
whose identity thereby collapses into refugee migrations. This is a common theme that continues to surface with African migration, and while not their primary intention, both Gow and Udo-Ekpo identify a certain shift in the thinking on black Africans. This is a shift away from the early narratives of black settlers, or a view of the black African population as an educated, political migratory or diasporic population. The more popular counterfactual perception in Australia at the time in which Udo-Ekpo and Gow released their work was, and continues to be, that black Africans were in Australia as refugees, and this stems as much from diverse socio-historical factors as from geo-political occurrences.  

A number of studies have influenced the perception of Africans in Australia, which shape our thinking around the notion of ‘African Australian’. As I have alluded to earlier in the chapter, this began with colonisation and continued with Udo-Ekpo’s study of Africans in the 1990s in the shadow of anti-African migration backlashes, Gow’s pioneering work with the Oromo refugee community at the turn of the century, and Hugo’s demographic study of the African population in Australia in 2004. Their studies, while not directly grounded in theorising race and political belonging of this nascent community, provide insight into how diasporic Africans in Australia have attempted to adjust to their displacement and the depredations of a racialised society.

Reading such histories in light of work on African diasporas elsewhere, one could suggest that what Gilroy (1993: 15) has described as a ‘compound culture’, an infusion of differing ‘black’ contexts into a unique form of black settler communities, will eventuate in Australia (see Zwangobani 2008). Given the newness of this migration, such a compound culture remains nascent and, while highly likely in future generations, contrary to Gilroy’s early theorising, would be less contingent on drawing its political sensibility and cultural expressionism from black America. While there are parallels with the diasporic movements of blacks here with those of America and the United Kingdom, Australia’s socio-historic and geo-political landscape varies significantly as do the migrants that are arriving and settling. Thus, the way in which the African migration attempts to work productively with its racialisation and forge a collective will be highly dependent on how the community is able to see itself as an emergent sociality. It might be one that is for the better part

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8 Gow’s work also offers brief insight into the role of both Pan Africanism and inter-ethnic animosity amongst some of the early African migrations, a theme that I will develop further (in the chapter on forced homogenisation).

9 The experience of black Africans in Australia belonging to this contemporary settlement are likely to experience a mutation that is more immediate; a transnational experience that stems from differing forms of political histories shaped predominantly by colonialism, apartheid, civil war and genocide. This is in contrast to the long-standing conception upon which Gilroy (1993) built the Black Atlantic of oppression, slavery and subordination. Nevertheless, Gilroy (2005a) has also addressed the tensions between these conflicting black histories.
unhindered by the particularities of modernity’s racial history, or formed strictly in response to a dominant culture in Australia, which has a historic tendency to attempt to position migrant populations into homogenous groups for social and economic exploitation. The challenge, then, will be to forge a community that is not confined to the ‘cheap appeals to absolute national and ethnic difference that are currently fashionable’ Gilroy (2005b: 6).

2.3 Post 9/11 Multiculture and the Immanent Question of Being and Belonging

While the previous research on African migration to Australia, discussed to now, highlights well the emerging diaspora and the context within which it settled in Australia, two events were to shift the mood surrounding African migration which to now had been relatively uneventful. To give a sense, then, of prevailing political climate at the time of the field research and the shifting perception of Africans in Australia, I turn now, to discuss the interplay of these events – the migration en masse of refugees from the African continent and the changing face of multiculture in a post 9/11 environment – in so far as they provide a macropolitical dimension to the research and impact directly upon the community.

In Hugo’s (2009) second study into contemporary African migration to Australia he is less nonchalant in celebrating the contribution of African migrants to the society. Rather than adding ‘another dimension to Australian multiculturalism’ the message here is that the impetus of the growing ‘African-born’ population was having a dire effect on Australia’s social cohesion. Hugo (2009: 31) states:

The other major area of concentration is in the refugee-humanitarian area... 6.4% of all settlers were accepted under this category in 2007-08, a total of 23.1% of this group were from Sub-Saharan Africa. There has been a shift in the origin of refugee-humanitarian settlers toward the Horn of Africa. In 1997 only eight per cent of Australia’s offshore refugees came from Africa, the number had increased to 70.6% in 2003-04 and 34.5% in 2007-08. In 2004 the Minister of Immigration announced that Australia would substantially increase its refugee intake from Africa, especially Sudan (Vanstone 2004). This resulted in a considerable increase in the number of refugee-humanitarian settlers from Africa... there was almost a doubling between 2003 and 2004 and the share of Africans of the total refugee intake also doubled to 70.6 percent. However, the last Immigration Minister of the Howard Government reduced
the African intake of refugees because of concerns regarding their ability to adjust to Australian society and their numbers reduced somewhat after 2004-05. The growth of these groups presents challenges for their successful settlement since they are culturally very different to the host community (my italics); they often lack English language, may have a history of broken or limited education and have large families which can sometimes lead to difficulties in finding suitable housing. This group of migrants also experience considerable problems in entering the Australian labour market.

I quote Hugo in detail here, for although his work is quite distinct in identifying shifts in the origin of African migration towards refugees from the Horn of Africa, this passage foregrounds the increasingly common perception that African migration to Australia represents a refugee phenomenon. Hugo also raises concerns, which I suggest impact directly on African youth, namely, the supposed inability of Africans to integrate into the ‘host community’ due to their cultural difference. He thus evokes those conservative discourses that, with a broad brush, homogenize the diversity within the African community whilst calling for a reduction in African migration. Both of these affronts, I argue, are indicative of the political climate prevailing over the last decade, which has affected the cohesiveness of the African community; this is a political climate that is overly concerned with integration (quasi assimilation), the threat of cultural difference, and the strategic dismantling of multiculturalism.

This political fragmentation and fear of migrants in the UK stems from what Gilroy (2005b) identifies as postcolonial melancholia. This melancholia that racks Britain he argues, began to emerge as ‘Asians and blacks’ previously subjugated in the peripheral colonies began to settle in Britain and the once imperial imagination of Britons gave way to a ‘social pathology’ which fed on hostility and violence towards blacks, immigrants and aliens. The difference, given the local context, is that Australia ‘lacked the cultural resources to imagine itself looming out of an immemorial past, to use Benedict Anderson’s description of the nation’ (see Stratton and Ang 1998). Nevertheless, social theorist Ghassan Hage’s (2003a) conceptualisation of a ‘colonial paranoia’ evokes a similar sense of resentment, to Gilroy’s postcolonial melancholia, in Hage’s case the particular ‘white Australian’ fear that its cultural dominance is under threat. This colonial paranoia is characterised by an increasing inability by white Australia to embrace the growing population of migrant settlers. Hage (2003a: 49) writes,

‘Paranoia’ here denotes a pathological form of fear based on a conception of the self as excessively fragile, and constantly threatened. It also describes a
tendency to perceive a threat where none exists, or, if one exists, to inflate its capacity to harm the self. The core element of Australia’s colonial paranoia is a fear of loss of European-ness of Whiteness and the lifestyle and privileges that are seen to emanate from them. This is a combination of the fragility of White European colonial identity in general and the specificity of the Australian situation.

This ebbing privilege of whiteness, then, as Gilroy (2005b: 101) calls it, is arguably the catalyst for the emergence of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party in the mid-90s, which signalled this new era of colonial paranoia in Australia. Hanson and her One Nation Party became the ‘voice’ for all those ‘ordinary’ white Australians who were under threat of ethnic hordes.

In a similar vein, the election of the conservative Howard Government to office in 1996 marked a shift in political discourse to the right in Australia and the beginning of the ‘end’ of Multiculturalism. Upon taking up office, the Howard government began a systematic dismantling of Multiculturalism, which continued over its 12 years in office. By 2003, the then Prime Minister indicated in the foreword to a new policy statement on multicultural Australia, a changed geo-political agenda given the ‘tragic events of 11 September 2001 in the United States of America and 12 October 2002 in Bali’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2003). So while the new policy reaffirmed ‘the government’s commitment to promoting diversity, understanding and tolerance in all areas of endeavour’ (the initial aims of multiculturalism) it also highlighted ‘a changed global environment in which we live’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2003); hinting at the need for a commitment to the nation and its core values. Later, in 2007, before the new policy had run its course, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs became that of Immigration and Citizenship. These changes, it was claimed, ‘did not mean that the term multiculturalism was defunct,’ rather ‘it was made in recognition of the obvious fact, and obvious belief on the part of the entire Australian community, that immigration should lead to citizenship’ (Howard cited in Koleth 2010). The shift in governmentality was accompanied by sophisticated tests of citizenship and tighter border control, and a form of thinking typified by a much quoted statement by the then prime minister that arguably has influenced the direction of immigration policy since: ‘we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come’ (Howard 2001). This began to be the catch phrase for a paranoid nation (Hage 2003b) in which ‘racial’ tensions began to be felt in a different guise through cunning attacks on the diversity within. Greg Noble (2005: 109) suggests, for example, that during its time in office the Howard government oversaw the amplification of a mood of fear and anxiety, which contributed to the marginalisation by the dominant culture of certain groups of Australians. This marginalisation was the result of opportunistic fear mongering by
the government in the wake of 9/11, the ‘Tampa Crisis’, and the ‘Bali bombings’. As Gilroy alludes to above, this has done little but generate fear among the population of an unknown ‘foreign’ threat and has fostered the racialisation of particular subjects under the pretence of cultural difference. The threat of the loss of a white national identity has been, and continues to be, fuelled by the convenient scapegoat of ‘boat-people’ or asylum seekers and refugees, whose alterity have provided a timely intrusion in the post-9/11 landscape (see Gilroy 2003; 2005b). They are a ‘threat’ to the national space and identity, and feed the government’s desire to assert the need for ‘core values’ based on its white imperial and colonial heritage.

The antagonistic production of race during this time also appeared in everyday encounters, as reference to ‘race’ based incidents during the first decade of this century imply: the use of Islamophobia in the common vernacular, the ‘white pride’ of the 2005 ‘Cronulla riots’ and attacks on Indian students are notable here. These mark an increasing xenophobia and racism and serve as tell-tale signs of the confusion and disorientation that have arisen over national identity, with the loss of whiteness at the core of national identity. Such occurrences signal a need to re-assess the manner in which we are able to live with diversity and difference, and to address the confusion over the meaning of multiculturalism since its inception in the 1970s. It is in such a climate that the notion of a multicultural Australia has been well and truly abandoned. As Gilroy (2005b: 1) attests, in a post 9/11 world, multiculturalism it seems, is dead:

Multicultural society seems to have been abandoned at birth. Judged unviable and left to fend for itself, its death by neglect is being loudly proclaimed on all sides. The corpse is now been laid to rest amid the multiple anxieties of the “war on terror.” The murderous culprits responsible for its demise are institutional indifference and political resentment.

For, even following the defeat of the Howard government in 2007 and the departure of its crusade to culturally homogenise Australia, Nikos Papastergiadis (2012: 3) argues that there remains uncertainty over the role of Multiculturalism as a part of our national identity:

With the election of the Australian Labour Party in 2007, there has been a

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10 Australia is not alone in such conservative reactions to Multiculturalism. In the ‘New Europe’ so too, have conservative political figures judged multiculturalism unviable and a threat to the unity of a nation, especially when self-sustaining migrant groups were seen as detrimental to the national culture. In 2011, three significant European leaders in succession, the German Chancellor Merkel, followed up by then British Prime Minister Cameron and French President Sarkozy all condemned Multiculturalism as a failure as it created cultural separatism rather than coming together in national unity (see Papastergiadis 2012).
lowering of the negative discourse towards multiculturalism. At the senior level of the government leadership there is no longer a routine stigmatic continuum between multiculturalism, open door policies on migration and global terrorism. Nevertheless there is a prevailing unease over the balance of interaction between the global and the local, and a strong emphasis that cultural diversity should not be gained at the expense of national cohesion.... In the absence of aggressive rhetoric from the political elites, the concept of multiculturalism has slipped under the radar of the mainstream media. However, this has also meant that the difficult challenge of working out what is meant by this concept has also dissipated.

In insisting on the subsequent need to change the way we think about multiculturalism, Papastergiadis (2012: 11) has argued that its future cannot be ‘reduced to the management of diversity within the nation’ as thinking and theorizing on multiculturalism can no longer be ‘separate from the universal and immanent questions of being and belonging’. Likewise, Jon Stratton and Ien Ang (1998: 157) argued almost two decades ago, that if we are to properly attend to such immanent questions of being and belonging we need to go beyond the old model of multiculturalism. This is a model, they add, that tended to freeze the fluidity of identity by synthesising unruly and unpredictable cultural identities and differences into a harmonious unity-in-diversity, and suppressed the potential incommensurability of juxtaposed cultural differences (157).

While I have anticipated that the question of becoming must be kept in play, for the moment the important point remains, the models of multiculturalism that such questioning seeks to challenge. Specifically, while Multiculturalism attempted to account for past atrocities concerning race in this country by ‘allowing’ cultural diversity, the racialised society remains neatly obscured by racial differences being turned into ethnic and cultural ones. The difficulty remains, as I have outlined, that this is a country that continues to grapple with a chequered past based on the politics of migration, and the ideologies that surfaced through colonialism, exclusion, assimilation, integration and eventually multiculturalism. This has been exacerbated in that throughout Indigenous relations have cast a shadow over attempts to build a pluralistic nation (not at least until reconciliation is achieved). That is, the discourse of Multiculturalism has in part been eclipsed due to the enduring conflict over the rights and place of Indigenous Australians who ‘would be reluctant to have their epistemological stake in the nation cast in with the “migrant” communities, not to mention white settlers’ (Anderson and Taylor 2005: 473). This is not to entirely discredit the public policy of Multiculturalism in Australia for its attempts to manage migrant settlement and adaptation. However, as Jayasuriya (2008: 28) suggests:
These policies are now seen as no longer functional or relevant in a social and political context vastly different to what existed in the 1970’s and 1980’s when multiculturalism was first formulated to address the needs of new waves of migrants as well as second and third generation migrants of ethnic origin. [my emphasis]

Addressing the immanent question of being and belonging within a multicultural mix, however, is increasingly difficult when doing so only risks marginalisation. For this is, as Kevin Dunn et al (2009: 3) state, a 9/11 environment:

in which certain groups are repeatedly denigrated through racist talk and other racist incivilities [that] can fundamentally undermine the sense of citizenship and belonging of those disparaged. In circumstances where such talk becomes common, the uneven dispensation of citizenship and belonging becomes normalized, unquestioned, and harder to challenge.

This degenerative racism is particularly pertinent when as Gilroy (2005b: 5) suggests:

...the idea of culture has been abused by being simplified, instrumentalised, or trivialised, and particularly through being coupled with notions of identity and belonging that are overly fixed or too easily naturalised as exclusively national phenomena.

What is important here is that these postcolonial discussions over Multiculturalism have reached a stalemate; as is evident above, existing discourses on multiculturalism rely on the naturalisation of attributes such as culture, colour, identity, belonging and race. We need then, to think differently about living with difference and diversity and what multiculture has to offer the interactions and encounters that occur at the micro level. For his part, Gilroy (2005b) signals the need to recalibrate and repoliticise our understanding of multiculturalism, to avoid its reappropriation and the reification of race that attends such reappropriations.

In giving a new vitality to the notion of multiculture, the ontological autonomy of the dynamics of becoming that I gestured toward in Chapter 1 is crucial. To the extent that the starting point of understanding multiculturalism is a field of identities, difference can only be conceived negatively. Multiculturalism’s success, then, would be judged from the point of view of how effectively or harmoniously these different identities can co-exist. The problem becomes altogether more productive when the starting point is an ontology of difference. Our being, as Massumi (2002b) puts it, is always ‘in direct belonging’, which is to say that we are always already immersed in relations that determine sociality as an always emergent, indeterminate one. It is
from this point, then, that we can be better placed to assert or defend always-emergent interests, without being *a priori* racialised, degraded or exploited. To theorise the politics of belonging for the African Australian community as an emergent, indeterminate sociality, the problem I must contend with, as this chapter has shown, is that race and racial forms of belonging are never completely open and indeterminate; they have a history. This history is certainly not determining in any total sense but neither can it be easily ignored.

In the following chapter I look to characterise multiculture with an emphasis on conviviality and prosaic negotiations with difference, in order to provide new grounds from which African Australian youth are able to contest and express their ‘being in direct belonging’ (Massumi 2002b) as they forge a collective identification as African Australian. In order to characterise multiculture in this manner, it is first necessary to grasp the sense in which we might speak of the event of becoming African Australian, so as not to position it as a linear or predetermined process.
In his reflections on the phenomenon of ‘postcolonial melancholia’, Gilroy (2005b) briefly gestures toward the notion of conviviality as a way of rethinking the value of multiculturalism, which he believes to have been prematurely proclaimed redundant. By referring to conviviality Gilroy means to evoke ‘the ability to live with alterity without becoming anxious, fearful or violent’ (2005b: 131) and a ‘spontaneous tolerance and openness’ (2005b: 131). For Gilroy, then, the question concerns how contemporary culture might negotiate the problem of living with difference and the attempt to articulate the kind of attitude that would enable us to do this positively. On this, Gilroy writes of the importance of producing counter-histories that do not merely ‘construct a history of simple hybridity to offset against the achievements of the homogenisers and purity seekers’. Rather, his interest is in the way that counter-histories might inform a new understanding of multiculturalism. Gilroy (2005b: 145-146) writes:

Instead, local and specific interventions can contribute to a counter history of cultural relations and influences from which a new understanding of multicultural Europe will doubtless eventually emerge. This negative work can discover and explore some of the emancipatory possibilities that are implicitly at stake in convivial culture but do not announce themselves, preferring to remain hidden and unpredictable.

Gilroy’s references to conviviality are important insofar as they point toward the kind of work that needs to be done to counter the homogenising effects of those forms of culture that attribute little or no positive value to difference. Further, Gilroy (2005b: xv) stresses that the openness of conviviality provides a degree of ‘distance’ from what, in much of the discourse on race to that point, had been the absolutely pivotal term, namely, identity. Gilroy displaces this focus on identity by paying attention to the ‘unpredictable mechanisms of identification’, since he sees identity as having become an ‘ambiguous resource in the analysis of race, ethnicity and culture’ (2005b: xv). Finally, Gilroy registers the prohibiting effects of affective environments in which fear and anxiety predominate, and seeks to give a name and a vague shape to that form of culture in which a more spontaneous openness would be possible.

However, Gilroy’s attempt to displace the logic of identity does not yet, as I argue in this chapter, go far enough as there is a sense in which difference retains, in his work, too negative a status. Difference, we could say, is seen as a problem to be negotiated. The convivial multiculture Gilroy imagines, is a kind of peaceful negotiation of the differences between us, enabled through a ‘negative work’ of
producing counter Histories that would otherwise remain hidden and unpredictable. Certainly, Gilroy's attention to the affective dimensions of conviviality is important, though I will argue here that the concept of affect moves us beyond the notion of a multiculture in which subjects relate to each other with an attitude of openness, or by virtue of their always partial identifications. Rather, the particular reading of affect that I pursue, paves the way for a notion of conviviality in which an attunement to the not yet subjectiv forces of the world produces an especially dynamic form of multiculture. My aim, then, is to understand multiculture as more than a problem of negotiating differences, understood as different identities or indeed variable identifications. My own inflection on conviviality, read through the work of Brian Massumi, takes as its starting point processes of differentiation and becoming, and involves an attunement to the constant variability of bodies in relation. It is from this point that such encounters can be evaluated: which encounters enhance the capacities of bodies and which diminish them?

In this chapter I give a sense of what this means for convivial multiculture. Convivial multiculture, I suggest, involves an interplay between the problematics of belonging and that of becoming. I u the word ‘problematic’ advisedly, to indicate that these are not problems in the merely negative sense, but ongoing processes that are articulated and actualised in the task of being ‘African Australian.’ The challenge, as I argue throughout the thesis, is to conceptualise a sense of belonging that does not position those negotiating African Australianess statically, but rather remains attuned to the openness and the possibilities for diverse becomings that potentialise everyday life.

To this end, in the first section, ‘The everyday politics of belonging’, I outline some of the ways that the concept of belonging might be understood, so as to avoid the stasis that tended to characterise more classical discourses on racial identity. Here, I draw on those discourses on race that stress the complexity of belonging, focusing particularly on attempts to expose the constraints of early discourses on identity politics. Relative to the classic position of identity politics, which asserts that my racial identity should be positively rather than negatively valued, discourses on intersectionality acknowledge the plurality proper to processes of identification and, in doing so, demonstrate that the problematic of belonging is always vastly more complex than a mere revaluation of identity would suggest. Where earlier discourses assumed identity politics to involve the recognition and revaluation of marginalised identities, discourses on intersectionality insist on the multiple processes of identification that the problem of belonging brings into play.

Ultimately, however, I suggest that we need to move beyond this intersectional approach to one that is more sensitive to the ongoing nature of differentiation
within social experience. I indicate that the recognition of multiple positionality still assumes the givenness of the social field and does not yet account for the lively nature of social belonging, which is the central concern of this thesis. In moving beyond the idea of race as but one of the ways in which one is *positioned* in the social field, the second section explores versions of everyday multiculture that stress the work that those marked by race do to negotiate their own sense of belonging within the broader social milieu. Drawing on the work of Gilroy (2005b), but also Anita Harris (2013; 2009), Anoop Nayak (2010; 2006) and Ash Amin (2002a), I examine the idea of belonging as a kind of individual and collective stylisation. Here everyday multiculture is theorised in terms of the dynamic relational work through which young people actively undertake both local and global appropriations of identity, which are never mere positions but forms of negotiations with more local and nuanced meaning. What is at issue here is the way in which African Australian youth engage in a ‘pick n mix’ fashioning of self in relation to others, in line with an evolving consciousness of their belonging in a dynamic social field. Here I outline the basis for the first dynamic of becoming described in the thesis, *reflexive negotiations of difference*.

Such cultural work does of course have its limitations. In a culture in which multiculturalism is so readily collapsed into consumable styles of life, these efforts to fashion one’s own belonging can fall prey to cliché. Moreover, as my analysis of interview material in Chapter 5 demonstrates, the consciousness that one develops of oneself as a particular kind of African Australian may be tied up with the reproduction of habitual ways of encountering others, as well as the production of exclusive cultures – styles of life, vernaculars or practices that mark one as belonging, or *not* belonging, in this or that group. Far from producing a conviviality in which race no longer matters (cf. Gilroy 2005b), the self-reflexive negotiation of belonging may produce hypostatised forms of racial difference and exclusive articulations of community.

With an eye to theorising a form of belonging that might be more open and thus convivial, I turn to the literature on affect. I suggest that in addition to the negotiations of difference that engage youth consciously and self-reflexively, the task of both belonging and becoming as African Australian engages a convivial multiculture in which bodies and their capacities are at the fore. I stress that it is a Deleuzian/Spinozan inflection on affect that best enables a dynamic sense of belonging, by attending to the variable affective intensities that quotidian encounters produce. Rather than merely being discursively positioned as yet another minority, one of several within a cultural hierarchy, becoming African Australian can produce a felt sense of belonging as a lived and dynamic collective. The ideas...
explored in this part of the chapter form the basis for the second dynamic of becoming described in the thesis, *political collectivism*.

There is a caveat here. While I will draw on the notion of affect to theorise multiculture as an open field in which difference has a positive sense, race may still have a ‘determining’ and indeed an adverse bearing on the encounters between bodies. In the final section – ‘Are we Marked by Race’s Materiality?’ – I explore how histories of race play out in such bodily encounters. The trouble with race is that the histories of association it evokes may collapse the openness necessary to convivial multiculture. Insidious forms of racism couched in macro-political discourses that instigate feelings of fear and anxiety may well induce a slide from everyday multiculture to forms of everyday racism. This subversion of an open sense of belonging is the theme of a later chapter and another of my dynamics of becoming, *forced homogenisation*. Attending to such a dynamic is not akin to a refusal of the potentials for convivial multiculture, but does enable us to appreciate the complexity of the ways that belonging and becoming play out in the context of race.

### 3.1 Race and the Everyday Politics of Belonging

The notion of belonging is a multifaceted and complex term within social theory, as I have alluded to in the introduction to this chapter. Often understood as contingent on racialised identities (Hall 1996c, Gilroy 1993; 2005b, Yuval-Davis 2011a; 2011b), emotional attachments (Skrbis 2008), connections, or lack there of, as early diasporic theorising would have it, to a ‘here’ or a ‘there’ (Ang 2001; Clifford 1994), or perhaps related to a sense of community or commonality (Amin 2012a). So while throughout the thesis I touch on the various conceptualisations of belonging, the question is how do we work with the politics coupled to a notion, such as belonging, that is so disparate in its sense, and social in its emergence?

In her work on the politics of belonging, Nira Yuval-Davis (2011a) advocates a politics in which the complex intersectionality of identity and social divisions – most commonly gender, class, sexuality and race – are negotiated. She rejects the notion that one can be said to suffer oppression as, for example, ‘a woman’, without understanding the different experiences of a woman who is black, working class and so on, since each social division has a different ontological basis that is irreducible to the other. Yuval-Davis (2011a: vii) writes:

> Contemporary political projects of belonging, whether formal state citizenships, memberships in nations, and/or religious, ethnic, indigenous and diasporic communities, but also cosmopolitan and transversal ones, are always situated and always multi-layered, which serves to contextualize them
both locally and globally, and affect different members of these collectivities and communities differentially. This is where the importance of intersectionality lies.

In stressing the complex intersections of positioning in the social field that any contemporary politics of belonging must negotiate, Yuval-Davis challenges the tendencies of earlier theories on identity to essentialise forms of oppression, a challenge that had, of course already been posed by others before her, perhaps most famously, bell hooks (1990). Yuval-Davis stresses that a politics of belonging always involves a process of boundary construction, in which symbolic and at times physical boundaries are established. She asks, ‘Can we be black and British’ or ‘Jew and German’ without the ‘the dirty work of boundary maintenance?’ (Yuval-Davis, citing Crowley, 2011b: 3). The construction, maintenance and reproduction of boundaries is, she insists, a crucial dimension of any political project, whether it is articulated by hegemonic powers within and outside the community, political agents, or those among whom belonging is itself contested. What is necessary at any level of articulation of boundaries, Yuval-Davis (2011b: 4) emphasises, ‘is that when we carry out intersectional analysis, we cannot homogenize the ways any political project or claimings affect people who are differentially located within the same boundaries of belonging.’

Yuval-Davis’ intersectional model of political belonging lends itself to a more dynamic, shifting and multiple sense of belonging than the model of belonging traditionally appealed to by hegemonic racist discourses, but also celebrated by those seeking to subvert hegemonic relations through a politics of identity. Here, it is also significant that Yuval-Davis (2011a: 15), citing Probyn (1996), registers the importance of work that sees ‘becoming’ as necessarily tied up with claims of ‘belonging.’ According to Probyn (cited by Yuval-Davis, 2011a: 15) ‘individuals and groups are caught between wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fuelled by yearning rather than stable identity.’ My concern here is that becoming is reduced to a mere attribute of already given ‘individuals and groups’. To put it another way, and as Yuval-Davis’s analysis makes clear, it is the problem of identity that remains at the fore in such constructions of the relationship between the problems of belonging and becoming. As a consequence, the more micropolitical relations of becoming and differentiation that I will argue are crucial to convivial multiculture, are overlooked. Such relations are not reducible to subjective emotions or desires but open up a space before the subject (individual or collective) who ‘wants’ to become and belong.

What is important is that at least a degree of analytical autonomy be given to the affective relations between bodies in encounter, in which becoming and
differentiation are the rule. My use of the word ‘becoming’ here signals much more than the change that happens to already given things, foregrounding, rather, an ontology in which difference is primary. In drawing attention to the minute differentiations that invariably occur when bodies encounter other bodies, Massumi’s attempt to move beyond the idea of the embodied subject’s position in the social field, to the body per se, is important.

In his introduction to *Parables of the Virtual*, Massumi (2002c: 2) cautions that a focus on the systemic and the positional run the risk of integrating ‘local cultural differences and the practices of resistance they may harbour’ into a governing ideology. According to Massumi (2002c: 3), the idea of positioning on a grid that has tended to dominate much writing on embodiment in cultural studies:

...was conceived as an oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on. A body corresponded to a “site” on the grid defined by an overlapping of one term from each pair. The body came to be defined by its pinning to the grid. Proponents of this model often cited its ability to link bodysites into a “geography” of culture that tempered the universalizing tendencies of ideology.

The critique of ideas of positionality offered by Massumi (2002c: 4) is not meant as an outright dismissal of such notions, but is developed ‘in the hope of building on their accomplishments, perhaps refreshing their vocabulary with conceptual infusions from neglected sources or under-appreciated aspects of known sources.’ What I must emphasise here is that the key shift is from the body as a site of identity – located in a grid of intersectionality – to the body as something that moves and senses. To put it differently, what I am tracing here is a shift from thinking about the body in terms of its identity in relation to a given social field, to thinking about it in terms of its capacities (Sharpe and Gorman-Murray 2013).

Without losing track, then, of the multiple and intersectional ways in which youthful bodies are expected to produce and reproduce gender, class, ethnicity and the like, I want now to push further the idea of becoming that I am suggesting is so crucial to convivial multiculture. I seek here to conceptualise the rich field of relations and overlapping reflexive, representational but also embodied acts in which youth of ‘African heritage’ engage, in forming a nascent and dynamic, yet potentially enduring African Australian community. This can be understood as an emergent sociality to which becoming, belonging and race give life. Much more than a social policy, multiculturalism demands an understanding of the ordinary spaces of a multiculture in which youth interact with one another in the micro-territories and social spaces.
that constitute the social milieu. Here multiculture is viewed as a lived field in which difference and belonging are actualised, articulated and contested.

Social encounters, I am suggesting, will undoubtedly bring into play a series of limitations that stem from the ways that bodies are positioned within the social field, as complex and intersecting as these are. But they will also bring into play an excess to these positions, by virtue of the capacities of bodies above and beyond their significatory capacities. When we consider bodily capacities and the felt qualities of their relations, we may be better able to contest the positioning of others as racialised subjects. Before pushing the idea of convivial multiculture to this less reflexive level of daily practice, I would, however, like firstly to pay attention to the reflexive negotiations of difference that Gilroy and others have in mind in their evocations of (convivial) multiculture.

### 3.2 Reflexive Negotiations of Difference

In his introduction to *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Gilroy (2005b) makes the claim that amongst us, in sharp contrast to the previous forms of multiculturalism politicised and declared dead by government and social commentators alike, exists a multiculture that has developed organically, spontaneously and uninterrupted by the organs of the state. Focusing on the social context in the United Kingdom, Gilroy (2005a: 438) suggests that in such a multiculture a number of characters:

> have created, not a mosaic pluralism among US lines, in which each self-sustaining and carefully segregated element is located so as to enhance a larger picture, but an unruly, untidy and convivial mode of interaction in which differences have to be actively negotiated.

In this turn beyond multiculturalism as a social policy to an untidy and open conviviality in which ‘ethnic differences get rendered unremarkable,’ the idea of multiculturalism is deployed to draw attention to that everyday practice through which difference is negotiated. As Anita Harris (2009: 188, my emphasis) argues, everyday multiculturalism is a:

> ...dynamic, lived field of action within which social actors both construct and deconstruct ideas of cultural difference, national belonging and place-making. Such a perspective intends to move beyond the notion of multiculturalism as an ideology or a policy, and beyond the focus on ‘ethnic’ groups or individuals and their capacity to adapt. Instead it addresses places and practices of mix, encounter, conflict, negotiation and recognition, the *lived practice* of cultural diversity.
Young people in particular, for Harris, exemplify everyday multiculturalism and she suggests that it is through analysing the everyday micro-geographies of their lives, their daily encounters and interactions, that we are able to move beyond multiculturalism as ideology to a more practical sense of multiculture. Pivotal to this, for Harris (2009: 192), is that the analytical frame of everyday multiculturalism provides a frame of reference for understanding how young people live with cultural diversity, in that it is concerned with those ‘sites and competencies’ through which youth culture is formed. Such sites or competencies include everyday neighbourhood locales and micro-publics of compulsory intercultural negotiations. Despite the varying contexts in which multiculture erupts, there is a reliance on seeing the global, consumer culture as that which shapes young lives. As Harris (2009: 195) attests, ‘[c]ulturally diverse music, TV, film, websites, fashion, books and comics, sport, food, image and style are all part of a postmodern global pick ‘n’ mix culture market routinely encountered by young people.’ Or, as Nayak (cited in Harris 2009: 195) notes:

young people draw upon the signs and symbols of multiculture to refashion their ethnicities beyond the spatial limits of the local . . . these performances are evidence of young people’s emerging ethnicities and their engagement with globalization, hybridity and new styles of consumption.

Everyday multiculture, then, is understood here as a practice of ‘local identity making out of diverse global possibilities’, by appropriating the ‘signs and symbols of low culture’ (Harris 2009: 195). It is such appropriations of culture that will become evident in Chapters 5 and 6, as I reveal how my participants draw on these tenets of everyday multiculture to form a sense of belonging.

To an extent, the hybridity that results from such ethnic appropriations are, in the case of black youth, necessarily diasporic. Of course minority ethnic groups, while able to identify with the multicultural nation, could still align with cultural practice, identity and belonging as they were practised back in the homeland and played out in more localized hybrid or cosmopolitan forms in the diaspora. That is to say that even within a multiculture, although relying on a global sense of identity, many of the participants in my research draw on the African diasporas, be it through popular culture, community, a collective past or what they envisage as a common destiny.

This ‘diasporic sensibility’ (as much as skin) can and does, however, clash with a national imagination and can generate the sense of difference as a negative difference to be negotiated. Despite the promise of an everyday multiculture in which youth no longer think of the nation alone as having direct bearing on their
sense of identity, we should not underestimate the lingering effect that the shift away from official multiculturalism, towards core values and citizenship have had, as I outline below. This is particularly the case when identity is grounded in representational politics of belonging. Nor however, should we underestimate the resultant race and xenophobia that has eventuated in the everyday workings of a national collective as it plays out at the local level, especially when race and the racialised subject continue to appear in the micro-geographies of social space and macro socio-political discourses. This is particularly the case when anti-immigration ideologies and xenophobia are ratcheted up for political purposes (Nava 2007), and forms of postcolonial melancholia (Gilroy) or colonial paranoia (Hage), which emerge in the national psyche and play out in the everyday. It is here, to borrow from Nayak (2011: 555), ‘that feelings of trust, risk, fear and insecurity are then situated within deep economies of emotion.’ These emotions, Nayak argues, become racialised when so-called crises within a nation ‘are seen to be the fault of immigrants and government attempts to foster multiculturalism.’ These feelings are not easily dislodged.

I have been outlining the potentials of the lived dynamic of everyday multiculturalism, suggesting that it may engage differences productively rather than reify racial and ethnic antagonisms. Nonetheless, the reflexive, pick and mix stylisation of identity, which Gilroy and others describe, privileges an ontology in which it is identity that holds sway; difference, understood as the difference between identities has only a negative status. I would like to push the idea of multiculture beyond this, perhaps comforting, orientation to a world in which identities, whether global, diasporic, hybridised and so on, give way to new and more dynamic forms of engagement with the politics of belonging. As later chapters demonstrate, understanding the dynamics through which young people become African Australian demands an analysis that moves beyond the discursive formation of identity and the politics of representation, towards a better understanding of the affective intensities that shape political encounters. Although Harris (2009: 192) does not detail what she has in mind, her claim that ‘the study of young people requires focussing on a multiculturalism of everyday spaces and the affective, embodied dimensions of living in these spaces...’ bears weight on the direction I am taking.

Nayak (2010: 2389) gives some more substance to what is at issue here:

An engagement with... the emotional politics of race should not lead us to ignore the materiality of bodies and the “geometries of power” (Massey, 1996 [1991]) constituted through racist practices. Instead, it allows us to supplement the representational aspects of ethnographic interpretation with
more “abstract descriptors” pertaining to “events, auras, rhythms, cycles, flows and codes” (Lorimer, 2007, page 96). In this rendering of race and place, concepts such as ‘parallel lives’, ‘social exclusion’, or ‘community cohesion’, powerful as they are, appear to overlook the emotional connections of being and belonging and the ambiguous ways in which multicultural intimacies and visceral hatred coexist. Conflict and conviviality are performed and worked through ‘on-the-ground’ and ‘in-the-moment’.

For Nayak (2010), an understanding of people’s ‘sense’ of place and their felt connections provides a better understanding of how race materialises, from an immanent state to an emergent and felt dimension of social experience. It is worth noting, however, in shifting from theorising that privileges identity and representation to theorising that accounts for affective encounters, that affect is an elusive concept. In the ‘turn to affect’ in the migration and multicultural literature, affect has often been reduced to the realm of emotion or feeling, as a means to theorise the way in which race, ethnicity (or migration and transnationalism) may effect belonging. Such literature deserves brief examination if we are to broaden our understanding of the socio-emotional field. Maruška Svašek and Zlatko Skrbiš (2007: 375), for example, explore how belonging may be affected by emotions. They state:

…both male and female migrants are prone to experience a sense of emotional destabilisation as their emotional dispositions, learned “back home,” may not be acceptable in their new locations. They may feel the pressure to hide what they regard as “natural” feelings, or they may feel forced to express them in newly coded ways.

Further still, citing Jackson (1989), they argue that ‘emotional processes cannot be understood through focusing on the individual alone as emotions all too often occur in social contexts; thus intersubjectivity itself is essential to emotional life’ (Svašek and Skrbiš 2007: 371). In order to elevate emotions on par with other social science concepts such as gender and class, Skrbiš (2008: 232) attempts ‘to provide a heuristic, albeit not exhaustive, framework for thinking about the intersections of transnational family life, emotions and belonging.’ In turn Skrbiš (2008: 236) argues that emotions should be understood as constitutive of the transnational family experience, and that a coherent theory of emotions is wanting. In making such claims he refers to migrant ‘experiences of adjustment, settlement, nostalgia, a shattered sense of belonging, renewal, loss, discrimination, abrupt endings, new beginnings and new opportunities’, suggesting that these are all potent sources for theorising emotions.

Other researchers have looked towards emotion as a means of interpreting social
interactions, not only in the area of trans-nationalism, but also with respect to race, ethnicity and multicultural spaces. In her article ‘Sensuous Multiculturalism,’ Amanda Wise (2010) attends to such a task, through exploring the way in which the changing nature of a multicultural suburb can impact on its long-term residents. Adopting Bourdieu’s theories of habitus and hexis, Wise argues that the problem in much of the literature on racism is that it assumes the challenge is simply to change the discursive environment rather than addressing emotions as the medium through which the body, memory and the representational sphere intersect. While the discursive regime is important, such accounts suggest, ‘it ignores the extent to which the representational regimes “out there” become, over time, deeply embodied, habituated and sedimented into the very fleshly fibres of our beings’ (Svašek and Skrbiš 2007). In other words, a sensuous approach tackles, as Amanda Wise and Adam Chapman (2005: 2) put it in relation to embodiment, ‘the crucial ways in which we experience and respond to the world not just at the level of representation, but through the very nerve fibres of the body.’

These descriptive accounts of the senses as they provoke emotions in the study of migration, transnationalism, multiculturalism and race bring us closer to a clearer understanding of how embodiment can be involved in the production of convivial multiculture. Certainly, it is necessary in understanding the context in which racism occurs to attend to the unconscious but often disabling habits and dispositions of the body, as well as visceral pleasures and emotions such as hope, fear or disgust. As my empirical material in Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrates, such factors play a very real role in the phenomenological experience of the racialised encounter. For the moment, however, and to anticipate later discussion in Chapter 7, I would stress the importance of distinguishing between affect as emotion, and affect as a potential relating to the variability of capacities.

While affect and emotion are certainly linked, we should be cautious of the tendency to reduce the former to the latter. Affect, as a Deleuze-Guattarian (1988) reading emphasises, is pre-personal and emotion is merely the capture of such pre-personal, nonconscious forces. It is the ontological primacy of affective force that is important here (Hynes 2013). Consider the formulation put forward by Divya Tolia-Kelly and Mike Crang (2010 n.p.), that the affective field represents the ways in which, ‘flows of emotion coalesce to form a social phenomenon that is beyond the individual subjective responses, feelings and sensibilities’. This assumes, however, that affect originates in individuals, though it exceeds them in such a way as to coalesce into a social phenomenon. In contrast, and following Massumi, I would suggest that it is important, at least analytically, to afford affect some autonomy, even if affect remains a socially mediated phenomenon.
Affect then, is neither simply an emotion, nor a personal feeling. As Shouse (2005: n.p.) suggests:

> Feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are social ... and affects are pre-personal.... An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential.... Affect cannot be fully realised in language... because affect is always prior to and/or outside consciousness.... Affect is the body’s way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience.

Massumi (2002c: 35; see also 2002b: 232) clarifies the relationship further when he suggests that ‘emotion is the most intense (most contracted) expression of the capture of affect.’ So while emotion provides a degree of analytical purchase, in turning to affect we must also consider that emotions are its expression, and thus may reveal as much about nonconscious processes as our corporeal responses to social encounters. If we attend to the desire for bodies to interact and enter into relations in their becoming (Grosz 1994), we may be better positioned to attend to the racialisation that is immanent to such encounters, and produce new ways to imagine coming together with difference.

### 3.3 Prosaic Negotiations of Difference and Affective Encounters

A more micropolitical approach to convivial multiculture, then, helps us to better understand the affective encounters that arise outside of the discursive formation and given cultural representations in which identity dominates. Over the last two decades a number of writers have been trying to develop an alternative approach to our ethical/political thinking as it is found in everyday multicultural life (for example, neighbourliness or civic duty) by emphasizing its affective and ‘non-representational’ foundations and in doing so they foreground the ‘visceral register’ as indispensable to this reconceptualization (Amin and Thrift 2002: 3).

Amin (2002a) for example, seeks new ways of conceiving ethnicity and race through exploring the everyday urban encounters that demand a daily negotiation of ethnic difference, rather than a national frame of race and ethnicity. He emphasizes ‘local liveability’, the micropolitics of everyday social contact and encounter that constitute micropublics, and the terms of engagement within them, as crucial for reconciling and overcoming ethnic and cultural differences (Amin 2002a: 959). In such a context, it is the local negotiations of ethnicity inflected by class practices, cultural habits and ingrained norms that are seen to matter in quite crucial ways (Amin 2002a: 960). For Amin (2002a: 970), habitual contact does not guarantee
cultural exchange, especially when it ‘can entrench group animosities and identities, through repetitions of gender, class, race, and ethnic practices.’ What is necessary he suggests, is that people are encouraged to step into, ‘everyday spaces that function as sites of unnoticeable cultural questioning or transgression.’ He has in mind a setting such as a school, leisure space or communal park, where ‘engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new attachments.’ The interaction that stems from such everyday contact and encounter is of a ‘prosaic nature’ and produces the kind of ‘cultural displacement or cultural destabilization’ through which people are able to ‘break out of fixed relations and fixed notions, and through this, to learn to become different through new patterns of social interaction’ (Amin 2002a: 970, my italics). Theorising the visceral nature of embodied and affective dimensions of encounters, then, provides us with a means to re-examine what it means to be social in a multicultural environment that is always more than the representations that occur there, and may allow difference to supplant the hold of identity.

The point is not, I should stress, that we could or should do away with representation altogether. To this end, Nayak (2006a) suggests that we would do well to not privilege one system of analysis or representation over the other but rather overlay diverse perspectives into a recognisable and coherent frame of what Nayak calls ‘post-race’ analysis. The problem here, though, is that race may not be the reified category that the discursive mobilisation of the idea of race suggests, nor is it a mere construction that can be so easily erased. As my interview material suggests, race continues to give a felt or visceral quality to our engagement with others, that works in conjunction with forms of representation to at least shape our encounters.

Yet, if we take the affective encounter between bodies as our starting point, rather than the discursive formations that represent encounters, we may be better positioned to work productively with the idea of race, towards a more ethico-political and convivial multiculture. In theorising multiculture here as a lived field of action, as well as a site for prosaic negotiations with difference, we are better placed to grapple with how affective encounters do the work of race and belonging. For in such sites of prosaic negotiations there exists a reliance on repeated exposure to difference to better understand the relational field that forms the in-between of social action. It is this repeated exposure to difference to which affect gives life, as much as the repetitions give life its dynamic, impersonal and productive quality. Affect, to this extent, concerns felt qualities rather than felt affections (fear, sorrow, happiness), and it is these felt qualities or vitality affects (Stern 1985) that I use to reconceptualise the way in which we theorise race and collective becoming.
Repetitive action has both a materiality and temporality that will contextualise and open up the dynamic of becoming, which I refer to as ‘political collectivism.’

Theorists such as Massumi and Shouse steer us towards the Deleuzian/Spinozan understanding of affect as the capacity to affect and be affected; affect here concerns the way in which bodies form enabling relationships with other bodies, which increase their capacity to act, or alternatively, ‘decompose’ the bodies in relation, decreasing their capacity to act. According to Sharp (2011), the point is to pursue those bodily encounters that bring us pleasure or joyous passions, and to avoid those that give us a diminished capacity to act and in turn lower our intensities. Affect is thus a bodily transformation that results in a change in power. As Sharp (2011: 29) puts it:

...an affect is not a response to an event “triggering bodily changes.” An affect is that event; it is a qualitative change, equally corporeal and mental, in the intensity of a being’s power to persevere.

The conscious experience of affective potentials or capacities, as thoughts, feelings, or emotions, provides a means to reinterpret the social and effect social change. In mobilising the concept of affect in this way, I will work here with the idea that engagement with difference (including racial difference) is a matter of attuning to a more affective world in which emotions, subjectivity and identity are ‘secondary’ to relations and the encounters between bodies.

The notion of affective attunement, which I explore further below, offers a way to attend to affect’s felt qualities while not assuming that the problem of affect starts from, or is resolved in, the subject-who-feels. Stern’s notion of vitality affects is important here. Stern (1985: 54) writes:

There is a quality of experience that can arise directly from encounters with people, a quality that involves vitality affects. What do we mean by this, and why is it necessary to add a new term for certain forms of human experience? It is necessary because many qualities of feeling that occur do not fit into our existing lexicon or taxonomy of affects. These elusive qualities are better captured by dynamic, kinetic terms, such as ‘surging’, ‘fading away,’ ‘fleeting,’ ‘explosive’, ‘crescendo’, ‘decrescendo’, ‘bursting’, ‘drawn out’, and so on.

11 ‘By affect [affectum] I understand affections [affectiones] of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections’ (E III def). (Spinoza, cited by Sharp 2011: 29).
Stern stresses that while our subjective experience is one in which the sense of self provides a degree of structure, it is the vitality affects that recall to us the dynamism of that emergent structure. According to Stern (1985: 60):

It is these subjective experiences of various organizations in formation that I am calling the sense of an emergent self. The particular experiences of the consolidation of a sensorimotor schema may have more of a quality of tension resolution than of “déjà-vu” or of discovery, as already described for some of the other senses of an emergent self.

In relating affect to convivial multiculture, the image I seek to evoke is of a form of multiculture capable of vitalising a social field, in which youth are able to tap into the felt qualities of belonging. This is, moreover, a field through which determinants of race emerge as dimensions of an experience that is itself always emergent, which means that these determinants can always be pried open, negotiated and contested. Such felt qualities are important here for I argue it is, remaining open to the problematic field of belonging or the sensation and felt qualities in an ‘direct, immersive, immediated way’ (Massumi 2011 n.p.), that grounds conviviality as a set of practices through which youth are able to contest their passive racialisation and simultaneously attune to one another as a form of political collective. Such political collectivism (the theme of Chapter 7) evokes a more active engagement with belonging, to which youth are able to attune and which triggers the event of becoming African Australian.

The seeming abstractness of the notion of affect finds a certain concreteness in this work on race. As Nayak (2010: 2370) citing Rachel Pain (2009) highlights, there is a concern that ‘much of the current work on affect lacks “grounding, embodiment or emotion” slipping into the ether of philosophic abstraction’. While Pain (2009) addresses the emotive register, rather than the more autonomous affective field, Nayak, nevertheless, raises an important point on risk of abstraction in any discussion on affect. Further, Nayak (2010: 2370) in citing Nigel Thrift (2004) warns that its abstraction ‘risks ethnocentrism’ – as bodies are not universal and are marked in ways that are ascribed particular emotional, physical and other capacities. It is on this point in particular, that I now make the argument that our bodies are indeed marked by race, and such marking may potentially diminish our capacity to act (and in turn our belonging), despite the promise of affect to offer new forms of resistance to complex ideologies and structures such as race.
3.4 Are We Marked by Race’s Materiality?

Affective encounters are those in which the relation between bodies is premised only secondarily on ascribed characteristics such as race, ethnicity, skin colour and so forth, and firstly on intensities and bodily resonances. Our bodies are primed, so to speak, to seek out other bodies with which to form associations that will increase our capacities. But of course race, as it is played out in the body of the racialised (as determined both by those who ascribe race and those to whom race is ascribed), also forms part of our memories of association and sense perception. As such, when we enter into intercorporeal encounters our bodies are at least to some extent already conditioned by race. This raises the question: even if affect is a preconscious event, how does our racialisation affect that actualisation or expression of the event and the affective resonances that draw bodies together? This interplay between racialisation and affect is an under theorised area, due to the precarious balance between histories of association that form our phenomenological experience, and the pre-conscious intensities that are expressed in our encounters.

In early postcolonial theorising, Albert Memmi (1965) emphasised a particular reciprocity or interdependence between the coloniser and colonized that was integral to defining the characteristic features and behaviour of both. Such contact, however, mutually defined and determined, according to Memmi, had an inevitable tendency to disintegrate (Majumdar 2007: 72; see also Stratton and Devadas 2010: 2). Of course not all relationships are between the colonizer and the colonized, nor are they inevitably going to disintegrate, yet the encounter that Memmi depicts revolves around a particular power relationship characterized by race. Such encounters occur within what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) depicts as a contact zone. As Pratt (1991:33) states:

…it is urgent to interrogate the contact zones: the ‘social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today.

In drawing on the work of Memmi, Jon Stratton and Vijay Devadas (2010: 3) I emphasise the relational nature of ‘the identities constructed in contact zones’, since ‘the identity of the coloniser is as inflected by the relation with the colonised, as the identity of the colonised is by their relation with the coloniser.’ For her part, Sara Ahmed (2004a) pushes the notion of the contact zone beyond the question of identity formation to the intercorporeal encounter itself. Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty on sense perception, Ahmed discusses what she describes as the ‘contact zone of impressions.’ For Ahmed, it is within this zone that race is
The intercorporeality of perception depends on histories of reading that come, as it were, ‘before’ an encounter between subject and another takes place. We can consider racism as a particular form of intercorporeal encounter: a white racist subject who encounters a racial other may experience an intensity of emotions (fear, hate, disgust, pain). That intensification involves moving away from the body of the other, or moving towards that body in an act of violence, and then moving away. The ‘moment of contact’ is shaped by past histories of contact, which allows the proximity of a racial other to be perceived as threatening, at the same time as it reshapes the bodies in the contact zone of the encounter. These histories have already impressed upon the surface of the bodies at the same time as they create new impressions (Ahmed 2004a: 31).

Ahmed’s point is that it is in this contact zone of impression, that our capacities to act are invariably mediated, such that the mere proximity of the skin of the other may dominate and indeed atrophy the potential of the encounter for conviviality. The proximity of the other, or more precisely, the ‘impression’ they leave in affective terms is, Ahmed suggests, what ultimately increases or decreases our capacity to act.

Ahmed (2010) is especially concerned to highlight the connections between the micropolitical and macropolitical dimensions of everyday encounters. Adopting the trope of the melancholic migrant, Ahmed argues that there are those who associate with the nation as the bearer of the ‘promise of happiness’. Ahmed (2010: 137) states:

For youth the freedom to be ‘happy’ is premised not only on the freedom from family or tradition but also the freedom to identify with the nation as the bearer of the promise of happiness. To identify with the nation, you become an individual: you acquire the body of an individual, a body that can move out and move up.

So while youth may ‘happily’ embrace a multicultural context through their encounters with difference there remains an underlying desire, linked to the promise of happiness, as contingent on social mobility and a disassociation from tradition (Hage 2006). This is important for our understanding of belonging, for as Ahmed (2010: 159) notes:
[a]fter all, the political struggle over national belonging exists because some happy objects are seen as overly compromising, as giving up on the very idea of who or what is the national subject. Some happy objects – one might think of the turban or burqa – become the cause of national unhappiness not simply because they cannot exist alongside the happy objects of the nation but because they are saturated by unhappy histories, as histories of Empire that are erased under the sign of happiness. Objects become unhappy when they embody the persistence of histories that cannot be wished away by happiness.

Following Ahmed, one could argue that the cultural presence of blacks, migrants and refugees prevent the erasure of a nation’s shameful past and turbulent present, and in turn, the political struggles over belonging become centred on the colour of skin, one’s ethnicity, or the choice of one’s religion as the object that compromises individual and national happiness. Such objects that evoke an affective response, registered as an emotion, may also reflect the collective emotions of the nation. My concern is with those ‘migrants’, in this case black youth, that embrace the national collective to such an extent that they become would-be proponents of the racial codes of exclusion of difference. In order to secure their own belonging, such youth may align with the dominant culture, while simultaneously negating their alterity within it. This in itself may provoke a slide from everyday multiculturalism to everyday racism, an argument that I explore further in Chapter 8 when I consider the dynamic of becoming, forced homogenisation. This is particularly the case, as I argue, when macropolitical discourses and memories of association collide in the production of racialised difference.

By the same token, there is a material element to our encounter with the other as object, which, when racialised, may affect our capacity to engage with difference. Nayak (2011: 556) states:

The materiality of skin, beards, turbans, mosques or veils have become the rubric through which race difference is assembled and the grammar through which race is made legible. The racialisation of these objects works to set them apart and in so doing endows them with a fetishistic quality, ushering forth feelings and affects that are barely communicable.

Nayak makes an important point that interests me here, as it further opens new possibilities; namely, the imperceptible affects of objects. There is a sleight of hand in portraying the materiality of racialised difference through our encounter with bodies (as objects) and their objects (skin, beards, turbans) as bearing an affective tone that is barely communicable. On the one hand it endows objects with
recognition and representation yet on the other hand there is a quality of imperceptibility that opens us to the sensible that can push us to the limits of an encounter and force thought, prior to any racialisation. Taking the object of the encounter as a ‘sign’ that sparks thought, Deleuze (1994: 139) writes that ‘something in the world forces us to think...this something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter.’ Such an object bears upon the senses not as an object of recognition, but as an object of sense – an unfelt feeling or prehension. What I take from Deleuze here is that fundamental encounters with sense take us to the limits of our faculties and forces thought, which, for its part, maintains a degree of freedom from prior determinations. What sense encounters, Deleuze (1994: 140) suggests, is a ‘sign’ that ‘in a certain sense is imperceptible [insensible]. It is imperceptible precisely from the point of view of recognition.’

To return to Stern’s (1985) vitality affects, we could say that ‘veridical perception’ – the direct perception of stimuli – pushes that which was previously unfelt to a point of perceptibility. Such perception, I suggest, forms a kind of intermediary sensation between autonomous affects (felt qualities), sense perception and felt affections (emotions). It is the emergent qualities of such perception and affects through which the collective sense is ‘felt’ or ‘sensed’ (as an unfelt feeling), that we may sense an emergent sociality, which is yet to be recognised or felt representationally. It is our responses to the imperceptible that matters, for such responses can determine the political, or the micro-political, as it were. Sharp (2011: 184) reinforces this point when she states:

If our identities are constantly being revised, reinterpreted, and experienced differently in response to new encounters and relationships, we will often find what we never knew we were seeking.... The politics of imperceptibility siphons enabling energy and power wherever it happens to find it. It infects and enjoins whichever beings and forces might aid in the construction of a joyful insurgency against patriarchy, misanthropy, imperialism, and, yes, crippling self-hatred.

The dilemma here, then, is how to siphon ‘enabling energy’ into our new encounters and relationships when faced with the materiality of race and its dis-enabling potential. As I will argue, towards the end of my exploration of the dynamics of becoming, this dilemma is an ethico-political one. On the one hand, we have the object of an encounter, of representation or recognition. This is an object upon which we can rest our thoughts, feelings and emotions and reproduce, in this case, reactions to difference, that risk an engagement with race via racism as a means to secure belonging. On the other hand, the alternative response is one that prioritizes those forces that force thought; this is thought, not as recognition or representation
but as sense, transformation and the opening to the new. It is this, I argue, that might give youth a way of defending their collective determination, not as an a priori identity but as an emergent sociality.

To return to the question of convivial multiculture, what I am suggesting is that this affective dimension of sociality is crucial to opening up the convivial potentials of multiculture beyond the self-reflexive and discursive work of youth involved in the process of fashioning subjective and political ways of being. I have suggested that the affective dimension of sociality opens up potentials, which may engage youth in a ‘becoming African Australian’ that has an attunement to novelty and difference. Also, I have insisted that to render affect as simply a personal attribute, synonymous with social or emotional and psychological states, is to lose its capacities as a sign, in the sense that Deleuze uses that term. As Maria Hynes (forthcoming) writes:

Rendered as personal or subjective, ‘affect’ ultimately aligns itself with recognition (those things ‘which do not disturb thought’) and thus ceases to function as the object of an encounter (those things ‘which force us to think’) (Deleuze, 1994: 138).

In this respect, I do not share Ahmed’s anxiety about affording affect a degree of autonomy from emotion. As Massumi (2002c: 9) stresses, affect is not pre-social, so much as open-endedly social; this means that while it is always more than the lived experience of the subject, it is not outside the histories, associations and memories that constitute us as social beings.

While Gilroy focuses particularly on the expression of convivial multiculture in social macro-structures (a process that he advocates yet seems to find immanently frustrating), the process of affective attunement that I am foregrounding is a more micropolitical process, in which relations are foregrounded, and so too, the possibilities for novel and emergent forms of sociality. Massumi (2011, n.p.) writes that:

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12 Ahmed (2004a: 39) writes:
I am hence departing from the recent tendency to separate affect and emotion, which is clear in the work of Massumi (2002). For sure the experience of ‘having’ an emotion may be distinct from sensations and impressions, which may burn the skin before any conscious moment of recognition. But this model creates a distinction between conscious recognition and ‘direct’ feeling, which negates how what is not consciously experienced may still be mediated by past experiences. I am suggesting here that even seeming direct responses actually evoke past histories, and that this process bypasses consciousness, through bodily memories. So sensations may not be about conscious recognition, but this does not mean they are ‘direct’ in the sense of immediate. Further, emotions clearly involve sensations: this analytic distinction between affect and emotion risks cutting emotions off from the lived experiences of being and having a body.
... the question of affective politics for me is accepting that we’re in that field of collective differential attunement or collective individuation, that we’re always being thrown back to it in a direct, immersive, immediated way.

The claim that I advance throughout the thesis is that it is from this starting point that it may be possible to escape, what I refer to in Chapters 5 and 6, as racialisation loops triggered by an epidermal reflex, in order to ‘exert some influence’ that is at once immersed in this micropolitical field of emergent differences, whilst challenging some of the presuppositions of the racialisation process. The question, as Massumi suggests, is ‘how can we implant new presuppositions, and proto-organize more liveable and convivial tendencies? (Massumi 2011, n.p.)’.

It is necessary to apprehend the potential of race, belonging and becoming in everyday encounters if we are going to defend our own ongoing determination as African Australian rather than concede to a priori associations. What is vital here is that we understand convivial multiculture as taking place in a highly socio-affective, relational field. Convivial multiculture, which occurs spontaneously in the local sites and landscapes in which youth interact, nurtures relational forms of knowing and becoming in which subjectivity is still to be defined. Seeing subjectivity in this way is not incompatible with recognising the effect of particular histories, a priori assumptions and the materiality of bodies, all of which mean that affective encounters are never entirely open nor contingent. Indeed, the question of the potentials within the micropolitics of everyday encounters becomes all the more important in light of these factors. It is for these reasons that I prefer not to see political belonging as premised on fixed positions or even the intersection of such positions, but rather treat it as a question of how we remain open to the embodied encounters and transitions that produce the shape and potential of daily life.
4 ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE POLITICS OF THE (IM)PERSONAL

In moving from experience of social life to conceptualization... we tend to find very frequently that it is not a theorist’s whole system which so illuminates, but his scattered ideas, his flashes of insight taken out of systemic context and applied to scattered data... The intuitions, not the tissue of logic connecting them, are what tend to survive in the field experience (Turner 1974: 23).

In attempting to address the problematic field that surrounds the emergence of the African Australian community, the question over which methodology is best suited to bring to light the social experiences of those considered ‘African Australian’, as well as the context which surrounds the community’s formation, demands attention. My concern here, then, is how to best capture and offer plausible explanation for such experiences, in the context of the social field in which they emerge. Of importance when researching and writing about a nascent, yet diverse, mobile, diasporic population, such as the African community in Australia, is accounting for the multiple and shifting paradigms that affect the community’s emergence. The complexities of race and ethnicity, multiculture, migration, diaspora, national belonging and so forth, all come to mind. This chapter explores why ethnography was the research approach best suited to revealing the social reality of my participants. I also explore the diverse methodological ‘intuitions’, to cite Turner (1974), which directed the methodological choices in this study and highlight the ‘tissue of logic’ that unites them into a method.

The priority in exploring this social field, as I hope is evident thus far, is primarily to think through and represent the way in which race perplicates into social experience for young people, and how it affects their sense of self. The aim here is not to let race overdetermine the research, but rather to probe for the differing sensibilities and experiences that surround race, and the multiple ways in which it is represented, felt and embodied within a multicultural context. To come at this from a different perspective, as Claire Alexander (2006: 402) puts it, ‘the central, shared concerns of ethnographers of “race” are the negotiation and construction of “difference” in “the field” and in writing.’ For Alexander (2006: 402), in researching and writing race into existence, ethnographies of race require an ‘acknowledgement and partial amelioration of power hierarchies in the research process and the engagement with the broader local and global political contexts and realities of “race”’.

To begin with, it is necessary to ethnographically probe for a ‘sensibility’ of the conceptual structures and systems that affect my participants’ becoming. In other words, as I conduct my research I begin to create an ethnographic study not only of
the subjects, but also the system(s) and processes within which we are also situated, or which situate us. For, as I am arguing throughout the study, social experience is often mediated by a host of social encounters, structures and thoughts, which consciously and unconsciously settle into our sense of self. It is in light of this situated awareness of double or multiple constructs of the self, among varying conceptual or world systems, that I pursued several lines of inquiry, which are both critical and constructive in approach and in the ethnographic imagination (Mills 1959). In recognition that this study is concerned with exploring African-Australianness as a diasporic community, it is worth registering the importance of some of the debates raised in the critique of single sited ethnography, as an attempt to recognise that subjects are now rarely seen as defined by the same rootedness to place the more traditional approaches to ethnography emphasised. James Clifford (1992) and George Marcus (1995) in particular, are instructive here in theorising the changing, more global nature of ethnography in which the colonised margin and imperial centre collapse into a more global and transitory world in which traditional approaches to ethnography are less viable.

Secondly, I highlight the significance of debates around reflexively positioning the researcher into the inquiry. Most recently, in particular through poststructural and postmodern movements, researchers have begun to understand the benefits of opening up the researcher’s position in relation to the research and research participants. Reflexively recognising the personal and political dimensions of social experience in research is seen as a means to access the life of individuals and collectives, through overlapping the researcher’s experience with the social field under investigation. Hence, scholars have called for new means of interpretation that would biographically situate the researcher (see Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 21). It is not the ideal of transparency via reflexivity that concerns me in this thesis, and much of my argument overall problematises the kind of approach to research that would lay bare the factors that determine one’s subjectivity as researcher or researched. Nonetheless, in exploring the limits and potentials of the ways in which race is sutured and resutured into the social field, it appeared important for me to develop something like what David Butz (2010) calls an ‘autoethnographic sensibility’, which, in this case, meant a sensitivity to the manner in which race’s perplication in my experience found its way into the encounters with my subjects. The intention here is not to claim this study as autoethnography, per se, but to adopt certain autoethnographic and reflexive practices in ‘performing’ the ethnography.

Finally, I conclude with interrogating a turn in ethnographic inquiry beyond the representational, personal and directly political subjectivity, that the paradigms discussed until now rely upon. With an eye to the limitations of identification and the more personal politics of representation, the methods of this thesis also try to
remain open to the less readily perceptible, performative and affective dimensions of social experience; these cannot always be identified but can be felt. That is, my aim was to dramatise those encounters and interactions that are affectively charged and help to bring ‘my people’, race and belonging to life. In this sense, I look in the ethnography towards ‘...moments of indeterminacy, undecideability and ambivalence’ and attempt to capture ‘a sense of the “tone” of any situation’ in the field (Dewsbury 2010: 327).

As a final point, before I move to the various methodological discussions, I would add that the very description of the ‘dynamics of becoming African Australian’ as a conceptual structure, is in itself a methodological choice. This is in so far as the dynamics provide, to borrow from JD Dewsbury (2010: 328) a ‘real practical-theoretical engagement’ with, and of, the field, which produces particular space-time connections in becoming, which would otherwise be unable to be represented in any linear determination. This is to say that the phases through which I present the field work and theoretical arguments are not meant to have temporal or spatial consistency as such, but rather appear more as a phasing in and phasing out of experiences. Such an approach enlivens the way in which we may view and interpret ethnography, ‘as a creative diagrammatic ensemble of the researcher’s engagement with the world’ (Dewsbury 2010: 328).

4.1 Ethnography and the Diasporic Subject

In Chapter 2 I presented an argument for the emergence of an African diaspora in Australia, in both a historical and contemporary sense, given that Africans have been arriving sporadically throughout this country’s settlement. In Chapter 3, I raised the argument that the current generation of black African youth harbour a form of ‘diasporic sensibility’. In reflexively negotiating their difference, such youth appropriate certain identifications that, given their global character, are necessarily diasporic. This raises a methodological question, to paraphrase Marcus (1995: 112), of how best to approach the salient and pervasive forms of local knowledge that remain to be discovered in the discourses of any contemporary site, while not losing sight of their definition through their relationship to the world system. Such a question necessarily heralds a departure from the time-honoured tradition of single-site mise-en-scene of ethnographic research, which foregrounded a research context that relied on the examination of the subjects as subalterns in a dominating capitalist or colonial ‘world system’ (Marcus 1995).

This scientific, or ‘traditional’, approach to ethnography advocates a strong notion of the author as expert who sets the agenda, collects the data and objectively and precisely writes the accounts of experience, interpreting the social interaction and
construction of the reality of the perceived ‘other’. Researchers in this context believed that they could through their own observations and interviews of subjects, documenting their life stories and personal experiences, access their inner life. Bringing forth a cultural account, then, would usually involve extensive periods ‘in the field’ observing and documenting ‘life in the village’. Thus ethnography in the traditional sense, according to Burns (1997: 297):

...essentially involves descriptive data collection as the basis for interpretation: it represents a dynamic ‘picture’ of the way of life of some interacting social group. As a process, it is the science of cultural description and originated in early anthropological studies (for example Malinowski 1922) working through cultural informants, gathering first hand data about the ways in which a group ordered their life by means of social custom, ritual and belief, and from this information constructing a picture of that groups’ cultural and perceptual world.

Whilst many ethnographers still have a notion of fieldwork as a special kind of localised practice of dwelling with research subjects, discourses on multi-sited ethnographies have had the benefit of challenging this notion of practice, which seems particularly unsuited to studying the diasporic subject. The assumption that village equals culture is challenged if not entirely relinquished, since ‘the ethnographer has localised what is actually a regional/national/global nexus, relegating to the margins, a ‘culture’s’ external relations and displacements’ (Clifford 1992: 100). As Clifford (1992: 101) writes:

Anthropological “culture” is not what it used to be. And once the representational challenge is seen to be the portrayal and understanding of local/global historical encounters, co-productions, dominations, and resistances, then one needs to focus on hybrid cosmopolitan experiences as much as on rooted, native ones.

For Clifford (1992: 101), the crucial ethnographic shift here involves a new focus on ‘concrete mediations’ of the native cum cosmopolitan, in specific cases of historical tension and relationship, since both are constitutive of what will count as cultural experience. This recognises that the construction of the social world of the ‘other’ may well be within, or indeed extraneous to, the world system. In a similar vein, Marcus (1995: 97) argues for a multi-sited ethnography as a way to account for the opening up of the world, and in turn the location at which culture forms. This is a departure from the time-honoured tradition of single-site, mise-en-scene ethnographic research in favour of a design that incorporates a strategy for ‘macro theoretical concepts and narratives of the world system, though does not rely on
them for... framing a set of subjects’ (Marcus 1995: 96). At the ‘heart’ of designing multi-sited ethnographic research then, as Marcus puts it, are ‘strategies of quite literally following connections, associations, and putative relationships’ (97).

In this pivotal shift in ethnographic research that Clifford and Marcus signal there is a call to recognise, and in some manner trace, the multiple origins of forces acting upon the subject of enquiry. Certainly, there is an important shift here from an essentialised understanding of the research subject as rooted to place. This has also challenged the understanding of the researcher as an objective knower merely studying the subject in his/her natural environment that more traditional ethnographic practice implies. What is important here is less the multiplication of research sites – and indeed, for the better part, the subjects of this study and I were localised with the geographical location of Canberra – than the attitude with which the ethnography is approached. In the diverse contexts within which I engaged with my participants, from schools, to homes to churches and social functions, my concern was not to garner the truth of their culture. Rather, it was to discern the impact upon their lives, embodied dispositions and consciousness of various local, structural and global forces.

It is then, for me, as the ethnographer, a matter of looking for those more salient or potent ways in which the multivalency of race perplicates into my participants’ perceptions of self and community. As Marcus (1995: 111) suggests, ‘[w]ithin a single site, the crucial issue concerns the detectable system-awareness in the everyday consciousness and actions of subjects’ lives.’ His suggestion here is not that research subjects articulate ‘an abstract theoretical awareness’; rather Marcus (1995: 111) pushes for the researcher to look for how participants share a ‘sensed, partially articulated awareness’ of systems, across specific sites, such as home and school, in the interview, as well as in relation to other subjects with whom they interact.

While Hage (2005) is less ebullient than Marcus about the notion of multi-sited ethnography, he nonetheless shares Marcus’ emphasis on the multiple perspectives that the best ethnographic research captures. Hage (2005: 474) writes:

[O]f all the disciplines deployed in studying globalization, migration and mobility, none are better equipped to capture the complexities

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13 To take the notion of multi-sited ethnography a step further, we could say then that ‘following the people’ could also act as a way of isolating the thing or metaphor (such as race or indeed belonging) that one was following, as mobile and multi-sited subjects experienced it.

14 Hage’s specific concerns with multi-sitedness are raised in the context of the study of migrants sharing a unifying culture across a number of global locations. Hage suggests that in such an instance, multi-sitedness is less helpful than conceptualising the field as a single, geographically discontinuous site.
of such social realities than an ethnographic analysis. This is because, more than ever, such realities still require the double gaze capable of capturing both descriptively the lived cultures with all their subtleties and analytically the global which structures them, both people's experiences and the social environment in which this experience is grounded, both the experiential surrounding that people are aware of and the macro-global structures that are well beyond their reach.

Thus, while I share with Marcus a concern with the ways in which my participants articulate and ‘know’ the world system as it shapes their experience as diasporic subjects across differing sites and relations, I also, following Hage, seek to give a sense of participants’ subjective experiences and cultural practices, as they were shaped by such macro-global structures and shifts. The everyday reality of my participants, for example, was markedly affected by events such as changes in Australia’s migration policies (which created a ground swell in the black African population) or the political push for a hegemonic national identity, and even events as far reaching as war, genocide and subsequent humanitarian crises in the African continent. Such events have borne directly on the consciousness and the more embodied and emotional dimensions of my participants’ lives and have had a bearing on their sense of self and community, as their experiential accounts, their everyday thoughts, feelings, emotions and experiences reveal.

As a final point to this section, this notion of the everyday and its significance to my ethnography needs some attention. Consistent with Hage’s stress on the importance of the double gaze, Essed’s concept of everyday racism recognises the interplay between the experiential and structural as felt in everyday life. That is, according to Essed (2002), the notion of the ‘everyday’ refers to a familiar world of practices into and with which we are socialized. Essed (2002: 177) writes:


In our everyday lives sociological distinctions between ‘institutional’ and ‘interactional’, between ideology and discourse, and between ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres of life merge and form a complex of social relations and situations.

The everyday, then, can be understood as that which is ‘systematic, recurrent, and infused into familiar practices’ (Essed 1991: 3); it involves socialized attitudes and behaviour, which link the structural and systemic with routine and mundane interaction. Within what I call the dynamics of becoming African Australian, my methodological approach attends to everyday social practices and interactions along
with the structural complexities in which they are grounded (Hage) or, following Essed, with which they merge in a complex of social relations.

Before advancing further into the methodological implications of my attempts to negotiate and ‘capture’ my encounters with my participants, I would first like to briefly introduce the context within which I met them and the methods adopted in the field. I should note here that it was not specifically attitudes and motivations that I was interested in with interviews or participant observation, but their everyday reality and those forces that shape it. Thus while my fieldwork involved a series of interviews with my participants, an equally rich account of my participants’ lives was gained via the everyday communication that we shared.

4.2 On Methods

Canberra
My primary site for the research has been Canberra, the capital city of Australia, where my participants lived during the majority of the fieldwork between 2005 and 2010. Canberra is and continues to be in every way ‘planned’ to accommodate the seat of parliament, as well as the thousands of public servants that reside in the city. Since Canberra’s inception in 1913 as the country’s administrative capital, the city has continually evolved to accommodate the population that has grown from several thousand to half a million in a century, but suffice to say it has and continues to be a ‘planned city’ (James 2012).

Extending out from the city centre and parliamentary triangle are now four satellite valleys, each of which boasts its own town centre and sense of community. These town centres are home to bus interchanges and skate parks, which serve as the domain of many of the city’s youth in their recreational time; so too the growing quasi-cosmopolitan city centre with its traffic free zones, shopping complexes and burgeoning bars, cafes and restaurants. From the everyday perspective, Canberra is characterised by the slow burn of suburban life and civic participation in annual events, from fun runs to multicultural festivals, and the ongoing cultural life of the city including film festivals, sporting events, academic life, national days, music gigs, and a night-life limited to a small club scene in the city centre.

As with much of Australia, Multiculture in Canberra is a result of the changing composition of immigration policies throughout Australia’s history, from the influx of post WWII Europeans that partook in infrastructure projects such as the Snowy Mountain Hydro Scheme, the thriving diplomatic core, economic migrants and more recently, the increasing population of people with a refugee experience. Yet despite its claim to be multicultural or a cosmopolitan city, the social homogeneity that its
suburban design evoked (Greig 2006: 50) contributes to the city having a reputation of being ‘sterile’. This is partially due to the fact that Canberra has particularly ‘low levels of unemployment and high average levels of education, that skews the 385 000 population towards upper-income households’ (cf. Greig; see also James 2012).

The Participants
Whilst Canberra served as the ethnographic site, I intiated the study in a particular location, at ‘the College’, and in a specific location and time, Canberra 2006-2010 and thereafter, I treated this site as the point of departure for my subjects whom with time and increased resources began following differing trajectories – gap years, studying overseas, urban migration, university, and employment. The tracing of such trajectories relied on an abstract relationship between the participants, their relationships with each other and the community, and with I as the researcher. Before I introduce my participants and provide more detail on these ethnographic encounters I should point out that, prior to the research fieldwork, as a professional teacher, I taught and interacted with all of my participants during their time in the College setting. Thus before I became researcher and thereafter friend I was for all intents and purposes their teacher!

As of a number of actors in this ethnography, I began following the lives of six key informants who completed their secondary education in a public college in the south side of Canberra (hereafter, ‘the College’) between 2004 and 2006. This was a highly progressive college with an international curriculum, renowned in Canberra for its level of academic achievement and the cultural diversity inherent in the school’s student population. To the extent that ethnographic work relies on building trust, rapport with and amongst one’s participants it could be said by virtue of being their teacher and ‘African Australian’ much of the ground-work was already done prior to entering the field. Thus, once my participants completed their secondary studies and my position as their teacher, had for the better part been relinquished, I continued to follow them and their lives.

It is significant that my key respondents – Adham, Amena, Keren, and Talia – were either born, or living in, Australia from a very young age. Talia (Nigerian) and Keren (Dutch-Eritrean) were both born here in the early 1990s, Talia to Nigerian parents who were economic migrants, and Keren to her European mother and Eritrean father who arrived in Australia as a young man in the late seventies. Whilst Adham (French-Nigerian) and Amena (Ghanaian) were not born here, they both arrived in Australia as infants, with their parents who migrated to Australia to further their higher education.
My two other respondents, Jomo (Zimbabwean) and Selam (Eritrean), arrived as the children of diplomats in the early 2000s. All had differing trajectories throughout their childhoods, yet coincided at the College in 2005/2006 at the time the African population in Canberra was becoming more visible and political through its engagement with Canberra’s multicultural community.

**Entering the Field**

The research I undertook in Canberra comprised a number of ethnographic encounters that involved participant observation and in-depth interviews in a number of locales, which included the college, universities, churches, my participants’ homes and a number of public or quasi-public spaces (including cafes, libraries, shopping malls, night clubs, parks, and events).

In the first phase of the study, although I knew all of my participants well from our initial two years together at the College, I spent much of my participant observation and interviews getting to know more about the ethnic origins and global patterns of movement of my participants and their families. I also learnt more about their lives in Australia, their aspirations and fears, as well as how they felt in the everyday Australian culture, or as members of the diasporic community. We would often talk about how they, or their friends, negotiated their being African Australian. As the study continued I became more involved in their personal and social worlds; spending more time with my participants and their friends in the field. As my connections grew I began to weave together the various stories and histories as they overlapped with each other and those of the African community in Canberra. As my time with participants increased so too did my connections and interest in the community. I soon met other members of my participants’ families and found myself spending more time at events such as church, chatting with their parents and attending celebrations such as African Australian day with them. Even after the fieldwork ended, I was invited to their weddings, children’s christenings, and even a pre-deportation celebration cum commiseration!

Over three to four years of the fieldwork I also conducted in-depth interviews with my key informants where we most often talked about the thoughts, feelings and emotions that shaped their lives as well as their relationships, significant changes and influences, and their perceptions of the African Australian community; here in particular I was able to flesh out the observations I had made in the field. The purpose of the periodic interviews, conducted between July 2006 and September 2009, was less to trace through the biographical development of my participants’ lives than to offer opportunities to further explore the questions and points of interest that had arisen as a result of the more informal time spent together. The open ended, in-depth interviews relied on a free flowing conversation based on the
quality of the social interaction between myself and the participants (Denzin 2001). While it was necessary as the researcher to at times initiate the conversation, it was a matter of focussing, rather than forcing, the direction of the interview. Following Minichiello (1995), interviews were based on a recursive model, in which prompt words in my participants’ discourse served as cues for further conversation. Again, direct answers were not necessarily what I was seeking in such conversations, which were often circuitous due to the sensitive nature of some of the topics, including often negative experiences of racialisation and feelings of confusion related to my participants’ sometimes ambivalent identifications.

The in-depth interviews also provided the opportunity to discuss participant generated texts in detail, since I had also found myself communicating with my participants via various media, including though not limited to, mobile phone, text message (sms), email, and social networking sites (e.g. Facebook). The openness of this form of communication supplemented the multi-sited fieldwork and provided opportunity for continual dialogue with participants. Due to the relatively long time span over which the research was conducted, these brief encounters were purposeful in maintaining an ongoing rapport with the participants.

**Presenting**

My presentation of the ethnographic encounters also demands attention. My choice to reconstruct the encounters in the form of conversational exchanges, in some instances, as well as fieldwork narratives and notes in others, represent the way in which I attempt to convey these encounters to bring to light the thinking and experiencing as it occurred in the field. This is to allow the ethnographic moments to retain some of their ‘performativity’. That is, allowing the research to open up in a way to give credence to, and track, as Dewsbury (2010: 332) puts it, those moments when:

> something ‘happens’ that glues us together – moments like the buzz of anticipation in a large gathering, or the heightened sense of attention resulting from a mutually directed gaze, or ‘the sense of shared tension and subsequent relief’.

The aim then is also to give the audience a sense of ‘being there’ and sharing the moment. With this in mind, I employ two different ways of presenting the empirical material. The interview situation uses initials to denote speakers and is presented in a kind of script style, with ellipses denoting pauses; more informal recorded participant observation is presented in a looser prose style. Gestural elements are noted where they seemed significant, again with the hope of giving a fuller sense of the less readily perceptible and more immediate dimensions of the encounter.
While I have sought in this way to convey not just the content, but also the sense of the encounter, of course the theorisation of the moment must follow; such is the remit of academic and ethnographic work. But so too do the ethnographic encounters reveal a life of their own outside of the interpretation that is given to them. So while I offer the ethnography, then, as part of the cultural experience of becoming African Australian, I also imagine it might have some valence as a cultural product in its own right (c.f. Dewsbury 2010). Thus in writing up the ethnography I sought to avoid, to paraphrase Swanton (2010: 2337), collapsing the social processes and performances of African Australianness into the social category it implies, but instead took a heuristic and experimental approach to African Australianness, whilst focusing on how race functioned, and whether it in fact was, or was not, performed in interaction. The aim here it to create an affective tone to the processes and practices of becoming and belonging as African Australian, to provoke new ways to understand multiculture’s affective relations, and race’s passage through social relations and experience.

4.3 Reflexivity

‘I was lookin’ back to see if you were lookin’ back at me
to see me lookin’ back at you’
(3d, Safe From Harm)

Hand in hand with the shifts away from the objectivist claims associated with traditional, single-site ethnography, there has been an increasing recognition of the impact upon the research of the researcher’s own background and, in turn, a sensitivity to his or her investments in the research. This has characteristically been figured as a matter of reflexively positioning oneself in the research in a manner that accounts for one’s gender, class, race, ethnicity, and so on. This positioning is intended to permeate the differing methods adopted by the researcher, such as participant observation, interviewing, even writing. As such the researcher acknowledges their cultural and social historical position within the cultural group that they are studying and lays bare, so to speak, where they stand. For others, this acknowledgement of self allows the researcher, to both look outside of themselves and reflect within themselves and, in a somewhat empathetic manner, they are able to position themselves with the ‘other’ as ‘other’. As Marcus (1995: 112) puts it:

In contemporary multi-sited research projects moving between public and private spheres of activity, from official to subaltern contexts, the ethnographer is bound to encounter discourses that overlap with his or her own. In any contemporary field of work, there are always others within, who
know (or want to know), what the ethnographer knows, albeit from a different subject position, or who want to know what the ethnographer wants to know. Such ambivalent identifications, or perceived identifications, immediately locate the ethnographer within the terrain being mapped and reconfigure any kind of methodological discussion that presumes a perspective from above or "nowhere."

While Marcus (1995) describes a reflexive approach ‘as the most powerfully defined dimension of method, serving to displace or recontextualise single site ethnography’ its application has varied. Early reflexive discourse, aimed to challenge the naïve objectivism of ethnographic approaches by insisting on a reflexive transparency on the part of the researcher. On this, Sandra Harding’s (1987: 9) discussion of ‘the best feminist analysis’ is instructive:

The best feminist analysis... insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed on the same critical plane as the overt subject matter... That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint... We need to avoid the 'objectivist' stance that attempts to make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible while simultaneously skewering the research objects beliefs and practices on the display board (cited in Cheryholmes 1993: 9).

The implication of Harding’s discourse is that, if we could sufficiently reflexively ‘position’ ourselves in the research on the same ‘plane’ as our participants, then we would effectively overcome the limits of our own experience as it affects the research, affecting too how the researcher reports the experiences of the research subjects. Gow’s (2002) reflection on his ethnographic study of an East African refugee community in Melbourne illustrates this point well. Gow emphasises that ethnographers are not always free from the politics of the community they are studying, and must be reflexive about their practice if they are going to avoid an objectivist, universalising position in their research. Gow (2002) writes:

I was invited to meet with Temam by their chairperson of the Melbourne OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) branch. Unbeknown to me at the time, the purpose of the visit was to put a challenge to me...they know about your research and want to find out when you are going to stand with us in the struggle...or whether you are just interested in research. They want you to participate in our struggle (23).

In attempts to determine and deconstruct his role as advocate, researcher and
community member, Gow continually confronted his political affiliations with the Oromo and the complex endeavour of representation through a reflexive positioning, asking - How, for whom, for what, and to whom? (23). While Gow’s takes a self-reflexive positioning in negotiating the risk that his own positionality brings to the ethnographic inquiry, some critics have raised questions over the extent to which such strategic positionality is able to share the same historical struggles as the research participants. Douglas Foley (2002: 473), for his part, attempts to inject a degree of ‘emancipatory intent’ into notions of reflexivity when he advocates for ‘incorporating more feminist, postmodern, and autoethnographic practices’ into ethnography. This demands, says Foley (2002: 474), that ethnographies are:

...a blend of autobiography and ethnography and aim to undermine grandiose authorial claims of speaking in a rational, value free, objective, universalizing voice. From this perspective, the author is a living, contradictory, vulnerable, evolving multiple self, who speaks in a partial, subjective, culture-bound voice.

Foley (2002: 475) pushes us on this point to consider the need within the autoethnographic field for a more situated and embodied way of knowing, which produces an analysis ‘rooted in the solidarity and sensibility that cultural and class struggles often produce’. In contradistinction to Harding, the suggestion here is that the researcher needs to go beyond merely acknowledging one’s situatedness. As such, it is ethnographers of colour, Foley argues, that will challenge:

...white middle-class autoethnographers (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2001) that tend to valorize generalized notions of emotion, intuition, and aesthetics as their ground of knowing rather than their historical experiences with economic, cultural, racial, and gender struggles.

In Foley’s reflexive approach the ethnographer, then, must have a ‘willingness to utilize introspection, intuition, and personal memories’ (474), and in doing so conjoin abstract theoretical constructs with everyday language and experience. On this, however, Norman Denzin (2003: 270) in advocating for autoethnography makes the pertinent methodological point, that the researcher needs to be more than just critically reflexive, they also need to be ‘committed to producing and performing texts that are grounded in and coconstructed in the politically and personally problematic worlds of everyday life.’ Indeed, as Bishop (1998: 207) suggests, ‘...to develop new lines of action, new stories, and new narratives in a collaborative effort (cited in Denzin 2003).’ These debates over the role of reflexivity require then, that the ethnographer attempt to assail themselves of all manner of objectivism and
position themselves within the research project. In doing so they must inquire within the ethnographic narrative the play of structures that shape and produce the ‘violence’ in question, the historical moment that produces it, and so too, give attention to the play of power and ideology (Denzin 2003: 239). While Denzin evokes the motto from feminist social theory, ‘the personal is political’, we would do well however, to explore further how to ethnographically probe, beyond the reflexive representations, for the sensitivities that bind, and are between, the researcher and participants.

Writing from a human geography perspective, David Butz (2010), touches on such an approach. ‘Autoethnographic sensibility’ for Butz, much like the approaches discussed above, involves the critical reflexivity to be able, through various guises attach the ‘self’ to the culture being studied; or as Reed-Danahay (1997: 9) puts it placing the self in a social context (cited in Butz 2010: 138). Butz (2010) pushes however, for the ethnographer to enact a type of sensitisation to the social setting through their own imbrication into the self-representations that they receive from research subjects as well as their own situatedness to the people and world being studied (141). ‘[W]hat we learn from research subjects about their experiences, emotions and opinions’, Butz (2010) says, ‘should be understood as sincere self-constructions that are produced in the micro social context of the research interaction’ (152). While Butz does not explicitly discuss the matter, he hints at the necessity to appreciate that the subject is not predetermined prior to the ethnographic encounter. Ethnographers then need also to be aware then that the field is ‘between ourselves and the people we research’.

4.4 A Turn Towards the Impersonal

In fostering a methodological approach in which the researcher reflexively wrestles with the problematic world of the personal and political, they must then, be sensitive to the problems of over-identification and emotional attachment to the subject. This ethnography, for example, is situated in the town in which I was ‘born and bred’, navigating the same schools I attended, and attending to the same complexities related to identity and belonging that I reflected upon as a youth. It is to be expected that taking on such a task would be riddled with the risk that I become not only politically or personally involved, but so too ‘emotionally’ in the field.

This risk, then, that the ethnographer becomes ‘emotional’ due to their complex interpenetration with those they are researching, warrants discussion. Hage (2009), for example, in chronicling his fieldwork with among Lebanese Shi’a in South Lebanon and in the diaspora, reflects on the complexity of emotion in the field. As an
emotional participant Hage suggests, he was able to get closer to people on a one-to-one basis, as it created a common ground for personal interaction. It also gave him ‘a participatory access to the mood that prevailed among them [his participants] collectively (71).’ In scrutinizing the sharing of ‘political emotions’ with, and amongst, informants Hage identifies, however, a particularly complex set of emotions that are specific to ethnographic practice, what he calls ‘ethnographic vacillation’. In simple terms, vacillation is the friction that arises between being analytically, emotionally and politically involved as the ethnographer, and having some sense of belonging to the culture being studied. This says Hage (cf.) opens the researcher to a complex and contradictory space of ‘self-constitution’, where the very viability of the self is always at stake. I use a brief note from my ethnographic journal, here, as an attempt to grasp at the complexities of ethnographic vacillation:

Upon reading Hage’s article ‘Hating Israel in the Field’ a memory of writing an article for publication over Christmas New Year 2011-12 surfaced. I was writing an article for the proceedings of a symposium I attended at the University of Sydney earlier in the year. Based on my fieldwork, and the theorising of Sara Ahmed and Paul Gilroy, I was wrestling with how best to articulate the fear and hate that seeped into my participants’ sense of self, when faced with what I described as macropolitical forces that sought to racialise African youth, and constrain the community’s attempts to forge a sense of collective belonging. In the midst of a passage I paused to gaze out the window and collect my thoughts, as I struggled with the complex and multilayered feelings that were sifting there. I suddenly noticed that there were tears rolling down my face. Whilst I was aware of the complexity of the task I was undertaking, in thinking and theorizing on race and how it affects young people, it was at this distinct moment that the complex interpenetration between the [auto]ethnographer and the field came discreetly to the fore.

Following Hage’s theory of political emotions, it could be said that as much as I was the ethnographer, I was now also a participant, at least emotionally, and ipso facto, politically. The series of events – the gaze, the pause, the perplication of race, tears, and the momentary delay before I registered the sensation on the skin, and then a rush of emotion – all reflect a moment of ‘self-constitution’ that is somewhere, as Hage theorises it, between the personal and the political. While I did not ‘look back’ for long at the precise source of the emotion, not then at least, I was aware of some sense of struggle that at some level I shared with my participants. This emotional identification foregrounds ‘ethnographic vacillation’ as an emotional state, that derives from being both a participant and an observer in ethnographic research. Vacillation, then, as Hage (2009: 77) writes
...is not just a movement between various states of being; rather, it is a state of being in itself. This is why it captures the state of being that is produced by the ethnographic navigation between the analytical and the participatory so well.

Certainly, then, vacillation takes us away from merely attempting to personally ‘position’ the researcher in the field, to a co-constitution of the experience with them at a socio-emotional level. While Hage’s theorising pushes further this notion of co-constitution of the relation between say, the researcher and research subject, further than Denzin or Butz have, I would like to push further how might we emphasise then, not the research subject(s) but the subjective relation between them. With an eye to the limitations of identification and the more personal politics of representation, and possibly too, emotion, I turn briefly to consider how we may as researchers remain open then to the less readily perceptible, performative and affective dimensions of social experience; those that are difficult to identify but can be collectively felt.

Massumi has warned that (2002c) if we over rely on the system or our ‘positionality’ then what happens to the body’s ability to sense? Linking our bodies, and indeed experience, to a predetermined grid of say intersectionality, or what Massumi alludes to as, a ‘geography of culture’, ‘may only serve to temper the universalizing tendencies of ideology’. How then does the researcher reflexively or emotionally position themselves within a social field, if the very positioning they attempt as a means to ‘establish’ themselves reflexively in the research, may also risk reproducing those ideologies they seek to critique or resist? Taking theorising on ethnographic vacillation as my point of departure, then, I question how we can move beyond the impasse between the personal and the political. To politicize the impersonal, so to speak, and to supplant notions of power and ideology based in culture. This signals a shift to better understand how the performative, in terms of the socio-affective spaces that we inhabit, also play a role in our ethnographic endeavours.

Until now, the politics and the performative within this methodology have been heavily invested in the personal politics of representation, discourse, identity and the reflexivity of the ethnographer to address the critical issues of race. Yet adopting an impersonal approach may also help us to appreciate how racialised or ethnicised relations between bodies are reproduced in these ethnographic encounters. If we are able to however, also maintain an element of an impersonal politics to our research endeavours and the encounters between bodies, we may better be able to engage with the ‘visceral way in which affects seep into the lives of young people as a means to foster a sense of self-determination and belonging less contingent on a
priori knowledge, power and positionality. The question here is how we may better grasp in our research endeavours, from the field to writing, an affective lens? How do we best capture those affective forces that precede their expression in social encounters?

Methodologically, then, the gesture required is to let representation, identity, and emotion, recede to the background in so far as we can, to allow the ‘tone’ to the situation transform the ethnographic encounter. This is not to suggest that the researcher has to surrender themselves to the mercy of structural forces beyond thier conscious perception, rather what is important in this approach, is that our cultural identities, or racial identities for that matter, are produced in the ethnographic encounter itself rather than predetermining the event on fixed positionality. Nayak (2006: 426) writes:

The discursive and embodied signification of race is forever incoherent and can only approximate this identity through socially recognizable signs, symbols and motifs. In this reading race is something that we ‘do’ rather than who we are, it is a performance that can only ever give illusion to the reality it purports. Significantly, there is no racial subject that prefigures ethnographic interaction.

My own strategy, then, for the better part, rested with perplicating race into the ethnography. So, as I discussed earlier, my own experience of race, as it folded into my sense of self and social world, is brought to life with the participants through the research process itself. In many ways my body is already witness to the empirical evidence of race which now enters in into the research encounters as my own body, memories of association and discursive representations are already imbued with it. Here race is co-constituted and traced with my participants in the field, through each of the dynamics of becoming, via language, embodiment, and sensation. So while it was not always necessarily a direct, or strategic, intention, I allowed my own racialisation, at times, to be the medium through which ideas would unfold, or to play out the tension with multiculture, belonging, and becoming African Australian. This perplication extends to the writing.

The research also evolved, through a number of places, relations, and social and embodied practices that included those more visceral and open moments in the field – pauses, gestures, praying, dancing or just ‘saying nothing’ – that could be interpreted as various performances of ‘African Australianess’. So too did the material connections of skin, clothes, cars, houses, even accents (Swanton 2010: 2337), all play a role, either on the fly, or in the moment, of the ethnographic experience. For it is through these felt connections, that add another layer to the ethnographic account that as researchers, we can trace the materialisation of race
from immanence to emergence.

I am however, in picking up on these various tenets of ethnographic practice and in impersonalising the political, working towards new injunctions and new methods through which we treat the ethnography as a moment of becoming, as Nayak (2010: 2373) has said, in its unfolding. So as much as race, emotion, ideology may fold into an ethnographic encounter so must they be allowed to unfold. As Nayak (2010: 2372) writes:

the people and places depicted cannot be reduced to ‘still life’, framed by a neat beginning and end imposed by the researcher, but are part of a continuous composition in the making.

My argument, then, is that we need not dismiss our reflexivity, but rather we need to understand these reflexive and indeterminate processes, not as a matter of making transparent the knower’s position and investments, but as a process of me, looking back at you, looking back at me.

My research involves the study of the way in which race is problematised amongst African Australian youth as they experience, and participate in, the emergence of the African Australian community in Australia. I focus on the everyday encounters, relations, and vicissitudes of experience that constitute multicultural life, as well as using the ethnographic double gaze (Hage 2005) to capture the diasporic and macro-global structures with which the everyday inevitable inflects. In attending to this interaction, I look to, as Marcus (1995) suggests, attend to the macropolitical context in so far as it affects my participants’ sense, of self and shared sensibility.

On this it is also the researcher’s reflexivity that I have highlighted as vital to ethnography in attempting to provide a picture of social reality as portrayed to me through the various methods adopted in the field. Here I think primarily of in depth interviewing and participant observation but also those more ‘impersonal’ approaches to ethnography. Reflexivity is mostly understood as I have analysed it, as a means to locate the researcher with the social-political context of the research work, to not only account for the their political or personal ‘positionality’ as the early discourses on ethnography would have it. But so too via the work of Butz (2008) and indeed Hage (2009) I have sought to indicate how a more autoethnographic sensibility or emotional vacillation can reveal more about the co-construction of the research encounter and hence, ‘knowledge production’, on the ground and in the moment.
To push the politicisation of the field further I bring into the methodological discussion, a reflection on how bodily changes and transformations that fly under the radar of conscious scrutiny (Sharp 2011: 14) provide an equally rich resource for the ethnographer to account for the way bodies come together politically. Thinking of politics as impersonal is a means for the researcher to remain open to the ethnographic encounter and in a sense, probe for forces that resides in neither subject nor object, but in the social relation itself. Thus if we allow race to recede to the background and allow, as I mentioned earlier, those gestures, pauses, surges in emotion, even just being there to take shape in the ethnography, then much of what cannot be represented can also shape the ethnographic encounter. By paying attention to the minutiae of the moment and the actualization of the potentialities that exist in each encounter we are able to locate (or perhaps write into being) enabling relationships beyond the identifications, representations and perhaps even emotions, those forces, tendencies, agitations that are prevalent in social experience.

So while my empirical focus, then, in the thesis, is on young people’s reflexive and embodied sense of self-difference, the discursive representations and gestures they produce, and the felt sensibilities they perform or desire, my intention is to show three things. First is how these performances are entangled with my participants’ racialisation as well as mine as the researcher. I also attend to the macropolitical context in so far as it affects the social field, and may alter the way in which performances of difference are shaped and enacted. And finally, given that I argue that multiculture is already and always going on, there is also a more micropolitical element to the study. While empirically difficult to capture, this aspect is vital to demonstrate how the performances of becoming African Australian may capture the social practices that co-constitute the immanent sociality as it emerges. This does not refute or ignore the fact that race does indeed surface in and through such ethnographic encounters, but we can account for it differently.
5 REFLEXIVE NEGOTIATION OF DIFFERENCE: THE EPIDERMAL REFLEX

So in primary school I was the only black person, apart from when my brother was there; we were the only blacks in the school. And sometimes it didn’t feel quite… you know, I guess it felt really weird.

You say weird, what was weird about it?

I guess you would really know it when you get the class photos and you are the ONLY black person, and then we get the massive year 7 picture and there is ONE black person and it’s like, ‘heh that’s me!’… And I remember something that I never forget and it obviously affected me… It was like Year 7, but this little girl comes up to me and asks “Why are your lips so big? Why are your eyes so round?” And then I remember one day I… I had been to the shopping centre… and this little kid was so innocent and she says “mummy, why hasn’t that girl had a shower?” It’s like, ohhh, is that what people think? And it is like, that is when you start thinking about it. What does this mean? Do people just not understand? Even the whole boyfriend thing, I use to think… I’m black and they are not going to come near me, sort of thing.

In his seminal text, *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon (1967a) shows how our bodies, or better yet, our bodily schemas, provide us with an embodied orientation to the world. Fanon’s theorising on the body schema has shaped much contemporary understanding of the phenomenology of race, in that Fanon claims the very corporeality of the body through which we live experience is reducible to a racial epidermal schema, that stems from the colour of skin. So pervasive is the racial epidermal schema, according to Fanon, that it has the ability to quickly become the lens through which a racialised subject will habitually navigate social experience.

In reflecting on the phenomenon of what he calls the ‘burden of the corporeal malediction’, Fanon (1967a) famously recounts his own experience, a quintessentially racialised encounter with a young white boy. Fanon describes how this encounter and the boy’s utterances (“look, a Negro”, “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!”), forces him to negate his own bodily schema and sense of self, in light of the racial historicity of ‘the negro’. As Fanon (1967a: 112) states, ‘…assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema.’ A number of scholars (Bloul 2013, Ahmed 2004a, Saldanha 2006) have used Fanon’s descriptions to theorise the means by which race differentiates bodies, and
for the racialised subject, becomes that which replaces their embodied orientation to the world.

Following on from these works, I look here to outline how what I call an ‘epidermal reflex’ is integral to the manner in which my participants engage with race and the emotional, embodied and conscious sense of difference it evokes. Talia’s description of her early encounters with her racialisation provides an entry point to understanding this process. Her memories of the class photo, in which she sees herself as the only black person, could be considered innocuous, yet they provide a sense of this reflex. Between the realisation that she is the “only black person in the class” and “heh, that’s me!”, something happens. It is this fleeting opening between the perception of self and the reflexive surging forth of one’s racialisation that I designate by the term “epidermal reflex.” A momentary sense of her difference triggers a ‘reflexion’ for Talia that leads to other memories, other moments in which she is somehow forced to negotiate her alterity, and with it the very negation of her bodily schema.

In speaking of the epidermal reflex, my intention is to evoke a double sense of reflex. The epidermal reflex is that which is, in the first instance, involuntary; like a hammer on a knee, the epidermal reflex is autonomic and immediate. Secondarily, in a moment that is, for the racialised, so interconnected as to be poorly captured by the language of temporal sequence, the epidermal reflex produces a reflexive subject who, as the precise meaning of reflexive suggests, makes an object of itself (“heh, that’s me!”). Importantly, this second sense of the reflex may not yet have the character of a fully conscious reflection, but is itself a somewhat involuntary process of self-objectification.

5.1 Why are your lips so big?

We can consider the operation of the epidermal reflex in the cited interview material from two perspectives: first, Talia’s racialisation is no more than a mere reflex of experience in a racialised society and, second, it is the instantaneous reflexivity through which she perceives herself as black. It is the autonomy of this epidermal reflex that needs to be grasped, insofar as the significance of this moment is lost if what follows from it is allowed to dominate the analysis. For this epidermal reflex constitutes a microperceptual change, which rapidly leads to a chain of more readily perceptible, because more conscious, associations and perceptions. Talia flits from the reflex response that she has to her image in the school photo to further memories of her racialisation, “lips so big... eyes so round”; memories that as Talia comments, “obviously affected me.” She moves to another memory of another brief interaction in which she is ‘left hanging’ in the encounter, as she experiences a
sudden sense of wretchedness and abjection from her own body in its blackness ("ohhh, is that what people think") and from there to a further, more deliberate, reflection ("and it is like, that is when you start thinking about it. What does this mean? Do people just not understand?"). Further still, her reflection turns to an inflection toward the future: “Even the whole boyfriend thing, I used to think – I’m black and they are not going to come near me, sort of thing.”

Talia’s utterances exemplify the manner in which a sense of self is produced through an internalised history of associations triggered by the epidermal reflex. Such a reflex brings into being an embodied sense of difference, and with it, I suggest, various memories, emotions, representations, and even language and identities, to which the subject may attach. We could consider this a form of emerging consciousness, as one in which a momentary epistemological break occurs with the dominant culture. It is, as I argue in Chapter 8, the often inchoate fear that this epistemological break creates, that may eventually manifest in a fear of becoming a perpetual outsider Gilroy (2005b); in turn this fear governs much of the experience of race. For the moment, it is an emerging body-consciousness that I am concerned to explore. As Merleau-Ponty (1962: 93) describes it, it is as if the body catches itself from the outside, ‘it tries to touch itself while being touched, and initiates ‘a kind of reflection’ which is sufficient to distinguish it from objects.’

Thomas Fuchs’ (2012) work is instructive here in explaining the way in which race may determine social experience in intercorporeal encounters. Fuchs (2012: 14) states:

As soon as we get in contact with another person, our bodies interact and cause subtle sensations in each other. Our bodies understand each other, even though we cannot say exactly how this is brought about. These non-verbal interactions are to such a large extent determined by earlier experience that we may speak of an intercorporeal memory, which is implicitly, and unconsciously, present in every encounter.

In line with Fuchs’ argument that we develop an intercorporeal memory, I would stress that the racialised subject’s memories of their own racialisation are not necessarily conscious. Repetitive interactions and encounters with others have a tendency, as it were, to ‘stay in the body’. In terms not inconsistent with Fuchs’, Ahmed’s (2004b) phenomenological explorations of racialised experience describe the process through which, as we interact with others, within the stirrings of our bodies, our perceptions of difference are at play, taking effect in every encounter and creating emotional and embodied responses. These stirrings are the result of
past impressions, traces or histories, left on a body from racialised encounters, which then permeate into what Fuchs (2012) calls our ‘intercorporeal memory.’

In Chapter 3 I argued that we are indeed marked by race’s materiality. I suggested that we are already conditioned by race as it forms part of our memories of association and sense perception. It is these racialised memories that eventually permeate into the conscious perception of self, triggered by what I have called the epidermal reflex, a bodily reflex through which surfaces the conscious realisation of one’s racialisation. My point here is that, whether or not it reaches the threshold of conscious awareness, the experience of the epidermal reflex leaves a trace of race, marking encounters as racialised encounters. It is through theorising this epidermal reflex that I seek to bring to light the latent potential that exists in a racist society for African youth to be racialised and constituted as ‘other’. I am interested in how such a reflex, and the subsequent reflections that it can induce, may integrate into the subject’s social representation of the self. My aim, then, in the chapters that follow is to deploy this notion of the epidermal reflex as a point of orientation, to work through how my participants take up various identifications in their becoming African Australian, based on their experiences of race. I seek to show the subtle ways in which, by virtue of being black, African youth are ‘forced’ to negotiate their belonging on different terms to other non-racialised youth.

In earlier chapters I outlined several dynamics that characterise the process of becoming African Australian: reflexive negotiations of difference, political collectivism, and forced homogenisation. It is the first of these dynamics, reflexive negotiation of difference that I have begun to theorise in this chapter. As I will go on to show, the identifications that organise everyday life arise through the tenuous, yet material, link between the epidermal reflex through which my participants sense their difference, their more conscious perception of their difference, and the simultaneous and subsequent forms and representations that are ascribed to them or with which they affiliate, based on their sense of a black subjectivity. As I argue in Chapter 7, the phenomenological experience of the epidermal reflex does not necessarily lead to ascriptive or indeed affiliative identities. That is to say, the ontological coupling of the experience of the epidermal reflex and the production of racialised representations and identities is not a matter of necessity, although much theorisation of race has assumed it to be so. It is precisely because it is tenuous that the experience of the racialised is never fully determined in racial terms. For the moment, however, what is important is the manner in which race perplicates in our encounters to form habit, and to this end I return to Talia’s experience from the opening transcript.
Talia’s efforts to describe key moments in the conscious realisation of her difference bring us closer to an understanding of how African youth may struggle with their sense of self, when living in a society in which being black is associated with uncleanliness (“Mummy, why hasn’t that girl had a shower?”). It is in such a context that we can also appreciate how race creates unconscious but potentially disabling habits and dispositions of the body. It is not simply a matter of wrestling with, as Talia puts it in reflecting on her racialisation, the question of “what does this mean?” Rather, it is a matter of understanding how her self-abjection and the momentary trauma, which stem from her racialisation, also integrate into how she, habitually and reflexively, navigates her conscious world. Borrowing from Rachel Bloul (2013), we could say that, so integrated into her corporeal schema can such shock become – “do people just not understand?” – that she must continually wrestle with the trauma of the encounter. One’s perception of self, as Talia’s encounter suggests, can at its most extreme result in dislocation, objectification, amputation; the subject may become an anonymous black being, perceived only as the essence of blackness as conceived by a racist society (Bloul 2013: 522).

In examining the work of Fanon, Bloul (2013) suggests that these racialisation processes, and indeed racism, can produce a sense of bodily abjection, which may become habituated. It is the shock or trauma, of, in Talia’s example, the initial encounter with her racialisation and subtle racism, which has the potential to reproduce itself in future encounters, whether it is brought consciously to mind or not. Bloul (2013: 523) writes, it is ‘not simply the soul scorching representations of bodies, but also the habituated corporeal exchanges which always-already reproduce racialised abjection. Each corporeal exchange reiterates the original trauma.’ So, the consciousness that one develops of oneself as African Australian may also be tied up with the reproduction of habitual ways of encountering the self and others. The problem that I seek to contend with, then, with the epidermal reflex, is that as it folds into one’s memories of association it may present as a reflexive spiral, a racialising loop from which the subject, as racialised other, is unable to emerge. Here the perplication of race becomes caught up within a racialisation loop, in which race becomes the ground of experience and the other potentials of the encounter are diminished. It is, as Saldanha (2010: 2412) argues, through these memories, that:

the epidermal schema has the potential to replace the body image a human being creates for himself or herself through a very superficial and simplistic essentialism – skin tells worth.

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15 There is also valuable work to be done in understanding the capacity of young children involved these encounters (see Taylor 2013).
So as Talia struggles to understand her interactions with others and her sense of self, the malediction begins to work its way into her conscious reflection: ‘I’m black and they are not going to come near me...’. Her utterance brings to mind Fanon’s (1967a: 116) notion that ‘I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the ‘idea’ that others have of me, but of my own appearance’. Is Talia now to be the slave to her own reflexive consciousness, predicated and perplicated by race? On this note, as mentioned in my introduction to the thesis, Gail Weiss (1999) states that, to a large degree, it is the memories, habits and horizons that give a body an ‘active agency’. My concern then, is how one’s phenomenological experience of the racialised encounter can influence the capacity to form future relations. And, in turn, how through reflexive habit, certain representations, styles of life, vernaculars or practices become habituated into ways of encountering others as a means to determine one as belonging, or not belonging, in this or that group.

The notion that, as Saldanha puts it, ‘skin tells worth’, relies on confluences of meaning to keep power relations in place. That is, power relations that produce race are only actualised in encounters through our response to the associations that such an event triggers. ‘Racist prejudice and exclusion,’ Saldanha (2010: 2414) reminds us, ‘arise out of what bodies themselves do, time and again, with an institutional agency behind them.’ However, Saldanha also insists that there is always the ‘possibility of disavowing’ the conditioning provided by race as an institution. This is to say that racial encounters are not by necessity, nor ever fully, pre-determined, even in such overt racialisations as Talia’s – round eyes, big lips, and blackness. It is our response to an encounter, in other words, and the action of our bodies that may open up opportunities for forming new bodily memories, habits and associations. This point will be explored further in Chapter 7; what is important for the moment is our response to the trace that racialisation leaves in our bodily schema.

In the chapters that follow I look to situate those associations and appropriations that young people make in a contemporary multicultural context. The interview material here will highlight how the consciousness that my participants develop of themselves as African Australian is otherwise engaged with the habitual reproduction and negation of difference, as produced by their racialisation. What I seek to emphasize is how black African youth growing up in a racialised society must negotiate an emergent sense of self and community, which is underscored by a particular desire to better know and understand ‘race’, as it is inscribed on bodies. In this instance, the racialisation of my research subjects generates questions surrounding their ‘belonging’, and in turn leads them to seek a subject position – ‘Black’, ‘black African’, ‘African Australian’, and so forth. It is through analysing the encounters and experiences relayed to me by my participants and my observations in the field, then, that I will illustrate how young people seeking a subject position
‘style’ themselves, within a multicultural context, as a form of self-determination that mitigates their racialisation.

In picking up once again on the notion of an everyday multiculture, I suggest that it is within such a social field that youth are provided the opportunity to perform and appropriate particular ‘perceptions’ of what it means to be black or African and to use these to initiate their own political sensibility and cultural expressions of becoming African Australian. We can consider this manoeuvre on several fronts. First, it could be perceived as a conscious and strategic move away from subsisting solely within and as part of the dominant culture, and as Gilroy (2005b: 5) argues, away from hegemonic notions of identity and belonging, which are too easily naturalised as an exclusively national phenomenon. Second, appropriations of ascriptive or affiliative identifications could also be seen as a form of resistance to the very marginalisation that I have argued (in Chapters 2 and 3) racialisation may cause in a racialised society. Lastly, and most crucially, is that these often temporary identifications also offer a way to explore, for my participants, the collective becoming of the African Australian community and their sense of belonging therein.

In the section below I explore the various responses that locally born participants Talia and Adham, amongst others, have adapted to the emerging consciousness of their ‘blackness’. Integral to this is a discussion of the ascriptive identifications that my participants adopt as a means to belong to their social milieu, stemming primarily from the larger diasporic formation known as the black Atlantic. I argue for the importance of cultivating more nuanced negotiations of difference, beyond the kind of mimetic popular culture emerging in Australia. I finish with a brief look at how these various ascriptive modes through which race is employed, may augment or diminish our capacity to form an open and embodied, and to an extent self-determined, sense of community as African Australian.

5.2 Being Black: ascriptive negotiations of difference

The idea that my participants consciously and unconsciously reproduced ascriptive identifications in response to their perception of self-difference became apparent soon after initiating the fieldwork observations and the first round of interviews. It appeared that my participants’, and indeed their peers’, knowledge of Africa and African people was limited to basic knowledge of the black Atlantic world with its inception in slavery, emancipation and subsequent civil rights movements, up to and including the popular cultural images of African Americans today; figures that are easily assimilated by youth – comedians, athletes, entertainers and so on. As the
transcripts upon which I base this chapter illustrate, through appropriating the popular cultural expressions that stem from the diasporic formation known as the ‘Black Atlantic’, these ascriptive identifications were a means through which my participants were able to explore an emerging black consciousness. While these practices were seen as a means to work against the racialised stereotypes, paradoxically they also reflected the popular cultural depictions of blacks that were ascribed to my participants by their peers. Non-African youth actively ascribed a predetermined racial character or cultural disposition to black youth, based on these associations with the popular cultural perceptions of ‘blackness.’

Such identifications appeared as a means by which my participants were simply able to ‘fit in’ to their own social milieu and provide them with what Giddens (1990) refers to as ‘ontological security’; that is, the confidence or trust we have in the world around us, both in terms of the things and the people with which we share our lives, which, as Noble (2005) notes, provide a perception of stability and continuity to our identity and sense of belonging. As Noble also notes, this trust is more sensual and affective than it is cognitive, grounded in the routines and spaces of daily existence (113). In the attempt to counter the ‘radical ontological insecurity’ (Bloul 2013) that may pervade personal and collective relations in light of racist trauma and everyday incivilities, there is value, and possibly necessity, in African youth appropriating versions of ‘blackness’ from the Atlantic world. Yet, my concern is whether this ascriptive identity that is ‘on offer’, stemming from the black Atlantic diasporic culture, might also constrain the emergent African Australian forms of personal and political belonging. In particular, the Americanisation of blackness has occurred in an environment that is, socially, politically and historically distinct from the environment in which we now find ourselves here in Australia, though it may also serve as a potent source of ‘race’ based identity.

The reliance on an ascriptive identity may thus create a ‘spatial and temporal’ diasporic disjuncture (Ang 2001), which may prevent youth achieving social autonomy. This is particularly the case when such ascriptions reproduce dominant racial codes appropriated and adapted from black America into practices here in Australia. Exchanges with my participants Ahmed and Talia were particularly instructive in this regard, highlighting how these popular cultural representations of blackness may be underwritten by existing racial discourse. Their narratives concerning their ‘ethnicity’ form the empirical basis of my attempts to evince their feelings over whether such subtle forms of racialisation seep into their interactions and self-perception.

It was summer 2007 when, through a chance encounter, I bumped into Adham at a local café in the city centre. I remembered him straight away, despite his changed
appearance, as Adham was one of the first ‘African’ students I taught at the College since I began teaching there in 2001. It was several years since I had seen him, and he had changed significantly from, as one of my other participants, Selam, once described him, “the little nerdy guy”. Now standing at over six feet tall, Adham had grown from a quietly confident adolescent to a young man. Although his facial features remained much the same, Adham now looked several years older than he actually was and appeared much more aloof than I had remembered him being several years earlier at school. Over time, with our increasing meetings, it became apparent to me that he regularly dressed in loose fitting jeans, hoodies, and with a set of headphones permanently around his neck. This new style – the aloofness, the dress code, even the music emitting from his headphones – I assumed at the time was a style he had appropriated from African American hip-hop. My first impressions were that his vernacular had also changed significantly from that of the “little nerdy guy” I encountered during school. As a college student, Adham had aimed to do actuarial studies at university and took pride in his thinking, debating, and cosmopolitan perspective on the world. Now, however, Adham’s still somewhat intellectual air was punctuated with popular cultural references, jargon and humour. This surprised me. I also noticed, especially during our interviews, that Adham had certain gestures and bodily movements, which reminded me of many of the ‘African’ men I had spent time with as a youth, living on and travelling through the Continent – an expression or look on his face, slapping his hand on his thigh to accentuate a point that he was making, or deflecting questions with charm and humour. These were gestures of Adham’s that I hadn’t noticed when he was a student at college, and I assumed they were learned from his father.

Whether Adham himself had noticed the changes to his demeanour I was not sure. In our first interview later that year, after our chance encounter at the local café, I asked him when and how the humour, music and characteristics of African Americans had influenced him. He wasn’t sure:

All I remember, when I went back to Asia to visit my mum, the first time in a couple of years, she was like really surprised...she was like “wow, you’ve really taken a lot from the hip hop culture.” I didn’t realise, I just don’t really notice it, maybe that’s because {laughs}.... I don’t know... I had no idea!

Watching and listening to Adham’s relaxed approach to the matter – his not knowing what led him to change his style – I began to question whether he saw himself as racialised, or if ‘race’ ever concerned him in his everyday experiences. My immediate assumption was that his appropriation was a racial one, yet we had discussed his experiences with race or racism on several occasions and Adham had impressed upon me that there was an absence of any experiences of racialisation during his
schooling. Given my awareness of the way that the perplication of race impressed itself on my own experience, I was anxious to take Adham’s self-understanding on its own terms; what, precisely, was the nature of this conversation we were having about race? I was perplexed and unsure whether, as was the case at school, Adham was testing my ability to engage and debate such matters with him. I knew Adham had grown up in a similar neighbourhood to me and attended similar schools (although we were a decade or so apart) where racism, and being racialised, were integral to my experience as a youth. Keren, Talia and Amena (who, like Adham, all grew up in Australia) had also described racialisation, stereotyping or exoticisation as central to their encounters with race at school and all, for the better part, saw Australia as a racialised society.

It was not until during the same interview in late 2007 that Adham alluded to the possibility of a racist society through a reference to the Klu Klux Klan. As the following extract suggests, he was certainly familiar with the extreme forms of racism emanating out of America that he coded into his everyday language:

K ... my mother was very aware that racial issues could always arise when I was a child. Was it a concern for your parents with you? I mean if they have lived in places like Brazil, which is totally — coloured, black, white, red — I mean you name it; they must have encountered some form of racism.

A Hmm...  

K Ok, do you agree at least that Australia has some sort of reputation for racial issues?...

A Yeah, well, like I think it’s probably where it is more kind of rural. But not really Canberra, this is where all the embassies are, it is a very multicultural city.

K So if you move out of Canberra, just across the border to Queanbeyan?¹⁶ ... [laughter]

A Yep, well in Queanbeyan there we ‘might have a problem’. That’s where things are black and white! It’s like the KKK in Queanbeyan... Yeah, Queanbeyan’s a very backward society

It was not until sometime later in winter 2008, when Adham and I met for a coffee at a local café, that I was better able to understand the way in which Adham dealt with matters of ‘race’. It was a year since our first interview. I gave him some time to look at the interview transcript and make any corrections for me. He chuckled every so often as he read through it, correcting me on any errors with names or times. After

¹⁶Queanbeyan is a small regional town that sits adjacent to Canberra in the state of New South Wales.
some small talk, we ordered coffee and the conversation soon segued into discussing Adham’s time at college, university and the ‘cats’ he now spent time with.

K Are any of the friends you hanging out with now, African?
A Nah man, not anymore. I mean like I have a couple of African friends, but like Selam’s brother Selassie, they went to Melbourne
K I was speaking to Talia and she said she thinks he is coming back… So who’re you hanging out with?
A Just a few friends from Uni normally; my mate Bill just moved to Sydney
K The guy you were living with who had the turntables?
A Yeah… I dunno if you know Hamza
K Yeah, I remember Hamza, he was at the college as well, yeah. Dark guy, Malay?
A Yeah, well him and a few other guys
K And you’re telling me race or colour never comes into play!
A Nah man, nah.
K You never even consider it?
A Nah man
K I dunno, maybe I am still a bit old school but I guess I do to some extent. I guess it is just a few hang-ups from the past, more than anything
A Ever since I was young, you know, like it (Australia) was a pretty multicultural country even when I was being bought up.
K Do you ever think it will be an issue?
A Nah, I dunno. It probably won’t ever be an issue cos I’m just so used to it!

I was not sure what Adham meant by his last response – “It probably won’t ever be an issue cos I am just so used to it.” Used to his colour? Used to multicultural? Used to his racialisation? It was a sudden ambiguity amidst such steadfast refusal to see himself as racialised, especially as Australia was, in his mind, “pretty much multicultural”. This was not the first time he had referred to multicultural. At an earlier moment, cited in the extract above, Adham referred not to Australia, but to Canberra as multicultural city. I began to think through what multiculturalism meant for Adham and to concede that although I initially thought he used this ‘multicultural’ utterance as a shield to the possibility that racism was alive and well in Australia, that things for Adham, as with other youth, were different to a decade or so earlier. Multiculturalism now had a differing hue to the social policy of the past. As Melissa Butcher and Anita Harris (2010: 451) attest, in Australia, ‘young people’s
complex and sophisticated constructions of community as highly localised, global and/or virtual offers ways to understand multicultural civic life beyond the conventional emphasis on cohesion (Harris 2009).’

I was still intrigued however, in spite of the possibility of new forms of multicultural belonging, with how race was intertwined with the emerging ethnicity of African Australian youth in Canberra. Was it more complex, than as Nayak (2003: 106) puts it, the mere refashioning of identity through an emergent ethnicity’s engagement with globalisation, hybridity and new styles of consumption? It was not until we stumbled into a discussion on parody and stereotyping in the same interview that I, and I suspect Adham, broached the problem of the subtlety of being ascribed a racialised identity through everyday interactions, such as those involving humour. This was particularly evident when race was implicit in the ‘new styles of consumption’, an idea which I pursued in interview:

K You ever get any shit, ever get any hassles?
A From my friends?
K Yeah, like now at Uni or when you were at school?
A Nah
K Not even stereotyping?
A Ahh, I mean you can joke about it every now and then. It’s fine with me, I mean I like Chappelle Show. You watch that? I think it’s hilarious
K You don’t mind stereotyping?
A It’s like, as long as it’s not too serious, you know.
K Put it this way, I was with Talia and a friend of hers at church recently, this white guy Craig. He went to the States with another friend of Talia’s – this guy called Caleb. About your size, big build, and same colour. He started telling me about his travel in the States, making jokes at Caleb’s expense. Calling him ‘black boy’ and making overt racial comments like “C’mon black boy, carry my bags”, like Caleb was his porter or servant...that sort of thing. And he was telling me this story and laughing about it all the while like he had licence to do so, ‘cos he was friends with a brother. I didn’t take offence but... I sort of thought, that’s just not on, I don’t know if I could deal with that sort of thing? Could you?
A Oh, well maybe not to that extent...my friends aren’t stupid like that man! They like, you know, their jokes go about as far as, you know, “fried chicken” ...
K Yeah? Where does that come from?
I dunno, black people are just...you go to KFC in the US...

And it is full of black people!

Yeah. Brothers.

(Laughing)... when I was a vegetarian, well, a vegan, and I met this Native American guy down the south coast, who had spent a lot of time with African-Americans. Now when I said to him that I was vegan he just laughed and said “you can’t be a black man cause a black man eats chicken!!” After that I went straight back to eating chicken...

Yeah I felt so out of place, it was so bizarre, I felt alienated to a certain extent.

Yeah, I’ve never heard of a black man being a vegan I gotta say, that’s even beyond vegetarian.

Yeah it is pretty hardcore stuff. It was good to come back to eating chicken again I tell you... So where do they (your friends) pick that up? That’s like American isn’t it?

Yeah, like they watch the Dave Chappelle show, you know.

Admittedly, I had not at this point watched much of Dave Chappelle. A quick look at some YouTube footage, however, quickly alleviated my ignorance; yes it was true, ‘black people have a genetic predisposition to eating chicken!’ (Chappelle 2007). Adham’s observation of what he considered the actuality (“you go to KFC in America and it is full of black people”) and the reiteration of this discourse opens up a number of possibilities for the compelling yet complex and contradictory role that black America, and indeed humour, play in reflecting on, and negotiating difference and a sense of belonging as African Australian. From a discursive stance, Simon Weaver (2010: 35) puts the case that jokes ‘require ambiguity or incongruity as content’ and serve as a rhetorical device that may impact on truth perceptions. While there is a possibility that such humour also masks questions of class and poverty, with respect to adolescents, Weaver (citing Les Back, 2010: 35), argues that the:

...anti-racist humour... of inter-racial friendships can be seen to mediate the ambiguity of the discourses of friendship and racist ideology. Tropes are employed here to manipulate meaning and render racist ideology meaningless.

The reappropriation by youth of such tropes may play a role in disempowering the codes inherent in racist culture by mediating ambiguity and, in turn, rendering racist ideology meaningless. The polysemic humour deployed by Chapelle, for example, plays with, and may alter, young people’s perceptions of themselves and,
potentially, the other. As Scott Sharpe and Maria Hynes (2016: 87) note, ‘humour has a dual role in both thwarting and affecting change... humour has both a conservative tendency, working to preserve the status quo, and a more radical potential, with a capacity to undermine social norms and values.’ Humour operates, Sharpe and Hynes (2016: 87) suggest, through a kind of de-commitment, whereby the enunciator of the joke ‘can always hide behind the claim that he or she is ‘only joking’. While they suggest that its uncommitted character may also ‘give humour an anti-racist potential’, they stress that ‘it is clearly no simple tool for anti-racist ends’ (Sharpe and Hynes 2016: 87).

It is never as simple, then, as a mere reappropriation of racial tropes by those to whom they are usually applied. Although youth may use such utterances with the intent to ‘socially bond’, parody always risks prolonging subjugating power relations based on race or misappropriating racial codes that merely serve to racialise and categorise, in this case, African Australian youth. The portrayal that Talia offers of her brother’s friend Caleb – “C’mon black boy, carry my bags” – and Adham’s admission that he would not take humour to that extent, suggests particular boundaries exist that may not be rationally known or defensible, but operate at a more bodily level. Bloul (2013) argues that we can harbour subtle, almost unconscious, bodily responses to such humorous interactions, due to a telehaptic sense that occurs in intercorporeal encounters.17 Bloul suggests that at the everyday level when confronted with racist rhetoric, humour or blatant racist attacks, our bodies respond in subtle, barely perceptible ways that may be at least as indicative of the effects of racialisation as the more mediated conscious responses we make. So while, for example, a young black girl in a class of multi-ethnic peers may herself laugh out loud at the remark, “Don’t worry about Tendai, she can just eat the chicken!”, the subtle, unmediated bodily responses in her laughter – a slight frown, a twitch in the corner of the eye – may be a more telling sign of the potentially injurious effects of such humour.

It is as if the embodied memory of racialised encounters automatically responds, while our socialised mediation of discourse attempts to conceal the trauma of racialisation. The question is whether or not racialised and non-racialised youth are able to decipher the limits of where such parody begins and ends. As Talia once commented to me with respect to such ambiguous humour, it’s difficult to determine, “when enough is enough”:

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17 Bloul (2013: 524) coins the term telehaptic from ‘the Greek tele (far) and haptikos (to touch) to indicate those affects you receive from the Other without necessarily seeing or touching her, such as when you ‘feel’ somebody next to you stiffen, or relax.’
K High school and primary school... did you ever experience any racism or prejudice?

T That I got sports captain said something to me. The fact that I got sports captain said that I am somebody; I am somebody important... this was until someone in high school told me to “go back to where you came from.” This really unsettled me, along with other comments about being black. My friends and I, we would also make racial comments towards each other. I think I was a bit sensitive to that, because I know what it can do to people. But some of my friends would say things that I would say, heh, that’s not on, that’s not really a joke! I don’t find that funny at all.... I think little things, like one-liners, I probably am a bit lenient at times, I was like c’mon move on. And then I started realising that it was not enough to just move on. In year 9 I was kind of trying to please everyone so I was just kind of “ha, ha”. In year 10 I started to develop a personality and who I thought I was, and then I started really putting my foot down and said ‘enough’ with the joking.

The interactions that I have picked up on here point to a constitutive ambiguity over the role of race and multiculture in everyday interactions, and highlight the often confusing ways that sensed difference and similitude translate into consciousness. We can recall Adham’s ‘not knowing’ how he appropriated hip-hop and other embodied traits, his reflections on the absence of racial encounters in what he depicts as a multicultural country, the various discursive representations of blacks he appropriates, and the ongoing use of racial humour by youth as a means to deal with their difference. These nuanced encounters with race demonstrate the potential for a pick’n’mix multiculture to give young people a sense of agency and ability to negotiate their difference or, alternatively, the potential to reinforce a racialised social field, and thus heighten the sense of alienation or alterity one may feel as a result of their racialisation.

Such ambiguity could well lead to youth experiencing what Sandra Bartky (1990) describes as double ontological shock. Bartky (1990), in her ‘phenomenology of feminist consciousness’, argues that ‘raising consciousness’ is a means to alter one’s social reality and create ‘new ways of being as well as new ways of perceiving’ (12). She argues, however, that women are susceptible to suffering a ‘double ontological shock’. That is ‘the realisation that what is happening is quite different from what appears to be happening, and, second, the frequent inability to tell what is really happening at all’ (Barty 1990: 18). This shock or realisation for Bartky can lead to a particular form of ‘wariness’ as it emerges from the:
[a]nticipation of the possibility of attack, of affront or insult, or disparagement, ridicule, or the hurting blindness of others.... It is an apprehension of the inherently threatening character of established society (19).

The degree to which this wariness is present in the emerging consciousness, Bartky (1990: 19) adds, will be a function of other factors, including ‘her level of political involvement, perhaps, the extent of her exploration of the social milieu, or the extent to which she allows resignation or humour to take the sting’. Parody and stereotype, then, certainly enable youth to internalise and mediate the ambivalences and vulnerabilities of race, and perhaps even convert them into elements of resignation and humour, to ‘take the sting’, when faced with their emerging consciousness of their racialisation. Yet, with this comes the possibility that what one thinks or feels ‘being black’ represented may not in fact be the case, or indeed the very meaning of this identity may become redundant.

I have been suggesting that there may be ‘hidden injuries’ in the appropriation of identities that young people like Adham move towards, without knowing precisely why. Such identifications may provide comfort or confidence, in various representations, and appear to provide forms of solidarity and knowing, even ontological security with others. Yet as we shall see, several of my participants also reveal experiences of ambiguity, insecurity or a ‘wariness’ of being black especially when the modes of blackness go beyond the tenets of what I call a ‘mimetic popular culture’. As I have begun to outline here, this is a culture that, rather than being produced in syncretic fashion, more closely draws on and imitates black American culture, as opposed to creating a syncretic culture, young people identify with a mimetic one.

5.3 Mimetic Popular Culture

The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and power (in an older language, this is sympathetic power). And I believe it is as necessary to the very process of knowing, as it is the construction of subsequent naturalisation of identities. But if it is a faculty, it is also a history, and just as histories enter into the functioning of the mimetic faculty, so the mimetic faculty enters those histories.

(Taussig 1993: xiii-xiv)
Popular culture’s obsession with the entertainment, infotainment and lifestyles of America infiltrate our interpretation and adoption of popular culture and with it youth’s knowledge, understanding and perception of blacks. This use of ascriptive identity by the youth in my study occurs locally through the appropriation of popular culture stemming from popular media. It is difficult for youth to resist the lure of ethnic absolutism (Gilroy 1993) when ‘black’ culture is associated with ‘making it’ in an otherwise white world. As another of my participants, Jomo, puts it, ‘If people didn’t think I was cool – because all black people are cool – I guess like black Americans, then I could play on the African side.’ Of course, as Michael Taussig notes, even seemingly natural identities are naturalised, themselves products of the mimetic faculty, and this opens important questions about the complex ways in which mimesis and history are intertwined. To what extent do the mimetic acts that arise here become part of the broader understanding of Africans in Australia, and how does it enter into ‘our’ history?

This question is one that came up in the course of conversations with one of my participants in particular. The ways in which Black American culture are appropriated in our beckoning for African Australian identifications was a regular theme of my conversations with Talia. I would often question how black Australian youth were able to create their own (multi) culture if it was imbued with American forms of blackness. For Talia, however, there was little doubt that black America provided the impetus for an African Australian identification. Her affiliation with ‘black music’ – hip hop, gospel, soul – was integral to her sense of self. Talia also spoke of her good friend who found local fame as one of the founding members of a popularised Canberra hip-hop dance group – Kulture Break; a group spawned in a bid to overcome the negative stereotype associated with ‘being black’. For Talia’s friend, Kulture Break continues to be a project for youth, both black and white, to identify with the political and cultural expressionism of the black Atlantic world as a means of empowerment. This ongoing debate with Talia revolved around the potential for black youth in this country to have representation beyond the celebration and consumption of popular culture that can be extracted from Black Atlantic culture. ‘Where is our intellectual heritage? Where is our message?’ I would ask. So, while it is accepted within this multicultural context that I am exploring here that black youth align with ‘global’ forms of blackness as one of the ways through which they may negotiate their difference, I look in this section to distinguish the way my participants project and introject the Black Atlantic as a form of mimesis. In Chapter 2 I referred to mimicry as a strategy adopted by the early African settlers as a means of reproducing colonial power and knowledge. Here however, I take mimicry as a strategy adopted by black African youth, which speaks to their reflexive negotiation of difference and capacity for political belonging as African Australian.
It was mid-2007 and Talia was on a lunch break from her ‘gap year’ job in a boutique-advertising agency in the city centre. We met at a local café and, as was our custom, began the conversation talking about family, before we turned to Talia’s music. Talia was an emerging singer and based herself at the local church, a site in which Talia felt she could freely assert herself, her voice and her beliefs. Church in particular, Talia explained to me, was where she could explore her spirituality through the Pentecostal religion and music, and was also one of the places in which she would freely associate with other African youth. We would from time to time discuss the way in which she adopted gospels as a means to express her belief – as she would jest, in “the blood of the lamb and Jesus Christ our saviour sort of thing” – and her identity.

On this occasion, Talia caught me by surprise when she expressed disdain with a Ghanaian movie she had watched with her mother the evening before. Talia had never lived in the US, though had made a return journey to Nigeria:

“I’m telling you” she started, “I was so embarrassed to even be seen at the cinema. The plot was just sooo bad and the acting seriously B grade. Africans really aren’t too good at creating entertainment.”

“Speak for yourself” I joked with her. “It can’t have been that bad!” Talia looked at me dumbfounded. “Trust me,” she said before she began to explain the plot of the film, the setting and particular scenes in detail. By the end of her explanation I had begun to appreciate her scorn, especially given how accustomed she was to mainstream American movies.

“I’m telling you though Talia” I responded after she had finished her summation, “we rely too much on seeing ourselves as good at music, dance, sport…”

In a quick inversion of her previous utterance she replied sharply, “But that is what we do!”

“Yeah but there has got to be more than that, a different legacy such as… what about an intellectual heritage?” I lamented.

“What, here in Australia?”

“Why not? Why do we always rely so much on seeing ourselves in terms of what others think?”, I challenged.

“But don’t we just stand out in certain areas because it is what we do and are talented at? Look at Timomatic, I mean he has achieved so much, his dance is taking him places,” she replied.

I was reluctant to push too hard as I knew that Talia was a very talented singer with ambitions and, as she suggested, her friends were fast becoming well known in the music industry…
“Maybe”, I said, ‘but when are we going to see ourselves for being intelligent or even political? I mean, I talk about this in class all the time in legal or economics. How long is it going to be before we see a black politician, or a black judge perhaps? You can bet that just about every company boardroom is white.” I emphasised the inequality we had discussed previously in the classroom.\textsuperscript{18}

“Yeah I see what you mean”, Talia confessed. “But that doesn’t mean that it isn’t happening.”

“Yeah, but in my generation! I’ve been thinking about this sort of thing since I was at school. Back then it wasn’t even just black politics...integration with Asia / Indonesia or the lack thereof, used to annoy the hell out of me! That was one thing I liked about Keating, that he attempted to make Australia part of Asia...” \textsuperscript{19} Talia jumped in before I had finished, she was thinking through the discussion.

“I guess dad is inspiring... working his way up in the public service, being recognised... a black man on the way up’!

The discussion with Talia reveals her particular leaning towards the black Atlantic culture as an authentic source of identification. Yet, the shift from her disdain with African film to her claim that entertaining is “what we are good at”, hints at Talia’s own internal conflict over how that ‘we’ is constituted. Although her parents migrated directly from Africa, travelled there often, and were very much involved with the African Australian community, especially in relation to traditional ways of knowing, Talia seemed to draw readily on the ‘character and power’ of the Atlantic world.

Is the mimetic faculty that Talia et al are drawing on, in Taussig’s sense of the mimetic, a means by which they, in copying the ‘originality’ of the Black Atlantic culture, exert power over the \textit{a priori} identifications afforded to them as black African Australian? To put this another way, the mimetic acts as a means to subvert the dominant perception afforded to black youth by their peers, and indeed the consumer culture in which they find themselves. This is to the extent, I suggest, that such mimetic qualities become habitually naturalised as a form of identity.

It was not until a meeting with Talia sometime later in 2008 that I noticed how she was blending and mixing specificities of language, music and religion from a number

\textsuperscript{18} I note that this conversation took place prior to the election of Barack Obama. Although arguably that too only globalized the plight of black people further through the political and cultural transformations of American society.

\textsuperscript{19} Paul Keating was Treasurer, and then Prime Minister under the Hawke / Keating Labor government of the 1980s and early 1990s. Keating was well known for his attempts to bring Australia into Australasia and instigating economic reform.
of more localised cultural influences. At this time Talia was performing as a key-backing vocalist in a 10-piece band, which was well recognised within Canberra’s subaltern music scene. That evening, the band was to play at a very popular local venue, known for its alternative music scene. We agreed to a brief catch up and ‘interview on the go’ at a local coffee shop nearby before I would spend the evening with her and the band at the gig. During the interview it was one of the first times that Talia opened up in discussing in depth her changing perspective on sexuality, indigeneity, drug use, and of course music; a discussion less shrouded in the previous reliance on aligning with the cultural codes or ‘traditions’ found in the African or American continents. In sharp contrast to the friends at church, the band was a mix of ethnicities, sexualities, and music styles. In the hours that followed before the gig, I would chat with Talia and other members of the band over a meal, as wine was passed around the table and the faint aroma of marijuana lingered in the air.

Whether Talia was just experimenting with her music or whether she was entertaining the ideas to become more involved in the lifestyle of the band and this alternative scene, was difficult to tell. What was apparent to me was that her very process of knowing through the ‘naturalisation’ of those mimetic qualities to her experience had appeared to recede. Nevertheless, in a follow up interview with Talia later that year she admitted that the ‘lifestyle’ of the band was too much for her. Church, her studies at university, and following her own path in music drew her away from continuing to record and tour with the band. It was not long after however, that Talia decided to leave university and move to Sydney to pursue her music career.

So, despite her brief exposure to Canberra’s alternative music scene, Talia’s social and professional world continued to be dominated by the influences of American culture. Talia eventually began to create a name for herself through her singing and entertainment. As a web page designated to market her gigs around town whilst living in Sydney highlighted, her alignment with a black diaspora was founded on an identification with the African and American continents. Perhaps not surprisingly, the former was associated with origin and the latter with influence:

Blessed with a rich musical family, her heritage dates back to the roots of music itself, Africa…. Talia’s influences include Alicia Keys, Lauryn Hill, India Arie, Joss Stone, Corinne Bailey Rae, Angie Stone, Mary Mary, Jill Scott, Monica, Brandy, CeCe Williams, Whitney Houston and the queen of soul Aretha Franklin (centrestagelive.com.au).

On this, the success of Timomatic (Tim Omaji) provides an interesting point of comparison. Omaji has made a name for himself in Australia as a gifted dancer and
performer appearing on Australia’s version of an American talent competition broadcast nationally. Building on his preferred genre of Hip Hop, Omaji, a self-taught dancer, received mentions and commendations throughout the competition from the judges, though he has also been subject to ongoing scrutiny of how he had made it so far in the competition when he was not formally trained in dance, hinting at a degree of anxiety about his worthiness for the award. Omaji has gone on from the competition to continue building his reputation as a hip-hop dancer and performer, including a role in the Australian stage performance of yet another iconic American production, ‘Fame’, and to achieve a place in Australia’s version of America’s Got Talent, Australia’s Got Talent. During the semi-finals the judges likened Omaji to James Brown and Michael Jackson, due to his unique dancing ability combined with showmanship and voice, which of course were strong influences in building his performance repertoire.

A driving theme of Paul Gilroy’s (1993) early work on the transatlantic development of black popular culture, is the elaboration on the cultural significance of ‘black music’ as it has emerged in syncretic fashion throughout the diaspora. Gilroy provides a number of insights into the emergence of particular forms of black consciousness, anchored in the slave experience and providing a means by which blacks could deploy various cultural media in order to communicate their own political and cultural expressions. Gilroy’s exploration of potent historical forms of resistance through music reveals the diasporic dimension of this expression as it was manifest in the transatlantic movement between Africa, the Americas and Europe. Such subversive performances sought to undermine the essentialist discourses that relied on ‘race’ and ‘culture’ as they intersected with notions of nationalism and Enlightenment thinking. Resisting oppression in this form, through embodied cultural performativity, may prevent foreclosure into an ‘ethnic absolutism’, by providing collective representations and counter discourses. Such performances may resonate with African youth here in Australia and promote forms of cross identifications and even solidarity, as is the case with my participants and their peers, who seemed largely engaged in attempting to synthesise such political and cultural expression through the consumption of the sights and sounds of black America, which were mimetically re-appropriated into a local style and vernacular.

Yet do such forms of expression, founded as they are in America’s fraught history, complicate the potential for black youth to seek a self-determined expression as ‘African Australians’? What continuity do black African youth in Australia find with ‘blacks’ in the histories of the Black Atlantic, and to what extent do these over-determine the scene? As much as the mimetic has a history that enters into its functioning, so too does the mimetic enter those histories (cf. Taussig). Upon what other grounds, then, might a belonging and becoming specific to African Australia be
actualised? Certainly, and as earlier discussed, the appropriation by black Aboriginal Australians of the political formations of black America in the late 60s and early 70s initiated new forms of solidarity and black consciousness and provided models of black political and collective resistance for Indigenous Australians, even if their wholesale appropriation in postcolonial Australia was problematic.

Yet, the global appeal of American culture, for the time being, appears to trump the reciprocity that could exist between other ethnicities, black (including Aboriginal Australians) and African Australia youth. For the better part, postcolonial settlement in Australia should raise questions as to the nature and political strength of the totality of ‘black’ cultures in this country.

In defence of black African youth, during the time of the thesis it was more than apparent that the prevailing image stemming from the African continent was too often that of war, famine, despotism, and so forth, as will be briefly raised in the next chapter. Very little was known or taught in school of the local Aboriginal people, let alone African history, so it is not surprising that black youth sought to naturalise an identity mimetically, through a history of association with black America. Indeed, when it comes to the politics, customs and traditions of the continent, few examples were produced that suggested that locally born black African youth of Talia’s generation willingly sought to draw on their traditional knowing, either due to an ignorance of such knowledges, or the pre-occupation with more global or popular forms of blackness.

It is difficult to say how these mimetic practices might extend into the adult lives of my participants. America still symbolises, besides wealth and fame, an imaginative escape and a source of liberation for young blacks. The lines of connection with the imperial centre of Britain, and even the traditional African homeland are, to a large degree, rejected. While my participants did seek some form of cultural resonance with their traditional African heritage as later narratives will illustrate, the perplexity remains how, for example, Talia’s eldest brother grew up speaking American slang under the influence of American television, while her older sister only a year or so apart began speaking with an ‘African’ accent in her early twenties, and Talia sports an amalgam of Australian colloquialisms and American hip-hop slang. All had been raised in Australia. Eventually, perhaps we may witness more syncretic forms of black identification, as Amin (2002a: 966) argues is the case in Britain, where through everyday negotiations with white youth:

...black youths have developed a nondefensive notion of Blackness based on diaspora connections, a local vernacular, a reworking of Britishness by claiming a Black aspect to it, new hybrid musical forms, and mixed-race
identities. Identities and attitudes on the move on different sides of the ethnic divide, and in this case, towards each other.

Given the relative newness of African diasporic formations in Australia, it is of no surprise that black youth in my study, in reworking notions of diasporic blackness and local vernaculars as a means to belong as African Australian, continue to wrestle with more mimetic forms of identity. In a conversation with Adham such appropriations were related to a kind of fascination with American culture:

K I remember the first time we met we were watching Big Brother at your house and we were talking about African American influences here, that that sort of thing.
A Yeah, I remember. I’ve been thinking a bit about it.
K One of the main guys that I read is a black academic from England, though he also lived and worked in the US at Harvard, a Professor of African Studies. He used to put a lot of emphasis on the influence of shared culture between blacks in the US and the UK. But lately he is really starting to steer away from it. One of the cultural items he explores is music and lyrics in the UK and one of the classic lines he analyses is in a song by the Streets – “we call them birds not bitches…”, yet here, I still think here we are still attached to the American way of blackness...
A Definitely, because... like Britain has its own kind of personality whereas Australia pulls personalities from like...
K From everywhere?
A Mainly from the US, like all the top songs are from the US and stuff whereas in Britain all the top songs are from Britain. It’s like the mainstream here is like just fascinated by the black American culture.
K I guess Sheilas doesn’t quite work as well as birds or bitches! {chuckles} What about Hamza and all those cats? Are they influenced by black American hip-hop?
A Yeah, like he likes hip-hop, and his clothing and image. Everyone... look at Will and his turntables!
K It’s odd... you look more European today, with the scarf and jacket and everything
A Changing it up!
K I guess it shouldn’t surprise me... when I was younger my books and music were predominantly black artists... Malcolm X, rap, reggae, even Spike Lee Joints were a favourite. I was right though with what I said last time we talked about this wasn’t I, looking at your clothes, your music, the posters on your wall at home, everything seems
pretty American, excluding your Audi of course which nevertheless you took me to KFC drive-in in!

A Well … {hesitates}... I’d have to say like with music, hip-hop is my favourite genre but I like to think I’m fairly eclectic. But put it this way, if the West Indies were playing cricket against Australia, I’d definitely be going for the Windies!

While it seems that any kind of Africanness cultured here in Australia will have the flavour of American appropriations of Africa, I would hesitate to say that these reflexive appropriations I have been talking about, are fully conscious or reflected upon. Adham’s comment above, of backing the Windies, appears a reflex response, even instinctual, and as I have insisted above, habituated. During my first visit to Adham’s group house I asked to see his room. Despite our earlier conversations Adham never mentioned that his walls were adorned with images of black Americans athletes and artists. This was yet another puzzling example of how the imagery of race may unconsciously and habitually be appropriated. This reflexive disposition also extends into one’s social relations and representations as a means to negotiate the racialised society. As my final extract, a brief dialogue that I had with Talia following meeting her friend Craig at church, depicts, a play of ‘power’ remains embedded in the social strata; “C’mon white boy carry my bags”, doesn’t quite carry the same ring!

K I couldn’t quite pick up on the, what do you call it, the joking thing between Craig and Caleb, you know, the ‘Heh black boy’ thing.

T Yeah I mean… they’re very comfortable with one another, and basically Caleb can do that back to him, exactly the same, they do to each other. So it’s more...

K … Right?

In this chapter, the reflexive negotiation of difference, I have explored what I suggest is an underlying desire by my participants to belong, as they come to terms with the complexities of their becoming African Australian. Grappling with their reflexive consciousness and the identifications that this involves, I have argued, emerges through the epidermal schema and the string of associations that it triggers in intercorporeal encounters. My suggestion in this chapter, then, is that the ascriptive identity positions adopted by black African Australian youth are typically attempts at forging a racialised identity, as a means to belong to the social milieu. Such positioning may align, not only with this perception of self that the epidermal reflex has evoked, but also the perception of their sameness to others ‘like them’ with the same reflexive disposition and sense of embodiment.
To put this simply, young people’s search for representations, which speak to an emerging sense of self, stem from the attempt to make meaning of and negotiate blackness in a society in which whiteness dominates. For my participants, engaging with the burgeoning black African community provides a way of appropriating representations as a response to the epidermal reflex, and a means to resist racial stratification and allow new forms of political belonging as African Australian. We should keep in mind however, as I suggested in Chapter 1, two significant developments in this thesis. Firstly, the insistence that these identity formations are but temporary attachments to subject positions and discursive representations, which emerge as the effect of, and allow us to trace, a more primary process of becoming. And that, secondly, these responses to racialisation are, at least in part, a form of belonging to an indeterminate, emergent sociality, in the face of an overly determined and racialised history and experience.

While intercorporeal encounters are constitutively indeterminate, the more reflexive aspects of the consciousness of becoming African Australian may provide a degree of grounding in alterity and a radical break with the dominant culture may ensue. In the experience of locally born African youth in particular, I suggest that this reflexive aspect of consciousness generates questions surrounding their ‘identity’ and in turn leads them to seek a subject position, Black, black African, African Australian, and so forth, that aligns not only with this perception of self that the epidermal reflex has evoked but the possibility of other forms of consciousness, solidarity and belonging in an attempt to disavow their being negatively ‘other’. This is, in part, the unconscious desire in subjects brought about by bodily interactions and intercorporeal encounters as filtered through ‘race’ and the epidermal reflex.

From my initial observations at the college and later still in post college life, to the narratives gleaned from in-depth interviews and discussions, my participants appeared to act in some kind of concert with one another, but also interacted on a daily basis with, and within, the school community. There were moments at which their individual and collective identifications competed with, contrasted to, vilified and reinforced certain points of continuity between African youth. In this chapter I have been concerned with those forms of identification that are ascriptive in nature. While I put forward the idea that ascriptive identity may unwittingly reinforce a racial hierarchy it is at times, however, adopted and reinforced by African youth. Their adherence to a particular vernacular, dress code, music and lifestyle grounded in the black Atlantic reflected this. Among other things, the risk of such identifications is that they participate in the same negation of difference found in the dominant culture; here the difference that is blackness, risks principally being defined by its not being white.
The more ascriptive form of identity that I observed in my study is neither uncommon nor totally untoward. It is a hybridising move towards more progressive forms of individualism in which, akin to Gilroy’s (1993) compound culture (see Zwangobani 2008), young people are adopting, blending, and fusing cultural traits. It is indeed likely in the contemporary global landscape that inflections and influences of a black political culture, as mesmerising and as far reaching as the popular culture of black America, the source of this ascriptive identity, will at some point permeate both black and non-black youth culture in Australia. From watching Big Brother with Adham, to Talia’s connections with the American music, to Timomatic’s appearances on Australia’s versions of popular American shows, I demonstrated that becoming African Australian is frequently saturated with mimetic versions of American culture. As I have suggested, it is nigh impossible for youth not to consume that which is ‘on offer’ from the global pop culture that emerges from America. How and why we make such choices in our appropriation is what will make the difference to our emergent black identity and the way race is mobilised and mapped on to notions of community (see also Alexander 2000; Baumann 1996) (Alleyne 2002: 619). To appropriate American culture or to entertain an ascriptive black identity for convenience, consumption or otherwise, runs with it the risk that we also inherit its racial commodification and the ‘deadening effects’ of existing discourse (Nayak 2010). That is, as Nayak (2010: 2372) points out, if we capture race within the existing discursive field of representation the ‘deadening effects of discourse can symbolically erase how race is embodied, lived, and put into motion in everyday encounters’. Arguably, part of the shift here, as Saldanha (2010: 2420) claims, is the creation of inequality through the capitalisation of affects for which the racial division of labour, the commodification of hip-hop, the multiculturalism of MTV and Gap are examples. Yet, as Saldanha further argues such ‘capitalist racialisations can never completely dominate the interstitial fluidities which might, if gathered, compose a new and genuinely ‘democratic’ flesh outside the world’s ossified body politic’ (2418).

The second continuity between African youth, the subject of the next chapter, is based more loosely on a form of diasporic consciousness and youthful pan-Africanism. This new diaspora (Werbner 2002, Brinkerhoff 2008, Zelesa 2005), as opposed to the diaspora of the Atlantic world, provides another point of similarity or sameness between black African youth. It produces an affiliative practice that, I suggest, provides connections for my participants in seeking rooted forms of their identity. My participants within the college setting for example, were undeniably engaged in understanding and developing their identities and the collective consciousness garnered through their rooted affiliation with the African homeland, family values, religion, and so on. And while this diasporic sensibility provided an
ambivalent point of identification, it also provided a means to work against various forms of acculturation, racism and assimilation.
6 AFFILIATIVE NEGOTIATIONS AND THE SEARCH FOR SOLIDARITY

It’s really weird but going through the school life or any type of life that I have lived I have always felt, you know, at the end of the day I felt so comfortable as an African. There was something within me that just goes ‘ahhh,’ you know, when Africa is a focus or when I am in African presence or something. Not just because of the colour of my skin because I feel comfortable anywhere but it’s just something there that I feel. And just the culture of it and something I find like the beauty of Africa, I’m definitely an African.

Talia

I have been describing those ascriptive identifications that form as a reaction to the perception of self-difference captured in the notion of the epidermal reflex. While such identifications share at least some of the characteristics of culturally ascribed identities, they may serve as a positive response to the sense of one’s difference and provide some kind of succour or grounding to social experience, as Talia indicates above. Yet, there is a certain ease in this identification with ‘Africanness’, which those who have more recently migrated from Africa may not share, simply because Africa does not have the abstract quality of an elsewhere for recent migrants, but the concreteness of a ‘there’, which is distinct from life now, ‘here.’ The individual born in Australia does not have to deal, at least not in the same way, with the complexity of the here and there, nor does s/he have to negotiate the confusing actuality that the ‘there’ of Africa has for the migrant (Ang 2001).

In this chapter, I am concerned with those more affiliative negotiations of difference, which tend to be related to the shock of migration as an event, which jars and propels those who experience it in distinct ways. When Massumi (2008) talks about shock as a microperceptual event, he means to describe the affective ‘hit’, or sense of being catapulted into the new that constitutes the felt dimension of a transition, before it is recognised as a personal event in one’s biographical history. I will explore this more micropolitical sense of shock further in Chapter 7. For the moment, my concern is with the experience of the event of migration, as a kind of macro-shock that clearly registers as a biographical event of profound significance. Certainly, the more microperceptual dimensions of shock will come into play through the empirical material that I analyse – the ways in which the body re-jigs around an event or interruption, the minute bodily perceptions or mini-shocks that we only consciously register through the effect they have on our being. But my principal focus at this point is on the following questions: how do affiliative, as opposed to ascriptive, forms of identification play out, particularly in the social experiences of recent
migrants to Australia? What are the precise ways in which migrants develop a consciousness of themselves as African Australian? How do they alter the multicultural practices and styles that mark one as belonging to this emergent sociality? And how do they, through their encounters in this new socio-cultural and political context, reflexively negotiate belonging and becoming and attend to the newness of life?

Thus while later chapters explore the more pre-personal and affective dimensions of the event of becoming African Australian, the assumption that underpins this chapter is that migration constitutes an event that also leads to a shift in consciousness, or at least political orientation. Indeed, much of the theorisation of migration and transnationalism that I will turn to draws such a conclusion (Werbner 2002, Brinkerhoff 2008). What matters, then, is how this shifting consciousness of youth, as participants in the emerging African Australian community, has bearing on the community’s formation, and on the everyday multicultural practices that, I am arguing, give it its dynamism. It is, I suggest, in light of their migratory experience, that through such practices, youth seek identifications with those who they perceive to be like them, in the sense of having a shared experience, rather than the phenotypical identity that the notion of race classically names (Bloul 2013). Nevertheless, there remains, I argue, a particular desire by my newly arriving participants, evoked in their narratives, to better know and understand ‘race’, as it is inscribed on their body.

While the concern of the previous chapter was the question of ascriptive negotiations, this chapter takes up a discussion of what I call affiliative negotiations and the search for solidarity. I focus primarily on how newly arriving migrants to Australia attempt to forge a sense of individuality, agency and belonging as they re-negotiate being black and African in the new environment. I give empirical flesh to the arguments here by reference to two of my participants in particular. Upon arrival to the country and indeed the school setting, both Jomo and Selam found themselves having to negotiate their emotional displacement as they experienced a shattered sense of belonging. It is from this point that they had also to navigate the hegemonic associations with being African or black at school and in the community as a means to engage with their social milieu. I indicate how pan ethnic solidarities provide a means to forge connections, which preserve a degree of openness with respect to becoming African Australian. While I argue that the shock of migration is an event of analytical significance, the kinds of affiliative negotiations of difference that I describe in this chapter are not utterly unique to African Australian migrants and to this end I give a sense of the way that Keren, a locally born participant, navigated her particular sense of displacement on an emotional level, as she forms affiliations along pan ethnic or African lines.
The reflexive negotiations of difference my newly arriving participants embrace, I suggest, replicate pan African, transnational and diasporic continuities. And, it is through these affiliations as ‘African’ or ‘black’ that they seek to actualise a sense of belonging and to work with the ambivalence that arises from a priori identifications, as well as those forms of racialisation that are associated with being part of the African Australian community. While I register some of the positive potentials of affiliative identifications, I also indicate that both ascriptive and affiliative negotiations of difference remain somewhat reactive. Difference, at this level, is still negative difference – difference from. And for this reason, as Chapters 7 to 9 explore, both affiliative and ascriptive negotiations of difference remain susceptible to the hypostatised forms of identity that are familiar to representational and phenotypical versions of race.

While I have, in Chapters 2 and 3, touched on the differing perspectives of diasporas and diasporic communities, I return here in the first section of the chapter to the problem of diaspora, with an eye to exploring the peculiar diasporic sensibility that characterises the experience of African migrants to Australia. In section two, ‘Fresh Off the Boat,’ I describe the emotional turmoil that my participants experience due to their migration to Australia. I illustrate how they wrestle with being ascribed a pre-determined and racialised identity position of ‘immigrant’, whilst contending with their emotional displacement from ‘home’ and a shattered sense of belonging. The emphasis is on illustrating the degree of difficulty for new arrivals to adjust to migration and the differing social and cultural milieu in which they find themselves; this is exacerbated by the difficulty in meeting those ‘like them’. The negotiation of hegemonic schooling is crucial here. I provide insight into the difficulty for my participants to negotiate their belonging while responding to their racialisation; a process that may hinder more open and sensuous modes of belonging and becoming. What I allude to in this section, then, as Nayak (1997: 58) has pointed out in his paper ‘Tales from the Darkside: negotiating whiteness in school arenas’, is how black youth are ‘continually having to manoeuvre across a White norm’ and in doing so ‘have to develop multiple strategies for negotiating its exigencies.’ In the third section of the chapter, ‘Roots and Understanding’ I explore the way that my participants seek solidarity through forming allegiances with other African or black youth to overcome the isolation, marginalisation and fatigue that their cultural difference presents in their everyday experiences at school.
6.1 Diasporic Sensibility

It quickly became clear in my research that the experiences of those of my participants who were newly arrived migrants were significantly different from those born here. Migrants to Australia described quite distinct associations and perceptions of difference, which shaped their social relations and sense of self. While the racialisation process the epidermal reflex evokes did not appear to concern them until their arrival in Australia, it is possible that these participants had experienced what Bloul (2013) refers to as a racialised corporeal schema, through which racist perceptions create and biologise imagined differences. Nonetheless, Selam and Jomo’s experiences suggest an epistemological break with the dominant culture as earlier described, at the same time that their embodied and emotional displacement from prior non racialised experience may create a sense of alterity with respect to locally born Africans.

I argued in Chapter 3 that African Australian youth harbour a form of ‘diasporic sensibility’ that results from alignment with, and to an extent reliance on, identity and belonging as they were practiced back in the homeland and played out in more localized hybrid or cosmopolitan forms in the diaspora. It is this reliance on a global sense of identity via the African diasporas, whether through popular culture, community or shared histories, that I have already begun to address in Chapter 5. Here, however, I turn towards capturing a diasporic subjectivity that revolves around notions of a ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘home’ and ‘host’ country; that is, it is the diasporic sensibility of those who have experienced the shock of migration that is the issue.

On diasporic belonging, Ang (2001: 54) argues that there is a vicarious, virtual element of belonging to a diaspora as it may only provide temporary alleviation or comfort from the alienation of a new country, or, alternatively, a dislocated sense of belonging due to the spatial and temporal displacement from that home located elsewhere. Ang (2001: 54) writes:

While in the so-called host country they are condemned always to be positioned as ‘different’ or ‘foreign’, (re)defining themselves as ‘diasporic’ – as belonging to an idealized home elsewhere affords them the promise of symbolic escape from the pains and frustrations of marginalisation. But this belonging is to a ‘there’ while being ‘here’ remains a vicarious, virtual one; never to be conflated with the ‘real’ thing.

20 Bloul (2013:523) cites cases of the Irish appearing in nineteenth century English eyes as ‘White Negroes’ and of Tutsis in Rwanda appearing dangerously ‘Other’ to Hutus, even though only the verification of identity documents could ascertain Tutsi identity.
Conversely, Clifford, in a pivotal essay, *Diasporas* (1994), puts forward the case that, the ‘host nation’ in which members of a diaspora reside, and against which they are defined, cannot assimilate groups that maintain important allegiances and practical connections to a homeland or a dispersed community located elsewhere (Clifford 307). The bind that results here, of course, is a double displacement. Migrants who seek identification to a diaspora, in an effort to diminish the possible marginalisation they experience in the host country, may feel a sense of displacement, as Ang argues, due to the very temporality of belonging to a diaspora, a displacement which is then compounded by a ‘failure’ to integrate, due to these very transient and vicarious allegiances.

According to Pnina Werbner (2002: 120), the solution to this double displacement for postcolonial theorists such as Clifford (1994) and Ang (2001) (see also Gilroy 1993 and Hall 1990), is to appreciate diasporas as ‘transnational social formations, that challenge the hegemony and boundedness of the nation-state and, indeed, of any pure imaginaries of nationhood.’ In this way, the very discourses that may lead to a sense of displacement are creatively transgressed through a shifting consciousness. Werbner argues, however, that such diaspora theorising ‘is the celebration of rootlessness as an aestheticising move which is both ahistorical and apolitical.’ She suggests that in a more globalised world we need to begin to think about diasporas as ‘mobilised’ and able to shift orientations in response to local predicaments or world historical events. Jennifer Brinkerhoff (2008) supports the claim that ‘new diasporas’ in a post 9/11 world shift between the politics of the new/host country and the old/home country. New diasporas, in Brinkerhoff’s view, have the potential to be mobilised for ‘constructive’ or ‘destructive’ ends depending on the diasporans’ ability to construct their identity in the host nation. Constructive diasporans engage with liberal democratic values including freedom of speech and self-determination, while destructive diasporans may be concerned with criminal and/or violent activities (68). The example Brinkerhoff (2008: 84) cites is that of Somali youth in the United States who choose to associate with ‘aspects of ghetto culture- a marginalised sub-culture in the United States-rather than mainstream middle-class culture’. This hybridising move away from class affiliation occurs, Brinkerhoff suggests, through choice, political and or aesthetic. Both Werbner and Brinkerhoff’s images of the ‘new diaspora’ portray diasporans as opportunistic in entering into political dialogue, solidarity movements or specific sub-cultures.

21 Clifford (1994: 302) states that the politics of diaspora discourses maintain a certain bias of a pluralist state based on ideologies of assimilation: although nation-states may not necessarily integrate diversity on these terms, that is, through outright assimilation, the use of words such as “minority”, “immigrant”, and “ethnic” suggest this as a dominant possibility. That such terms are readily identifiable in the lingua franca of “multicultural” Australia supports the argument that mainstream Australia while often cited as a pluralist state, as discussed above, still holds expectations of assimilation qua integration.
In the face of these competing paradigms of diasporic subjectivity, it is Hall’s (2012) discussion of the work of Avtar Brah that I suggest best articulates my participants’ relationship with diaspora. Hall (2012: 30) writes:

...the idea of diaspora troubles the notions of cultural origin, of ‘roots’, of primordial identities and authenticity. ... It reaches naturally for the messy territory of the multicultural. It introduces the logic of translation and entanglement. As Kobena Mercer put it, it ‘critically appropriates elements from the master codes of the dominant culture and “creolizes” them, re-articulating their symbolic meaning otherwise’. It is the moment of the ‘here’ and ‘there’, of the double inscription, of double consciousness and multiple belongingness.

Here, in his more recent theorisations of diaspora, Hall’s shift towards the ‘messy territory of the multicultural’, ‘the logic of translation and entanglement’ and ‘multiple belongingness,’ contextualises well the multicultural context I have observed with my participants. This is a context in which, as they seek to articulate, yet disrupt, their own cultural heritage, they begin also to acknowledge their newly formed ‘diasporic sensibility’ in becoming African Australian. The ascriptive codes that Talia and Adham appropriated were not shared as politically nor as fervently by Selam or Jomo; during their time at the college in particular, I did not find Selam or Jomo appropriating cultural versions of black American life. Their formative experiences as young people seemed more immediately wed to the African continent, rather than the routes of the Black Atlantic diasporic world. They drew much of their diasporic sensibility from the continent, and reproduced this politically and culturally upon first arriving in Australia. Jomo and Selam’s arrival brought a new set of relations to the African students at the school as they began to foster what seemed a ‘novel’ sense of pan-Africanism and trans ethnic solidarity at the college, one that seemed to transcend the ascriptive identity ‘on offer’ to black youth.

The aim here, as I conceptualise what we might call a ‘diasporic sensibility’, is to generate a sense of the differing arguments surrounding the diasporic subject. My concern, given this context, is the question of how young people, when faced with a diasporic consciousness, avoid the kind of habituated identifications that result in racial stratification and a susceptibility to be positioned, for example as Udo-Ekpo (1999) suggests, *inter alia* Africans as unwanted migrants?
6.2 Fresh off the Boat

Selam.
When I first Selam as a Year 11 student in 2004, she had only just arrived a year earlier from Eritrea with her family. She was wearing traditional clothing, her English was jilted and she appeared shy, relative to the Selam that I would come to know. That she was Eritrean was not apparent from first meeting, though her African features were obvious; her hair was braided and tied back, her skin was a light olive complexion that probably darkened a couple of shades in the mid-summer. She was tall for an adolescent, larger than most girls of her age, yet graceful in her movements. Over the space of a year however, Selam gradually began to modify her appearance. She began to wear more jewellery and light makeup: large hoop earrings that accentuated her Eritrean features of the high cheekbones and fine nose, dark circles of mascara around her eyes. She removed her braids and had her hair straightened (I would joke with her that she reminded me of Jackie Brown, a character in a Tarantino film). Selam also began to dress in a fusion style that combined both Western and East African dress; standard jeans or pants offset with bright textures and colours were draped around her shoulders or upper torso.

Selam’s mannerisms were very expressive, she was always smiling and quick to make comments on any topic being discussed. She would often use physical gestures, clicking her fingers, clapping her hands whenever speaking to emphasise a point; this was especially notable in the family setting and amongst her siblings, who were often more reserved in their manner. Such gestures appeared essential to Selam’s ability to express herself, whether speaking her mind on the political situation of the Eritrean community in Australia, or discussing her own feelings surrounding her migration. The question of family values in particular always brought out such gestures in Selam:

“...we have much greater family values in Africa than we do in Australia. And I don’t mean that in a bad way it’s just a fact you know. We have different values, cultural values, family values. Here when you turn 18 you are allowed to get out of the house and do whatever you want, do your own life. Back home you don’t get out of the house unless you get married. We have family, you spend time with your family, you have to respect them. You can’t talk back to them, you can’t scream at them, you can’t have a proper fight with them {striking her left hand with her right index finger}. There is too much respect for them basically, they brought you for this world and you are expected to respect them too much. Now that is in a good way.”
Emotions played an important role in Selam’s migratory life. She would joke about how much she cried and yearned to return to Africa, upon her arrival in Australia at sixteen years of age. In her imagination, politically and spiritually it seemed Selam had never really left Eritrea behind, in what for her seemed a forced migration to Australia due to her parents’ diplomatic posting:

K  So what did you know about Australia?
S  Nothing, absolutely nothing! Well I thought Sydney was the capital city. And I came here ... I thought what the hell is Canberra? Where is Canberra? All I knew was Melbourne and Sydney and that was it. So when we were flying into Canberra I hated it. All I could see was trees, I thought, did it even have houses. And so we got here and I turned to dad and said “This is not the place is it?” and he’s like “It’s a’ight, it’s very quiet.” And I’m like... nah, back home you are used to so much noise, so much...everywhere you go, you go to your neighbours, you have relatives, you have everything. It’s like there isn’t a day where you don’t do anything basically! You go out with your friends, you have your neighbours, your neighbours are like your family, you know. You can leave your kid with them for a week and nothing will happen you know. You eat with them they come eat with you it’s like we are so close to each other you know.... It’s like when we came here we didn’t even know our neighbours. We didn’t know our neighbours for THREE years; we never even met them! And I just hated it. I came here to school; it was like so hard, you know. Everything was so hard, school, the system, the language, friends – EVERYTHING. I used to come home and say, “I don’t want to be here anymorrre!”
K  Did you cry?
S  {laughs} YEAH, I use to cry all the time, “I don’t want to be here anymore. Why did you bring us here?” And dad is like, “it’s ok. You’ll get used to it, once you get used to the language you’ll like it.”

In Skrbiš (2008: 236) view, understanding transnational families raises two crucial problems regarding emotions. The first, Skrbiš argues, derives from the existence of emotional ties that inevitably link individuals to families, while the second is linked to the fundamental nature of the migration experience itself. Skrbiš (2008: 236) goes on to add that:

Migration is invariably a process that dissociates individuals from their family and friendship networks, as well as from other socially significant referents that have strong emotional connotations. These may include familiar surroundings, such as landscapes (Schama), buildings (Hobsbawm), sacral
objects or sacred spaces (Skrbiš): everyday routines and practices, and language.

Skrbiš’ theorisation captures well Selam’s experience. There was the sense of a forced detachment in her mind from Eritrea, and the emotional ties of family and family values. This detachment was only exacerbated by memories of life back home – noise, neighbours, friends – not to mention the sights and sounds of Asmara, that all had strong emotional connections for her. Their sudden absence, upon arrival in Australia, creates an obvious instability and with it heightened emotions – hate, anger, sorrow – as Selam became detached from her former relations, and struggles to integrate her body into this new landscape. I would like to take Svašek and Skrbiš’ (2007) reasoning on the predisposition of migrants to experience emotional displacement further, and think of Selam’s emotional turmoil as an emotional displacement; that is, a displacement from these collective senses of Eritrea and the landscape that she describes, which has shaped her feelings, her body, and her emotions. It is this longing for the senses of Eritrea, and the diminished belonging Selam first experiences in Australia, that goes part way in explaining her seeking an identification as African Australian. Yet, as I will suggest shortly, this is complicated by her being racialised, or positioned, as different or ‘not from here’. According to Talia, for example, Selam was ‘African African’, or ‘fresh off the boat’. The response for Selam, the means to reflexively negotiate her difference, given the socio-emotional field in which she now found herself, was to seek representations of her Africanness and associate with those perceived to be like her along embodied and emotional lines.

Jomo

Jomo

I had only seen Jomo from a distance around the college until a couple of weeks prior to the end of his last year there in December 2006. I knew that he was a Shona from Zimbabwe and that he had arrived in Australia two years prior, though I had not had an opportunity to speak with him until then. In our conversations that followed he was comfortable talking about a host of subjects in his flawless English, and would think and respond carefully to any suggestions put to him. As the child of diplomats, Jomo had lived in various countries, and hence from a young age had been exposed to various cultures and he appeared at first to be almost without prejudice or preconceived notions of others.

When I asked Jomo in our first interview in 2007 about his reaction when his father first told him they were moving to Australia, Jomo broke out into a grin:

Jomo

I was immediately excited... I thought I would soon be living in a
Western society with all of its trappings – skyscrapers, the latest fashions, music, culture and technologies.

K So was that the case after you got here?
J When I came to Australia I had expectations, expectations that were not met. I didn’t find any, like I didn’t find any good friends ...and I was thinking of going to America or London to study.

K So what was the difficulty with finding friends?... Was it cultural? Racial?
J (laughing) If people didn’t think I was cool – because all black people are cool – I guess, like black Americans, then I could play on the African side. I never expected that kind of attention (laughing) that you can actually take advantage of it if you like. If you know your way around and no one knows where you are coming from, then you can make fun. Simple things like “we don’t have TV in Zimbabwe, or I have a lion as a pet.”

The excitement Jomo felt about migration quickly turned to disappointment, within a short time after his arrival. Although he did not discuss his emotions in as much detail as Selam, nor did they surface readily in our discussion, Jomo showed obvious disappointment and projected a sense of urgency when speaking of the need to ‘get out’, America, London, anywhere, before he got stuck.

On the question of friendship, the conversation took an interesting turn. No doubt unaware at the time about the ways in which the perplication of race in my own experience affected my reaction to Jomo’s mention of the difficulty finding friends, I immediately questioned whether ‘cultural’ and ‘racial’ issues were the cause. Jomo’s, at least ostensibly, more light-hearted response, played on the exotic and the ascriptive ‘cool’ of Black America, as a means for Jomo to re-negotiate his belonging as a ‘black’ youth in the new terrain and to navigate the emotions that migration and its emotional displacement brings. Jomo learned to quickly re-code his feelings or to express them in newly coded ways (see Jackson 1989). Such light-hearted attempts to re-jig his emotions, so as to mitigate his disappointment, bought Jomo time to adjust to the local conditions and once again allowed humour to take the sting.

Perhaps I had overplayed the role of race in interpreting Jomo’s sense of isolation, but I could certainly identify with the role that some light-hearted lying played in gaining a sense of empowerment. I recalled similar tactics adopted by my siblings and I prior to our first visit to Zimbabwe from Australia in the early 1980s. We were not migrants and had grown up locally in Canberra, but with very little idea of what experiences our journey to Africa would bring, my siblings and I choose to tell friends
at primary school that we were the children of chiefs in Africa and that we had lions and other wild animals for pets. Even back then on our first visit in the early 1980s, newly liberated Zimbabwe was a semi-militarised state. I could scarcely imagine what the country was like amidst the chaos that was occurring in 2004 at the time of Jomo’s departure, though a colleague summed up the situation neatly. During a brief discussion I mentioned my Zimbabwean heritage and this stopped the conversation in its tracks. “God, what a country” was his immediate reply, “once the bread basket of Africa, now the basket case”. To add to the confusion in Zimbabwe was President Mugabe’s new status as TV Show personality. Mainstream ‘infotainment’, such as Good News Week or Rove, began to use images of Mugabe and the currency associated with Zimbabwe as yet another African country to crumble or fail at the hands of a violent dictator. The image and the words of Mugabe were used indiscriminately either to make fun of the political situation in Australia, or for senseless humour.22

Jomo avoided on a number of occasions discussing the reality of the situation back home in any depth. Perhaps this was a tactic to stay under the radar and to avoid drawing attention to his origins and political affiliations, for fear that they would exacerbate his attempts to ‘fit in’, especially at a time when Zimbabwe was under much scrutiny in the West. In any case, the differences Jomo did reflect upon between life in Australia and back home related largely to more mundane matters of daily routine:

Back in Zimbabwe we would always rise early in the morning to shower with a proper breakfast at the table, greeting and speaking with family before heading off to school. Now it seems more rushed. The house is a bit smaller so we don’t actually do cleaning in the morning we just kind of leave the cleaning for the weekend. It’s definitely a different lifestyle... I think at this time maybe we are just kind of adapting umm I guess, to the Australian way of life. I mean just taking a shower and going to work.... The most African thing that I do is probably greeting my parents when I return home at the end of the day. Back home after meals we’d thank my mum for cooking, here we don’t, it’s a bit more casual a bit more relaxed. I’m not sure what my mum thinks!!

22 One of the most absurd moments I was to witness was an image of Mugabe in a pose purportedly holding a Hungry Jacks burger. Commentary on Zimbabwe also extended to popular music. One such example is Damien Marley and Nasir Jones in ‘Road to Zion’ (2005) who in condemning the Mugabe regime subtly utter the lyrics ‘President Mugabe holding guns to innocent bodies in Zimbabwe’. A generation earlier his father, Bob Marley & the Wailers (1979), would praise the same country and leader with the lyrics ‘Africans a-liberate (Zimbabwe), yeah’. See also extensive discussion on the music of Thomas Mapfumo who has overtly criticised the Mugabe regime since the 1990s.
Sensitive to these differences, Jomo was able to adapt to the local conditions in Australia quickly. His dress soon resembled most college students – jeans, a T-shirt and runners – and he blended into college life quickly, more so than Selam. Even Jomo’s command of the English language included more localised jargon:

J The thing is, I think my accent is not quite... it’s not that different, so I think everyone thought that I had been here for a long period of time.
K Yeah, I guess so, cos at ‘the college’ you blended into the woodwork straight away, you know what I mean? Like you didn’t make a fuss. Some of the African girls at college like to perform. You remember Selam?
J Selam, yeah.
K Like she really just made her presence known, especially at Multi Nation Day performances. The Zimbabweans that I have met recently, Shona or Ndebele are like you, they generally like to blend in, they know how to adjust quickly. Maybe it is a postcolonial thing? It’s like when we first met, I realised that you had come from Zim but you were very comfortable, seemed like you just fit in. It was sort of like you were born and bred here...or maybe I am biased! {Jomo laughs}

As new migrants Selam and Jomo shared a particular desire directly linked to more dominant discourses on what it meant to be Australian; that is, a desire to gain permanent residency. During the times that I met with Jomo and Selam, gaining permanent residency was a dominant concern. Jomo in particular did not want to return to Zimbabwe:

K Ok, so if you had to go back to Zimbabwe tomorrow, would you embrace it?
J Umm, no. Considering... if Zimbabwe was as it was when I left I wouldn’t mind going back but I wouldn’t be looking forward to going back. Having... although the media exaggerates things, having seen the destruction in some places, how things have changed I wouldn’t value going back.

Anxiety about residency was intensified at the time of my study, due to the post 9/11 environment in which citizenship and the concomitant obligation to uphold ‘Australian values’ was becoming especially emphasised. This was an era in which ‘new’ forms of racism were subtly generated by aligning political discourses on
national belonging, not with the biological hierarchy of yesteryear, but with the idea of cultural difference as ‘unAustralian’. This emphasis on the need for a demonstrated fidelity to the country was not, of course, peculiar to Australia, as Amin’s (2002: 977) reflections on the mood in the United Kingdom at the time suggest:

The latest manifestation is the government's proposal that new immigrants should be required take an oath of allegiance to British cultural norms (such as fair play) and citizenship norms (presumably liberal). This kind of act perpetuates the idea that immigrants (subtly also those born and brought up in Britain) need to prove their loyalty and their national cultural credentials, while the identity and affiliations of White Britons who presumably also include racists, internationalists, anticapitalists, socialists, Muslims, antinationalists, cosmopolitans, eco-globalists remains unproblematic.

Thus the intensification of the question of belonging that occurs on arrival to a new country was for the migrants in my study compounded by the State’s push for belonging as an exclusively nationalistic phenomenon. Here, clearly, belonging is conflated with identity.

There were, no doubt, differences between the experiences of Jomo and Selam that an intersectional framework could elucidate, through attention to, for example, the ways in which race intersected with gender, ethnicity, class and so forth. Yet what interests me here is how they both shared a similar perspective on the difficulties of migration. Their cultures, in their minds, revolved around their respect for family and community, and their familial routine, traits they thought did not exist in the Australian way of life. They both lamented the lack of understanding of African people and cultures that eventually resulted in an inability or lack of desire to make ‘white’ friends. This perception of their exclusion from white circles was exacerbated by the fact that they were both considered by other youth to be FOBs – ‘fresh off the boat’ – a term previously reserved for asylum seekers and refugees arriving to Australia via boat and supposedly lacking in cultural awareness and education. This obvious colloquial misnomer reflects a hegemonic suggestion that only local knowledge counts, and merely reinforces aspects of the diasporic theorisations outlined earlier, such as the idea that clinging to traditional ways could be ultimately self-defeating. In highlighting the similarities between Jomo’s and Selam’s perceptions of the experience of migration, my point is not to generalise about African migrants to Australia; this was clearly not meant as a representative nor generalisable study. Rather, my aim in outlining some of the contours of this peculiar diasporic sensibility is to gesture toward the messy territory of the multicultural, which troubles the notions of cultural origin and authenticity, as it introduces the
logics of translation, entanglement (Hall 2012) and adjustment.

In Jomo’s case his examples of negotiating his self-difference in the local terrain, highlights how Jomo’s diasporic sensibility involved a conflation of, and his entanglement in, a here and there. When I asked him about the cultural change, in particular, Jomo reasoned with me that “kids are trying to fit in to society so they won’t want to do things that are considered uncool”, and as such, cultural change to a more western lifestyle was inevitable:

K So what are you going to do about this loss of culture?
J To be honest there is not much I can do while I am living here. Even if I was to go back now to Zimbabwe it’s like I’m, like growing up differently. Even our generation back in Zimbabwe are not as cultured as the previous generation. It’s like they are all trying to live civilized, like the westernised lifestyle, so it’s like I would just fit in, it would seem normal
K Are you still speaking the language, Shona?
J Yeah and it sounds weird. When I call one of my friends (in Zimbabwe) he just laughs and goes “tsss, what the hell, you sound like a white person, man!” And I’m thinking to myself, “you can’t get an Aussie accent, you can’t get an Aussie accent!”
J Even now I think in English and I have to translate to Shona, whereas before it was the reverse.

Acculturation and loss was a way of life for Jomo. This was particularly the case, since even back in Zimbabwe, a country that by western standards was rapidly deteriorating to a point of collapse, he perceived life as becoming more westernised. On this point, I sensed from Jomo that even if he returned to Zimbabwe, any status he would receive from living in the West would be short lived. Nevertheless, there is also a degree of complexity in Jomo’s thinking around the notion of cultural loss. As the conversation turned to language, for example, Jomo’s varied responses showed a certain ambiguity over where in fact he was positioned (here or there) in his psycho-social space. On one hand Jomo took the similarity of his accent (and indeed command of the English language) in Australia as a means to conceal his foreignness among the dominant culture, as both language and accent gave him a sense of local entitlement here in Australia. Yet in reflecting on the possibility of a life back home, his accent suddenly becomes a potential source of racialised taunting, and quickly becomes a source of anxiety – “you can’t get an Aussie accent, you can’t get an Aussie accent!” Further still, as the closing extract to this chapter reveals, overall there is a touch of uncertainty that, maybe it is his accent, after all, that has led to his treatment as ‘other’ by his ‘black mates’. Thus Jomo’s adjustment to the
‘multiple belongingness’ and messiness of the multicultural is also complex, and perhaps even confusing. This signals ambiguity in Jomo’s sense of self, but so too demonstrates the complexity and contradictions in reflecting on one’s sense of difference that stems from a diasporic sensibility.

The arrival of Jomo and Selam (as well as her brother, Selaisse) seemed, to an immersed observer, to have disrupted the existing sense of solidarity at the college among the locally born African youth. As the children of diplomats, they shared a sense of privilege in being in Australia as part of the growing African middle class to be educated in the West; they were well-educated and well-travelled transnationals, members of the new contemporary African diaspora, for whom Africa remained a ‘pressing existential reality’ (see Zeleza 2005). For example, the existential reality of life back in Africa was more than evident upon my first visit to Selam’s family home, in which the Eritrean and Arabic influences in her life were strikingly present. The smell of incense and spices wafted through the living room, diplomatic plaques adorned the walls, and a picture of his Excellency the President of Eritrea hung in the formal lounge. Al Jazeera was on the television beaming live to Mecca, marking the end of Ramadan. Selam’s Aunty seated me in the living room, and began to prepare me traditional tea. My senses were adrift somewhere between Zimbabwe and Morocco.

6.3 Affiliative Negotiations and Hegemonic Schooling

Thus far in this chapter I have been describing the affiliative negotiations of difference that function in relation to a diasporic sensibility and which serve as a response to the status of being ‘fresh off the boat.’ Here I want to reflect specifically on the educational context and the impact that it has on the formation of affiliative forms of negotiation – those negotiations of the sense of difference oriented toward solidarity and shared experience. For all the public and policy discourse on multiculturalism in Australia in recent decades, Australian studies continue to trace evidence of hegemonic educational practices, through which the values taught are those of the dominant culture. On this, Stratton (2011: 4) suggests, that the conservative Prime Minister John Howard during his time in office (1996-2007) saw the curriculum as a means to preserve a particular hegemony. Stratton (2011: 4) writes:

Howard directly intervened in the school history curriculum to ensure that

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23 On this point Paul Zeleza (2005) argues, contra to Gilroy’s (1993) claims, that the new diaspora is distinctly at odds with the old diaspora which is contingent upon an African Americanisation of diasporans. Zeleza contests that new African diasporas often privilege those that are mobile, and able to access western education.
the conservative view of Australia’s past would be taught.... [H]e had a clear, and conservative, view of what kind of Australian society he wanted. He actively sought to re-establish an Australian national identity that was fundamentally homogeneous and based on Australia’s British cultural heritage.

It is in such a context, that minority socio-cultural groups must acculturate, remain invisible or perhaps figure as a kind of exotic curio. On this, Forrest et al (2016: 620) note that ‘white “middle class teachers”’ continue to be liable to claims of ‘replicating and sustaining dominant patterns of white hegemony’. Further, Watkins et al (2016: 62) conclude from a large Australian survey of teachers’ understanding of multicultural education and ESL teaching that ‘there is no guarantee the teacher workforce possess the necessary expertise to adequately deal with the rapidly changing demographics within Australian schools and the educational and social challenges these pose.’ Clearly, much has been written in international critical race studies and educational literature alike on the ways in which it is possible to challenge hegemonic forms of education; most famously Paulo Freire’s notion of critical pedagogy inspires practices oriented toward opening up dialogical spaces to work against the dominant norms embedded in education systems. On this Denzin writes:

A commitment to critical pedagogy in the classroom can be an empowering, dialogical experience. The instructional spaces become sacred spaces. In them students take risks and speak from the heart, using their own experiences as tools for forging critical race consciousness (Denzin 2003: 273).

However, in the absence of such positive attempts to bring racialised norms into focus in the educational space in order to counter their effects, dealing with the problem of hegemonic schooling lies squarely at the feet of those marginalised by it. This is, of course, a point that much postcolonial theory has noted; namely, that it is the racialised who bear the responsibility for the problem of race and its relation to normative existence (Said 1985; Gilroy 1993). In the educational setting, and as Nayak (1997: 58) suggests, non-white students must adopt a ‘variety of techniques’ to resist hegemonic schooling, techniques that ‘incorporate individual acts of subversion and accommodation, as well as processes of avoidance, resistance and negotiation.’

That the onus to resist the effects of covertly normative schooling falls to racialised students is evident in a number of ways. To the extent that race is recognised as ‘positive difference’ it is, for example, seen as, quite literally, a ‘project’ for the
racialised to take on. As one locally born participant of Eritrean/Dutch parentage, Keren, indicated in the following exchange:

K: So did you learn much about your ethnicity at school?
Ke: At high school...nothing; when I was at primary school I probably learnt more but not at high school... Not unless I approached a teacher to begin a project and I did something to swing it that way. I noticed at high school and in college as well, if I picked a subject like that (related to Africa) then I would get interest straight away from the teachers, and the marks would go up!

{both laughing}

K: I thought you were going to say that, you had to re-educate them...your teachers!
Ke: You could say that!

Here the question of Kerin’s ethnic difference finds its place within the culture of her schooling as a source of fascination; this gives Keren an exotic status, at least temporarily, an issue that she spoke about on a number of occasions.

Although during their time at the College my key informants, their siblings and friends were forming a critical mass sufficient to create the presence of an emerging ‘new ethnicity’ (Hall 1996b) as African Australian, the opportunity to explore this new ethnicity through the school curriculum, pastoral care, extra curricula programs, and through teachers was limited. This was the case not only for Selam and Jomo who were new to Australia, its way of life and its education system, but also for Adham, Talia, Amena and Keren who were already established and had spent many years in school in Canberra. As Keren implies above, there were few opportunities within the school environment to learn more about their ethnicity or culture, since the problem of race was attributed to those marked as racialised.

While being positioned as the exotic bearer of the problem of difference may be tedious, the burden of proving one’s worth is also one that my participants registered on a number of occasions. For Talia, for example, being of African heritage meant that gaining recognition for her achievements in educational contexts was particularly challenging, though this was a challenge she felt that she had to take on for herself and for the ‘African community’:

T: Coming from being born here and having African parents, I used to live a lie saying ahhh I’m the same as everybody else and others would say, yeah you’re the same as me. But I think I will face challenges. I don’t know how to explain it, it just happens like that,
but even within myself I feel that I have to go an extra mile just to prove myself. ...it is not something that controls my life but it is always standing back there. Even with school achievement I have had to prove myself. This is not only personal but also doing the African community proud.... My mum says African women especially find it really hard (in this country). Really hard to break through, and there is always barriers around them.

As Saldanha (2010: 2413) comments in reading the work of Fanon, there are a host of moral and psychological inferences made on a ‘black man’, such that:

The fact that this black body earned a PhD, speaks multiple languages, travels extensively, and enjoys poetry and literature, the fact of 'my' individual embodiment is for racist perception irrelevant.

This sense, then, of having to try that much harder to prove oneself was not uncommon and one that pervaded familial attitudes towards education as well. On this, Selam’s reflections on the regular exchange that took place between she and her father on the question of tardiness was instructive. Upon chatting with Selam one day I asked her to describe for me a typical day in her life as lived here in Canberra and whether there were certain moments that resonated with her as signs of the impact of her Eritrean culture on daily life:

Since I am an African or Eritrean, you get up in the morning and you have a cup of tea ... basically all of the family is there. And we were always late, but, yeah, my dad tries not to be late. He always tries to be there on time, and he gets always angry in the morning {slapping her hands together}... “When are you going to learn that is what pulls Africa back?” my father would ask.....The lecture every morning. ...we have that, yep. And he goes, “You see that is why people don’t expect much of us!” “When are you going to learn?” ....We have that like every morning, the lecture. And me and my brother just goes, yep, “yes dad” and he goes, “no, I am serious” and he drops us to school and he goes “I don’t want you to be late next time.” And we are like “ok dad, we understand.” And the next morning {laughing, slapping her hands} we are late again. Every time we are late!

Selam’s father’s negative assessment of his own culture vis-à-vis Western culture is evident here in the claim that time inefficiency is ‘what pulls Africa back’. But of course what is also Implicit in his ‘lecture’ is the caution that when it comes to the behaviour of those who are conspicuously different, as Selam is, people will be watching; her difference, he warns, is likely to be perceived negatively.
For her part, Selam saw the question of ‘assimilation’ to Australian life rather differently to her father, and she insisted on doing what she could to re-value the difference of Eritrean culture. Selam was adamant that people needed to know more about her culture and she was intent on re-educating those around her. As in the majority of mainstream schools, the college held a Multi-Nation Day, which was celebrated at the school each year in October. A number of different ethnic groups would perform traditional dance and music, sing traditional song and prepare food to raise money for charities in the developing world. Here Selam and her brother, accompanied by several other African students, would perform dance or music steeped in tradition to exemplify their Eritrean culture. In Selam’s eyes, this was a means to overcome the lack of cultural understanding that made her adjustment to life in Australia difficult. Rarely however, would she have opportunity to elucidate on the specific details of her culture in such a forum, so that her performance ran the risk of being perceived as ‘African dancing’, reinforcing the essentialist view of Africans as an homogenous, exotic people and the kind of ‘spaghetti and polka’ version of multiculturalism described by Mary Kalantsis and Bill Cope in the 1980s to reflect the ‘tolerant’ forms of multiculturalism that relied on celebrating diversity.

Her attempts to further others’ understanding of Eritrean culture only temporarily settled Selam’s discomfort, however, and her sense of marginalisation led ultimately to Selam seeking her sense of belonging elsewhere. Again, we began to see an assertion of what I have called a diasporic sensibility. Through particular gestures, whether simple explorations of ‘Africa’ within the margins of the curriculum or more culturally significant statements, this sensibility served to both consciously and unconsciously resist the hegemony that the nation state and its institutions reproduce through their cultural norms and so-called shared values. Through their solidarity, friendship and engagement with each other my participants began to overcome the sense of isolation and cultural outsiderism that their ‘race’ and ethnicity produced, a feeling that was evident in their early schooling or upon arriving in this country. The small victories in discovering more of their cultural heritage or making the voices of minorities heard was serving as a temporary remedy, if not a panacea, for the sense that their culture, ethnicity, and the plight of black people for equality, were on the outside. They were bringing their situated knowledge to the fore, seeking solidarity through sameness. From my own perspective as a researcher, by this point significantly immersed in their lives, it was pleasing to see these emergent solidarities, which seemed to be positive responses to the sense of marginalisation the youth were experiencing. Reflective questions remained in my mind, however: “Will such efforts to belong capture them within a limited range of determinations? What scope will there be within these attempts to revalue their difference for novel forms of becoming?”
6.4 African friends and Ethnic Solidarity: seeking roots and understanding

After spending much time with her at school, I realised that Selam was largely disillusioned with school life and, with a strong need for sameness, she found herself immersed in the African diasporic community in Australia. In turn she appeared to become less engaged with those that did not understand her. Much of Selam’s anguish revolved around the lack of knowledge Australians had of African people, their culture and their way of life despite her attempts to re-educate them:

S  Ahhh, well, they don’t have much understanding of my culture… a lot of people had never heard of Eritrea
K  mmm
S  And basically they don’t know much about my culture, like they don’t know…umm…
K  I’m just thinking of when I first met you in one of my business classes you were…
S  I was just quiet and didn’t know
K  You weren’t that quiet…
S  Wasn’t I?
K  I don’t quite remember Selam as the quiet one {smiling}!
S  Ok {grins}
K  …Not at all, in fact. You weren’t loud either, just comfortable in who you were. But again, you were struggling and I thought people might not have understood where you were coming from, let alone where you were at.
S  Exactly, yeah. Year 12 was better once I had my African friends.

Seeking African friends was a conscious move for Selam towards belonging, and one that began to create the impression of a unified and affiliated black culture in the school. I had interpreted her adamant assertions that there was very little understanding of African people in this country as a reference to white Australians. It was through my discussions and interactions with Adham, Keren, Talia and later Amena, however, that I came to appreciate that it was as much those that Selam at first considered like her, and with whom she sought solidarity, that lacked the understanding of her culture that she so desired. Selam herself suggested that whilst she was in the same year as Talia and Keren, and knew them reasonably well, it was not until in Year 12 when she met her ‘African friends’ that she started to have a sense of affiliation and belonging at school. Unlike Talia and Keren who were raised in Australia, and admitted a degree of ignorance or lack of knowledge as to their
African culture, these African friends were ‘new arrivals’ and shared, in her mind, significant continuities with Selam.

Talia had mentioned to me how Selam and her ‘African friends’ – Do, a Ghanaian girl and Rudo, a year 11 girl from Zimbabwe – were often together at school. Rudo and Do offered Selam an escape from the marginalisation she was experiencing and the emotional displacement that first plagued her upon arrival. Through her new African friends, Selam re-continued in her African culture including ‘her’ humour and sense of family togetherness. And yet their arrival added an extra layer of complexity to my attempts to understand the social interaction and affiliations between my key informants in determining their sense of community as African Australian.

As a newly arriving migrant, Selam’s reflexive and embodied consciousness led her to seek sameness as a means to heighten her belonging, but she did so in ways that were significantly distinct from those employed by Talia and Adham, who featured in the previous chapter; Selam’s alterity to the dominant culture was not renounced through the same associations and appropriations of popular culture that they relied upon. Being more immediately wed to the African continent and experiencing the shock of emotional displacement, Selam found solace in integrating into the landscape, seeking solidarity and sameness through pan-African alliances. This was a means for her to create her own emergent identity and to re-continue as an African, a means to resist the racial associations that her epidermal schema had triggered in the labelling of her body as ‘other’, as well as her own displacement.

Selam was not alone when it came to seeking affiliation through African friends. Keren, who had earlier confessed to me that she needed to know her culture, eventually took it upon herself to re-engage the community and also actively sought solidarity across African ethnic boundaries. Living in Canberra and attending schools in which there was an increasing population of African youth, Keren was able to find affiliation with other African kids and reflect upon their shared experiences and interactions. For Keren, a defining moment in discovering herself as part of an African collective came in year 8, before she attended college:

I met this group of mixed race friends when I was in year 8, around 14. It was at this stage that I was reattaching myself to the African community... going to their houses and being acknowledged as dad's daughter and knowing like, ‘wow’ I have been here before.

This particular group of friends were known to each other collectively as the 0.5s (point fives) – code for bi cultural or, in the old language, ‘half caste’ kids, all of an African and European mix. Keren found that blending with the point fives gave her a
new lease on her African (Eritrean) life. She was able to comfortably discuss her friends’ ethnicity and cultural heritage, and was at ease mixing with the African community. Yet there remained a disjuncture for Keren between her new found affiliations and her gestures towards a more ‘authentic’ African Australian identity. Though Keren shared solidarity and affiliation with her point fives, when with her other African friends, she at times still felt isolated due to her being of mixed ethnicity; and she was considered by some of her African friends and their families as “a token white.”

For his part, Jomo was well aware that while “people here are naturally curious because I am different… most Australians are relatively ignorant as to Zimbabwe.” Yet it was not solidarity that Jomo sought with other Africans in the first instance; indeed, when it came to African friends Jomo did not have any. Jomo however, did seek friendship and solidarity along ethnic lines, associating during the latter stages of his time in college and into university with, as he expressed it, ‘black’ Asians. Jomo put it this way:

Most of my friends are Sri Lankan and Indians. I hardly have any white friends. There are a few but they are not really my good mates I guess. The thing is I don’t think that black and white people get on together well. People with similar skin colour share the same experiences, a sort of shared experience of the past rather than the present… ...When one thinks of race, the only incident that I can recall is walking through the interchange and someone shouted out "go back to your own country". I didn’t take this too seriously, I shrugged it off I guess because I don’t live here permanently… My Sri Lankan friends take racist taunts more seriously, especially ‘go back to your own country’, as they were actually born here, they didn’t migrate here.

Jomo’s reflection on how the lack of cultural knowledge and understanding of difference steered him towards seeking solidarity with those that he felt were more like him or who at least could better relate to his experience triggered memories for me, which I raised in discussion with Jomo:

This reminds me of a friend of mine in high school, at our Year 10 reunion, who joked with me when looking at one of our Year 10 formal photos: “That’d be right, bloody Zwangobani sneaking in with

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24This may explain why, during her first year at college, Keren did not appear as attached to her 0.5 nor African friends. She began mixing with a different group, a group that were into experimenting with drugs and alcohol, skipping school and discovering their sexuality.

25Black ‘Asians’ is not a term I adopted myself, but rather a term that Jomo used to describe his friends. In more contemporary vernacular, some Asians consider themselves brown (see Australian Story 2012)
the wogs.” With you it is different, I’d probably say that you snuck in with the Sri Lankans!

{both laugh}

J yeah

Such ethnic solidarities seem to grow from a sense that less ostracism or overtly racist reactions to difference come from those that share an experience of marginalisation (Bloul 1999). Even though Jomo initially sought ethnic solidarity based on the colour of skin, he also suggested that he and his friends shared similar cultural norms and expectations. Jomo would, for example, often talk about how his ethnic friends shared the same set of underlying values with respect to their parent’s expectations, career choices, even girlfriends.

K But aren’t Indians and Sri Lankans culturally different to blacks?

J But in relation to their family and their expectations. How they live is all so much closer to my experience ...

Jomo and I talked further on the role of the first born or elder sons in Shona and Ndebele culture. The responsibility for family and siblings, the respect paid to elders, the anticipation of a good paying job and starting one’s own family. These were points of intersection with Jomo’s Sri Lankan and Indian friends – strict boundaries and expectations placed on Jomo by parents contrary to ‘more westernised’ families, this included restrictions on them as adolescents to socialise freely. Although it was evident in Jomo’s example that solidarity revolved around sameness (within cultural difference) – colour of skin, values, beliefs, expectations and shared experiences of racism due to this difference – this solidarity did not preclude Jomo on arrival from being treated as different, even by those with whom he eventually found solidarity.

K But haven’t they (Indian and Sri Lankan mates) been here a lot longer than you? Weren’t they born here?

J Yeah.

K So they didn’t give you the fob treatment?

J Umm, I guess I got that from everyone.

K It didn’t matter?

J It didn’t matter… Maybe my accent is different!

In this chapter, the negotiations of difference pursued by my participants, and particularly the newly arrived ones, drew more readily on the pan-African political orientation and diasporic sensibility associated with the continent, rather than the global consumption of blackness. In these affiliative negotiations we witness the
production of an African Australian ethnicity through more traditional paradigms of African heritage, infused into the local context. This produces mixed emotions and feelings, and at times a distinct disjuncture between how newly arrived youth experienced their African heritage and their sense of identity relative to their locally born counterparts. Nevertheless, within the interactions and representations that I explored in this chapter, there remained a tension between diasporic, local and national senses of belonging. This tension appeared to create a push towards seeking sameness and solidarity along cultural and ethnic lines, which at times inflected on the politico-cultural positioning of other non-whites. This resulted in representations that sustained the embodied memories of association that surfaced in their reflexive consciousness, and the representations that speak to their sense of self as a black African youth. Through these ongoing reflexive negotiations of difference they continued to shape what could be considered a ‘new ethnicity’ as African Australian, and resisted conceding to an arbitrary and hegemonic category or a priori position based on race.

While there were no overt attempts by the African youth at the College to create a collective identity through student groups or associations such as would erupt from time to time in the school environment, with Indigenous, Muslim, even Christian youth, there was a sense of community of sorts between African youth and their families, a community based on mutual recognition and knowledge of each other’s African heritage. Yet there was no guarantee that these attempts to seek solidarity through a host of exchanges and affiliations would be successful, and indeed, the dynamic pluralism of such groupings defied the homogeneity implied in the image of ‘an African Australian’ community. The reflexive negotiation of difference through affiliation in this sense, shares with more ascriptive negotiations a tendency to hypostatize racial difference and, to put it in more ontological terms, to see difference as merely negative. As Deleuze (1994) insists, difference is merely ‘difference from’ when identity is the dominant term; even the revalorisation of difference through its celebration cannot escape this logic. In this case, the pursuit of affiliations capable of providing ‘roots and understanding’ cannot avoid the risk of remaining situated as racialised subjects, even though the emotional and embodied purchase these solidarities provide offers an alternative to being socially or institutionally othered and marginalised. The question is whether the pursuit of sameness to counter displacement and resist racialisation might also reinforce those ‘confluences of meaning that keep power relations in place’ Saldanha (2010: 2414)?

It is significant that several of my participants have a conscious memory of an encounter that bought to the fore their perceived alterity to the dominant ‘white’ culture. While at times these memories stem from overtly racialised, or perhaps racist, encounters with others, they demonstrate well the sometimes subtle manner
by which the idea of race works into the social experience of those racialised, for whom a new encounter invariably produces an overdetermined string of associations and bodily dispositions. While I have argued that it is among the capabilities of the body to have its own sense of agency and reflexivity which informs young people’s efforts to negotiate their perceived difference, I emphasised that this negotiation of difference is triggered by what I have called the epidermal reflex; that is, a bodily reflex, through which the felt sense of difference leads to a heightened sensitivity to one’s racialisation, giving rise to an embodied sense of difference. It is the racialisation of bodies, as my theoretical use of Ahmed, Memmi and others has illustrated, and my empirical work suggests, that affects the capacity for young people to form relations when encountering their racialisation, as triggered by the epidermal reflex. For it is the various memories, emotions, representations, and even language and identities to which the racialised subject may attach that directly affect such relations, not only in the present, but in the future.

Much of the negotiation of self-difference, as I have illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6, occurs within a space in which youth are in an ongoing process of reacting to, and in important ways contesting, their racialisation and perceived alterity. My participants’ ascriptive and affiliative identifications, I have suggested, are based on the tenuous link between the phenomenological experience of self that surfaces with their racialisation, and the various representations and discourses which they appropriate to give meaning to their embodied sense of difference. In describing such processes, I have sought to contribute to the understanding of the practices of everyday multiculture described by Harris (2009; 2013), Gilroy (2005b), Nayak (2010; 2006) and others, through focusing on the embodied processes and emerging forms of consciousness that are germane to such everyday multiculture. Given the role of the body in these processes, I have used the notion of ‘reflexive’ advisedly, to give a sense of the simultaneously reflex (autonomic) nature of the epidermal reflex and the forms of both conscious and bodily reflexivity to which it gives rise, when the subject sees his or herself as an object through the lens of the encounter with the other and the associations, memories and habits with which encounters are invariably bound.

I should stress that the ascriptive and affiliative negotiations of difference I have described in these two chapters are crucial for African youth in the midst of forming a sense of belonging as African Australian. They provide means through which youth can move away from dominant notions of identity and belonging, or resist the racism that may stem from the racialising process. Yet, if I have been suggesting that the pan-ethnic affiliations described in this chapter, like the ascriptive codes of representation described in Chapter 5, offer the potential for African youth to foster
a sense of their belonging as African Australian, I have also suggested that they remain somewhat reactive negotiations of difference – literally reacting to the usually negative sense of one’s difference from the norm. To put it another way, the negotiations of difference I have been describing do not yet mobilise the more positive sense of difference, which, in Chapters 7 and 8, I stress is crucial to the understanding of convivial multiculture. That the representations and discourses that such youth appropriate in their efforts to negotiate their perceived difference give rise to tenuous and incomplete identifications is, I suggest in Chapters 7 and 8, an opportunity as much as it is a problem. For I suggest that, within the epidermal reflex through which one ‘recognises’ an encounter as a racialised encounter, there remains the possibility of bifurcations – unpredictable actualisations of affective potentials which, to the extent that individuals and emergent collectives can attune to them, can enable race to perplicate differently in the future. As I argue in the next chapter, then, the epidermal reflex need not be merely a trigger for the reproduction of sameness. Rather, it may also be what primes youth to be able to affectively attune to one another, and thus foster an open and indeterminate collective sense of belonging as African Australian in a world which is, by its very nature, always becoming.
I have been, up to now, arguing for convivial multiculture as a set of practices through which youth are able to come together to identify with an image of an African Australian collective. Such multiculture is premised on the local negotiations, or what Amin (2002a) calls prosaic negotiations, of difference, which offer a means to destabilise fixed relations and identities and enact new patterns of sociality. Given the socio-historical context of the migration of non-whites to Australia, and the ongoing racialisation of Africans, I have also sought to bring forth a better understanding of how race continues to perplicate into social relations and indeed, into the identification of African Australianness.

In this chapter, my concern is to draw attention to those potentials for conviviality that lies less in the identifications of individuals and groups and more within the relational field itself. While I remain committed to convivial multiculture as a social practice and a means through which young people might enact social change, my intention here is to show how the non-conscious and pre-personal – affective – dimensions of the relational field, hold the potential to actualise different modes of political belonging as African Australian. This is, I suggest, a form of belonging that has the potential to be less encumbered by the everyday vicissitudes and habitual repetition of race. Amin (2002a), for his part, hints at the processes and micropolitics necessary for the types of negotiations that disrupt habituated and ingrained responses to race, or for that matter gender, sex, class and so forth. Likewise, Harris (2009; 2013), in succinctly capturing the notion of an everyday multiculture, calls for a focus on the emotional and embodied dimensions of experience through which we may enact such multicultural practices. Amin and Harris offer a provocative invitation to theorise what prosaic negotiations would look like through a more visceral and affective lens. What I consider here, is how convivial multiculture and the prosaic negotiations of difference upon which it is enacted, are underwritten by affective and relational processes of differentiation and becoming. As I will argue in the conclusion, this has implications for understanding the complexity of the relationship between the micropolitical potentials inherent to social life and the macropolitical conditions that, at least in part, impact upon their becoming-actual.

Massumi, in arguing for micropolitics as a means to enact social change, suggests that we need to examine the affective tendencies that persist in a relational field if we are to rethink the way in which bodies may coalesce into a political collective. For Massumi, however, it is a question of how the collective potential in any event can be collectively felt and acted upon differentially to allow bodies, adopting the Spinozian definition of affect, to increase their capacities to affect and be affected. To this end, Massumi puts forth the notion that it is through the complexity of the
affective field that we may disrupt the dominant and habitual reflexes that tend to
predetermine any political event and diminish the power of bodies and collectives.
As Massumi (2008: 6) puts it:

...bodies can be inducted into, or attuned to, certain regions of tendency,
futurity, and potential, they can be induced into inhabiting the same affective
environment, even if there is no assurance they will act alike in that
environment.

Massumi invites us, then, to consider the ways that bodies can collectively attune to
the potential that inheres in a social field. That we are already pre-populated by a
host of instincts, inclinations, feelings and memories (Massumi 2008: 3), does not
preclude us from inhabiting the same affective environment. Nor, however, is there
any certainty that we will act alike once we attune to that environment. This
differential attunement is key to Massumi’s thinking and indeed my own, in putting
forth an argument for convivial multiculture. To now, the kind of coming together in
difference that I have described relies on difference as effectively the same as
another’s. As a way of dealing with a perceived difference from the norm, ascriptive
and affiliative negotiations of difference draw together those who share in this sense
of difference. It is this form of reflexive negotiation of difference that draws bodies
together to form solidarities or collective associations. If, however, we foreground
an ontology in which difference itself is the determining force in social relations,
rather than identity, we create possibilities for different modes of sharing in and
belonging to an always-becoming social field. Difference, in this sense is seen as an
excess to its representational forms, and is always more than the positions and
intersecting identities to which it gives rise. Difference is a pure variation in sense.
So, how we sense and share the collective field is what produces our identification
within it, and allows bodies to increase their collective power.

According to Massumi, in any given relational field there is a surplus of unactualised
affective potential that is in excess to the expressions and representations that
persist within a social situation. To this end, any identification of representation, or
even emotion for that matter, is always only partial. Massumi (2002b: 213) writes
that:

... an emotion is a very partial expression of affect. It only draws on a limited
selection of memories and only activates certain reflexes or tendencies, for
example. No one emotional state can encompass all the depth and breadth
of our experiencing... The same thing could be said for conscious thought. So
when we feel a particular emotion or think a particular thought, where have
all the other memories, habits, tendencies gone that might have come at the
point? And where have the bodily capacities for affecting and being affected that they’re inseparable from gone? There’s no way they can all be actually expressed at any given point.

When we take an affective ontology as our starting point, attention is drawn to that excess of experience that cannot be represented, though it can be felt and expressed in the body. Here again I would stress the necessity of preserving an analytical distinction between affect, and the emotions in which it is invariably captured. An emotion, thought, or representation is only a partial expression of our body’s capacities to affect and be affected. This suggests, that as complex and intersecting as social encounters are, they bring with them a limitation in their significatory capacities to fully capture the felt qualities of any social relation.

It is timely to remember that, as I suggested in Chapter 3, there are ongoing calls for a greater understanding of race and the immanent questions of being and belonging (Papastergiadis 2012; Stratton and Ang 1998). While such scholars privilege a discursive, intersectional or emotional analysis in understanding the processes via which race and belonging collide, I turn to a more affective method to respond to such questions. So, while necessarily relying on the verbal articulations of research subjects as a lens by which to appreciate social encounters, I attend also to what is not said, to the gestural elements of an encounter and to the points of bifurcation that produce events. By appreciating that empirical experience is always conditioned by a more transcendental level of forces and relations, one can supplement the more conventional focus on the discursive and intercorporeal, with an attention to the incorporeal and affective dimensions of events.

For bodies to access the surplus, or excess potential, that exists in any situation and collectively respond to it involves what Massumi (2008) calls a politics of microperception: a micropolitics. Massumi uses the example of a fire alarm to illustrate. Everyone who hears an alarm is cued in concert, they are primed, so to speak, “to respond to the same event”, though each will respond in different ways. The collective response to such an event can be considered an ‘affective attunement’ to a sign, and it is the “sum total of the different ways of being interpellated by the same event [the alarm] that will define what it will have been politically” (Massumi 2008: 6). To grasp the complexity of such collective political situations, then, it is necessary to appreciate the nature of our priming to an event, and how in turn, bodies may affectively attune in response to a trigger, such as a sign or sensation. I borrow these key terms from Massumi in evoking a sense of how micropolitics are vital to the creative variation necessary for an indeterminate sociality to emerge. And it is this notion of a micropolitics that I use to shape further
my notion of convivial multiculture and, indeed, to frame my notion of political collectivism, my second dynamic of becoming African Australian.

In moving away from the earlier dynamic, the reflexive negotiation of difference, that I have thus far been considering, I seek here to explore a less reactive and differently political manner in which one might actualise the evasive, collective sense of belonging as African Australian. I shift my approach here away from the methodological individualism (Saldanha 2010) that showed how my participants’ expressions of belonging surfaced through racialised encounters and bodies and their biographical and social histories (strings of association). Instead I now synthesise these embodied and reflexive strategies of self-identification, into a more affective and also immanently collective and political process. The dynamic process of political collectivism that I reveal here offers a way for youth to connect with others, and to remain challenged by that connection in ways that might be outside of their direct control (Massumi 2002b), yet through which they are able to defend a self-interest without being totally bound to it. The guiding question here is, how do we in our relations allow race and racialised identifications to temporarily recede and open up to new possibilities of becoming and belonging? How does a move away from predetermined identifications, or even the illusion of a final identity as African Australian, open youth up to something more? This is not to deny the perplication of race in relations, but rather to seek that which comes before and between race’s unfolding.

To explore these arguments, I return to the fieldwork extracts as they depict the differing interactions between my various participants: Keren, Talia, Adham, Jomo, and Selam. Through experimenting with these vignettes, various extracts and social theory, I intend to show how their everyday encounters and ongoing negotiation and contestation of difference may also reveal the vitality of affective attunement. It is through such encounters that their actions mark their collective self-affirmation that works, at times, at odds with the dominant representations and discourses, and begins to consolidate their sense of belonging. In doing so, I take becoming, then, as the starting point, rather than allowing identity and representation to be the lodestar of the event. As JD Dewsbury (2014 n.p.) points out:

...the key here is to realize that our accounts of the event need not be dependent upon, or even interdependent with, a principle of identity; rather we should experiment in apprehending the becoming of ourselves in... the open sense makings of those “conjunctions of forces, confusions between entities, events as encounters (Gibson, 1996: 199)”.

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7.1 Cueing Our Capacities

Political collectivism, as I am describing it in its micropolitical sense, relies on being *primed* to an event. Thus, in this section, ‘cueing our capacities’, I build on the previous chapters to reveal how the past negotiations and habitual engagements with race that produce the psychic and social renderings of black subjectivity underwrite the ways in which such priming plays out. I outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 how my participants, by virtue of being black, were ‘forced’ to negotiate their sense of self and belonging to the social milieu on differing terms to non-racialised youth. The response to the racialisation of their bodies, I argued, was my participants appropriating, in both conscious and more embodied ways, various identities and styles to account for the emergence of race in their social encounters. As such, I have suggested that in many ways it is the racial histories of my participants that determined those identifications and associations, which evoked a certain ‘sense’ of themselves as African Australian. My concern, however, is that within the reflexive negotiation of difference the epidermal reflex becomes habituated, embedded in my participants’ everyday lives as habits. The string of associations that race evokes, through intercorporeal encounters, has the potential to repeat itself (*I hate it when I always respond like that, when I let it get to me!*). Even if we are aware that such associations function, we may not be “aware of them as they function” (Massumi 2008: 10, emphasis added). We must be wary then, as Massumi (2008: 10) argues, that such “secondary awareness wears out” to the extent that we can repeat an iterative process, such as the body positioning that the epidermal reflex evokes in a nonconscious way. Thus as Massumi puts it, habits:

...can end up not attending to the newness or difference in the situations triggering it. When this happens, it has a tendency to make the coming event conform to past events. It loses its powers of adaptation, its power to renew itself, becoming a mere reflex (2008: 10).

The habitual response to race would suggest that youth may reproduce identifications and representations without the conscious realisation of the hold that race may have in forming their relations and self identification. My concern is that such processes of identification evoked by the epidermal reflex, could become so habituated as to diminish capacities for more ‘self-determining’ modes of political collectivism in the name of African Australianness. As the scare quotes suggest, I use the notion of ‘self-determining’ with caution, to indicate that I am not speaking of a collective subject, nor an organic unity. Rather, I aim to evoke a mode of actualising the always-already relational social field, which is not purely externally nor pre-determined, but is unpredictably determinable.
What is meant by this will be the subject of this chapter. For the moment, the important point that I seek to emphasise is that, within the repetition of the past in current actions and eventually habits, there remains the possibility for novelty, to the extent that the habits that we develop can enhance a body’s sensitivity to the event to come; which is to say, its openness to the potential bifurcations in any actualisation of the present, and in any unfolding of the future. This is crucial, for it is in this sense that we can be ‘primed’ to re-become, we can mobilize such habits to become a force that is creative to the newness and, as Erin Manning (2013) puts it, ‘the moreness of life’, rather than succumb to the repetitive iteration of what has come before.

Thus while I have been suggesting that the epidermal reflex is that which triggers a habituated, if ‘reflexive’ response to difference, I am suggesting here that it can also serve as a priming for novelty, a priming toward an as-yet undetermined future. My argument, then, is that while the epidermal reflex may re-inscribe bodies and reproduce the very discourses and subject positions that give power to ‘race’, it may also open possibilities to actualise new forms of belonging. It is thus possible to think through becoming and belonging in more socio-affective and political ways, which might be less encumbered by past processes of racialisation. This is certainly not to dismiss race’s role in social experience, but rather, to think through how one’s racialisation serves also as a point of departure, or a priming, for more sensuous, political and collective forms of belonging. This is to give primacy to the affective relations between bodies, rather than their representations. In this regard, it is those disjunctures and confusions in my participants’ sense of self that I am exploring here, such as the absence of knowing what it is to be African, Australian, African Australian, or for that matter, Australian African. While such an absence of knowing, along more conventional renderings of identity and belonging could be seen as a rupture in the idea of a collective sense of belonging, and thus as merely negative, here I advance the idea that this absence of knowing opens my participants up to experiment with a more virtual and abstract sense of belonging.

As the following extracts suggest, there is an excess to any identification that might be actualised in the process of becoming African Australian. It is this excess in the relational field that opens up new possibilities for the collective sense of belonging and, in a Deleuzian sense, is that which forces us to think ‘with a problem’ rather than seek a resolvable solution. It is this confusion over what it is, and what it means, to be African Australian, which may open to something more – to the excess and moreness of the present and the indeterminacy of the future.

In indicating how my engagement with my participants over a series of years made me aware that their reflexive negotiations of difference were only a part of the
picture, I will begin by returning to Selam. We can recall that Selam was well grounded in the Eritrean diaspora and would challenge whether those who had lived their lives in Australia were authentic Africans. Selam was still struggling with the English language, her dress code and appearance was more ‘ethnic’ than that of her peers and her experience as an African was very much at the foreground of her social experience *per se*. Selam eventually expressed a sense of belonging when she was finally able to connect with her African friends, or what Talia once called ‘African Africans’, and form pan-African affiliations. Prior to this time, Selam argued, she was unable to share her cultural character, due to discontinuities with the way in which she experienced the world relative to non-Africans, and at times a sense of alienation from what Selam referred to as ‘Australian African’ youth, such as Talia.

Circumstances were similar for Jomo. Jomo’s ‘black consciousness’, and the forged connections that gave him a sense of belonging, came into being when he was able to befriend other non-white youth. This sense of belonging and solidarity rested with the like-mindedness of black (non-African) youth and their resistance to, or interpretation of, the dominant culture. Paralleling Selam’s strivings to adopt and adapt to ‘her’ Australian way of life (to the extent that, according to others in the Eritrean community, Selam and her brother were ‘becoming too Australian’), Jomo was acknowledging that he feared he was losing his sense of Africanness. In both cases, and as their interview transcripts in Chapter 6 indicate, their sense of belonging to the diaspora that inflected naturalised Eritrean or Zimbabwean identities, had diminished through the difficulty to continue to perform those rites and rituals they were accustomed to back in the homeland. This was compounded by the lure of the western way of life.

For their part, Amena, Talia, Keren and Adham were not burdened in the same ways by the sense of being a part of, and belonging, to the broader ‘Australian’ culture, having being schooled in Australia for the past 12 years. Whilst they at times felt different to the dominant culture, due to their African heritage and the reflexive disposition that their colour and the epidermal reflex evoked, they nevertheless identified themselves as Australian. At the same time, claiming authenticity as Africans also provided problems of sorts, with Talia, Keren and Ahmed all claiming to “not know” what it meant to be an “African”. On this, the following exchange with Talia was instructive:

K What do you know of Nigeria?
T Right now, very little
K Because you have said to me that you are African and that your beliefs all seem to revolve around your African culture, your African values... So what do you want to know of Nigeria?
Well... That’s a very good question... *(biting her bottom lip, head tilted back, looking at me out of the corner of her eyes while gently nodding her head)* ... I don’t... umm... I don’t know.

At this point in our dialogue, Talia stretched her arms out wide and slowly bought her hands together, fingers spread, then interlocking one another, onto her chest over her heart. She started talking about particular qualities of African people and also the social inequalities that she had witnessed in Nigeria, including domestic violence against women and what she perceived as a very patriarchal system. Talia then suddenly remembered the initial question, what did she know about Nigeria? What did she want to learn about Nigeria?

I don’t know... just to learn about where I come from, that’s something I’d like to just go for a few months to Nigeria to do, and you know, meet my family members that I hardly know and actually learn about... ‘cos I say I’m “Nigerian” *(making scare quotes with her fingers)* but I don’t even know... can’t even say, what is a typical Nigerian. I know typical Nigerian food but that’s... *(shrugging her shoulders and mumbling a response)* ... Not much.

It was not difficult to discern that Talia had some anxiety concerning her lack of knowledge about Nigeria, given how much she had pinned on her identification with Africanness (not even knowing what a ‘typical Nigerian’ is). While she seemed to find some comfort in her ability to identify certain qualities of African people and to recount details of the politico-cultural circumstances she had observed, her perceived lack of knowledge nonetheless appears to open Talia up to a broader sense of lack, vis-à-vis the identity of Africanness she so longs to call her own. The problem that this lack produces for her sense of self gains at least some degree of positivity for Talia in the future orientation of a ‘few months’ spent in Nigeria becoming more immersed in family and culture.

Perhaps it says as much about my own experience and the perplication of race in my present, that I was so keen to find out how my participants negotiated the question of their Africanness in their lives. In any case, my interest in this question lead to some interesting exchanges, such as the following conversation with Adham:

*K* Have you ever been to Niger?
*A* No, I haven’t. Yeah. I should do it sometime. I haven’t actually been to Africa to tell you the truth!
Ok that throws me to another question. Do you see yourself as an African?

A Umm...

Well I can ask you differently. Do you see yourself as an African, as an African Australian, American, what? How would you describe yourself?

A I mean that’s a tough question.

Well would you describe yourself as an African? [laughing]

A Well I wouldn’t say yes, and I wouldn’t say no. I’m kinda in between I guess!... I know that my dad is, definitely African. But at the same time I’m not that familiar with the customs, with the culture, enough to call myself an African.

K So what sort of customs do you… well, what customs are you not familiar with?

A Well, I’m not familiar with them {laughs loudly} … so...

It’s just the way you talk to people… Like, my dad always thinks that I don’t show enough respect. Yeah, you know, stuff like that, which I guess, like… I just picked up the cultures from Australia, you know.

Despite my persistent questioning, Adham’s lack of knowledge about Africa did not seem to particularly trouble him, at least not in the way in which it did for someone like Talia. Going to Africa was something he vaguely felt he ‘should do’ sometime and the question of his identification with Africanness (‘I wouldn’t say yes, and I wouldn’t say no’) is a genuinely ‘in between’ one.

This reference to the in between of identity is an important one, which deserves further attention. From the point of view of identity politics, such in-betweenness would represent an indication of the insufficient valorisation of Africanness in Australia; it would signify a lack of a legitimate ‘African’ identity with which those of African heritage might identify. Here, being ‘in between’ is a problem, in the purely negative sense of that term. From the point of view of an intersectionality framework, this in-betweenness would indicate the trials of negotiating multiple positions (Australianness and Africanness). And for those who emphasise the intersubjective character of social experience, such in-betweenness would be seen as an indication of collective ethnic identifications and collectivities in the making.

At various points in the thesis I have highlighted the ways in which the ontology of difference that this thesis seeks to foreground challenges both identity and intersectionality, and the presuppositions of the frameworks which privilege these concepts. At this point I would like to clarify my relationship to the notion that
everyday multiculture is a primarily intersubjective process, for this has implications for the opportunities that I believe the notion of convivial multiculture presents.

At first glance, the idea that everyday multiculture is an intersubjective phenomenon would appear to align with the affective and emergent collectivism I am gesturing towards in this chapter. According to Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham (2014: 412), for example, ‘conviviality can be understood as an atmosphere and an affect.’ Conviviality, they suggest ‘is intimately related to a sense of becoming, and “becoming” occurs inter-subjectively (Wise, 2005)’. I would stress, however, that becoming is not merely something that happens to things already given; it is not, for example, the change that happens ‘to’ subjects. Rather, in the more fertile sense in which Deleuze (1990; 1994) uses the term, becoming describes the very nature of a world that is never fixed nor given in advance. Similarly, I would stress that affect, in the sense that Deleuze (1990; 1994) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987; 1994) use that word after Spinoza, is not a merely intersubjective phenomenon. On this I take my lead from Massumi (2008: 3-4):

Calling affect, or that felt moment of bodily moving on, calling that intersubjective is misleading if intersubjective is taken to mean that we start from a world in which there are already subjects that are preconstituted, or a pregiven structure of subject positions ready for subjects to occupy. What is in question is precisely the emergence of the subject, its primary constitution, or its reemergence and reconstitution. The subject of an experience emerges from a field of conditions which are not that subject yet, where it is just coming into itself. Those conditions are not yet necessarily even subjective in any normal sense. Before the subject, there’s an in-mixing, a field of budding relation too crowded and heterogeneous to call intersubjective.

I would like to suggest that Adham’s description of his sense of himself as ‘in between’ might be read as describing something other than the failures or trials of identity. Rather, it can be seen to point towards the in-betweenness that is thoroughly constitutive of the relational field. It points, that is, toward ‘a field of conditions,’ which ‘are not yet necessarily even subjective in any normal sense’ (Massumi 2008: 3-4). As I argue later in this chapter, this understanding of the in-between character of all social experience has important implications for the idea of a convivial multiculture. Viewed affectively – from the point of view of the always shifting capacities of bodies as they emerge as individuations in the relational field – this in between is precisely what potentialises social experience, what reminds us that all identifications are effects of a more primary becoming; that is to say, that all belongings are also becomings.
For the moment, the point is not so much to celebrate the confusion that youth may feel, but to make sense of the way that the disjuncture that is constitutive of the experience of African Australianness can serve as an impetus to experience encounters differently. This is to pursue the possibility of the epidermal reflex serving as a priming for other forms of collectivism, as I go on to argue. Here, it is the ‘absent present’ of another, albeit imagined, home that shapes, and possibly potentialises, experience in the now:

K    Let’s take you out of Australia and put you in Eritrea. What would happen?
Ke    {laughs} I’d feel like more of an outcast
K    You’d feel like more of an outcast?
Ke    I’d feel like more of an outcast
K    How come?
Ke    I don’t know. I don’t know too much about Eritrea, I don’t know about the way that they would operate
K    You say, more of an outcast. Why more of an outcast?
Ke    hmm {exhales}... just because, just because... literally because I wouldn’t feel... I wouldn’t be able to slide in unnoticed. Does that make sense? Like here I can... cos... cos there are lots of different ethnicities around, so... like I’ve never been there so I can’t say, but I know if I’m treated as an outcast it’s more, it’s more how I consider myself
K    You’ve never used that term, outcast... I can pick up on it but you never use that term... but you do...
Ke    Yeah, I do..
K    Yeah! So you think that?... What’s the driving force behind feeling like an outcast? What part of you makes you think that you’d feel like an outcast? That you wouldn’t fit?... Is it race?... Is it mixed race?... What gives you that feeling?
Ke    {flatly} ... It’s being of mixed race...

Pushing Keren a little further on this sense of herself an outcast, she emphasised that ‘it’s only subtle, though, it’s not like a slap in the face... it’s just something I’ve picked up from being observant... being of mixed race.’ I sensed some tenderness around this issue and suspected that were it to re-arise it would be via a circuitous route. Our rather prolonged conversation took a turn towards discussion of the political and cultural life of Eritrea, though the problem of her relationship to this lost home that she has never actually been to, and the fear of it not having the homely quality she yearned for, persisted:

K    What is your perception of Eritrea? Overdeveloped? Underdeveloped? Developing world? What would you say?
Ke  Ummm, I kinda see it as a developing world. If I think of Eritrea I think of just... I kinda think of lost family...
K  So it’s the values and traditions? ... What would you say?... ummm... So what of you... what part of you makes you think that you’d feel like an outcast? What sort of values do you have that makes you think that you wouldn’t fit?
Ke  Mmmm, ummm. Food...
K  Yep, simple. Keep going...
Ke  {laughs} ... Food and family and the way that I value family here, I would say that there are different family values there
K  Respect for family?
Ke  Yeah, exactly, and ummm... how you treat them... {pauses}
K  Ok food, family...marriage, health?
Ke  Ummm... health would probably be different, comparing... I guess health is more valuable here, you don’t have to worry about it. Marriage, I’m not sure how it works there, I’m really not sure how it works there... Like, just, just generally yeah. I mean the way I think of it first of is how, how you can go unnoticed... you know what I mean. I mean, going there, perceiving it from here is hard...
K  Do you want to go there?
Ke  {pauses}... Yeah, I want to... but there is family that probably doesn’t even know that I am here {waving to camera}

This sense of being an outcast appeared to be at least partly related to anxiety about a lack of cultural knowledge of how things operate in Eritrea; Keren seemed to fear that she would be in some sense tested as an African were she to go to Eritrea, that she wouldn’t be able to ‘slide in unnoticed’. Yet Keren also expressed a sense of being a bit of an outcast here, because she is of mixed race, a status that she indicated made her more attuned to the subtleties of not fitting in. The temporary detours in the conversation to discussions of food, family, marriage and health were a form of posturing on both our parts, because the question of the ‘outcast’ was hanging heavily in the air. While discussions of the question of values provided a way to begin processing and categorising a sense of difference, it also felt like it was not quite getting to the heart of the matter and Keren seemed to be genuinely tender around this issue of the family that did not know her. What particularly interested me in this exchange, however, was the gesture, difficult to capture here, of her waving to an imagined family. When Skrbiš (2008) describes the forms of longing and nostalgia that make an absent place ‘present’ for migrants, he focuses on those cases in which people cannot return home due to, for example, ethnic violence or civil war. For Keren, however, the experience of absence occurs as a form of loss for something that she has never experienced, has never really known as ‘home’, and
yet which clearly functions as a kind of constitutive shadow at the edge of all her attempts at belonging.

While we might just see this absence as mere lack, it is its presentness as lack that I find especially interesting. This shadow of the family she never knew and who (herein lies the anxiety) probably do not know her, that provides the impetus to seek some sort of collective experience, a kind of indeterminate belonging. I am suggesting that, in the absence of a pre-determined content to Africanness or a unanimous collective sense of what it means to be African Australian, there is a potential – and even a push – to allow for new sensations, new openings, difference and an indeterminate belonging, which a world in constant becoming offers. So, not knowing what it is ‘to be’, ‘to belong’, ‘to become’, African Australian is a problem and sensation that takes us to the limits of our faculties, pushing our experience and forcing us, as Deleuze would say, to think. To speak of thinking here does not imply something merely cognitive but the process by which a faculty confronts its limits, forcing us to eschew old habits and the associations teeming within our memories in order to open to new ways of feeling, being and becoming.

“I am African Australian... or am I?” This reflective prompt, this questioning over what it means to be African cum African Australian, reveals a disjuncture between the felt sense of being and belonging as African Australian and the expression or representation of African Australianness. We can see here then, how, from tracing through experiences, the overlaying of the reflexive negotiation of difference with the indeterminacy of knowledge demonstrates the fragility of the representations that are in play, as they serve to organise relational forces. It is as if the social field reveals a bifurcation between the phenomenological subjectivity in which associations and identifications are in play, on the one hand, and the positivity of the problem of ‘not knowing’, on the other, where each moment is irreducible to the other in actualising a sense of self. The key here, as I argue, is to realise that we may be able to transcend the given, forcing thought to its limits, to be able to mobilise a collective sense freed from the moorings of representation and identity.

I thus treat the reflexive negotiations of difference described in earlier chapters as a potential priming to a more collective sense of becoming and belonging as African Australian. If my participants are able to first work with their habitual rendering of difference, premised on a reflexive racial disposition, only then can the affective non conscious forces at play in a situation be mobilized in ways that break with the habitual feelings and forms of identification that ‘speak to’ their sense of difference. The idea here is that my participants in many ways are, through their reflexive negotiation of difference, becoming more ‘sensitive to what’s coming’ (Massumi 2008: 10) as they open up to an emergent sense of self. As Massumi puts it:
Habit can rebecome a creative force for the acquisition of new propensities, because it makes capacities available for enaction, and something can vary in the course of that making-available, and then be added to a body’s repertory. To mobilize habit in this rebecoming way, the body, as you say, has to become sensitive to what’s coming. It has to feel the priming, as a formative force, before it bears fruit. Perversely, this is a kind of preemptive power.

Once primed, bodies have at least the potential to rebecome, while to fall back on past representations and racialised identities to define political and communal belonging is to limit the political imagination and isolate youth from the openness, newness and potentiality of difference.

7.2 Affective Attunement

To realise the necessary indeterminacy of the social that is being put forward here, it is crucial to appreciate, as Massumi (2002c) suggests in the *Parables of the Virtual*, that the body is never a brute fact, nor is it ever purely corporeal. If intercorporeal relations concern the more determined aspect of racialised experience, they are only ever part of the picture. For bodies are also sites of *incorporeal transformations* and events. And intercorporeal relations, I have suggested, can also serve as a prime for the indeterminacy of the social, with its always unpredictable events to come. Drawing on Deleuze and the work of Henri Bergson, Massumi argues that the body is paradoxically, in ‘position’ and ‘in passage or process.’ He describes the body as something material but incorporeal, concrete yet abstract. So, rather than only thinking the body as something pre-determined to a grid of positions, we need to think also of the ‘abstractness’ of the body in its own indeterminacy; as Massumi (2002c: 5) puts it, “its openness to an elsewhere and otherwise than it is, in any here and now.” In taking becoming African Australian as a collective, relational event, then, we need to consider, as I outlined above, that in such a situation there is a reservoir of excess potential that is unfelt. Tapping into that reservoir, re-cuing it to work against ideological presuppositions and *a priori* determinations, involves then the attunement to the variability of bodies in relation, so that their capacities are augmented.

I have been insisting on the autonomy of affect from the emotions capture in a subject. Similarly, here I want to think through the implications of the idea of feeling that is not yet captured as what is felt by the subject. To put it into Massumi’s terms, it is about that ‘constitutive level where many somethings are doing, most of them unfelt…. Or again, felt only in effect. No less real for passing unfelt’ (2008: 5).
What matters in conceptualising this unfelt feeling is that we attend to affect’s felt qualities, while not assuming the problem of affective belonging starts from, or is resolved by, a subject who feels. Affect here has an excessive quality, as Deleuze (1990) has pointed out, excessive to both subjects and the state of affairs in which it is actualised. There is, in Deleuze’s rendering of affect that I am turning to here an emphasis, as Hynes (2013: 564) has pointed out, on affects as “pre-personal forces which can only be analytically approached (if not grasped) by allowing a certain autonomy from the subjects who experience them.” Affect, then, has a virtual quality that exceeds any subjective determination of it, or indeed any embodied disposition.

My claim, in attending to this micropolitical level, is that the response, or attunement to, that unfelt feeling, ‘felt’ only as potential, can serve as a crucial trigger within the event of becoming African Australian. As Massumi (2011: n.p.) puts it, that unfelt feeling is the ‘jumping off point’; it is the presupposition of an event’s unfolding, perceptually felt without necessarily being thought. If my participants’ relation to the event of becoming – felt as a sense of belonging – is felt prior to its unfolding in thought, there remains the problem of tracing how this sense emerges in concrete expressions, so as to better work with race’s perplication into thought and experience.

What matters, is that we appreciate that the body is in movement, continually reliving each moment through past tendencies as it strives towards a future. Immanent to this continuity is a relation of past capacities with future ones not yet realised. Each time a capacity or memory is played out in the body, it creates an opportunity to be lived differently in the future, in its repetition. It is the accumulation of the tendencies that are co-constituted by past experiences, and future unfelt potentials that are also the residue of our past actions, that can prime us, push the faculties to their limits and open up to the unpredictability of becoming. For, as I have indicated through the extracts above, such accumulations create a sense of tension and indeterminacy between lived expression and unactualised or unfelt potential in my participants’ relations and sense of self.

How youth respond to this priming, then, is important, for as briefly mentioned earlier, it defines political engagement at a microperceptual level. That one does not feel that one belongs comfortably as an African Australian, does not preclude the sensation of not belonging from entering into the constitution of experience. Indeed, as the scant autoethnographic reflections scattered throughout this thesis indicate, the genesis of this thesis hinged on the problematic field that this sensation created. Where did it come from? Do others feel it? How? The problems of belonging and becoming African Australian are hereby the occasions for thought, not, however,
through representations of the social field, but through the social field itself, through that difference that is prior to its emergence in identities, representations and identifications and which transcends its own expression in the social.

As James Williams (2003: 154) suggests, ‘the first sensation that something anomalous is significant’ is precisely what triggers an event, by which he means not simply an empirical happening, but an incorporeal transformation, which transforms the very nature of things. My participants, when faced with questions concerning their felt disposition as African Australian, articulated a distinct absence of feeling or knowing what it feels like to be an African Australian. While there was a degree of reasoning with the idea of what this meant, the notion of a collective sense and feeling was wanting. In contesting and negotiating their racialisation, Talia and Adham for example, opened up to the sensation of not knowing what it means to identify as African Australian, and were ambivalent over whether they shared a collective ‘felt’ sense as African Australian. This brings us back to the notion that identity and representation and, indeed, meaning, are secondary to the primary constitution of the subject through sense. While it would be difficult to argue that an African Australian collective did not exist, it is the priming effect of this unfelt feeling that triggers an inevitable problem, given the changing social context: how then do I belong in becoming ‘African Australian?’

There is, I argue, as I turn towards the notion of affective attunement, an element of survival in my participants’ negotiations in response to the very event of their becoming African Australian. This very sense of belonging being a problem – not merely in the negative sense, but at least a question that is an impetus – shapes the immediate environment of the emergent subject and involves a form of ‘negative prehension.’ As Vicki Bell (2012: 110) puts it, it is “in such a scenario or ‘occasion’ of what Whitehead called prehensions, elements ‘grasp’ one another, actively attempting to ensure their survival, or some quality thereof:

Be it my son’s arm as he reaches out from his cabin bed for the reassurance of a bedtime hug, or the roots of the offshoot from the vallisneria plant in his aquarium that dangle down seeking anchor, from the point of view of the emergent subject, the ‘desire to survive’ … shapes the immediate environment, acting upon, or with, its elements as they concern it and as they will allow themselves to be a concern for it.

We need to treat negative prehension, then, as “a somewhat paradoxical concept that refers to a feeling entering positively into the constitution of an experience by dint of its active exclusion from it” (Massumi 2008: 5). The question is, then, whether the impetus that drives my participants to seek belonging will trigger forms of
multicultural practice that may allow them to tap into that unfelt feeling and attune to a collective in the making or, conversely, trigger that more negative sense of their difference that will produce more reactive identifications and even hegemony.

As Massumi (2002b: 215) eloquently points out in his explanation of the virtuality of affect, a body is always “selecting from it, extracting and actualising certain potentials from it.” Affect, Massumi (2002b: 215) goes on, in its broadest sense is that which remains as a “perpetual reminder”, an excess of pure potentials, once a body actualises it through language or expression. Pertinent to this discussion is the idea that we can access the excess in affect. How young people ‘tap into it’ and how it plays out impacts on where people might go next, what they might do; it is this problem of affective attunement to the ‘productive indecision’ (Massumi 2008: 5) that the question of one’s belonging can bring about that the following section explores.

Micropolitics is a qualitatively different form of political engagement, one that relies on, and stems from, the affective resonances between bodies. It is a politics that attempts to rescue the excess potential that occurs in an event from being sutured to structures and positions. If the excess potential in relations is cued into and reconfigured, then, it can shift an event politically, beyond a priori demands of identification. Such politics is, as Massumi (2008: 7) puts it, about seeking “the degree of openness to a situation, in hopes of priming an alter-accomplishment... in a way that amplifies a previously unfelt potential to the point of perceptibility.” Thus, if we are able to remodulate the microperceptual, let’s say of the epidermal reflex as it leads to a chain of more readily perceptible and conscious associations of self-difference, then we may be able to re-imagine race, or at least its bearing upon us in the moment.

In the introduction to this chapter I outlined the requirement for affective politics that I am putting forward here. That is, that it is in our response to a sign that a political collective can emerge, through the attunement to a yet unknown or unfelt event; it follows that in attuning to a not-yet-felt feeling that race, as a category of representation, recedes. To understand this notion further it is vital to appreciate the concept of affective attunement, first described by Daniel Stern (1985), as a theoretical approach to understanding the way in which bodies coalesce politically. Affective attunement is matching of sense, not representation. It is an open field of differentiation, out of which singularity of feeling emerges and merges at certain points or ‘landing sites’ (Manning 2013) at which, or to which, we attach content, representation, and racialised identities.

In turning to affective attunement I offer a way of grasping the less determinate
dimensions of the epidermal reflex. Certainly, as suggested in previous chapters, the epidermal reflex can lead to a collapse of possibilities, when skin becomes the determinant upon which the subject’s phenomenological experience is governed and, in turn, representations and territories marked. Here, I push past the idea of ‘skin as containment’ (Bick cited in Manning 2013: 1) by opening up a space beyond and between the phenomenological experience of a subject, by theorising a more direct and relational experience. Manning (2013: 3) clarifies the distinction between the phenomenological experience of the subject and this more direct and relational understanding of experience:

...[d]irect experience takes place not in the subject or in the object, but in the relation itself... the associated milieu is active with tendencies, tunings, incipient agitations, each of which are felt before they are known as such, contributing to a sense of the how of the event in its unfolding.

The main media through which this co-constitutive emergence of the self occurs is that of affect, or adopting Stern’s theory, the ‘vitality affects’, for these affects facilitate the affective attunement to the event as it unfolds and through which the encounter is subjectively felt. Again, this is not intersubjective in the sense that there is a preformed subject freely entering into relations, but rather, the subject is formed in the relation itself, in direct experience (Massumi 2008). Stern’s theorising on what he calls vitality affects suggests such affects are conducive to a ‘feeling with’ rather than a ‘feeling of’ the event as a means via which the relational co-constitution of the subject occurs. Vitality affects, then, are an experience of “dynamic shifts or patterned changes within ourselves or others” (Stern 1995: 156). Vitality affects must be distinguished from the categorical sense of affect that we find, for example, in the work of Silvan Thomkins (2008), whose schematisation delimits a list of nine categorical affects, understood as the biological dimension of subjectively experienced feelings.

For Stern, in contrast, vitality affects are forms of feeling that are defined less by their hardwiring in subjects then by the dynamic contours they assume in their realisation. The vitality affects are linked with vital processes such as eating, sleeping, the coming and going of thoughts and emotions (and arguably the forming of relations!). They are in themselves the quality of feeling, experienced as rushes or surges, that are elicited by changes in motivational states, appetites or tensions: He felt a rush of anger. The sadness washed over her before she drifted off to sleep. Stern insists that while at times we may share the same categorical affects of, for example, happiness, anger, or regret, we may not necessarily share the same feeling qualities associated with such expressions or representations. This is to say that expressiveness is not necessarily linked to categorical affect signals. As Stern
suggests, the vitality affect of an explosive smile, linked with an emotion such as happiness, may share the same vitality affect as getting out of a chair ‘explosively’. It is this abstract quality of vitality affects that permits correspondence between different modes of organisation (expression/behaviours).

In speaking of ‘affective attunement’, then, I mean to trace a shift of attention to what is behind behaviours, to the quality of feeling shared ‘before’ they are felt properties of the subject. What is attuned to is not a person’s behaviour or expression, but rather that which reflects the quality of feeling. In Stern’s (1985: 157) words it is the:

...[t]racking and attuning with vitality affects [that] permit one human to "be with" another in the sense of sharing likely inner experiences on an almost continuous basis. This is exactly our experience of feeling-connectededness, of being in attunement with another. It feels like an unbroken line.

So what does this suggest for a collective coming together? The crucial point here is that affective attunement provides a way to conceive the complexity of politics, which are too often and sometimes insufficiently understood through predetermined categories of self and other. This is a move to understand more intricately the forces that shape an emerging collective as coexistent in its formation. In the more micropolitical field, we can say that an event ‘creates its own stakes, its own limits and that we must continuously be alert to these stakes and engage with the limits’ (Manning in Massumi 2011 n.p.). This requires that we are willing to approach thresholds in our relations, without diminishing the subjective engagement at play when an event happens. It is, according to Massumi (2011 n.p.) a question of addressing:

...the fact that we’re sort of double featured in relational fields. It’s not that we cease to be the personalities we are, cease to have those subjective characters that we attribute to ourselves and that other people attribute to us. It’s that, in addition to that, we are functioning relationally through our differential attunement in the field. The processual role we play in the relational field is associated with our personality, but it’s not reducible to that, to our subjective positioning.

Thus, ‘who we are’ in our actualisation of a relation may not coincide with what we recognise as our identity. The field actualises our vitality affects into certain expressions, even while we maintain subjective positions. While this may be a source of ambivalence, frustration or confusion, it nonetheless has implications for the question of conviviality and its relation to multiculture. Conviviality, in this sense,
involves an openness to change a relational field while being changed by it. For my participants, this could be portrayed as a ‘double becoming’ in which becoming is a form of modulation by a collective field, which at the same time is being modulated by them (Massumi 2011).

The theatrical metaphors employed by Massumi are fertile and, I suggest, may be a useful way of thinking about the ethnographic process’ emergence. As an example, I offer a brief extract. Although I hadn’t captured the thought in writing, I had reflected on numerous occasions what started me thinking about, and doing, the doctorate research. It is a short vignette that I had told to people a number of times, but which has always changed, in the telling:

In many ways the genesis of this thesis stemmed from an epiphenomenal moment during teaching. It was simply one day, during school, when in the midst of teaching a class, looking out at the class, I sensed several ‘African’ students looking back at me, and I, in turn back at them. It was in this moment that I ‘felt’ something yet there was no ground to the experience. The same students had been in the class all along but it was on this day, at this particular moment, when the sensation occurred to me that something anomalous was occurring.

Not long after I began to sense some form of affirmation, but of what I was not sure. My life continued unabated, but I soon began to notice in a number of public places (shopping malls, hospitals, universities) across the city, more Africans, going about their lives. Perhaps the significance of this would have been lost, if it had not been for a recollection of my youth, when at school and in the community I could have been considered the ‘only native in the village’; there were no other kids of African heritage, no other kids of colour for that matter, except for my siblings and I. Now however, it seemed that the African population had swelled significantly, and I was sensing ‘something’, but what, I was not sure. At that time I had no name for what we may now call a diaspora.

Back at school I soon, somehow, found myself in the mix with these young people. Each day we started talking more – lauging and trading stories. It was not that I had suddenly identified as African Australian, I never had, but nevertheless, I didn’t quite know the person I was becoming either... it was not long after that the thought of this study emerged, and I began the research process.
To adopt briefly Deleuze’s concept of dramatization, the question that concerns me here is how one might steer away from the repetitive performances and habits of the self, so as to dramatize the ‘potential activity in the field itself, that comes from within the field’ (Massumi 2011 n.p.). This requires remaining attuned to a field, how one affects it and is affected by it. As Massumi (2011 n.p.) puts it:

You’re never standing outside just directing or judging or critiquing or commenting upon or describing. You’re adventuring. You’re taking risks, not so much in the sense of putting others at risk – although that could happen, which makes all of this directly a question of ethics – but more fundamentally taking risks with who you think and feel you are and what you can become.

The complexity here (as I hope my vignette above alludes to) is in remaining open to belonging as an indeterminate sensation. This is by no means a simple task, to work with the paradox in the relational field of becoming African Australian while African Australian becomes you. Yet, as I go on to argue in the closing of the thesis, there are political and ethical potentials that such an act brings into being.

In this more micropolitical approach to the question of collective formations, it is not an ‘economy of identifications’ (Bloul 2010: 9) that dominates, but difference as an affective resonance, which resides in neither subject nor object of identification, but rather is present, as Dewsbury (2000: 481) insists, ‘as a field of latent potential’. The diverse ways in which one might actualise such potential constitute, as Massumi (2008: 7) suggests, a kind of ‘alter-accomplishment’, which, in this case, can represent a means to accomplish belonging otherwise. Micropolitics, according to Massumi (2008: 7), ‘seeks the degrees of openness of any situation, in hopes of priming an alter-accomplishment’, since ‘just modulating a situation in a way that amplifies a previously unfelt potential to the point of perceptibility is an alter-accomplishment.’

This process of affective attunement, I argue, offers another way of understanding the interactions between my participants in their search to belong, and in their becoming African Australian. It is a question of grasping the latent potential that is immanent to the encounters described and taking affect, difference and the in-between of relations as a pivotal starting point. In doing so, we can more clearly understand the processes of becoming in their collective and political dimensions. This is not to entirely dismiss the notion of ‘a sort of collective “one true self” … which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common’ (Hall 1990: 223).  

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26 Hall (1990) foregrounds the examples of Aimé Cesaire and Leopold Senghor’s idea of Négritude for establishing black self-respect and the political project of Pan-Africanism, the implication being that the formation of a sense of shared history and identity has been crucial to the experience of colonised
Such images of the collective have clearly been crucial to the politics of race and to the forms of collective resistance through which postcolonial politics have forged new futures. Yet such forms of collectivism are necessarily reactive in nature, and they may thus struggle to free themselves of their reactive histories. They suffer too from the inflexibility of identity politics, which, as I argue in Chapter 8, may fall short of conviviality when difference is only thought as ‘difference from’; belonging as African Australian can, in such cases, become a highly exclusive affair.

For the moment, the important point is that starting from affect as I do in this chapter provides an invitation for an indefinitely constructive thinking of embodied, relational becoming, which harbours an immediately political aspect. Stressing the impact of a peculiarly Deleuzian/Spinozan way of thinking about affect on what ‘politics’ looks like, Sharp (2011: 13) insists that affect concerns a form of impersonal politics:

Rather than a concern with whether representations were contested or confirmed, an impersonal lens is trained upon the affects that concretely determine individual and collective power. Insofar as individuals were exhilarated and forged connections pregnant with unknown futures, this event contributed to the agency of those involved, engendered the basis of new forms of shared power, and thereby “succeeded.” Such connections may not have taken the form of email addresses exchanged or future meet ups established, but may be nothing other than a coagulation of joyful affect that enabled ambient bodies and minds to think and act more effectively or, in Foucault’s words, to engage in an “art of not being governed quite so much” in their everyday lives.

Of course, it is also conceivable that encounters may amplify sad passions, entrench divisions between social groups with different demands and self-conceptions, and foreclose alliances that had seemed replete with possibility beforehand. Yet this potential for a diminution of capacities should not lead us to shy away from the fertility of affect and the impersonal politics with which it is associated. There is, moreover, much to be gained from moving beyond the merely representational dimensions of social experience to affirm relations across and through the affective field. A de-emphasis on representation provides the potential to momentarily suspend the closure associated with racialisation, in a society in which black African youth are perceived as a departure from the norm and thus always as ‘different from’. Taking affects as the sign of our always relational constitution, may offer a way of ‘being black’ that need not acquiesce to racial discourse. To an extent, embodiment now provides a point of departure for understanding multiculturalism’s peoples.
convivial potentialities, rather than its point of truth. And affectively attuning to the emergent sociality of collective situations offers a means to better understand those forms of coming together that are based not on racial affiliation or ascription, but on the moment to moment ways in which we attune to the points of bifurcation where belonging otherwise is possible. As I suggest in the following section, there is no key to deciphering what triggers produce bifurcations; indeed, attuning to the resonance of signs may mean temporarily suspending the temptation to ascribe meaning, in order to see what else is being expressed in events.

7.3 The Sign of the Collective

An engagement with the variability of affect is no substitute for discursive analysis but, if approached sensitively, we might find that the spoken word conceals as much as it reveals about the affective field (Nayak 2011: 555). Or, as Manning (in Massumi 2011 n.p.) puts it, a special kind of attentiveness to what is said and not said is necessary if we are to ‘learn from the complex modalities at work beyond narrative structures.’ With this in mind, I now turn to a generative moment of my field experience, and reconnect with an encounter that is germinal to reimagining the event of becoming African Australian. This is an ethnographic field note, compiled of transcribed text and my recounting of events, which I had roughly titled ‘reading books’:

It was the week following year 12 Graduation in late 2005. I had spent the better part of two years with Selam and Talia on campus, engaging with them in the classroom, observing them in their friendship groups and within the college surrounds. Both were about to take a gap year. I’d planned to interview Selam and then Talia a day apart. On the first day of interviews as I was preparing to interview Selam, Talia stopped by to say hello, I must have told her I was going to be there. We were in the art faculty corridor outside one of the studios. On one side of the corridor was a bleached white wall with several abstract art works and textiles hanging. Sunlight was streaming in through the windows on the other side. The faculty was otherwise empty.

As Talia approached, the two looked at each other, and they held each other’s gaze. There was no one else in sight. While both girls had been at the College for the last couple of years I had not seen them together often. It was not until the following year at African Australian Day event, that I would see a closer friendship between the two emerging. Selam was dressed in her usual attire of denim jeans with
boots, a loose fitting printed cotton blouse, a necklace, large hoop earrings and makeup that highlighted her eyes and sharp cheekbones. Similarly, Talia was wearing jeans, an African print blouse, and chunky jewellery. A conversation started and we chatted for a while as I organised the recording equipment. Their body language seemed relaxed as we talked about the end of the school year and joked about moving off into the unknown. Talia had with her a novel that she was reading. Selam suddenly noticed that Talia had a book with her, she pulled back her head and a whimsical expression, a kind of wry smile, appeared on her face and she made an offhand comment to Talia as she departed. Selam and I began the interview.

“Now Talia was here a minute ago”, I said to Selam as I hit play on the video recorder. “And you said to Talia that she was Australian born”, “Yeah”, she replied. “And that was why she reads books!” (We both broke into laughter, Selam blushing slightly.)

Selam, while laughing, continued: “Ok, I have a lot of African friends here and we all share similar interests. And we all don’t like books, and I know a lot of Africans that don’t like reading books, especially the ones that were born back home. Or that have lived there at least, you know.”

“Back home you don’t need to read stories; you don’t need to read books other than your schoolbooks. You don’t need to. Whereas here people give you books to read, the teacher suggests books to read...and that is why I’ve never read a book. I think in my life I think I’ve read only one book (giggling shyly). And you know that book is about a Somalian woman.

The next day upon interviewing Talia, I opted to start with the same interaction.

“Now, Selam said yesterday that Africans don’t read books”, I teased. Was there friction between you, you’ve already mentioned before there are ‘differences’ but is there friction between someone who is born here, as yourself as an African Australian, as opposed to somebody that who has come to this country?” “I think that there is misunderstanding; there are some things that I look at go, oh – ‘why do they do that?!’ (She raises her hands to her head). Sometimes I think there is a certain difficulty, let’s say for an African moving, here
and accepting that this is just the Australian life and that is what you comply with, and then they look at me and say, ‘why is she just conforming, isn’t she an African?’ So I think there is friction there and misunderstanding. ‘Cause I know that I am guilty of saying, ‘Oh, they are so fresh, so African!’, and not in an encouraging way.”

This interaction could at first glance be considered a simple exposé of the ways that race intersects with other structures, such as nationality, class, and so forth. But how do we analyse and understand such an encounter micropolitically? What if this encounter reveals a different interplay of difference and a more open-ended negotiation, which enriches our understanding of the complexity of collective situations? There is a qualitative dimension to the particular empirical event that I am narrating here, a kind of convivial standoff between Talia and Selam in which diverse potentials, which are immanent to the situation, are actualised.

On the one hand, there appears a reluctance to open to the newness of the situation – an ‘African’ who reads a book – and a tendency to regress to a kind of conformist attribution of difference, in which a difference which is not immediately recognisable is coded with a degree of negativity. Yet, on the other hand, the very prosaic nature of the exchange in itself entails an opening to the new. New language begins to appear in an attempt to decipher the affective transformations and emotive positioning, to force habits to ‘rebecome’ in the acquisition of new tendencies, new propensities, and new feelings. The role played by the book – the problem that orients the situation – is important here. Where a discursive framework would tend to focus on the book as a cause or source of meaning, viewed expressively what matters is the way that the book functions as a sign. On the question of the sign, Deleuze (1994: 20) writes that the sign is ‘what happens within’ a system, in the sense that it ‘flashes across the intervals when a communication takes place between disparates.’ To speak of a communication taking place ‘between disparates’ in this context is certainly not to speak of the literal, verbal communication between two different subjects. Rather, it is to evoke a more intensive quality, which generates qualitative diversity. It is the problematic status of the book – as something not immediately recognisable, as that which leads to questions more than to answers – that makes it so important here. To put it another way, it is not the meaning of the book that is significant in this situation. Indeed, it is only through habit that we solve the problem of the difference between those who do and do not read books by interpreting it as an essential difference; namely, the difference between ‘African Africans’ and ‘Australian Africans.’

Beyond such habits of attributing meaning and cause, there is the question of the problematic and expressive status of the book, which does not resemble the subjects
to which it attaches. Again, Deleuze (1994: 73) is instructive when he writes that ‘the signs by which an animal “senses” the presence of water do not resemble the elements that its thirsty organism lacks’. What is important is that something ‘flashes across the intervals’, actualising the latent potentials for a form of conviviality that is not based on recognition and similitude, but on the pleasures of difference. We could say that between Talia and Selam a vitality affect is produced, a burst of determination that traverses the in-between that is their relation. And the affective attenuation of the situation reveals, in this case, certain bonds of complicity between Selam and Talia, the potentials of which are only limited by the subjective tendencies, the habits of discursively attributing difference, and their translation in emotive terms.

In gesturing towards the forms of conviviality that feelings and affective capacities betray, Nayak (2011: 555) writes that:

> Cohesive communities are said to be those that are comfortable interacting with one another, coming together at various ‘meeting places’ (Massey 1996 [1991])... shops, schools, places of worship, community forums... and so forth. Community cohesion is then a type of sticking together of feeling, and a sharing of sentiments. A political working of affect derived from these close interactions can be seen when Paul Gilroy (2004) remarks upon the importance of ‘conviviality’ to the everyday practice of multiculturalism and civic engagement. In this sense the success of multiculturalism or community cohesion is not simply dependent upon social interactions but the feelings and affective capacities that might build up through these performances over time.

It is this ‘sticking together of feeling’ that particularly interests me here and which offers a fertile way of understanding the exchange between Talia, Selam and myself. Whether or not sentiments are shared is not, for me, the important part and indeed it may be, as I have suggested here, that it is when they are not shared that the problem of difference gains a more positive potential. What matters is that ‘sticking together of feeling’ that somehow exceeds the subjects who feel, those unfelt feelings which, to the extent we can attune to their positivity, can produce forms of conviviality in which identity no longer asserts its demands. Certainly, we may still have performative gestures that evoke identity and its representation. Yet, there is, beyond this, a sticking together of feeling in a kind of relational knowing. And what is important is that the illusion of a final identity, subjective or communal, is

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27 This relational knowing evidently differs from the relational knowing that Fuchs brings to the fore via Stern. While Fuchs encapsulates a relational knowing of how to deal with others (e.g. as primary experiences of consciousness), such relational knowing agitates affective forces as primary to patterns of behaviour.
engulfed in the very process of becoming, with its ongoing game of deferral and displacement.

In examining the implications that this attunement may have for the idea of an emergent collective sociality for my specific case study, a number of processes were evident. On the one hand, I have suggested that through the social environment that prevailed at the College, participants began attending to their sense of difference from the norm, and this lead to their coming together in a collective of sorts. But there were also less obvious collective pre-conditions to their encounters, which were not based on racial affiliation per se, but on affective forces – vitality affects that channel through one’s memories of association, one’s needs for self-determination and the very racialisation that primes them.

In the case of Talia and Selam, I have described a kind of relational knowing that is generated from a lack of recognition at the level of identity, which, crucially, leads to a kind of ‘sticking together of feeling’. It is this that constitutes the micropolitical moment, and with it the possibility for action to alter the conditions of emergence and impact upon the constraints that will invariably surface. To paraphrase Massumi (2008: 14), there is no situation of being outside a situation. It is only through recognising one’s complicity and the limits of a situation that you can modulate those constraints. Such a micropolitics does not judge, nor seek to contain difference, nor does it habitually prevent becoming, but engages becoming and difference in a way that makes new habits available to the body. As Massumi (2008: 10) argues:

something can vary in the course of that making-available, and then be added to a body’s repertory. To mobilize habit in this rebecoming way, the body... has to become sensitive to what’s coming. It has to feel the priming, as a formative force, before it bears fruit. Perversely, this is a kind of preemptive power. It is a preemptive power that is creative of a moreness to life....

Papoulia and Callard (cited in Thrift 2010: 2428) remind us that it is possible to play fast and loose with the concept of affect, and, in the current profusion of Deleuzian talk, to very easily ‘tip us over into saying not very much about pretty well everything’. The answer for Thrift (2010: 2428) is to use the work of Deleuze as it applies to actual events, so that:

Such work realizes that the affective practices that bind strangers to each other arise from the articulation of triangulated relations to something that seems stable, like racial, national, sexual, gendered, and class identity.
Thrift’s own stress is on that form of affective attunement which is not fully conditioned by such structures, which nonetheless provide the means through which we express our affective modulations. It is, I have suggested, the potentials opened up by the sign of an unfelt feeling that can, in turn, impact upon our macropolitical positioning and the ways in which we engage with both the productive and destructive potentials of race.

In this chapter I have sought to displace the habits of a phenomenological reading of my empirical material, through a more affective and expressive account. With this in mind, I have de-emphasised my participants’ consciousness of their encounters in order to provide an alternative account of the problematic emotions, ideals and embodied tensions, which usually have a negative status in accounts of belonging. It is a matter of exploring the connections that are created around novel differences, which might interrupt the more habituated performances of racialised identities. Empirically, this means engaging in a kind of creative experimentation, through which to reinvigorate our understanding of social change. The earlier interpretations, such as those put forward in Chapters 5 and 6, thus gain new capacities in the effort to critically and constructively determine how a collective sense as African Australian may arise, which is in excess of racial identifications.

In this way I have advocated a particular understanding of convivial multiculture as providing novel conditions for the emergent social field, when young people respond to the unfelt feeling that signals their belonging. The prosaic nature of such multiculture is by no means at odds with its capacity to produce new forms of political belonging, which diverge from a nationalistic framing of race, ethnicity and belonging, and, further still, are not entirely contingent on representation for their formation. I have argued that micropolitics bring about a necessary re-negotiation of race, if young people are to increase their collective capacities rather than succumbing to be passively racialised subjects. What is key to such renegotiation is that the embodied representations and experiences of race are seen as secondary to the relations through which they emerge.

Through my participants’ encounters and the interactions that occur between them ‘on-the-ground’ and ‘in-the-moment’, an unfelt feeling of ‘something more’ surfaces, as they collectively attune to the building critical mass in the African population. This does not suggest that the collective sensation associated with a critical mass had reached a particular level of conscious awareness amongst my participants, upon which they subsequently acted. Rather, their response to the welling event that manifests in a nascent ‘sense’ of a collective, stems from a kind of fine-tuning to local conditions, which, in turn, demands a deeper commitment to an engagement
with the tensions and ambiguities difference produces. This collective quality to the emergent collective extends the ‘field of play’ (Thrift 2004) in which my participants seek belonging as African Australian. Rather than sequestering ‘belonging’ entirely to of skin, which is to say, isolating our knowing to the subjective phenomenology of the epidermal reflex, I have theorised alternative means through which youth come together in difference via other cross modal means. Here race gains an immanence to the situations in which it plays out, rather than, as a politics of representation would have it, a habitualised and predetermined essence.

To coalesce politically through affect requires that we reach a threshold in our faculties and move beyond a response to the recognition of our memories of association and intercorporeal past, as that alone which determines the outcome of an encounter. This is not to say that our past memories and associations do not play a role in the constitution of the event of our becoming. As I have indicated in Chapter 5, the bodily dispositions and memories that surface in the behaviour or bodily schemata of a racialised subject shape social experience, and at its worst can result in self-abjection or an overdetermination from without. This highlights the complexity in forming an indeterminate, emergent sociality when we are already predetermined unto ourselves within the feelings and representations that race produces.

An affective attenuation to the social field that is less encumbered by the predetermined racialised subject, provides a catalyst here for coming together in difference. While each of my participants carries their own set of histories and habits, tendencies and capacities, there is no guarantee that they will act in unison in responding to the desire to belong. Yet, if we see the field as modulated by vitality affects, we can consider the nature of their response, which we would normally think of in terms of these histories or habits, in terms of the relational field itself. Affective attunement to the relational field then, better reflects the complexity of any situation in which race perplicates. Tuning in to this excess potential, allowing vitality affects to attune bodies as co-constitutive in their emergence across and through difference, time and time again, provides an opening via which we can welcome the new and re-invigorate familiar problems: how do we work productively with our racialisation when it can spread fear and hatred amongst us? What practices can we adopt that help us to resist the social stratification of race?

In the following chapter, Chapter 8, I consider more closely what happens when the micropolitics becomes entangled with the macropolitical, in more and less productive ways. What happens, for example, when the State recognises the emergent African Australian community, and in this very recognition prevails an attempt to control the conditions of its emergence? A micropolitical event is always
only partial, the event generates an excess that can once again be acted upon and counteractualised. Yet, what happens if the macropolitical attempts to limit the possibility for the micropolitical to flourish, and make use of the excess for its own means? Such tensions, I suggest, can foster hate and fear vis-à-vis race, serving at times to cut youth off from the welling events of their becoming-collective. Yet, insofar as becoming is never a linear process, the more negative ways in which race perplicates in experience need not lead to a generalised closure of potential. The question then remains of what kinds of conviviality are required to nurture their fragile potentials.
8 FORCED HOMOGENIZATION

“The thing is”, she continued, “I have been here my whole life...and what makes me so mad is that they come from war torn countries to seek refuge in Australia and they give Africans a bad name as now people don’t look at you and think that she’s Ghanaian – all they think is she’s ‘African’! It’s not fair, why should I have to suffer because of them? I have so much against the Sudanese or Sierra Leoneans because it hasn’t just affected them, it has affected all Africans living in Australia.”

Amena

Until now I have portrayed an image of relatively harmonious relations between my participants in the emergence of the African Australian community. There has, for example, been a certain ease to the manner in which I have evoked the ‘emergent community’, which appeared to be building in the time of my study, despite the trials faced by black African youth who had to negotiate the everyday realities of their racialisation, adjust to the shock and shifting consciousness that migration brings, and attend to the complexities of living within a diasporic community. Seen from the point of view of the affective dimensions of the social field, I have sought to show how there existed, amongst my participants, a genuine potential for conviviality, which suggested a kind of natural prosaicness to social encounters and with it an often joyful coagulation of affects. Amena’s utterances in the opening extract, however, literally ‘pull the rug out’ from the ongoing conviviality in play in the community’s emergence. They brutally recall that one of the implications of an ontology that can grasp the always differentiating and bifurcating nature of social reality, is that there is no guarantee of progress and that conviviality is a fragile potential, which, left unnutured, can just as easily disintegrate into fear and hatred.

Certainly, the encounter with Amena was something of a turning point for me, which led me to reinterpret my perception of the encounters with, and between, my participants. Had this potential for animosity been latent all along? Or had circumstances caused a deterioration of relations within the emergent community? In this chapter, I suggest that both questions can be answered affirmatively. The potential for decidedly unconvivial relations was certainly there, not as a festering reality awaiting its unfolding, but rather as one possibility within a politically and, as I suggest in Chapter 9, ethically complex world, into which multiple potentials are always folded. But it is also the case that circumstances had prompted the actualisation of the sad passions expressed in Amena’s polemic. This chapter takes as its principal concern this problem of the ways in which macropolitical discourses may alter relations, actualising difference as negative differences, which surface as a form
of everyday racism in my participants’ quotidian encounters. So while I have to now prioritised the everyday encounters between my participants in the emergence of the African Australian community, it is necessary to consider the implications of those macropolitical discourses that work to disrupt the multiculture at play. As I have indicated in the previous chapter, those micropolitical potentials that inhere in social life cannot do so in isolation from the macropolitical conditions that tend to influence an always-becoming social field. Amena’s disgust offers a particularly striking expression of what eventuates when macropolitical conditions complicate the possibility for those forms of political belonging that I have elaborated to this point.

To give a sense of the type of discourses that provoked Amena’s reaction to the Sudanese/Sierra Leoneans, it is worth briefly revisiting the changing pattern of African migration to Australia. This is particularly pertinent when in Amena’s disgust there is a creation of boundaries, and in her mind some form of priority given to those Africans that have been ‘here’ longer. For it is the macropolitical discourses surrounding the most recent migration of Africans to Australia, I will argue, that played a key role in eroding the ongoing conviviality and political collectivism amongst my participants, and simultaneously promoted a kind of conformity to a larger hegemonic project couched in ideas of citizenship and nationality.

The effect that these emerging macropolitical discourses have is significant, as it adds further complexity to the social field in which my participants must contend with their becoming African Australian. My findings, with respect to the particular dynamic that this chapter outlines, bring into sharp relief the potential for disharmonious relations amongst the youth in this study as the micropolitical and macropolitical come into tension. Their distinctness from the reflexive negotiations of difference outlined in Chapters 5 and 6 and from the forms of affective attunement considered in Chapter 7, indicates the increasing complexities of a multicultural environment in which the emergence of dominant political discourses disrupts ongoing diasporic sensibilities and micropolitical practices. I show that, within this complex environment, the attempts by my participants to align with a particular identification as African Australian and locate a prevailing sense of belonging were adversely affected. At this particular juncture in the emergence of an African Australian collective, a hegemonic process I have called forced homogenisation, another dynamic of becoming African Australian, unfolds to destabilise the convivial practices that to this point have shaped the various modes of political belonging. I link this process directly with the empirical event of the arrival of black African refugees and the often xenophobic discourses associated with their intake into the population; I refer to the coincidence of this event with such discourses as ‘The Arrival’, to evoke the drama with which this refugee intake was
Forced homogenisation, I argue in Section 2, results in a number of failed encounters between my participants, both at an intercorporeal level but also in the way in which the image of ‘The Arrival’ surfaces in their conscious perception. This, I suggest, amounts to a ‘slide’ for the youth in my study; namely, from an openness to the possibilities of diverse becomings and to those convivial practices that may increase capacities, into a rejection of difference, which results in a contraction of the emerging social field. This is a moment in which my participants experience a push towards being homogenised as a multicultural minority, and the lingering effects of racism and xenophobia towards black Africans by the dominant white culture spills over into their quotidian encounters with difference.

The focus of this chapter, then, is the extent to which African Australian youth in my study were affected by the process of forced homogenisation and the implications it has for thinking through convivial multiculture. I do not attempt to explain the lived realities of these refugee youth, nor provide their perspective in detail; instead I explore those discourses produced by conservative ‘white’ Australia that form the context and conditions that make possible the potential abjection of such refugee youth by my participants. On this point, in Section 3 – Feral Belongings – I theorise how such discourses, which are utilised by the State in an attempt to regulate belonging, push my participants to the limits of social experience, and it at these limits that such abjection occurs. This, I argue, reflects an anxiety, and in turn a fear, that surfaces when my participants find themselves at risk of becoming what Gilroy (2005b) calls ‘perpetual outsiders’. But how does this fear manifest and circulate amongst bodies? The approach I would like to take to explore this question is concerned with the materialisation of race in encounters. Specifically, I seek to show how youth, in attempting to recuperate meaning from an empirical event that does not readily fit into their schemes of understanding and representation, such as the mass arrival of refugees, may reproduce structural and embodied emergence of race(ism) in the social. This creates a new disjuncture in the dynamic process of becoming African Australian, as the potential that open conviviality offers for the productive deployment of race is now invested in a process of bounded, rather than open, differentiation. Instead of dealing with these issues in a purely abstract sense, I draw on my ethnographic material in order to explore the impact of the changing African population and the associated discourses on the respondents in my study.

8.1 The Arrival

The migration of Africans to Australia had, for the better part remained ‘under the radar’ in the national discourse on immigration until The Arrival. In this sense, the reflexive negotiations of difference, and the open and indeterminate approaches to
belonging, as I depicted them, appeared to be relatively unencumbered by homogenising macropolitical discourses. Yet early in the study I found myself navigating the effect of this sudden intake of humanitarian entrants from Africa under Australia’s Special Humanitarian program. This was evident, on one hand, in the emergence of a particularly banal form of racism appearing in the dominant culture’s perception of Africans. On the other, I had noted that whenever mentioning my research to scholars or more liberal minded members of the community, the immediate assumption was that I was researching Sudanese refugees; the prevailing impression this gave me was that the only African population that existed in Australia were refugees or humanitarian entrants, or that these were the only ones worth studying.

Yet, the historical accounts that I opened up in Chapter 2 remind us that Black Africans were aboard the First Fleet sent to establish Australia as a colony in 1788. Nevertheless, they were later refused settlement, with a number of other non-whites, in Australia for the better part of a century under the White Australia Policy (Curthoys 2003; Hage 2002; Pybus 2001). African migration commenced once again with the abolition of the Policy, and the subsequent adoption of Multiculturalism in 1973 as State policy. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s then, and even into the late 1990s, it appeared as if the African migration was settling relatively unscathed, and was viewed as contributing to Australia’s multiculturalism (Hugo 2004). Most significant however, for current purposes, is the migration of Sub-Saharan Africans to Australia since the early 2000s in light of a significant change in Australia’s refugee-humanitarian migrant intake. It was this migration in particular that saw the African population reach a critical mass in Australia. And with this critical mass there also appeared new discourses that depicted African migration as a problem that presented structural challenges for, as emphasised by Hugo, ‘Africans’ were ‘culturally very different to the host community.’ They, according to Hugo (2009: 31):

...often lack English language, may have a history of broken or limited education and have large families which can sometimes lead to difficulties in finding suitable housing. This group of migrants also experience considerable problems in entering the Australian labour market.

It is worth briefly revisiting Hugo’s work here, for it is this perception that, as I suggest in this chapter, complicated efforts towards political belonging for my participants. While Hugo attempts to report impartially, there is a particular homogenizing tendency in his work to portray African migration to Australia as a
refugee phenomenon. It is this ongoing representation of Africans as a homogenous
group that is ‘different’ to Australians that, I suggest, leads to divisiveness within the
community. Further still, it reflects the ongoing socio-political climate at the time of
the study in which the racialisation and marginalisation of the other was
commonplace, and Multiculturalism as a social policy was all but abandoned.

It should not be surprising, then, that the African population, as a significant
migration to Australia, came under intense scrutiny during this time. Hage (2006b)
has argued that overt reactions to difference, or to that which is seen to impede
upon a so-called sovereign space, often figure as a numbers game. Hage (2006b)
offers the analogy of a garden in which one or two weeds are harmless, but when
this number of weeds grows tenfold, limits are reached and the potentially invasive
or noxious weed will attempt to be eradicated. In inviting a parallel with human
migration, Hage alludes to the occupation of Australian national space by non-Anglo
migrants and the subsequent reaction by the state to control and eradicate the
threat. So, while early scholars on the African migration to Australia such as Gow
(2002) and Udo Ekpo (1999) portrayed a calmer political climate and less adverse
reaction to the migration to Australia, drawing on Hage’s analogy, I suggest that as
the African population increased, a tipping point was reached and a new relational
field emerged. And within such a field the critical mass in the population is
contextualised as injurious to the ‘host community’. Paradoxically, Adham once
commented to me in reference to the growing non-white population, that everyday
racialised encounters were less frequent, at least while at school, due to the fact
that, ‘when there are more of you, it becomes less of an issue!’ Yet while the
increasing population may provide a sense of security and the possibility for
conivviality, it simultaneously poses a threat to the ‘dominant culture’ and may in
turn increase the possibility for everyday racism.

During several years of my fieldwork there was a sustained attack on African
migrants in Australia that, as I am arguing, shifted the dominant perception of the
African population. As early as 2005, outspoken conservatives had begun to make
public statements in the media brandishing ‘African youth’ (in this instance referring
primarily to newly arriving refugee youth from the Sudan) as delinquents who
formed gangs and participated in crime. Andrew Fraser, a Macquarie University
academic, was challenged for making strident comments on the risks of allowing
African migration to Australia. Fraser (2005, cited in Dick 2005) claimed that ‘an
expanding black population is a sure-fire recipe for increases in crime, violence and a
wide range of other social problems.’ Such comments were further exacerbated in
2007 by political figures, such as former leader of the One Nation Party, Pauline
Hanson and the then Minister for Immigration, Kevin Andrews, who called for a
reduction in the intake of African ‘migrants’ because of their inability to integrate
into Australian society (Pearlman 2007); as Harris (2013: 25) notes, this was an ‘unprecedented step’ for a Minister. These comments coincided with several regional towns’ local councils refusing to accept African refugees:

Last week Tamworth City Council rejected a proposal by the Immigration Department to resettle five refugee families in the area after concerns were raised by residents that such a resettlement could stir racial unrest. According to the objectors, some 393 out of a population of about 35,000, the cultural differences exhibited by a dozen Sudanese already living in Tamworth were such that an increase in their numbers could spark a repeat of last year’s Cronulla race riots in Sydney. These Sudanese, as well as committing a number of traffic offences and being involved in one sex-offence case, had shown a tendency not to take direction from authority. “They are very nervous people, they tend not to want to give out their name. They find it difficult to assimilate into our community because they have a fear of authority”, was how mayor James Treloar defended the decision, before claiming Tamworth had insufficient health services to cope (Canberra Times 2006).

How this ongoing media representation of Africans as delinquents unable to integrate into Australian society racialised the Sudanese ‘other’ in the ‘psychic domain’ (Brah 1992, cited in Hall, 1996b) of my participants and affected their perception of the newly arrived African refugees is difficult to gauge. Notable too was the impact of the associated push by the Howard Government during this time to validate a hegemonic White national identity. What was evident, however, was a sudden hostility towards ‘them’ – newly arrived African migrants – who were being marginalised, not only by the dominant culture, represented in the idea of White Australia, but gradually also by my participants.

This move to re-assert a hegemonic notion of the nation should not have been surprising, given the normative push in Australia’s socio-historical and political past toward the ‘Othering’ (Said 1978) of difference, to adopt the now common lexicon. I do not have space here to elaborate on the various migrations that have attempted to resist this process of being racialised and ‘othered’ as an ethnic group, as they attempt to settle in what was once seen as a White nation. Rather, the point I seek to make is that macropolitical discourses may affect everyday encounters in producing negative difference, as the identity of those considered as other is represented in relation to a dominant cultural disposition, and seen as inferior to it. This politico-cultural move to place identity at the forefront of social relations privileges the notion of a White Australia, and seeks to undermine the value of convivial multiculture in which difference is the determining force in increasing the
capacity of bodies. The politics of belonging and race takes a radical turn, then, when black African youth are faced with the homogenising force of these conservative dominant discourses. It is as Gilroy (2005b: 146) suggests, the small triumphs of anti-racism that emerged (such as my participants’ engagement with difference) had evaporated, once the ‘invasive immigration’ of African refugees was constructed as an intractable problem with national dimensions.

To describe the effect of this process that I am outlining on my participants at an everyday level, I borrow a term from Gilroy (2005b: 123), who similarly argues that in the United Kingdom there exists a generation of youth who he describes as holding a fear of being trapped in the vulnerable role of ‘perpetual outsider.’ The ‘elementary logic’ that ensues, in youth distancing themselves from and othering other African youth, is that those who have suffered due to marginalization or fear of being seen as outsiders will subsequently replicate this process of marginalization with others, through the politics of inclusion and exclusion (see also Hage 2006a). Their local sense of entitlement, Gilroy (2005b: 123) argues:

...leaves them reluctant to make common cause against racism and xenophobia with more recently arrived refugee and asylum seekers. To do so would be to accede to the secondariness and marginality with which racism associates them.

Taking up the call to racialise others is presumably the best way to prove that they are not real immigrants at all but somehow already belong to the home-space, thus attempting to embrace and inflate the ebbing privileges of Whiteness (Gilroy 2005b: 101) through reproducing racist and xenophobic reactions to difference.

As I discuss in the next section, my key informants were encountering what Ahmed (2004a: 30) calls the ‘contact zone of impressions’, the space in which intercorporeal encounters occur and the perception of others causes an emotional response. In this case, my participants experienced discomfort surrounding the alterity of the ‘other’, which produced an anxiety over their own identification as African Australian. The effect of these conservative discourses was to contribute to the polarization of difference, when African Australian youth encountered the influx of refugee-humanitarian Africans and the bodies of these ‘new arrivals’ began to impress upon their psychosocial and socio-emotional space.

The engagement with pure difference, which I characterised in Chapter 7 as having convivial potentials, was to be ruptured with attempts to assign meaning to The Arrival. In turn, the dynamics of becoming African Australian and the sense of belonging it enacts, reached a limit, and the dynamic process bifurcated once again.
Previously, in Chapter 7, I described a bifurcation between a phenomenological subjectivity and the problem of ‘not knowing’. The irreducibility of this perception to sense, forced thought,\(^{29}\) and provided the impetus for my participants to push towards a more indeterminate sense of belonging as African Australian, which was less encumbered by \textit{a priori} representations.

Now however, race and belonging were to be determined on different grounds. The bifurcation that I allude to here stems from the tension between an indeterminate and open collective association (the micropolitical) and significantly more closed macropolitical discourses. Here, I suggest that the reflexive processes that stem from the epidermal reflex are doubled over. Now the reflexive processes that the epidermal schema produces, involves a negotiation of both the experiential, and of racialised macro-discourses. This is to say that the phenomenological subjectivity that the epidermal reflex triggers now finds an object – the other – through which to negotiate the personal historicity of race and the discursive representations grounded in macropolitical discourse.

Rather than respond to the unfelt and excessive feeling that occurs in social relations and experience in an open and indeterminate way, youth react not only to their own racialised histories, but also to the racial significations that the macropolitical fosters. The fear and anxiety this generates can impede an open becoming, and provoke a slide from a context of everyday multiculturalism to an everyday racism. I have suggested that the excessive, affective dimension of social experience, and of the relations between bodies, can be tapped into by youth, micropolitically, as a means to embed themselves in a social field. My point here is that the polity can also manipulate the excess in order to interpellate the subject to its ideological presuppositions. What happens, then, if the ‘unknowing’ and the excess in social experience and relations is subsumed by the discursive production of anxiety and fear?

\section*{8.2 Failed Encounters}

As early as 2006, deep fissures in the community were starting to appear, as the following ethnographic vignettes depict. In an informal meeting with Keren at one of Canberra’s more upmarket restaurants in Manuka, we had a candid conversation, one of the first in which Sudanese youth were discussed. Keren had been working here as a waitress since only just managing to finish school; the owner was mentoring her in fine dining, and she had already built up her own client base. We

\(^{29}\) As discussed in chapter 7, thought in the Deleuzian sense is the process by which a faculty confronts its limits, in order to open to new ways of feeling, being and becoming.
met for coffee one summer afternoon after her shift at work had finished; it was late
2006. Although a busy afternoon on the terrace with several animated conversations
occurring at nearby tables, Keren and I were able to enter into a deep conversation
concerning her experiences with her African friends and family. We had been talking
for close to an hour before the topic of Sudanese youth arose:

“It’s funny”, Keren started, “but when I go to Sydney, I don’t see as much of it
here (in Canberra), but in Sydney you see a lot of African people around, I
mean especially this time when I went to see a performance and it was an R
& B venue so there were lots of African people there. But I was really
surprised to see this huge fight erupt between the Sudanese and other
African youth. It made me realise how racist they are!” “To one another?” I
asked, surprised that the topic had turned in this direction. “Yeah”, Keren
replied, “like when Africans are talking about Sudanese people, it’s not like
they talk about them as they normally do about each other. They say “the
Sudanese”, in a derogatory way. And it’s, like, why?” Her face amplifies her
confusion over the treatment of the Sudanese. “And, you know, they say that
they are really stingy people as a whole”, she adds. I sought clarification:
“Who, the Sudanese?” “Yeah, it’s like they are always trying to find a back
door or something”, she smirks.

“I can’t believe it, there is just this huge tension between Sudanese and other
African youth. And they say…”, Keren chuckles. “Let’s just say that they say
they are confused because they speak so many different languages.” She
pauses before adding, “I just don’t understand why they were so against the
Sudanese though!”

I found myself reflecting on my own thoughts on the Sudanese. That same year I had
begun committee work with a local agency that provided support for refugees
integrating into the Canberra community; the main clients were now the Sudanese. I
had quickly become familiar with the community, attending local soccer
tournaments and Sudanese Association meetings. I was taken aback at how quickly
the community had arrived in Canberra and the extent to which local organizations,
churches and government were supporting them. I had never seen a migrant group
receive such open political support, and so quickly.

Keren continued to explain her thinking. “I think it also because they have
such a different look! Normally with Africans it is really difficult to tell where
they are from until you start talking to them. But with the Sudanese they just
have that look – they are really skinny with small heads and really long
necks!” Keren laughs a touch nervously, I tentatively join in. She adds, “And I
Although Keren was diplomatic and relatively cautious about the judgments she was making about the Sudanese, the intercorporeal moment surfaced when she describes ‘that look,’ a look that began triggering the fear and anxiety that was rippling through various pockets of the community. Most Africans can pass as Africans, yet the Sudanese were Sudanese. Their bodies, ‘really skinny with small heads and really long necks’ cause an impression, an impression through which Keren regresses to other impressions, past encounters with other Africans, and falls to a negative difference. The surfacing of the Sudanese body and the impression that it makes on Keren could be seen as the start of a slide from productive engagement with difference to the performative process of othering: the repeating of past associations as well as the generating of the object, the object that is read as an invasion of bodily territory, as well as of the nation (Ahmed 2004a: 31-32).

While Keren’s response could be interpreted as productively contesting difference, in her laughter there remained a degree of anxiety, and a failure to know how to interpret the Sudanese, especially when faced with the Sudanese as a derogatory utterance by other African youth. In Chapter 3 I indicated, through the work of Dunn et al (2009), that certain utterances and encounters lend themselves to a social context in which forms of racist incivility or ‘race talk’ are commonplace, for example ‘FOB,’ ‘token white one,’ and so on. Such talk suggests a normalizing of an unequal dispensation of belonging, inflected by race that becomes normalized and harder to challenge. Whether this was an intentional act or otherwise is difficult to determine. The derogatory utterances surrounding Sudanese youth however, brings to light a much more insidious aspect of race and adds weight to the manner with which racism may be normalized as everyday.

Exchanges with Talia provided a slightly different perspective on the contact zone of impressions, as based on histories of past contact and the fear of forced homogenization – being ‘cast in’ with refugee youth. On more than one occasion in 2007, Talia expressed a complete discomfort with the newly arrived Sudanese and Sierra Leonean youth who were not part of the African population at the College or her small group of African friends. When addressing the topic of these newly arrived refugee youth, Talia preferred to keep her distance from talking about ‘them’. In our third in-depth interview, when the topic arose, Talia looked at me and responded, “I’ve told you what they are like”, rolling her eyes and indicating “don’t go there”. She was referring to the only time that we had discussed her interaction with new arrivals; an encounter with a Sudanese man on her way home from work during her gap year:
“I was riding the bus home one day from work... I’ve told you how I find buses are the real tell-tale sign for racism.”

Talia was referring to an ongoing conversation we had been having over how, when using the public bus system, she often experienced what she considered to be racist encounters, most often people avoiding sitting with her or making unwelcome comments.

“Anyway,” (Talia continues) “I’m minding my own business sitting on the bus, when out of nowhere this Sudanese guy comes and sits next to me. I’m like thinking to myself, ‘there are numerous other seats on the bus so why are you sitting here?’ He suddenly leans in close to me, looking me up and down, and then says: “I love you”. I didn’t know how to respond. I just looked at him. (Talia put an expression on her face, raising one eyebrow, pulling her head back turned slightly looking at me from the corner of her eyes). I’m not sure for how long, maybe just a couple of seconds. “Then what’s my name?”, I asked. I immediately broke through his façade as his eyes dropped. “I don’t know”, he replied, “but I love you”. I got up and moved away.”

I do not seek to play down the intersection between sexism and racism that appears to be occurring here in this account of the ‘Sudanese guy’s’ advances, which were understandably perceived by Talia as an unwanted incursion. Yet, the slide from this account of the undesired attention of a male to an account of an encounter with an undesirable Sudanese man cannot go unremarked upon. Indeed, Amena and one of her good friends had open discussions with me over African boys and the ‘pecking order’; that is, how various ethnic groups were hierarchically ordered in terms of their sexual ‘suitability’. Needless to say, Sudanese boys were not high up on the list. Nevertheless, Talia’s encounter in this case also reveals a trigger for a perceivable emotional response. I recall here Ahmed’s (2004a: 31) discussion of those encounters that create a perception of the ‘other’, which are ‘dependent on histories of reading that come, as it were, “before” an encounter between subject and another takes place’. For her part, Ahmed (2004a) provides the example of a White racist subject who encounters a racial ‘other’ and subsequently, due to past histories of interpreting the racial ‘other’ as threatening, responds with a barrage of emotions (fear, hate, disgust, pain); reproducing old impressions and creating new ones (31).

With this in mind, Talia’s story may be seen as an encounter in which the past histories of contact in an everyday multiculture, with diplomatic and economic migrants, spills into a repudiation of difference. With these ‘earlier arrivals’ such as Selam, a productive engagement with difference required creative and tenuous
tension; in African Australian vernacular, they (new arrivals) were “fresh”, “FOB”, or “African Africans”. The encounter with a Sudanese man, however, was, to use an old adage, the straw that broke the camel’s back. The failed encounter, which may be expected in such non-routine sites of engagement (see Wise 2010: 96), resurfaced when the Sudanese man appeared in Talia’s local church. Here, in defence of her personal space, Talia narrates how she “put him in his place”:

“Anyway, the following week I was attending church as always on a Sunday morning. This morning I performed at church, as usual, and then afterwards I opted to mix in with congregation and talk. When out of nowhere I saw this Sudanese man there, I had never seen him at church before. I walked straight up to him and in front of his family said to him “So what’s my name?” He didn’t reply of course. He was in my territory; I just looked at him and held my gaze, intimidating. I quickly put him back in his place.”

The obvious sexual politics of this encounter notwithstanding, what is notable in this failed encounter with multicultural was that it provided a stark contrast to the solidarity and pan African approach to which Talia had earlier subscribed. In her first interview, for example, Talia explained to me that she believed in an essentialised bond with other Africans, a bond that in her words was, ‘a belief that Africans are always there for one another and will always acknowledge one another as a community or a spiritual group of people.’ Such sentiments, in light of the changing African population, however, had diminished, revealing the rather naïve essentialism upon which they had been founded.

It was not only this episode, but the ongoing malaise I was observing, that problematised the sense of potential for (be)coming together as an African Australian community that I otherwise perceived. The relations that I have been mapping through the various encounters of my participants, demonstrated their capacity to reach a limit, one that threatened the possibility for the ongoing and necessary indeterminacy of the social, which I have argued in Chapter 7 makes possible the collective sense as African Australian. In Chapter 5 I spoke of an involuntary process of self-objectification that results for black African youth when faced with the reflexive processes of the epidermal reflex. For several of my participants the image of The Arrival, with its predetermined racialisation of the Sudanese, encroaches upon the possibilities for more open and indeterminate relations. As several of my key informants’ experiences suggest, the veridical perception that gives a collective sense to the emergent sociality, before it is expressed or represented, is now perplicated by race. This is particularly the case when my participants fear becoming perpetual outsiders through the process of forced homogenisation. There is now an object, the presence of a racialised other
(individual and collective), through which they can give materiality to race.

I suggest that my participants’ reaction to the Sudanese can be understood as an anxiety surrounding their own collective becoming and belonging as African Australians. This is triggered by the possibility that their collective identification will be jeopardised, given the changing socio-political discourse, by the hegemonic and discursive a priori production of what it means to be an African in Australia. This is hardly surprising. As suggested in Chapter 2, ‘racial prejudice and stereotyping, and scapegoating have confronted African migrants and refugees continuously throughout their brief settlement in Australia’ (Udo-Ekpo 1999: 152, see also Gilroy 2003; 2005b). What differs here, however, is that such scapegoating appears as a manoeuvre by black youth to unwittingly reassert such hegemony and with it maintain their own quality of life and social position.

It is instructive at this point to return to Ahmed’s reading of Fanon’s foundational analysis of his encounter with a little white boy – ‘look mama a Negro.’ As I first discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the epidermal reflex, Fanon’s analysis is integral to understanding how race triggers a reflexive process and the possibility of a ‘racialising loop’. Ahmed (2002a) notes that anxiety and fear are both generated through particular objects that adds to this racialisation. Ahmed (2002a: 4) writes:

In anxiety, one's thoughts often move quickly through different “bits” of one's life that are yet to be resolved. Each thought accumulates the helpless and generalised feeling of anxiety; anxiety hence tends to stick to objects that are nevertheless not its cause. Given this, I would argue that anxiety becomes an approach to objects rather than, as with fear, being produced by an object’s approach. The slide between fear and anxiety (from one to the other, or between each other) is hence indicative: it shows us how an approach of an object can easily become an approach to an object, and vice versa.

Throughout the various dynamics of becoming African Australian I have identified, I have highlighted the attempts by my participants to negotiate their becoming and to attune to a political collective, and with this the partial nature of their actualisations and identifications. Yet, with these attempts to become African Australian there are unresolved tensions, that until now I have suggested have been worked with productively, until an object of anxiety appears. How to approach the object, to paraphrase Ahmed, evokes anxiety over what it means to be African Australian (do they mean me when they say African?). But with the approach to an object (I can’t believe they come over here and run amuck!) follows the approach of an object, and so too the fear of being a perpetual outsider (now people don’t look at you and think that she’s Ghanaian – all they think is she’s ‘African’!). When faced with the fear of
becoming ‘perpetual outsiders’ youth seek, in this instance, claims to some form of ‘authenticity’ as African Australians via the antagonistic production of difference. Perhaps the best way to describe what occurs here to the indeterminate collective sense of the emergent sociality is that there is an ‘invagination’ or infolding of the social field (Grosz 2008: 24) with the emergence of the shadow that The Arrival creates.

As the vignettes in this chapter suggest, constraints and forms of self-consciousness appear on the scene, as pre-determined racial difference grounded in the politics of representation enters the frame. The problematic of belonging is now caught up with forms of everyday racism, as the discursive regime of race thus inserts itself between the subject and its body (Saldanha 2010: 2414). But what brings us to this point? How have my participants reached a limit in the relational field that they can no longer surpass?

8.3 Feral Belongings and the Spectre of Race

‘... are culturally very different to the host community’,
‘... an expanding black population is a sure-fire recipe for increases in crime, violence and a wide range of other social problems’,
‘... They are very nervous people... They find it difficult to assimilate’,
‘African migration should be stopped’

In Chapter 7 I suggested that to affectively attune to a relational field, we must be continuously alert to, and willing to engage with, the limits that it creates. In this sense, the problematic field that belonging and becoming African Australian creates, and the limits it produces, are an occasion for thought. In his discussion of the relational field, as this concept plays out in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Massumi (2011: n.p.) makes the point that a relational field is ‘unlimited in the sense that it is full of unactualised potential for value creation, both economic and affective, and for the generation of events and newness.’ Massumi goes on to suggest, however, that there are limits to the relational field. Massumi writes:

Deleuze and Guattari say that there is an intuitive, collective understanding of where the limits are for a given field. Not going past the limit, and tumbling over the threshold into a new field, is a marker of people’s collective, affective investment, their differential attunement, toward staying in the relational field they’re in, not because of how much they get per se, but because of the life-values, the quality of life, that the relational field they’re in affords them.
Following this description, I would like to suggest that many of my participants reached, through the exposure to the influx of Sudanese refugees and the hegemonic discourses surrounding this event, a marked, but possibly tentative, limit. Earlier discussions have focused on ascriptive negotiations of difference (such as the pick and mix lifestyle that is a feature of much contemporary multicultural life), forms of affiliation, and practices of affective attunement, all of which have varying potentials for a collective increase of capacities. The influx of African refugee migration, in contrast, changes the relational field and pushes it to a new limit, one that my participants are reluctant, as their responses suggest, to permeate. Talia’s initial comment in relation to the arrival of Sudanese refugees illustrates this well: “I told you, don’t go there.” Her gesture here implies that the risk that is necessary to attune to a collectively field (Massumi 2011 n.p.), is not worth it.

If we take belonging as a qualitative intensity to life that surges forth in my participants’ becoming African Australian, then the implication here is that at the limit of the relational field, there is now a rush of fear and anxiety, and the impetus to belong assumes a quite different tone as the dominant qualitative intensity to our becoming African Australian. The felt quality of belonging that was actualised through conviviality is now actualised through the intense emotions of hate and fear. There is an attempt to hijack conviviality by the ‘coercive politics of fear’ (Connolly 2005; Thrift 2004). And it is the spectre of race that perplicates here, to directly affect becoming.

That we are negotiating black on black relations within a contested space where there are limits and boundaries, concerns not only the relational field, but also a host of geo-political and socio-historic contingencies – sovereignty, self-determination, terra nullius, settler status, top down and bottom up multiculturalism. Within the dynamic relations of a convivial multiculture, there is a collapse, a fracturing or infolding as a policing of the boundaries materialises and the emerging sociality characterised by a more open-ended, direct and immersive belonging, is reduced to a politics of race. While this is not necessarily a conscious, reflective judgement, as ‘the movement in the relational field by nature overspills the individual and its actuality’ (Massumi 2011: n.p.), there is nonetheless a collective, relational evaluation involved. The distancing that I witnessed amongst my participants, then, represented a movement away from bodies that attempted to inhabit their social space, directly bearing upon their particular identification, and sense of belonging, as African Australian.

It is at this point that I would like to return to reflect on the role of the macropolitical in political belonging. And my claim is that the State attempts to weed out those ‘feral belongings’ (Massumi 2002c: 83) that may compromise ongoing hegemonic
relations, arguably as a means to curb the ‘ebbing privilege’ of whiteness. The rejection of the black bodies of the Sudanese, then, by my participants in forging their new ethnicity, is based on attempts to expel the Sudanese from the White social space, and results in a sudden slide, from everyday multiculturalism to everyday racism. This act of negation and reliance on a bounded representation of the other is fundamental, I argue, to the nation-state in the ‘turning’ that constitutes the citizen, the individual, as its subject. One could argue that such negative discourses have found their mark with my participants in turning them into subjects who compromise their emerging sociality and new ethnic identification in order to align with a dominant culture. It is as if their constitution as ‘Australian’ and their capacity to contest their racial and structural homogenization as ‘African’ rests on a kind of rite of passage into hegemonic relations, in relation to which the so-called African refugee serves as a convenient scapegoat.

In this, State forms of power – from the political discourses they circulate, to the policies they enact and the media representations they engender – play a crucial role. In particular, what I would like to draw attention to at this point is the way in which the State attempts to regulate the conditions that allow belonging to emerge. In its more ‘Static State’ form, to cite Massumi (2002c), regulatory apparatuses, from bureaucracy to media, regulate and exercise power. In this respect Massumi speaks of the State as ‘a dedicated institution of application, a specialized bureaucracy,’ which attempts to ‘weed out’ those organic irruptions of new belongings and new potentials that may disrupt the national agenda. We should think of this as any potential belonging that may transcend or otherwise challenge the status of national belonging. Massumi (2002c: 83) writes of such a ‘static’, which is to say, power conserving, State form:

The Static is incapable of perceiving the distinction between an infraction of its rules, and the emergence of a new belonging, a new field of potential. It only knows the negative. It can only construe change negatively, as a prospective transgression of the regulations it will, by right, impose. The Static is by nature reactive (“static” also in the sense of favouring stasis, changing only in response to an outside it can only perceive as an impingement on itself, or as a perturbation). ...Effective expressions of the positivity of belonging elude the State. This is why the State, like any regulatory apparatus, follows that which it regulates. Its applications are always retrospective, sniffing out and running after feral belongings it must attempt to recoup, to rechannel into State-friendly patterns.

To the extent that those processes of differentiation and becoming exceed the associations of negative difference, they are deemed feral belongings that the State
must reign in. Thus, micropolitical activity that fosters unpredictably new forms of emergent sociality occasions the reassertion of hegemonic forms.

Harris (2009: 199) points out that ‘everyday racism’ is ‘a strategy reserved for reasserting monocultural hegemony’ and can be ‘understood as an antagonistic production of difference in the effort to re-centre white entitlement’. The complexity of the situation suggests that, in this instance, it could also be seen as an attempt to claim black entitlement and authenticity, as I hope the closing vignette below will illustrate. This final vignette relates to Amena, who shared a similar trajectory to Talia insofar as she was born to African migrant parents, who arrived in Australia when Amena was only 18 months of age. For Amena, the new immigration of Africans created an emotional betrayal of her own sense of what it meant to be an African Australian, which resulted in a profound intersection of the fear and anxiety generated through both intersubjective encounters and long-established racist discourses, as the following field notes attested:

Two years after Amena had completed college we met at the Canberra University for another in depth interview; it was 2008. Amena seemed agitated, though I had no bearing on what was wrong. We began with our usual catching up – what we had been up to since we last met – and I enquired as to how her family was, which led into Amena talking about her desire to go to America to visit her grandmother:

“Australians are too malicious in their racism”, she said, “I mean, I can’t honestly say because I haven’t been to the US, but let’s say that when you are African American in America and you say ‘I’m American’ no one is going to question you, no one is going to give you a hard time about it.” I began thinking on the fact that in America, Blacks had been there since slavery and that while Africans (not to mention Indigenous Australians) have been here since colonization, Australia’s policies of exclusion seem to have been what has made recognition as an Australian so difficult.

I began to speak, but Amena, catching me unaware, continued her line of thought as if I had not even spoken. “The stupid Sudanese...I hate the Sudanese”, she spat with vehemence. “Whoa! Why?” I replied. “Sudanese or Sierra Leone... I think it might be both. The way they are just running amuck. They come over here as refugees and just run amuck. I remember when that thing was really big.” “You mean in the media?” I asked. “Yeah. People use to come up to me and ask me, ‘Are you from Sierra Leone?’, and I would say – ‘NO WAY! Not, no, NO WAY!’ Because I hate those people for what they have done, they’ve just made it harder for everyone else and given everyone a bad
name.” Amena was clearly agitated with the situation. I was not sure what had prompted her outburst. “And people on the bus would talk about it while you were there, as if they were trying to send a message to you. I’m not from Sierra Leone; I’m not from Sudan. I have been here my whole life. People my age have been here just as long as you have if not more, don’t treat me like that.” I attempted to deflect her anger: “Is it their fault (the Sudanese) or is it still just part of that maliciousness you were talking about?” Amena folded her arms across her chest. “It is the Sudanese’ fault and the maliciousness”, she replied. “A bit of both”, I responded. “Yeah”, she agreed, pausing for a second, “but the Sudanese people are the reason that things are so malicious.”

While I have been speaking of the way that the State appropriates, so as to manage, feral belongings, I have meant to describe a particular form of power, rather than simply an institution of governance that presides over individual and social life. And while I have spoken of ‘forced homogenisation’, discourse such as Amena’s is not the mere product of an imposition. And, even though I will suggest that she is ‘compelled’ by macropolitical circumstances to respond as she does to the event of The Arrival, this is no mere coercion. Rather, it is a question of the relationship between subjects and the homogenising forces in which they become confusingly caught up. That Amena is not sure whether it is the refugees from the Sudan or from Sierra Leone that are the problem (‘I think it might be both’), what she does remember is the way that after ‘that thing’ that ‘was really big’ in the media, people would come up to her and ask her a question (‘Are you from Sierra Leone?’) that clearly called on her to either identify with the supposed troublemakers and thus repudiate national identification and its moral codes, or, conversely, to turn on the refugees and identify herself with a normative Australian identity. On the one hand, Amena gestures towards the difficulty of attributing blame (“It is the Sudanese’ fault and the maliciousness”), yet she ultimately falls into the logic of identification that demands that maliciousness be assigned to a cause (“… the Sudanese people are the reason that things are so malicious”).

One cannot overlook the profound complexity and paradoxes that the participants in my research face in attempting to position themselves as ‘African Australians’. With an absence of recorded African migration in Australia’s historical past, unlike in Europe and North America, African migrants have been faced with the task of building their own collective identification in a country that hosts a turbulent past in relation to non-White migration. African youth, I have argued, in navigating the social field, were thus engaged in producing an open field of convivial multicultural, in which difference was the site at which connections were forged and new forms of political belonging flourished. But any micropolitical activity that attempts to
entertain a notion of self-determination must be sensitive to the temptations and dangers of homogenising forces. As Erin Manning (2013: 70) puts it:

[W]e must walk the tightrope carefully... as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, there are no micropolitical experiments impervious to capture by macropolitical tendencies and vice versa: “everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics” (1987, 213).

So, while I have throughout my argument held onto the notion that there is indeed a surplus potential in the social field, which is to say, an excess to the expressions and representations that persist within it, the question remains of what happens when the effects of macropolitics is to curtail micropolitical flourishings.

Against such micropolitical flourishings then, I argue, we sense a shift in relations with an empirical event – the migration en masse of black African refugees to Australia and a number of macropolitical hegemonic discourses that followed in the wake of this migration. This amounts to a macropolitical process of forced homogenisation, that, via various organs of the state, pushes Africans in Australia into a pool of ethnic ‘others’ and entertains the notion that Africans are unwanted migrants, unworthy of social, cultural, political and economic participation. Forced homogenisation then, amounts to a sort of forced rite of passage for ‘migrant minorities’ into hegemonic relations. That is to say, the dominant culture will, in a routine response to difference, other ethnic minorities, forcing them to accede to the position of a multicultural minority. This is an attempt to cling to the once White nation and a melancholic reaction (Gilroy 2005b) to the threatened loss of Whiteness as the core culture.

For my participants, the confrontation with later waves of immigration of African refugees forced them to come to terms with their own alterity when faced with the threat of being pushed into a homogenous ‘multicultural minority’. The Arrival, I suggest, compelled them to re-assess their status as ‘African Australians’, compelling them to reflect upon their position in the dominant culture, either reinforcing or rejecting those social institutions and norms that potentially subjugate the emergent self through positioning it as ‘other’.

The ‘failed’ encounters that I have illustrated between several of my participants cannot be understood outside the hegemonic discourses that inhere in this and other empirical events and their historical antecedents. Such discourses, which position newly arriving African refugee youth as deviants, participants in crime, uneducated and, most importantly, as unable to integrate into Australian society, hijack the unfelt feelings of the relational field in a way that necessarily threatens
conviviality. Thus in the process of forced homogenisation the excess potential or unfelt feeling, which I have indicated is the impetus for my participants towards an open field of always-becoming conviviality, is hijacked. That is to say, that such potential recedes as a heightened sense of fear and anxiety around race, amongst African youth emerges, and the open conviviality collapses into phenomenological subjects and discursive representations of difference. Forced homogenisation, then, effectively undermines the potential for an ongoing conviviality, as the state attempts to ‘turn the subject’. The inaugural gesture in this case, to paraphrase Massumi (2002c: 68), is to conjure away the individual/collective in order for it to return as determined by the strata, rather than the individual/collective determining of it.

Countering the ongoing preoccupation with the Sudanese population by academics (Windle 2010; Cole 2013; Nolan et al. 2011; Cassity and Gow 2006) and politicians alike, I have attempted in this chapter to provide a broader view of African youth and the complexities they face as they attempt to negotiate their becoming and belonging amongst various discourses, which attempt to conflate conviviality with more hegemonic approaches to national identity. Beyond this, I have sought to highlight the potential of ethnography to broaden our understanding of the racial milieu in which young people now find themselves. What I have sought to show here, that in agreement with Harris (2009: 202), youth are ‘social actors with a range of complex strategies for living in cultural diversity rather than as passive vessels for identity or attitude problems... people with agency.’ However, the impact of continual engagement with difference and the multiple processes of negotiating their own alterity against dominant norms and a discourse that was homogenizing African youth as ‘other’, resulted in these youth ultimately reproducing dominant forms of everyday racism.

Lest the sanguine tone of the previous chapter jar too sharply with the discussions here, I would stress that it is not a question of opposing to an ideal (the ideal of conviviality) the harsh reality imposed by the macropolitical spheres. Far from it. The point, rather, has been to highlight the creative variation necessary for, and that enables, conviviality to survive in the face of the socio-political, as well as biographical, perplication of race. As Massumi (2008: 19) puts it:

Even macro solutions designed to curtail micropolitical activity often end up feeding it by making it a necessity to invent new ways of getting by and getting around. Creative variation is the only real constant of politics.

According to Mattia Fumanti and Pnina Werbner (2010: 10), ‘we need to know more about... young Africans growing up in the diaspora, and the kinds of associations and
leaderships this new generation will form when they reach maturity.’ The point of this chapter has not been to provide data towards such a project, but rather to give a sense of the fragility of convivial multiculture in the face of macropolitical forces that tend, and sometimes aggressively push, toward homogeneity. As Susan Ruddick (2010: 24) has argued, if we do not remain open to interrogating the bases of our fear of, or indifference to, alterity, we risk not experiencing the conditions of the present, and thus the opportunities for a new political imaginary.
I opened this thesis with the question of what it would mean to think through and represent the specific and non-generalisable experiences of being ‘African Australian’, without preventing the becoming that, as I have argued, is proper to all social experience. My initial concern was, given the newness of the African population in Australia, that the identification of ‘African Australian’ would become not only a tool of the sometimes exclusionary politics of belonging, but also an *a priori* social category to represent those of black African descent, without giving proper attention to the collective ‘sense’ that is expressed in such an identification. Further still, given that racially inflected expressions of difference are all too often ascribed to those seen as ‘other’ in Australia’s socio-political and historical context, my concern was that race would inevitably become foreclosed as the central tenet of such identification, without giving due course to its productive potential. My own intention, in seeking to analyse the complex experiences observed and conveyed to me by the participants in my study, has not been to put race at the centre of the social experience, but rather to challenge the way in which race is problematised to begin with. This is especially necessary when the questions of identity and belonging are explored in relation to non-white youth, since much theorisation in that direction has prioritised race as the central category, or perhaps explored its intersection with class, gender, sexuality and other categorical terms.

My own aim has been, in adopting a term I have developed in the thesis, to show how race *perplicates within*, rather than being straightforwardly *implicated in*, social experience. The crucial distinction here is that the former term lends itself to a more dynamic understanding of social reality. It is more possible to hold onto the transformative promises and demands of becoming, as well as belonging, when the social experience of those ‘marked’ by race is seen in dynamic terms. The question is no longer how we, as analysts, make sense of the ways that race is implicated in experience, as though we were faced with the brute reality of race, or indeed racism. Rather, it becomes a question of the *sense* of experience as it plays out, in this instance, around the problems of belonging and becoming African Australian. In the same move, the ‘problems of belonging and becoming African Australian’ gain a positivity as *problems*; no longer posed as deficiencies requiring resolution, the manner in which they productively orient, and give novelty to, social reality comes into the picture. It is with an eye to this dynamic character of race’s perplication in social experience that I have identified a series of dynamics that, in diverse ways, fold into and shape that experience – the reflexive negotiation of difference, political collectivism and forced homogenisation – though, as I have stressed, these are meant as one way into the analysis and are certainly not exhaustive.
In the first instance, my endeavours to appreciate the experiences of those who tentatively, and often ambivalently, identify as African Australian has required that I put into question those epistemological and ontological paradigms that hold the potential to reproduce race as an unproblematised given of social reality. More specifically, a representational ontology prioritises identity as the starting point of social experience, from which racial and ethnic identities are all too easily naturalised as the key determinant through which belonging is articulated, and subsequently expressed, in social encounters and interactions.

How can we, in contrast, through exploring the emergence of the African Australian community, re-problematise notions of identity and those forms of belonging that remain, sometimes to their detriment, bound to identity and the representational tradition? In exploring this question, my approach has been to exploit the work of Deleuze, and those Deleuzian inspired shifts in social theory which treat the discursive and embodied representations of social reality as effects of a more primary dynamic of differentiation; becoming and difference are now what feature at the forefront of our accounts of social experience.

The important point I make in tracing such a shift is to insist that neither identity nor race should be privileged as the primary constituents in the formation of an emergent sense of self, but considered as secondary to the dynamism of multiplicity and difference (Deleuze 1994). Starting with differentiation and becoming as the ‘groundless ground’ (Deleuze 1994) of social experience has allowed me to offer a more fertile way of figuring the problem of belonging, which might hopefully be more sensitive to the complexities it presents in reality. This is not belonging, as to an identity, but belonging as ontologically inseparable from these more primary processes of becoming and difference, of which identity is an effect. Without fully appreciating some of these complexities of the social field, in which an identification such as African Australian is produced, we risk the impetus provided by the desire to belong becoming manipulable to an exclusionary politics of belonging.

My aim, then, in thinking through the various processes through which race, becoming and belonging articulate, has been to contribute to existing debates on alternative way of thinking about the emergence of race in social encounters. In this, undergoing research into the precise empirics of African Australian community, in all its peculiar historical and contemporary configurations, has lent richness and complexity to the study of African diasporas internationally. But it has also opened a new angle in the exploration of those social practices that invite us to remain open to belonging and resist the kinds of a priori representations that produce a passively racialised subject. Here convivial multiculture as a kind of social practice comes into view. And it is these convivial practices that, I have argued, hold the potential for the
transformations necessary for race to be productively taken up in thought. On this, Massumi (2002b: 240) best articulates the kind of transformations that I have addressed in this thesis when he states:

So it seems to me there needs to be an ecology of practices that does have room for pursuing or defending rights based on an identification with a certain categorised social group, that asserts and defends a self-interest but doesn’t just do that... If you do think of your life potential as coming from the ways you can connect with others...You have to think of your being in a direct belonging... to the same social field — an indeterminate or emergent ‘sociality’.

In theorising the emergent sociality of the African Australian community, I first prioritised political belonging over race, as holding the potential for young people to connect within a convivial multiculture. Multiculture is characteristically conceptualised in terms of the harmonious negotiation of the differences between individuals (cf. Gilroy). Yet, I have suggested that such a conceptualisation, while naming some of the important work done in the name of multiculture, does not yet get to the potential for conviviality that exists at the affective, pre-individual level, before ‘connection’ is rendered in negative terms as a work to be done. As Massumi (2008) puts it, this more ‘direct belonging’ offers a new lens through which to grasp the interplay between the problematic of belonging and that of becoming and it is with this in mind that I have pursued an ontology of affect. Such an ontology, I have argued, best conceptualises the forms of conviviality and the prosaic encounters that shape it, to offer new ways to imagine belonging; this is a belonging that is freed from the illusion of a final identity as African Australian, being oriented, rather, to nurturing the ‘being in a direct belonging’ that is the indeterminate, emergent aspect of sociality per se.

It is both macropolitical and micropolitical processes that trigger belonging. In sounding out how an ontology of affect gestures towards the convivial practices necessary for this more ‘direct belonging’, I have insisted that this micropolitical level of affect is only part of the story. For while I have focussed on how convivial multiculture forms through the micropolitical dimensions of becoming, it would be remiss to underestimate how macropolitical structures and discourses hold sway in intermingling with, or disrupting, such becomings. This is particularly the case when the racialised subject invests in race, in both conscious and unconscious ways, as a key determinant in their psychic and social identity (Hall 1996). And, as I have also indicated, State forms of power are adept at exploiting such investments for their own political purchase.
It is the discursive and embodied ways in which subjects take up race that may diminish the capacity of individual and collective bodies to assert their own self-interest, or for that matter to be ‘self-determining’. Rather than dismiss race, then, I have set out to give some form to the dynamics through which it perplicates, or folds back into, social encounters. So even if youth are, through multicultural practices, able to transcend the manner in which race is implicated in social experience through its biological, discursive and embodied hold, race may still fold back through social relations, encounters and interactions as a structure of thought. The driving question I have sought to address here is how, given race’s hold, can we work with it as a productive force when it perplicates within our becoming? How do we evaluate which encounters may increase our capacities and which may diminish them, particularly when our personal and social histories are heavily invested in race? Before gesturing towards some responses to these more ethical questions, I will briefly return to the earlier dynamics of becoming that the thesis has described, to give a sense of what is at stake here.

9.1 The Dynamic Logic of Becoming African Australian

In extending Fanon’s thinking on the way in which race becomes embedded in the racialised subjects’ embodied orientation to the world, I outlined how for my participants, the reflexive negotiation of difference is triggered by an epidermal reflex. This micro-reflex is twofold in the sense that it evokes in the racialised, a reflex process that is involuntary and immediate, as it occurs in encounters. Further, this reflex is a somewhat involuntary process of self-objectification. This emerging consciousness, the self-realisation of one’s racialisation and self-difference, which stems from intercorporeal experience, amounts to the individual seeking forms of social identity, representation and belonging that can account for their conscious perception of an embodied sense of difference, on something that feels more like their own terms.

I argued that, as they contended with race and the problem of belonging, the youth of my study appropriated particular forms of representation, in this instance, social forms of ascriptive and affiliative identities, to negotiate the perception of alterity that the epidermal reflex evoked. The multicultural practices associated with such identifications took place within an environment in which coming together in difference was premised on a negotiation of the sense of one’s lack: namely, one’s difference from the norm. Both ascriptive negotiations, in which youth aligned with existing cultural images of Africanness, and affiliative negotiations, in which pan-ethnic solidarities provided a sense of community, offer a means for such youth to revalue their difference positively. In this regard, the role that such identifications
with African Australianness play for young people negotiating their alterity cannot be underestimated.

Given that such negotiations of difference are, at least in part, a reaction to my participants’ racialised history and experience in light of a dominant ‘white’ culture, it is perhaps not surprising that they remain somewhat reactive in character. To put it in more ontological terms, at the level of these negotiations, difference does not yet gain a positivity, but retains the status of ‘difference from’; difference is simply the difference between identities. In practical terms, this means that while youth relied on the appropriation of certain forms of representation as a means to ‘fit-in’ to their social milieu, and as an attempt to contend with and possibly ‘transcend’ race, they habitually reinforced the structures of representation through which race and the racialised subject are reproduced. This creates a paradox in my analysis at this particular juncture in the ‘event of becoming African Australian’. As ‘black’ youth attempt to transcend their racialisation through collaboratively engaging in the production of an emergent black, diasporic, pan-ethnic consciousness they embrace representations that may serve to further racialise them. Racialised embodied memory then, for a subject who is grappling with the conscious self-realisation of their alterity, may trigger a reflexive spiral from which one’s racialisation in intercorporeal encounters is inevitable. Thus the perplication of race within social experience is manifest.

In following this ‘logic’ we need to begin to consider how sense actualisation affects the manoeuvring and shifting of identity positions as a reaction to the perplication of race. In turning to the question of “how do I belong?” within the field, and the first dynamic of becoming, I explored the problematic juncture that emerges when my participants were seeking, desiring and attempting to actualise a ‘sense’ of belonging vis-à-vis their racialization. Sense, in this instance, is best understood as a variation in the ability of bodies to affect and be affected. Sense actualisation, then, brings to the fore certain encounters that result in variations in the power to affect and be affected within a social field. The interesting point here is what happens to race, when a body’s capacity provides the productive impetus to form relations, rather than the representations that are secondary to such affective capacities.

Certainly, my participants’ narratives in this dynamic illustrated that particular diasporic or pan African identifications were adopted as a means to belong, however there remained a lack running through the event of becoming African Australian. This lack we could associate with a lack of belonging, based on the inadequate attention given to Africanness in Australia, and would signal a lack of belonging to an identification. In treating this lack however as the object of an encounter, it is, as Deleuze would say, something that forces us to think. It is this very act of being
pushed to the limits of our experience that results in thought as a kind of excess to the social field and relations.

It is the disjuncture between the excess ‘sense’ that forces thought, and the lack of knowing that I have explored in the second dynamic of becoming political collectivism. The second dynamic of becoming, political collectivism, and the multicultural practices that shape it, emerged through and within the relational field itself – and its very excess. Convivial multiculture, in this dynamic, has been seen as a means to work with race’s perplication into social experience, and I characterise such multiculture by the social practices that allow bodies to increase their capacities. The political act here is not one premised on race or ethnicity per se, or the politico-cultural associations previously ascribed to and affiliated with. Nor did I prioritise the host of inclinations, feelings nor memories through which race perplicates, as determinants of the emergent field. What I was particularly concerned with was the possibilities for priming to something more. For once primed, it is the collective response to an unfelt feeling, a negative prehension, or a lack in social experience, which opens up the micropolitical field to a new set of possibilities.

I have suggested that it is through the affective tendencies that persist in a relational field that bodies coalesce into a collective. It is their affective attunement to the relational field, or rather the excess potential in it, that defines the micropolitical moment. In responding to the question of how such attenuation occurs, I argued, through the work of Massumi and Deleuze in particular, that my participants are responding to a sign, in the Deleuzian sense, that bears upon the senses and forces thought. It is a response to ‘not knowing’, as a sign of an encounter, which takes us to the limits of social experience, as illustrated by the utterance, “I am African Australian… or am I?”

Here, to illustrate the argument for an affective coming together and further my contribution to the field, I pushed Stern’s notion of affective attunement to vitality affects as a way of understanding the shaping of multicultural practices. I suggested that vitality affects should be thought of as ‘activation contours’, those feelings or sensations that precede that activity of conscious thinking and perception, yet activate it. We should think of such affects as activating thought and allowing bodies to share ‘feeling’ before its realisation in the subject. As such, it is the ‘quality of feeling’ in social experience that we are attending to in our social relations rather than the representations that reside there. My participants, then, in the event of becoming African Australian, express more collective associations as they begin to sense a critical mass in the African population approaching. This affective attunement is not a conscious process so much as a socio-affective fine-tuning to the
conditions of emergence of such sociality. Affectively attuning to one another within the social field opened up my participants to what Sharp (2011: 13) calls ‘shared forms of power pregnant with unknown futures’, through which, albeit temporarily, the sutures and structures of race appear to recede and those micropolitical flourishings shape the social field.

Now let us return to the third dynamic Forced Homogenisation, to revisit an empirical event (The Arrival), shaped by the migration of African refugees to Australia, that provides a catalyst for the macropolitical to disrupt the always-becoming micropolitical. While the arrival of African refugees brings with it a change in relations between my participants, the primary focus of my inquiry here was, how had this event affected the already in play multicultural field? The particularly racialised, discursive representations of Africans in Australia, in this dynamic, had taken on macropolitical dimensions that, undermining the ongoing conviviality, fostered an environment of fear and anxiety. This, I argued, reflected a larger hegemonic project that is particular to Australia’s socio-historic and political landscape, in which a climate of racist and xenophobic reactions to difference has often served as a means via which the ‘State’ ruptures emergent becomings and belongings. In other words, as the African population tended towards a critical mass, homogenising forces emerge in an attempt to demonize and racially vilify Africans to reassert white hegemony, and force those collectively seen as ‘other’ into a ‘multicultural minority’.

The empirical work in this dynamic reveals a number of failed encounters that, I suggested, stemmed from my participants’ encounter with the image of The Arrival and its impression on them. The direct impact here on multiculture amounts to a hijacking of the possibility to re-modulate the affective excess in the social field. The regressive macropolitical discourses treat such indeterminate belongings as ‘feral belongings’ that need to be recouped and rechanneled into State-friendly patterns. (Massumi 2002c). Now race is perplicated once again, however to deleterious effect. Its perplication here results in an uncertainty over what it means for my participants to be African Australian and indeed any associated collective sense. The invocation of fear, anxiety, hate, and disgust, vis-à-vis race reveals latent potentials in the dynamic field of becoming. So while there remain latent potentials for a convivial multiculture to enact new ways of belonging, the possibility that begins to impress upon us here, is that the question ‘how do I belong?’ as a driver of becoming, is inextricably perplicated by race. It is as if that excessive potential within social experience is taken up by race, at the point of bifurcation, rather than remaining open to indeterminate becoming and belonging.
9.2 Ethics of Excess

Throughout the thesis I have spoken of ‘becoming African Australian’ as an event in and of itself, which, as my thesis attests, I consider worthy of analysis. While I have referred to the specific socio-historic events that have shaped the empirical reality of processes of identification and collectivisation in Australian history, I have also isolated the sense of the event of ‘becoming African Australian’ itself. In this, I have been inspired by Deleuze’s sense of the event as an incorporeal transformation that is always more than the empirical happenings that we would situate in linear time and locate in space. The dynamics of becoming that I have outlined in the thesis all suggest a particular space time juncture. However, these dynamics are unable to be represented in any linear determination, as they are always ongoing, and only appear to pivot off an acute sense of the present. A Deleuzian reading of the event, then, suggests that becoming is not determined by a before or after, past or present; rather it is a simultaneity in time, a push and pull within the present (Williams 2008).

I would emphasise here the difference between this sense of an incorporeal or ideal event and the sense in which representation figures the ‘ideal.’ To speak of ‘becoming African Australian’ as an ideal event is not to treat it as an ideal, in the way that our tradition, after Plato, has understood that term. That is to say, the ideal event of ‘becoming African Australian’ is not something that exists outside the present (as a pre-existing image of community or something to be strived toward). To the contrary, it refers precisely to the immanent transformations that take place within the ‘push and pull’ of the present.

Likewise, when I have spoken of ‘becoming African Australian’ as a problem, it is a very precise and Deleuzian sense of the problem that I have had in mind, whereby the problem is not a deficit of thought requiring resolution – a ‘moment of insufficiency in knowledge’, to quote Deleuze (1994: 63) – but the occasion for new thought to take place. Williams (2003: 121) illustrates this distinction well:

Put simply, thought escapes the model of recognition when sensation forces thought to take place. This is not the activity of recognition but the passivity of a ‘fundamental encounter’ (*I have missed something about the rain on these dull grey streets*). This thought does not involve the division and correct attribution of recognition (*The grey of London or the blue of Marseilles*?). It is a sign that forces us to think with a problem (*I have missed something of those dull grey streets and these blue skies. What new life can be created to express grey and the blue?*). The force of the problem, as independent of the questions and solutions of recognition, is that it goes beyond any past solutions stored in memory. It is a problem because it does not yet have a solution and because it
does not even allow for solutions that cancel it out.

To speak of the problem of belonging as having a positivity as a problem is to consider how the sense of lack (How do I belong? Do I belong?) becomes an impetus toward new expressions, new becomings. To translate it into the terms used by Williams above, the problem of belonging can be expressed as ‘I miss something… what new life can be created to express that which I miss?’

I have theorised convivial multiculture in terms of an always-emergent social field, which is always and already in play. Yet, I have also argued that such convivial potentials are fragile and they require convivial practices to enable their expression in any present social reality. The dynamism that the thesis embraces, then, also has broader application for the notion of political belonging. The implication is that belonging is best understood as an aleatory and excessive quality of social experience, through which race variously perplicates. The question then becomes, how do the various ways in which we look to actualise a sense of belonging hold the potential to endow race with sense or expression? What sorts of macropolitical conditions nurture or hinder the realization of the convivial potentials of the micropolitical sphere? And, conversely, how does the ethical work that is carried out at the level of micropolitics impact upon the macropolitical domain? Such questions are particularly important when our histories of race cannot be erased, and there remains the possibility that our memories or histories of association, based in our experiences of race, may prejudice present and future relations and encounters (I think they like me because of the colour of my skin, even though they treat me like I don’t belong… They know I know, so why do they make me feel like I don’t belong?)

Within each of the dynamics that I have identified, I have sought to articulate how the everyday vicissitudes of my participants’ experiences, their variations in thought and feelings, reflect the social field, while still serving as a particular chapter in their becoming African Australian. The point has not been to compare these experiences with an ideal of what African Australianness might, ‘in an ideal world’, look like. As Adkins (2012: 509) puts it, the aim here is:

...to make oneself worthy of what happens to us... to affirm life as it is, rather than allowing oneself to be consumed by the ressentiment that comes from wishing life could be otherwise.

This is certainly not to suggest that those who bear the negative effects of racialisation should suffer stoically. Clearly, a sense of injustice at one’s reduction through racialisation or the denial of one’s potentials for becoming is a crucial motivator for transformation. However, while convivial multiculture could be
considered a possibility immanent to the present, there will be variance in the ways in which individual and collective actors productively engage with difference. That our young protagonists, in their attempts to actualise the excess value in belonging, ‘tap into’ hate, fear and race motions us, to think about the extent to which we go to reach a vague, undetermined state, such as belonging and the ‘ethics’ with which they are associated. How might we inhabit this uncertainty together? How would The Arrival, for example, play out if the excess in social relations were actualised ethically? For while I suggested in political collectivism that the potential for decidedly convivial relations existed, awaiting its unfolding, its realisation is only one possibility in a politically and ethically complex world. Likewise, at the bifurcation of social experience, the potential persists for un-convivial relations, into and within which race may be perplicated, amongst multiple potentialities – to fear, to hate. If we can pry open this gap further and explore the affective space that determines our actions and passions, and if we work to close the distance between the excess value in belonging, in relation to the lack that we experience in life, then perhaps we can determine how best to act in a given situation and ‘rescue’ our becoming African Australian from the habitual and structural perplication of race with fear or hatred.

In closing, then, I am gesturing toward the question of the ethical aspect of our encounters. For once we actualise a given potential, or we organise our encounters to increase our capacity to act or to empower us, we are in a position to go on desiring and selecting those relations that will continue to do so. Spinoza’s often cited maxim is crucial here: ‘we do not know what a body can do’, the point being that this question over our individual and collective capacities remains open ended. Among the numerous relations and encounters that my participants experience in each moment of their becoming African Australian, it is as if race is a spectre awaiting manifestation. Yet, we could say that when race is left obscure in belonging, allowed, at least temporarily, to recede amongst the diverse affective forces which shape our encounters, it is neither unimportant nor intrinsically threatening, but merely less intense in its relation. It will continue to perplicate in our encounters, but perhaps with less necessity. We can recall the medical sense of perplication as a procedure of ‘drawing the cut end of an artery through a slit in the wall of the same artery just above, in order to arrest bleeding’ (cf. Medical-dictionary). Translated into the terms of my argument, the notion of perplication offers a way of imagining how we might arrest the necessity with which race bleeds into our encounters, at least temporarily, to the extent that we can open ourselves to the potential bifurcations and counter-actualisations within social experience. The efforts in this thesis are intended as a kind of counter-actualisation of the event of ‘becoming African Australian’, a way to work with it, replaying the event differently with the hope of making the experience of race and indeed racism more productive to our becoming.
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