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Affect, Belonging, Community
Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Performance and
Writing in post-2001 Australia

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Abstract

This doctoral dissertation examines the production and function of representations of asylum in writing and performance in Australia since 2001. It encompasses creative work that portrays asylum seekers (people whose protection claim has not been assessed) and refugees (people whose status has been determined within the terms of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees) as well as work that engages with the issue of asylum more broadly. My selection of performative work includes theatrical production, performative art installation, protest action and film, and my selection of written work includes novels, poetry, memoirs, short stories and letters. The timeframe of the analysis acknowledges 2001 as a decisive period in the development of punitive national policy (and ideology) on unauthorised asylum seekers, concurrent with the escalation of sovereign security discourse worldwide after 11 September, that continue to inflect Australia's engagement with non-belonging non-citizens.

If the upheavals of 2001 and concomitant proliferation of creative arts response mark the starting point of this study, the last two years have presented a renewed intensification of the challenges faced by the world's displaced. Recent global economic crises have heightened the vulnerability of people living in economically and politically unstable parts of the world, prompting an increase in refugee numbers; the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, stated in a press conference with the Australian Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Evans, in February 2009 that recent economic deterioration is an "accelerating factor" upon the existing pressures that force people movements, and moreover, a "generator of xenophobia" directed at refugees in many parts of the world.

In its emphasis on creative and cultural work in writing and performance, approached to a significant extent in terms of counter-representations to (usually) pejorative government

and news media discourse, this project speaks to crucial questions posed by Suvendrini Perera, writing in response to the Tampa incident of 2001: “The terrain of representation, of language, imagery and narrative ... emerges as a crucial site for contesting the disconnection and separation of refugees and asylum seekers from wider society. What representations of refugees, other than official ones, are available in the public sphere? What are the forms and modalities by which refugee stories are told and made visible?” (“A Line” 32-3). Despite its broad analytical umbrella, encompassing writing and performance – both forms that themselves contain a number of representational modalities – created by Australians and by refugees, this study can only begin to provide an answer to Perera’s questions. In doing so, it develops an overarching (though by no means exclusive) theoretical concern with *affective cross-cultural engagement*. I endeavour to illustrate some of the ways in which selected creative representations construct spaces of affective contact and connection between human lives separated-in-proximity by sovereign demarcations of national community.

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Introduction: Human Refuse in an Interconnected World

The decisive activity of biopower in our time consists in the production not of life or death, but rather of a mutable and virtually infinite survival.

—Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*

On the morning of 16 April 2009 a small Indonesian boat that had been intercepted by a Navy patrol vessel off Australia's north-west coast exploded, killing five of the forty-seven Afghan asylum seekers on board and injuring dozens more. Thirteen seriously injured people were evacuated directly to the Australian mainland for urgent burns treatment, while twenty-nine were transported to AED Oil's Front Puffin rig in the Timor Sea before being treated on the mainland and later detained on Christmas Island. While the group of thirteen were entitled to access Australia's refugee determination and appeals procedures, the remaining twenty-nine were not, having first arrived at an excised offshore place. The oil rig stands outside Australia's maritime migration zone under the terms of legislation devised in response to the "Tampa affair" of August 2001, when the Australian government refused to allow 438 asylum seekers rescued in international waters by the Norwegian container vessel MV Tampa to enter Australian territorial waters. This turning point in the development of national policy (and ideology) on unauthorised asylum seekers, concurrent with the escalation of sovereign security discourse worldwide after 11 September, continues to inflect Australia's engagement with non-belonging non-citizens. The authority-through-disavowal over the bodies of the asylum seekers taken to the oil rig can be traced to the state-devised instrumentalisation of lives at sea that underpinned Tampa eight years earlier.

Articulations and points of causality between events of 2001 and the present form a crucial contextual basis for this study, which examines the production and function of representations of asylum in writing and performance in Australia since 2001. This includes creative work that portrays asylum seekers (people whose protection claim has not been assessed) and refugees (people whose status has been determined) as well as work that engages with the issue of asylum more broadly.¹ In its emphasis on creative and cultural production, approached to a significant extent in terms of counter-representations to (usually) pejorative government and news media discourse, this project speaks to crucial questions posed by Suvendrini Perera, writing in response to Tampa: “The terrain of representation, of language, imagery and narrative ... emerges as a crucial site for contesting the disconnection and separation of refugees and asylum seekers from wider society. What representations of refugees, other than official ones, are available in the public sphere? What are the forms and modalities by which refugee stories are told and made visible?” (“A Line” 32-3). Despite its broad analytical umbrella, encompassing writing and performance – both forms that themselves contain a number of representational modalities – created by Australians and by refugees, this study can only begin to provide an answer to Perera’s questions. In doing so, it develops an overarching (though by no means exclusive) theoretical concern with *affective cross-cultural engagement*. I endeavour to illustrate some of the ways in which selected creative representations construct spaces of affective contact and connection between human lives separated-in-proximity by sovereign demarcations of national community.

The creative texts that have been produced in Australia in recent years on the issue of asylum articulate, in different ways, to fundamental questions relating to sovereign power and

¹ Asylum seekers arrive at a host / receiving nation without authorisation and request its protection. Most refugees are not resettled in a host nation until they have undergone determination processes within the terms of the United Nations Convention (1951) and Protocol (1967) Relating to the Status of Refugees.

biopolitics, transnational relations and security, persecution and displacement, community and belonging. In this context, an emphasis on affect – the sensorial, emotional aspects of cross-cultural contact – might look like an avoidance of *realpolitik*. If this is the case, it is likely a consequence of the entrenched binary opposition between affect or emotion and reason or rationality. Surveying the research that has been produced on emotions in sociology (the discipline outside of the natural sciences that has dominated work on the topic) over the last three or four decades, Jochen Kleres notes that one of the main challenges faced by sociologists, and more recently by humanities scholars, is that of overcoming the valorisation of psychological or neuroscientific accounts of emotion, and more fundamentally, of deconstructing the assumption that scientific method operates independently of emotion; as he argues, “The emphasis on the internal logic of the scientific method – objectivity, the dispassionate operator – fails to convince when one considers that emotions are not reducible to neurochemicals, but are only real in the sense that they are experienced within the context of sociality and more specifically of unfolding lives” (15). Certainly, in this study, attention to affect, to senses and emotions, illuminates rather than deviates from the “hard” materiality imbricated with asylum, with its urgent politics.

The recent work of cultural and social theorist Ghassan Hage, sociologist Amanda Wise and performance scholar James Thompson has demonstrated particularly well how analyses of affect and *affective practice* can connect explicitly with politics in contexts of displacement, oppression or crisis. My approach to affect, its production and function in the context of creative work, is inextricably political, taking its departure from the idea that an individual’s sense of nationhood, security and belonging is produced via a constellation of affective responses (to places, people, actions, ideas, discourses) and that writing and performance can affectively reproduce, reflect or reorient these responses. The forms of affective cross-cultural engagement

constructed in the creative texts I examine include shame, pity, fascination, exoticisation or aversion, as well as the more genial (and probably more expected) affects of compassion, understanding and hope; in this sense, cross-cultural affect can constitute, as I show, an ethically complex engagement. The politics of affective response to the other have come to the fore in recent years in the contexts of asylum and forced migration, and nationhood more generally. For Hage, writing with explicit reference to former Prime Minister John Howard's Australia, the affective dimension of nationhood is epitomised by the xenophobic figure of the worried citizen or paranoid nationalist (*Against* 3). Given that the basis upon which most Australians perceive asylum seekers and refugees is affective – emotional knowledges derived from government discourse, media reports and an idea of the national interest – it stands to reason that the affective work of the encounters and representations that I examine here is a basis for other (minoritarian) knowledges and understandings.

If the upheavals of 2001 and concomitant proliferation of creative arts response in Australia mark the starting point of my analysis, the last two years have presented a renewed intensification of the challenges faced by the world's displaced. Recent global economic crises have heightened the vulnerability of people living in economically and politically unstable parts of the world, prompting an increase in refugee numbers; the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, stated in a press conference with the Australian Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Evans, on 24 February 2009 that economic deterioration is an “accelerating factor” upon the existing pressures that force people movements, and moreover, a “generator of xenophobia” directed at refugees in many parts of the world (“Press Conference” np). Graham Huggan makes a similar point in different terms, arguing that racism “is an effect of the complex transnational network of capitalist-inspired social relations that structures our contemporary world” (*Australian Literature* vi). The global forces that produce a twinning of

interconnection and inequality are, I argue, crystallised in the coercion of asylum seekers and refugees, in Australia and elsewhere.

While it is necessary to observe the distinction between economic migrants and refugees – the latter are, according to article 1 of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (upheld in the 1967 Protocol that removed geographical and temporal limitations), deemed to have a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (np) – the persecution that precipitates refugee movements cannot be considered in isolation from economic pressures. It has, of course, been widely argued that the rise of the Third Reich and the genocide that led to the drafting of the United Nations Convention, is linked to social discontent during Germany’s economic collapse in the 1920s and early 1930s.² Reflecting upon more recent refugee movements, political scientist Matthew J. Gibney notes that “political instability and civil war are often inextricably associated with – if not the direct result of – economic underdevelopment” (13). Certainly, the deaths of five people off Australia’s coast are part of an interconnected series of events that can be linked, at least in part, to economics: although the Afghan economy has benefited from the development of international trade relations since 2001, the nation’s security situation is deteriorating and half the population remain below the poverty line; the people on board the vessel that exploded off the Australian coast are some of the more than three million Afghan asylum seekers and refugees worldwide.³

For most who are forced to flee their homes and seek refuge elsewhere, vulnerability is barely alleviated at the place of arrival: the overwhelming majority⁴ of the world’s forty-two

² For further discussion see, for example, A. J. Nicholls, *Weimer and the Rise of Hitler*.

³ The vast majority of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers are currently living in Pakistan and Iran (“2005 UNHCR Statistical Yearbook – Afghanistan” 231).

⁴ More than eighty per cent of the world’s population of asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced people are living in underdeveloped countries, according to 2009 United Nations Refugee Commission report (“2008 Global Trends” 7).

million asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced people live in border camps or at town fringes within or proximate to their unstable, impoverished homelands. Such populations include (but are certainly not limited to): members of the Muslim Rohingya Burmese minority living in Bangladesh and the Thailand–Burma / Myanmar border; Bhutanese living in long-established camps in Nepal; Iraqis in Syria and Jordan; Afghanis and Pakistanis of the north-west province sheltering in Pakistan and Iran; Zimbabweans in South Africa; the variously displaced of the war in Darfur, conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and unrest in Somalia. Under the 1951 United Nations Convention and the 1967 Protocol, either or both of which are applied by the world's 147 signatory nations in their administrative or judicial refugee status determinations, many of these displaced people may not fit the definition of a refugee. This is due mainly to the specific emphasis in the Convention on *persecution*, which does not describe people fleeing in response to war, natural disasters, climate change pressures, famine or disease; as Gibney maintains, “there is no necessary link between refugee status and life-threatening states of affairs” (7). Facilitated in part, then, by tight status definitions and interpretations, the imbalance in “burden-sharing” (to use the oft-repeated international relations phrase) of the world's refugee populations mirrors, to a significant extent, the imbalance in prosperity between nations in the global economy. I am concerned to focus here on one aspect, namely, the apposite case of Australia, of the comparatively small human flow from places of relative poverty and instability to places of relative wealth and stability. In examining this, many of the political and social causes (and discourses) of unequal burden-sharing are laid bare.

Unauthorised asylum seekers or “onshore” arrivals are those who arrive at a receiving or host nation (in the case of Australia, this includes arrivals at excised territories) prior to applying for refugee status. These people, the main object of controversy within receiving nations and the central focus of this study, are typically described as “illegal immigrants” in government and

media discourse internationally; in Australia, the pejorative “queue-jumper” has also been widely deployed.⁵ Under the terms of article 31(1) of the United Nations Convention, punitive treatment of these arrivals is not justified:

The Contracting States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees who, coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened in the sense of article 1, enter or are present in their territory without authorization, provided they present themselves without delay to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence. (np)

I do not employ the term “illegal immigrant” here to refer to unauthorised asylum seekers because it constructs a binary distinction between the lawful and the unlawful that while accurate with respect to most forms of migration / immigration, is problematised in fundamental ways by the appearance of a person requesting protection, as is their right, from a nation that is a signatory to the United Nations Convention. Further, I avoid the term due to the ways in which it can strategically connote the justification of exceptional biopolitical powers, such as the mandatory use of prolonged or indefinite extrajudicial detention.

The Australian post-2001 context can be seen to function here as a particular but not unique geo-historical moment in which responses to unauthorised arrivals within a so-called first world receiving nation may be productively examined. My rationale for this analytical time-frame is, as I have indicated, historically determined: in addition to being the year in which terrorist attacks on the United States altered political and social landscapes internationally, the refusal in August 2001 by the Australian government, led by Howard, to allow the MV Tampa and its

⁵ As Prime Minister, John Howard employed the term in statements and writing; in an article published in several Australian newspapers in 2001, he wrote, “For every queue jumper seeking to enter Australia through the back door there is another genuine refugee whose prospects of a better life either in Australia or elsewhere are put on hold” (Howard, “Messages” 19; Howard, “A Clear Message” 5). A leading Australian educational resource, Making Multicultural Australia, lists the term “queue-jumper” as a “hotword” (“Queue-Jumper” np).

human cargo to enter Australian territorial waters is a crucial moment in the instigation of policies of deterrence relating to unauthorised asylum seekers (both boat and air arrivals, although government and popular discourse focuses on the more affective, alien image of the boat person⁶), and a concomitant increase in creative arts work and social action responding to these policies. And while, as I have said, Australia is not unique in its general antagonism toward asylum seekers, or specifically, its use of extrajudicial detention (similar carceral systems operate in the United States, the United Kingdom and several other European Union member states⁷), it is arguable that from 2001 it established one of the modern western world's most punitive models for dealing with all unauthorised arrivals to its oceans and shores. Before I explicate this model and its origins in more detail, I will provide an outline of this study as a whole.

Representing asylum: mapping an affective terrain

Until relatively recently, scholarly work on asylum seekers and refugees has been largely the domain of social and political scientists, mental health researchers, economists, historians and international law experts. Over the last ten years, humanities scholars have turned their attention to debates relating to forced migration and associated issues of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and global interconnection. Research networks and concentrations are important loci for the examination of cultural production in displacement contexts, giving rise to

⁶ The number of onshore asylum applications made in Australia (distinct from its annual offshore humanitarian and refugee intake of approximately 10,000, referred by the United Nations Refugee Agency) peaked in the years 2000 and 2001 when 13,100 and 12,400 claims were made, respectively ("Asylum Levels and Trends" 5). Less than one third of these were boat arrivals. Onshore asylum applications made in Australia are consistently a fraction of those made in the European Union and North America ("Asylum Levels and Trends"; Tarczynski).

⁷ The United States operates numerous detention centres holding more than 30,000 immigrants and asylum seekers at any one time (for an in-depth analysis, see Amnesty International's 2009 report, *Jailed Without Justice*). Meanwhile, members states of the European Union (EU) voted in 2008 to limit the detention of non-citizens in its 224 detention centres to eighteen months (Brothers np); the United Kingdom, to give an EU example, utilises eleven "Removal Centres", mainly for the detention of failed asylum seekers (see "Immigration Removal Centres").

a dialogic cross-fertilisation of ideas as well as creative practice. Based at the University of Manchester, the ongoing research project *In Place of War*, launched in 2004 and directed by James Thompson, has constructed a comprehensive archive of international performances responding to conflict and crisis and continues to support new performance work. A transnational research network founded by Australian theatre scholar Helen Gilbert at Royal Holloway, University of London in 2006, *Performance and Asylum*, is concerned with a broad range of performance relating to asylum seekers and refugees; the project facilitates and strengthens connections between academics, practitioners and community stakeholders in Europe, Canada and Australia. The University of East London is home to the interdisciplinary Research Centre on Migration, Refugees and Belonging, directed by Nira Yuval-Davis. Based at the Arizona State University, the ongoing research project, *Refuge & Rejection: The Humanities in the Study of Forced Migration*, connects international humanities scholars dealing with the issue of asylum and publishes an online journal.

While based principally in the humanities, this project necessarily employs an interdisciplinary approach, apprehending the numerous spaces in which refugee movements and experiences, as well as creative representations, take place and are critically examined. I engage with the work of literary, performance and cultural theorists, social scientists, psychoanalysts, philosophers, political and economic historians, social workers, lawyers, politicians, activists and advocates, refugees and artists. My discussion of selected creative works proceeds with reference to, variously, scholarly, government, legislative, journalistic and non-specialist discourse, as well as material from my own interviews and correspondences. The latter is an attempt to synthesise a complicated, affective dialogue. Specifically, my interviews and correspondences with refugees were underpinned by a sense of duty or care and a relation of trust regarding the discussion and potential publication of traumatic testimony, as well as the challenge of negotiating linguistic and

cultural differences; at the same time, affective concerns had to be balanced with an avoidance of excessive academic self-consciousness in positioning myself as interlocutor to subaltern or minoritarian subjects.

This question (and practice) of affective cross-cultural engagement lies at the heart of my study, even though each chapter also deals with its own particular set of critical, theoretical and political issues. In both the minority and (comparatively) mainstream environments where creative work responding to the issue of asylum is produced in Australia, grassroots networks forged by refugee supporters, whether politically, artistically, religiously or ethnically oriented, are indispensable to this engagement. They focus the contact, conversation and community mobilisation around which social and creative work on asylum occurs; in instances where refugees produce creative work, non-refugee supporters provide the friendship, care and practical assistance that enable refugees to speak across the gap to their audiences. Support organisations are often originators of creative texts: in writing projects involving asylum seekers and refugees, they are usually the means by which personal encouragement, collection, editing, publication, advertising and dissemination occur; in performance contexts, supporters and advocates are typically responsible for logistical work, organising venues, fundraising, sponsorship and promotion. My focus on cross-cultural engagement between asylum seekers or refugees and Australians defines, for better or worse, refugee identity as tied dialectically with citizen identity and possibly marginalises creative work produced within and for various refugee communities, but I maintain that the relation between the citizen and the non-citizen, the belonging and the non-belonging, is paramount inasmuch as it embodies, literally, the key areas of debate imbricated with asylum in the twenty-first century: nation and nationalism, citizenship and security, globalisation, multiculturalism and racism (particularly Islamophobia).

The central motive force for refugee supporters and support communities, and thus for the creative work examined here, has been the emergence in Australia of punitive policy regarding unauthorised asylum seekers, particularly mandatory extrajudicial incarceration in various on and offshore locations, for years in many cases (this is discussed in more detail in the next section of the introduction).⁸ The artists, activists and refugees whose work I consider form a crucial part of the affective response to federal asylum policy and implementation that emerged to become something of a national minority movement from around 2001. However, I employ the word “movement” loosely, as refugee supporters in Australia have tended to form as essentially heterogeneous and decentralised clusters of individuals and organisations. While creative work produced in response to, and by, asylum seekers and refugees is almost by definition supportive, the way in which that support is articulated, particularly the degree to which it opposes government policy and power, is varied, framed in terms of affects ranging from humanist, universalised compassion to politicised, radical resistance.

James Goodman argues that refugee support movements that intensified in Australia in the early years of the twenty-first century were bifurcated in terms of national and global preoccupations; the former, he argues, “is broadly instrumental, geared to national policy change, effectively to remaking ‘the nation’, and reclaiming national pride against the shame of refugee detention” while the latter “is more expressive, in demonstrating anger and outrage in the name of human empathy and dignity” (270-71). Both, he maintains, are underpinned by deep emotional responses to the refugee other, which provide the necessary impetus for cross-cultural solidarity and representation:

⁸ Immigration detention centres that have been utilised by the Australian government to hold asylum seekers include Villawood (Sydney), Maribyrnong (Melbourne), Perth, Northern (Darwin), Baxter (South Australia), Woomera (South Australia), Port Headland (Western Australia), Curtin (Western Australia), Christmas Island, Nauru and Manus Island (Papua New Guinea); of these, Villawood, Maribyrnong, Perth, Northern and Christmas Island remain operational. In addition, contingency centres, residential housing and transit accommodations are based around the country, none of which allow free movement of detainees / residents. For more detail, see “Managing Australia’s Borders”.

Affective embedding, one may say, is a precondition for sustained mobilization.

The aim here is to evoke an emotional response to an issue, one that elicits cognitive reflection and action. This involves the mobilization of moral emotions, arising from, or in reference to an experience or situation, an affective value appeal or normative judgment, and which then generates moral evaluations and social expectations, and thus actions. (272)

While I would agree that lines of connection (both embodied contact and ideological contact) between refugees and supporters, citizens and others, are typically initiated in terms of what Goodman recognises as “moral emotions”, they are constituted in creative texts over a multifarious emotional terrain that exceeds this; certainly, the work that I examine mobilises a range of affective engagements between artists and audiences, and a number of ways of thinking about the cultural, linguistic, political and ethical challenges of these engagements.

All of the works I have selected for analysis were produced in Australia between 2002 and 2007 and were created, variously, by asylum seekers, refugees and Australian citizens and residents; they represent aspects of the precarious lives – in the sense, following Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life* (2004), of state coercion – of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia. My selection of performative work includes theatrical production, performative art installation, film and performative protest acts, and my selection of written work includes novels, poetry, memoirs, short stories and letters. Some of the items I have chosen for analysis are the product of individual endeavour (such as novels and poetry), while others are collaborative works produced by Australian artists (these include theatre productions and performative protests), while still others are projects in which asylum seekers and refugees work with Australians in what might broadly be thought of as a witness–facilitator relationship.

The genres of performance and writing, particularly when defined expansively as they are here, offer creatively and politically productive spaces for imagining and representing asylum seekers and refugees and the issues that relate to them. Performance and writing have capacities to request or provoke political, ethical, emotional and imaginative engagement with audiences / readers. However, it is important to acknowledge that the nature of this engagement varies greatly between different genres. Indeed, one of the main methodological challenges of this study is that of apprehending similar theoretical, political and social issues within and across texts and textual modalities that, although comparable, are not commensurate. Furthermore, work created by asylum seekers or refugees differs in its representational politics from work created by Australians; a different set of power relations, ethical concerns, institutional, economic and cultural positionings underpin each. My decision to present a multi-genre, multi-perspectival study comes at the expense, perhaps, of sustained genre-specific discussion and analysis, but draws instead diverse lines of articulation, offering insights into a cultural–artistic–political landscape in a specific geo-temporal context.

A pervasive theme that links the different creative texts I discuss is that of psychological trauma. The fundamental or dominant model of expressing or recalling traumatic experiences is testimony; this form of representation conventionally involves a witness speaking accurately of their own experiences before one or more persons. The first chapter of this study examines testimonial theatre by asylum seekers, refugees and Australians, focusing on strategies of what I term “affective generalisation” employed by witnesses who speak of or for a trauma community. I consider this speaking-about-others as a form of intersubjectivity that complicates the typical model of testimony as first-person witnessing; it emphasises the importance of the community implicated in and affected by a traumatic event, and the role of the (emotional) imagination in constructing a shifting subject-position that takes up the traumatic memories of others. The

analysis here centres around three performance works. A solo play, *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* (2005), is written and performed in Brisbane by Iraqi refugee Towfiq Al-Qady and supported by the advocacy collective Actors for Refugees, Queensland. Al-Qady's piece interweaves stories of his loved ones and of asylum seekers with whom he was transported to Australia with his own life history in a poetic, stream-of-consciousness narrative. *Through the Wire* (2004) is a testimonial play devised and directed by Australian Ros Horin and presented in Melbourne, Canberra and regional New South Wales. In *Through the Wire*, the characters of three refugees, based upon actual people and their testimonies, are played by Australian actors, while the fourth refugee performs as himself. *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* (2004) is devised and performed by members of innovative Sydney-based theatre company Version 1.0, utilising Hansard transcripts of the 2002 Senate Select Committee on A Certain Maritime Incident, which dealt with the notorious "children overboard" affair of the previous year and the SIEV X tragedy (which I will summarise shortly). My analysis traces some of the representational processes by which testimony is enacted, focusing on the inevitable transformation of the witness–subject within the framework of the theatre. Employing the work of trauma and testimony scholars, psychoanalysts and witnesses to trauma including Primo Levi, Dori Laub, Cathy Caruth and Jenny Edkins, as well as scholars and practitioners of community and minority theatre including Julie Salverson and Baz Kershaw, my analysis of the three works throws up questions and problems relating to truth, memory, translation, agency, empathy, community and the ethics of representing the trauma of another person – all of which are especially fraught in instances where a non-refugee attempts to represent, to enact, a refugee's story.

In the second chapter I study three anthologies of writing by and about asylum seekers and refugees in order to consider the significance of multivocal, dialogic representation (by men, women and children, of various abilities). Employing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's metaphor,

I argue that the anthologies operate according to rhizomatic structures of heterogeneous connection, being constituted and received at a range of autonomous yet interdependent points. In this, the collections trace some of the existing grassroots structures of advocacy within which relations between asylum seekers and Australians exist, as well as forging new affective and pedagogic lines of connection. *Another Country: Writers in Detention* (2004, expanded in 2007), edited by Rosie Scott and Thomas Keneally, presents writing by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated asylum seekers and refugees elicited via grassroots support relations across the country. In its editing and promotion, this publication utilises the influence of high-profile Australian cultural figures, engaging a larger readership as well as correspondence with Amanda Vanstone, then Minister for Immigration. *Alone, Together: Writing from Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia* (2006) is collected and edited by the Refugee Claimants Support Centre in Brisbane and presents writing by the centre's clients and their local communities. This publication is a geo-culturally specific work, operating mainly as a therapeutic expression of community, regeneration and creativity for Brisbane's refugees and their supporters. *Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories by Young Writers Aged 11-20 Years* (2004), edited by Australia-based writers / advocates Sonja Dechian, Heather Millar and Eva Sallis, developed out of a nationwide schools writing competition. Here therapeutic and pedagogic functions coalesce: most of the contributions are the result of an encounter and dialogue whereby a young Australian has written about a refugee who has shared his or her traumatic testimony. The three anthologies decentre the typical model of the artist / witness of asylum by offering space for a diversity of voices; as discrete texts they are heteroglot, stratified and dialogic (in a Bakhtinian sense) items, and moreover, they construct externally dialogic lines of connection, being embedded within networks of advocacy, educational and creative communities.

Chapter three investigates self-injury by asylum seekers in detention and the creative representation, or citation, of these injuries in written and performative work. In this chapter, the

political and ethical implications of extrajudicial detention of asylum seekers become a central concern. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (published in English in 1998)⁹, political philosopher Giorgio Agamben observes that the incarceration of people who are excluded from belonging by the state represents the exacting (paradigmatic) power of the modern sovereign to produce *homo sacer*, an ancient Roman Law term he invokes to mean “bare life”. Following Hannah Arendt’s observation that the removal of citizenship rights equates to the removal of human rights, Agamben’s bare life describes life divested of citizen and civic rights and instrumentalised entirely by the sovereign, whose defining power is the control over life (and death) under a “state of exception” or emergency. Employing Agamben’s theoretical frameworks for analysing sovereign power and the production of bare life, I argue that the indefinite extrajudicial detention of asylum seekers constructs a state of exception¹⁰ that separates devalued bodies and what I term “embodied citizens”: those who possess the social and juridical functions of bodily wellness and liberty (nutrition, healthcare, a home, freedom of movement and the right to *habeas corpus*). I regard self-injury by asylum seekers (which in Australian detention centres has mainly taken the form of lip-sewing, cutting and hunger striking) as something that is *produced* by sovereign mechanisms of biopolitical power, the latter being upheld (as Michel Foucault observes) by the dispersed and decentralised effects of the ruling class’s strategic positions. At the same time, I consider self-injury in the sense deployed by Maud Ellman, as a form of (often defiant) communication or agency on the part of the coerced and disempowered.

While presenting Australian audiences with the possibility for imaginative encounter with injured bodies that seem immutably “other” to their own, the creative representations of self-injury examined in chapter three offer something more troubling, but also potentially

⁹ For translated sources, I provide the date of first publication in the original language in the bibliography.

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, whose work is especially important in chapter three, has examined the relationship between sovereign power and the state of exception in several works, most recently *State of Exception* (published in English in 2005).

transforming: a context for affective recognition of proximity (both ethical and political) to the sovereign-produced position of exception. Three poems by asylum seekers, “Asylum” by Mehmet al Assad (2002), “Dream of Freedom” by Mohsen Soltany Zand (2004) and “Make a Whistle from my Throat” by an anonymous detainee at Baxter detention centre (2005), are rare and important representations of self-injury by people who have experienced bodily instrumentalisation by the Australian state. Eva Sallis’s novel *The Marsh Birds* (2005) presents a fictionalised account of an unaccompanied minor from Iraq who is detained in Australia. Iranian refugee Shahin Shafaei’s solo touring play *Refugitive* (2002-04) centres around an unnamed man undergoing a hunger strike in detention. This trope is echoed in public solidarity fasts enacted by various Australian activists (2004). Blurring the boundary between the representation of pain and its bodily reality, veteran Australian artist Mike Parr’s performance installation *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002) is a gruesome piece that saw Parr stitch his face and brand his body in support of detainees.

In the fourth chapter I examine the dominant discourse of state sovereignty and related issues of spatial or territorial belonging. The concept of a unified, clearly delineated sovereign space, under the control of representative authorities, is the implicit bedrock of enduringly popular political discourses of national identity, security, border protection and human legitimacy (the citizen) and illegitimacy (the illegal alien). With reference to Foucault’s notion of heterotopias as well as work on sovereignty, borders and asylum by critics including Agamben, Prem Kumar Rajaram, Perera and Sophie Nield, I contend that even as they galvanise the assertion of sovereign territoriality by government authorities, asylum seekers in Australia problematise the binary precepts of sovereignty by occupying a “border space” simultaneously inside *and* outside the nation. I consider the representation of this liminal position within several creative works. Australian writer Linda Jaivin’s tragi-comic novel *The Infernal Optimist* (2005) deals with the

experiences of a young Turkish-born Australian permanent resident who is placed in Villawood detention centre for character-related visa violations. Another view of this space is presented in Villawood detainee Angel Boujbiha's poem "My Name is Asylum" (2002), which interrogates territorial and ideological distinctions between belonging and non-belonging from the perspective of a person subjected to uncompromising exclusion inside / outside Australia. Australian Victoria Carless's play *The Rainbow Dark* (2006) employs a satirical framework for apprehending the nation's affective demarcations of belonging, imagining an absurd Australian state in which asylum seekers are incarcerated within the homes of moral citizens. Lebanese Australian artist Mireille Astore's performative installation *Tampa* (2003) consisted of the artist occupying a cage-like sculpture at Tamarama beach, Sydney, representing the Tampa ship, for eight hours per day over an eighteen-day period, reinscribing the sunny beach location in terms of capture and containment. The opening poem of her collection by the same name, "Picnic" (2006) by Australian Fay Zwicky, focuses the issue of territorial belonging in terms cross-cultural encounter and engagement, recounting a picnic shared at a Perth public park with refugees from Afghanistan. Australian poet S. K. Kelen's satirical "Attitude: Don Juan in the Shopping Mall" (2007) is concerned with the cultural and political connections and disjunctions produced in a globalised world where racist violence abounds and multiculturalism manifests as manufactured commodity.

The fifth and final chapter extends the interrogation of sovereignty put forward in chapter four. Taking as a provocation the Aboriginal Australian performative ritual of the Welcome to Country and non-indigenous acknowledgements of country (both of which take place frequently at events and gatherings across the country), chapter five considers what might derive from a structurally marginalised but affectively acknowledged Aboriginal territorial claim (inhering in the right to welcome, or presumably reject, the newcomer) in the context of determinations of belonging and non-belonging, citizen and alien. I trace recent moments of

engagement between Aboriginal activists, elders and scholars and refugees and consider the imagining of such engagement in Australia-based writer and broadcaster Sandy McCutcheon's political thriller novel *The HaHa Man* (2004) and the feature film, *Lucky Miles* (2007), written by Australians Michael James Rowland and Helen Barnes and directed by Rowland. In doing so, I am concerned less with material interventions into Australian sovereign biopower vis-à-vis asylum than with affective interventions, examined as three broad modalities: activism (protests, statements and critical discourse), intimacy (interpersonal contact, encompassing support as well as conflict) and creativity (representation in *The HaHa Man* and *Lucky Miles*).

I do not seek to present an archive of creative output in Australia during the period under examination; my selection and analysis of written and performative works is designed to apprehend key research questions and theoretical preoccupations particular to each chapter, as well as to explicate my overall concern with affective cross-cultural engagement. Several artists and creative works cannot be afforded an in-depth consideration in this study for reasons of length. These constitute the broader creative and historical context in which my analysis is located, and some of them, including international works, are referenced in the chapters that follow. Over the next two paragraphs I offer an indicative, rather than comprehensive, view of the creative terrain upon which this work stands.

Several theatre projects of the last decade have dealt with the issue of asylum, many of them forging creative relationships between communities and across cultures. One of the first works to respond to the mandatory detention of asylum seekers in Australia was *First Asylum* by Philip Dean, produced by La Boite Theatre in Brisbane in 1999. A verbatim or testimonial format was employed in *Citizen X*, developed by Sidetrack Performance Group in 2001 based upon letters from detained asylum seekers and performed in 2002. The testimonial format is favoured by Actors for Refugees, a national collective established in Melbourne in 2001, founded upon an

interest in the advocacy of asylum seekers and refugees through theatre; its flagship production, *Something to Declare*, a testimonial touring piece devised by Michael Gurr from correspondence and interviews with asylum seekers and refugees, was first staged in 2003 and toured nationally over the next three years. Actors for Refugees was expanded to the United Kingdom by one of its original Australian co-ordinators, Christine Bacon, in 2006 (the philosophy and practice of the UK company, recently re-named Actors for Human Rights, is evident in the verbatim text devised by Sonja Linden, *Asylum Monologues*, which is examined briefly in chapter one). Some performance work dealing with asylum has operated in mainstream performance locations, such as the verbatim piece *In Our Name*, performed by Sydney's Company B, Belvoir St Theatre in 2004 and the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of Australian Hanne Rayson's *Two Brothers* in 2005. Other works have taken place in smaller community venues, including Nazar Jabour's multimedia performance work *No Answer Yet*, presented in 2002 by a collective of young performers at the Palais Royale Youth Venue in Newcastle; *There is Nothing Here*, an anti-racism piece written and performed by Afshin Nikoueresht and Dave Kelman, presented at Melbourne's Footscray Community Arts Centre and La Mama Theatre in 2002; Linsey Pollak's *Papers of a Dead Man*, a music performance work presented at Brisbane's Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Art in 2006 (one of the poems examined in chapter three, "Asylum" by Mehmet al Assad, featured in Pollak's show) and *The Pacific Solution*, a satirical play written Ben Eltham and performed in 2006 at Brisbane's Metro Arts Theatre (this work is considered briefly in chapter four).

A number of Australian filmmakers have employed documentary formats to apprehend the issue of asylum, especially mandatory detention; examples include Tom Zubrycki's *Molly and Mobarak* (2003), Tahir Cambis and Helen Newman's *Anthem* (2004), Clara Law and Eddie L. C. Fong's *Letters to Ali* (2004), Steve Thomas's *Hope* (2007) and Anne Delaney and Bentley Dean's *A*

Well-Founded Fear (2008). Like *Lucky Miles*, examined in chapter five – not itself a documentary – these works have the capacity to reach larger audiences than theatre and performance art; the medium of film enables easier, wider and ongoing public dissemination, well-established cultural popularity and high-profile spaces for critical reception.¹¹ It is also, arguably, able to circumvent some of the representational dilemmas of live performance, enabling refugees (and more particularly, non-actors) to speak their own traumatic testimony – something that is rare in live performance.

A small cohort of relatively prominent Australian novelists form the nexus of an important advocacy and cultural production project concerning asylum; as established writers supported by major publishing houses, their work has the capacity to reach broad audiences. The novels examined here by McCutcheon, Jaivin and Sallis occupy this category; to these can be added Thomas Keneally's dystopic parable, *The Tyrant's Novel* (2004) and Morris Gleitzman's popular children's fiction dealing with asylum in Australia via the trope of childhood friendship, *Boy Overboard* (2002) and *Girl Underground* (2004). As I discuss in chapter two, anthologies of writing by and about asylum seekers and refugees are an important development. Some of these benefit from high-profile affiliations or endorsements that attract public attention (albeit modest) in the form of reviews, festival appearances and other media promotions. An example of such work is *From Nothing to Zero: Letters from Refugees in Australia's Detention Centres* (2003), edited by Meaghan Amor and Janet Austin and introduced by QC and prominent asylum seeker advocate Julian Burnside. Published by Lonely Planet and launched by former Prime Minister of Australia Malcolm Fraser, the collection presents detainee letters that testify intimately to the importance of lines of compassionate connection between asylum seekers and Australians. Smaller-scale collections have been released in association with community-based support organisations, such

¹¹ *Lucky Miles*, for instance, was reviewed by the respected and influential duo of David Stratton and Margaret Pomeranz on their Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) television show, *At the Movies* on 11 July 2007.

as *The Sound of Hope* (2004), edited by Rose Costelloe and published by the Companion House Assisting Survivors of Torture and Trauma, Canberra. Such work is similar to community-oriented publications that have appeared in recent years in Britain and the United States, including *The Silver Throat of the Moon: Writing in Exile* (2005), edited by Jennifer Langer (director of advocacy organisation Exiled Writers Ink and editor of other similar collections); *Between a Mountain and a Sea: Refugees Writing in Wales* (2003), edited by Tom Cheesman, Eric Ngalle Charles and Sylvie Hoffmann; *The Story of My Life: Refugees Writing in Oxford* (2005), edited by Carole Angier; *From the Outside In* (2007), edited by Nushin Arbabzadah and *Bamboo Among the Oaks: Contemporary Writing by Hmong Americans* (2002), edited by Mai Neng Moua. These works provide a space for self-representation by traumatised and disempowered people who might otherwise struggle to compete in the market system of the modern publishing house.

Waves of migration and histories of exclusion

The discussion that I offer in this study, the abovementioned selection of creative texts and the critical and theoretical, not to mention political, perspectives from which I examine them, must be understood in the context of Australia's histories since colonisation, and to its more recent asylum histories. Over the following pages, I will attempt to offer a synthesis of some key elements of these. Non-indigenous¹² Australia was built on migration and born out of a globalising ethos: the age of British imperial expansion created lines of cultural and economic interconnection that traversed the globe. The New South Wales coast was claimed for the British by James Cook in 1770 and the region was settled from 1788, outside the usual mechanisms of international law by way of the doctrine of *terra nullius*, via forced convict transportation and

¹² Throughout this study I use the terms "indigenous" and "Aboriginal" interchangeably to refer to Australians of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island heritage.

voluntary emigration. Australia nurtured foundational narratives of white¹³ migrant achievement in a vast, untouched land; the country's national anthem, which was first performed in 1878, contains the spirited exhortation, "For those who've come across the seas / We've boundless plains to share". This sharing took place along racially selective lines. In the 1850s the governments of Victoria and South Australia imposed an entry tax on the Chinese, who were the widely resented and frequently vilified competition of Europeans in the goldfields; James Jupp observes that the arrival of Chinese miners "ignited a fear which remained central to immigration policy for the next century and has not yet finally disappeared" (*From White Australia* 8). Migration to Australia became strictly controlled under the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, or White Australia Policy, which functioned to intentionally restrict non-white immigration to Australia until 1973. The policy utilised a dictation test in which applicants were required to write in a European language and established federal crimes relating to immigration, including provisions by which immigrants could be detained and deported.

The non-explicit nature of racial discrimination under the terms of the White Australia Policy (via the dictation test, which served as a deterrent and was thus applied in fewer than 2000 cases [Jupp, *From White Australia* 10]) is indexical of a general masking of discriminatory practices within the nation's emerging liberal democratic paradigm; at the Federal Convention of 1898, the first Premier of Western Australia (and later the Minister for Defence) Sir John Forrest observed, "there is a great feeling all over Australia against the introduction of coloured persons. It goes without saying that we do not like to talk about it, but still it is so" (qtd in Williams, *A Bill of Rights* 37). As exclusionary entrance policy was being formulated from within the continent's white settlements, the vast territory claimed by the emergent Commonwealth of Australia

¹³ An unstable and contentious category, "white" is used in this study in the manner it is generally deployed in the Australian context: primarily as a description of Anglo-Celtic ethnicity, but as a category that also assimilates, for the strategic purpose of invoking a unitary "core" national culture, eastern and southern Europeans (Huggan, *Australian Literature* 74).

contained more diverse and heterogeneous histories and populations than its narratives of nationhood were prepared to acknowledge. As historian Henry Reynolds observes:

At the time of Federation [1901] the European population was small and either stationary or declining everywhere except along the Queensland coast. There were thriving Asian communities in most northern towns – Broome, Darwin, Thursday Island, Cooktown, Cairns, Townsville and Mackay. Large areas of the north – the Kimberleys, Arnhem Land, Cape York and much of the dry inland – were home to Aborigines who had little or no experience of Europeans and who could not in any practical sense be considered to be part of the new nation. (*North of Capricorn* xiv)

The masked discrimination practices of the White Australia Policy connect with the occlusion of these non-white histories; as Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis argue, an inheritance of white Australian culture is the necessity for the containment of ambivalence regarding histories of migrant arrival: “The resonance of migrancy is compounded in Australia by the twinning of the always having arrived with the wilful forgetting of the nature of that arrival – of colonial conquest and racism” (232). Similarly, the popular idea that Australian settler culture is characterised by egalitarian openness or “mateship” (a term Howard sought unsuccessfully in 1999 to incorporate into the preamble to the constitution), and the residual pull of the pastoral notion expressed in the national anthem of reward for all who seek it via toil in the continent, are inescapably entangled with what William E. Connolly terms “the politics of forgetting” (138) – a certain ongoing effacement of historical specificity or a “concealment of impurities” that is part of the narration of national identity and the consolidation of practical sovereignty. The politics of forgetting is coupled with selective, racialised knowledges and identifications: Australian

nationhood requires the definition of that which will not be incorporated – in other words, of the others in opposition to which the nation is constituted.

The White Australia Policy began to be relaxed under Harold Holt's tenure as Minister for Immigration in the 1950s and later under his leadership of the Liberal government in 1966 and 1967; Holt was integral to the constitutional referendum of 1967 that enabled the state to legislate for Aboriginal Australians and to include them in the national census. There have been undoubted successes in the development of a multiethnic and multicultural Australia since the official abandonment of the White Australia Policy in 1973, in terms of a more open immigration policy, national policies supporting multiculturalism and actions to address injustices facing indigenous Australians – central to which was the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. In the two decades following the takeover of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese communist government in 1975, Australia accepted approximately 137,000 Indochinese refugees, including some 2000 unauthorised boat arrivals (Jupp, *The Australian People* 69). However, as Bruce Grant notes, a 1979 poll indicated that "Australians had, at best, mixed feelings about the new arrivals" (np). Ien Ang identifies the persistent fear of invasion from the Asian north as an affective key to the "psycho-geography" of white Australia (129-30). As Gibney observes, the influx of Indochinese refugees intensified these invasion fears, being "a first visible sign to many Australians of the implications of ending racial discrimination in entrance" (179). The late 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century are marked by a more or less exclusionary articulation of concepts of sovereign territoriality, border security and legitimate belonging, much of it promulgated by Howard's conservative Liberal-National coalition government. While this can be connected to the intensification of western neoconservatism, sovereign security discourse and fears of radical Islam after 11 September 2001, and an increase in the number of mainly Muslim asylum seekers attempting to enter Australia

without authorisation, it should also be traced to the racially and culturally selective spirit that, as I have suggested, is imbricated in the very founding of the nation.

Although different forms of immigrant detention have been employed more or less continuously in Australia, the mandatory immigration detention system was instituted by the Keating Labor government, with bipartisan support, under the Migration Amendment Act 1992. It is a continually changing mechanism that should not be considered in monolithic or absolute terms; certainly, the “perpetual battle” (*Discipline* 26) for biopolitical control that Foucault describes as a condition of the nation-state is exemplified by the conflicting public pressures upon and changes made to Australian government policy on unauthorised asylum seekers over the last two decades. The 273-day limit on detention was removed in 1994, making way for the incarceration of some detainees for several years. In 1998 the ultra-tight wing, populist One Nation Party, led by Pauline Hanson, released its immigration policy, which proposed that all persons found to be refugees should be ineligible for permanent protection or residence and instead be granted temporary visas and be required to return to their country of origin when it became safe to do so. The policy was denounced by Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock and Minister for Health Michael Wooldridge (Harvey and Cummins 5; “Hanson ‘Worsens Torture’” 28). A year later, in October 1999, the government instituted the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) for onshore or unauthorised asylum seekers found to be refugees; Ruddock served as a stalwart mouthpiece for the government’s hard-line stance until 2003 (when he was succeeded by Amanda Vanstone).

The three-year TPV (which although similar to protection legislation relating to non-refugees in the United States, had no direct international precedent¹⁴) denied family reunion, the

¹⁴ The United States employs an immigration designation, Temporary Protected Status, for people who have not been found to be refugees but who have fled a dangerous situation in their homeland. In 2003, a Human Rights Watch report argued that temporary status is inappropriate for fully adjudicated refugees, stating: “Australia is the

right of return to Australia after overseas travel, as well as access to a number of social, settlement and educational services (Mansouri and Bagdas 23). This reformulation of One Nation policy is a notable instance of what Jamie Mackie (following William Maley) describes as the “soft Hansonism” of Australian federal politics during this period (see Mackie); of this encroachment, Gibney observes that “the blunt language” of One Nation “created a new space to express views on immigrants that bordered on the racist” (188). Peter Mares has argued that the TPV represented sovereign hostility and prohibited successful resettlement into Australian society, giving refugees “no place to drop anchor ... no emotional mooring” (26). In a 2006 *Sydney Morning Herald* article commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Tampa incident, it was reported that Australia was at that stage the only receiving nation that had not granted citizenship to any of its twenty-eight Tampa refugees – the other nations that accepted these people (and their families) were New Zealand (which took 208), Sweden (seven), Norway (two) and Canada (one) (Marr 11).

In 2001, several deeply controversial events took place concerning unauthorised arrivals to Australia. The Tampa incident occurred in August, sparking international condemnation, yet according to various polls the Howard government’s refusal to accept the asylum seekers was supported by up to ninety per cent of Australians (Henderson 12). On 6 October, a sinking “Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel” (SIEV) 4, carrying 223 asylum seekers, was intercepted by the Navy vessel HMAS Adelaide 100 nautical miles north of Christmas Island; the sea rescue became known as the “children overboard” affair after senior government ministers, and the Prime Minister, repeated the false claim that asylum seekers had thrown children into the ocean in order to manipulate the Navy and secure passage to Australia. On 19 October 353 asylum seekers

only country to grant temporary status to refugees who have been through a full asylum determination system and who have been recognized as genuinely in need of protection for 1951 Refugee Convention reasons” (“Human Rights Watch Commentary on Australia’s Temporary Protection Visas for Refugees” np).

drowned when the unidentified vessel SIEV X sank in international waters between Indonesia and Australia; a 2002 Australian Senate Select Committee on “A Certain Maritime Incident” (which also dealt with the “children overboard” affair) concluded of the SIEV X, “the Committee finds it extraordinary that a major human disaster could occur in the vicinity of a theatre of intensive Australian operations, and remain undetected until three days after the event, without any concern being raised within intelligence and decision making circles” (“Executive Summary” np). There has to date been no further official investigation into the tragedy and it remains an under-remembered, under-commemorated event relative to its terrible loss of life.¹⁵

Narrated by the Howard government as evidence of an ongoing security threat and the need for tough border protection policies, these events heightened popular negativity towards asylum seekers (“illegals” and “queue jumpers” in much government and media terminology) and created a climate of emergency – in effect, what Agamben describes (after Carl Schmitt) as a “state of exception”. The exceptionality that emerged in the United States after 11 September 2001 involved the possession of knowledge within dominant sites of power; of the terrorist attacks, Neal Andrew observes, “Particular discursive, representational and institutional structures have a tight hold on that event now. We are faced with the powerful claim that exceptional times require exceptional measures” (np). As the representative authority that holds, to continue the Foucauldian terminology that Andrew deploys, an institutional power base from which knowledge about asylum seekers is dispersed, the Australian government responded rapidly to its own “exceptional” situation (contemporaneous with the United States), by passing a total of seven acts relating to migration through the federal parliament in the month of

¹⁵ The events of 2001 concerning asylum seekers and the Australian government’s and opposition’s responses to them are examined in detail by journalists David Marr and Marian Wilkinson in *Dark Victory* (2003).

September 2001.¹⁶ This modality of executive power explicates Agamben's observation that in modern liberal democracies, the state of exception sees a "confusion between acts of the executive power and acts of the legislative power" (*State* 38); it also exemplifies what Agamben identifies as "a continuing tendency in all of the Western democracies" for an explicit declaration of a state of exception to "gradually [be] replaced by an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government" (*State* 14). The popular assimilation of (indeed, affective support for) the ideology underpinning the fast-tracked legislation became apparent in the general election in November 2001, when Howard was re-elected with an increased majority.

The main purpose of the legislation was to excise certain territories – including Ashmore and Cartier Islands, Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands – from Australia's migration zone, ensuring (as noted at the opening of this introduction) that very few boats would reach Australian migration territory and thereby enabling the government to avoid processing intercepted asylum seekers under Australian law. In accordance with its economic priorities, the government's excision legislation did not diminish Australia's large (indeed, the world's third largest) Exclusive Economic Zone (the area of ocean in which a nation holds special rights regarding exploration and use of marine resources), or the rights of Australian citizens or visa holders to travel freely within and across excised places. The excision legislation worked alongside what was termed the Pacific Solution (as Perera notes, "apparently without an ear for inauspicious resonances" ["What is a Camp" para. 5]): the costly (Mansouri and Bagdas 72-3) establishment of offshore detention and processing on the excised Australian territory of

¹⁶ The legislation includes: The Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Act 2001; The Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) (Consequential Provisions) Act 2001; The Border Protection (Validation and Enforcement Powers) Act 2001; The Migration Legislation Amendment (Judicial Review) Act 2001; The Migration Legislation Amendment Act (No 1) 2001; The Migration Legislation Amendment Act (no 5) 2001; The Migration Legislation Amendment Act (No 6) 2001.

Christmas Island, as well as on the island nation of Nauru and on Manus Island (Papua New Guinea). As Perera observes, the establishment of the latter two facilities “testif[ies] to the economic and diplomatic power wielded by Australia over its neighbors” (“A Pacific Zone?” 207) – both states were given much-needed financial incentives for holding asylum seekers.

The geopolitical technologies of excision and offshore detention, both of which bear out Ang’s assertion that racial and spatial anxieties are intimately linked in the logic of nationalist white Australia (130), are examples of the bold, zealously coercive action that defines a nation for its own members and to the international community of non-members. As an execution of jurisdiction, excision represents a significant (re)articulation of Australia as a sovereign power. It is, moreover, a processual technology that has been subject to contestation: while proposed additional excisions of thousands of islands adjacent to the Australian continental mainland were rejected by the senate in 2002 and 2003, then passed in 2005, the Howard government successfully applied a retroactive excision of Melville Island, some thirty kilometres from the mainland and eighty kilometres from the city of Darwin, in order to remove in November 2003 of a small group of Kurdish boat people that had landed there. As Perera notes, this extraordinary action encapsulates “the marvelous, brutal, incontrovertible logic of excision” (“A Pacific Zone?” 203). Rajaram describes the Pacific Solution as “a performative assertion of itself by the Australian state, its sovereignty and the range of permissible identities and meanings therein. The solution performatively extrapolates and articulates the ethical and political range and limits of ‘Australia’” (“Making Place” 292). The absurd biopolitical violence of excision is part of this performativity – the strategic removal of formerly Australian territories for the single purpose of avoiding unwanted human cargo amounts to a type of legislated artifice; as in the theatre, everyone is aware of the illusion. Aside from state performativity, the excision of territory and the advent of offshore detention (and indeed, mandatory detention overall) circumvent

societal recognition of asylum seekers and thereby prevent the social performance of identity that, as Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr observe, enables individuals to become members of a national community (xiii-xiv).

In the years since their inception, various of Australia's immigration detention centres have closed and new centres have opened, while conditions have improved in accordance with the recommendations of several Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) reports. The climate of strident demonisation began to wane and in 2005 the detention of children and their families, increasingly unpopular among the Australian electorate, ceased. In August 2006, the Howard government's attempt to pass legislation that would permit it to send all unauthorised arrivals offshore for processing was cancelled because the government lacked requisite support from within its own coalition. Within six months of its election victory in November 2007, the Kevin Rudd Labor government had announced the closure of the offshore detention and processing centres at Nauru and Manus Island and the abolition of the Temporary Protection Visa.

In July 2008 it was announced by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship that the policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers would be abandoned, except in cases of adults deemed a security risk. The impetus for this change was, as Evans stated, to address the "worst excesses" of the Howard era and restore the balance between fair and humane action and border security ("New Directions" np); the waiving of detention debts (since mandatory detention was inaugurated in 1992 asylum seekers had been billed for the costs of their detention) under the Migration Amendment (Abolishing Detention Debt) Act 2009 suggests the integrity of the government's rationale. However, Evans's rhetoric and political action are not well aligned: at the time of writing, Australia holds almost 3500 people, including more than 200 children under eighteen, across five detention centres and various transit and community-style facilities,

including offshore facilities at Christmas Island, and retains its excised migration zone.¹⁷ In August 2009 the Australian parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration reported of conditions at the Christmas Island detention centre (which holds the majority of the detention population): “The extraordinarily high level of security ... in terms of the height of the electrified fences, surveillance, and the segregation of staff from detainees ... [is] excessive and inhumane and bordering on ludicrous” (Joint Standing Committee 42), advising that this is inconsistent with the Rudd government’s principle of humane refugee determination processes. In his dissenting report for the Joint Standing Committee, Liberal Member of parliament Petro Georgiou expressed concern about the welfare of children in alternative and community detention, observing, “It must be made very clear that both immigration residential housing and transit accommodation are closed, secure environments where detainees are closely monitored by guards and are not allowed to freely come and go” (Joint Standing Committee 158).

A return to punitive policies regarding unauthorised arrivals seems increasingly to lie on the horizon of Australia’s political landscape. The Rudd government came under intense pressure from members of the opposition and the media in the days following the explosion upon the vessel carrying Afghan asylum seekers, cited at the beginning of this introduction. In recent months, increased numbers of boat arrivals and reports that Christmas Island detention centre is operating beyond capacity continue to give affective traction to assertions that the abolition of the Temporary Protection Visa and scaling back of offshore detention are policy failures. Facing mounting pressure over these issues, Rudd has adopted increasingly resolute rhetoric: “this government’s approach to border protection ... is hard-line, tough, targeted and integrated with the border protection efforts of our friends and partners around the world”, and described

¹⁷ At 14 May 2010 a total of 3471 people were being detained in a range of facilities; 2514 of these were held in detention centres (Villawood, Maribyrnong, Perth, Darwin, Christmas Island). The Department of Immigration and Citizenship updates detention statistics regularly (Immigration Detention Statistics Summary np).

people smugglers as “the vilest form of human life” that should “rot in hell” (qtd in “PM Tells People Smugglers” np). The deployment of such language (by a typically measured politician) indicates Rudd’s belief that constructing an affective image of toughness on border protection is the requisite stance of a Prime Minister of Australia. And certainly, the Rudd government’s action on asylum seekers retains some of the strategies of geopolitical disavowal constructed in 2001: in April 2002, a year after the Afghan asylum seekers taken to AED Oil’s Front Puffin rig were excluded from accessing Australian law (and crucially, the right of appeal) in their asylum claims,¹⁸ the government announced its controversial move toward hard line asylum biopolitics with a suspension in the processing of all Afghan and Sri Lankan asylum claims until further notice.

The national contained in the global: problematic sovereignty

Fundamentally, the interrelated ideas of nation, sovereignty, security and citizenship are the bulwarks around which contemporary social and political debates over the reception of asylum seekers and refugees are oriented. Of course, these are not new ideas. Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651), John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Du Contrat Social* (1762) offer variations of an emergent European philosophy of sovereign power and the social contract: essentially, common adherence to laws and the relinquishment of certain liberties in exchange for order and security. However, the concept of a social contract between the citizen and the state had been articulated much earlier in Plato’s *Crito*, where the condemned and imprisoned Socrates, embodying the Laws of Athens, speaks of “the contracts and undertakings by which you agreed to act as a member of our State” (52d, 93). The social contract

¹⁸ For further discussion of this see Michael Vincent, “Oil Rig Asylum Seekers’ Status Uncertain.”

entails structures of coercion; indeed, the centralised exertion of biopolitical power over human movements into, and the behaviour of citizens within, a defined territory might be seen as mutually constitutive with the modern sovereign nation. Foucault connects the emergence of the European nation-state in the eighteenth century with the consolidation of technologies for coercive biopower: the discipline of human behaviour (the production of docility) via social structures such as the army and the school system, and of course, the carceral surveillance and regulation enabled by psychiatric institutions and prisons. The delineation of the nation as a unified, inviolable entity requires this regulation of its citizenry as well as mechanisms for excluding unwanted non-citizens – amongst which unauthorised asylum seekers, it is popularly agreed, loom large.

An important aspect of the social contract is the valorisation of the idea of citizenship – the discourse of which offers a touchstone of cultural identity constructed, Anthony Burke argues, “all too often in fearful and repressive relation to internal and external Others” (para. 29). Recent public debate in Australia over the issue of national values has focused less upon the conduct and attitudes of the Australian-born than upon the values to which new citizens and should pledge allegiance, in what is effectively a codification of the social contract. In October 2007, at the tail end of the Howard government’s leadership, the Australian citizenship test was implemented, requiring candidates to answer twenty questions drawn from a pool of 200 (in English only) covering Australian values, history, politics and geography. The test, which had controversially included a question requiring candidates to identify cricketer Donald Bradman, and moreover, from 1 October 2007 until 31 March 2009 was failed more often by refugee and humanitarian program applicants than by any other type of applicant,¹⁹ was reviewed and simplified by the Rudd government in August 2009.

¹⁹ For more detail on these statistics, see *Australian Citizenship Test: Snapshot Report*.

A significant criticism of the Westphalian model upon which Australian sovereignty is based (in essence, the principle of non-interference in the affairs of an independent territorial authority) is that its founding necessarily precedes its authority, which is derived from and inheres in the concept of individual wills made one under the representative body politic. Connolly calls this “the paradox of political founding”; as he explains with reference to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s concept of *volonté générale*, “For a general will to be brought into being, effect (social spirit) would have to become cause, and cause (good laws) would have to become effect. The problem is how to establish either condition without the previous attainment of the other upon which it depends” (138). In other words, sovereignty authorises its own claim retrospectively, obscuring its (often violent) founding by becoming the non-justiciable originator of the laws under which citizens and aliens alike are regulated.²⁰ As I emphasise in chapter five, within the Australian context, the founding of British sovereignty outside of the common and international law mechanisms of conquest (by force of arms), cession (under treaty) or settlement (of uninhabited land) means that the status of Aboriginal sovereignty remains problematic and unresolved. Even as the Australian legislature and judiciary have consistently affirmed, via the High Court’s decisions in *Mabo v Queensland (No. 2)* (1992) and *Wik Peoples v Queensland* (1996) as well as in land rights and native title acts, the ultimate authority of Australian sovereignty, and the status of Aboriginal citizens as subjects therein, they acknowledge the partial and incomplete nature of sovereign ownership and control. While they have not been able to represent the undermining of the political structure of Australian sovereignty, Aboriginal citizens nonetheless stand to challenge its ideological underpinnings and rationale, and do so, variously situating narratives of nation, history and culture in a postcolonial context through activism, research and representation.

²⁰ Maria Giannacopoulos discusses the concept of the non-justiciability of sovereignty in the Australian context in “*Mabo, Tampa and the Non-Justiciability of Sovereignty*.”

While asylum seekers do not, of course, represent an alternative claim to sovereignty as indigenous Australians do, a significant implication of their unauthorised arrival is the problematisation of the contemporary concept of sovereignty as a self-contained, binary entity. The construct of the political border offers a spatial manifestation of this problematisation. The shifting maritime border resulting from the excision of Australia's migration zone highlights the degree to which the space of the nation is negotiable, continually made and remade according to immediate (geo)political and social pressures and desires. Australia's construction of carceral spaces in remote locations, both on and offshore, in which to place asylum seekers gives rise to a blurring of the distinction between "Australia" and "not-Australia". These are the fundamental paradoxes or ironies that the asylum seeker induces: the appearance of the asylum seeker and coercive measures to define sovereignty in the face of this appearance actually bring about, or at least make apparent, the indistinctness of the nation. This is an important issue in chapter four, where I seek to explicate the political and ideological implications of the asylum seeker in terms of territoriality: the occupation by these non-citizens of spaces that are paradoxically both inside and outside the "sovereign nation".

As scholars of ethics and society including Judith Butler (see *Precarious Life* [2004]), Joanna Zylińska (see *The Ethics of Cultural Studies* [2005]) and Joseph Pugliese (see "Penal Asylum" [2002]) have illustrated, a philosophical intervention into contemporary discourse on state sovereignty and border protection can be identified in French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's emphasis upon a first principle of responsibility in the face of the other. For Levinas, an inheritor of Kantian moral philosophy, a relation of recognition and response, epitomised in the human(e), naked encounter "face-to-face with the Other" ("Time and the Other" 45), is a condition of being in the world that precedes politico-legal concepts of sovereignty and citizenship. This ethical philosophy, situated, I would argue, in terms of an implicitly *affective* body-to-body

relationality, is distinct from the partialist political position held by nation states such as Australia, whereby, as Gibney explains, it is assumed “that states, in their role as representatives of communities of citizens, are morally justified in enacting entrance policies that privilege the interests of their members” (23). In contrast with – indeed, oftentimes in direct opposition to – the idea of a relation of responsibility to non-citizens, the partialist view is concerned primarily with “the reciprocal duties of citizens, those, in other words, already sharing a state ... [it] implicitly assume[s] that the question of who is and should be a member of the political community is basically unproblematic” (Gibney 24). The partialist position – which in Australia underpins the citizenship test as well as the prerogative of immigration detention – differentiates the citizen from the non-citizen in apprehending issues of responsibility, and as such stands in direct contrast with Levinas’s insistence: “My *self* ... is never absolved from responsibility towards the Other” (qtd in Malka 291).

Increasingly, globalisation represents a challenge to the role and value of partialist politics, and indeed, to some of the underlying precepts of state sovereignty. The global market encompasses the transnational movement of goods, capital, ideas and people, and as the current international financial collapse has underlined, is a highly interdependent entity. The concept of the sovereign nation (which as critics such as Homi Bhabha, Ghassan Hage and Benedict Anderson have argued, depends for its cohesion upon the narration and perception of unified identity) is being eroded, or at least complicated, by something akin to postnationalism, whereby the nation is subordinated in terms of power and influence to globalising forces. These are not only economic; for instance, the Internet revolution has precipitated a significant reconfiguration of social and cultural locatedness, a shift in the ways in which humans imagine and identify themselves, their communities and their nationalities – as Graham Barwell and Kate Bowles observe, disembodied transnational movement on the Internet “complicates our understanding

of the everyday performance of nationality” (141). It is impossible to disentangle today’s interconnected “postnationalising” phenomena that are, variously, economic (international trade relations, transnational corporations, global markets, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank Group), technological (Internet-based communications), ideological (the circulation and spread of ideas and systems, such as liberal democracy, market capitalism, socialism, religious authoritarianism), spatial (human movements: forced, voluntary and military) and political (the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union). All of these give rise to cosmopolitan communities and the cosmopolitan subject, who enters into relations with others from diverse origins and cultures, engaging over and across ideas of the local and the national.

The experience of the asylum seeker or refugee within the sovereign receiving nation is an important relational standpoint from which to examine forms of postnational or cosmopolitan interconnection. Kwame Anthony Appiah offers a philosophy of cosmopolitanism centred upon the idea of the affable (and inevitable) *conversation* between others as a method of engaging across borders, cultures and “ways of life” (xxi). Grounded in political pragmatism, Jacques Derrida apprehends the complexities of cosmopolitanism in relation to asylum and immigration in France; in “On Cosmopolitanism” he identifies a contradictory logic inasmuch as the principles of hospitality and the right to asylum contend with the legislated imperative of conditionality and limitation on residency rights (11-12). Certainly, not all cross-cultural encounters offer spaces for conversation in Appiah’s sense; the economically privileged, transnationally mobile “world citizen” occupies a radically different position to the asylum seeker, the refugee, the exile – what Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge and Dipesh Chakrabarty term “minoritarian cosmopolitans” (6). As Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo observe in their analysis of theatrical responses to the issue of asylum in Australia, “Cast out from their natal communities and denied full access to viable alternative forms of cultural citizenship, refugees and asylum

seekers might be conceived as testing the ontological limits of (new) cosmopolitan subjectivity” (187). Gilbert and Lo remind us that cosmopolitan community, certainly in the genial, open context Appiah imagines, is denied to some in accordance with the exclusionary prerogatives and practices of sovereign power.

The work of creative texts might be to fill some of the silences, the obstructed conversations, resulting from sovereign biopolitical coercion. In doing so, they call this coercion into question: in the space opened up by the problematisation of ideas of the sovereign nation and the citizen contained therein – by asylum seekers attempting to enter the nation-state, by receiving nations attempting to hold them in a position of exclusion, as well as by broader transnational movements and communications under globalisation – creative representations of asylum can achieve social and political efficacy – a term I employ in Kershaw’s sense of influencing “wider social and political realities” (1). Drawing lines of cosmopolitan connection between groups who are differentiated on the basis of nation and citizenship, creative works construct conversations via their production processes (subjects–stakeholders–artists) and encourage further conversations and engagements between citizens and their marginalised others (subjects–stakeholders–artists–audiences). From this point, “wider social and political realities” may be influenced and changed. However, it is important to acknowledge that the different genres of creative work that I examine here complicate, if not preclude, a uniform application of concepts like efficacy; certainly, Kershaw’s theorisation of efficacy specifically concerns the “ideological transaction” of performance, where the “community of the audience” plays a vital, constitutive role (23). As much as they may reach large numbers of readers, written texts cannot be said to cohere an audience community in the same embodied, spatio-temporal sense as performance.

Notwithstanding its multivalency in a many-genre study such as this, the issue of efficacy, of socio-political and cultural intervention or “work”, is a critical one; in the context of the creative works I examine, it must always contend with, and be measured in relation to, profoundly affective ideas of nationhood, security, citizenship and belonging. John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge argue that while the globalising world “cannot be adequately understood in terms of the fixed territorial spaces of mainstream international relations theory”, globalisation does not translate into “the Final Fall of the territorial state” (99). As Anderson notes, the idea of the nation “arouse[s] ... deep attachments” (4); undoubtedly, creative responses to asylum in Australia face enormous challenges in intervening in the affective discourses by which governments establish and maintain their authority and garner the general allegiance of the body politic. A sense of security within a nation, of protection from unwanted occupants or incursions, depends upon – indeed, Burke (following Hobbes) argues, is “linked umbilically to” (para. 21) – the idea of sovereignty as fixed and defended. The capacity for a creative text to disrupt this potent affective relation is not great. However it is conceptualised, efficacy is rarely decisive or dramatic, and indeed, is often difficult to define; ideological change and grassroots political action may well be prompted or proliferated by creative work, not necessarily in a neatly causal fashion but within a web of alternative political and affective knowledges and actions – and as Gilbert and Lo argue, “cumulatively” (204).

Representation contained in language: trauma, agency, community

The question of how (or indeed, whether at all) disempowered or oppressed subjects can be the agents of their own representation has been engaged with widely since Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak examined (and politicised) it in the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” more than twenty

years ago. Taking up the issue, scholars in various disciplines, particularly postcolonial, cross-cultural, feminist and related critical areas, have considered the ways in which the speech of the subaltern is contained within and limited by the dominant discursive structures in which his or her subalternity is defined and constructed.²¹ An important overall function of the creative texts I examine, apart from efficacy in terms of socio-political and cultural change, is that of community-building, both across refugee and receiving cultures and within refugee communities; it is in relation to this community-building that the issue of subaltern agency might be explicated for my purposes. If agency derives from the construction and consolidation of group identities linked by common experiences of oppression (as Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism" can be seen to suggest²²) as much as the act of speaking to the powerful, then creative practice by asylum seekers and refugees often constitutes a form of therapeutic agency. For instance, in the gathering of contributions to a collection of writing by asylum seekers and refugees living in Australia (such as *Alone, Together*) threads of commonality – trauma, uprooting from the homeland (which entails the loss of familiar languages, traditions, foods) and the painstaking rebuilding of family and community structures – are drawn together so that the essentialist connections between individuals become important sites of healing, hope, regeneration, dialogue and representation. Similarly, theatre productions in which refugees work with Australian practitioners to bring refugee stories to the stage invariably (even in the case of solo performances by refugees such as Al-Qady's *Nothing But Nothing* and Shafaei's *Refugitive*) involve dialogic engagement between communities of refugees and Australians before the curtain goes up, and further, generate unanticipated and productive conversations with audiences.

²¹ For a summary of the critical debates surrounding subaltern agency, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, esp. 79 and 215-18.

²² Gayatri Spivak's first use of the term appeared in "Criticism, Feminism and the Institution: An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak."

While a good deal of the work examined here involves collaboration and self-representation by asylum seekers and refugees, much of it involves the representation *by Australians* of these disempowered, marginalised people. For this reason, a crucial analytical concern that runs throughout this study relates to the ethics of speaking for others. As I have mentioned, some of the works under analysis (such as *CMI* and *The Rainbow Dark*) deal with this difficulty by employing a perspective whereby definitions of Australia and Australianness vis-à-vis asylum displace direct portrayals of asylum seekers or refugees. In instances (such as Horin's *Through the Wire*, Jaivin's *The Infernal Optimist* and Sallis's *The Marsh Birds*) where Australian artists seek to represent detained asylum seekers, either in a directly biographical or in a general sense, ethical stakes are high not only because the artist is speaking for the subaltern, imagining or appropriating his or her subjectivity, but because the artist stands as an authoritative source of narrative construction: the Australian immigration detention system is specifically designed – by way of remote on and offshore carceral locations and strict controls over media access and public visitation – to render asylum seekers effectively invisible to most Australians. The space for subaltern speech is radically curtailed.

Compounding these challenges is the centrality of trauma to asylum seeker and refugee stories. As I explain in more detail in chapter one, several scholars on trauma and testimony, including Holocaust survivors such as Primo Levi and Dori Laub, argue that psychological trauma is ultimately unrepresentable, the product of an extreme event(s) that wounds the psyche in a way that cannot be expressed in language or other forms of communication. A central ethical problem facing non-refugee artists who seek to represent traumatised others, therefore, is the apparently unbridgeable gap between the witness to trauma and the receiver; the great difficulty of comprehending and representing traumatic experience. Salverson, with reference to the performance projects she has facilitated with students in Canada, warns against an “erotics of

injury”, a phrase she employs to describe the indulgent fascination with or even fetishisation of pain and trauma in performative representations of refugees by non-refugee artists. Such affects, she argues, serve to fix refugee identity along the narrow lines of victimhood and suffering, and limit the range of stories that might represent the life and identity of a refugee (“Change on Whose Terms?” 122). At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge the inevitable predominance of trauma and suffering within refugee stories; as Amanda Wise maintains, “any study of diasporic identity within a refugee community that omitted such an important issue is seriously deficient” (93). Wise’s engaged research with East Timorese refugee communities in Australia leads her to conclude that trauma, both as an individual and community-based lived experience, is absolutely central to the identity and lexicon of these communities. The way in which communication between asylum seekers or refugees and non-refugee artists or academics takes place is crucial; in order for asylum seekers or refugees to be able to speak affectively (and effectively), time and space must be made for a listener to bear witness (to *attend* in the fullest sense of the term, as in concentrated presence) to the testimony while avoiding the impulse to assimilate it (or worse, fetishise it) within an overarching tragic narrative. Throughout this study, I consider the lines of affective creative communication – the ethical conversations in Appiah’s sense of “not only ... literal talk but also ... a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others” (85) – that are constructed via the refugee–artist–audience relations underpinning the creative texts under analysis.

All of the written and performative work examined here employs, to greater or lesser extents, linguistic representation (in the case of Astore’s and Parr’s performance works, vocal language is withheld while the written word strategically deployed). Elaborating the idea that psychological trauma ultimately exists beyond representation, Jenny Edkins observes that “unspeakability” is also connected to “Relations of power ... produced through and reflected in

language” (7); this point is pertinent in relation to asylum seekers and refugees who travel to receiving nations such as Australia. English, the global lingua franca and the language of political authority in Australia, is the language in which asylum seekers must plead the legitimacy of their case, and must hear or read official regulations and rulings that pertain to them. English in Australia is, in Edkins’s terms, “the language of the powerful, the words of the status quo, the words that delimit and define acceptable ways of being human within that community” (8). The lack of English language with which to articulate oneself amounts, for asylum seekers, to a lack of an acceptable way of being human within Australia, and to a denial of human rights. This issue manifests in stark performative terms (in the sense of a speech act) in the Australian political context; upon arrival in Australian territory and encounter with a figure of authority, asylum seekers are required to utter words to the effect that they seek asylum from the Australian government under the United Nations Convention on refugees, and until they do this they have made no case for protection. Shafaei observes that his ability to express himself in English immured him against despair while in immigration detention. It also placed him in a leadership role amongst fellow detainees, for whom he would translate correspondence from the department of immigration, engaging with the relations of power of the host / receiving culture as embedded in its bureaucracy (Cox interview np). In a televised interview with broadcaster Andrew Denton (a high-profile format available to Shafaei, who is a clear and confident English-language communicator), Shafaei explains, “I started writing letters to [the] United Nations. I chose that way, but a lot of people who cannot express themselves [in English], who cannot ask for their rights in that language ... it is a situation of despair” (*Enough Rope* np).

In the creative texts I examine and others like them, English is almost exclusively the vehicle for representation; written and performative work by asylum seekers and refugees in Australia requires either translation by a third party or the use of a second language by the subject

– in effect, translation of the self. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere describe translation as “a rewriting of an original text”, arguing that “All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate language to function in a given society in a given way” (xi). Even when they do not involve the translation of a pre-existing text, representations of asylum seekers and refugees nonetheless require the translation of experience and thought – and trauma – into the language and embedded cultural frameworks of the host audience.

Future trajectories and the spaces of imagination

Amid economic deterioration and political unrest, and ongoing crises facing the world’s refugees and other displaced peoples, it is vital that methods of connecting across the divide between the enfranchised and the disenfranchised are imagined and practised. In this regard, writing and performance, which engage the emotions and the imagination as well as practical community, contribute to and augment cultural and political debate and change. The political and economic power structures with which creative works on asylum contend in the project of imagining and producing ethical social realities are formidable. They are also complex, inasmuch as the instrumentalisation of the non-belonging, non-citizen through state biopower in the twenty-first century consists, as Agamben observes, in the production “of a mutable and virtually infinite survival” of bare life (*Remnants* 155). As refugee and internal displacement flows are linked to inequalities and injustices within interconnected local and global communities, the unequal distribution of various kinds of recognition and resource – economic, legal, social, ethical, human rights – among different categories of legitimacy within a sovereign space forms the difficult

context in which creative arts must function to represent those who are excluded from full human community.

The Intersubjective Witness: Trauma Testimony in Performance

Between yes and no I have spent all my life.

—Towfiq Al-Qady, *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story*

We speak in their stead, by proxy.

—Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*

Testimony and representation

Alexander Donat, author of the Holocaust memoir *The Holocaust Kingdom* (1963), was born Michal Berg. He adopted the name Donat at the Vaihingen an der Enz concentration camp after exchanging names with a young boy, a fellow prisoner who wanted to remain with his last surviving relative rather than be transferred out of the camp; Donat was transferred and the boy, bearing the name Berg, died shortly afterwards. Of this interchange of identity, Donat writes, “Officially, I died there, too ... here Berg died and Donat was born” (259). Yehiel De-Nur (born Yehiel Feiner), also a survivor of the Holocaust, wrote of his wartime experiences under the title *Ka-Tzetnik 135633* (Concentration Camp Inmate 135633); of De-Nur, Jeremy D. Popkin argues, “the complete emptying out of his identity symbolized by the adoption of a number in place of a name also marks the fusion of the identities of all those who bore numbers” (348). These authorial strategies situate the author-witness within a particular historico-political context, and draw attention to the others that experienced the trauma. The writer is positioned as *both* singular

witness *and* representative of a collectivity or community of witnesses. While Donat's and De-Nur's modes of representation reflect on the one hand the de-individualisation effected by the Holocaust, its violent production of "bare life" (a concept explicated by Giorgio Agamben, outlined in the introduction), they also suggest that recourse to a trauma community, a form of strategic essentialism through minority group identification, can be a nexus around which a witness "gathers" the significance (human, historical, political) of their experience, focusing its constitutive relationship with those for whom they speak. In this chapter, I consider the ways in which theatre can serve as a productive medium for "intersubjective witnessing", a term I employ to describe the creative and emotional application of phenomenological concepts of empathy between self and other, via the adoption of different perspectives in enactments of trauma testimony.

I examine three theatre works that present testimony by or about asylum seekers and refugees in Australia: *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* (2005), written and performed by Iraqi refugee Towfiq Al-Qady and supported by Actors for Refugees, Queensland, *Through the Wire* (premiered 2004), devised and directed by Australian Ros Horin and *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* (2004), devised by members of the Sydney performance company Version 1.0. In his solo work, Al-Qady tells his own story (invoking his adult and child selves) and also takes on the perspectives of his mother, daughter and fellow asylum seekers. During the production of *Through the Wire*, Iranian theatre practitioner and refugee Shahin Shafaei was instructed by his Australian director how to perform as himself; Shafaei's testimony, his very subjectivity, were mediated and transformed during the process of creative self-representation. In these performances, as in Donat's and De-Nur's memoirs, the witness to trauma becomes a symbolic or intersubjective figure, a representation of himself and a speaker for other witnesses to the traumatic event. Aside from Shafaei, other performers in *Through the Wire* are not refugees, but

enact (somewhat problematically) refugees' testimonies. In contrast, *CMI* is devised from testimonies *about* asylum seekers – specifically, the 2002 Australian Senate Select Committee on the “children overboard” affair, summarised in the introduction. In this chapter, I employ the phrase “speaking for” to describe the act of performing on behalf of a *like community*, or what might be termed a *trauma community*, and the phrase “speaking of” to describe the enactment of trauma testimony by a person who did not experience the event(s) being represented. While my contention that members of a trauma community are more effectively positioned to speak for others within that community risks constructing a moral assumption, I maintain that it is based upon a true dichotomy (here, between the disempowered asylum seeker and the empowered Australian citizen), and that it bears application, with critical caution, in this chapter.

The concept of intersubjective witnessing represents a shift away from conventional understandings of trauma testimony, which privilege individual subjectivity. Whether in law, psychology, history or literature, to testify is to speak alone, to give a first-person description of an experienced event. A belief in the singularity (albeit incomplete) of testimony underlies Primo Levi's assertions in his memoirs *If This is a Man* and *The Truce* (published in English in 1958 and 1965 respectively) and his book of essays *The Drowned and the Saved* (published in English in 1988) that the only true witnesses to the Holocaust are what he calls the “submerged” or the “drowned” – those who died in the concentration camps.²³ This argument leads (as it did for Levi) to the conclusion that “true” subjectivity is impossible in relation to the camps. But in another respect, in identifying the (lost) subjectivity of the drowned, Levi accounts for their experience, and for their crucial, constitutive position within the collectivity of which he, as survivor, is part. In this sense, the very structure of his testimonial self-representation serves to

²³ Primo Levi occasionally employs the term *Muselmann* (Muslim) to refer to people in the liminal space before death; as he explains, the term was “used by the old ones of the camp to describe the weak, the inept, those doomed to selection” (*If This is a Man* 94). Giorgio Agamben takes up the term in *Remnants of Auschwitz* where he engages with Levi's work.

witness *for* the drowned – as he writes, “We speak in their stead, by proxy” (*The Drowned* 84) – even as it asserts (rightly) that the latter’s experience can never be testified completely. When testimony is transposed into the explicitly imaginative space of the theatre, the possibilities for intersubjectivity are heightened. I investigate the ways in which performative testimony of or about asylum seekers and refugees operates as, variously, a representation of individual subjectivity and / or a representation of / for other subjectivities.

Probably due to its centrality in the law, testimony in any form, whether a written memoir, an oral account or a theatrical performance, is typically expected to adhere to standards of veracity and to eschew the imaginative or creative techniques of fiction. This informs the terms upon which testimony is commonly characterised and received: as a first-person account of individual (often traumatic) experience, a “true” representation of individual subjectivity. Of course, imperatives of truth and evidence contend with the inevitable processes of construction and mediation (connected to the fallibility of memory and the “translative” nature of representation) involved in testimony, problematising the determination of “what actually happened in the past” (Kennedy, “Stolen Generations Testimony” 116). While acknowledging that, as Rosanne Kennedy observes, the categorisation of testimony inheres in contention (“Stolen Generations Testimony” 116), this chapter is oriented around “issues of interpretation, agency and authority in the process of making witness”, or what Kennedy refers to as a discursive approach to testimony (“Stolen Generations Testimony” 117). My approach coalesces around the notion that testimony is a mode of representation that, like any other discourse, does not constitute a transparent reflection of historical events: to testify is always already to represent, to mediate. The value of this understanding is indicated by French resistance member Charlotte Delbo’s assertion in the epigraph of her poetic, fragmentary Holocaust memoir *Auschwitz and After* (published in English in 1985): “Today, I am not sure that what I wrote is true. I am certain

it is truthful". The distinction between what is factually *true* and what is essentially *truthful* has a compelling resonance in relation to theatrical representations of refugee testimony.

The theatrical enactment of testimony complicates and compounds the representational problems already at stake in the act of testifying. In performance, testimony becomes entangled with aesthetic concerns: it is generally edited or "devised" for the purposes of narrative or thematic structure, and comes to bear some of the characteristics of fiction, such as dialogue, emotional contrast, metaphor, symbolism and multiple subjectivity. In the performances under analysis here, intersubjectivity works in two key ways. Firstly (and this is a consequence of performance *per se*), the enactment of testimony, whether by the original witness or, as is more often the case, by a performer in place of the witness, always *transforms* the witness--subject into "other"; he or she is "generalised" and becomes a figure, a representation, within the framework of the performance. Secondly, the testimonial texts "gather" the subjectivities and experiences of other witnesses – parents, lovers, children, neighbours, fellow citizens, fellow boat people – to the traumatic event(s). The decentralisation of the singular witness emphasises lines of affective engagement, connection and community – preoccupations that are crucial in theatre. At the same time, instances of "speaking of and for" and "generalising" can be problematic in terms of agency or authority and risk de-specifying individual experience, constituting asylum seekers and refugees as a homogenous category. These issues focus the tensions and slippages between individual and community, "truth" and "fiction" that inhere in testimonial narratives.

Trauma and testimony: psychoanalytical and linguistic aspects

The field of trauma and testimony studies carries the legacy of work (autobiographical, historical and theoretical) connected with the Holocaust, which has considered testimony in the various

contexts of memory, language and historiography, psychoanalysis and narrative and interpretation. Crucially, different writings exhibit a common concern with issues of representation – indeed, of *representability*. Acknowledging that work on testimonies of a particular historical event cannot be directly applied to other events, and cautious of the dominance of Holocaust studies and its potential to subsume other histories of trauma, I maintain that writing on the Holocaust can inform analyses of other testimonies to state corporeal violence, such as those of the Aboriginal Stolen Generations in Australia, and here, those of asylum seekers and refugees.²⁴

In its sense as psychological wounding, trauma does not describe a temporally specific and finite experience, but the psychic *history* subsequent to an event or events; by definition, then, it is imbricated in structures of memory, and therefore construction and representation. Trauma scholars have identified patterns of unwitting re-wounding among traumatised subjects in the form of repetitive nightmares, hallucinations, thoughts or behaviours. Cathy Caruth describes this as the “possession” of the subject by the trauma (“Trauma and Experience” 4-5); extending Freud’s observations from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* regarding wish fulfilment in the dreams of trauma sufferers, she argues that the subject’s repeated psychological wounding makes the trauma available to consciousness so that a cathartic voice is “paradoxically released” (*Unclaimed Experience* 2).²⁵ As I discuss in more depth in chapter three, Amanda Wise and Joseph Pugliese have examined instances in which asylum seekers and refugees in Australia have re-traumatised or re-injured themselves, and consider the psychological, social and affective functions of this re-injuring. In her in-depth study of East Timorese refugees in Australia during the struggle for

²⁴ Comparative analyses of Holocaust testimony and Stolen Generations testimony can be found in Rosanne Kennedy’s “Vulnerable Children, Disposable Mothers: Holocaust and Stolen Generations Memoirs of Childhood” and Simone Gigliotti’s “Unspeakable Pasts as Limit Events: The Holocaust, Genocide, and the Stolen Generations.”

²⁵ Jenny Edkins situates post-Freudian trauma theory in relation to the phenomenon of psychic repetition, observing that such theory developed as a result of the post-World War II epidemic of shell-shock, which “led to a reconsideration of psychoanalytic theory, then based on the notion of dreams as the fulfilment of unconscious wishes” (1).

independence, *Exile and Return Among the East Timorese* (2006), Wise employs Ghassan Hage's concept of *affective intensification* to describe ritualised re-enactments and commemorations of trauma, in which the "isolating rupture of unruly pain" was re-experienced and channelled into "a corporeal, sensorial collective narrative" (101) or identity and "rendered meaningful in a very embodied way" (117). The independence protest movement, Wise discerns, generated for its participants bodily emotion and thus the sensation of intense connection with the suffering of absent friends and relatives. Pugliese describes the self-harm with razor wire by an asylum seeker incarcerated in Australia as an act of "corporeal poetics" that enables a paradoxical release of trauma, and a mode of communication, via repeated wounding ("Subcutaneous" 27). While creative production by artists who have experienced trauma should not be conflated with involuntary psychological repetition or self-harm, the function of making known (to oneself and to others) seems to connect with some testimonial work, especially autobiographical theatre work such as Al-Qady's, which as I argue contains in its repetition-as-practice therapeutic potential as self-determined self-expression.

A fundamental dimension of the question of representability with respect to testimony has to do with the limits of language and the inevitable interpretive gap between linguistic interlocutors. Jenny Edkins apprehends trauma testimony within this paradigm with her observation, "the difficulty that testimony experiences – that there are no words to express what the witness needs to say – is an extreme and exemplary form of the difficulty with language more broadly" (188). Inasmuch as it is an experience of extremity, trauma takes place outside language and cannot be made sense of or recounted, much less captured, in language. As Edkins observes, trauma is, "In Lacanian terms ... an encounter with the real ... that which is outside the linguistic realm, outside the symbolic or social order" (213-4). In this regard, the "gap ... at the heart of subjectivity" (Edkins 214) can be seen to be more than usually apparent in the context of trauma.

The view that the experiential horror of trauma is ultimately “unspeakable” and incommunicable is often invoked in relation to Holocaust testimony. Because the Holocaust’s ultimate purpose was genocide and most witnesses did not survive to testify to it, the notion of unspeakability applies here in both a literal and linguistic sense. Zoë Vania Waxman considers literal unspeakability in terms of the obligation to speak for others, observing, “in wanting to bear witness to the Holocaust, survivors have to refer to matters outside their own experience” (166). Levi offers a severe picture of the incompleteness of witnessing to the Holocaust, describing survivors such as himself: “the worst survived, the selfish, the violent, the insensitive, the collaborators of the ‘gray zone,’ the spies” (*The Drowned* 82); further to this, he maintains, “we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses” (*The Drowned* 83). Levi’s view is paradoxical in light of his insistence that even if the submerged had had paper and pen, they “would not have testified because their death had begun before that of their body. Weeks and months before being snuffed out, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, to compare and express themselves” (*The Drowned* 84). The implication of the idea that true witnessing occurs only upon the onset of aphasia and diminished consciousness relegates testimony, which requires the human faculties Levi cites, to a position of indirect subjectivity in relation to the recollected event. Agamben apprehends the paradox at the heart of Levi’s notion of the complete (drowned) witness as more than a historiographical issue of – or indeed, exemplified by – the Holocaust, arguing that it expresses:

nothing other than the intimate dual structure of testimony as an act of an *author*, as the difference and completion of an impossibility and possibility of speaking, of the inhuman and the human, a living being and a speaking being. The subject of testimony is constitutively fractured; it has no other consistency than

disjunction and dislocation – and yet it is nevertheless irreducible to them.

(*Remnants* 151)

The performance texts I examine in this chapter serve to emphasise this dual structure of testimony, contending explicitly as they do with spaces of construction and mediation – of the *auctor* – in the project of incomplete witnessing and speaking of or for the persecuted, the incarcerated and in some cases, the drowned.

Despite its paradoxes and dislocations, testimony is recognised as an important means of communicating and recording traumatic events and as a therapeutic and validating process for trauma sufferers; as Leigh Gilmore writes, “Language is asserted as that which can realize trauma even as it is theorized as that which fails in the face of trauma” (7). Laub apprehends the therapeutic function of testimony in terms that are similar to Caruth’s description of making known through involuntary psychological repetition, observing that Holocaust survivors “needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one’s story”, even though “the story ... cannot be fully captured in *thought*, *memory*, and *speech*” (63, emphasis in original). When language is employed to represent trauma, transformation inevitably occurs; as Delbo explains in her last book, *Days and Memory* (published in English in 2001), “I feel that the one who was in the camp is not me, is not the person who is here, facing you” (3). This suggests that the subjectivity connected with the traumatic experience becomes, is *felt to be*, “other” to subsequent subjectivity.

Performance texts: towards affective generalisation

The following analysis of theatre works is underpinned by the proposition that acknowledging the constructedness of trauma testimony as a mode of representation, and moreover, its

interdependence with the subjectivities of other members of a trauma community, opens up spaces for *affective generalisation*, for one witness to speak beneficially for and to imaginatively represent others. Caruth recognises the significance of affective community in relation to trauma: “one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another ... trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility of listening to another’s wound” (*Unclaimed Experience* 8). The possibilities of communication and encounter with another are crystallised in testimonial performance, which is largely concerned with forging connections between witness and artist and between artist and audience. With differing degrees of self-consciousness, the plays under analysis here raise representational issues connected with the enactment of the witness, the relationship between self and community and between veracity and theatricality.

Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee’s Story

A solo work written and performed by Towfiq Al-Qady, *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee’s Story* is the most emotional, lyrical and impressionistic in style of the three performance texts examined in this chapter. Al-Qady, a visual artist, writer and actor, was imprisoned and tortured under Saddam Hussein’s regime for refusing to paint the Prime Minister’s portrait or join the military. The work was supported by Actors for Refugees, Queensland and produced with directorial assistance from Australian practitioner Leah Mercer. It was performed in 2005 at Brisbane’s Metro Arts Theatre, a space that regularly hosts independent artists, and that in this case simultaneously hosted an exhibition of Al-Qady’s paintings. With live accompaniment by Iraqi musician Taj Mahmoud (playing the oud), Al-Qady testifies to a lifetime’s accumulation of trauma: a fearful and deprived childhood, the deaths of family members and friends, political persecution as a young adult and the arduous journey, with a boatload of fellow asylum seekers, to Australia. The recourse throughout the performance to the trauma of a community – a family,

a nation, a group of asylum seekers, child civilians of war – belies its claim to tell “one refugee’s story”.

Al-Qady’s offers a fluid, unstable and occasionally dreamlike narrative, privileging expressionistic sense over linear or historical coherence. While his involvement in a solo, autobiographical project indicates his desire to speak publicly, to construct his own life narrative, Al-Qady does not demonstrate Levi’s anxiety regarding the witness’s burden in the face of official (dominant) knowledges and histories. The issue of reliability influenced Levi’s positioning of his subjectivity in his memoirs *If This is a Man* and *The Truce*; he explains, “I have deliberately assumed the calm, sober language of the witness, neither the lamenting tones of the victim nor the irate voice of someone who seeks revenge. I thought that my account would be all the more credible and useful the more it appeared objective and the less it sounded overly emotional” (“Afterword” 382). Working toward different ends (affective, communal and therapeutic) within the framework of theatre, Al-Qady’s subjectivity in *Nothing But Nothing* is markedly different from this “reliable” model.

At the beginning of the performance Al-Qady enacts himself as a child: “I am a child, I like to play. / I am a child, I like to play with everything. / I like to play soccer. / I like to play with the ball but we don’t have enough money to buy a ball”.²⁶ The use of the first-person “I” activates the singular specificity of testimonial speech; however, the present tense narration, especially from the perspective of Al-Qady the child, creates a poetic immediacy that disarticulates the text from historical imperatives of fixed viewpoint and continuity. Wavering between re-experience or re-enactment and testimony, Al-Qady switches from present to past tense as he describes events in Iraq: “What is this? / This is love. / Her name was Leila. / With Leila, I saw my dreams. / I like her, I love her, Leila”. The stream-of-consciousness technique

²⁶ All quotations from *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee’s Story* are taken from Towfiq Al-Qady’s unpublished, unpaginated playscript (2005) with the author’s permission.

gives the impression of direct transmission of a subject's emotional state, but in Al-Qady's case, it is an explicitly mediated form of first-person disclosure, being in English rather than his native Arabic, a translation he found intellectually and emotionally difficult; as he explains, "I hadn't studied English before and it was hard to express my feelings with little English. The language problem was another suffering for me" (personal correspondence np). If the telling of his story served therapeutic ends for Al-Qady, it also produced further difficulties to overcome.

Of course, while it gives the appearance of a direct, unmediated flow of "truth", Al-Qady's technique is a deliberate artistic mode, a framework through which his traumatised subjectivity is mediated. His expressionsitic approach to testimony is evident in a one-sided, repetitious conversation with his dead father: "Dad, dad I miss you ... When will you come back? / Please come back ... DAD! / I miss you. / Please come back, / You promised. / You promised. / Please dad, come back". While far removed from an evidential, documentary mode, these words, performed by Al-Qady in a defeated, crouching position with his back to the audience, testify incisively to the traumatic loss of his father. These emotive present-tense sections of the monologue, most of which are performed against dim red lighting, create the impression of a man haunted by traumatic memory, bringing to mind psychoanalytical analyses of the unwilling repetition and re-experience of trauma in dreams or hallucinations. The obvious and crucial difference is that Al-Qady's use of repetition via first-person narration is not unwilling, but situated and purposeful. It constructs an emotional (affective) framework from which the audience community is called to imagine itself as witness to the traumatic events. The relationship between this *affectiveness* and the *efficacy* of the performance consists, as Baz Kershaw observes, in its potential to transform "the immediate and ephemeral" and to "influence, however minutely, the general historical evolution of wider social and political realities" (1). This politicised approach to the work of performance underpins my analysis here.

While in one sense Al-Qady is conspicuously alone both onstage and as a persecuted figure, the importance of interlocutors, whether friendly, hostile or indifferent, is reinforced throughout the performance; every point of his physical and emotional journey is contingent upon the outcomes of his human relationships and encounters. He engages in various “conversations”, between his child-self and his mother, with his first love Leila, with his young daughter, with an Iraqi official and with an Australian immigration official. He also sings an Arabic song from his mother, a recollection of childhood that suggests the type of affective intensification about which Hage and Wise write: a behaviour or performance that generates embodied emotional engagement with members of the homeland community, both living and dead. Moving between present and past tense, he recounts the successive losses of family members: the deaths of his father, Leila and her brother in war, and the forced separation from his daughter and his wife upon his fleeing Iraq. While these sections of the narrative are anguished and expressive of Al-Qady's individual grief and loss, they also testify to the casualties of successive wars in Iraq – in other words, to the community of civilian witnesses to which he belongs. During the journey to Australia, when avenues for human help are exhausted, Al-Qady attempts to engage with the ocean, the sky and the boat as benevolent interlocutors: “Good morning, sea / I like you and I am scared of you at the same time. / Please be quiet and soft with us because we are weak people”. His words and pleas remain unanswered, and this, the point at which the possibility of human connection beyond the community of desolate boat people is most remote, constitutes one of the bleakest parts of the performance.

Kershaw describes the active, constitutive role of audience members in the work of performance: “the spectator is engaged fundamentally in the active construction of meaning as a performance event proceeds. In this sense performance is ‘about’ the transaction of meaning, a continuous negotiation between stage and auditorium to establish the significance of the signs

and conventions through which they interact" (16-17). Al-Qady constructs an overtly transactional relation with his audience, extending the significance of interlocutors to the immediate space of the performative encounter. Dominating the stage, "opposing" the audience, is a large wooden cut-out of the word "NO", which Al-Qady utilises at various points as a grim or threatening symbol, such as his father's grave, a prison cell, or the boat to Australia. In a gesture to cosmopolitan engagement (or indeed, the refusal thereof), the word is also posted in various languages on the walls of the theatre. At the beginning of the performance, Al-Qady implores his audience-interlocutors to respond to his candid questions; he walks up the theatre's central aisle and gestures directly to individuals, asking, "Really, I would like to be your friend. Would you like to be my friend?", followed by, "if you are my friend, then maybe you wouldn't mind if I asked you to help me – could you help me?" This technique is particularly affective due to the exclusivity of solo performance; certainly, Al-Qady's opening stage directions – "This actor possesses all of the stage and audience attention" – are consonant with Jo Bonney's argument, "More than any other form of live performance, the solo show expects and demands the active involvement of the people in the audience. They are watched as they watch, they are directly addressed, their energy resonates with that of the lone artist" (xiii). Al-Qady faced considerable difficulty taking on, alone, the role of initiator of conversation across cultural and linguistic barriers; as he recalls, "I ... feel nervous because I think that the people don't know what I said. I also had a problem with the pronunciation of some words. For this reason I feel that I can't make contact with the people" (personal correspondence np). Eliciting the word "yes" from audience members, individually and in unison, Al-Qady succeeds in situating them as an affirmative community, the significance of which is explicated by his self-identified position of liminality, always on the threshold of belonging: "Between YES and NO I have spent all my life"

(this echoes a line from the poem with which Levi begins *If This is a Man*: “Who dies because of a yes or a no” [17]). Upon initiating this dialogue, Al-Qady begins to tell his story.

In this way, his work positions the audience in an active position of facilitation, emphasising what is often implied in testimonial representation: the significance of the human agent(s) to whom the witness speaks – and ultimately, the possibility that a listener will *bear witness* to the testimony. Wise describes the necessity of listeners in terms of a constitutive relation: “testimony or narratives are meaningful in the social and cultural context of those who ‘hear’” (119). In *Nothing But Nothing*, the audience confirms the subjectivity of the witness by replying “yes”, and thus vocally consenting to the enactment of the testimony. Al-Qady’s gesture establishes a situational relationality, whereupon the connection between his subjectivity and the audience is contingent not just upon his act of testimonial representation, but upon the audience’s willingness to hear it. This relationality is invoked at several points during the performance when Al-Qady walks up the aisle of the theatre; at one point he moves behind the audience up to a side mezzanine, insisting that he cannot fight in war, and later, his frantic pleas for asylum are directed to the audience from numerous vantage points around the stage and aisle. A final “yes” from the audience signals freedom and the culmination of his journey / performance. Al-Qady affectively activates what might be regarded as a series of Levinasian face-to-face relations: “The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question (“Ethics as First Philosophy” 83). His repeated questioning coheres the audience as community, something Kershaw (following Raymond Williams) argues is necessary for performance to work as cultural or ideological intervention, since community is “the concrete medium of face-to-face interactions through which we transact ideological business” (29).

The participatory, transactional role of the audience in “befriending” and “helping” Al-Qady mirrors the role of the Australian immigration authorities that are the elected representatives of the Australian people. Of course, given that audience members have, in attending the performance, indicated some degree of sympathy with the plight of asylum seekers and have already implicitly consented to hear Al-Qady’s testimony, it is inaccurate to claim that the contingency implied by his request for affirmation is equivalent to the life-altering power of immigration authorities to assist or reject; what his gesture invokes, rather, is the cross-cultural framework, the space of alterity, within which asylum seeker and refugee voices must strive to be heard. More specifically, it recognises the position of liberty and agency held by the Australian people relative to the asylum seeker or refugee. Al-Qady’s call for recognition and response situates his performance within the context of cosmopolitan community, of what Peggy Phelan describes, with reference to postmodern, post September 11 performance, as a “sense of connection to one another that exceeds simple geophysical, ideological, or cultural proximity” (577), and further, within a paradigm of ethical interdependence in which privileged communities are called upon to assist persecuted communities. The appeal to the audience blurs the boundary between actor and spectator so that the two exist in interrelation, rather than duality. Susan C. Haedicke, drawing on the work of Kershaw and Augusto Boal, argues that participatory techniques in theatre challenge the passivity of conventional spectatorship and demand more from the audience in terms of identification and social action (109). While performances of *Nothing But Nothing* did not call upon the audience in the mode of Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (which is literally shaped by audience interventions), they extend interaction and the potential for efficacy in social action beyond the bounds of the play with the addition of post-show question and answer sessions with Al-Qady – literally a cosmopolitan conversation in Kwame Anthony Appiah’s sense.

The perspectival scope of Al-Qady's monologue is such that the others for whom he testifies are not limited to people known personally to him; much of *Nothing But Nothing* apprehends communities of civilians with common experiences of war. As he enacts the boat journey to Australia, he imagines how he would represent the global community of refugees to the non-refugee community: "I'd like to make a huge sculpture of the refugees of the world, from this water, to say to the world, look, look what the war has made for the people". Instead of a strategy of making known through individualisation, Al-Qady imagines the amalgamation and de-individualisation of the world's refugees as a way in which to communicate their plight; in this, he is imagining a fundamental ethical relation based upon global cosmopolitan community.

He also imagines a national community. Enacting an interview with Australian immigration officials, Al-Qady resists individualisation by telling the officer: "my name. / I forget, I can't remember. Please write my name down as Sinbad. / Sorry, my number ... 5 million. 5 million refugees, they escaped from my country". His choice of the symbolic, de-individualised name, Sinbad, concurs satirically with western stereotypes of the foreign, exotic seafarer, as well as with Middle Eastern narrative tradition. The political identification of belonging to an Iraqi community is tied to a generalised subjectivity based upon an imagined community: in an Australian newspaper interview connected with *Nothing But Nothing*, Al-Qady speaks of the personal and the communal interchangeably: "I like the art. I like museum. We like to paint. We like to write. Iraqi people are very nice" (qtd in Dalton 1). In her analysis of Aboriginal women's life narratives, Debbie Rodan observes that the decentring of the testifying "I" can function to strengthen community connections and identities within the context of a minority collectivity. While the respective minoritarian positions of Aboriginal Australians and refugees cannot be conflated, they bear certain significant similarities (as I discuss in chapter five) that make Rodan's critical approach apposite in this context, focused as she is on elucidating "the

shared group experience of a small 'we': for instance, oppression and subjugation experienced by specific peoples within a shared 'lifeworld'" (60). Al-Qady designates himself as belonging to a community, or in Rodan's terms, a "lifeworld", of refugees from Iraq. This essentialism serves a strategic purpose: Al-Qady seeks to generalise the category "Iraqi refugee" in order to speak for this community to Australians, countering various pejorative identifications (militant Islamist, terrorist, illegal immigrant) that solidified in the west following 11 September 2001 by characterising his people as "very nice" – deserving of humane recognition.

Nothing But Nothing places particular emphasis on communities of children. At the beginning of the work, Al-Qady recalls his childhood desires, fears and hardships as well as those of the children with whom he grew up. The burgeoning awareness of the child Al-Qady of what is denied him in his life in Iraq prompts broader consideration of the condition of the child: "How many children are in the same situation? / How many children are worse than my situation in this world? / Without dreams, without food, without water. / And how many children die in this world?" Al-Qady's subjectivity is mediated in and through a community of children living amid poverty and war. He reflects his experience back upon the collective subjectivity of the child, asking the audience, "Do you know the feelings of the child when you say to him, no?" The experience of a deeply personal trauma is translated into a violation of the generalised child-subject: "The war destroys the hearts of small children". Al-Qady's narrative slippage between the specific and the collective means that lines such as "I can't stop the war. / I am a child" are transformed into an affective generalisation of the subjectivities or voices of civilian children.

Al-Qady's monologue speaks for other subjectivities in more subtle ways. During the enactment of the boat journey to Australia, his self-character sees a butterfly and is drawn out of listless exhaustion by the prospect of land and the anticipation of freedom; in a newspaper interview, Al-Qady explains that his friend and fellow asylum seeker saw the butterfly that

heralded land (Dalton 1). He therefore grafts the experience of a fellow witness onto his own testimonial performance; in what is an ostensibly autobiographical narrative, such a strategy of aggregation serves to testify for other subjectivities and to gather their experiences into a trauma community. This approach parallels the Aboriginal women's narratives characterised by Rodan in terms of strategic essentialism, as life stories "in the sense of encompassing the stories of others, and/or as composites of the experiences of Aboriginal people" (56). Al-Qady's performance subjugates strict autobiographical veracity to another type of truth: that of a like community. Mary Ann Hunter observes that the production was strongly supported by Brisbane's Iraqi community (30); it was positioned, therefore, to speak not only for, but also *to* members of Al-Qady's trauma community. Subaltern agency and representation, in a non-individualistic sense, can be seen to derive here from community-building and affective group identification.

Nothing But Nothing presents an at times overwhelming mood of disempowerment; as he portrays it, the determination of "yes" or "no" that has instrumentalised Al-Qady's life has been made by authorities whose attitude towards him has ranged from indifferent to hostile to life-threatening, and his corresponding dejection and subservience are discernible throughout the work. The large onstage "O" is inscribed with the word "please" and Al-Qady repeats the words "please", "sorry" and "thank-you" frequently, often when such courtesies are patently unwarranted: "Please, can I sleep in this alley? / Can I sleep in this corner? Can I sleep on this footpath? Thank-you, thank-you". During the boat journey to Australia, his powerlessness is emphasised when he implores the sky, sea and boat to be merciful. In an interview with Australian immigration officials, he repeats the word "sorry" several times. Edkins observes, "The concept of trauma oscillates between victimhood and protest and can be linked with or articulated to either" and maintains, further, that "victimhood offers sympathy and pity in return for the surrender of any political voice" (9). Al Qady's narrative articulates to a large extent with

victimhood; his earnest performance is established early on as a lament: “my dream, my struggle, my escape, my tears and my suffering”, and he refers to himself as “a victim of the war”. Unlike *Through the Wire*, which I examine shortly, Al-Qady’s work touches only lightly upon the experience of mandatory detention in Australia, not seeking to protest directly this political coercion (in which his audience is unavoidably enmeshed).

The issue raised by Edkins of the surrender of political efficacy or voice should be apprehended carefully. As I outlined in the introduction, Julie Salverson is critical of the victim trope in performative representations of trauma testimony, arguing that a “preoccupation with the experience of loss and a privileging of trauma ... provides an essential yet limiting framework that fixes testimony within a discourse of loss and the tragic” (“Change on Whose Terms?” 122); this, she contends, ultimately “sustains the psychic residues of violent histories, codifying the very powerlessness they seek to address” (“Transgressive Storytelling” 35). With regard to protest performances by East Timorese communities in Australia (mainly Sydney) during the long struggle for independence, Wise notes that these performances tended to be inscribed by Australian spectators in terms of a homogenised framework of victimhood, that these spectators “were most receptive to a certain kind of East Timorese diasporic identity that emphasized the suffering of exile as a particularly moral state of being” (119). At the same time, Wise acknowledges the inescapable centrality of trauma and suffering within the East Timorese lifeworld; as she observes, “the word ‘trauma’ is familiar currency in the community” (93). It is certainly arguable that in *Nothing But Nothing*, Al-Qady’s victimhood serves to elicit uncomplicated pity from an audience comprised mostly of Australian citizens, who in their belonging occupy positions of power relative to himself, and in whose name the federal asylum mechanisms by which victimhood is codified and sustained operate. This is not to say that asylum narratives *must* concern themselves with these power structures and with detention in particular (though many

such works do). As indicated by my explication above of Al-Qady's engagement with his audience, his face-to-face appeals for response both to him and his community, it is not sufficient to assume that his self-representation as victim correlates with the compromise of a political voice.

Moreover, the narrative of *Nothing But Nothing* is not focused solely upon trauma. Certainly, aspects of the text meet Salverson's call for the inclusion in testimonial work of "the complex terrain of laughter, of the imagination, or the pleasure of encountering another person in the touching of worlds that is testimony" ("Change on Whose Terms?" 124). Even if it serves in part as a counterpoint to illustrate what he has lost, Al-Qady expresses the terrain of the imagination, of happiness and hope:

I'd like to be an artist.

I like to paint, to draw.

But we don't have enough money to buy colours.

I draw my dreams in my imagination.

I draw a special place.

In my place, the sky is filled with birds and colours and the earth filled with
flowers, trees, rivers.

But suddenly my dreams were stolen.

Al-Qady describes his sense of strength and confidence prior to fleeing Iraq: "I am a young man now, very strong, very happy. / I can do anything now. / No one can say to me, 'NO'". His recollection of falling in love with Leila and his excited, hyperbolic plans for the future with her – "we'll have a baby boy or a baby daughter, 10, 20, 100 more?" – seem to epitomise the "terrain of laughter ... the pleasure of encountering another person" that Salverson describes. Certainly, on

the closing night's performance I attended in Brisbane, the lines elicited laughter from the audience.

While the trope of victimhood is problematic, the concern in narratives such as Al-Qady's with experiences of oppression, disempowerment, loss and grief does not necessarily delimit the possibilities for resistance and transformation, and for efficacious communication with an audience. Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray employ the term "subversive speaking" to describe testimony that does not underline and redouble the witness's position of disempowerment, but in which the witness recognises themselves as interpreter of their own experience, and not simply as a reporter of events (282). Al-Qady's narrative does not employ overt criticism or protest, but in assuming the position of interpreter of his experience, by presenting an unstable subjectivity and tracing its interrelations with the communities to which he belongs, he begins to instigate subversive speaking. When in the performance he tells, without explicit detail, of the misery of the Iraqi prison, Al-Qady also describes "the best thing [he] did", which was to paint a dove of peace on the prison wall; although he obeyed the order to wipe it away, he resolved "that art was stronger than the prison ... stronger than Saddam Hussein". Al-Qady's politicised interpretation of his experience enables him to perceive a sense of purpose and agency in the midst of persecution. His contextualised self-representation and integration of the subjectivities of different trauma communities in *Nothing But Nothing* provides an opportunity for conversation with the audience community and thus opens the space for transformation from disempowered victim to instigator of social and cultural change. His scrawled inscription, immediately following the closing night's performance, of the words "thank you" and "freedom" across the large wooden "NO" appropriates the pleas of subservience that punctuate the performance and transforms them into a subversive inscription akin to the one he employed in the Iraqi prison – albeit met with an entirely different response. In *Nothing But Nothing*, Al-Qady

constructs an ethically steadfast identity that is intertwined with different communities of witnesses to trauma, and his narrative is underpinned by an imperative to speak for them, to an engaged community.

Through the Wire

While *Nothing But Nothing* is a solo, autobiographical work in which questions of witnessing and intersubjectivity ultimately concentrate upon Al-Qady as the creative agent, *Through the Wire*, with a cast of seven, complicates further the issue of testimonial representation, even though stylistically it adopts a more documentary tone than Al-Qady's text. *Through the Wire* was devised and directed by Australian practitioner Ros Horin and premiered at the Sydney Opera House studio in 2004 after a workshop season at the Sydney Festival earlier that year; it subsequently toured, with the assistance of production and touring company Performing Lines, to Melbourne, Canberra and regional New South Wales in 2005.²⁷ A verbatim theatre work (which as its name suggests, employs a script gathered or devised from testimonies), it is based upon Horin's interviews with four refugees, Farshid Kheirollahpoor (played by Wadih Dona), Shahin Shafaei (himself), Mohsen Soltany Zand (played by Ali Ammouchi) and Rami (played by Hazem Shammass), who spent between twenty-two months and four years in various Australian detention centres.²⁸ The four men's stories are interwoven in the play with testimonies from three Australian women who provided emotional and practical support for three of the men during their detention: visitor to the centre Suzanne (played by Rhondda Findleton), who supported Soltany Zand, visitor Doreen (played by Katrina Foster), who supported Rami and detention

²⁷ The interstate tour was assisted by the New South Wales state government's Ministry for the Arts after federal funding was unexpectedly withdrawn. The casting of the female roles in the 2004 workshop season differed from that of subsequent performances; in this chapter I refer to the casting of the subsequent fully-realised performances unless otherwise indicated.

²⁸ Iranians Farshid Kheirollahpoor, Shahin Shafaei and Mohsen Soltany Zand were detained together for certain periods in Western Australia and are acquainted with one another, while Iraqi Rami was detained at Villawood in Sydney.

centre officer Gaby (played by Eloise Oxer), who supported and subsequently fell in love with Shafaei.²⁹ The names of the refugees and the women remain unchanged in the play. Verbatim theatre is a relatively common documentary format that has been employed in several recent performance works about asylum seekers and refugees in Australia, including *Citizen X* (premiered 2002), *Something to Declare* (premiered 2003) and *In Our Name* (2004), as well as overseas projects, such as *Asylum Monologues* (premiered 2006) in the United Kingdom, which I discuss briefly in this chapter to explicate some key representational issues.

Through the Wire was marketed with an emphasis on the “truth” of its content; the Performing Lines information pack for the touring production states, “Each of the characters speak[s] authentically – *in their own words*” (2, emphasis in original). The work’s promotional material and programme employed a close-up photographic image of Shafaei, the only person to perform as himself, and as such, the authenticating (and fetishised) body on stage. The reproduced photograph of Shafaei’s refugee body was appropriated, then, according to its commodity value as a true image of difference or otherness, a manoeuvre Graham Huggan characterises in terms of the “postcolonial exotic”: the marketing of Shafaei is indicative of the “the process through which ethnicity is turned into a commodity ... [that] passes through the hands of, is both consumed and endorsed by, many different people” (*The Postcolonial Exotic* 154). I would add that in this context, the political status as refugee is also produced as commodity, alongside ethnicity. *Through the Wire*’s musical accompaniment was composed and performed live by Iranian Kurdish refugee and former detainee Jamal Alrekabi, augmenting its credentials as an authentic enactment of *and* by refugees. It was received in these terms: reviews and media promotions almost uniformly refer to the work’s “true stories” or “human stories” (see, for

²⁹ At the time of production, Soltany Zand, Kheirollahpoor and Rami had been granted permanent protection in Australia. Shafaei held a Temporary Protection Visa. In this chapter I refer to the men as “refugees” rather than “asylum seekers” as this was their status at the time of the production of *Through the Wire*.

example, “Brutal Look”, Clark, Gill and Rose), reflecting an assumption that it met certain standards of testimonial veracity, despite the fact that, with the exception of Shafaei, the refugee characters were played by non-refugee actors. As I argue here, the (re)presentation of a refugee’s testimony by another person introduces significant processes of mediation and construction and it is largely in this respect that *Through the Wire* is a more complicated and problematic example of testimonial enactment than *Nothing But Nothing*, written and performed by its author–witness. In other words, while I acknowledge that Shafaei’s promotion as the authentic body on stage produces him as a commodified figure of otherness, I also recognise that his position in the play is informed utterly, and uniquely among the other cast members, by his authenticity *as himself*.

As in Al-Qady’s work, the set of *Through the Wire* is relatively simple, consisting of a wire cage that foregrounds the play’s emphasis on communication across carceral lines. A live-feed video projects close-up images of the performers, intensifying the face-to-face relation between audience and “witness”, whilst simultaneously enacting a mediation whereby the photographed face is captured in a framework of surveillance. The play depends centrally, however, on words: on its verbatim text. Horin employs a discontinuous narrative technique to explicate the refugees’ stories, with an emphasis on the importance of the cross-cultural connections that formed between the men and (with the exception of Kheirollahpoor, whose strength derives mainly from his activism in detention and his friendships with other detainees, including Soltany Zand) the Australian women through the barriers of the detention system. The text switches between the seven different perspectives to construct an overarching narrative trajectory: reason for fleeing homeland, journey to seek asylum, detention in Australia and development of support friendships, visa approval and release. The play coheres with the use of dialogic connectors,

including thematic overlaps, the repetition or elaboration of comments and recollections, the sharing of jokes and making of comparisons.³⁰

Interspersed with one another, the refugee's stories, variations on the trope of personal integrity and / or resistance to oppression resulting in persecution, become affectively generalised in terms of a plea for ethical recognition and response by reasonable Australians. At the beginning of the play, the men give their reasons for fleeing their homelands. Soltany Zand (who, as I discuss in chapter three, has produced written and spoken word poetry in Australia) had been a clerk of Iran's Military Courts and became a whistle-blower on judicial corruption. Rami had been a hospitality student and hotel concierge and was tortured in Iraq after providing foreigners with directions to a restaurant. Kheirollahpoor was a medical technician in Iran and fled after attempting to covertly investigate the suspected poisoning of Ahmad Khomeini, the son of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. Shafaei was forced to abandon his life in Iran after a raid on a theatre that covertly staged his work, which had already been banned for challenging state ideology.

Within the dialogic framework of Horin's text, the men constitute a witnessing community, sharing similarities in terms of geo-cultural background (with the exception of Iraqi Rami) and persecution, followed by the trauma of prolonged incarceration in Australia. Thomas Trezise observes that the representation of trauma within a collectivity constructs the self "as a tension between particular and universal" (880), and certainly, the structure of *Through the Wire* establishes a universal thematic focus around which the specific or particular coalesce. The four men offer their testimony as members of the political category of "unauthorised asylum seekers detained in Australia". The play's tendency to universalise the four refugees' experiences in terms of an integrity-persecution-salvation narrative arc risks the commodification of which Huggan

³⁰ Direct quotations from the unpublished playscript of *Through the Wire* have not been permitted here.

writes with reference to refugee stories in Australia: “unsung heroes are pitted against dehumanized/dehumanizing villains in an allegorical struggle to lift the burden of the oppressed” (*Australian Literature* 130). Inevitably, *Through the Wire* and similar texts – including those authored by refugees – circulate against the backdrop of a global fetishisation of homogenous victimhood; this might indeed be a necessary aspect of the always-imperfect project of representation in the context of aggressive government and media commandeering of discourse on asylum.

Each refugee’s story is told with reference to others with whom their lives are imbricated. At the play’s opening, Kheirollahpoor and Shafaei describe being urged to flee by friends, and offer small details of their family lives: in Kheirollahpoor’s case, his mother’s murder during the 1979 Iranian revolution and the disappearance of fellow clinicians following the suspected poisoning plot; in Shafaei’s case, his family’s wish that he would pursue a safer career path as a doctor and the arrest and disappearance of the director of his play. Shafaei speaks of his boat journey to Australia using the first-person plural pronoun “we”, citing the nationalities of the 112 people on board, describing their fear and violent sickness (Levi also uses this form of community subjectivity with respect to Holocaust survivors; as he states, “I can use the first person plural: I am not one of the taciturn” [*The Drowned* 150]). Similar descriptions of life in the homeland and stories of fleeing are recounted by Soltany Zand, who explains that his mother gave him her jewellery to pay the people smugglers, and Rami, whose desire to excel in the field of hospitality prompted his ill-fated communication with foreigners.

Kheirollahpoor tells of how at Port Headland detention centre he was a “detainees’ representative” and something of an activist, speaking on community radio about the poor conditions in which hundreds of people were being held and the violent coercion of several individuals by guards. Kheirollahpoor and Soltany Zand became involved in a co-ordinated mass break-out and protest (with Woomera detainees); Kheirollahpoor recounts the planning and

execution of the action (of which he was an instigator), involving almost 100 people, in terms of “we”, invoking a group identity that cohered upon chants of “freedom” and “protection not detention”. Also active in advocating for his fellow detainees, Soltany Zand proudly recalls an incident in which he defended a small child who was being treated with contempt by guards. Similarly, Shafaei explains his role in translating official correspondence for fellow detainees unable to understand English. The play’s testimony is formulated, then, with reference to interconnected, group subjectivities and thereby marks out the politicised space of an asylum community.

As well as cohering a trauma community of non-Australians, *Through the Wire* is concerned with lines of cosmopolitan engagement with Australians – specifically, the close, trusting relationships between three of the men and the women who were willing to bear witness to their trauma. This structure of intimate identification, where an asylum seeker’s story is received by an Australian support figure, underpins the recent Australian documentary films about asylum seekers, Tom Zubrycki’s *Molly and Mobarak* (2003), Clara Law’s *Letters to Ali* (2004) and Steve Thomas’s *Hope* (2007). In basic terms, such a structure in performance enables the Australian supporters to serve as conduits through which the testimony of asylum seekers can be received by an Australian audience. The women in *Through the Wire* serve mainly to offer their perspectives on the men’s experiences and on the detention system in general. They become symbolic of a listening Australian community – one that is, not insignificantly, also a gendered community: the importance of Australian women in constructing lines of communication and advocacy is noted in my analysis of anthologies in chapter two. The structure of a listening relationship is presented to audiences and with it the affective pull of ethical responsibility; as one reviewer observes, “The power of testimony is irresistible ... [the work] challenges our very conceptions of national decency and moves us to sympathetic involvement with these most

shamefully treated fellow human beings” (Helen Thompson 9). The intimacy of the relationships between the refugees and the women also provides the context for testimony that exceeds its traumatic context and bears witness to “the material reality of a ‘lived life’” (Rodan 56). The representation of these relationships in *Through the Wire* fleshes out its lived lives, unfixing the testimony from, in Salverson’s words, “a discourse of loss and the tragic” (“Change on Whose Terms?” 122) via brief recollections of jokes, teasing, anguished phone calls, legal struggles, a birthday celebration and a burgeoning romantic relationship.

In her role as writer / deviser / director, Horin appears to have been anxious to uphold certain standards of testimonial veracity; in a newspaper interview she explains, “I went through the process of how do I know these people are telling the truth. I wasn’t like some bleeding heart automatically believing everything” (qtd in Morgan 14) and elsewhere describes her approach to the project as “quite forensic” (qtd in Simmonds 124). Aligning herself as “us” within the “them and us” refugee–Australian binary, Horin implicitly distances herself from the emotive unreliability that (as Levi recognised) can be associated with traumatised subjectivity and positions herself as arbiter of truth. Gilmore argues that legalistic imperatives of truth, accuracy and evidence can put witnesses in a position of disempowerment: “Because testimonial projects require subjects to confess, to bear witness, to make public and shareable a private and intolerable pain, they enter into a legalistic frame in which their efforts can move quickly beyond their interpretation and control, become exposed as ambiguous, and therefore subject to judgements about their veracity and worth” (7). Noting similarly the structures of power around which testimony often operates, Gayatri Spivak goes so far as to define it as “the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression, to a less oppressed other” (“Three Women’s Texts” 7). The burden of scepticism placed upon the witness to trauma, leads, as Kennedy notes, “to an unsettling realisation: that only the culturally conferred status and authority of the historian

distinguishes his or her interpretation of evidence from the interpretations found in testimonies” (“Stolen Generations Testimony” 121-22). In her construction of *Through the Wire*, Horin’s interpretation of the refugees’ stories is self-authorised, and her creative framework is the vehicle in which the testimony is communicated to the Australian public.

The representation of a witness by another person, by an actor, is a crucial aspect of the transformation of witness–subject into other, and a key concern of this chapter; as I have explained, three non-refugee performers played three of the refugees in *Through the Wire*, speaking their testimony and presenting themselves *as* the refugee witness–subjects. Salverson identifies the risks involved in this form of representation-of-the-other in terms of an eroticised identification with trauma narratives, or what she calls an “erotics of suffering” or an “erotics of injury”. Recounting her unease watching a community college performance event based upon the experiences of refugees, Salverson observes: “Audience and actors together were looking *out* at some exoticised and deliberately tragic other. Even more discomfiting than the voyeurism I felt a participant in was the almost erotic manner in which the actors performed pain” (“Change on Whose Terms?” 122). These observations focus some of the challenges and ethical implications involved in attempts – especially mimetic attempts such as those of *Through the Wire* – to represent another person’s trauma.

In the face of questions regarding the ethics of employing actors to perform as refugees, it can be argued persuasively that practical and psychological concerns take precedence over representational authority or authenticity. In reference to Sonja Linden’s *Asylum Monologues*, a verbatim work created by Actors for Refugees in the United Kingdom (recently re-named Actors for Human Rights) that utilises professional actors to present refugees’ testimonies, Tim Finch³¹ argues:

³¹ Tim Finch is Director of Communications at the United Kingdom Refugee Council.

The way to change people's minds or people's perceptions on this issue is to hear from asylum seekers and refugees themselves ... It wouldn't be appropriate and it's certainly not possible for there to be a sort of 'touring circus' of asylum seekers and refugees going around every community ... what Actors for Refugees does is the next best thing: uses their real words, their real experiences, but uses other people to get that across; so it's testimony. (qtd in *Asylum Monologues* promotional DVD np)

Asylum Monologues is presented by actors who sit or stand before a microphone and read from the testimonial script; as the work's director Christine Bacon explains, the simple presentational style means that the work requires minimal rehearsal for the actors, who work gratis, and is easily transportable – on 21 June 2007 the work was performed in twelve British cities simultaneously (Cox interview np). Finch's reference to a "touring circus" suggests a concern with what Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo describe as "reproducing the refugee as spectacle" (196), and Bacon invokes a similar argument to explain why refugees do not perform as themselves in testimonial works such as *Asylum Monologues*: "Refugees, unless they're actors, are not performers, so it's ... tokenistic to do that" (Cox interview np). Downplaying the problematics of the gap between actor and refugee-witness, Bacon emphasises the transparency or honesty of the enactments in *Asylum Monologues*, arguing, "there's no sense that we're trying to manipulate ... or [that we] can't be trusted", and that the actors are discouraged from the type of emotive portrayals that trouble Salverson, being instructed to "forget *being* the character ... you as an actor [are] investing in this testimony ... bearing witness to this person's experience ... standing shoulder to shoulder with them" (Cox interview np), rather than mimetically performing *as a refugee*.

The views expressed by Finch and Bacon speak to crucial issues of psychological wellbeing and practical awareness-raising, to the importance of representing the testimony of

people who are not prepared to speak in a public context. Such concerns are certainly applicable to *Through the Wire*, which in positioning its performers imaginatively *as* the people whose words they enact, requires of them a greater actorly / affective investment than is the case in *Asylum Monologues*. Receiving the work in terms of the theatrical paradigm it establishes, one critic of the 2004 Sydney Festival workshop season hints at a conception of “truthfulness” that is reminiscent of Delbo’s, calling for a recalibration of the testimony–theatricality relation: “The reality of the stories ... makes them less theatrical. Perhaps they could be condensed and combined, making them less literal, but more emotionally honest and theatrically effective” (Dunne 19). However, Finch and Bacon’s observations cannot be applied in the case of Kheirollahpoor, who auditioned unsuccessfully for the role of himself. Not surprisingly, Dona was uneasy upon learning that he had prevailed over the person he was to portray: “He was the real guy so you can imagine how I felt in hindsight. I didn’t actually know that it was him in the [audition] room. I thought it was some exotic actor that [Horin] had selected to read as well” (qtd in Krauth 28). Dona’s misidentification of Kheirollahpoor as an “exotic” actor is ironic, indicating that within the mimetic framework of the theatre it is more likely that one will encounter a representation of the witness rather than the witness himself; the refugee is already designated as an absence to be filled by the presence of a performer. This is a paradigmatically different approach to the telling of refugee stories than that of community theatre companies overseas such as Birmingham-based Banner Theatre and Toronto-based Jumbies Theatre, both of which are underpinned by ideals of social inclusion, justice and community-building, as evinced in the recent works *They Get Free Mobiles... Don't They?* (Banner, 2007) and *Bridge of One Hair* (Jumbies, 2007), employing professional and non-professional performers from local and refugee or migrant backgrounds.

Asylum Monologues is typically, though not exclusively, performed by white British actors. Bacon maintains that this is a reflection of the availability of actors in Britain and the non-

racially-selective basis upon which performers are recruited; moreover, she suggests that it enables the work to speak more affectively to the similarly constituted (in other words, predominantly white) British audience community (Cox interview np). While clearly problematic, this argument accords with Bacon's stated aim of speaking for but not *as* refugees; it acknowledges the gap between refugee and actor, and the actor's position as symbolic of the traumatised subject, rather than as an imitation of the subject. The casting of *Through the Wire* operated differently: while the women's roles were performed by white Australian actresses, the refugees' roles were performed by actors of Middle Eastern descent. Dona is a Lebanese migrant, Ammouchi (playing Soltany Zand) is the son of Lebanese immigrants and Shammas (playing Rami) is an Israel-born Palestinian. In contrast, then, with Bacon's social-pedagogic aims, the enactment of testimony in *Through the Wire* represents an attempt to mask the gap between witness–subject and performer. Kirsten Krauth reports that Kheirollahpoor, Soltany Zand and Rami approved the actors that represented them in *Through the Wire* (28); this acknowledges the importance of agency and self-determination in the representation of disempowered witnesses by others, and associates Horin's project with these imperatives. The overarching paradigm of veracity in *Through the Wire* prompted one previewer of the Sydney Festival rehearsed reading season to conflate witness and actor, writing, "Four refugees will join theatre industry heavyweights Jacki Weaver and Lucy Bell on stage tonight" (Clark 18); another commented, "there's a dignity conferred especially by the closeness of the Iraqi and Iranian players to their material" ("Brutal Look" 9). These comments are indicative of the "crossover" (Krauth 28) between witness and actor upon which Horin's construction of a trauma / asylum community is deliberately founded, and underline the complex slipperiness of the ethno-cultural terms in which such a community is imagined.

From an actor's perspective, Dona embraces these crossovers and confluences, observing that while he is aware of the responsibility of representing a specific individual, he embraces the potential universality of testimony: "Words are words ... it does not matter to me what their origin is" (qtd in Krauth 28). Dona's comment might be an appropriate reflection on the nature of theatre, which involves the interpretation and appropriation of words by a performer (under direction) and the concomitant loss of authority over those words on the part of their author; in this sense, the transformation from (specific) self to (general) other that occurs when a witness's testimony is enacted can be seen as intrinsic to the performance medium. In order to respond with compassionate identification to the testimonial stories enacted in *Through the Wire*, audience members are required to engage with the generalisation and structures of symbolic community through which the stories are represented – in other words, they must engage with the *idea* of the individual witness. Yet, as Dona's discomfort being selected over Kheirollahpoor indicates, the actors in *Through the Wire* could not avoid questions of representational authority. Oxer, playing Shafaei's partner Gaby Schultz in the touring production, was anxious to reconcile the individuals she had met with the representational framework of the play: "I've met Gaby a few times and ... I've had to make sure I've done justice to their story" (qtd in Longworth 50). This challenge was compounded for Oxer by the fact that Shafaei is an experienced theatre practitioner and held specific creative opinions on his self-enactment; she recalls, "Shahin tells me one thing but Ros wants something else ... It's her vision, her creative frame" (qtd in Longworth 50).

The problem of representational authority, of a centralised creative frame, is most acute with respect to Shafaei's performance. Shafaei had to audition for his role as himself, and commented in media interviews connected with the production on his discomfort being instructed / constructed by Horin: "I do struggle with [the performance] ... It's a very bizarre thing to be on the stage as yourself but being directed by someone else" (qtd in Humphries 38);

elsewhere he observes, “there’s a director who says ‘Walk in this way’ or ‘Tell this line in this way’ and you know that in your real life it was done another way” (qtd in Gill 100). While the crossovers between actor and witness of which Krauth writes are instances of literal (interpersonal) intersubjectivity in relation to the three actors who played Kheirollahpoor, Soltany Zand and Rami, the idea of crossover is also applicable to Shafaei’s constructed subjectivity in his performance as himself. Inevitably, the figure of “Shahin” represented in the play is similar, yet other, to the individual who experienced the traumatic event(s) and offered his testimony.

Horin’s authority over Shafaei’s self-representation contrasts with the processes underpinning *Nothing But Nothing*, which was almost entirely Al-Qady’s creation, both in terms of writing and theatrical realisation; directorial assistant Leah Mercer explains that although Al-Qady was assisted in English pronunciation and phrasing, the piece “was not a collaboration; I (along with some other key individuals) was really just helping to facilitate [Al-Qady’s] vision and his vision was very clear and very specific. It was as if he already had it all clearly performed in his head. For the most part we were just assisting him with the logistics of that vision” (personal correspondence np). Because it was not mediated by conventional direction, Al-Qady’s enactment of his intersubjective testimonial narrative differs in terms of agency and authority from Shafaei’s representation of the self. While both *Nothing But Nothing* and *Through the Wire* involve the transformation of witnessing selves and the creation of despecified and collective subjectivities, the processes by which these took place differed in the two productions along the crucial lines of agency and creative authority.

If the documentary presentation of the testimony and the ethnicity-specific casting of *Through the Wire* attempted to mask distinctions between the actors and the witness-subjects, the emotional difference between Shafaei’s approach to his role and that of the other actors remained vast. Dona’s comment, “words are words” (qtd in Krauth 28) comes into sharp

contrast alongside Shafaei's performative experience: "I feel the pain in each dialogue ... it was very hard for me to reveal every personal detail of my life" (qtd in Gill 100). Confounding her expectations, Krauth found Shafaei's enactment, the performance of the true witness, less convincing than those of the non-refugee actors: "The first time I see *Through the Wire* I am least engaged by Shafaei's performance. This unsettles me for weeks but when I go the second time I realise this man tells his story with the distance and abstraction of a writer / actor through necessity; he can be deported any time" (28). Given Shafaei's acknowledged struggle with self-enactment, the risk of re-traumatising by repeatedly revisiting the past must be added to immediate political fears.

Shafaei regards his performance in *Through the Wire* and his solo piece, *Refugitive* – discussed in more depth in chapter three – as vehicles by which he was able to assist a community of others; in 2005, he observed that his work enables him to help "the people who are still in detention, my friends who I am still in contact with, and I know how much pain they are going through still" (qtd in Gill 100). In a newspaper interview, Shafaei recalls the day that a television was brought into the Curtin detention compound: "The first time we got a video, this kid came on screen, and a three-year-old boy, who hadn't seen another child for 10 months, just ran to the screen and started touching the kid on the TV. That will break anyone's heart. You feel that – why should this kid feel like that?" (qtd in Stark 2). Shafaei interprets the subjectivity and social deprivation of the child, who is not in a position to articulate his own experience. In the same interview, he speaks for other members of the community of detainees, interpreting their motivations: "The people who would go on hunger strike, they would tell you that this is a situation where you have no choice ... People cut themselves to feel that they were still alive. They feel that they are not any more accepted as human" (qtd in Stark 2). Shafaei utilises his access to the Australian media to speak and advocate on behalf of the other asylum seekers with

whom his trauma occurred – to testify for what *they would tell* if given the opportunity. He makes their trauma public and identifies its significance within the collective historico-political context of the Australian immigration detention system.

An equivalence can be found in Krauth's discussion of *Through the Wire* with the issue of transformation from specific to general in representations of asylum seekers and refugees. Krauth dedicates her article to "S*", a man in Baxter detention centre with whom she corresponds. The use of a letter in place of a name serves, in one respect, to protect the identity, and therefore the refugee status application, of the asylum seeker; it also generalises the relationship between Krauth and the detainee in terms of an Australian–asylum seeker engagement akin to the cross-cultural, cross-gender conversations represented in *Through the Wire*. In a televised interview with Shafaei, Australian broadcaster Andrew Denton points out that he (Shafaei) and the other detainees were subject to a numerical identification system: "You got to Curtin and you ... ceased really being Shahin Shafaei, you became refugee number 1319" (*Enough Rope* np). As illustrated in the writing of Ka-Tzetnik 135633, cited at the beginning of this chapter, and in Al-Qady's self-identification as "5 million refugees", the depersonalising state manoeuvre of numbering bare lives might be appropriated in a strategy of resistance as a locus around which a community of witnesses can coalesce and be spoken for. This was the case for Shafaei / 1319: in *Through the Wire* Shafaei and Gaby wryly explain that Shafaei belonged to a group of detainees, whose numbers started with the unlucky 13, that became known as a vocal, rebellious collection of young men. In small resistances such as this – *interpretations* that amount to Alcoff and Gray's subversive speaking – the assigning of numbers is reinscribed according to the terms of those who bear them.

Reflecting in 2008 (after an interval of three years) on his work in *Through the Wire*, Shafaei considers that the emotional stake involved in his self-representation justifies Horin's directorial interventions:

There were nights that I was emotionally connected to my story; you would imagine as an actor that that would have to be the best performance, but that was the most monotonous performance because I was emotional. And straightaway it would affect six other professional actors. That performance would be completely flat ... That is why Ros *needed* to take me somewhere else. (Cox interview np)

This retrospective observation seems to bear out Bacon's argument that the iteration required for performance constitutes too great an emotional demand: "you can't ask asylum seekers to continually get up and tell their story" (Cox interview np). It also indicates that for Shafaei, the repetition of his trauma, although voluntary, did not result in the cathartic release of voice of which Caruth writes (*Unclaimed Experience* 2). While Gilbert and Lo suggest that the distance observed by Krauth in Shafaei's performance indicates his "successful insertion of a critical caesura between the related subjectivities of performer and refugee" (197), Shafaei's own recollection of his work discloses that his distant performances were the moments at which that caesura failed; the nights when he was able to alternate successfully between sad, frightened, playful and humorous emotional states as required by the role occurred, as he explains, when he was able to transform affective, painful subjectivity into a communicable *image* of his subjectivity (Cox interview np). His experience aligns with the problem of unrepresentability discussed by Laub, Edkins, Gilmore and others: when Shafaei was connected to his trauma in performance, he appeared before the audience as distant and disconnected – in essence, incommunicable.

CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)

The final performance work examined in this chapter is underpinned by self-conscious awareness of the problems of testimonial representation, and as such, offers alternative (and challenging) ways of bearing witness to the plight of the mostly silenced others that seek asylum in Australia. Sydney-based theatre company Version 1.0's *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* was produced by Australian theatre practitioner and scholar David Williams and devised communally by its performers and dramaturg Paul Dwyer using Hansard transcripts of the Senate Select Committee on A Certain Maritime Incident, tabled in October 2002. This Committee investigated the information flows surrounding the events of 6-8 October 2001, when the HMAS *Adelaide* intercepted the distressed smuggling vessel SIEV 4 (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel 4) and rescued its passengers. The incident has come to be known as the "children overboard affair" because of a widely repeated report, later found to be incorrect, that a child (or children) had been thrown into the water by a person (or persons) on board the SIEV 4. With some additions written by the performers and dramaturg, the extracted Select Committee transcripts elucidate some of the ways in which accounts of the incident were reported and interpreted by various individuals, including Navy personnel who were present at the event, senior Navy personnel and politicians to whom these eye-witnesses reported and a selection of senators from various political parties.

The Version 1.0 production, first presented at Performance Space, Sydney in 2004, touring later that year to Canberra venue The Street Theatre, contrasts crucially with the verbatim theatre projects about asylum seekers and refugees, of which *Through the Wire* is a prominent example, that were produced in Australia around the same period – indeed, John McCallum describes *CMI* as a "mock-verbatim" work (136). *CMI* calls directly into question the idea that the use of verbatim testimonies brings a performance work closer to "truth". The Select Committee, the performance seems to maintain, achieved little in terms of the verification and

analysis of events, much less in apprehending asylum seekers as human witnesses rather than abstract players; Williams observes, “The Liberal senators behave shockingly, they stonewall and deny and waste time, but the Labor Party doesn’t care about the asylum seekers, it just wants to embarrass the government” (qtd in Norrie 15). Because the Committee heard no testimony from any of the 223 asylum seekers that were on board the SIEV 4, *CMI* confronts some of the ways in which asylum seekers are constructed in dominant Australian discourses and knowledges; the work serves to turn a mirror upon Australian narratives of nationhood, identity and values vis-à-vis asylum seekers, its politically-produced excess. In devising a script based upon the complicated, convoluted strands of communication and analysis tabled from the Select Committee, Version 1.0 constructs a chilling political satire of Australians unwilling to engage on human, face-to-face terms with the non-belonging, non-citizens in their midst.

In contrast with the concern with veracity and “authenticity” in *Through the Wire*, the problems involved in employing actors to perform the testimonies of others are apprehended directly and self-reflexively in *CMI*. The nine performers (Danielle Antaki, Nikki Heywood, Stephen Klinder, Deborah Pollard, Christopher Ryan, David Williams, Frank Dwyer, Ren Khava and Minna McClure) essentially appear as themselves, “playing” the thirteen people involved in the Select Committee with self-conscious artificiality. A reviewer of the Canberra production notes of the work’s studied non-mimesis, “the actors play in character, but drop out at times as if it is almost too difficult to play the role” (“Awash” 23). The gap between the Committee testimony and Version 1.0’s performance of it is underlined with comic self-consciousness in the opening scene, which consists of an interview with Defence Minister Peter Reith, played by a small child (Frank Dwyer, Khava and McClure, alternating) who reads the testimony aloud while their words are processed and evaluated on a lie detector machine. From the outset, then, *CMI* reflects upon its own processes of representation, accentuating the spaces of mediation that

verbatim theatre often attempts to conceal; as a reviewer of the Sydney production argues, the child's reading "establishes a performance code in which voices and gestures sifted from the Senate transcript are assumed, dropped and wrestled with as a way of imagining the kind of dubious political operations that can make national headlines alternately happen or disappear" (Bryoni Trezise 6). After several minutes have passed and some more of the testimony has been heard, an overhead projection announces to the audience: "WE KNOW THAT WE ARE NOT REALLY THE SENATORS WHO TOOK PART IN THE CMI SENATE INQUIRY. STEPHEN IS A LOT SHORTER THAN SENATOR COOK AND DEBORAH WHO PLAYS SENATOR FAULKNER IS ACTUALLY A WOMAN. WE FOUND THAT OUT AFTER THE AUDITION" (149).³² As well as parodying the misinformation that is the central subject of the performance, this statement satirically pre-empts the charge of manipulating official records – the audience is left in no doubt of the gaps between the event in question, the testimony of that event, and the representation of that testimony within the theatre space.

The statement is one of several interventions and subversions that punctuate the performance, producing a paradigm of disorientation amid the verbatim; when the "Committee" descends into chaos and confusion and the wheel-mounted enquiry table that dominates the stage begins to spin, another overhead projection reads, "NO TABLES WERE SPUN DURING THE CMI ENQUIRY. EXCEPT PERHAPS THE TEA TROLLEY. BUT THIS IS SPECULATION NOT FACT" (154-55). This and similar references to processes of theatrical manipulation mimic the concern with precision of representation that is manifest in the Select Committee testimonies. While the statements from which the text of *CMI* is drawn employ exacting, careful language, they are based upon ambiguous evidence and interpretive constructions. Particularly striking is the slippery concept of the "fog of war" upon which Vice

³² All quotations from *CMI* (*A Certain Maritime Incident*) are taken from the version of the play published in *Australasian Drama Studies* (2006).

Admiral Shackleton bases his account of the events at sea in the Autumn of 2001. *CMI* takes this up, quoting him at length:

It is related to the reality that everything is real but it is not real. You are trying to pull threads and strands from many miscellaneous and sometimes disconnected information flows. You are trying to build a puzzle from many disconnected pieces ... You are dealing with millions of shades of grey ... This is constantly moving and going up and down all the time. (147-48)

In the performance, as in the Committee from which it is devised, this evasive articulation of the difficulties of perception during the foggy event is met with approval from Senator Brandis, who remarks that Shackleton's statement is "Most eloquent" (148); the audience is left to ponder the nature of the fog in which Shackleton found himself, or as Williams incisively asks in an essay on the production, "Does such a 'fog or war' actually exist, or is there simply a fog machine?" (116).

Peggy Phelan's recent observation, "The condition of witnessing what one did not (and perhaps cannot) see is the condition of whatever age we are now entering" (577), is glaringly exemplified in the context of the Senate enquiry, in which the politicians who testified were not present witnesses of the (non)event in question. This is comically underlined at the beginning of *CMI* when the child-as-Reith asserts that children were thrown overboard on the basis of photographs and a low-quality film that he has not seen:

these photos show absolutely without question whatsoever that there were children in the water. Now we have a number of people, obviously RAN people who were there who reported the children were thrown into the water ... I have subsequently been told that they have also got film. That film is apparently on HMAS *Adelaide*. I have not seen it myself and apparently the quality of it is not

very good, and it's infrared or something but I am told that someone has looked at it and it is an absolute fact, children were thrown into the water. (145)

This verbatim statement exhibits flagrant disregard for the significant mediation involved in the indirect (mis)apprehension of the event, and its enactment in *CMI* confronts this with the use of obvious mediations. The third act of the performance, "Chinese whispers and 'tearoom gossip'", which opens with a series of confusing and chaotic phone calls and much misunderstood communication, presents a hyperbolic exposition of processes of mediation and distortion – in essence, an absurdly uninformed and ineffectual mode of speaking-of-others.

While *Nothing But Nothing* seeks in various ways to engage conversations with a receptive audience community and *Through the Wire* portrays compassionate, affective relationships between asylum seekers and Australians, tracing testimonial narratives in and around these, *CMI* works upon a clear moral and ideological distinction between two cultural communities: "Middle Eastern looking" (159) asylum seekers and Australians. One of the major interpretive lines along which this distinction is articulated is that of "values"; when questioned by Senator Jacinta Collins on the proposition that Australian Navy personnel were manipulated into rescuing the asylum seekers from the sinking vessel, and moreover, that "the abuse of children is a systematic pattern amongst asylum seekers" (157), Real Admiral Smith observes, "In our situation, if you take a sailor and he sees a mother and a child in distress, his natural inclination will be to help. That natural inclination, the culture of which we are a part, was being exploited" (158). When questioned further on whether he believes that care for children is a feature that distinguishes Australians from the group of asylum seekers, Smith comments, "I am not prepared to comment on the culture of the people involved here. I can only comment on our own culture and our own values. I saw our culture and our values, the things for which we stand, being exploited" (158). In speaking for the perceived homogeneity of Australian inclinations and values, and their

exploitation by the asylum seekers, Smith (as represented in *CMI* by way of his own words) demarcates the two communities along lines that are not merely national or territorial, but also moral. The capacity for humane response that is deemed characteristic of Australian community – and certainly, in Smith’s terms, of the “professional young men and women who were being asked to do a very difficult job” (158) – is perceived to be manipulated by the ruthless cohesion with which the “other” community eschews such characteristics.

Similarly, Senator Mason observes that during the embarkation of the Transit Security Element (rescue personnel), the intentions and behaviour of the asylum seeker group were unitary: “During the riots self harm and threats to children became commonplace and were not seen to be out of the ordinary, almost a ‘modus operandi’” (159). In a strategic paradox, while the human motivations of the asylum seekers are inferred with some precision and confidence here, they are spoken of in bureaucratic, dehumanising terms, described variously as SUNCs (Suspected Unauthorised Non-Citizens), UAs (Unauthorised Arrivals), PIIs (Potential Illegal Immigrants) and UBAs (Unauthorised Boat Arrivals); as a reviewer of the Sydney production observes, the subjects of the enquiry “exist only as acronyms” (Norrie 15). In speaking of a group of people that are deemed entirely separate from Australian community, and who do not testify for themselves, Smith and Mason are able to infer in simplistically pejorative terms these people’s collective subjectivity (and fulfill a common desire to believe in the goodness of one’s own people or nation). This inference, I argue, can be differentiated from Al-Qady’s performance as a member of a traumatised community, which while similarly strategic, serves to advocate for those who have experienced similar persecution and to historicise asylum in terms of a global plea for recognition and response. *CMI* concerns itself with the ways in which the Select Committee testified about (and discredited) a community defined in terms of cultural and moral alterity – one existing in a conspicuously disempowered position in relation to the Australian political and

defence authorities that monopolised all avenues for testimony on what they designated as the “children overboard” affair.

The fourth and final act of *CMI*, “Sunk without a trace”, deals with the secondary focus of the Select Committee, which was the SIEV X disaster of 19 October 2001, in which 353 asylum seekers drowned on their way to Australia. As I mentioned in the introduction, this tragedy occupies the largely silenced fringes of the nation’s narratives of commemoration. Attending to this silence, but also cognisant of its inevitability, Version 1.0 concludes the performance with a computerised voice “speaking” testimonies from the few survivors of the disaster, while a corresponding written transcript is projected onto the back wall of the theatre. The testimonies, indistinguishable from one another in this mode of presentation, are drawn from translations of interviews filmed in Indonesia after the sinking (McCallum 140). The computerised voice dehumanises the witnesses, and in this way, even as it seeks in the final act to represent the testimony of asylum seekers, *CMI* insists on the distance that separates the Australian community from these survivors, and from the numerous drowned for whom the survivors speak. It also signifies that the testimonies are always incomplete, occupying the fractured space between the bare life of the survivor and the death of the drowned; it is beneficial in this context to re-state Agamben’s characterisation of “the intimate dual structure of testimony as an act of an *auctor*, as the difference and completion of an impossibility and possibility of speaking, of the inhuman and the human, a living being and a speaking being” (*Remnants* 151). As the human / inhuman voice speaks in the final moments of *CMI*, the performers (the “Committee”) begin to clear away the performance props and all but one performer (laid out as in a mortuary) depart the stage, thereby emphasising the containment via non-response to which asylum seekers’ voices are subjected and positioning the audience as the only potential listening community – or what McCallum refers to as an “affective community” (141). Here, Kershaw’s

observation regarding the audience's role "in the active construction of meaning as a performance event proceeds" (16) can be seen to apply in the absence of performers: in leaving audience members literally to make their own ends, *CMI* confronts them with the onus of listening and responding.

The ongoing challenge: representing connection

Rodan cautions that attempts to testify about the "experience of others in order to construct a grand narrative will inevitably exclude those who have a different experience to the majority" (59). In testimonial theatre work that entails the speaking of and for other subjectivities, there is a risk of homogenising under the logic of community, of subsuming the differences between witnessing subjectivities. When a witness speaks for another person who is positioned similarly in relation to a traumatic event – for example, when Al Qady speaks for a family member or fellow refugee in the same moment as he tells his own story – the risk of homogenising largely concentrates upon issues of individual identity and the unrepresentable specificity of traumatic experience. The representation of a witness to trauma by a performer who has not experienced the same or similar traumatic event, as occurred in *Through the Wire*, introduces a different set of issues relating to agency and self-determination, to the transformation of the witness–subject within the framework of the performance. *Through the Wire* also offers a salient exposition of the dilemma of mimetically or affectively speaking-as-other (potentially engaging Salverson's "erotics of injury") in order to connect with an audience, in its juxtaposition of performances that were "convincing" enough to prompt critics to elide refugee and artist with Shafaei's apparent emotional distance – a sign, as he explains, of painful emotional engagement with his own memories. A self-reflexive work such as *CMI* deliberately avoids affective engagement with the

testimony from which it is drawn, seeking instead to emphasise its own mediation of and dislocation from the testimony, and in turn, the mediation and dislocation separating the testimony from the events at sea. The work also highlights a key implication of pejorative government and media representations of asylum seekers: that these are the product of overwhelming power imbalance, moral manipulation and the control of spaces from which to testify.

The performance works I have examined offer different ways of apprehending the construction and narration of community or commonality. This narration may, as *CMI* shrewdly illustrates in its presentation of statements made by Australians about asylum seekers, deploy moral distinctions in order to consolidate the wedge that continues to be drawn between western receiving nations and the global community of unauthorised asylum seekers: politically produced as non-citizen, non-belonging excess. Alternatively, it may facilitate the type of affective generalisation that emerges in *Nothing But Nothing*, whereby Al-Qady's testimony is situated and its significance expanded vis-à-vis a trauma community, on whose behalf he initiates conversation with the audience community. In *Through the Wire*, the idea of community is based explicitly upon lines of identification and communication across boundaries; indeed, its representational problematics highlight both the dangers and rewards of affective cosmopolitan community, whether between detainees and Australians, witnesses and performers, or performers and audiences. As I examine further in subsequent chapters, the model of engagement or connection across the divide between asylum seekers or refugees and Australians is a crucial, if limited, basis upon which creative works on asylum achieve social, cultural and political efficacy.

Dialogue and Decentralisation: Anthologies of Writing

We, the Iranian asylum seekers in Port Headland, Villawood and Baxter are writing to tell you that we escaped from the country of Iran for our freedom and our survival.

—Letter from Iranian detainees, *Another Country*

Writing on asylum: rhizomatic dialogues

The small numbers of asylum seekers and refugees that have been involved in creative arts projects in Australia since 2001 have typically been men with professional arts experience and / or tertiary-level education: the figure of the refugee artist–witness that emerged in the previous chapter bears this out.³³ Undoubtedly, Australian women play prominent roles in the support and facilitation of creative work by asylum seekers and refugees, but these projects do not often present the work of women. In this chapter, I situate two anthologies of writing by asylum seekers and refugees and a third by school-age Australians and refugees as projects created and circulated across heterogeneous, dialogic networks that decentre the typical model of the refugee artist–witness and of the Australian artist on asylum. *Another Country: Writers in Detention* (2004, expanded in 2007) is edited by Australia-based novelists and human rights advocates Thomas

³³ This tendency is not, of course, absolute. In 2007, an exhibition involving seven male and six female refugee and migrant artists, “Dis/place: Making Work in Exile”, was presented at the Campbelltown Arts Centre in New South Wales. In 2005, a quilt art project by Iraqi women refugees, “Between Memory and Hope: Tears for the Future”, was exhibited at the Potato Shed Arts Centre in Geelong, Victoria.

Keneally and Rosie Scott and presents writing by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated asylum seekers and refugees. *Alone, Together: Writing from Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia* (2006) is collected and edited by the Refugee Claimants Support Centre in Brisbane and presents writing by the centre's clients and by other members of Brisbane's refugee communities. *Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories by Young Writers Aged 11-20 Years* (2004), edited by Australians Sonja Dechian, Heather Millar and Eva Sallis, developed out of a nationwide schools competition based upon engaged conversation across cultural boundaries. In each of these anthologies, a range of subject-types – men, women and children from different ethnic, cultural, religious, educational and linguistic backgrounds – coalesces so that a diversity of voices is presented within the privileged cultural space of a published text.

The anthologies can be defined according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of "minor literature": published in a major language (English, some of which is translated) from diverse marginal positions (and therefore encroachments or deterritorialisations of the field of English language publication), they are inextricably political and collectively constructed. Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that in a minor literature, "everything ... is political" (*Kafka* 17) is apposite here: many of the items in the anthologies are explicitly political, commenting on federal government policies and international relations and arguing for social justice, but even where the writing is less explicitly engaged with politics, it is always imbricated in the particularities of state persecution, territorial displacement and obtaining protection in Australia. Deleuze and Guattari articulate the inevitable contextual politicisation of minor literature, observing, "its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it" (*Kafka* 17). Certainly, underlying the diverse and multivocal contributions

within the three anthologies is the common political fact of asylum, and the urgency of subaltern representation.

At the levels of both production (involving creative, socio-political, cultural and educational input) and circulation, the anthologies operate according to structures of heterogeneous connection; they are constituted and circulated at a range of autonomous yet interdependent points. In this regard, they may be analysed with reference to Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor, borrowed from plant biology, of the rhizome, a subterranean stem that connects horizontally within a decentralised, multiplicitous network of stems (in contrast with a system of branching from a central root or tree). The rhizome operates according to "Principles of connection and heterogeneity" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 7) and can be applied to structures and organisations in a variety of contexts: scientific, socio-political, cultural and creative. While the three anthologies are distinct from one another in their particular modes of production and circulation, each accords with rhizomatic principles in crucial ways. They exemplify Deleuze and Guattari's description of the book as *assemblage*, comprised of a multiplicity of "lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories", which is thus "unattributable" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 3-4). The view that "There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 4) is incisive in the context of the collections: the rhizomatic processes by which they are constructed are mapped out in the heterogeneous published texts. In turn, the networks that are formulated in and around the anthologies reflect the broader social structures of advocacy and community within which relations between asylum seekers / refugees and Australians exist. As the anthologies demonstrate, these structures connect the spaces of asylum with agents of cultural-artistic, educational and political influence in Australia.

If, as I suggest, the heterogeneous totalities of each of the three anthologies – resulting from the lines of articulation and interconnection by which they emerge and circulate – bring

greater significance to (or even, are of *primary* significance over) each individual contribution, it becomes necessary to examine some of the ways in which the anthologies function in terms of context. As works containing diverse modes of writing, each of the anthologies bears consideration in relation to Mikhail Bakhtin's key concept of heteroglossia, which essentially describes the internal stratification of language: its multiplicity in terms of style and usage and its variability in accordance with social, political, professional and historical contexts. Bakhtin argues that effective novelistic discourse is comprised of "heteroglot, multi-voiced, multi-styled and often multi-linguaged elements" (265), an authentic reflection of the heteroglossia of spoken language. Being literally rather than metaphorically "multi-voiced", the anthologies produce a marked and democratic heteroglossia, with explicitly differentiated contributions in language that is variously non-native, translated, professional, non-professional, adult, adolescent, childish, as well as diverse in form, including letters, diaries, poems, drama, essays and stories. The anthologies are internally dialogic by virtue of their multi-vocality and externally dialogic in terms of their socio-political articulation with the body of creative representation by and about asylum seekers and refugees in Australia.

Recognition of the heteroglossia that manifests in the anthologies underscores the key implication outlined at the beginning of this chapter: in bringing many (but related) voices from many (but related) perspectives into public participation the three anthologies enact a decentring or democratisation of the typical model of the artist / witness of asylum. To identify a typical subject is not, in this instance, to ascribe power or authority to this subject: certainly, any asylum seeker or refugee artist occupies a minoritarian, marginalised position. Rather, it highlights the gaps and absences in creative representations by asylum seekers and refugees – attention to which is important not just because of values of democratisation and diversity, but also due to the frequently gendered representation of asylum seekers and refugees within government and

media discourses in western host nations. Terry Threadgold observes, with reference to the United Kingdom, that the “discursive construction of asylum is ... gendered male” (223); this, she argues, is only partly explained by the fact that men comprise the majority of unauthorised arrivals to the United Kingdom (as is also the case in Australia). Threadgold draws on the work of Nira Yuval-Davis, Floya Anthias and Eleonore Kofman, who argue that in the UK, “In the post 11 September period there has been a certain conflation of the criminal male, the Muslim and the fraudulent refugee and a growing legitimization of the suspension of their human rights” (521). A similar observation could certainly be made of the Australian context, where the discourse of criminalisation tends to centre upon what Threadgold terms “dangerous men”, and is backed up by government and media disavowal of self-mutilation, hunger strikes and demonstrations that have most publicly (though not exclusively) been enacted by men within Australian detention centres.³⁴ Australia’s Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) scheme for onshore asylum seekers found to be refugees served to further masculinise the image (and demographics) of the refugee population in not allowing family reunion for TPV holders, the majority of whom were men. Both *Another Country* and *Alone, Together* provide space for women to directly represent themselves in the face of external discourses that relegate their husbands, fathers and sons to figures of anonymous criminality, and themselves to positions of indeterminacy, or worse, insignificance.

Child asylum seekers and refugees are not explicitly incorporated within derogative discourses of criminality and threatened sovereignty, yet neither are they “invisible” in the sense Threadgold employs with reference to women. Rather, the trope of the child as innocent in need of protection has been persuasively deployed on both sides of the political divide: refugee

³⁴ This is discussed in more detail in chapter three. It is worth noting that the typical figure of activism within immigration detention was dramatically decentred in May 2008 by more than 100 unaccompanied child asylum seekers held on the Aegean island of Leros (under the authority of the Greek government) who enacted a series of hunger strikes in protest against poor conditions in detention (Brabant np).

advocacy such as the Australian activist organisation ChilOut: Children Out Of Detention and former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser's online petition to end Australia's detention of children existed alongside the Howard Government's attempts to frame asylum seekers as careless and even abusive parents, as seen most infamously in the 2001 "children overboard" affair. While children are often the *object* of representation, the anthologies examined in this chapter, in particular *Dark Dreams* and *Alone, Together*, are rare spaces in which children and young people self-represent with relative autonomy.

Less readily definable than the categories of women and children, but significant in terms of the decentring and democratisation of self-representing subjects, are men who are neither educated professionals nor experienced in creative arts industries, but who seek to communicate within the framework of an anthology of writing, either as part of a group or as individuals. In participating in a cultural project that requires self-representation within the bounds of a published, English-language text, the contributing writers of all three anthologies can be regarded in terms of Homi Bhabha's concept of "vernacular cosmopolitans [who] are compelled to make a tryst with cultural translation as an act of survival. Their specific and local histories, often threatened and repressed, are inserted 'between the lines' of dominant cultural practices" ("The Vernacular Cosmopolitan" 139). In each of the anthologies, writers engage in acts of speaking across the borders of language, culture and privilege, thus claiming a subaltern stake in cosmopolitan conversation.

Organisation and stratification: opposing impulses

In stating that the three anthologies examined in this chapter operate in a rhizomatic fashion, formulating lines of connection and conversation within and across diverse communities, and

that they constitute heteroglossic texts informed by a multiplicity of personal, social and political forces, it is helpful to examine further the conflicting or opposing impulses that are exerted upon publications of this kind. The anthologies represent a social–cultural–economic deterritorialisation inasmuch as the specialised skill required to publish written work derives significantly from the interrelated factors of access to education, social and cultural background and economic position. As a category within the book publishing industry, anthologies often aim to *exemplify* a particular topic or form of writing, to bring together what are considered some of the most important articulations on a topic, or present what are deemed the best examples of a written form within a particular time frame and / or geographical location (such as, for instance, Penguin’s various international anthologies and Australian publisher Black Inc’s annual collections of “Best Australian” poems, stories and essays). The three anthologies dealt with here deterritorialise this format by emphasising multivocal representation for the purposes of political and / or pedagogic and / or therapeutic efficacy, subordinating technical finesse to this project.

As I discussed in the introduction, the collection of writing by marginalised, disempowered refugees is a small but identifiable mode of book publishing both in Australia and overseas, particularly the United Kingdom. Characteristically, such publications feature contributions from men, women and in many cases children from different backgrounds: some are professional writers, others not “writers” at all, but individuals compelled to write, often in an attempt to testify to trauma and connect with host / dominant cultures. While they suggest the democratisation of publishing culture in English, these collections are reliant upon structures of advocacy, community activism and cross-cultural facilitation. They are assisted by residents of the host nation, and via this assistance are drawn lines of connection with publishers and other agents of literary, cultural and political influence. Certainly, much of the writing I consider in this chapter would not have appeared publicly without (often highly personal) relations of advocacy

and the complex organisational networks within which this support functions; inevitably, this writing enters the public domain via an imbalanced power relation.

This imbalance can be explicated here in terms of Bakhtin's notion of the opposing forces (what he calls the "embattled tendencies") of unification and stratification in language: "stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing. Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (272). There is a unifying impulse within the anthologies – to collect, select, crystallise, organise into a single (dominant) language, edit and in some cases correct pieces; these are forces working against the writing's polyglot, multifarious, stratified, diverse, dialogic and multi-lingual realities. In this sense, the organisational impulses of anthologising contend with and oppose the social, cultural, pedagogic and political project of multivocal, heterogeneous representation.

The unconventional style of editing employed in all three of the anthologies I consider goes some way towards countering unitary (centripetal) forces. As I illustrate, the editors of each publication occupied a decentralised position within the rhizomatic network via which writing was solicited, created and submitted. Editorial processes in each case allowed (often strategically) for unprofessional, awkward or unpolished contributions. Many of the contributions in *Another Country* are translated by fellow asylum seekers in detention, and although Keneally and Scott made some basic corrections and word suggestions (personal correspondence with Scott np), much of the writing remains idiosyncratic in style and structure, with the grammatical errors characteristic of a writer of non-English-speaking background. Similarly, the editorial team that worked on *Alone, Together*, comprised of community support workers and educators, corrected items in accordance with basic rules of English spelling and punctuation, but retain the

constructions and phrasing, tonal or stylistic characteristics and vocabularies of the writers. The editors of *Dark Dreams*, indicating a desire to preserve the integrity and “authenticity” of the writing, self-reflexively acknowledge the asymmetry of power that underlies the editor–young writer–refugee relation; in her foreword, Sallis explains that contributions have “been lightly edited, preserving the voice and rhythm of the author. We corrected spelling, punctuation or expression only where it interfered with sense” (4). The contributors for whom English is a second language offer, Sallis writes, unique “vigour and spirit” (4). In each of the anthologies, then, the value of directness and “truth” supersedes the usual publishing interests of technical accuracy, structural cohesion or logic and internal consistency. Even as it reflects an ethical awareness of the need to facilitate, without undue mediation, the voice of hitherto silenced subjects, the “hands-off” style of editing variously employed in the anthologies brings up the problem of unwitting editorial condescension.

Connection and heterogeneity: three Australian anthologies

Another Country: Writers in Detention

Edited by prominent Australian human rights advocates and authors Thomas Keneally and Rosie Scott, *Another Country: Writers in Detention* was originally published in 2004 by Halstead Press in association with Sydney PEN (a branch of the international writers’ and human rights organisation) as a special issue of the Australian journal *Southerly*; it has subsequently been published in two further editions, in 2005 and (expanded) in 2007.³⁵ The collection was conceived (by Scott initially) as a core project of the Sydney PEN Writers in Detention Committee, formed in 2003 by Keneally and Scott to assist writers held in Australian detention

³⁵ All quotations from *Another Country* in this chapter are from the expanded edition (2007).

centres through advocacy, publicity and referral to International PEN. While the roles of Keneally and Scott as instigators and editors of the project are unavoidably authoritative and centralised to a certain degree, they operated as facilitators within a network of dialogues and interactions. Both forfeited financial payment, while ensuring that each contributor was remunerated; this inversion of normative economic hierarchy is indicative of the broader systems of decentralisation by which the project took shape.

In order to gather pieces of writing for *Another Country*, Scott called upon supporters and advocates from around Australia, who then disseminated the call among their networks and / or communicated with asylum seekers in detention and those recently released. The support and advocacy structures that surrounded the collection on the level of production were marked by their gender specificity: Scott remarks that “without exception” contributions came about as a result of the advocacy of a woman on an asylum seeker’s behalf (“Introduction” 6). In this regard, the compassionate cross-cultural communication / conversation underpinning the writing has a good deal in common with the witness–supporter model of *Through the Wire*, analysed in the previous chapter. The asylum seekers who took part in the anthology responded in many cases because of their particular relationship with the person that sought to engage with them and hear their stories. This process of bearing witness was active: frequently, advocates were required to encourage a depressed, traumatised individual to take part in the project, to type the writing, organise translation if required and submit it to Scott (PEN Annual Lecture 4). Over the course of a year, these geographically diverse clusters of personal conversation, encouragement and motivation, linguistic translation and written processing occurred outside the ambit of a centralised authority. The anthology required non-experts to work with non-experts in a deterritorialisation of typical writing, translating, editing and publishing processes. The points of contact over which the project cohered traced the lines of support and advocacy already mapped

out between individual Australians and the restricted world of immigration detention; in other words, the rhizomatic networks via which material for *Another Country* was gathered intersected with and overlaid grassroots practices of personal support and engagement. And as I observe over the following pages, the anthology served to bring these grassroots practices into connection with high-profile cultural and political spheres.

Upon receiving submissions, Keneally and Scott's editorial selections were not based solely upon the content and literary merits of the pieces of writing; rather, the question of selection was inevitably imbricated with that of psychological wellbeing. Before beginning the processes of soliciting work, Keneally and Scott were advised by Iraqi doctor, former detainee and winner of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Human Rights Award, Aamer Sultan (whose work appears in *Another Country*), that a significant proportion of detainees might be depressed and traumatised to the extent that a rejection of their work would risk further psychological damage; as Scott recalls, "We realised this was going to be no simple literary anthology. For many, these words and stories were a matter of life and death" (PEN Annual Lecture 3). The editors did not feel licensed to formulate selections and rejections according to conventional literary value systems; instead, a variety of voices of different abilities were encouraged and represented in the published text. Scott explains that when rejection did occur she sought to put writers in contact with alternative sites of potential publication (personal correspondence np). The issue mentioned earlier in this chapter of editorial condescension should be weighed in this context; Keneally and Scott's editorial roles brought them into contact with various sites of trauma, and their position was underpinned by a humanitarian and mental health duty of care.

The efficacy of *Another Country* can be considered in terms of therapeutic processes (affecting the contributors) and cross-cultural engagement and activism (affecting Australian

readers). In terms of therapeutic efficacy, the opportunity to contribute to a publication represents a rare departure from the voicelessness that is the norm for asylum seekers in detention in Australia and for new refugees dealing with the challenges of resettlement. In a 2005 PEN lecture, Scott cites the case of Iranian contributor Mohammad Reza Zandavar (who writes as Tony Zandavar), related to her by his Australian advocate and friend Annise Gaffney: as he entered his fifth year of detention, Zandavar deteriorated into a deep depression and became unable to write; the news that his work had been accepted for publication in the anthology led to some psychological improvement. Further, once brought to the attention of Keneally and Scott, Zandavar's legal case was assisted by funds raised by Sydney PEN, and his talent as a poet was acknowledged via further publications and readings in absentia (Scott, PEN Annual Lecture 15-16). In such ways, *Another Country* and its associated cultural work operate therapeutically as a nexus of hope for the futures of individuals, making possible the imagining of one's life outside the non-social, non-belonging spaces of detention. Ghassan Hage emphasises the affective and social importance of hope, observing, "once one has hope within one's field of vision, one discovers the astounding degree to which the constellations of feelings, discourses and practices articulated to hope permeate social life" (*Against* 9). Not merely a soft or vague emotional state, hope is crucial to living and belonging in the social world; the anthology project enabled hope to manifest for Zandavar as an affective practice (in Hage's terms, "something that one does" [10]), as an affect (in Hage's terms, "something that one has" [10]) – even, indeed, as a survival strategy.

The therapeutic, hopeful work of *Another Country* took on a collective dimension with a launch in the South Australian desert outside Baxter Detention Centre in 2005, attended by approximately 100 people from all across Australia. The launch was addressed by Keneally and Christine Rau (sister of the wrongfully detained Australian permanent resident, Cornelia Rau), short speeches were given by organisation representatives, and a number of formerly detained

contributors read from the collection. While earlier metropolitan launches (in Sydney and Melbourne) had engaged Australian audiences, the Baxter launch took the collection to the carceral living space of some of its contributors. The people that travelled to the detention centre responded to the contributors and other asylum seekers in what amounts, I would argue, to an embodied conversation. As a journey undertaken by a collection of Australians to one of the remote interior spaces of the continent, the launch inscribed, if only for one afternoon, the desert territory occupied by non-belonging non-citizens as an actively supportive space; the proximity of the Australians and the detainees served the affective purpose of corporeal solidarity, communicating to detainees that they are already within Australia, as much as they may feel separate from it. The Australians present at Baxter symbolically conveyed their desire to redress an imbalance under an economy of “deep inequality” in the “distribution of hope” within western societies (Hage, *Against* 17).

As well as working to support and hearten detainees, the community conversation of the Baxter launch also focuses what is probably the main function of *Another Country*, politicised, publicised cross-cultural engagement and activism. An English-language publication, the anthology is facilitated by Australian advocates and cultural figures largely for the political, pedagogic purpose of speaking to the Australian public. In a newspaper interview, Keneally describes his view of the publication’s aim in terms of its potential effect on Australians: “This is a tiny antibody put into the bloodstream of the body politic ... We have a Government that runs down, demonises refugees ... we wanted to show their human voices” (qtd in Verghis 14). In line with Keneally’s comment, the editorial framing of *Another Country* situates Australians as the primary intended receivers of the work. Scott contributes a brief introduction which operates as a bridge between Australian readers and the unfamiliar “lifeworld” (Rodan 60) that the featured writers occupy. Employing the collective “we” of the Australian reader community, Scott begins

her introduction, “When we read this collection, we are entering another country – a shadowy, unfamiliar country with its own laws, language and borders” (5). Upon establishing this dichotomy between “we” the reader and the world of the writers represented, Scott articulates the paradox encapsulated in the collection’s title: “this is a nightmare country they’re mapping for us, and it lies in the heart of Australia” (5). She locates the unfamiliar country at home, and thus instigates a political and ethical challenge for the reader.

The quotations and blurbs on the back cover of the collection provide a focus for its Australian critical community and further orient the publication in relation to Australian subjectivities. An excerpt from *The Age* newspaper asserts that the anthology “encapsulates our collective shame”, while a blurb by respected Australian writer David Malouf articulates (via a civil version of what James Goodman terms “global” refugee solidarity [279]) a cosmopolitan proximity and sameness linking “us” with the “others”: “Listening to these voices is like looking into a mirror. They come not from strangers but from men and women who are already fellow citizens, close and clearly recognisable, of the same world we live in”. These comments, which frame the collection and guide the (default Australian) reader, attempt to bring the foreign object of the incarcerated asylum seeker into closer view in terms of ethical global community. While the book’s invocation of the “Australian reader” vis-à-vis its others inheres in homogenisation, it functions strategically in the project of apprehending categories of belonging whose political applications are strictly binary.

As a monolingual collection, *Another Country* consists of a series of minority deterritorialisations of the internationally dominant language of its publication: the differing English-language abilities of writers and the processes of translation that were involved in many contributions are a significant factor in the collection’s distinctive heteroglossia. Of the work submitted by non-English-speakers, Scott explains that in some cases Australian advocates

organised translations, while in others, an asylum seeker with a better understanding of English would translate for their fellow detainee (personal correspondence np). In the process of translation, a piece of writing is inevitably altered or affected by a dialogue between different subjectivities (in the case of fellow detainees, a personal dialogue shaped by the shared context of traumatic experience and incarceration), arguably becoming imbued with *personified* heteroglossia – specifically, the “double-voicedness” that Bakhtin identifies in a novelist’s character construction. Bakhtin argues that a character constructed by a novelist “serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions” (324). Several contributions to *Another Country* are not translated, but written in English as second-language; various abilities are represented, from comprehensive command to broken English. Of the latter, the most prominent mode of writing is the group letter by detainees in the form of a request or plea to Australians, whether for protection, provisions, or simply understanding. In such instances, the *social* heteroglossia of the letter’s collective, dialogic composition comes inevitably, and urgently, to the fore.

These letters are oriented around the twin concepts of community and cross-cultural communication, and in a similar mode to that adopted performatively by Towfiq Al-Qady in *Nothing But Nothing* (discussed in the previous chapter), seize the opportunity to speak across the divide, to engage an affective transaction between one collectivity and another. While in the written format, such transactions lack the embodied face-to-face proximity of Al-Qady’s work, they have the potential to “speak” affectively to a number of readers over time and geographical location. An “Urgent Request” is written by a group of Iranian asylum seekers at Baxter detention centre to the “Prime Minister and All Australian People”. The letter – which appears to be on the behalf of male detainees, describing themselves as “fathers and sons and husbands”

(39) – imploringly asks for a halt to a deportation order for the following day and is suffused with desperation. Another letter comes from Iranian detainees in Port Headland, Villawood and Baxter detention centres, and details the dangerous political situation in their home country, citing recent human rights abuses. At the end of the collection there appears an anonymous “Thank You” from a detainee in Baxter, written dialogically, in response to a protest gathering that took place outside the centre during the 2003 Easter weekend. These contributions are underpinned by immediate, practical imperatives; they confront the Australian reader directly, and confirm the vital necessity for listeners to bear witness to the voices of detainees. Some contributors who do not employ the letter form nonetheless write for an imagined Australian reader–listener. Afghan detainee Ahmad Shah “Abed” Acheakzai, who contributes a poetic recollection of the traumatic experiences that have shaped his life and led to his journey to Australia (his “second death” [45]), concludes his piece with the words, “I hope you are not too upset by my story” (45), a sentiment of lingering irony that strikes at the heart of Australian readers’ anxieties over citizen responsibility for government action. These pieces locate the collection as explicitly, necessarily dialogic: written *because* of Australian policy (a political context of production), *to* Australian people (the body politic for which policy stands).

An apparent cross-cultural pedagogic function of *Another Country* – to identify the human universality or “sameness” linking self (belonging in / to the nation) and other (non-belonging) – operates alongside the opposite function of differentiation, the construction of heterogeneity and multivocalism. With its various forms of expression (stories, drama, poetry, diary, memoir, letters, newsletters and even drawings and cartoons), it is particularly successful in bringing into dialogue work of differing accomplishment, suspending conventional distinctions of artistic value for the purposes of activism and visibility. Several of the contributors are skilful writers, such as Iraqi Yahia Al-Samawy, who has published several collections of poetry, Iraqi Adeeb Kamal Ad-

Deen,³⁶ also the author of several poetry collections and whose poem “Sleeplessness” appears in Black Inc’s 2007 anthology of *Best Australian Poems*, and Shahin Shafaei, whose work as an actor–witness in *Through the Wire* was discussed in the previous chapter (Shafaei’s short play *Refugitive* is published in *Another Country* and examined as performance in chapter three). Cartoons by Afghani artist Adam Janali and drawings by Afghani artist Ghulam Sakhi Hazzara are interspersed throughout the collection. Alongside these are the non-professionals, including anonymous individuals and small groups, whose contributions serve the practical purpose of recounting and testifying – the letters cited above are examples. Another is fourteen-year-old Mina’s diary excerpt, which charts some of the traumatic experiences, including violent demonstrations, taking place around her at Woomera. Mina and her family returned to Iran after two years in detention. An excerpt from Sri Lankan detainee Sarath Amarasinghe’s incisive regular newsletter *Baxter News* is indicative of a commitment to activism and agency within the carceral environment. Whilst seeking to convey a pedagogic message of cross-cultural human sameness – or in Iraqi contributor Khalid Al Sharifi’s words, “We didn’t come from another planet” (58) – *Another Country* simultaneously creates a dialogic space where an explicitly diverse range of asylum seekers participate as self-representing individuals. In this, the collection can be seen to construct, within its pages, a dossier on cosmopolitan community as engagement amid difference.

While the stylistic heterogeneity of the anthology is obvious and apparent, its decentring of typical asylum seeker subjectivities in terms of gender and age may not be as immediately apparent. Measured alongside human population statistics, the collection does not present an even distribution of gender and age: Mina’s diary is the only item written by a child and only one in five of contributions (a total of five items) are written by women (this ratio excludes Mina’s

³⁶ Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen and his family arrived in Australia in 2003 after successfully applying for asylum from Jordan; as offshore applicants the family were not detained in Australia (Ingram 21).

diary, three letters where the writer's gender is not specified, an anonymous "Cambodian poem", and letters by Keneally and Amanda Vanstone). However, when considered in relation to Australian immigration detention statistics, the voices of women and children are well represented. At 13 July 2005, a year after the anthology's original publication, women comprised fifteen per cent of the detainee population; the proportion of children is even smaller, at six per cent in 2005 (Cox and Priest 17). Scott notes in her introduction, women "are in a minority in the camps, those who are there are often too busy keeping their families together to write" (6). Given this context, the decentring in terms of gender and age of the typical model of the refugee artist-witness should be considered in terms of *representation* rather than equal distribution vis-à-vis human population.

The unique concerns and needs of women in detention encompass physical (including sexual) safety, healthcare and nutrition (particularly during and after pregnancy) and child protection and safety,³⁷ and the representation of these minority concerns constitutes a significant thematic decentring enacted by *Another Country*. While many of the male contributors, both professional and non-professional, employ overtly artistic devices, writing poetry, narrative (autobiographical) prose and in one case drama, none of the women write poetry and only two write narrative prose. All of the women's contributions focus on pregnancy and / or motherhood, as well as the experiences of husbands and extended families. One woman imagines the subjectivity of a father whose son drowns on the journey to Australia, while all the other female contributors write of motherhood and family from personal perspectives. In different ways, they express an urgency deriving from a sense of failing in their responsibility for the care of family members, especially children. "Mary's Story", written by Iranian secretary Mary Yousefi, details the worsening mental illness of her husband and twelve-year-old son as a result of

³⁷ For analysis and discussion of the condition of women in Australian immigration detention, see Eva Cox and Terry Priest; Connie Levett 21.

prolonged detention and ill-treatment at Woomera and Baxter detention centres. This contribution begins in the third person and quickly moves to first-person narrative, finishing with a challenging imperative to the imagined Australian reader: "It is up to you to decide what you should do about all this inhuman treatment and disrespect for humanity!" (57). One of the most affecting items in the anthology (a consequence, perhaps, of its acute corporeal imperative) is a brief letter from three pregnant women, identified only as "Tum 46", "Nim 12" and "Nim 14" (none of whom appear in the author biographies at the end of the anthology), directed to the authorities of the unnamed detention centre in which they are held. The letter is written (as Scott confirms) in English without the assistance of a translator (personal correspondence np) and contains spelling and grammatical errors that suggest painstaking composition by women unfamiliar with the language they must use to make their plea. It is bare and functional, stating the stages of the pregnancies and listing three requests: larger clothing ("we need a wide cloths to be comfortable because our abdomen is increase in size gradually" [53]), flat shoes ("because our shoes is not helthy for pregnant women" [53]) and an extra serve of milk and fruit daily ("we suggest to give the workers in the mess our numbers" [53]). The authors betray no impulse to articulate a subject position within a personal narrative, and no deliberate artistry. It is telling that of the writers who do not provide full or genuine names, almost all are female: "Leila" (an Iranian woman on a Temporary Protection Visa), Mina, Tum 46, Nim 12 and Nim 14 achieve self-representation within a published text, while remaining the "invisible women" of which Threadgold writes.

In a challenge to invisibility more broadly, *Another Country* is affiliated with figures and spaces of high cultural-literary status (beginning, of course, with Booker Prize winner and officer of the Order of Australia, Keneally). These affiliations form rhizomatic connections between worlds of belonging and non-belonging and promote the activist projects of awareness and

political change. The collection featured at a panel session at the 2004 Sydney Writers' Festival, where it was presented by Malouf and read from by Australian actors Claudia Karvan, Bryan Brown and Rachel Ward, as well as by some contributors who had been granted refugee status. Later in the same year, it was the focus of a session at the Melbourne Writers' Festival. The anthology attracted coverage within the three major Australian broadsheet newspapers (*The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*), as well as smaller regional media. This kind of cultural circulation and reception typically surrounds established, profit-generating authors, and in this respect, *Another Country* deterritorialises the milieu of its high-profile Australian supporters.

High-profile advocacy facilitates lines of direct political engagement: the third, expanded edition of *Another Country*, published in 2007, reproduces a letter written by Keneally as a representative from the Sydney Writers' Festival panel to the then Minister for Immigration, Amanda Vanstone. Keneally writes:

At a crowded session of the recent Sydney Literary Festival on Sunday May 23, a session which dealt with a recent collection of detainee writing named *Another Country*, there was a unanimously supported proposition from the floor. As a result, I was deputised by the audience and the panel, the latter consisting of both former detainees and Australian writers, to present to you the following motion. (118)

Keneally requests the abandonment of the policy of indefinite, mandatory detention, and criticises the detention system on the basis of values of human rights and liberal democracy. Vanstone's response to Keneally's letter – in which she refutes his arguments, defending the immigration detention system and Australia's humanitarian record more broadly – is published on the following pages of the anthology. This edition of *Another Country* thus draws up, by way of an explicit political opposition, a line of connection with government power.

The collection's affiliation with PEN, a respected international organisation supporting writers who have been subject to political prejudice or human rights abuses, is a crucial aspect of its political efficacy, and enables it to articulate with human rights activism internationally. As a PEN project, the anthology connects with one of the largest writers associations in the world, with more than 140 independent centres in 104 countries, and with consultive status at the United Nations and UNESCO. The 2004 HREOC Community Human Rights Award was awarded to PEN Australia, and Keneally and Scott were nominated for the Human Rights Medal for that year. The judges of the HREOC awards praised *Another Country* as enacting an "effective campaign of raising asylum seeker issues within the Australian conscience. PEN was able to bring national and international pressure to bear in seeking the release of asylum seekers in detention" (qtd in Keneally and Scott 127). Affiliation with PEN provided the broader context in which the anthology could be situated, and in turn, brought wider attention to its Australia-specific action. *Another Country* has been utilised by International PEN for distribution and reference, and has prompted the formation of Writers in Detention committees in Germany based upon the Sydney model. Copies of the collection have been purchased by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the International Detention Coalition for distribution and research (Scott, "In Praise" 39).

For Keneally and Scott, the practical political goal of bringing about the release of detainees was crucial to the broader anthology project. The Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra branches of PEN were significant in securing individual releases from detention: members of the autonomous centres worked collaboratively, using PEN's name in a campaign of letter writing, lobbying, public demonstrations and fundraising. Several detainees were assisted in becoming members of PEN, a move that Scott believes gave them extra protection in the detention centres (PEN Annual Lecture 12). Sydney PEN awarded anthology contributors Zandavar,

Amarasinghe, Sultan (all mentioned above) and Ivory Coast journalist Cheikh Kone the honour of the “empty chair” on Days of the Imprisoned Writer events. This symbolic act of political remembering absence is iterated at PEN events around the world, and the recognition of Zandavar, Amarasinghe, Sultan and Kone in this manner links them with other writers, many with high profiles, imprisoned for political reasons. These practical and symbolic undertakings locate the work of *Another Country* less as a “literary” project than as a vital accessory to political action.

Alone, Together: Writing from Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia

The numerous contributions that make up *Alone, Together: Writing from Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia* were collected and edited by the Refugee Claimants Support Centre (RCSC), Brisbane in 2006. In its conception, the collection differs crucially from the other anthologies examined in this chapter: the idea to produce a publication of writing originated with refugees at the RCSC. The project was co-ordinated by Helen Wilkinson from Brisbane’s Queensland University of Technology, and assisted by a number of Australian educators, community workers and volunteers; the published product does not cite a particular person(s) as editor(s), thereby explicitly decentring the usual orientation around editorial agency in favour of community agency. A publication of the RCSC, a non-government funded organisation established in 1995 with a grant from the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, *Alone, Together* constitutes a grassroots deterritorialisation of the structures and interests underpinning the book publishing industry.

Unlike *Another Country*, which presents writing by asylum seekers and refugees from a range of (mostly carceral) locations across Australia, *Alone, Together* is a territorially specific work. Contrary to its subtitle, which suggests an Australia-wide scope, pieces for the collection are written by clients of the RCSC and by refugees living in and around Brisbane. In this regard, it is

comparable to British collections *Between a Mountain and a Sea: Refugees Writing in Wales* (2003), edited by Tom Cheesman, Eric Ngalle Charles and Sylvie Hoffmann and *The Story of My Life: Refugees Writing in Oxford* (2005), edited by Carole Angier, both of which (as their titles indicate) collect writing by refugees whose experiences of asylum cohere around a particular geographical location, and function (in the sense of cultural work) to build localised community identities within these multicultural spaces of resettlement. *Alone, Together* emerged out of conversation: the story sharing that took place at the “gathering table” at the RCSC, and its opening piece, a short poem titled *This Table*, signposts these origins. The group-authored poem expresses the importance of the gathering table as a locus for food and shelter, as well as support, dialogue and community. Wilkinson’s introduction suggests the organic, spontaneous lines of connection by which the project emerged: “the group [at the RCSC] was not big enough to write a whole book on their own, so they invited other refugees and asylum seekers living in Brisbane to help them. The response was great, and it grew and grew” (6). Alongside these localised networks and connections within Brisbane’s refugee communities, the project drew lines of articulation with the Queensland University of Technology via a Community Service Grant, which provided funding and an allocation of paid and volunteer staff to assist with typing, editing and proofreading items for the collection.

The processes of gathering and processing material for the collection were rhizomatic in important ways: they formulated lines of horizontal articulation within and across Brisbane’s refugee communities, support organisations and the tertiary education sector, and functioned organically and without centralised direction in terms of writer, content and style of contributions. However, the collection is also a product of centralising forces: the RCSC constitutes a vital locus for the project both geographically and in terms of community. It is a source of physical and emotional nourishment, and a place of dialogue, for the refugees who

conceived the collection. The Australians involved in the project worked with and within the RCSC, and the proceeds from the publication are directed into its support activities. The limitations of Deleuze and Guattari's model of the rhizome are apparent in this context: the model does not serve as a particularly effective means of imagining a community cultural project that is simultaneously decentred, democratic and organic (drawing multiple lines of articulation within and across Brisbane's refugee and social support communities, and facilitating the participation of a variety of subjects) *and* centred around a geographical and community base – ultimately, around a table.

A more effective way of examining the anthology is in terms of the formulation of localised dialogues. While the collection is subject to forces of unification inasmuch as its writers are required to employ non-native language (English) in order to be incorporated within the publication, and inasmuch as the writing is edited (albeit lightly: non-native idiosyncrasies are frequently retained) by Australian educators and community workers, it is for the most part marked by the forces of stratification and (literal) multi-voicedness that characterise, in Bakhtinian terms, a heteroglossic text. The project is concerned with the nurturing and development of inclusive dialogues within Brisbane's refugee communities, and is stratified in terms of the diversity of its participants along the lines of gender, nationality, ethnicity, culture, education, religion and age. In this regard, the work of *Alone, Together* can be compared (in terms of philosophy, if not form) with that of the theatre companies referred to in the previous chapter, Birmingham-based Banner Theatre and Toronto-based Jumbies Theatre, both of which emphasise social inclusion and justice in their theatre performances and employ professional and non-professional performers of various ages from both citizen and migrant or refugee backgrounds. In Australia, perhaps as a consequence of the comparatively small and dispersed nature of refugee communities, creative works that engage refugees and locals from diverse

sections of society tend to be project-based rather than ongoing under the ambit of a creative company or organisation.

Notwithstanding its dominance as a world language, the use of English in *Alone, Together* facilitates these localised connections, providing the vehicle for effective communication across the multiple language groups from which the collection's contributors are comprised. English is also, of course, the vehicle for practical dialogues with the local Australian facilitators of the project, and for potential communication with an Australian audience. The collection's foreword by the co-ordinator of the RCSC, outlining some of the social and cultural implications of Australian refugee policies, is a pedagogic and socio-political message aimed at anticipated Australian readers. To the extent that it constructs such communication, *Alone, Together* is not positioned to make significant inroads into the Australian community beyond localised refugee supporters and advocates: unlike the other two collections examined here, it does benefit from high-profile advocacy, and was barely discussed in newspapers or other forms of public discourse.³⁸ Nonetheless, the collection's availability at several Australian libraries³⁹ and facilities for its online purchase (via the websites of the RCSC and Brisbane-based eco-product store Biome) enable, at least in theory, lines of connection with audiences from a range of geographical and cultural contexts.

A conspicuous element of the heteroglossia of *Alone, Together* is the prominence of writing about happiness, celebration, pride and tradition. In contrast, *Another Country* emphasises the carceral context from which most contributions are composed, its writing imbued with

³⁸ The collection was briefly discussed in Queensland newspaper *The Courier-Mail* within the context of national Harmony Day prior to its launch at the Queensland University of Technology in March 2006 (Mirosh 43).

³⁹ *Alone, Together* is held at the Brisbane City Council Library; the Queensland University of Technology Libraries (Carseldine, Gardens Point and Kelvin Grove campuses); the University of Queensland Library; the University of the Sunshine Coast Library; the State Library of New South Wales; the State Library of Queensland; the State Library of Victoria; the University of Western Australia Library; and the National Library of Australia. In contrast, *Another Country* is available at 43 libraries and museums around Australia, and *Dark Dreams* is available at 79 libraries around the country (Libraries Australia np).

hopelessness and a pervading mixture of disempowerment and anger (constituting in this way an indictment on indefinite mandatory detention), and the young contributors to *Dark Dreams* were, as I show, instructed to write about traumatic journeys into exile. While recollections of persecution, suffering and loss are present in *Alone, Together*, they appear alongside writing that evokes peacetime life in the homeland: social and religious customs, family and community celebrations and traditional stories and proverbs. In this way, the collection serves to construct multi-dimensional images of refugee subjectivities.

Many of the writers appear content to highlight their cultural otherness within Australia, rather than seeking to argue for their belonging in terms of cultural assimilation or universality. Sixteen-year-old Has from Iraq presents what is, in the Australian context, a challenging poem in which she frames her pride in wearing the Hijab as a rejection of perceived western promiscuity, sexual violence and sexually transmitted disease:

You see we are not controlled by a mini skirt and tight shirt

We are given only respect, and never treated like dirt

So you seem we are the ones that are free and liberated

We are not the ones that are sexually terrorised and violated

We are the ones that are free and pure

We're free of STDs that have no cure (44)

Other writers are less antagonistic in articulating pride and cultural identity. Abebe Fekadu details the processes of marriage arrangement in the rural Gonder region of Ethiopia, incorporating humorous, personal observations – “Only the groom’s parents know who the bride is. Every one else is very curious to see if she is beautiful, fat or short, and how old she is” (63) – alongside sobering ones: “The third option is very terrible. Sometimes a girl will kill herself” (65). A contribution by Peter Chot Deng, outlining courting and marriage rituals in south Sudan, seeks

understanding from imagined Australian audiences: “Now you can understand how special the customs of the Nuer people of South Sudan are and why I miss them. I hope you will understand why I feel so sad to have lost some of my culture” (67). Consecutive accounts of Christmas celebrations in Pakistan and New Year celebrations in Afghanistan, Iran and Vietnam serve simultaneously to suggest points of difference and similarity with the cultures of the host country.

Several contributors write stories, fables and proverbs from their homelands, representing cultural identities through intergenerational rather than personal narrative. These contributions typically incorporate elements of fantasy, particularly in the representation of relationships between humans, animals and imaginary creatures. Huda Jibril Abdulahi from Ethiopia tells a story in which the protagonist converses with a hyena, a princess and a giant on his journey to meet with a wise man, and elsewhere contributes a list of twelve Ethiopian proverbs. Twelve-year-old Omel Qallandar from Afghanistan tells a traditional morality tale, passed on by her grandmother, in which the patience and virtue of a young girl is rewarded by a wish-granting bird. Such writing stands in contrast to the recollections of trauma that appear in the collection (which are grounded in harsh, unadorned reality), being communal and inherently dialogic, repeated across time and space in order to draw lines of continuity within and across homeland and exilic communities and down the generations.

An emphatic mark of the heterogeneity of *Alone, Together* and of its formulation of community dialogue is a section of favourite recipes from a variety of homelands. These make up one of the seven sub-sections of the anthology, under the heading “nourishing”. Recipes are not traditionally claimed by an individual author, but are instead encoded with intergenerational memory and cultural identity. When offered to others, they signify hospitality and connection through common experience. In the context of forced migration and trauma, loss and deprivation, recipes recuperate experiences of security, home, provision and nourishment.

Filipina Australian writer Merlinda Bobis describes the intensified, embodied self-identification associated with eating food from home in the new country: "Eating becomes a ritual of remembering. Nothing beats the immediacy of body memory in the process of ingesting food: smell and taste affirm old loyalties and bring comfort. Eating becomes a symbolic homecoming. Food from home becomes more precious when eaten far away from home" (11). In her nuanced analysis of cookbook-memoirs written by Middle Eastern women in exile, Carol Bardenstein observes that the significance of homeland food within migrant and especially exilic communities is symptomatic of the broader operations of memory and identity, both individual and communal: "new configurations of memory take shape and new performances and presentations of identification emerge, pointedly inflected in terms of gender, class, and ethnic affiliation, that would not have emerged in these particular forms if not for the experience of displacement" (355). The place of food and recipes within *Alone, Together* further explicates the significance, particularly in therapeutic terms, of the table around which it emerged. They also have a cross-cultural function in relation to Australian community: the recipes simultaneously underline the relationship of difference / unfamiliarity between the writer and the new country, and serve as the instrument for dialogue and familiarity through the universal ritual of sharing food.

Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories by Young Writers Aged 11-20 Years

While the two collections I have examined so far include a certain amount of work by children and young people, the decentralisation of adult subjectivity is, notwithstanding educational instruction and editorial framing, more comprehensive in *Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories by Young Writers Aged 11-20 Years*, edited by Australians Sonja Dechian, Heather Millar and Eva Sallis. Published by Wakefield Press in 2004, this collection of stories, essays and reflections ranges further in terms of Australian refugee histories than *Another Country* and *Alone, Together*,

both of which focus on recent arrivals. It incorporates the stories of refugees and forced migrants from Europe during and after the Second World War, from Vietnam in the 1970s, from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and recent arrivals from across Africa, Asia and the Middle East; there is also a contribution by a young descendent of Melanesian labourers brought to the Queensland cane fields in the nineteenth century. In most cases, contributions are the result of an encounter and dialogue, written by a young Australian with whom a refugee has shared his or her traumatic testimony; typically, they concern the experience of a young person, even though in some cases the refugee is now an adult. A smaller number of contributions are personal testimonies by young refugees. *Dark Dreams* connects with an established trope (cogent in global humanitarian contexts such as UNICEF, World Vision and the Christian Children's Fund) of the innocent, suffering child in need of protection and advocacy; this image is universally emotive / affective, and can serve as a wedge with which to defy pejorative stereotypes of asylum seekers and refugees perpetuated in Australia and other receiving nations.

If *Dark Dreams* utilises children and young people as potent political functionaries, it also provides a space for contributors to speak on their own terms within a project whose pedagogic ends serve the young writers first and foremost. While there is likely to have been some therapeutic or social value in the anthology for the refugees that shared their stories for it, the main beneficiaries in terms of political, social and literary education are the Australian students involved.⁴⁰ The collection is both efficacious and problematic: as authorial agents, the young writers effectively deterritorialise (dominant) adult discourse on asylum seekers and refugees, but in some instances, their subject-matter – whose backgrounds and experiences are of course vastly different from those of most Australian students – comes to occupy an objectified remove.

⁴⁰ The pedagogic function of *Dark Dreams* continues in some secondary schools. The collection is listed as a teaching item by the Tasmanian Education Department, where it forms part of the learning sequence on immigration for secondary students (see "Why Can't I Live Where I Like?"); it is also listed as a teaching resource on the Australian Global Education website, initiated and funded by AusAID.

As with *Another Country* and *Alone, Together*, the material that comprised *Dark Dreams* was gathered via a rhizomatic structure of heterogeneous connections. While Keneally and Scott used pre-existing grassroots refugee support networks across Australia to gather submissions for their project, the development and submission of work for *Dark Dreams* relied upon Australia's secondary education systems.⁴¹ The anthology is a product of a national schools writing competition, "Australia IS Refugees!", devised by Sallis and co-ordinated by Dechian in 2002 under the ambit of the community organisation Australians Against Racism (AAR). The competition initiative functioned as an objective in itself, prior to finalised arrangements for book publication.⁴² It was directly aligned with AAR's broad and ongoing endeavour of combating racial and cultural prejudice (the organisation was founded in response to negative Howard government representations of asylum seekers). Under the competition's terms, students were instructed to hear the story of a refugee and to re-tell it in their own words; some told the story of a family member, friend or classmate, others wrote in response to an invited classroom discussion with a refugee, while still others made arrangements to meet and interview a refugee. The competition guidelines explicitly welcomed entries by young refugees, and indeed, almost a quarter of contributions in *Dark Dreams* are written by such students, who tell their own story or that of a close friend from their homeland. This is a significant proportion given the challenges faced by refugee school students in the areas of English language and literacy, in addition to the social and cultural difficulties of resettlement ("Strengthening Outcomes" np). For the most part, AAR's competition was aimed at non-refugee students: the guidelines contained suggestions for

⁴¹ The competition was aimed at students in their final three years of secondary school, although younger students submitted work and are published in *Dark Dreams*.

⁴² The "Australia IS Refugees!" competition guidelines state, "A book form publication of the best stories will also be considered at the time of judging" (Australians Against Racism 2).

establishing contact with a refugee and offer examples of interview questions (the narrative emphasis being on the so-called “journey” into exile and experiences upon arrival in Australia).⁴³

While the work of the competition project occurred for the most part within Australia’s secondary school classrooms, it mapped out a broader national network of connections that engaged various sections of Australian society. Organisers elicited private and corporate sponsors and high-profile competition judges (Thomas Shapcott, Phillip Adams, Helen Garner, Libby Gleeson and Meme McDonald) as well as former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser as prize presenter. The first prize, sponsored by the United Nations Association of Australia, was a visit to Geneva during a sitting of the UN in 2003 (accompanied by the President of the UN Association of Australia, Margaret Reynolds). As with the high-profile support for *Another Country*, these links with significant writers, political figures and organisations served to attach cultural status to an amateur and explicitly educational project, and they were emphasised within the competition guidelines, which touted the judging team, the prestigious first prize, as well as the monetary rewards offered. Attracting hundreds of submissions, the project relied upon links between social justice and educational organisations as well as sites of individual activism and advocacy: logistically, the competition was facilitated by co-operation between AAR and the national and South Australian education unions, the New South Wales Teachers Federation, the Independent Education Union, the Fremantle Refugee Support Project, refugee advocates, teachers, parents, and not least, refugees and school students. *Dark Dreams*, the textual product, is a secondary (though certainly a widely-disseminated and thus potentially influential⁴⁴) line of articulation out of a competition project that had already mapped networks of political activism,

⁴³ As a starting resource, the competition guidelines reproduce a story written by a Polish post-World War 2 immigrant to Australia (Australians Against Racism 3-6).

⁴⁴ According to Wakefield Press’s Stephanie Johnston, *Dark Dreams* sold approximately 5000 copies, a significant number in Australian publishing terms (Cox, personal correspondence np). Royalties were directed into AAR projects, and editors worked without payment.

literary creativity and social education. In this sense, *Dark Dreams* connects within and across other rhizomatic networks, and itself crystallises the work of several organisations and individuals in the enduring form of a book publication.

The high-profile support for AAR's competition and publishing project is very likely responsible, at least in part, for certain of its modes and spaces of reception; the children's efforts did not slip under the radar of public attention as might normally be expected in a juvenile context. At the time of its release in 2004, *Dark Dreams* was reviewed in Australia's three main broadsheet newspapers, several regional newspapers as well as respected national publications, *The Australian Book Review*, *The Bulletin* and *Journal of Australian Studies*. Prior to this, in 2002, the winning entries from the schools competition were published in an award booklet titled, "AIR!: Australia IS Refugees". In a strategy reminiscent of Keneally's letter to Vanstone on behalf of a Sydney Writers' Festival audience and panel, AAR sent copies of the award booklet to members of the Australian parliament. Sallis records in the foreword to *Dark Dreams* that the then Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock responded to a young writer's piece describing harsh conditions in Port Headland detention centre with a sixteen-paragraph rebuttal. This communication represents an extraordinary line of articulation, a two-way engagement marked by fierce ideological opposition, between Australian school activity and the arena of federal government.

In 2003, the competition concept was taken up by Amnesty International Australia under the title, "Voices of Hope". This organic link between AAR's original project and ongoing social justice activism has become, in association with Amnesty, a regular schools competition and Youth Arts Festival. In 2004, AAR devised a schools project that expanded the concept of "Australia IS Refugees!", inviting students to tell the stories of displaced peoples from a range of contexts, including Aboriginal Australians, asylum seekers and refugees and other migrants. In 2005 Wakefield Press published selected entries from this competition in a collection titled, *No*

Place Like Home: Australian Stories by Young Writers Aged 8-21 Years, edited by Dechian, Jenni Devereaux, Millar and Sallis. A small number of contributions are entries from the first AAR competition (of 2002). Viewed in these broader contexts, the “Australia IS Refugees!” project and *Dark Dreams* can be seen as elements in an ongoing process of social, political, educational and representational work.

In utilising Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphor of the rhizome as a model for analysis, is important to recognise here that while the structure of the original schools competition and the creation of *Dark Dreams* (as well as subsequent lines of articulation from these) can be identified as rhizomatic in several characteristic ways, certain hierarchies and points of relative authority within this overtly pedagogic project limit the application of the metaphor. Sallis’s role as deviser of the competition’s terms, Dechian’s role as competition co-ordinator, and subsequently, Dechian’s, Millar’s and Sallis’s positions as co-editors of the published collection, are inevitably *centralised*, even though they did not directly commission or oversee the writing. Moreover, school teachers constitute significant points of centralisation within the project, shaping the ideological and, in some cases, practical contexts within which the refugee stories could be heard, as well as directing pieces of writing via the usual (and essential) processes of instruction, guidance, editing and correcting. The competition guidelines recognised the practical necessity for a dispersal of authority between teachers and students with the instruction, “Get your teacher’s help with techniques for interviewing and the techniques of writing that best bring a retold story to life” (Australians Against Racism 2). Exerting additional centripetal or centralising forces, the high-profile competition judges selected most of the work to be published alongside the winning and commended submissions. Effectively, the organic model of the rhizome – decentralised, spontaneous, without limits – is a helpful but limited means by which apprehend the competition

and anthology: the products of heterogeneous engagements between community, education and politics, inflected nevertheless by defined structures of power and authority.

Dark Dreams plainly elucidates its underpinnings in cross-cultural connection and kinship between refugees and young Australians; in her foreword to the collection, Sallis refers to the “transforming process” involved in the writing, “in which the final story reflects the author as much as the subject” (2). One of the young writers, Lucy McBride, self-reflexively considers the ethics of the encounter, remarking upon her own ignorance and position of privilege in relation to the young refugees she interviews, as well as the influence of the popular media in predetermining her understanding of refugees, observing, “Although my aim for this interview was to learn about refugees, what I realised within the first few minutes did not directly concern them, but myself” (13). McBride recognises what is essentially a Levinasian ethical relation: that her subjectivity is constituted within and because of her encounter with the other – literally *in the face* of the other. For this writer, “transforming” processes involve the development of consciousness regarding her own subject-position, particularly its cultural and historical contingency. Moreover, McBride explains how, during the interview process, she becomes aware of ethical considerations, particularly a duty of care in the face of a traumatised interlocutor:

After a few moments I realise that this boy is exactly what I, and the rest of Australia, have been reading about in the newspapers every day for over a year. He is an ‘illegal’ immigrant, seeking asylum in Australia. An image of this boy having to sit in front of customs officials flicks through my mind, and I suddenly do not want to ask him similar, intrusive questions about his life and his journey to Australia. (12)

This type of concern, this complex affective response to the other, is not raised in the competition guidelines, which focus on the subjectivity of Australian students and their task of eliciting a refugee's "story."

While the explicit and sophisticated reflexivity exhibited by McBride is unusual among the contributions to *Dark Dreams*, some writers articulate an awareness of their difference in the face of their subject in other ways. Hannah Moore's description of her visit to a young Iranian girl in an Australian detention centre apprehends an ethical dilemma with sensitivity, considering the troubling idea that strategies of concealment may be a component of empathetic interaction across gaps in experience, understanding and life opportunity. Prefacing her piece with a translated poem by the young Iranian detainee, Moore begins, strikingly, in mid-conversation, with her own self-consciously ineffectual response to the question of when the girl will be released: "I don't know" (188). After telling the Iranian girl's story in first-person perspective (an appropriation of subjectivity that appears frequently in *Dark Dreams*), Moore returns to her recollection of the face-to-face encounter:

'Hannah, these are just a few of our problems,' Anhar stated. / 'I know,' I said. I didn't know at all. I couldn't begin to imagine real fear. / There was another pause. / Anhar stumbled over the broken English, 'Hannah, I had to leave, you know, I cannot go back.' / 'You'll be out soon,' I whispered. I hoped, but it wasn't what I thought. I thought months, many months, maybe a year or maybe... (192)

In an instance such as this, the competition project of encouraging dialogue between young Australians and asylum seekers or refugees is arguably most efficacious: compassion and connection are drawn across cultures, within and in spite of a context of recognisable and at times overwhelming otherness.

Most of the young Australians' contributions do not articulate an experiential and / or ethical challenge in terms of the process of telling the traumatic story of another person. AAR guidelines encourage the students to imagine shifts of subjectivity, and correspondingly, many do not merely speak *for*, but *as* their subject. Twelve-year-old Tita Tran writes, "My name is Nguyen Tan Thinh. It was the year 1980 ... I was only nineteen years old" (25). Other writers, while not employing first-person perspective, nonetheless erase the gap between themselves and their refugee interlocutor: "While Lucie told me her story, it seemed to take hold of me. It was like I was her and these things were happening to me" (18). The naïveté of this youthful perspective subsumes the specificity of the refugee within the writer's world of reference. Sallis notes in her foreword that processes of transformation are particularly apparent in two consecutive pieces written by a twelve-year-old girl and boy, respectively, which tell the story of the same Iraqi woman. The young boy, Adam Bennett, writes, "I was just a normal thirty-year-old woman. I lived in a country called Iraq" (95), and goes on to list horrific tortures from a first-person perspective. The young girl, Chelsea June, relates a similar story of horrific trauma and injury, but her version has different emphases and differences of fact. The transformation that occurs here in the process of representing refugee testimony is essentially a more obvious and explicit instance of the transformation from self to other that I discussed in the previous chapter with reference to performance work. The editors of *Dark Dreams* did not place a great deal of value on factual accuracy; in her foreword, Sallis writes, "if a young writer speaks of the white Australia policy in the 1860s, that is fine by us. There are many organic truths outside facts, and these stories are works of fiction, imagination and history all in one" (4). This is an unconventional editorial approach to the task of representing refugee testimonies; Sallis's decentring of truth / historicity, informed as it is by the age and inexperience of her writers, reorients the project of making meaning in and through political trauma narratives.

In some cases, the refugee subject and the young writer are school friends and the writing is infused with the knowledge gained from interview / discussion processes, as well as by the pre-knowledge and trust of the friendship. Nitya Devi Dambiec writes about Albana Derguti, an Albanian refugee and school friend: “She is in my art class at school and paints using beautiful colours. Together with our friends we paint so many pictures and maybe we use up more paint than everybody else in the school put together, but not to worry” (93-4). In this piece of writing, the recollection of the refugee’s experience becomes, in part, a collaborative exercise: “I was scared ... It was my first school in Australia.’ And then with a laugh, ‘Maybe the people were going to eat me!’ I write this down. With both of us laughing, she said, ‘No! Don’t write that!’ We laughed and smiled and decided to write it anyway” (93). Here, the writing is the product of cross-cultural interaction with a dynamic of shared (though not necessarily evenly) agency. Dambiec’s piece presents the voice of her interlocutor; her work inheres in social processes of dialogue, negotiation and humour.

All of the writing in *Dark Dreams* manifests some form of this inherent social heteroglossia, resulting from the centrifugal or stratifying forces that shape it: the contexts and dialects of the refugees whose stories are told, as well as the young writers’ own contexts and dialects, affected as they are by the ideological and editorial influence of teachers, parents and competition organisers. The ethical and representational problematics of this multivocality might helpfully be apprehended with reference to the idea of *personified* heteroglossia, if we consider that the dialogues that took place in order for the students to write are not dissimilar to character construction and its resulting “double-voicedness” as described by Bakhtin (324). Personified heteroglossia in the novel, the literary form of which Bakhtin writes, is internally dialogic, being (conventionally) the work of a single authorial agent. In the context of the Australian students’ contributions in *Dark Dreams*, the manifestation of double-voicedness is the direct result of

specific encounters and conversations; double-voicedness here appears as writing in which the human subject of representation is not the authorial agent. This poses an ethical difficulty similar to that raised by the non-refugee performers in *Through the Wire*, examined in the previous chapter; the students write for, and in some cases appropriate in a creative, emotive, even fetishising manner, the first-person voice of a separate human witness. To put it another way, the students create characters out of their interlocutors.

The personified heteroglossia within the writing is, of course, acute due to the vast gap, the relation of alterity, between writer and refugee in terms of cultural, social and religious background, as well as, crucially, exposure to traumatic events. Only a small number of contributors are able to articulate this alterity without entering into some form of the relation of objectification Julie Salverson identifies as the “erotics of injury” (“Change on Whose Terms?”). AAR’s project seems in some ways to be more interested ideologically in sameness than in difference, seeking to work with a notion of equivalence or universality among children from around the world. And arguably, if children are regarded as “unfixed” subjects, with capacities for cross-cultural imagination and malleable world-views, *Dark Dreams* might be permitted to bypass some of the ethical considerations that would arise if it consisted of adult cross-cultural re-tellings of refugee testimonies. Indeed, the ethical onus in this context is probably upon the critic apprehending the work: I have a responsibility to think through the implications of analysing the writing of children. Certainly, for the editors of the collection, the age of the writers permits a de-emphasis on historical and political veracity, as Sallis outlines in her foreword. It is worth noting, then, that in some cases, the young writers’ lack of success in breaching the gap between themselves and the refugee subject, as well as their errors of fact, are the basis for expressive charm: “Moving to Iran wasn’t a good idea because now they didn’t have any money or a place to live and didn’t even know Iranian. So they went to a place like the Salvation Army for help.

The Salvos helped them a lot” (105). Questions of ethical encounter, of appropriation and misrepresentation, must be weighed with the writers’ youth, being such that they cannot be expected to be properly cognisant of these complex issues. A different set of ethical frameworks is required for apprehending the representational politics of *Dark Dreams*; the central child–child relation upon which the project is grounded is a limited space in terms of representational ethics, while it seems, as I have sought to show, to be an expansive one in terms of imaginative, compassionate cross-cultural encounter and connection.

Literary value and political efficacy

Dark Dreams focuses a prospect that is pertinent, to greater or lesser extents, to all three of the anthologies considered here: that as published texts, they demand non-literary, non-historiographical criteria for determining value, and are most relevantly and profitably analysed within the contexts of process, advocacy, dialogue and (counter-discursive) politics. In general, literary sophistication and stylistic uniformity within the collections tends to be subordinated to social and political imperatives; to a large extent, they demand non-literary criteria for determining value or efficacy. This strikes at the heart of debates over which territories are occupied by art, culture and politics – an issue taken up in a different context by Eric Michaels in the provocatively titled, *Bad Aboriginal Art*, where he claims of Aboriginal visual art, “almost nothing of this work is ever designated ‘bad’” (142), and by Michelle Hanna, who warns against the deployment of less rigorous receptive frames for indigenous art: “The inability to recognise or make a space for the possibility of second-rate Indigenous art necessarily implies the failure to recognise or make space for excellent Indigenous art” (80). In the case of the anthologies, the project of making space must cohere with the project of making up ground, of facilitating

inclusive representation in a political context where it has been radically and quite comprehensively curtailed. Editorial cognisance of the power imbalances underpinning the anthology projects resulted in a resistance of the centripetal forces of which Bakhtin writes, and a concomitant promotion of stratification and heteroglossia within the collections. In *Another Country*, space is made for professional, sophisticated pieces of writing, and for unprofessional, awkward pieces: these co-exist side-by-side. The range of styles and topics canvassed in *Alone, Together* constitutes a multi-dimensional series of representations. The young contributors to *Dark Dreams* engage with refugee experiences from various historical contexts, with differing degrees of insight and perception.

Deleuze and Guattari observe of Franz Kafka's paradigmatically rhizomatic writing: "we will enter ... by any point whatsoever; none matters more than another, and no entrance is more privileged" (*Kafka* 3). Inasmuch as it suggests writing that does not impose structural directives in terms of trajectory and semantic normativity, writing that is decentralised rather than linear and hierarchical, this characterisation can be applied to the anthologies: readers may enter at any point – indeed, there is no particular gain to be had in reading them beginning with the first page and finishing with the last. The collections do not direct emphasis to a particular point(s) of centralisation; instead, they invite and inevitably produce a multiplicity of reading experiences. Deleuze and Guattari observe of minor literature, "in it everything takes on a collective value" (*Kafka* 17); in anthologies oriented around the issue of asylum, each piece of writing becomes creatively and socio-politically situated, and indeed elucidated by its place as part of the collection.

Individually, each of the publications I have examined is a dialogic text constructed and circulated via heterogeneous spaces of grassroots advocacy, education, cultural influence and political power; together, they form part of a larger rhizomatic network as elements within a

multidisciplinary field of creative work in Australia that is essentially a movement of counter-discourse to pejorative representations of asylum seekers and refugees. In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari's characterisation of a minor literature as writing in which "What each author says individually already constitutes a common action" (*Kafka* 17) is eminently applicable; the individual contributions of writing come into greatest significance – politically, socially, therapeutically and creatively – in their collective context as articulations on the experiences and lives of people that have sought protection in Australia.

The Citation of Injury: Regarding the Exceptional Body

one last time / please observe / I am sewing my lips together

—Mehmet al Assad, “Asylum”

The ongoing failure of *habeas corpus*

In July 2008 the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship of Australia’s Labor Government, Chris Evans, announced the abandonment of mandatory detention of asylum seekers, except as last resort. Two years on, five detention centres remain operative.⁴⁵ While Evans’s announcement seems not to have heralded the dramatic change in the biopolitical and human rights landscape that it seemed to promise, it did mark a shift away from the most punitive period in which the bodies of unauthorised arrivals were “produced” by the Australian sovereign authorities that disavowed them: incarcerated indefinitely without trial and positioned abjectly in the public consciousness by acts of self-injury. I examine the production of injury – hunger strike and self-mutilation – upon the detainee body via an analysis of its representation, or citation, in several items of Australian writing and performance. These include three poems written in English by asylum seekers, “Asylum” by Mehmet al Assad (2002), “Dream of Freedom” by Mohsen Soltany Zand (2004) and “Make a Whistle from my Throat” by an anonymous Baxter detainee (2005);

⁴⁵ As stated in the introduction, the immigration detention centres currently in operation are Villawood, Maribyrnong, Perth, Northern and Christmas Island. At 14 May 2010 a total of 3471 people were being detained, 2514 of these in detention centres and the remainder in transit and community-style detention. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship updates detention statistics regularly (Immigration Detention Statistics Summary np).

Australian Eva Sallis's novel *The Marsh Birds* (2005); Iranian theatre practitioner Shahin Shafaei's solo play *Refugitive* (performed between 2002-04); solidarity fasts by Australian activists (2002-04) and Australian artist Mike Parr's performance installation *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002).

While presenting Australian audiences with the possibility for imaginative encounter with injured bodies that seem immutably "other" to their own, these works also offer something more troubling, but potentially transforming: a context for affective recognition of proximity (both ethical and political) to the sovereign-produced position of exception.

In liberal terms, indefinite imprisonment without trial sees bodily agency transferred from the individual to the state without proper recourse to the writ of *habeas corpus*, which stands (in many nations around the world, including all nations under common law) to protect detained persons against the state by demanding their appearance before a court. Particularly in nations that uphold the writ, but even in those that do not, long-term imprisonment without trial – of, for instance, suspected enemy combatants in Guantanamo Bay or Bagram, Palestinians in administrative detention in Israel, people undergoing "reeducation through labor" in China or undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers in Europe, the United States and Australia⁴⁶ – constitutes an exercise of severe biopolitical power. The operation of sovereign power to suspend, restrict or deny altogether the usual rights and liberties (central of which is *habeas corpus*) of particular individuals or groups in a society is what can be termed a "state of exception". The term (translated from the German *Ausnahmezustand*) was coined in 1922 by Carl Schmitt, and has been developed by later thinkers, most notably Giorgio Agamben, whose examination of the connection between the state of exception and sovereign power has been articulated in several works, most recently *State of Exception* (published in English in 2005).

⁴⁶ As noted in the introduction, the United States holds more than 30,000 immigrants and asylum seekers in detention at any one time (see *Jailed Without Justice*). Member states of the European Union, which uses 224 detention centres, voted in 2008 to limit the detention of non-citizens to eighteen months (Brothers np).

Australia's immigration detention system constructs a state of exception that separates devalued bodies and what I term "embodied citizens": those who possess the social and juridical functions of bodily wellness and liberty (nutrition, healthcare, belonging within a home or habitat, freedom of movement and freedom from extrajudicial detention). In some nations, such as China, where reeducation centres are part of the status quo, the state of exception is, paradoxically, the state of normalcy. However, the notion that western liberal democracies do not present paradoxes with respect to the deployment of biopower is not persuasive: unauthorised asylum seekers to Australia do not constitute one of the "most extreme internal conflicts" (*State 2*) that would conventionally prompt a state of exception, and their extrajudicial detention is a state practice that has continued for several years, as it has in the European Union and the United States. Agamben characterises the Nazi concentration camp (a murderous space that, I maintain, should not be elided with the immigration detention centre) as exemplifying a permanent state of exception in which, he observes, what "was essentially a temporal suspension of the state of law, acquires a permanent spatial arrangement that, as such, remains constantly outside the normal state of law" (*Means without End* 39). More recently, Agamben has revisited these ideas with reference to biopower within the United States since 11 September 2001, arguing, "the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones" (*State 2*). A state of exception or emergency is, then, in spite of its name and its conventional meaning as a state of ambiguity between politics and the law (*State 1*), a mechanism that can be incorporated into the permanent (or at least extended) operation of a sovereign authority; it is arguably this entrenchment of exceptional powers that is of particular concern in political, legal and ethical / humane terms in the twenty-first century.

In Australia post-settlement, the liberty of certain disenfranchised groups within society has always been more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of sovereign power. Ever since the exceptional British assertion of *terra nullius*, Aboriginal people have experienced coercion under an ongoing state of exception, notoriously upheld by the Australian state and federal laws that functioned until the 1970s to forcibly remove children from their families (the Stolen Generations), and to deny voting rights, inclusion in the census and freedom of movement. Today, the appalling living conditions within some remote Aboriginal communities, while not literally carceral, constitute nonetheless a form of *homo sacer*, or “bare life” (as I mentioned in the introduction, a term utilised by Agamben to describe a non-belonging body divested by state force of the political status, and thus the rights and liberties, that make it “effectively” human) and would be unthinkable in non-Aboriginal communities.⁴⁷ However, taking into account Agamben’s observation that the state of exception and the instrumentalisation of bare life are characteristic functions of sovereignty rather than a moment of its breakdown, embodied citizenship can be seen to be a conditional / provisional position under what Joanna Zylińska (drawing on Judith Butler) terms “an ethics of bodies that matter” (85). Indeed, prolonged incarceration without trial represents a “limit-position” to which, in theory, *any* individual may be relegated – as attested by the recent high-profile cases of Australian citizens David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib, Australian permanent resident Cornelia Rau, as well as the small number of New Zealand citizens held in immigration detention in Australia.⁴⁸ This is especially apparent given the singular manner in which sovereign biopower may be possessed; Butler notes that following President George W. Bush’s military order on 13 November 2001 regarding the

⁴⁷ The controversial Northern Territory National Emergency Response or “intervention”, enabled via a “special measures” exemption from the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, represents a state of exception with the rationale of reducing the gap (in terms of physical and social health) between Aborigines and other Australians.

⁴⁸ For further information on the composition of the detention population see Immigration Detention Statistics Summary.

indefinite detention of suspected enemy combatants, “the executive branch assumes the power of the judiciary” (54). This is comparable in some ways to John Howard’s personal deployment of biopolitical authority in relation to asylum seekers. In the 2008 ABC television documentary, *The Howard Years*, the former Foreign Minister Alexander Downer revealed that the Pacific Solution was devised without consultation with cabinet after Howard instructed him to “go and find someone who’ll take” the Tampa asylum seekers (“Whatever it Takes” np).

With the precariousness of human liberty in mind, my analysis of the citation (I employ this term to describe the *direct referencing* by artists or activists of reported self-injuries upon asylum seekers’ bodies) of injury is articulated within the context of the encounter between the injured asylum seeker (represented in the work) and the embodied citizen (the audience). This encounter at once highlights the vast gap in terms of bodily liberty between asylum seekers and embodied citizens, and demands consideration of the latter’s *continual proximity* to a position of exception. In the face of state mechanisms that detain the asylum seeker, Australian viewers are called to examine the mechanisms (of inclusion within the body politic) by which their own liberty is upheld, and to consider its possible suspension. Perhaps more importantly, proximity also functions in terms of an ethical recognition of the interconnection between embodied citizens and exceptional bodies, or what Prem Kumar Rajaram terms the “intercontamination of identity” (“Disruptive Writing” 220) between the citizenry and its others.

Detention: the production of injury in Australia

The Australian mandatory detention system presupposes and produces Zylinska’s “ethics of bodies that matter” (85). As outlined in the introduction to this study, the system has undergone a number of amendments since being instituted by the Migration Amendment Act 1992,

developing into a structure of punitive deterrence from 1999, when the Temporary Protection Visa was introduced and becoming increasingly hard-line from 2001, when the “children overboard” affair played out and the high-profile Tampa incident inaugurated the Pacific Solution of offshore processing. Detention was scaled back somewhat from 2005, when it was determined that children were to be held in community-style detention, rather than detention centres. Acts of self-injury by asylum seekers occurred most frequently from 2000-2005, when conditions in detention were at their poorest and when detainees would often be held for months or years without progress on their case.⁴⁹

Self-injury has mostly taken the form of hunger strikes and lip-sewing. In 2000, groups of asylum seekers began hunger strikes at Curtin and Woomera detention centres. In January 2002, hundreds of mostly Afghan⁵⁰ asylum-seekers at Woomera, around 100 detainees at Curtin and more than twenty-five at Maribyrnong embarked upon a sixteen day hunger strike; many of these, including a number of children and teenagers, sewed their lips together, beat themselves with rocks and swallowed detergent and shampoo. Another mass hunger strike lasted for fourteen days at Woomera in June and July of the same year. In 2003, thirty-six asylum seekers embarked upon a hunger strike at Nauru detention centre. In December 2004, a group of Iranian detainees at Baxter sewed their lips together as part of a group hunger strike.⁵¹ Hunger strikes have taken place in Villawood in recent consecutive years: in October 2005 a small group of Chinese men began a strike, with two of them continuing for a month (“Detainee’s Six” 26); in March 2006 up to eighty people became involved in a strike (Cubby 7) and in March and April 2007 a group of

⁴⁹ A 2001 Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report on Australia’s onshore immigration detention facilities expressed serious concerns about the living conditions in the centres (*HREOC* 2001). A 2007 Commission report (also of onshore facilities) found that while there has been some improvement in conditions, detainees are still held for too long (*HREOC* 2007).

⁵⁰ The detainees were responding to the department’s decision to halt the processing of visas for Afghan asylum seekers.

⁵¹ For details on self-injury and protests in Australian detention centres during the period 2000-2004, see Mary Crock, Ben Saul and Azadeh Dastyari 201-02.

around thirty Chinese detainees launched a strike to protest against a new round of deportations, with an additional 100 people refusing meals in solidarity (Marks 4). These and similar events received varying degrees of media attention. While the 2007 Villawood strike was reported nationally, those of earlier years were covered extensively in the national and international media. For instance, the 2002 hunger strikes and self-mutilation were reported by *The New York Times*, Reuters, the BBC, *The Guardian*, the UK *Independent*, the *Birmingham Post*, the *Agence France-Presse*, and the *South China Morning Post*, among other outlets. Certainly, acts of self-injury by asylum seekers in Australia construct lines of wretched corporeal connection internationally. In May 2008 more than 100 unaccompanied child asylum seekers embarked upon hunger strikes in protest against poor conditions in detention on the Aegean island of Leros (under the authority of the Greek government).⁵² Jenny Edkins and Véronique Pin-Fat analyse the hunger strike and face sewing in 2003 of an Iranian asylum seeker in the United Kingdom in terms of sovereign biopower (1-2), and cite in their essay other instances of self-injury, including that of three Kurdish Iranian asylum seekers living in Glasgow who sewed their lips together in 2004 during a month-long hunger strike protesting the rejection of their asylum applications (Doherty np).

Self-injury, including hunger striking, is not an uncommon human response to incarceration (even the simulation of incarceration can result in self-inflicted injury: psychologist Philip Zimbardo's famous Stanford Prison Experiment in 1971 prompted some "prisoners" to hunger strike [Sherrer np]). In its reduction to a condition of bare life, and especially in the absence of habeas corpus, the incarcerated body becomes the sole site of agency. In this understanding, self-harm can be seen to operate in opposition to the overarching biopower of imprisonment; as Adrian Parr observes with particular reference to self-harm by child detainees

⁵² This hunger strike had a direct political effect that similar Australian strikes did not: the detained children were visited by Giorgos Costandopoulos, the Greek deputy health minister, who stated they would be transferred to better accommodation on the mainland (Brabant np).

in Australia, “What is at stake here is the power over life” (290). The work of Michel Foucault, one of the first theorists to foreground the body in cultural and literary criticism, provides an important starting point for an analysis of the battle for biopower and the concomitant production of injury. In *Discipline and Punish* (published in English in 1977) Foucault examines the production of docile bodies within European power structures since the eighteenth century. Foucault coined the term biopower to refer to the technologies that manage and exert authority over groups of bodies; in its collective capacity, biopower is crucial to the emergence and maintenance of the modern nation-state (in this we see a precursor to Agamben’s argument that the state of exception is *characteristic* of sovereignty). Biopower manifests within schools, medical institutions and in the cultural control of gender behaviours, but its most explicit and coercive manifestation is incarceration. The prison system for convicted criminal offenders is a central site for the production of disciplined bodies, but carceral bio-power also operates outside the criminal justice system; as Foucault notes (with particular reference to the incarceration of the insane throughout Europe), the “principle of extra-penal incarceration was in fact never abandoned” (*Discipline* 297). The detention of asylum seekers in Australia and other nations is a contemporary case in point.

The creative and cultural representation of asylum seeker injury by artists and activists enters into the “perpetual battle” for biopower of which Foucault writes: “[power] is not the ‘privilege,’ acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions” (*Discipline* 26). Australian audiences to these representations are asked to consider their relationship with the injured body and their implication, as embodied social citizens, in its production. In offering this relational space, representations or citations of injury intervene in the unequal “dialogue” between detainees who have injured themselves in acts of attempted

communication (embodied subaltern speech) and the federal government, which occupies the position of chief interpreter of these communications.

During the mass lip-sewing and hunger striking at Woomera in January 2002, the widely-cited statement of the then Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock epitomised a discourse of immutable difference between the asylum seekers and Australians: "Lip-sewing is a practice unknown in our culture ... and it's something that offends the sensitivities of Australians" (qtd in "Lip Sewing" 10). This statement repudiates any implication of government policy in the production of self-harm, and moreover, communicates the absurdly xenophobic view that lip-sewing is "known" in the cultures of asylum seekers. Acts of lip-sewing and hunger strike by detainees, while stark physical expressions of the impossibility of being heard – of being "bodies that matter" – were in their violent silence able to be re-inscribed by government voices in order to assert the validity of government action; as Joseph Pugliese observes, "Situating by government and media discourses within the topos of the abject, the refugees are framed as self-mutilating barbarians: they thus redeem our legislated violence" ("Subcutaneous" 28). Ruddock's resolve to enforce a state of exception in the name of sovereignty appeared to redouble in the face of the self-mutilation: "They believe it will influence decisions. It can't and it won't" (qtd in "Lip Sewing" 10). Rajaram notes that the government's interpretation of self-injury "as a calculated move to influence decisions or change a policy" reflects "a continued insistence on the moral and political dichotomies of territoriality" ("Disruptive Writing" 227). Appropriated by the government, lip-sewing coheres the ideological position of the embodied citizenry, a discursive manoeuvre of which Rosalyn Diprose observes, "Bodies deported, incarcerated, and rejected on the basis of their foreignness only ... have been sacrificed in the service of maintaining National unity by evoking a sense of shared and stable communal values" ("The Hand" 47). The creative works I examine here serve as interventions into this binary thinking, prompting consideration of

the ways in which state mechanisms produce the injury of detainees, and from this, drawing attention to the proximity of Australians to this injury, both in terms of a common human subjection under state power and an ethical responsibility for the other.

Cultural work: the citation of injury

The representation of self-mutilation and / or hunger strikes in the works I examine operates as a displaced index to actual bodily injury: half-concealed, carceral acts of self-harm come to be cited before an audience. But the artist–audience relation can in fact be seen to reinforce and consolidate the dynamic that is already inherent in the original self-injury. Maud Ellman argues that the hunger striking body “is itself a text, the living dossier of its discontents” (17) and that the strike is intrinsically and fundamentally an act of representation that depends for its meaning upon an observer: “Self-starvation is above all a performance. Like Hamlet’s mouse-trap, it is staged to trick the conscience of its viewers, forcing them to recognize that they are implicated in the spectacle that they behold” (17). Pugliese apprehends lip-sewing by asylum seekers detained in Australia within the context of self-representation, as “attempts by refugees to reclaim and resignify their exilic bodies” (“Subcutaneous” 28). This embodied representation, Pugliese adds, is a direct response to the manner of their detention: “By intextuating the organ of speech literally with a thread, refugees symbolically magnify the acts of censure and prohibition that reduce them to silence” (“Subcutaneous” 31). The meanings generated by the detention system and by acts of self-mutilation performed within it are apprehended in three poems written in English by detained asylum seekers as a contradictory terrain of spectacle and eloquence, agency and silence. The poems have the tone of a swansong, announcing a renunciation of hope – an affective state and lived practice explicated, as I noted in the previous chapter, by Ghassan Hage

in terms of functioning in society and connecting with an imagined future (*Against* 9-10) – as well as the loss of selfhood that Agamben argues is a condition of bare life.

“Asylum”

Written by Iraqi asylum seeker Mehmet al Assad, “Asylum” articulates self-sewing with desolate immediacy and has been taken up in both print and performance contexts. It was first published in *The Age* in 2002 and has subsequently appeared in *Borderlands e-journal* in 2002, the website of the Canberra-based Refugee Action Committee in 2005 and various other advocacy websites. It was incorporated into Sidetrack Performance Group’s *Citizen X* (premiered 2002), where it featured at the beginning of the production and as its closing piece. In 2006, “Asylum” was one of fourteen poems by refugees set to music by Linsey Pollak for the show *Papers of a Dead Man* at the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Art in Brisbane. The poem reads as follows:

Will you please observe through the wire

I am sewing my feet together

They have walked about as far

as they ever need to go.

Will you further observe

through the wire

I am sewing my heart together

It is now so full of

the ashes of my days

it will not hold any more.

Through the wire
one last time
please observe
I am sewing my lips together
that which you are denying us
we should never have
had to ask for. (*Age* 9)

Spoken directly to an imagined Australian public on the free side of the wire, the repeated request to attend underlines the view, expressed by Ellman, Pugliese and others, that self-harm is an attempt to communicate to another. In this case, it literally calls for an audience. The poet's polite, calm voice, so out of alignment with the obscene surrender it describes, recalls Primo Levi's deliberate deployment in his memoirs of "the calm, sober language of the witness, neither the lamenting tones of the victim nor the irate voice of someone who seeks revenge" ("Afterword" 382). Al Assad's tone seems to subtly mimic the civilly disinterested position of many of the embodied citizens from whose world he is excluded, and indeed, to respond ironically (whether by accident or intent) to Ruddock's stated concern for the offended "sensitivities of Australians" in the face of lip-sewing by asylum seekers with the formal sensitivity of its request.

As well as constructing this linguistic / tonal alignment (in a language that is not his own), al-Assad highlights the *ethical* proximity of asylum seekers and the Australian people whose protection they seek. As Rajaram notes of the poem, "The subject is hostage to the other, is fundamentally intertwined with the other" ("Disruptive Writing" 224). Similarly, Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo argue that the poem "explicitly metaphorizes lip-sewing as staging the graphic failure of the social contract by which requests for asylum should at least be heard" (2007, 199).

The poem is oriented around the idea of encounter, recognition and compassionate connection, even as it concedes to the knowledge that these potentialities are circumvented under the body politic.

The communication of one's own act of lip-sewing through (written) language appears to inhere in paradox. Elaine Scarry contends that physical pain leads to the "unmaking" of the world, while human creativity leads to the "making" of the world, in the sense that "intense pain ... destroys a person's self and world ... [it] is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates" (35). While Scarry refers specifically to torture, her point might be applied to the self-destruction enacted by self-harm, and especially to the language destruction enacted by lip-sewing. Scarry maintains that the perception of bodily emplacement in one's environment and the possibilities for interpersonal engagement are unmade as the experience of pain diminishes consciousness of the world beyond pain. It is a view that connects, perhaps obliquely, with Levi's paradoxical assertion, discussed in chapter one, that the true witnesses to the Holocaust are those beyond perception and consciousness (ultimately, the drowned), and with Edkins's conceptualisation of trauma as existing "outside the linguistic realm, outside the symbolic or social order" (214). Such theorisations seem to conflict with the argument made here that self-injury is a mode of communication, unless it is regarded, in its very *self*-authorisation (in defiance of victimhood), as the communication of one's unmaking: the marking of bodily exclusion from the world. As far as the creative representation of self-injury is concerned, James Thompson's discussion of Scarry's thesis on pain seems apposite: "The contraction [of pain] ... once the 'sounds and cries' have died down, can prompt a return to language" (147); he argues that pain can lead to an urgent need to communicate and considers the productive affects associated with this: "Where that urgency does exist, there is a link to beauty, because it too can prompt a form of engagement

with others” (147). Certainly, “Asylum” can be seen to describe the poet’s unmaking through pain, while the representation of injury in poetry is a mode of picking up the pieces, or of *re-integration* in a creative context where one may be seen or affectively attended to by others.

“Make A Whistle from my Throat”

“Make a Whistle from my Throat” was written by an Iranian detainee at Baxter detention centre.⁵³ It was submitted by the detainee to refugee advocate Don Reid, who published it under the name “DA” in the minor street press *Micropress Oz* in 2005 after making some grammatical corrections, approved by the detainee.⁵⁴ In the same year, employing the grassroots networks of connection between Australia’s refugee support communities (discussed in the previous chapter with reference to the gathering of work for anthologisation), Reid circulated the poem among refugee advocates and organisations with a note from the poet stating, “the author of this poem is a number”, and it was published on the Canberra-based Refugee Action Committee and the Project Safecom websites under “anonymous” (personal correspondence with Reid np). As well as indicating the poet’s concern that the publication of his name would jeopardise his claim for refugee status, his anonymity is reminiscent of the de-individualising authorial or representational strategies mentioned in chapter one – of Alexander Donat, of Ka-Tzetnik 135633 (Concentration Camp Inmate 135633), of Towfiq Al-Qady / Sinbad / “5 million refugees” and of Shahin Shafaei / 1319 – and it allows him to speak for a community of bare lives. Jeremy D. Popkin’s observation of this strategy, already quoted, is worth returning to in this context: “the complete emptying out of his [Ka-Tzetnik 135633’s] identity symbolized by the adoption of a number in place of a name also marks the fusion of the identities of all those who bore numbers” (348). The

⁵³ Although the poet is now resident in Australia and not at risk of deportation, I will not disclose his name here, since his work was released into the public domain anonymously.

⁵⁴ This issue of the street press is not held in a library or archive and I have been unable to obtain a copy of it elsewhere; I cite the Refugee Action Committee online publication of the poem in this discussion.

anonymous Baxter poet charts his own reduction to bare life within the framework of the community of others who have been assigned numbers in place of their names, who have been alienated from agency over their own bodies by the biopolitical structures that hold them indefinitely. His poem reads:

I do not know
what will happen after I die.
I do not want to know.
But I would like the Potter to make a whistle
from the clay of my throat.
May this whistle fall into the hands
of a cheeky and naughty child
and the child to blow hard on the whistle continuously
with the suppressed and silent air of his lungs
and disrupt the sleep
of those who seem dead
to my cries. (Refugee Action Committee np)

Like “Asylum”, this poem expresses the pain that comes from the withholding of humane recognition and response by those from whom it is sought: “those who seem dead / to my cries”. It presents a troubling image of unmaking, to employ Scarry’s term, whereby self-representation is imagined as coming with death; with the use of one’s corpse as a tool in another person’s life. The poet conceives not of agency but of being used by another person. A crucial similarity between this piece and “Asylum” is that even as both are works of written agency, and in al-Assad’s case a description of dire bodily agency, the poems express the desire for the ultimate disembodiment of death. Ellman apprehends this contradiction: “It is true that hunger

depends upon its context for its meaning, but it is also true that *self-inflicted* hunger is a struggle to release the body from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself” (14).

“Dream of Freedom”

A similar trope of disembodiment, of freedom-in-death, appears in Iranian poet and refugee Mohsen Soltany Zand’s poem, “Dream of Freedom”, published in 2004 in the anthology *Another Country*, discussed in the previous chapter. Soltany Zand – who is one of the four refugees represented in Ros Horin’s *Through the Wire*, examined in chapter one – began to make an impact within Australian advocacy and creative circles whilst still in detention; during 2001, musicians Annette Hughes and Geoffrey Datson regularly visited him in Villawood to collaborate on an album, *Mohsen*, produced by Queensland’s Stickylab and featuring Soltany Zand’s poetry set to music. In 2003, after four years of incarceration, Soltany Zand was released and in 2006 his double album, *Australian Dream*, was produced by Stickylab. This work features spoken and song forms of Soltany Zand’s work, performed in part by the poet, but mostly by a variety of Australian cultural and political figures, including veteran theatre practitioner John Bell, actor Claudia Karvan, Thomas Keneally (whose refugee advocacy has been discussed in relation to *Another Country*), former Premier of Western Australia Carmen Lawrence and Australian Democrats Senator Andrew Bartlett. In this way, Soltany Zand’s writing is voiced by “bodies that matter”, and as such, call fellow Australians to attend.

In “Dream of Freedom” Soltany Zand focuses the simultaneous representation and release derived from cutting himself with a razor. The poem begins:

I’m looking for a sharp razor

All rent is settled in a second

I can see freedom, the red of nature’s sunset

and God on the sharp razor
Red is the only colour I can see
The hand is cutting
Blood is all over the room (*Another Country* 107)

Soltany Zand expresses the embodied relief that comes from cutting open his skin and releasing his blood “all over the room”; his relief is the tangible de-constitution of the incarcerated body to which his life has been reduced. Even as he attempts to generate release from the self, the poet seeks to self-represent via his injury: “I put my bloody hand on the wall / I want to present this red of my life to nature” (107). This desire to communicate fails because the poet is alone (“There is nobody looking for me”), and the only solution therefore is to await death; the poem ends with a desperately bleak sentiment: “Everybody must die / Then why not soon?!” (107). Regarded with the background knowledge of Soltany Zand’s abovementioned achievements, his continuing creative practice, the tragic trajectory of his poem is perhaps alleviated to a certain extent; nonetheless, within the public spaces he has found to communicate his trauma, Soltany Zand stands for other, less visible, former and current detainees.

The Marsh Birds

A tragic process of human unravelling is described, this time from the perspective of an Australian writer and refugee supporter, in Eva Sallis’s novel, *The Marsh Birds*, published by Allen and Unwin in 2005. The novel centres on the lonely journey from childhood to young adulthood of Iraqi asylum seeker Dhurgham al-Samarra’i. When the story begins, twelve year old Dhurgham is alone, having become separated from his middle-class Baghdadi family during their attempt to flee Iraq and cross into Syria. He waits for days at the appointed family meeting-place at the Great Mosque at Damascus, but the reunion never occurs. After a period of two years in Syria,

living with a sexually abusive guardian, Mr Hosni, Dhurgham is smuggled to Australia via Indonesia. The middle section of Sallis's novel, more than a third of the text, takes place in the (fictional) Mawirrigun detention centre, administered by the government department for immigration, pointedly referred to by the acronym AID. Dhurgham spends the next four years in detention, which precipitates his psychological and physical ruin.

Upon Dhurgham's arrival at Mawirrigun, Sallis constructs a moment of involuntary human recognition between the opposing figures of asylum seeker and citizen:

A golden-haired workman, bare torso copper in the early sun, stood by the sentinel gates and stared up at Dhurgham as the bus passed him. His deep-set blue eyes were inquiring, uncertain. His stare was so intense that Dhurgham felt something was demanded of him personally. He raised his hand. The beautiful young man involuntarily lifted his own, then dropped it to his side and frowned.

(73)

This striking, silent encounter, which fundamentally enacts a Levinasian face-to-face relation, is for both participants an unavoidable, affective response that precedes prejudice, desire and nationality. While it constructs an almost caricatured image of ethnic difference, the encounter encapsulates more subtly a complex and contradictory emotional landscape of contact amid difference: of obligation, fear, distrust, as well as openness, curiosity and care. We can read in the beautiful blond Australian's behaviour – a wave followed by a frown – a moment of disconcertion over the demarcations of embodied citizenship, the idea of otherness despite a palpable proximity. The need to respond to Dhurgham-the-human seems to conflict with the logic established by the political context of their “meeting”: Dhurgham is an exceptional, non-belonging body, to be placed apart from citizens like the workman. During the first months of his prolonged incarceration, Dhurgham's relations with Australians parallel in various ways the

complexity and ambiguity of this initial moment of recognition. But as the situation in the detention centre deteriorates and Dhurgham's spirit becomes more and more degraded, possibilities for close regard of the other are increasingly curtailed. As it descends into a space of rioting, self-harm and dejection, the detention centre becomes an environment in which the possibility for compassion and care is suppressed and asylum seekers and Australians are compelled away from one another. Sallis charts, in this way, the production of exceptional bodies within the context of extended extrajudicial incarceration.

In her portrayal of Dhurgham's years in detention, Sallis emphasises the struggle with adolescent identity formation, frequently manifesting as confused, physical rage. Dhurgham's overwhelming loneliness and self-revulsion (as he calculates the considerable sum of money stolen from him by the manipulative Mr Hosni), the realisation that "He was an idiot baby" (117), are impotently directed at his young friend Aziz: "Aziz asked him what was happening, man, and he punched Aziz full in the mouth, then threw himself out of the door and into the dusty compound, speechless" (118). Dhurgham begins to derive excitement and even joy from acts of violence, real or imagined: "He fantasised about killing all the guards, Mr Chris; how quickly and absolutely his wrath would come down upon them!" (132). As the detention centre is on the verge of a riot, Dhurgham savours the mood: "Any chink for laughter or frenzy and Dhurgham would have taken it, just to feel his limbs move with speed and purpose, anything to unleash himself from the sleep that was dragging at him, anything to crack through the slow crust the desert seemed to settle on them" (148). When violence erupts, it momentarily brings Dhurgham back into bodily self-possession:

Dhurgham went mad with the release the riot brought. He was ripped off Mr James' back to struggle in delight and fury against the guards, screaming abuse ... He was as euphoric as if the bus and caravan [of Australian protesters] had driven

in, busted down the fence and flown away with them into the sky. He sprinted up and down the compound screeching with adolescent happiness at the burning buildings and the advancing troops of his enemies, his arms outstretched. (153-4).

The riot precipitates a suicide attempt by Dhurgham's mentor Abu Rafik, who is unjustly labelled a ringleader; Dhurgham finds him "hanging from the fan, dangling between the bunks, slowly turning, face away. Dhurgham felt his heart die and for a moment couldn't move. Ammu's hands and legs moved in pain and the fan slowly turned him face to face with Dhurgham" (155). Abu Rafik's suicide attempt prompts Dhurgham's realisation that he is not valuable in the life of the older man, and is the turning point in the boy's deterioration: "He felt as though he had been slashed open" (155). Sallis constructs the detention environment around this violent, bodily framework, in which her protagonist oscillates between explosive, exhilarating self-possession and a visceral, paralysing sense of insignificance.

After the riot, a culture of self-harm begins to permeate the detention centre: "The long-term inhabitants seemed unable to go near anything sharp without slashing themselves, or near anything chemical without drinking it ... Someone discovered that you could cut yourself in the corner capping of the jaunty new dongas, and soon everyone was doing it and the dongas had to be redesigned" (164). Sallis focuses this image of the commonness of detainee self-harm with the tragic and specific transformation of Abu Nizar, a gentle, uncomplaining figure that Dhurgham particularly loves and admires. When Abu Nizar, suffering the symptoms of a kidney infection, is informed by the guard responsible for dealing with his illness that he and the other detainees are "lower than animals" (165), he communicates his despair:

Abu Nizar climbed onto the roof that afternoon. He shouted over and over, 'I want my watch! Where is my father's gold watch!' and tapped his wrist repeatedly. Then he slashed himself open across the belly with some glass he had been hiding

before the guards swarmed up and beat him down with batons. Abu Nizar disappeared, transported in the night to a hospital in Adelaide. When he returned two weeks later, he was put in isolation and for some reason never released in all the remaining time Dhurgham was there. (165)

Abu Nizar's horrific act of bodily inscription leads to his removal from sight; his attempt at self-reclamation prompts the curtailing of his ability to communicate his distress.

Along with Abu Rafik's suicide attempt, Abu Nizar's self-injury brings about a change in Dhurgham; instead of expressing himself with outward explosive physicality, he turns his desire for autonomy and bodily power inward and embarks upon a hunger strike. For Dhurgham, this act is a declaration of power and strength against that of the imprisoning forces. Sallis's representation of Dhurgham's hunger strike adopts an aggrandising tone that contrasts with the sober voice of al-Assad in "Asylum"; while both locate self-injury as an attempt to communicate with Australian observers, the description of Dhurgham's attempt is imbued with a specifically adolescent, male desire to project strength and glory:

Dhurgham went on hunger strike. The heat shimmered around him and inside him. The weaker he got, the more he felt he was glowing with heat. Here, here was the power and the glory he had lost all this while! Here in his empty belly and his legs and arms that could no longer carry him! He thought of the curling leaves and glinting mosaics. He found he could remember with clarity every curl, every frond, every ancient façade and stair, and he lost himself in ageless grandeur ... He was a saint and a devil, a dagger in the sides of the guards ... Without moving his head from his bed he could feel their discomfort and his resolve strengthened ... He was strong. Stronger than these guards and these soft voices, and stronger

than these flimsy walls, these metal barricades! He soared in a waking dream,
ecstatic in his burning bed, joyous, vicious, exultant. (167-8)

Dhurgham's hunger strike allows a brief, delirious egoism to overcome the emasculating razor wire of detention. The sense of attaining glory through hunger-as-spectacle recalls Franz Kafka's short story "A Fasting Artist" (also translated as "A Hunger Artist"), whose protagonist imagines the "glory of surpassing himself to achieve the inconceivable, for he felt that his capacity to fast was boundless" (213). Dhurgham's deriving of strength through what is, in Scarry's terms, the unmaking of his world, is a pitifully ironic representation of the extent of his disempowerment; as a reviewer of the book argues, Dhurgham barely has the agency to occupy the centre of the novel: "Dhurgham can hardly be described as a protagonist; the only power the system leaves him is the power to destroy himself" (Gorton 4).

Underlining the insubstantiality of his assertion of corporeal power, Dhurgham is no match for the physical forces of the detention centre: "Dhurgham was cuffed to the bed by one hand and both feet. Miss Cora held his head to stop him threshing. A new guard he hadn't seen before straddled his stomach. Mr Theo held his arm and the nurse inserted a cannula and attached it to a drip" (169). His hunger strike brought to an undignified end in this way, Dhurgham discovers that he has failed utterly to achieve bodily authority; he is transferred to another detention centre 3000 kilometres east: "the guards put him on the darkened bus without letting him return to his room and get his shoes. It all happened in a split second ... and then for days he felt himself sitting like a ghost in his new room, taking his time to catch up with his body" (169). Just as Abu Nizar's slashing of his stomach results in him being placed in isolation, Dhurgham's hunger strike serves only to redouble the exertion of sovereign biopower upon him, and to exile him further from his own body.

Dhurgham's deterioration manifests in stark corporeal terms; at the beginning of his journey, his physical beauty is one of his defining traits (and a factor in his guardian Mr Hosni's paedophilic infatuation with him). During his hunger strike, Dhurgham changes almost beyond recognition, as Peter, the well-liked director of the centre's education facilities, observes:

He saw a bone-thin teenage boy lying flat on a bed, huge black eyes burning but otherwise motionless. Dhurgham pulled dry lips back over sticky yellow teeth in a grimace and whispered, 'I am stronger than all of you.' Peter didn't see the joy.

He only saw a boy with fetid breath who should have been using his muscles and mind, wasting away in a feverish madness. (168)

By the time Dhurgham has endured four years in detention and smuggled himself to New Zealand, he has begun to occupy his body differently, to bear his excluded (non-)status physically. The perception of the New Zealand immigration official that interviews him captures this change; at first, the official sees "A dark, closed, secretive face. An ugly, almost obsequious manner" (178), and then "for a moment the face of a very beautiful young boy shine through the shifting, hunched cunning" (179). From the perspective of these long-term physical changes in Dhurgham, self-harm can be seen as an acute crystallisation of the enduring physical effects of several years spent seeking asylum. At the end of the novel, Dhurgham's period of happiness in New Zealand with a host family and a love affair with their teenaged daughter is cut short when he is told that he is to be deported back to Australia. In his devastation he smashes the family's furniture and batters himself with a chair-leg until he is covered in his own blood. The family's repulsion and horror, mingled with guilt, is a heightened version of Peter's response to Dhurgham's hunger strike: in his "volcanic pain" (239), Dhurgham becomes a terrifying spectacle with which civil contact is impossible, even as he represents the result of failed civic hospitality. Crucially, Sallis's exposition of this wretched situation within the broader context of indefinite,

mandatory detention offers readers a measure of understanding of the mechanisms by which sovereign Australia produces individuals who are excluded from the status of embodied citizen.

While it is a work of fiction, Sallis's novel is derived from her research on government and non-government reports and asylum seekers' court proceedings, as well as her personal experiences as an advocate for asylum seekers and refugees. In the acknowledgements at the end of the book she names the individuals upon whom several characters (not including Dhurgham) are loosely based. Perhaps with these things in mind, one critic seems to occlude the importance of Sallis's position as a writer-on-behalf of asylum seekers, arguing that the novel is "compelling as a work of testimony" (Gorton 4). In this conception, Sallis is seen as providing a direct, unmediated glimpse of the experiences of asylum seekers detained in Australia. While her novel does not and cannot do this, there is some strategic value in being regarded as something of a stand-in for asylum seekers as far as political efficacy is concerned; the same review concludes that Sallis's novel might indeed function as a dossier for change: "if it can help to dismantle Australia's practices of detention, it will have value" (Gorton 4). If indeed the novel did contribute to the changes made to detention practices, especially since 2008, it did so *alongside* voices from within detention centres, such as those expressed in the poems examined earlier in this chapter, and the voices of former detainees who strive upon their release to reclaim embodied agency within the sovereign territory from which they have been excluded.

Refugitive

Iranian playwright, director and actor Shahin Shafaei (whose work in *Through the Wire* was discussed in chapter one) is an indomitable case-in-point of the latter. His self-penned, self-directed solo play *Refugitive* toured to more than forty metropolitan and rural locations across Australia from late 2002 until its final staging at the Adelaide Fringe Festival during February and

March 2004. The play emerged out of Shafaei's desire for encounter and communication with Australian audiences: after his release in February 2002 from Curtin Detention Centre after twenty-two months of incarceration, Shafaei began to conceive a performance that would respond to common misconceptions held by Australians about asylum seekers. In other words, he recognised from the outset the importance of engaging lines of connection between asylum seekers and the citizens on whose behalf asylum policies are implemented. While in *Through the Wire* Shafaei undertook the painful task of enacting his own story, *Refugitive*, he insists, is not autobiographical (Cox interview np). The work centres around the experiences of an unnamed man undergoing a hunger strike in detention in Australia; placed under surveillance in a small cell, the man engages in conversations with his hungry, pain-wracked belly and with different immigration authorities. Co-produced and facilitated by Australian activist, playwright and director of New Mercury Theatre, Alex Broun, the premiere performance of *Refugitive* took place in Sydney in November 2002 (as part of a double-bill performance alongside Linda Jaivin's play *Halal El/Mashakeh*).

Subsequently, Shafaei and Broun, in association with New Mercury Theatre, worked together to organise the extensive tour of *Refugitive* to Queensland, New South Wales, ACT, Victoria and South Australia. The structure of the tour's organisation highlights, in a similar manner to the anthologies examined in the previous chapter, the importance of rhizomatic networks mapped by grass-roots support groups; in this case, Rural Australians for Refugees and Refugee Action Collectives representing the different states visited were especially crucial in promoting the play and seeking out interest and performance sites within small towns and regional centres. As Rand Hazou observes, by reaching a number of communities, *Refugitive* "became a locus for a 'web of discourse' ... through which the hunger strikes could be closely examined" (184). The tour can also be seen as an important reclamation of spatio-corporeal

agency on the part of Shafaei, whose previous embodied experience of Australia was carceral and agonisingly static. At the same time, Shafaei was limited by the biopolitical implications of his refugee status; while he was performing, he held a Temporary Protection Visa, under the terms of which he was not entitled leave to return to Australia if he travelled outside its borders.

Shafaei's play, a dynamic and physically demanding work in performative terms, constructs an incisive critique of the operation of biopolitical power within the Australian detention system via its "dialogues" with correctional and immigration authorities, wryly referred to as the "Australian Colonisation Manager" (17) and the "Minister of Physical Powers" (18).⁵⁵ Upon being informed that he has been "screened out" by immigration and is "not entitled to apply for asylum in Australia" (19), the protagonist asserts his right to request asylum and to have his case considered judicially: "How did you decide? Without any official interview in the presence of a solicitor, and hearing our reasons for seeking asylum, how did you reject us?" (19). Later, the man is told that his letter to the United Nations cannot be sent:

DIMIA MANAGER: Yes, about this letter to the UN. I read it completely.

THE MAN: But you can't read my personal letter to the UN!

DIMIA MANAGER: Who says that? You? I, as the DIMIA Manager, have the authority to work as a filter for any correspondence. (20)

Bringing his character into dialogue with the authorities that hold him under surveillance, Shafaei is able to locate his performance directly within the context of policy implementation; he apprehends the uncomfortable nexus of Australian legislation and international human rights obligations from a position of extremity embodied by the act of hunger striking. Moreover, Shafaei re-frames biopolitical surveillance within a performative context in which he is the author and agent of his own surveillance by an audience. While it contains a degree of didacticism, this

⁵⁵ All quotes from *Refugitive* are taken from its published version in *Another Country: Writers in Detention* (2007).

articulation of protest on behalf of asylum seekers is strategically important in terms of communicating the information necessary, as far as Shafaei is concerned, for an Australian audience to consider the political framework in question.

In its representation of the operation of Australian biopolitical violence, *Refugitive* incorporates satire and slapstick and utilises the vernacular of western popular culture. Government rhetoric is satirised in the DIMIA Manager's assertion: "From now on don't forget that you are queue jumpers, illegal immigrants ... would you please pass me my Australian Oxford dictionary edited by Howard University, oh thanks ... there we are, you are boat people" (16). The detainee observes that the "Australian Colonisation Manager" sees the asylum seekers "like gladiators. Actually, he looks at me like I'm Russell Crowe" (17). After raising the ire of this manager, the detainee is comically choked "like Homer with Bart" (18). This aspect of the performance seems to have come as a welcome surprise to audiences. One critic observed that *Refugitive* "surprised and delighted audiences with its lack of bitterness and disarming comedy" (Smith 22). Another noted, "Audiences who have seen *Refugitive* have remarked on the absence of bitterness, especially towards Australia" ("Behind the Wire" 14). Shafaei acknowledges that the incorporation of comedy enabled him to communicate with Australian audiences on terms that would be familiar: "I started studying all the characters that would make sense ... I knew *my* style of working was not going to make sense, it's a very different culture" (Cox interview np). While the incorporation of comic vernacular into the performance might be seen as a "soft" treatment of the decidedly non-humorous realities of self-injury in detention, it is important to recognise the efficacy of this strategy in terms of generating sentiments of proximity between Australians and asylum seekers. Shafaei points out that the comic and less confrontational elements of the performance served this very human purpose: "to see that human face so close to you is so hard to reject ... especially if that face hasn't tried to push you away" (Cox interview np). Moreover, as

Hazon has observed, the use of humour “circumvents” (182) the valorisation of trauma and suffering in stories of asylum that Julie Salverson warns against (and which remains an important consideration throughout this study). Or as Shafaei puts it: “I am showing you that I am a human being with sorrows, with laughter ... I would cry, I’d get hungry” (Cox interview np).

Contrary to the expectations that accompany a solo performance of this nature, Shafaei does not use *Refugitive* to chart his own personal experience in immigration detention; his performance is, much like Towfiq Al-Qady’s *Nothing But Nothing*, examined in chapter one, an intersubjective work that seeks to reveal the humanity of the “community of others” with whom he was incarcerated. The traumatised young people – a three year old boy who had not seen another child for several months, a thirteen year old girl who went on a hunger strike and a seventeen year old boy who sewed his lips together – mentioned towards the end of the play are based upon Shafaei’s former fellow detainees. Although he witnessed the hunger strikes and lip-sewing of those around him in detention, providing whatever support he could, Shafaei did not perform either of these self-injuries. The reason for this, he maintains (and as I noted briefly in the introduction), is the agency conferred by his grasp of English – the same agency possessed by the poets discussed in this chapter. Scarry observes that language represents a mode of being or creating in the world that is the opposite of bodily pain: “so long as one is speaking, the self extends out beyond the boundaries of the body, occupies a space much larger than the body” (33). Having a means of linguistic self-representation within the bureaucratic spaces of immigration detention made Shafaei, in his words, “the fortunate one” that did not have to resort to other, desperate, means of representation (Cox interview np). In the play, bodily deprivation is framed as an attempt at communication-beyond-language with the immigration authorities: “Nobody cared about us not eating so this was the only remaining choice to stop drinking, the only choice, the only decision that you can make around here” (15). The decision to not eat or

drink represents attempted agency – even if it amounts, in Scarry’s terms, to the unmaking of the world – and a challenge to recognise value in exceptional bodies. The interlocutors of the hunger strike (the immigration and detention authorities) have determined the meaning of the strike and the value of the bodies enacting it by way of an apathetic response: “nobody cared”. The only instance of a caring response in the play is the protagonist’s polite words to his own stomach: “please co-operate with me for the last part, my dear stomach” (22); here, self-harm, whatever else it may express, is not an act of self-hatred.

The importance of the interlocutor or audience to self-injury can be seen as a significant impetus for its citation in creative work. In reference to Kafka’s “A Hunger Artist”, Ellman observes, “The moral seems to be that it is not by food that we survive but by the gaze of others; and it is impossible to live by hunger unless we can be seen or represented doing so” (17). In Ellman’s view, the receiver of the hunger strike is crucial to its efficacy; hunger striking is “To hold the body up for ransom, to make mortality into a bargaining chip” (17). Being deemed exceptional to the Australian nation with whom they attempt to “bargain” with hunger, the bodies of asylum seekers carry little capital in and of themselves; indeed, the terms “ransom” and “bargaining chip” suggest the possession of agency that (as Sallis’s novel implies) is surely minimal in the face of the Australian biopower that underpinned mandatory detention. But the citation of injured, exceptional bodies in works such as *Refugitive* alters this (im)balance.

Moreover, while the government maintained a strident refusal to be moved by detainee self-injury, media reports of it constructed dialogues that afforded asylum seekers some agency in terms of the interpretation of their silent acts. Media coverage occurred in the face of tense battles over access to detainees. In January 2002, journalists outside Woomera were instructed to move 700 metres away from the centre’s gates. An hour long stand-off ensued when journalists refused to move. An Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio journalist was arrested

and charged with failing to leave Commonwealth land; she was later released on bail on the condition she immediately leave Woomera ("Woomera Crisis" 5). Despite this, journalists accessed information; several Australian and international reports of the Woomera mass hunger strikes and self-harm cited, alongside government statements, a letter by Afghan asylum seekers obtained by *The Sydney Morning Herald*: "We have no hope, we see no future ... We are ready to die ... We only request the Australian people help us, otherwise we have no choice but to continue the hunger strike until the end of our life" (qtd in DeBelle 6). The media also variously quoted lawyers representing detainees, advocacy and religious groups and current and former Woomera employees. In 2003, the newly appointed Minister for Immigration Amanda Vanstone responded to hunger strikes by asylum seekers detained at Nauru: "It's not in Australian territory, it's on Nauru and being run by other people. If someone doesn't want to be there, they can go home. Nobody likes to see people who are feeling that they have to take what appear to be drastic measures in order to protest, but people will do what they want to do" (qtd in Shaw and Gregory 2). In several newspaper reports, this unyielding disavowal of responsibility is cited alongside comments by lawyers Eric Vadarlis and Julian Burnside and Hassan Ghulam, president of the Hazara Ethnic Society of Australia, emphasising the necessity for a humane response.

These dialogues illustrate the conflicts and contentions surrounding biopower, especially in relation to its most violent articulations upon the bodies of excluded detainees; as Athena Athanasiou argues, "The challenge, following Foucault, is to rethink 'technology' not as a singularly constituted and reified instrumentality, but rather as a plural, dispersed, and discontinuous engagement" (144). Certainly, while debate in the public sphere regarding detainee self-injury did not effect an immediate significant disruption of the constitution of state biotechnology, I argue that it contributed incrementally, along with works such as *Refugitive*, to the body of opposition to indefinite detention that has manifested in the political and ideological

shifts of recent years. Shafaei's citation of the act of hunger striking weighs in on the discursive battleground surrounding self-injury. His former closeness to hunger striking bodies in detention frames his performance and protest within a context of personal and political authenticity. Even though his play is not autobiographical, Shafaei's own identity was integral to the efficacy of his performances – almost all reviews of the show provide a précis of his own story of fleeing Iran and arrival and detention in Australia.

While it does not tell his personal story, Shafaei regarded *Refugitive* as an opportunity for communication with Australians, both in terms of his identity as a refugee and as a theatre practitioner: “it was very much an introduction of myself to Australia and Australia to myself” (Cox interview np). His performances were followed by question and answer sessions that often went on for longer than the fifty-minute show; typically, Shafaei would be asked personal questions that required him to speak about his traumatic memories. In this way, Shafaei offered an intensification of the intimacy inherent in solo theatre and his appearances before an audience were imbued with the idea of *attending* to another. By constructing points of contact and dialogue, Shafaei also served as a figure by which audiences could regard their proximity to asylum seekers still held in detention. This realisation of proximity manifested largely in terms of an ethical relation; Shafaei recalls that in every question and answer session, the question would arise: “what do you think we can do now?” For Shafaei, this was a tremendously encouraging sign of what he calls a “social movement”. He responded by encouraging people to “have the conversation” with each other, to attempt to contact asylum seekers in detention, and to write to state and federal representatives (Cox interview np). Shafaei's emphasis on conversation echoes Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept of cosmopolitan engagement as everyday practice. As well as encouraging what might be thought of as cosmopolitan social and compassionate communication, Shafaei's suggestions implicitly highlight the interdependent relation between Australians and asylum

seekers: democratically elected state and federal politicians both protect the rights and freedoms of Australians, and enact the detention system in the latter's name.

Solidarity Fasts

Acts of self-injury by detained asylum seekers had powerful affects upon sections of Australian society cognisant of the fact that the biopolitical power of a democratically elected government is exerted in the name of its citizenry, and who opposed this violent definition of their citizenship. For these Australians, detainee self-injury was a manifest indictment on the failure of human rights standards. One mode of response on the part of Australian activists was to perform their solidarity, indeed their proximity, to detained asylum seekers. In August 2002, the Lismore Refugee Action Collective held a ten day hunger strike to protest mandatory detention policies. In November 2004, PEN Australia released statements of concern about the health of a group of Sri Lankan detainees at Baxter on hunger strike (including Sarath Amarasinghe, a writer, PEN member and creator of the newsletter *Baxter News*, excerpted in *Another Country*) and on 1 December that year Rosie Scott, Denise Leith, Thomas Keneally and other PEN members fasted outside the Department of Immigration in Canberra to express solidarity with the Sri Lankans. Later that month, a number of Australians engaged in similar "solidarity fasts" and "vigils" in order to express their support for Iranian Arab asylum seekers who were at that time undertaking hunger strikes at Baxter detention centre. The main solidarity fast, staged for twenty-four hours from 17-18 December in Melbourne's Bourke St Mall, involved writer Arnold Zable, comedian Corinne Grant, musician Kavisha Mazella, writer Thomas Shapcott, actor Diana Greentree and artist Kate Durham, among others. Similar public fasts occurred in Launceston and Brisbane. Also in December, in an individual show of support for the Iranian hunger strikers, Senator Andrew Bartlett fasted for three days.

In these instances, the citation of injury cohered *temporally* with the injury being referenced; as “vigils”, they constituted periods of conscious, sustained watchfulness or *regard* for the hunger strikers. As protest acts, they confronted the Australian spectator with the notional alignment of the embodied citizen with the violent existence of the detained asylum seeker. The Australian protesters utilised the “bargaining power” of their “bodies that matter”, under the gaze of the public (both literally and under the virtual gaze of the Internet where the fasts were publicised) within emphatically free living spaces, to draw up lines of connection with the detainees, communicating the ethical responsibility of the citizen for the carceral exclusion of the asylum seeker in corporeal terms.

Such acts operate as moments of communion in which supporters and asylum seekers perform a similar (though certainly not the same) bodily protest act. They bear some resemblance to the commemorative and protest performances of East Timorese refugees in Australia during the struggle for independence in their homeland, examined in depth by Amanda Wise (as I mentioned in chapter one). These performances, which mostly took place in Sydney, involved the street theatre that re-enacted torture and police brutality, the celebration of East Timorese culture via songs and dance, the construction of a replica lulik house, the public weaving of an enormous tais (traditional cloth) commemorating the victims of the 1991 Dili massacre, Catholic passion processions in which participants carried crucifixes bearing victims’ names, and the display and circulation of graphic images of torture and rape of East Timorese at the hands of Indonesian government forces. Wise considers the connection between the bodily character of the protest and commemoration strategies and the production of affect (which she defines as “bodily emotion associated with an idea or set of ideas” [93]). She deploys Hage’s idea of affective intensification to characterise the psychological structure of the protest movement. The investment made by Australians who performed solidarity fasts in support of hunger striking

asylum seekers constituted a deliberate bodily involvement, generating affect and thus empathetic identification.

The strategies of intensification of which Wise writes are associated with the concept, explicated by Hage, of migrant guilt (he examines this with reference to Lebanese communities in Sydney ["The Differential Intensities"]); this guilt is particularly acute when those remaining in the homeland are leading difficult lives in a dangerous environment. To a large extent, solidarity fasts by Australians reflected a sense of "citizen guilt" in response to those within their own nation whose lives are more difficult than their own. The solidarity fasts differed from migrant guilt in that they operated across cultural communities within one national space; nonetheless, the desire to pay a debt in an unequal moral economy constitutes a similar relation. Both migrant guilt and citizen guilt indicate a desire to bear witness corporeally to the pain of others.

Close the Concentration Camps

The affective intensification of empathetic and ethical connection with asylum seekers manifests in brutal corporeal terms in the work of veteran Australian artist Mike Parr. On 15 June 2002 at Monash University Museum of Art in Melbourne, Parr presented his provocatively titled performance installation *Close the Concentration Camps*. The work reduced the typical gap between injury and its creative citation, consisting of Parr sitting silently on a chair within the gallery space from 1:00-6:00pm with his ears, eyes and mouth sewn up and his trouser ripped open at the thigh, upon which the word "Alien" was branded.⁵⁶ Written on the wall of the gallery space, in

⁵⁶ Mike Parr's performance installation at Sydney's Artspace one month earlier (3-4 May 2002), *Malevich [A Political Act]*, in which he sat with his arm nailed to the wall for thirty hours, also protested the incarceration of asylum seekers, displaying the words CLOSE THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS on the wall in an adjacent smaller gallery. Parr's Monash work represents a more direct citation of the mode of self-harm enacted by detainees. On 2 May 2003, Parr underwent another process of facial-suturing in protest at the Australia's involvement in the Iraq war. In this piece, entitled *Aussie Aussie Aussie Oi Oi Oi [Democratic Torture]*, Parr sat as his lips were sewn up by another person; he sat in a chair for twenty-four hours, after which time electrodes were attached to his face and viewers

large black lettering, were the words CLOSE THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS. The horrifying spectacle was webcast live for its duration. In another room of the gallery (not visible on the webcast) the political rationale of the work was explicated with passages from the Australian parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration's "Not the Hilton: Immigration Detention Centres: Inspection Report" (2000) projected on to the walls. The work constructed an explicit and deeply confronting deterritorialisation of the original context of the injuries Parr cites: the so-called "concentration camps" in which Australia detains unauthorised asylum seekers. At the same time as citizens were hearing reports of self-harm in detention centres on television and reading about them in the newspapers, Parr offered his body as a means for these injuries to be "seen" at close hand. Rajaram characterises Australia's instrumentalisation of the detained asylum seeker in terms of a relation of consumption and spectacle: "The performance of refugee identity creates a spectacle, a theatre of cruelty, inanity, absurdity and violence designed for the consumption of a public identified and cohered by the spectacle itself" ("The Spectacle of Detention" 1); if Australia's detention system produces the figure of the asylum seeker as object other via the enforced performance of identity, Parr might be seen to construct an *ethical spectacle* of citizen identity, using his own body to disrupt the coherence of the "public" of which Rajaram writes.

Close the Concentration Camps confronts some of the complex dynamics of observing pain in others. The close surveillance to which detained asylum seekers are subjected when they harm themselves (in any carceral system, "at-risk" prisoners are frequently monitored in isolation [Groves 60]) is reconfigured in Parr's work in the performer-audience relation. This relation is simultaneously intimate, occurring within a confined space that challenges the viewer to attend to the spectacle offered (or perhaps demanded) by Parr, and alienating, with Parr speaking and

were invited to administer electric shocks. The back wall of the gallery displayed text taken from news reports of the Iraq invasion.

responding to no-one for the duration of the performance. The use of live webcam seems to reference both video surveillance in isolation cells and the mediatised glimpses of asylum seekers available to the Australian public. It also, of course, disseminates the event to a larger audience. Susan Sontag's study of the wide circulation of horrific images in contemporary life led her to observe that "wars are now also living room sights and sounds" (16). Certainly, the live-feed vision of Parr's self-violence on screen and at home faced challenges in terms of overcoming "compassion fatigue" (Scheer 25) in a desensitised media age. Beyond desensitisation, looking at the pain of others is a psychologically and ethically complex act; Sontag argues that as well as eliciting shame and shock from the spectator, violent images (or in Parr's case, performances) can also construct self-centred affects: "the provocation: can you look at this? There is the satisfaction of being able to look at the image without flinching. There is the pleasure of flinching" (37). In Parr's performance, a large mirror placed on the wall opposite him allowed gallery attendees a mode of spectatorial mediation or distancing, but at the same time, reinforced the challenge of looking by making it difficult to avoid the subject, and moreover, confronted viewers with the image of themselves in the act of looking / averting. Whatever the political efficacy of his work, Parr can (like other image-making that deals in bodily injury, such as the East Timorese protest strategy of displaying and circulating graphic photographs) be charged with exploiting a human propensity for visceral, morbid fascination.

A reviewer of *Close the Concentration Camps* considers the risk of manipulation of asylum seekers, framing this as a question in the by-line: "Mike Parr is going to great pains to support asylum seekers – literally. Is it sensational exploitation or legitimate protest art?" (Heinrich 3). Parr acknowledges the ethical problem of representing the suffering of asylum seekers from his relative distance as an Australian: "it's ridiculous; you can't possibly re-represent the plight of someone in a detention centre sewing their mouth together, their lips together" (Parr, Question

and Answer np). I argue, however, that the work contemplates this very gap in subjectivity, effectively bringing two disparate subject-types into coalescence. For the duration Parr, a professional, successful white male – in other words, a relatively privileged figure within the society of Australian embodied citizens – displayed this status with his dark suited “professional” (albeit crumpled) attire. Framed in this way, Parr’s endurance of the very physical injuries – sutured flesh – that represent for many Australians (especially in the politically charged climate of 2002) the abject, unwanted non-citizens held in detention touches the very nexus of distinctions between the citizen and its other. Parr’s self-injury brings these opposing positions into contact; his performance suggests that the injury of asylum seekers, while occurring in a place that is geographically and experientially distant from most Australians, is connected to (here, literally bleeds into) the supposedly healthy body of the nation. In this way Parr demands that audience members regard their proximity (both in terms of the political structure of their own liberty and their ethical responsibilities) to this position of exceptionality or exclusion. Further, that the injury borne by Parr is real demonstrates that immigration detention has produced injury for asylum seekers *and* for the citizen who cannot accept its implementation in his name.

As well as offering Australian audiences the prospect of their proximity to the incarceration and injury of asylum seekers, *Close the Concentration Camps* is an act of identification on Parr’s part. Injuring himself in a similar fashion to the detainees as a means of lamenting their incarceration, Parr brings himself into personal alignment with them in a type of communion or ritual – these concepts seem appropriate to account for the profound, durational investment of having a needle and thread drawn through one’s flesh while having totalising regard, or “bearing in mind”, the similar pain of asylum seekers who have done the same. In this capacity as communion or ritual, Parr’s work, like solidarity fasts by Australians, bears similarities with the affective intensification of the East Timorese protest strategies described by Wise. Within the

same category may be placed the ritual (re)enactments that occur each year in many parts of the Christian (particularly Catholic) world during Easter commemorations of Christ's passion and death, some of which involve self-injury. Indeed, as Wise explains, Catholic ritual and identity permeated the East Timorese protest movement, with the passion of Christ becoming co-opted into the project of corporal commemoration of suffering: "The embodied nature of Catholic ritual provides a potent ground of sensorial identification for a traumatised community, especially through the invocation of the powerful imagery of Christ's tortured body" (100).⁵⁷ The efficacy of such cultural or religious "performances" can be considered both in terms of external communion (with and among spectators) and in terms of a personal, internal process. Edward Scheer describes Parr's bodily installations as having the "effect of contemporary secular ritual" (24), supporting the notion that they perform cultural and psychological work. What distinguishes Parr's performance from most religious ritual and from the protest rituals of the East Timorese in Australia is his singularity as performer; he is physically separate from the asylum seekers with whom he might be said to be in communion, and separated in his bodily pain from his Australian audience members, even if they function otherwise as onlooker-participants in the ritual.

The internal, personal function of protest ritual for the East Timorese analysed by Wise relates to the psychological processing of personal trauma (this psychology is apprehended in Cathy Caruth's notion of "making known" through repetition, discussed in chapter one). While Parr is not part of the traumatised community for whom he injures himself, his work represents an intense relationship with the self; to choose to have one's flesh threaded (this is mostly

⁵⁷ Amanda Wise observes that the proportion of East Timorese (within East Timor) identifying as Catholic rose from less than thirty per cent prior to 1975 to more than ninety per cent during Indonesian occupation. She attributes this, and the centrality of Catholicism to the protest movement in Australia, to several factors: the role of the Catholic Church in East Timor as a place of sanctuary from violence, the church's active promotion of East Timorese cultural traditions and the function of Catholicism as a means of cultural resistance to and differentiation from the predominantly Muslim Indonesia (97-9).

performed by Parr's domestic partner rather than himself), to sew up the orifices of speech, sight and hearing, is a concentrated act of self-possession. The combination of sensory deprivation and physical pain focuses, paradoxically, both an abject relation with the flesh and intensification of its centrality to selfhood. That Parr's performance work has for decades explored corporeal limits evinces his ongoing concern with sensory extremism; in *Close the Concentration Camps*, he calls for this intense regard or awareness to be extended to and connected with others who are suffering.

A central paradox of *Close the Concentration Camps* is that even as it invites viewers to "witness" the injuries of asylum seekers, attempting to counteract the distancing effect produced by the often remote incarceration of these people by suggesting lines of identification and engagement between asylum seekers, Parr and the audience, it also symbolises dehumanisation and the absence or failure of communication. In a question and answer session at the Sydney Biennale in 2008, Parr discussed the latter aspect of the work, emphasising the production via his self-mutilation of what he terms an "anti-face". For Parr, this anti-face represents the failure of human(e) engagement that has marked European Australia's history:

it's the response to Ruddock's claim ... that we don't throw children overboard:
that's a defining perversion of desperate refugees to this country ... it's this
cripplingly childish idea that we're exempt from the sins of our forebears, that
we're all born again in this country, and that we're people of limited
responsibility. So my response to this was to sort of sew my face into a knot.

(Parr, Question and Answer np)

Thinking of Parr's sewn face as a knot is a severe, painful image of what, in his view, is a failure of response in Australia; it emphasises the importance, recognised by Levinas, of the human face in terms of ethical and affective encounter. Parr's reference to "limited responsibility" focuses the point that a failure to recognise an ethical obligation to engage compassionately – whether with

indigenous Australians or with asylum seekers – produces limited human beings, or a nation without a face. Ironically, in representing an insufficiency of certain affective responses, of human feelings, Parr challenges his audiences (and himself) with an acute sensorial demand.

The continuation of sovereign biopower

Foucault's observation that "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself" (*History of Sexuality* 86) is borne out in the paradigm of Australia's immigration detention system, with its deployment of aggressive strategies of geographical (via detention centres placed in remote mainland and offshore locations) and discursive (via strict limitations on contact with the Australian public) masking. The creative citations of injury that I have examined function, in a symbolic sense, shoulder-to-shoulder with the actual human injuries they represent; within the Australian public spaces where they have been read or performed, these creative works demand the unmasking of Australian biopower in relation to detainees, with the result that it has become intolerable to many embodied citizens.

Rajaram's notion of an "intercontamination of identity" ("Disruptive Writing" 220) between asylum seeker and citizen (which he discusses with reference to poetry by asylum seekers) is apt as a means of regarding the creative representation of self-injury. The works I have discussed apprehend the relationship between asylum seekers and Australians in visceral terms, whereby the injury of asylum seekers enters the body politic in a process akin to intercontamination. The works chart part of the continual battle between sovereign power and human liberty. Edkins and Pin-Fat's assertion that sovereign power is a "relation of violence" (1) as well as Rajaram's observation that "the advent of the refugee" is often accompanied by the

“brutal mark of sovereignty” (“Disruptive Writing” 220) are explicitly evinced in the bodily injuries of people detained by the Australian state.

The efficacy of the creative works can be indexed in part by changes made to Australian onshore asylum policies in recent years. In this regard, it is necessary to consider the Rudd government’s stated intention – currently being tested by a sharp increase in boat arrivals – of limiting the use of mandatory detention in the broader context of sovereign biopower, which as Agamben and others have argued, is *continually* articulated in terms of a politics of exception, of inclusion and exclusion. Butler’s recent observations regarding the Guantanamo Bay detention centre and United States sovereign (read: executive) authority are an important aspect of her broader mapping of the history of sovereignty as non-linear and her concomitant assertion that states of exception recur across time and location:

It is crucial to ask under what conditions some human lives cease to become eligible for basic, if not universal, human rights ... to what extent is there a racial and ethnic frame through which these imprisoned lives are viewed and judged such that they are deemed less than human, or as having departed from the recognizable human community? (57)

Butler’s questions are critical in focusing the ongoing struggle for human rights in the face of sovereign power. By highlighting the ethnic factors of the exertion of contemporary biopower (which are undeniably significant in relation to Australian detention as well as Guantanamo), these questions present a necessary qualification of my suggestion at the beginning of this chapter that, in theory, *any* individual may be subject to state coercion. It remains the case that certain bodies are more liable to be positioned outside of the terrain of full sovereign belonging. As long as concepts of alterity continue to exist in tension with concepts of interconnection (as human history gives us every reason to believe) certain human lives will be, to use Butler’s term, more

precarious than others.

The Border Space and the Sovereign State

And I, both in and out of it / learning how to live a life, / sit quiet in a cold place
/ waiting to touch the sun-warmed earth.

—Fay Zwicky, “Picnic”

Impossible dichotomies

In a secluded stretch of the shoreline of Canberra’s Lake Burley Griffin, some six kilometres from the parliamentary precinct and its national institutions, a curving line of individually decorated timber poles stands as a memorial to the 353 asylum seekers who drowned in the 2001 sinking of the SIEV X (unidentified Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel). In October 2006, the memorial proposal had been embroiled in bureaucratic struggles, during which it had appeared unlikely that the project would be afforded lakeside space.⁵⁸ Several months prior, a display of other boat stories was emplaced in the capital rather more prominently: *Exiles and Emigrants* was a large-scale touring exhibition held from December 2005 until June 2006 at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne and the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. It featured nineteenth-century social-realist, pastoral, Pre-Raphaelite and early Impressionist paintings, and a range of artefacts, gathered from major international cultural institutions. Images of seafaring and settlement were narrated in triumphant terms: “It took exceptional resilience and courage to face

⁵⁸ For information on the permission difficulties, see “Symbolic Token.” In October 2007, Federal Territories Minister Jim Lloyd demanded the removal of the memorial, which he asserted, “trivialises existing memorials which stand in remembrance of those who gave their lives in service to our country” (qtd in Alexander 3).

the long and arduous sea journey to the distant colony of Australia, with little hope of ever returning to the homeland”, read the curatorial note affixed to the gallery wall. While the human migrations associated with the business of European empire-building worldwide included the transportation of slaves, indentured labourers and convicts and the displacement of indigenous populations, *Exiles and Emigrants* focused almost entirely on voluntary emigration.⁵⁹ In this way, it implicitly confirmed the “politics of forgetting” (Connolly 138) underlying colonial representations of burgeoning nationhood. The territorial and cultural relationship between the SIEV X memorial and *Exiles and Emigrants* is suggestive of Australia’s complex borders and discontinuities, as well as engagements and connections: in the nation’s capital city over a period of a few months, different ocean voyagers were remembered in disparate, yet proximate, spaces.

This chapter continues the latter’s interrogation of sovereign biopower, turning attention now to spatiality: to the conceptualisation and actualisation of national territory and the border. The spatial hostilities that have been constructed around the unauthorised asylum seeker to Australia over the last decade consist of interconnected political and societal modes of regulation and containment: the policing of the nation’s borders and shifting maritime migration zones, the corralling of asylum seekers in remote detention spaces and ongoing marginalisation upon classification as a refugee. I examine the limits (and paradoxes) of sovereignty discourse with an analysis of six creative works that engage with the problematic positioning of asylum seekers: specifically, their occupancy of “border spaces” that are simultaneously *inside and outside* sovereign Australia. These are Australian Linda Jaivin’s novel *The Infernal Optimist* (2006), detained asylum seeker Angel Boujbiha’s poem “My Name is Asylum” (2002), Australian Victoria Carless’s play

⁵⁹ The only work in the exhibition that portrayed Aboriginal presence was Harden Sidney Melville’s “The squatter’s hut: News from home” (1850-51), which depicts an Aboriginal mailman. The only reference to Asian settlement was a reference to the arrival of the first Chinese labourers in the exhibition catalogue’s chronology (*Exiles and Emigrants* [Catalogue] 132); similarly, the only reference to convict transportation was a note citing its abolition in the catalogue’s chronology (133).

The Rainbow Dark (2006), Lebanon-born Australian artist Mireille Astore's durational performance installation, *Tampa* (2003) and poems by two Australians, Fay Zwicky's "Picnic" (2006) and S. K. Kelen's "Attitude: Don Juan in the Shopping Mall" (2007). The idea of "border spaces" can usefully be compared with the concept of "borderscapes" explicated in Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr's edited work of the same name; as they explain, "the concept 'borderscapes' ... emphasize[s] the inherent contestability of the meaning of the border between belonging and non-belonging" ("Introduction" xxviii). Even as they are instrumentalised by state and social power structures, unauthorised asylum seekers stand, within the border spaces of the nation, to interrogate the concept of Australia as inviolable and independent, showing it to be permeable, contestable and part of a globalised community.

In apprehending asylum in Australia in spatial terms, particularly in relation to coercive biopolitical control over movement and the occupation of territory, it is helpful to consider John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge's observation that in the social sciences, space is most commonly understood in either a territorial or a structural sense. With reference to the former, they argue, "space is viewed as a series of blocks defined by state territorial boundaries" (79). In the structural sense, space is regarded in terms of human interconnection, of "geographical entities of one sort or another, nodes, districts, regions, etc. [that] have spatial effects that result from their interaction or relationship with one another" (80). While, as Agnew and Corbridge note, each of these understandings is insufficient as a means of conceptualising the complexities and indeterminacies of spatiality in a globalised world, in combination they offer for my purposes a means of unpacking some of the political and social power relations that regulate the lives of people who seek to arrive at a sovereign territory without authorisation. The political formulation of asylum and border protection policies in Australia, as in other sovereign nations, is based upon a territorial understanding of national space, in which the nation is a fixed and bordered /

bounded entity, while the lived effects of these policies can be viewed in terms of structural spatialities, whereby unauthorised asylum seekers are emplaced in various relational positions at the borderlands of legitimate Australia.

As I discussed in the introduction, the dominant image of Australian sovereignty is necessarily one of legal and ideological unity. The coercive modes of biopolitical organisation that have been applied to unauthorised asylum seekers and refugees in recent years are based upon the normative concept of an either–or relation determining who is and who is not a legitimate inhabitant of Australian space, and even more fundamentally, between what is and what is not Australian space. The nation’s borders are politically defined and commonly imagined as lines that divide inside and outside, Australia from not-Australia; as Schlunke observes, “the ‘threat’ to our shores naturalises the idea that ‘Australia’ is a whole nation that has complete borders that can be protected” (para. 6). In terms of this linear understanding, the idea of a border space announces itself as a paradox, and it is in this apparently paradoxical sense that I identify asylum seekers and refugees as occupying spaces that are both inside *and* outside the nation. In this way, these unwelcome, exceptional bodies problematise the dominant construction of the nation-state, which in its dichotomous imagining, does not permit such paradoxes. I seek to trace some of the ways in which the problems and paradoxes of sovereignty and territoriality are concentrated, in the six abovementioned creative texts, around the figure of the asylum seeker or refugee who is instrumentalised by the border technologies of sovereign Australia.

I am concerned specifically with technologies of detention and visa / residency rights. As already outlined, since the inception of mandatory detention in Australia in 1992 unauthorised asylum seekers have been placed variously in detention centres on the continental mainland, on an offshore territory (Christmas Island), in the territories of other nations (Nauru and Papua New Guinea), and from 1999 to 2008, held as adjudicated refugees within a liminal threshold of

belonging under the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) system. These constructions highlight the constitutive relation between territorial (the state) and structural (the human) spatial effects and engagements; they are spaces that come into existence when a person is legislatively excluded from belonging or legitimacy within the sovereign state, and that produce and promulgate certain (anti)social relations of power. Onshore detention centres demarcate detainees from the living spaces of the continent on which they are sited, while offshore centres (inaugurated by the Pacific Solution, discussed in the introduction) remove bodies from the migration territory – and thus the legal obligation – of the nation. The exclusions (legislative, territorial, social) enacted by the practice of extrajudicial detention construct, paradoxically, a simultaneous inclusion within the body politic; Giorgio Agamben articulates this paradox: “the camp is a piece of territory that is placed outside the normal juridical order; for all that however, it is not simply an external space. According to the etymological meaning of the term *exception* (*ex-capere*), what is being excluded in the camp is *captured outside*, that is, it is included by virtue of its very exclusion” (*Means without End* 40, italics in original). Similarly, Rajaram argues that unauthorised asylum seekers to Australia are “the remainder or excess” (“Making Place” 293) that are conceptualised as not-belonging vis-à-vis the nation, but are as such instrumentalised by its power. The restricted living space created by the three-year TPV (which, as stated in the introduction, denied family reunion, the right of return after international travel, as well as access to many social, settlement and educational services [Mansouri and Bagdas 23]) was a structural manifestation of Australia’s authority over human legitimacy within the “free” national space beyond incarceration, and produced dispersed border spaces of non-belonging and un-settlement across the nation.

The idea of spaces that contain heterogeneous elements simultaneously – such as nation territories containing lives that belong and lives that do not – can be illuminated by the application of Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopias, articulated in his 1967 lecture, “Des

Espaces Autres” (published in English as “Of Other Spaces” in 1986).⁶⁰ Concerned with the construction of spatial identifications through relations of power, Foucault describes the heterotopia in terms of juxtaposition and contradiction: “The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (“Of Other Spaces” 25). While not an exclusively modern phenomenon, heterotopic spatiality is a condition of contemporary globalisation; in a comment that seems to presage the increasing pace and extent of global interconnection in the twenty-first century, Foucault observes, “We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (22). Positing a rough genealogy of space, he contends that in the Middle Ages, territory was organised in a hierarchical, oppositional fashion: “sacred places and profane places; protected places and open, exposed places: urban places and rural places” (22). By contrast, he suggests, from the mid-twentieth century, the social organisation of space can be conceptualised in terms of simultaneity and relations of proximity rather than opposition or dichotomy. This conceptualisation of space is essentially what Agnew and Corbridge term a structural one; it concerns the complexities and coercions involved in human emplacement.

Foucault asks, “what type of storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve a given end” (23); the border spaces that I seek to explicate in this chapter highlight this issue of problematic human proximity in heterotopic space. In particular, I am concerned with what Foucault terms “heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed” (25). The detention centre is a heterotopia of deviation, a border space in which those who impinge upon sovereign territorial demarcations and whose behaviour is deemed un-belonging / unbecoming are situated. A less blatant and territorialised border space

⁶⁰ “Of Other Spaces” was not reviewed for publication by Michel Foucault and is not part of the official corpus of his work.

than the detention centre, the TPV represented a dispersed and decentralised heterotopia of deviation; constructed solely for the containment of unauthorised asylum seekers judged via determination processes to be refugees, it offered a liminal residency space, imposing restrictions that made refugees into living reminders of their own illegitimacy.

Constructing Australian sovereignty

In legitimating the British claim to sovereignty over the continent of Australia outside established common and international law mechanisms (of conquest, cession or settlement of uninhabited land), the determination of Australia as *terra nullius* was crucial: the territory was held to be uninhabited according to the terms of European international law. More specifically, this meant that the indigenous peoples were not recognised as having any social or political organisation and that the territory was, as such, without sovereign claim. As I have mentioned in the introduction to this work and in chapter three, indigenous Australians were demarcated from non-indigenous Australians until the latter half of the twentieth century by limited voting rights, exclusion in the census and biopolitical coercion (the removal of children from their families, institutionalisation in missions and residential facilities, town boundary zones operating on a curfew basis and restricted travel / movement rights). I discuss the implications of unextinguished Aboriginal sovereignty vis-à-vis asylum in Australia at length in chapter five; suffice it to say here that in spite of its deeply problematic founding, Australian sovereignty is, in legal terms, an independent, inviolable, representative authority; its power has scarcely been made more apparent in recent years than in relation to unauthorised asylum seekers – Rajaram’s observation that Australia represents “a sovereignty of control and of creating dichotomy, of determining legality and illegality” (“Making Place” 296) is articulated in response to this historico-political specificity.

In territorial or spatial terms, the imprecision of sovereign control belies the totalising presumption of its founding authorisation. The latter is the so-called paradox of political founding, mentioned in the introduction to this study: the problem of sovereignty, as Anthony Burke observes, “presuming itself to authorise and precede the very act of its coming into existence” (para. 16). Henry Reynolds argues that territorial control by colonial authorities in Australia was in fact gradual and incomplete; he distinguishes three (simplified) “zones of territory” whereby control was exercised directly (such territory was small), intermittently, or not at all (“Sovereignty” 211). The “politics of forgetting” (Connolly 138) – facilitated by a common acceptance of unifying narratives of national identity, pride and security – necessary for the maintenance of the Australian nation subsequent to its paradoxical (and violent) founding is of the same nature as the effacement of liberal principles necessary for widespread public acceptance of the coercive marginalisation of asylum seekers, their relegation to border spaces that are effectively excised from the dominant idea of nation. The extrajudicial incarceration of asylum seekers, especially the mandatory, indefinite detention that occurred during the most hostile period of John Howard’s leadership, occurs because the sovereign authority and much of the population have entered into something akin to a politics of forgetting, in which the violence and ideological bias of detention is subsumed as *realpolitik*, a necessary biopolitical organisation operating in the interests of Australia’s sovereign territorial integrity.

Human migrations and acts of becoming

The political borders that delineate the nation-state are both geographical and conceptual; while physically drawn, they are not frequently encountered in their physicality by members of the national community (except by mobile cosmopolitans who regularly travel internationally).

Certainly, the strategically shifting maritime delineations that construct the political status of unauthorised asylum seekers are rarely regarded *in situ* by most Australian citizens. Rather, borders function *affectively* for most citizens as the demarcations of an imagined national community; they can therefore be discursively co-opted as the focal point of concepts of nationality and nationalism, which as Benedict Anderson observes, “command ... profound emotional legitimacy” (4). Deploying Anderson’s concept of nation as imagined community, Sonia Magdalena Tascón argues, “National borders actualise the limits of the nation’s identity and its geographical integrity; the two are not separable. Within them is contained the imagined community” (126). Tascón is effectively articulating the inseparability of a structural (“the nation’s identity”) and a territorial (“its geographical integrity”) understanding of the border. As subaltern excess excluded from belonging within the imagined community yet subject to the full force of its biopolitical authority, asylum seekers are vulnerable to contradictory pejorative characterisations; Suvendrini Perera articulates the ways in which this ambivalence manifests in populist Australian discourse on asylum seekers:

By extraordinary processes of signification, the asylum seekers become, in certain popular understandings, simultaneously the objects *and* the agents of criminality: criminal *and* passive, inanimate *and* violent, wretched *and* millionaires, cargo *and* pirates, contraband *and* hijackers, traffickers *and* traffic, victims of ‘people smugglers’ *and* invaders of Australian sovereignty. (“A Line” 28)

Defined by the terms of these paradoxical simultaneities, asylum seekers become impossible subjects situated defencelessly inside and outside the nation-state.

The border position of the asylum seeker insistently underscores the ambivalence Homi Bhabha identifies as characteristic of the sovereign nation: “It is the mark of the ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy – and an apparatus of power – that it produces a continual

slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories, like the people, minorities or 'cultural difference' that continually overlap in the act of writing the nation" ("DissemiNation" 292). As I argue, the Australian nation produces such slippages, and thus its territorial provisionality, via the biopolitical coercion of asylum seekers and refugees; inevitably, the idea of a singular, common sovereign will is compromised -- as Bhabha maintains, the presence of the subaltern other "disturbs those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" ("DissemiNation" 300). Australian ideological manoeuvres are not remarkable as far as the liberal democratic paradigm is concerned: as I outlined in the introduction, the country maintains a partialist political philosophy (Gibney 23-4) that underpins the discursive emphasis in mainstream politics on sovereign integrity and security, national values and identity and the primacy of Australian domestic interests.

When ideological manoeuvres connect with political actions, the processual nature of the border is made evident. Sophie Nield conceives of the border and the asylum seeker as mutually constitutive, performative entities, arguing that the border "is a place where you have to appear. The border, and the border-dweller or refugee ... both 'appear' at the moment at which they come into conjunction" (65). In this formulation, just as a character in a play "appears" onstage via the convergence of performer and representational space, the unauthorised asylum seeker is performatively produced in the encounter with the border, and the border is produced by the attempt to cross. The border is in this sense productive of transgressive identities inasmuch as it marks the convergence of socio-political and geographical manoeuvres and engagements. If this concept is extended temporally, the historical contingency of political borders becomes apparent; for instance, Australia's maritime delineations, central to the regulation of unauthorised asylum seekers, are mapped over a space with a centuries-old history of ocean crossing by Macassan (Indonesian) fishermen that, prior to the White Australia Policy, engaged trade, labour, social and

cultural relations with northern Aboriginal coastal communities (Reynolds, *North of Capricorn* 12-14). If Nield's conception of the border underscores its processual and contingent nature, of human appearances (and disappearances) in time, it also necessarily draws attention to the discontinuity and contestability of Australian sovereignty.

Border thinking: writing and performing identity

The Infernal Optimist

Directing capacities of imagination towards the border spaces in which the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia are instrumentalised, the six creative texts I consider here uncover, in different ways, some of the problems and paradoxes (both political and social) of the sovereign state. In explicating the position of the asylum seeker and refugee in terms of non-belonging spaces, the following analysis can be seen to respond to and support Walter D. Mignolo's assertion that "cosmopolitanism today has to become border thinking, critical and dialogic, from the perspective of those local histories that had to deal all along with global designs" (182). Best-selling Australian writer Linda Jaivin's tragi-comic novel, *The Infernal Optimist*, published internationally by Fourth Estate in 2006, is set almost entirely within Villawood immigration detention centre in the months following August-November 2001, a period during which, as I outlined in the introduction to this work, the issue of Australia's sovereign territorial authority occupied the national (and indeed, international) consciousness to an extent that remains unmatched since. As she did with *Seeking Djira*, her 2003 satirical play interrogating complacency surrounding the issue of asylum, Jaivin utilises satire as a mode of political critique, illustrating some of the systemic and day-to-day punitive effects of mandatory detention, and drawing attention to the mutability and irony of sovereign distinctions between legitimate

Australia and illegitimate not-Australia. At the centre of the novel Jaivin presents us with an endearing, malapropism-spouting narrator, Zeki Togan,⁶¹ a young Turkish-born Australian. Having never converted his permanent residency to Australian citizenship, Zeki finds himself locked in Villawood as a “five-oh-one”, referring to Section 501 of the Migration Act 1958, which enables the deportation on the basis of character of non-citizens who have spent more than twelve months in prison. Zeki’s crime is breaking and entering, a skill that he believes confers him kudos as an authentic Australian in a country that was “built by convicts” (58). In her clown protagonist, therefore, Jaivin imagines a process similar to that described by Nield of appearing or becoming at the encounter with the border: Zeki is constituted as an unwanted non-citizen within the border space of detention, having come from an apparently secure position as self-proclaimed Australian larrikin.

An uneasy combination of separation and proximity (Australia—not Australia, citizen—detainee) is apprehended throughout the novel. When Zeki is transported to Villawood, he is confronted by a paradoxical awareness that it is near to the western Sydney suburban spaces with which he is familiar and yet not part of any territory he has known:

In factuality, Villawood isn’t that far from me folks’ place, but once we turned off Woodville Road onto Christina, and then turned up Birmingham, what is opposite Leightonfield station what I never even knew a train to stop at, it began to feel like we was going to some kind a secret place what didn’t have no connection to the suburbs what surrounded it. (16)

Zeki is experiencing a process of personal re-mapping in a place that both is and is not Australia. Having until this point felt blithely secure in his belonging within an imagined Australian

⁶¹ The novel’s narrator shares his name with Zeki Velidi Togan, leader of the anti-Soviet Bashkir (Turkic) National Liberation Movement from 1920; Linda Jaivin appears, then, to position her Turkish-Australian larrikin as a figure of resistance to power/oppression and of political change.

community, he is forced to apprehend an unfamiliar non-belonging in a territory that, although adjacent to his own home, has not previously existed for him. Zeki's sense of Villawood as a "secret place" speaks to the processes of forgetting and disconnection implicit in the narration of the nation.

In a deterritorialisation of "proper" written English, *The Infernal Optimist* is told in Zeki's ungrammatical voice, a colloquial Australian vernacular peppered with surprisingly insightful "met-oh-fours". When the asylum claim of Zeki's fellow detainee Hamid, a young man from Afghanistan, is regarded with suspicion on the (absurd) basis of expert Swedish reports on his supposedly Pakistani vocal inflections, Zeki becomes concerned that his own case may be affected by the peculiarities of his speech – or as he terms it, his "influxuations" (41). He need not worry: Zeki's ungrammatical slang is recognised as "Aussie" by those who meet him. The cultural capital of Australian slang is signposted in the novel's epigraph, an extract from country singer-songwriter John Williamson's ode to "true" Australianness, "I'm Fair Dinkum". Zeki's customary way of speaking is at times verbatim of the vernacular lyrics of Williamson's ballad ("I'm fair dinkum, / bloody oath I am"); for instance, when Zeki defends his case, he argues: "I reckon spending most a me life in Oz makes me fair dinkum, even if I never got me papers" (58). While not speaking grammatical English, Zeki communicates with brash straightforwardness (essentially, the same quality that makes Williamson the appropriate figure to perform at populist national events such as rugby matches, the public memorial for Australian conservationist and television personality Steve Irwin [2006] and a telethon-style event in support of Victorian bushfire victims [2009]). According to one reviewer, Zeki's language is "more truthfully Australian perhaps, with its bastard English, its ebullience and subversive humour, than our best attempts to get the grammar right" (Johnston 32). Another critic expresses a similar sentiment, arguing, "the characterisation itself constitutes the book's most biting political commentary ...

Zeki – with his anti-authoritarian streak and easy-going attitude, his own dire flaws and his compassion for others – comes across as the novel’s most quintessentially Australian figure” (Woodhead 25). At the same time, Jaivin seems to ask the reader to consider the degree to which Zeki’s “unAustralian” ethnic and religious identity, as a Turkish-born Muslim in Australia’s 2001 “post-Tampa” cultural climate, has contributed to the strict application in his case of Section 501.

In the novel’s satirical inversion, the self-proclaimed Australian protagonist is a marginal figure within the detention space. Zeki quickly comes to admire the “asylums”, recognising that, unlike himself, many of them are accomplished professionals who have not spent their adult lives engaging in criminal activity. Zeki is positioned at the bottom of the Villawood social hierarchy in terms of popularity with visitors: “To respectable visitors, asylums was the kings, overstayers was the common people and five-oh-ones, we was the bottoms in the heap” (134). Not being an asylum seeker, Zeki is not entitled to free legal assistance, relying instead on the expensive advice of Mr Gubba, a lawyer with “dyed blond hair what was blow-dried and a tan what had to be from one a them solipsariums” (33). In Zeki’s malapropism, combined with Mr Gubba’s appearance and the fact that his name is an Aboriginal slang term for white person, Jaivin creates a chain of meaning: the lawyer represents powerful, self-centric white Australian legal definitions and discourses, regarded from a minority perspective.

While the bureaucratic determination of the immigration detention centre as not-Australia is inescapable – as Rwandan detainee Thomas observes, “The government said you have to be in Australia to study and that from a legal standpoint, I am not here at all” (177) – Zeki’s experience and narration of his world “Inside” locate it as inexorably part of Australia. When he is moved to a lower security section of Villawood, he notes, “Inside the yard there was some grass, and even some gum trees” (30) – here, a Williamsonian contentment with a “home among the gum trees” (expressed in the well-known song of that name) is evoked. Occasionally,

Zeki registers signs of bushfires, an annual Australian occurrence, via the affective sense of smell: “Them fires burned for days. You could smell the ash and eucalypt oil” (127). He watches the “faint glow on the horizon, beyond the razor wire” (72) that testifies to Sydney life occurring outside and to the stark biopower by which his body has become regulated: “Life and me, we’d been separated by a great parallel fence” (72). This experience of simultaneous proximity to and separation from legitimate, free Australia seems to be shared by other detainees; Zeki notices that Azad, a Kurdish Iraqi asylum seeker with whom he has become friends, collects “feathers from cockies and maggies and currawongs and even one or two from a kookaburra” (112). The significance of Azad’s collection is ambivalent. A bird is able to traverse land and (in some cases) ocean without regard for the political delineations of nations; at the same time, the feathers in Azad’s collection are native items, talismans that bring him closer to an imagined Australia.

The juxtaposition of the audaciously free bird and the imprisoned detainee becomes fraught at a certain point in the novel, when several detainees observe:

[in] the no-man’s land between the inner and outer fences ... a currawong had walked into the middle a the coil a razor wire. He was looking all round and up into the sky like he was deciding whether to fly. We could all see that if he opened his wings they’d be shattered like lettuce in a felafel shop, except black and white instead a green. (125)

The designation “no-man’s land”, a contested territory without fixed sovereign hold, becomes here a politicised space of transition to non-belonging, in which life and death are proximate and non-citizens are produced as Agamben’s *homo sacer* or “bare life” (a concept outlined in the introduction and the previous chapter). While Zeki succeeds in luring the currawong to safety using some sunflower seeds, the bird’s brief caging represents the violent potentialities of the

carceral space, even as its movements enact the interconnection between legitimate and illegitimate Australia.

The Australian visitors to the detention centre, who bring food and gifts in addition to affective human connection, link legitimate Australia with its border space. A naïve but well-meaning visitor, April, comments to Zeki that her movement in and out of the detention centre disrupts her sense of locatedness within the nation: “I know this is only my third visit, but I feel completely ... *destabilised* by this place. Like there are two parallel universes and I am living with a foot in each one” (138). Zeki’s reply is characteristically pragmatic: “Better than having both feet in the wrong one” (138). In her representation of April’s anxiety, Jaivin invokes something of the difficulty underlying what James Goodman terms the “national” mode of refugee solidarity, where support for refugees is contingent upon notions of moral national identity (274). Between 2001 and 2005, Jaivin was a regular visitor at Villawood. She has described her own feelings of “visitors’ syndrome”, explaining, “The entry into this world was ... a life-changing experience”, during which she “felt more and more knocked about and depressed” (qtd in Neill 1). Jaivin is essentially describing an affective unsettlement derived from close recognition of the other, a face-to-face relation, and the knowledge that, even as a citizen, she possesses little power to produce immediate political change. In April, she distills a troubling awareness of simultaneous schism and proximity at the border, accompanied by ethical responsibility. At the same time, Jaivin draws attention to the self-serving aspects of affective visitor support:

Some a the visitors cried, what put a strainer on us all. Others talked about feeling ‘this amazing connection’ with the asylums, like they all got cordless phones with no static on. They said things like ‘you’re not terrorists’ and ‘you’re not bad people’ like they was telling the asylums something new. They all promised they

was gonna visit all the time, every week at least. We never saw most a them again.

Some a the asylums was disappointed at this. (203)

Jaivin offers here a fairly scathing critique of the national mode (Goodman 274) of affective refugee solidarity – which is perhaps also partly a self-critique – highlighting the fleeting, even whimsical, potential of emotional response face-to-face with the oppressed other.

In addition to individual interactions between visitors and detainees, Jaivin depicts in-detention music performances organised by refugee advocates as well as a demonstration outside the Villawood fences. The latter is based upon a demonstration that took place at Villawood in early 2002. The novel describes chants of “freedom” by activists and asylum seekers alike, while also portraying the upsetting affect of the melee on several detainees, especially young children (180-83). Within the fictional frame of the novel, the representation of vociferous community engagement between legitimate and illegitimate lives draws attention to real-world slippages between the imagined nation and its border space, and perhaps more importantly, to slippages between activist passion and detainee anxiety. Demonstrations at various detention centres in the years following 2001 were, Goodman argues, affective touchstones for refugee support movements in Australia, being, as he observes, impelled by “emotional power” that was often “overwhelming” (270). Goodman describes the Villawood protest (the one featured in Jaivin’s novel): “detainees waved from an exercise yard in full view of the demonstrators, making symbolic contact across the border – across three metal fences, a line of security guards, a line of police horses and two lines of riot police. The demonstrators responded by waving hands, many in silence, and many in tears” (270). With its somewhat less celebratory view of this intense emotional engagement, Jaivin’s novel can be seen to be drawing from the attempted embodied solidarity of a heightened moment of encounter at the border and repositioning it to

communicate in other affective registers, chiefly humour combined with critical compassion, to a broader spectrum of readers.

Framing the novel from Zeki's irrepressible point of view, Jaivin maintains this humorous, somewhat defiant tone, even as her novel veers inevitably toward the tragic: Zeki's situation and that of the asylum seekers that are his friends become increasingly dire and hopeless (one critic notes the verisimilitude of the novel's tragedy, observing, "tales of persecution and suffering are so vivid and realistic that they seem to be drawn directly from the author's experiences with refugees" [Woodhead 25]). Through the medium of comedy – which, the same critic argues, "allows Jaivin to get in the human side of the refugee equation through the back door" (25) – the novel reminds us that Australian sovereign power, in enacting absurd and changeable delineations between belonging and non-belonging, territory and non-territory, maintains ruthless practical authority: the power to emplace non-citizen bodies and thus produce its own excess, or bare life. And yet, by tracing the connections between the nation space and the border space, the novel challenges over and again the binary between legitimate and illegitimate Australia. As if to underline this, Jaivin concludes with a final ironic inversion: the escape of two asylum seekers, who will face an illegitimate, internal border existence, and Zeki, seemingly the most Australian of all, being deported and forced to create a new life in Turkey, never to return "home" to Australian territory.

"My Name is Asylum"

Published in *Borderlands e-journal* in 2002 and the website of the Refugee Action Committee, Canberra in 2005, Villawood detainee Angel Boujbiha's poem, "My Name is Asylum", apprehends the detention centre as an impossible space that produces non-belonging and non-selfhood. Writing in English in an intersubjective manner akin to that employed by Towfiq Al-

Qady in *Nothing But Nothing: One Refugee's Story* (examined in chapter one) and by Shahin Shafaei in *Refugitive* (examined in the previous chapter), Boujbiha adopts the perspective of a child born in the detention centre: "My name is asylum / I was born in here / Here is the detention centre" (np).⁶² By deploying the figure of the child who has never occupied any place except a carceral one, Boujbiha crystallises the effect of Villawood of producing the non-citizen, non-person, or in Agamben's sense, bare life. For the child born in detention, identity is the product of political classification as "asylum". Australia-born yet not-Australian, such a child exemplifies Agamben's description of the "topological structure" of the state of exception as *Being-outside, and yet belonging*" (State 35).

As a person subject to the pejorative construction of unauthorised asylum seekers by the Australian government and (much of) the media, Boujbiha perceives a racialised hierarchy underpinning his excluded position, and in turn, the ostensibly egalitarian discourse of Australian multiculturalism:

People from all over the world
 No!
 Not from every where
 There are no Americans here
 There are no English and Germans here
 There are no Japanese in the centre
 The centre is multicultural
 But it has only one culture inside
 The detention culture. (np)

⁶² All quotes from Angel Boujbiha's poem are taken from its first publication in *Borderlands e-journal* (np).

In the poet's view, Villawood is, paradoxically, the product of racialisation and homogenisation; it represents the opposite of cosmopolitan community. Boujbiha's words recall Judith Butler's observation regarding United States sovereign biopower, which was quoted at the end of the previous chapter, and which is apposite here:

It is crucial to ask under what conditions some human lives cease to become eligible for basic, if not universal, human rights ... to what extent is there a racial and ethnic frame through which these imprisoned lives are viewed and judged such that they are deemed less than human, or as having departed from the recognizable human community? (57)

Boujbiha angrily expresses his awareness of the failure of ethical recognition that has enabled his exclusion from the Australian human community.

In contrast with the permeability of the razor-wire border between Villawood and free Australia as represented in Jaivin's novel, Boujbiha's perspective as a person who is subject to the biopower of the state is considerably more rigid: "The centre is circled by wire / Wire makes it scaring // The higher fence / Which stops birds coming inside / Stops thoughts and imagination / Which stops the world outside" (np). Jaivin's Villawood, while a place of suffering and tragedy, retains an essential life-force, not only in the "infernal optimist" Zeki, but in the porous relationship between free life and bare life: birds and bird feathers, visitors and music performances. For Boujbiha, Villawood is a devastating place that completely prevents both territorial and affective participation in the nation. "My Name is Asylum" demands that the question of proximity, expressed in this chapter in terms of the border space, be apprehended cautiously: from the perspective of a detainee whose life (and hope for an imagined future life) has been comprehensively curtailed by the biopower of sovereign Australia, the proximity

between Australia and its excluded zones is less a context for the challenging of sovereign discourse than a cruel and uncompromising fact.

However, even as he expresses the brutal instrumentality of the fence separating the detention space and the “world outside”, Boujbiha conceives of an inherent territorial paradox produced by the positioning of the detention centre and the exceptional bodies caged within – which are, in Agamben’s terms, “included by virtue of [their] very exclusion” (*Means without End* 40). Boujbiha notes in the first half of the poem, “The centre is in Villawood / Villawood is far from Australia”, while concluding with a stark reminder of the proximity between legitimate Australia and its excluded zone: “My name is asylum / I am still here / In the detention centre / In Sydney / In Australia” (np). These final lines contain a provocation to the reader, inasmuch as “asylum”, for all his or her non-identity, is fundamentally a human subject (“I am”) awaiting the humane recognition of the people that occupy the same city, within the same nation.

The Rainbow Dark

In their representations of people who are subject to Australian sovereign biopower, *The Infernal Optimist* and “My Name is Asylum”, considered together, indicate the ambivalence of the concept of proximity between legitimate Australia and the carceral border space; a similarly troubling sense of proximity (or seepage) is considered from an opposite perspective in Cairns-based playwright Victoria Carless’s satire *The Rainbow Dark*. The play won the 2006 Queensland Theatre Company George Landen Dann award and was first performed during the Backbone Youth Arts 2006 Fragments season of short plays at Brisbane’s Metro Arts Theatre (the same space that hosted Al-Qady’s *Nothing But Nothing* and Shafaei’s *Refugitive*); it was subsequently performed at the Jute Theatre in Cairns in 2008. In the following analysis where I describe performative

elements of the work (as opposed to textual), I refer to the Metro Arts production, directed by Kat Henry.

Carless situates her play in what is perhaps the epitome of legitimate, “interior” Australia: the domestic living space – in this case, the home of sixty-something sisters Gloria and Babs (played by Jan Nary and Kaye Stevenson in the Fragments season). Henry’s 2006 production utilised the small space of the Metro Arts Theatre, with its intimate proximity between stage and audience spaces, to create a sense of domestic insularity; the set consisted of two couches, covered in protective plastic, and a small kitchen area. The world of the play is a satirically distorted version of Australia, in which carefully screened Australian families take on the responsibility of incarcerating “Peoples from Elsewhere Who Don’t Recognise Perfectly Good Borders ... in an appropriate vestibule” within their homes (9).⁶³ The vestibule of choice for Gloria and Babs is the cupboard under their stairs, which remains invisible to the audience. The play’s premise places the domestic space of legitimate Australia and the carceral border space of illegitimate Australia under the same metaphorical and literal roof. In terms of this territorial simultaneity, the sovereign nation cannot fully renounce and immure itself from what it deems illegitimate. Indeed, inasmuch as Gaston Bachelard’s observation, “the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being” (xxxvi), applies here, the detained people are integrated into the very bodies of Gloria and Babs. To apply Bachelardian metaphor further, the cupboard under the stairs can be seen as the space in which is stored the sisters’ “secret psychological life” (78).

The incarcerated “Peoples from Elsewhere”, held by the women for approximately one year (“Give or take a week” [9]), remain unseen and are represented only in snatches and traces: through the discussions of Gloria and Babs, the occasional muffled cry, a baby’s slipper. As

⁶³ All quotations from *The Rainbow Dark* are taken from Victoria Carless’s unpublished playscript (2006), with the author’s permission.

“secret” subjects, they exist in the play the same way they do for many Australians, that is, unseen and (occasionally) imagined. When the women feed the people, they carefully avoid the Levinasian face-to-face encounter (much less any form of cosmopolitan conversation) that would affectively compel them to attend to or *regard* their relationship with their prisoners; as Gloria admits at the beginning of the play, she is unaware of exactly how many people are held under the stairs: “I don’t look. Can’t bear their eyes” (9). The women consciously work to avoid full acknowledgement of the detainees, effecting their own “politics of forgetting” (Connolly 138). *The Rainbow Dark* produces an imaginative heterotopia: while the stage consists of a non-carceral homely space, it contains the unseen space of the unhomely. Joanne Tompkins observes, “Heterotopias are particularly productive in theatre, which is predicated on the structuring of imagined worlds. Not only does this concept help reconfigure non-places, it also provides further anchoring in stage space for the multiple worlds that may coexist with, interact with, and resist the ‘real’, mimetic one” (95). Carless’s play pivots upon heterotopic contradiction: the domestic living space, the heart of Australian identity and “way of life” (and thus the focal point of affective homeland defensive anxiety and rhetoric), is also the space in which asylum seekers are incarcerated; the home both nourishes the lives of citizens and produces the bare life of the non-citizen.

Like Australia’s poor island neighbours Nauru and Papua New Guinea under the Pacific Solution, Gloria and Babs are given financial assistance from the government to detain asylum seekers. Anxious to downplay an economic motivation, the women assure themselves and each other of the modest nature of the assistance, and frequently bemoan their poverty. To justify their task, the women employ the language of civic citizenship, congratulating themselves on their “civil-minded” willingness to take on such a challenging responsibility – as Babs declares, “We don’t shirk our duty” (6). When Babs gives voice to her gnawing concern about muffled

voices in the dark and cries in the night, Gloria is quick to remind her not to dwell on what is a “minor inconvenience. Compared to the good we’re doing” (7). However much it might present the compromising of a fundamental humanitarian instinct, the government’s delineation of human legality is watertight for Gloria and Babs, and moreover, a concept to which obedience is a deeply felt moral responsibility. The women are cases in point of Nick Dyrenfurth’s observation that in Australia, the discourse of citizenship, under the domination of mainstream politics, “has often been infused with varying degrees of morality, with civic citizenship positioned as a ‘desirable activity’” (184). Rajaram argues that moral invocations against unauthorised arrivals (encapsulated in the terms “illegal” and “queue jumper”) make “the ‘problem’ of asylum seekers a common one: the goal of ensuring sovereignty thus becomes not the sole obligation of a border-fixated state, but the responsibility of all Australians” (“‘Making Place’” 297). This construction of individual responsibility is a feature of the democratic nation-state; William E. Connolly observes, “The democratic, territorial state sets itself up to be the sovereign protector of its people, the highest site of their allegiance, and the organizational basis of their nationhood” (135). It positions itself in this way, Connolly argues, through a convergence of the “Nostalgic realism and nostalgic idealism” (135) underlying democratic theory. The democratic political imaginary

fosters the experience of connection between the life of the members and the common meanings that draw them together, between the desire to shape the common fate through democratic politics and the construction of territorial structures of public accountability, and between the territorialization of democratic politics and the production of the national security state. (136)

The notion of a common obligation to serve the sovereign security interest underpins the satirical world of *The Rainbow Dark*, and is a crucial moral touchstone for Gloria and Babs.

One of the central tropes around which the women's act of exclusion is played out is that of food. The women control the degree of nourishment that they will ration to the detainees, conscious that generosity with food would indicate that the people under the stairs deserve hospitality as houseguests, that this would blur the demarcation between Peoples from Elsewhere and guests. Inevitably, even the modest food that is allocated to the detainees signals their occupancy of Australian territory: the sisters complain about the extra mouths to feed in terms of an iconic Australian food product – “the extra vegemite on the bill” (18). The two women are visited by the local butcher Donald (played by Hugh Taylor in the Fragments season) who as well as pursuing a romantic interest in Gloria, is prompted to call in order to offer surplus meat stocks for the detainees; as he points out, “The fact of the matter is, you have starving people living under your stairs and I have leftover food!” (19). The women refuse the offer because it contravenes government policy; as Gloria insists, her and her sister's act of sacrifice helps to ensure that so-called Peoples from Elsewhere cannot “benefit *illegally* from my Land of Plenty” (19). Here Gloria invokes a partialist philosophy (Gibney 23-4), in which allegiance and assistance is due first and foremost to legitimate members of the Australian community, and moreover, that membership of that community is straightforward. One of the central ideologies of nation in Australia connects to land bounty: the utilisation of sovereign territory as a productive food source – as the national anthem affirms, “We've golden soil and wealth for toil”. The construction of a national community characterised by industriousness upon the land connects, Matthew J. Gibney argues, to anxieties about the manner of sovereign ownership in Australia: “white settlers needed to make good use of the land if they were to be justified in excluding others. The ease with which the previous inhabitants had lost control of the territory testified starkly to the importance of populating Australia if the British were to possess the moral right as well as the practical ability to exclude” (169). Gloria and Babs's sense of entitlement and

ownership should, then, be connected with the anxiety that sharing freely with Peoples from Elsewhere might erode their (the women's) sovereignty.

The source of ethical intervention in the women's insistence on respect for "Perfectly Good Borders" comes from their dog, Sylvia. Applying a comic combination of vulgar canine physicality and human concentration and focus, Dirk Hoult's portrayal of Sylvia in Henry's 2006 production apprehends Carless's characterisation of a liminal human-canine subjectivity: Sylvia alone grasps the plight of the detained people and seeks by various means to communicate on their behalf. One of her first attempts to draw the attention of Gloria and Babs to the detainees' cries for release takes a bodily form: as the women watch, Sylvia begins a conspicuous display of retching and eventually vomits up a baby's slipper; Gloria enacts an immediate denial ("Nothing to speak of. She's been through the bins again" [10]) while her sister inspects and quietly pockets the slipper. Sylvia's act of ingestion and disgorging signals the women's ethical entanglement, their inescapable bodily proximity, to the detainees. Sylvia's subsequent behaviour is comically semi-human: in her next attempt to communicate with Gloria and Babs she trots on to the stage, scratches herself and sits expectantly, a cardboard sign with a rudimentary drawing of a window hanging around her neck. Finally, Sylvia makes her case using human communication, speaking to Babs, the sister most affected by her conscience:

BABS: But – I – you – you've never spoken before!

SYLVIA: As they say, desperate times call for desperate measures. Maybe
 you just weren't listening hard enough. (22)

It takes a figure of in-between-ness, a dog with human(e) instincts – or in performative terms, a human acting as a dog – to observe the necessity for recognition and response. Equally troubling, lines of communication are more readily bridged between Babs and her dog than they are between the sisters and their human prisoners. Sylvia serves to underscore the normative social /

political / ethnic stratification (to which the women hold fast) that privileges Australian citizens above asylum seekers by harnessing a capacity for agency over and above that which is available to the people who, in a cell beneath the stairs of a family home, are being subjected to treatment both sub-human and sub-dog.

Prompted by Sylvia, and in between idle gossip, Babs comes to acknowledge the ethically untenable basis upon which some twenty-five “Peoples from Elsewhere”, including several children and a newborn infant, have been locked under her stairs in cramped, dark conditions for a year. Ultimately, Babs is unable to quash her conscience, and neither, it emerges, is the more outwardly staunch Gloria. By the end of the play, the sisters join the growing number of families that defy Australian law and release the asylum seekers out into Australia proper, through the window in the cupboard. Along with alleged escapes across the country – one of which, Donald notes, occurred recently “from a sewing room in Marraborn” (15) – the release of detainees represents the seepages that challenge the imagined impermeability (and homogeneity) of the nation. The innocuous home of Gloria and Babs, confined by obedience, convention and order, is just one component within a dispersed heterotopia of deviation: according to the contextual framework of the play, numerous Australian households detain people who, in not recognising “Perfectly Good Borders”, deviate from the norm of territorial belonging. This manoeuvre is not merely a satirical metaphor that speaks to the injustice of extrajudicial detention; it also focuses the notion, articulated by Foucault, that power, including biopolitical coercion, is not the exclusive domain of sovereign authorities (power from above), but a decentralised and dispersed series of societal structures, practices and engagements. *The Rainbow Dark* seems to claim that the extrajudicial detention of asylum seekers is upheld by the consent and action (or inaction) of the citizenry. The play insists on ethical proximity, on the notion that asylum seekers are imbricated in the fabric of the nation, as forcefully as they may be disavowed and deemed not-Australian.

In its premier season in Brisbane, *The Rainbow Dark* was prefaced with an opening sound-bite of John Howard's vilifying narration of the "children overboard" affair, centring upon the statement, "I don't want people like that in Australia. Genuine refugees don't do that ... They hang onto their children" (qtd in Marr and Wilkinson 251). This dramaturgical choice (not indicated in the script) served the affective purpose of recalling the eventful latter half of 2001 when unauthorised asylum seekers became a major national issue, and many citizens were deeply unsettled by breaches of "their" borders. In scaling political discourses and manoeuvres down to a domestic sphere via the medium of satire, Carless crystallises the relational structures (the attitudes and impulses) that underpin sovereign biopolitics. A similar strategy was employed in Ben Eltham's 2006 satirical play, *The Pacific Solution*, which was performed at Brisbane's Metro Arts Theatre a few months prior to *The Rainbow Dark*. In Eltham's play, three housemates (named, in a thinly veiled allusion to prominent Liberal Party politicians, John, Phil and Mandy) are interrupted during an afternoon of watching cricket on television by the sudden appearance of a young man in their living room. The man asks for asylum, prompting the housemates to defensive hostility: they lock him in a wardrobe and formulate a means to absolve themselves of responsibility for him; their "solution" is to excise the wardrobe from their lease agreement. The black absurdity of the play's premise (which is not dissimilar from the refugee-intruder motif that appears in the prologue of Hannie Rayson's play *Two Brothers* [Melbourne Theatre Company, 2005]) is akin to that of *The Rainbow Dark*, and it operates in a similar affective manner by inviting the audience to consider the face-to-face implications of asylum and the Australian living space.

The image of living space might also be seen to parody the discourse that has been presented in defence of immigration detention in Australia: in her reply letter to Thomas Keneally, published (as mentioned in chapter two) in the expanded edition of the anthology

Another Country, former Minister for Immigration Amanda Vanstone argues that the right of a sovereign nation to determine who may enter the country

is very similar to the right of any householder to decide who will enter their home and how long they will remain welcome there. None of us would turn away a stranger who is fleeing immediate danger, but how many of us would unquestioningly accept someone into our home who simply wants to move from another home that they do not like and where they are not in danger? (120)

The logic that rationalises immigration detention within a simple rubric of household etiquette is precisely what is interrogated in *The Rainbow Dark* – and found wanting.

Tampa

Lebanon-born Australian artist Mireille Astore's *Tampa* was a durational performance work that took place from 30 October to 16 November 2003 during the annual event Sculpture by the Sea at Tamarama beach (adjacent to the more famous Bondi) in Sydney. It utilised a cage-like structure of thin poles spaced fifteen centimetres apart, shaped as a 10:1 scaled version of the MV Tampa. Astore occupied this space for eight hours per day over the eighteen-day period, exposing her "imprisoned" self to observation, recording (but not responding to) the comments of viewers and passers by and returning their gaze by taking photographs from within the structure; the comments and photographs were posted onto a website. Astore's corporeal investment in the work, involving long days of self-confinement upon the beach, confronts viewers with an affective image of concurrence between the appearance at the border and imprisonment; in other words, she makes explicit the connection between border politics and carceral politics by integrating them via the located-ness of her performance.

More than any other work examined in this chapter, *Tampa* derives much of its meaning and efficacy from its site-specificity (indeed, in this way, it is comparable to the visual arts projects mentioned at the opening of this chapter, the SIEV X memorial and *Exiles and Emigrants*). The signification of the beach in relation to issues of nation, citizenship, belonging and borders is ambivalent. The vast majority of Australia's population live on or proximate to the coast; certainly, the metropolitan national imaginary centres upon this space, rather than the sparsely populated interior of the continent. Neighbouring a world-famous surf beach (Bondi) and part of a hub of leisure activities centring upon the sun and sea, Tamarama epitomises a prominent and celebrated aspect of the so-called Australian way of life, one that Astore characterises as "hedonistic" ("When the Artwork" 240). In this regard, Astore transgressively locates her performance at the heart of a territory that is claimed and possessed emphatically by settler Australia. It should be noted that the terms of this claim were contested on another Sydney beach, thirty kilometres south of the more wealthy Bondi and Tamarama, two years after Astore's performance, when white and Lebanese Australian youths converged in and around Cronulla beach in a series of violent, racially motivated riots; international media reports showed disturbing images of young white Australians defiantly brandishing the national flag, slogans such as "we grew here, you flew here" and "ethnic cleansing unit" inscribed on banners and bare chests.

The Cronulla riots focus, perhaps, the other dominant signification of the Australian beach: what Ien Ang terms the white "psycho-geography" of invasion (129-30). Given Australia's geo-political position as an island-continent (a position that is less a geographically evident fact, Ang argues, than a naturalised idea [129]), border consciousness and persistent invasion anxieties centre around the idea of long coastlines, and beyond, vast oceans. Like Nield, Katrina Schlunke articulates the border as a liminal place of entry or arrival at which one *becomes* illegitimate;

employing the metaphor of the Australian beach, she describes the border as “an in-between space neither land nor sea, a threshold of becoming where strangers are made rather than met” (para. 6). The coast / beach, therefore, is imagined as both safe and unsafe: simultaneously a vulnerable site of potential invasion (especially from the north) and a protective symbol of delineation that underlines notions of national territorial integrity, upon which Australians play out a central part of their leisure culture.

While the SIEV X memorial is located, as I have noted, in a relatively quiet location, from which it remembers marginalised stories and lives, Astore’s performance centres around the discordant emplacement of a representation of asylum and imprisonment within an affluent, heavily-populated territory. The performance constructs a heterotopia, where a carceral space stands side-by-side with an ostensibly free, open space. It also produces a temporal echo, a type of reterritorialised ghosting of the ship that had occupied the national imagination two years previously (just as the SIEV X memorial represents a ghosting of that sunken vessel, with a section of painted poles tracing its outline). Astore describes her position in the work as “the personification of a refugee” (“When the Artwork” 242): her family left Lebanon for Australia upon the outbreak of civil war in 1975, though she acknowledges that their status was “migrant”, not “refugee” (“When the Artwork” 239). Seeking to literally *stand in*, then, for the unauthorised asylum seekers that were held on board the Tampa, and by extension, for people imprisoned in Australia’s detention centres, Astore performatively emplaces herself both inside and outside the nation, reminding audiences of the continuing effects across time and space in terms of sovereignty and nationhood of the bio-territorial performance of Tampa in 2001.

By not responding to (but instead recording in a notebook) the comments of various members of the public for the duration of the performance, Astore highlights the impossibility of cosmopolitan conversation between Australians and detained (silenced) asylum seekers. At the

same time, the work produces discontinuous and disembodied “dialogue” via the artist’s publication on her website of the remarks that were directed at her from passers-by. This online documentation represents a diverse range of responses, including admiration from a number of people sympathetic to the plight of detained asylum seekers, generalised concern for the artist’s welfare and comfort, offers of food or drink, bemusement, antagonism, as well as frustration and hostility from people demanding Astore’s recognition and a reply to their questions (“Migrant [comments]” np).

Several observers appear to have assumed that Astore was an asylum seeker or refugee; she was asked questions such as “do you speak English?” and “So when are you going to get your permanent residency visa?” (“Migrant [comments]” np). Her non-whiteness, or in other words, her categorisation as a person occupying the borders of Australia’s dominant ethnicity, prompted these people to collapse the gap between performer and referent – arguably, an embodied affect Astore sought to achieve by standing, as I have noted, as “the personification of a refugee” (“When the Artwork” 242). The transaction (in Baz Kershaw’s sense of the active negotiation and construction of meaning in performance [16-17]) between performer and spectator reveals Astore’s own body as, in Rajaram and Grundy-Warr’s terms, an “exemplary” site for dominant inscription: “exemplary bodies are often racialised or gendered (recognized or misrecognized primarily in terms of race or gender) or are migrants from particular areas” (xv). Astore cites American artist Coco Fusco and Mexican artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s interactive performance work, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit Sydney* (1992), which engaged with colonialist practices of caging and display of the indigenous other, as a referent for *Tampa* (“When the Artwork” 255, n. 3). She also cites Ghassan Hage’s concept of “ethnic caging” (a term he deploys with reference to Australia’s incarceration of asylum seekers [*White Nation* 106-07]) as an important point of departure (“When the Artwork” 249). Hage considers the

implications of the detention of those deemed other or external to Australian liberal democratic society in terms of the nation's internal social structure, asking, "Can 'we' really be nice to ethnics in the internal organisation of the nation and cage them in its external organisation without there being any relation between the two?" (*White Nation* 107). For Hage, the ethnic caging of asylum seekers is symptomatic of the underlying structure of "multicultural" Australia; he apprehends it in psychoanalytic terms, as "a phenomenon which expresses a repressed structure that constitutes and underlies all of the reality of which it is a part" (*White Nation* 108). The trope of repression can be equated with the processes of forgetting which, as I have stated in this chapter and in the introduction, are a requisite part of the narration of the unified nation. As corporeal provocation / polemic, then, Astore's work asks questions concerning the forgotten or repressed relationship between national ethnic organisation or categorisation and detention practices in Australia.

"Picnic"

The heterotopic emplacement of the refugee within the Australian public leisure space is an image taken up by prominent Australian poet Fay Zwicky in "Picnic", the first poem in her 2006 collection of the same name, published by Australian press Giramondo. In contrast with the works examined so far in this chapter, Zwicky's poem apprehends non-carceral heterotopias of deviation: the existence of liminal, constrained, border lifeworlds within free territories of the nation. Given the date of the poem's publication in *Picnic* (prior to the abolition of the Temporary Protection Visa in 2008) and its reference to absent detainees, not to mention its preoccupation with the theme of life in stasis, it can be assumed with some confidence that some or all of the refugees of whom Zwicky writes are TPV holders. The poem begins by presenting an image of simultaneous proximity and difference: a picnic shared between the poet and a group of

Afghani refugees within a space of authorised and explicit freedom and democracy, a public park in the West Australian capital of Perth.

The poet and the refugees occupy “a green sweep of Kings Park grass / dappled with late summer shadow” (1), and enjoy the happy dissonance of a shared meal: “Meat balls, hummus and tabouli / mingled with our sizzled sausages / on paper plates. Coke and juice” (1). As I discussed in chapter two in relation to the publication of refugees’ recipes, the act of sharing food from home plays an important role in ameliorating the dislocation of exile by generating affective community identifications. Zwicky’s representation of the “mingling” of the foods offers an image of cosmopolitan engagement that, I would argue, eludes encapsulation in terms of Hage’s concept of “White cosmo-multiculturalism”, or multiculturalism operating under the control of a white dominant class (*White Nation* 202); this, he argues, manifests (among other contexts) in the gross consumption of the non-white other through the incorporation and commodification of so-called ethnic cuisines. While as a typically depoliticised, decontextualised signifier of otherness, food continually risks reproducing what Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese describe as “an assimilationist economy of cultural containment and control” (110), the sharing of a picnic in Zwicky’s representation functions as a politicised space of proximity and engagement, a context for attending to a subaltern community (especially here, to stories of trauma and loss), even as the food acts as a nostalgic signifier of essentialist cultural and national identities; in other words, of difference.

The cosmopolitan conversation as Zwicky represents it is concerned with the refugees’ stories, each reflecting a different stage on the alien–citizen continuum of belonging: “Someone had found work. / Someone had been accepted as / a lab technician. Someone’s husband / still in detention three years on” (1). There is little evidence here of the “enriching” role to which Hage maintains the non-white migrant is relegated according to the white fantasies of

multicultural Australia – he argues, “While the dominant White culture merely and unquestionably *exists*, migrant cultures exist for the latter” (*White Nation* 121). Not even able to occupy a belittling position at the “enriching” ethnic margins of the white Australian imaginary, the refugees represented by Zwicky stand within a largely invisible in-between space where participation in the cultural life of the nation is on hold; the picnic is suffused with the ever-present fact of sovereign biopower, dictating the possibilities for negotiating and resettling identities. Although the refugees can, and do, move within a major locale of Perth public life, the democratic and “borderless” space of Kings Park, they can take only a measure of the Australia it symbolises: “Nobody seemed to be thinking of / a better world, nobody was asking / for more than a place to sit quietly / and wait” (1-2). The theme of waiting echoes Astore representation of caging within the nation in *Tampa*; in Zwicky’s poem, it speaks to the dilemma of people living border lives in the environment of a metropolitan park. The poet is conscious of her difference; while sharing the meal and the conversation, she is nonetheless on the border space of the community: “Watching all this, in and out of it” (2), facing a limited context for free connection with a group of people who stand, vulnerably, both inside and outside the nation.

The explicitly imperial signifier “Kings Park” focuses the impact of colonial dominance over the Australian landscape. The park was named to mark King Edward VII’s ascension to the British throne,⁶⁴ and inevitably, this inscription exhibits a temporal or historical specificity; it privileges imperial knowledges and claims to ownership, which are affirmed by the park’s State War Memorial, conjoining Australian and British national identities. The presence within the space of new, non-European, non-indigenous occupants invites the reader toward an awareness of the disconnections and discontinuities between dominant or “official” constructions of space and their human engagements over time; like other acts of territorial naming that have been

⁶⁴ For more information on Kings Park, including its Aboriginal heritage, see “History and Memorials.”

absorbed into national knowledges, the materialisation of Kings Park reinforces a hegemonic forgetting of the displacements by which Australian space came to be owned. Rajaram observes that a fundamental element of Australian imperialism

is the ultimately unsustainable dislocation of space from time. Space appears as permanent and somehow static, open to order, and entity where 'land', meaning a space over which jurisdiction is thinkable, is given. Reinvigorating space with a sense of subjectivity brings in notions of 'place', where meanings of space are articulated and defended differently over time. ("Making Place" 294)

The fragile occupation of Afghan refugees at the fringes of Kings Park's claim to sovereign (and imperialist) territorial authority echoes other occupations and displacements that have taken place on the land over time. Zwicky's poem invests the image of Kings Park with a sense of temporal and political subjectivity that contests the terms of its possession.

Zwicky is compelled to reflect upon her "own young wifehood / as a stranger" (2) in Zurich, her "first child born / in an alien tongue, the grey apartment block, / the cold, the speechless folk who passed / without a nod or a smile" (2). In her position as a stranger, she ensured her own half-life, her own incarceration: "I rarely ventured out, avoided peak hours" (3). Like the refugees, the poet occupied a border space: "And I, both in and out of it / learning how to live a life, / sit quiet in a cold place / waiting to touch the sun-warmed earth" (4). Zwicky here reiterates her description of a space "both in and out of" the legitimate sphere of the sovereign nation, and continues the characterisation of waiting, a trope that is epitomised in the event of indefinite incarceration, but which also focuses more broadly a position of internal exclusion from an imagined community. While Jaivin's novel, Boujbiha's poem, Carless's play and Astore's performance installation explicate the border existence of asylum seekers via the theme of incarceration, Zwicky's poem considers the way in which borders operate within the life of a

refugee (particularly under the Temporary Protection system) even after he or she has been granted the right to move within the public territories of the nation. In its representation of a small moment of cosmopolitan conversation, "Picnic" attends to human lives that, even in their near-invisibility, cannot be easily excised from the nation's identity; as Zwicky writes, "What weighs the heart must / sit it out till nightfall for release / once everyone's asleep. And even then ..." (2). In this capacity, the poem represents a melancholy insistence on Bhabha's "Counter-narratives of the nation" ("DissemiNation" 300) that disturb the imagined unity of the modern sovereign state.

"Attitude: Don Juan in the Shopping Mall"

The image of a nation asleep is extended in Canberra-based poet S. K. Kelen's long poem, "Attitude: Don Juan in the Shopping Mall", published in the *Australian Literary Review* (a monthly liftout of *The Australian* newspaper) in 2007. While Zwicky's poem exhibits a consciousness of cultural difference, Kelen reflects on a paradoxically homogenous multiculturalism. Central to this is the figure of Juan, translated from Byron's satirical take on the archetypal Spanish lover to a non-specific son of immigrants to Australia (who is reminiscent, in fact, of Jaivin's "encouragable" and promiscuous Zeki). Kelen's Juan "could be any of a million characters"⁶⁵, though he is not white: "His accent is dinkum / Aussie but to many Juan was dark like a foreign country". Faced with an array of potential "ethnic option[s]", the poet resolves to "Call him Juan, keep it simple", neatly and ironically erasing the ethno-cultural specificity of his protagonist: "Family background tick multicultural". Kelen invokes in this way the idea of unqualified whiteness, or whiteness as the default against which the ethnic other is classified as different; as Julie Matthews argues, "Whiteness is recognised by non-white people as a position of privilege

⁶⁵ All of the quotations from S. K. Kelen's "Attitude: Don Juan in the Shopping Mall" are from page 25 of the *Australian Literary Review* in which it appears; pagination will not be given from this point onwards.

and power because it is experienced and seen as what-they-are-not" (32). Juan's non-specific otherness is appended to the already-complete, bounded and legitimate sovereign (white) Australia.

Focusing on a different type of Australian public domestic space than that of Zwicky's poem, Kelen presents an ironic meditation on the cultural and ethnic diversity of modern Australia within the context of the manufactured culture of the nation's consumer spaces: "Migrants – survivors – refugees – settlers safely / Tucked in bed ashore the island of shopping malls / Now these families call Fortress Australia home". Characterising the shopping mall as a manic – yet numbing – microcosm of contemporary Australia, Kelen's picture of multiculturalism (in contrast with Zwicky's) exhibits self-consciousness awareness of something akin to Hage's "White cosmo-multiculturalism"; he describes "Happy roasting coffee beans, chocolate / And all the world's ice-cream, kebabs and / Hamburgers' crackling aroma you can eat the air". But Kelen is not only concerned with the white assimilation of "ethnic cuisine"; an array of foodstuffs contained under one roof and awaiting consumption is symptomatic of gluttonous globalisation more broadly, where the world is available literally on a platter for the modern consumer. The homogenised shopping mall space offers globalised metropolitan sameness whether it is situated in Shanghai, Dubai, Bangkok, London or Sydney.

In Kelen's poem, the domestic space of the shopping mall, the safety of Australia, is an ambivalent space, a contradictive garish paradise, a peaceful fortress, that turns its back on the world beyond its borders. In the poet's vision, homogenous Australia subsumes all ethnic variants of Juan into the "brave new lucky country of the mall", where, it is ironically declared, "there's nothing between people / But a bond called mateship and the spirit of the 'fair go'". Kelen draws attention to the illusory nature of this unitary space: the poem's irony is apparent in its claim that the oxymoronic "indoor forest" is a feature of the shopping mall's "Warmth and

truth". Elsewhere the poet offers, sardonically, a newspaper headline image of "*Race relations success / these three Vietnamese boys / shoot up with skinheads*". Ultimately, the fact that the poem's picture of homogenisation is, like the shopping mall itself, flimsily held together by contradiction and artifice, testifies to the inescapable heterogeneity – or in the terminology of this chapter, to the presence of "border spaces" – within multicultural Australia.

Further undermining this shopping mall illusion of sameness, Kelen juxtaposes images of everyday Australian hedonism with those of distant poverty and violence: "What people want or can afford the mall gives // Pets, banks, books, cameras and food without end / Oceans away from the rubble and tents". A "happy mongrel", Juan is, like so many Australians, insulated from "a world / Incredibly sad – as seen on tv – huge swathes of continents / Where children search for shrapnel to sell for scrap / Where there's no food on the table, where there's no table / The nearest shopping mall's a thousand miles away". In a globalised society, Kelen argues, international media images do little to evoke a sense of affective proximity between places of economic privilege and places of poverty (Susan Sontag's theorisation of the mass circulation of images of human suffering, mentioned in the previous chapter, is apposite here). Even when the vast distance separating the island insularity of Australia (and its distillation in the overtly "insulated" space of the shopping mall) and the less fortunate lives beyond its shores is breached by the migrations of boat people, there remains, the poet tells us, an ongoing failure of affect: "As Juan's dad told him 'always vote for the least worst fascist' / A hand of friendship – your government let refugees drown in the sea". Globalisation, in Kelen's imagining, informed as it is by the spectre of SIEV X, succeeds in producing cosmopolitan consumers, but not humane cosmopolitan engagement.

As in Byron's epic *Don Juan*, boat stories and shipwrecks are a theme of "Attitude: Don Juan in the Shopping Mall"; Kelen imagines the safe island of the shopping mall, and by

extension the island of Australia, as formed by successive boat arrivals. Juan himself is a figure whose “forbears came by boat from somewhere” some “Two centuries after the British boat folks washed ashore”. In the third stanza, the poet considers the trope of the shipwreck as a metaphor for contemporary forced migration:

Time for the shipwreck -- a starfish on bleached coral.
Big island like Australia has plenty of coastal treachery,
Juan's boat hit a storm before he was even born,
Back home families and traditions were trampled in dust.
Those who got out brought memories of homelands
Turned nasty: torture, hunger, every day some
Bad news, ruins, guns and weeping. The world
Turns its back. That's the modern shipwreck.

Kelen concludes with a grim view of the Australian consumer culture's response to this modern shipwreck: “Juan knew it was too late to save the Earth. / You might as well enjoy the technology and the girls”. Byron's satire of the romantic hero is echoed in Kelen's dystopic, anti-heroic conclusion; the shopping mall's chief, and globalising, function of gross consumption, seduction and diversion prevails.

Beyond the disempowered challenge

In spite of narratives and biopolitical actions to contain and unify it, the Australian nation-state produces, via its coercive relationship with excluded groups of others, its own slippages. The creative works I have examined in this chapter represent the lives of asylum seekers and refugees, highlighting in the process the paradoxes presented by their exclusion and capture (or to return

to Agamben; *ex-capere* [*Means without End* 40]) under the logic and instrumentality of Australian nationhood. The heterotopic border spaces occupied, in various ways, by asylum seekers and refugees in Australia challenge and unravel the seams of the sovereign state. But it must be remembered (and the reminder can surely be found in Boujbiha's desolation) that the challenge represented by non-belonging people that inhabit this space of simultaneity to the unitary constitution of the nation-state is only a challenge to the extent that they are aggressively coerced via punitive policies. In other words, the challenge of the asylum seeker is only a challenge *because* of their oppression under sovereign biopower. Mindful, then, of what Mignolo terms "critical and dialogical cosmopolitanism" (182), my analysis here can merely identify spaces within the creative texts of engaged communication that contest territorialised notions of nation, citizen and alien and that begin to confront the gap that must be bridged between the paradoxical disempowered challenge-to-sovereignty of the asylum seeker and practical change.

Welcome to Country? Positioning Indigenous Sovereignty

We can't separate ourselves from other human beings – it's a duty.

—Wadjularbinna Nulyarimma

“We will decide who comes to this country”: sovereign territoriality

At the opening of the Australian parliament on 12 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd acknowledged the “traditional” owners of the land after being Welcomed to Country in a ceremony performed by Aboriginal people from around Australia. Similar welcomes and acknowledgements of country are common at many types of events and gatherings (with State and Territory guidelines devised on their implementation), but they had never been part of the opening of federal parliament prior to 2008. The landmark welcome ostensibly enacted the idea that the Australian government’s authority is somehow granted by – and not imposed upon – Aboriginal people. That this symbolism is conspicuously at odds with historico-political reality underpinned the latest incarnation of public debate in Australia over the efficacy of the Welcome to Country and acknowledgement of traditional owners. In March 2010 the opposition leader Tony Abbott’s suggestion that the latter in particular is often “out-of-place tokenism” (qtd in Maiden 1) prompted a brief flurry of discussion on the role of symbolic thought and action in

organising human affairs generally, and specifically, on whether Australians should be explicitly reminded of the unceded, unresolved sovereignty of Aboriginal people.⁶⁶

Setting aside debates over intention, efficacy and symbolism, it is undeniable that whatever form of Aboriginal sovereignty the Welcome to Country and acknowledgement of country signify or articulate, its structural difference from executive, legislative and judicial powers – the bulwarks of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson terms “patriarchal white sovereignty” (87) – is profound in a nation where there are currently no Aboriginal members in the federal parliament. Moreton-Robinson pinpoints the ambivalence of ceremonial recognition, arguing that it is “simultaneously a reminder and a denial of the existence of Indigenous sovereignty. The reminder is evidenced by the presence of Indigenous bodies, but its denial is contained in the words ‘traditional lands’, which transports ownership back into the past not the continuing present” (98). In part, the position of indigenous territorial authority is thrown into sharp relief in the context of Prime Minister John Howard’s pronouncement at the launch of his 2001 election campaign: “We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come” (qtd in Marr and Wilkinson 324). What, then, might be the value of taking indigenous protocols as a provocation in the context of unauthorised asylum seekers? What might derive from a structurally marginalised but ceremonially, performatively acknowledged Aboriginal territorial claim (inhering in the right to welcome, or presumably reject, the stranger) in the context of determinations of belonging and non-belonging, citizen and alien, audacious boat-person and deserving offshore refugee?

In this final chapter, I investigate these questions by tracing some recent moments of engagement between Aboriginal Australians and unauthorised arrivals (asylum seekers and refugees), and consider the imagining of such engagement in Australia-based writer and

⁶⁶ As noted in the introduction, I employ the terms “Aboriginal” and “indigenous” interchangeably to refer to Australians of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island heritage.

broadcaster Sandy McCutcheon's novel *The HaHa Man* (2003) and the feature film, *Lucky Miles* (2007), written by Australians Michael James Rowland and Helen Barnes and directed by Rowland. I am concerned primarily with affective interventions into Australian sovereign authority in relation to asylum, which I examine as three broad modalities: activism (protests, statements and critical discourse), intimacy (interpersonal contact, encompassing support as well as conflict) and creativity (representation in *The HaHa Man* and *Lucky Miles*). This chapter is structured somewhat differently to the previous four, inasmuch as my analysis of Aboriginal protests, statements, critical discourse and interpersonal contact occupies much of the first half, while my analysis of creative texts is taken up in the second. This responds to the fact that indigenous politics and activism vis-à-vis asylum seekers and refugees in Australia is an underexamined field of scholarly enquiry *per se*, and reflects the lack of creative writing and performance work to have apprehended it.

While projects such as Aboriginal-Asian theatre practitioner Jimmy Chi's acclaimed musical theatre work *Bran Nue Dae* (premiered 1990) and Vietnamese Australian (and former refugee) Hung Le and Aboriginal Australian Ningali Lawford's comedy collaboration *Black and Tran* (premiered 2000) represent important creative intersections between Aboriginal and non-European migrant perspectives and cultural contexts,⁶⁷ it is fair to say that in literary and performative responses to the issue of asylum in post-Tampa Australia, Aboriginal figures seldom appear in any significant capacity. As far as the stranger–citizen dyad central to so many refugee narratives is concerned, Aboriginality, Australia's "citizen other" category, has tended to be sidelined in the project of representing the plight of disenfranchised non-citizens. *The HaHa Man* and *Lucky Miles* are exceptions to this tendency, offering reflections on how Aboriginality

⁶⁷ Peta Stephenson's *The Outsiders Within: Telling Australia's Indigenous-Asian Story* (2007) offers an insightful analysis of Aboriginal, Asian and white Australian cultural, artistic, literary and performative engagements over the last 100 years. Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo's *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australasia* (2007) examines Aboriginal and Asian influences on Australasian theatre practice from the colonial era to the present day.

connects with asylum and related issues of sovereignty, space / territory, biopower and citizenship. It must, of course, be noted that academic arguments for comparison or alignment between indigenous Australians and asylum seekers run the risk of recapitulating well-traversed theorisations of postcolonial power relations, or worse, of corralling Aboriginality and asylum as twin paradigms of victimhood and marginalisation. And yet, in its attempt to position indigenous sovereignty and draw out its affective implications in terms of the reception of unauthorised asylum seekers, this chapter is a crucial development of the arguments laid out in the previous chapter regarding the paradoxes and limitations of dominant state sovereignty discourse.

Indeed, official Australian sovereignty is most explicitly problematic in relation to Aboriginal Australians – the people against whom the founding violence of settler sovereignty was acted. In Australia, the assumption of ownership and authority by the British was not achieved via any of the routes laid out under common and international law: conquest (by force of arms), cession (under treaty) or settlement (of uninhabited land).⁶⁸ This originary colonial failure – anchored by the doctrine of *terra nullius* – to engage with indigenous peoples under common or international (not to mention indigenous) law continues to represent an intractable problem. Some progress has been made in reconciling indigenous land title claims under Australian law, but these are often in remote geographical spaces that settler Australia does not use or occupy. The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 provided the basis upon which indigenous people in the Northern Territory could claim land rights based on traditional occupation; currently forty-nine percent of land in the state is indigenous-owned. In 1992 the High Court's landmark ruling in *Mabo v Queensland (No. 2)* overturned *terra nullius* with

⁶⁸ It should be acknowledged that “lawful” modes of claiming sovereignty contain their own problems: in Aotearoa–New Zealand, a fundamental contention in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) is its guarantee that Maori retain *tino rangatiratanga*, which translates to “self-determination”, or arguably, “absolute sovereignty”. The Maori version of the Treaty states that *kawanatanga*, or governorship, is to be ceded to the British, while in the English version, the term *sovereignty* is used. For in-depth analysis, see Claudia Orange's comprehensive *The Treaty of Waitangi* (1987).

respect to land (giving way to the concept of Aboriginal native title) but maintained that Aboriginal title to some land had been validly extinguished. The court also ruled that indigenous Australians remained subject to Australian sovereignty; in effect, reiterating the axiom that state sovereignty is self-authorising and not justiciable.⁶⁹

The Mabo decision prompted the Native Title Act of 1993, which while certainly not guaranteeing native title to indigenous people, provides a mechanism for dealing with claims. In 1996, the High Court's ruling in another landmark case, *Wik Peoples v Queensland*, stated that native title rights could continue on lands held under certain statutory pastoral leases; in other words, that the two titles could co-exist. However, the High Court rulings and the Native Title Act (along with a 1998 Amendment) do not simply promote indigenous land title (much less sovereignty); indeed, the Act retrospectively validates forms of settler land title that were arguably made improperly, particularly vis-à-vis the Racial Discrimination Act 1975.⁷⁰ The Australian state has not found a way to reconcile juridically the issue of native title, much less that of indigenous sovereignty; as Henry Reynolds observes, "Australian jurisprudence makes sense only if the Aboriginal people were traditionally so primitive as to be almost without law, politics or authority – a conclusion at odds with modern anthropological knowledge and with principles of human rights upheld by the High Court in the Mabo judgement" ("Sovereignty" 210). It is from this paradigm of non-sense that alternative, affective articulations of Aboriginal sovereignty or territoriality manifest.

The assumption of sovereignty in Australia without conquest, cession or settlement places it in a singularly problematic position in comparison to other former European colonies. But in terms of the collision between state sovereignty and indigenous rights, Australia is not

⁶⁹ For further discussions on the non-justiciability of sovereignty and the implications in relation to indigenous Australians see Maria Giannacopoulos; Henry Reynolds (1998).

⁷⁰ For further discussion on the issue of indigenous Native Title and the implications of the High Court decisions and legislation, with links to court decisions and relevant legislation, see Rod Hagen np.

alone in its dilemma: on 13 September 2007, when the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, four member states voted against it: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. Representatives of these four countries variously expressed concerns about how key provisions of the Declaration relating to sovereign authority – including the right to self-determination and the upholding of customary legal systems, access to land and resources – could be practically implemented. These objections were not merely the domain of non-indigenous representatives; New Zealand's Minister of Maori Affairs under the Helen Clark Labour government, Parekura Horomia, stated:

the declaration [is] fundamentally incompatible with New Zealand's constitutional and legal arrangements and established Treaty [of Waitangi] settlement policy.

Article 26 of the Declaration states that indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired. For New Zealand this covers potentially the entire country. It appears to require recognition of rights to lands now lawfully owned by other citizens, both indigenous and non-indigenous. This ignores contemporary reality and would be impossible to implement. (Horomia np)

In this situation global thinking on sovereignty presents local difficulties; the UN-constructed pronouncement on indigenous people's rights comes into conflict in fundamental ways with the political and territorial structures of several nations. Nonetheless, on 3 April 2009, the Australian government endorsed the Declaration. While of certain affective significance, the practical effects of this endorsement in terms of political recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty are uncertain, especially since a Declaration is not legally binding. The complex relationship between affective action and practical, material power is a dialectic that lies at the heart of this chapter.

Material sovereignty and affective sovereignty

The local and international events that account for the year 2001 being the starting point of this study also had implications for Aboriginal Australia. While the Tampa stand-off in late August precipitated the radical Pacific Solution and terrorist attacks in the United States produced a vociferous nationalism and militarism articulated around perceived imminent security threats, an official 2001 deadline for national reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, set with bipartisan support in the federal parliament a decade earlier, passed by, unmet. This is in spite of an apparent groundswell of public support for reconciliation, expressed in large-scale symbolic, affective actions such as national people's bridge walks, marches, "sorry" books and cultural performances (most notably, the Festival of the Dreaming in 1997) in the years leading up to the deadline. Suvendrini Perera points to the 2001 period in Australia as marking a "shift in focus from the pivotal question of internal or domestic sovereignty and the relationship between the state and its Indigenous subjects to the exercise of sovereignty at the extremities of the national geo-body over its oceans and neighbouring regions, as well as upon enemies imaginatively located at the limits of the nation" ("Acting Sovereign" 4-5). In the aggressive repudiation of people seeking refuge in Australia without documentation, widely applauded in the anxious 2001-and-after period, national interests moved away from indigenous Australia.

Taken together, two significant events of more recent years exemplify the duality between material power and affective action that underlies the ambivalent and continually re-negotiated relationship between Aboriginal people and the Australian sovereign. The tenuous basis upon which Aboriginal self-determination stands was illustrated in late June 2007 when the Howard government sent Australian Defence Force personnel into Northern Territory indigenous

communities in response to an alleged epidemic of child sexual abuse. This controversial Northern Territory National Emergency Response or “intervention”, which saw the government acquire Aboriginal lands under temporary lease, was enabled via a “special measures” exemption from the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. Currently continuing with some adjustments under the Rudd government, the intervention reaffirms Australian sovereignty by exerting exceptional powers and underlines Giorgio Agamben’s assertion, “the sovereign ... is the one who marks the point of indistinction between violence and right by proclaiming the state of exception and suspending the validity of the law” (*Means without End* 104). On 13 February 2008, as the first item of business at the opening of parliament for the year, Rudd apologised on behalf of the parliament to Aboriginal Australians forcibly removed from their families (the Stolen Generations) and their descendents. This act was of great importance to many indigenous people who had requested in vain for several years that Howard issue a statement of apology. While it emphasised unity and reconciliation and not an alternative or parallel indigenous claim to sovereignty, Rudd’s affective words acknowledged the damage inflicted as a direct result of the power wielded by the Australian state: “We apologise for the hurt, the pain and suffering we, the parliament, have caused you by the laws that previous parliaments have enacted. We apologise for the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied” (Rudd np). Even as these two events indicate a renewed federal interest in indigenous Australia, they offer a profoundly contradictory engagement, whereby coercion, in the form of the suspension of racial discrimination legislation and the temporary acquisition of Aboriginal lands, sits alongside what many regarded as a significant expression of recognition and respect.

Several hundred indigenous people from across Australia converged upon Canberra for the official apology; it and the indigenous welcome to country that had opened parliament the preceding day were well-received by many. Ngambri (Canberra region) elder Matilda House-

Williams, who led the welcome to country, described it as “The best time in the history of the Australian Parliament ... A Prime Minister has honoured us, the first people of this land, the Ngambri people by seeking a welcome to country. In doing this, the Prime Minister shows what we call proper respect” (qtd in “MPs ‘Welcomed to Country”” np). Yankunytjatjara (north-west South Australia) elder and former public administrator Lowitja O’Donoghue described the apology in affective terms, as “a healing process for many of the stolen generation” (qtd in Coorey and Peatling 1). However, other Aboriginal commentators expressed disappointment over the fact that the Prime Minister and opposition leader’s speeches were not accompanied by a speech from a national Aboriginal representative, and that meetings between government and Aboriginal representatives were not held at the time of the apology. Sam Watson, a Birri Gubba (central Queensland) activist, writer and filmmaker, notes that in Canberra “there wasn’t a sustained engagement between the Rudd government and the Aboriginal community leaders; there needs to be a lot of work done there” (qtd in “Sam Watson” np). Without discounting the point that the formal apology, like the ceremonies of the previous day, did not produce Aboriginal authority, territorial, structural or otherwise, it is my purpose here to map some of the more minoritarian, and indeed intimate, ways in which similarly affective work operates, in Aboriginal activism, interpersonal contact and creative representation.

Activist affects

The remote Northern Territory Aboriginal community of Ampilatwatja, home to the Alyawarra people, is one of the “prescribed” townships that was acquired by the federal government in 2007 for five year lease under the terms of the Northern Territory intervention. In August 2009, Alyawarra members, represented by spokesperson Richard Downs, lodged a formal request with

James Anaya, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples, that they be classified as refugees. Downs's letter to Anaya reads: "The current status of Aboriginal people is that we are refugees in a Country we have called our own since time immemorial" and requests that the United Nations "Ensure[s] that the Australian government is aware of, and fulfils, its obligations under the International Refugee Convention, the UN Charter for Human Rights, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other international human rights covenants" (Downs np). This followed a protest that began a month earlier, when thirty community elders walked off the dilapidated Ampilatwatja and established a camp outside the government-controlled boundary.⁷¹ The activism is a response to a lack of improvement in living conditions despite promises made at the time of the intervention. The submission to the United Nations serves the potent political function of contextualising the Alyawarra's position – forced relinquishment of leasehold and scant provision for basic housing and infrastructure – in terms of an internationally recognised political status. For Downs, the walk-off constitutes a simultaneous exile and return, with the camp situated on his mother's country; in other words, even as it embodies the abjection of the townspeople, the protest is a rejection of government determination and an attempt to, as Downs explains, "create a sustainable community for ourselves" (qtd in "Aboriginal Community" np). The walk-off is continuing, and in Sydney in April 2010 a documentary charting the construction of a protest house at the camp (with the support of trade unions and community organisations), *The Ampilatwatja Walk-off Protest vs the NT Intervention*, was presented by Actively Radical TV.

⁷¹ The protest echoes earlier actions, most famously the Gurindji / Wave Hill cattle station walk-off of 1966-75, led by Vincent Lingiari, which mobilised the land rights movement and led to the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.

While the Alyawarra people's activism articulates a generalised connection with refugees based upon similar disenfranchisement and displacement, the responses of a number of other Aboriginal activists, elders and scholars specifically to mandatory immigration detention represent quite a cohesive statement of responsibility for, and hospitality toward, the stranger. But like the Alyawarra protest, these responses seem to be propelled by a sense of affinity with experiences of oppression, and in this capacity, they strategically underscore a politicised Aboriginal identity as much as they express support for asylum seekers and refugees. The Aboriginal Tent Embassy, which has stood on the lawn of Old Parliament House in Canberra intermittently since 1972 and continuously since 1992, is an important nexus of Aboriginal activism, especially regarding sovereignty and land rights.⁷² Current and former representatives of the Tent Embassy have publicly expressed support for asylum seekers and refugees. At an event organised by the Refugee Action Committee in 2000 to welcome refugees who had been resettled in Canberra, Gunilaroi / Kamilaroi (North-central New South Wales) member Robert Craigie invoked a connection between them and Aboriginal people who, he asserted, had become refugees within their own country. On behalf of Isabelle Coe, a Wiradjuri / Ngunnawal (Canberra region) elder and Tent Embassy founding activist, and other embassy members, Craigie offered Canberra as a "safe haven" (qtd in Griffiths np). Sam Watson, who was a founding member of the Tent Embassy in 1972, has been a vocal advocate for asylum seekers and refugees for several years. In 2001, in response to the infamous Tampa stand-off, Watson expressed affective identification with the desperation of the asylum seekers: "why ... would they be risking their lives, and the lives of their children, on the open seas. They need medical

⁷² The Embassy consists of a brightly painted shed and a small collection of tents and communal living spaces occupying part of the lawn in front of the Old Parliament House, within the current parliamentary precinct. The site displays the Aboriginal flag, several protest banners and murals bearing messages on indigenous rights and maintains a sacred fire representing peace, justice and sovereignty. Both an activist and living space, the embassy was a point of convergence, social interaction and emotional connection at the time of the official apology in 2008.

treatment and deserve a safe haven” (qtd in Mason np). Watson’s support formulates a mutually-constitutive solidarity: “The government is scapegoating refugees in the same way as they scapegoat indigenous people” (qtd in Mason np). In 2002, in response to mass hunger strikes and self-harm taking place at the remote Woomera detention centre, Pat Eatock extended an offer of asylum to detainees on behalf of the Tent Embassy. Although a symbolic gesture, which was never going to directly influence policy decisions, the offer (which was reported by the national and international media) denounced the “callous and inhumane” (qtd in Barkham 18) treatment of asylum seekers at the same time as it explicated the sovereign claim that is central to the Embassy’s continuing activism. Emerging at a time when asylum was one of the most inflammatory and emotive issues in Australia (propelled by tense situations such as the Tampa stand-off and hunger strikes), these statements essentially *answered affective discourse with affective discourse*; while they could not intervene materially in the politics they decried, they enabled the circulation of alternative affects – of welcome and hope – legitimised by Aboriginal territorial authority.

Noeleen Ryan-Lester, an Adnyamathana (the Flinders Ranges of South Australia) woman and social justice campaigner, invokes a connection between indigenous people and asylum seekers in terms of biopolitical coercion under Australian sovereign power; in an interview, she notes, “Baxter is not the first detention centre in Port Augusta. The first one was the Davenport mission, where they put Aboriginal people. It had a fence around it too, to stop the Aboriginal people from coming to Port Augusta. Port Augusta was just for the whites” (qtd in Taylor np). Like Ryan-Lester, Linda Dare of the Bungala people (South Australia) identifies a continuity between successive histories of exclusion, coupled with what is effectively, in William E. Connolly’s terms, a “politics of forgetting” (138); in the same interview, she asserts: “John Howard ... and everyone in Parliament have got to realise that we are the first people of this

country ... what right have they got to lock up other people? They got off a bloody boat, or their ancestors did" (qtd in Taylor np). In 2003, Dare (along with Bungala, Kokatha and Adnyamathana community members) joined a gathering of several hundred refugee activists outside Baxter detention centre (Murphy np). In 2005, Ryan-Lester and Dare were part of an anti-racism protest by the Port Augusta indigenous community, an act they linked to simultaneous protest activities at nearby Baxter, thereby drawing lines of embodied connection between two of the nation's spaces of exception, or in Foucauldian terms, its heterotopias of deviation.

Wading into the contentious waters of asylum politics in post-2001 Australia – essentially meeting, as I have noted, affective discourse with affective discourse – activists such as Ryan-Lester and Dare, and members of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, might be seen to be addressing what Hage regards as the key affective inequality in contemporary Australia. Taking up Hage's claim, mentioned in chapter two, that "societies are mechanisms for the distribution of hope, and ... the kind of affective attachment (worrying or caring) that a society creates among its citizens is intimately connected to its capacity to distribute hope" (*Against* 3), we can make the (admittedly somewhat schematic) argument that Aboriginal refugee activists offer "caring" affects as opposed to Australia's dominant (according to Hage) "worrying" affects, and thereby begin to respond to inequality in the "distribution of hope" (*Against* 17). Given that Aboriginal supporters of asylum seekers and refugees frequently cite a sense of affinity with oppression, and that this reinforces a politicised self-identification, their activism is imbricated with Aboriginal affective interests as well those of the newcomers. Of course, a redistribution of hope can seem a distant aspiration in the sobering light of the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association 2010 Health Impact Assessment of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, which reported that Aboriginal Australians suffer "a deep sense of alienation and a collective existential despair" (*Health Impact*

Assessment 8) – in another word, hopelessness. Nevertheless, that the nature of engagement between Aboriginal people and refugees is inevitably small-scale, its political impact undramatic, does not, I argue, diminish its significance for those it affects.

Gungalidda (Gulf of Carpentaria) elder and Aboriginal Tent Embassy member

Wadjularbinna Nulyarimma elaborates in an essay the activist perspectives I have described with reference to basic spiritual and ecological values. She likens the Australian government's control of discourse on unauthorised asylum seekers to a similar control of discourse on Aborigines: "we know that what the Government says about Aboriginal people is wrong, so we are not going to believe" pejorative rhetoric on asylum seekers (para. 2). Central to Nulyarimma's argument is a humanist duty of responsibility: "Before Europeans came here, (illegally), in the Aboriginal world, we were all different, speaking different languages, but we all had the same kinship system for all human beings ... everyone is part of us and we should care about them. We can't separate ourselves from other human beings – it's a duty" (para. 6). In an essay that scathingly unravels the concept of the "un-Australian", re-deploying it with reference to the Australian government's treatment of Aborigines and asylum seekers, Tony Birch articulates a similar view of duty to the stranger, asserting that Aboriginal people "must ... assert more moral authority and ownership of this country. Our legitimacy does not lie within the legal system and is not dependent on state recognition ... we need to claim and legitimate our authority by speaking out for, and protecting the rights of others, who live in, or visit *our* country" (5). The notion of ethical inseparability between asylum seekers and Australians challenges the dichotomies of citizen and alien, legitimate and illegitimate, that rationalise mandatory detention. Nulyarimma's and Birch's perspectives are founded upon concepts of indigenous sovereignty defined in part by a right and responsibility to offer hospitality to newcomers. These are expressed as community perspectives: Nulyarimma writes on behalf of Gungalidda elders who, she asserts, were distressed by the

Tampa incident and subsequent legislative amendments, while Birch writes in part as a call to activism, concluding his essay with an affective demand to Aboriginal people “to speak, to write, to march, to protest, to be angry and put that anger into expression and action” (7).

Seeking to elucidate the question, “What can Indigenous people offer to thinking about refugee issues?”, Mark Minchinton invokes (after Dinesh Wadiwel) Achille Mbembe’s concept of *necropower* (the ultimate, defining power of the sovereign to kill) to align the oppression of Aboriginal Australians and asylum seekers. He considers carceral spaces that construct “death worlds” and confer bodies the (non-)status of “living dead”, concepts taken from Mbembe that engage Agamben’s idea of *homo sacer* or bare life (crucially, however, Agamben argues that modern biopower inheres in the production of infinitely *surviving* bare life, rather than death [Remnants 155]). Minchinton describes Palm Island’s carceral history to illustrate his point: “Palm Island was a site of beatings, humiliations, and arbitrary imprisonment; a place where Indigenous people’s right to movement, food, health care, and freedom of association was denied” (2). He continues: “Like refugees, Indigenous people are exiles. But exiled in their own country. Both groups have much to offer each other: much to learn in terms of resistance, of perseverance, of working together to make Australia a place that welcomes difference and diversity” (3). If Minchinton’s identification of certain carceral histories occludes other (for example, convict) histories, this serves the strategic, affective purpose of formulating cross-cultural solidarity in the present.

The trope of affinity as a result of comparable experiences under sovereign power is, as I have shown, a recurring and affectively productive one in activist and academic contexts. In spite of this coherence of perspective, it is important to resist homogenising Aboriginal responses to asylum seekers and refugees. Former ATSIC family policy and health commissioner Marion Hansen has identified unauthorised asylum seekers as competing figures of oppression and

marginalisation that detract from social, political and economic focus on Aborigines. At a National Press Club of Australia seminar on 21 September 2001, Hansen (in opposition to whom Nulyarimma positions her article) expressed support for the Howard government's policies and voiced concerns that the economic cost of detaining asylum seekers and subsequently assisting their resettlement in Australia threatens the employment prospects of Aboriginal people and comes at the expense of funds for Aboriginal support and benefit programs (Wright 3). Professing to speak on behalf of indigenous people around Australia with whom she had spoken on the issue of "illegal immigrants", Hansen called into question the hardship of people who seek to arrive by boat: "We have to protect our shores. Questions have been put to me that if they are really refugees, how come they can afford to pay literally thousands of dollars to these smugglers or people who are actually getting these boats to come across here?" (qtd in Wright 3).

Indigenous law specialist and Tanganekald and Meintangk (south-east South Australia) member Irene Watson argues that the opposition expressed by a number of Australians to the prolonged, indefinite detention of asylum seekers redirects public attention away from human rights issues concerning indigenous Australians. While she does not support the mandatory detention of asylum seekers, she notes, "it is the detention of Aboriginal peoples in this country that we have turned our gaze away from; a much more deserving victim has emerged, along with another human rights struggle, the refugee" (42). Watson is referring specifically to the high rates of juvenile detention of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, a comparison that identifies a similar instrumentalisation of vulnerable lives, even if it risks obscuring the differences between two forms of incarceration, particularly in terms of judicial process. While Watson is more sympathetic towards asylum seekers, her view is, like Hansen's, underpinned by a sense that asylum seekers represent a competing oppressed minority in Australia and as such threaten the fragile social, political and economic standing of indigenous Australians. In Watson's

formulation, affective human rights responses (to the “deserving victim”) that might prompt social change are in limited supply; or to put it another way, affective attention has an all-too-protean relationship with immediate politicisation.

Intimate affects

If activist affects such as those I have discussed engage with and within the public sphere, they articulate to, and are often sustained by, personal contact and intimate engagement. As I have already noted, Levinas emphasises recognition and response that is epitomised in the human(e), naked encounter “face-to-face with the Other” (“Time and the Other” 45), a relation that embodies, or *affectively produces*, a fundamental ethical demand and a primordial condition of being in the world. Anecdotal evidence derived from my interviews with refugees underscores the ethical and affective work of face-to-face contact. Iranian artist and refugee Ardeshir Gholipour proudly recalls being welcomed to Australia by occupants of the Canberra Aboriginal Tent Embassy; this welcome was deeply significant for Gholipour, whose detention for five years and prolonged battle to avoid deportation took a psychological toll, communicating to him that he was not welcome under the terms of sovereign Australia (Cox interview np). By making contact with Tent Embassy members, Gholipour can be seen, paradoxically enough, to be framing his affective sense of belonging in terms of a communal, politicised otherness; the Canberra Tent Embassy (like other protest sites that have stood for shorter periods in Sydney and Melbourne in recent years) occupies a manicured civic space that is invulnerable to native title legal claims and as such constitutes a highly visible confrontation, or what Paul Dwyer terms a “counter-memorialising” (199), of the displacement that has occurred in order for the space to become a state possession. The alternative authority of Aboriginal sovereignty offered similar affects of

belonging in Australia for Shahin Shafaei when following his release from detention he was, in his words, “adopted” by an indigenous community in North Queensland. Shafaei continues to wear a carved pendant given to him by this community (Cox interview np). In these instances, an intimate experience of Aboriginal welcome was a crucial aspect of the affective – and indeed politicised – work of belonging in a new country.

The affective potential of face-to-face welcome and support is understood by O'Donoghue, whose association with refugee issues encompasses involvement with the United Nations and local humanitarian and refugee support organisations, including the Refugee Advocacy Service, A Just Australia and the National Council of Churches in Australia. In public statements, the former chairwoman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) has articulated a politicised link between Aboriginal people and unauthorised asylum seekers; in an address to the National Council of Churches on 11 July 2004, she commented, “when asylum seekers – boat people – are dismissed as queue jumpers or ‘illegals’, I want to remind Prime Minister Howard and Ministers Ruddock and Vanstone, that my people had to deal with boat people over 200 years ago!” (np). O'Donoghue expresses a particular sense of affinity with Afghan asylum seekers, citing the Afghan heritage of many of the indigenous people of her Oodnadatta (South Australia) region as a result of colonial-era contact with cameleers (Speech, Refugee Advocacy Service np). This articulation of kinship intervenes in unitary discourses of Australian nationhood by (re)claiming a national history that is sidelined in celebratory narratives of British settlement and convict heritage.⁷³ Identification with Afghans in O'Donoghue's state capital of Adelaide is strong; the city's Aboriginal Catholic Ministry has forged particularly close ties with the Afghan refugee community and in 2003 its Aboriginal

⁷³ For a discussion of the history Aboriginal and Muslim relations, see Peta Stephenson, “Islam in Indigenous Australia: Historic Relic or Contemporary Reality?”

Otherway Centre (a drop-in community centre) was partially converted into a makeshift mosque (Australian Catholic Social Justice Council 4).

In recent years, O'Donoghue's key "affective work" has been as an advocate, teacher and mother figure to young Afghan refugees living in Adelaide on Temporary Protection Visas. She became involved in the lives of the young people when she gave English classes at an Adelaide Baptist church, and subsequently became a support figure to them and a regular presence at the so-called "Afghan room" established by her friend, broadcaster Stephen Watkins, in his home. The young refugees, who had spent various periods in immigration detention centres, appear to have responded to the support with a sense of belonging; as one declares of the "Afghan room", "This is our territory" (qtd in Jopson 33). For O'Donoghue, the act of welcoming refugees must be performed in a personal (as intimate, affective practice) as well as political capacity; in a speech she comments that she has "welcomed them. They are here. They are part of us. They are grafted into my ancestry and my country" ("Return to Afghanistan" np). The "us" that O'Donoghue invokes is not the imagined community for whom the Australian government claims to act, but an alternative community founded upon kinship connections and continuing indigenous sovereignty. O'Donoghue's public explanation of intergenerational, communal and territorially located "grafting" combines with her private role as "a mother figure" (qtd in Jopson 33) to young individuals; such close, affective ties can be seen as an active cultivation of the "intercontamination of identity" that Prem Kumar Rajaram argues is an inevitable consequence of Australia's relationship (of disavowal) with undocumented asylum seekers ("Disruptive Writing" 220). For O'Donoghue, intercontamination or grafting has historical, political and personal dimensions, all of which are intimately imbricated with her Aboriginality.

Of course, the affective consequences of face-to-face encounter between Aboriginal people and asylum seekers should not be characterised simplistically in terms of solidarity,

hospitality and support. The ambivalence that can underpin interpersonal contact is illustrated well by the indigenous Tiwi Islanders' relationship with uninvited boat arrivals to their territory in recent years. The Tiwi Islands (comprising Melville Island and Bathurst Island) are situated eighty kilometres from the Northern Territory's capital city, Darwin, and within the regulated zone of the Australian Defence Force Border Protection activities in the Arafura and Timor Seas. On 4 November 2003 a group of fourteen Turkish Kurds and four Indonesian crew landed at Melville Island. Suvendrini Perera describes the encounter between the Tiwi people and the boat arrivals:

The Islanders ... were surprised to come across obviously foreign men on the beach who asked them, 'Is this Australia?' Perhaps the arrivals were confused by the large number of black faces and the general third world look of the place. The Islanders' answer marked a subtle distinction: You are on Melville Island. Yes, it is Australia. *In but not of*. Did the arrivals register any qualification? ... They requested water, indicated they were from Turkey, and asked for asylum. Only a few weeks earlier, the Islanders had been instructed by visiting officials what to do in such an eventuality. The men were provisioned, quickly dispatched back to their boat, and the authorities notified. ("A Pacific Zone?" 201-02)

That same day, the government applied a retrospective excision of the island (and thousands of other islands proximate to the continent) from the migration zone, promptly towed the boat into international waters and directed it back to Indonesia. The Tiwi people's submission to Australian authority resulted in the politically cynical exclusion of their island from the national community and from Australian legal obligations pertaining to migration. While the excision was later rejected in the senate (but re-implemented in 2005), and although some outraged Melville Islanders reportedly resolved to disobey future government directives (Hodson np), the government's extraordinary action nonetheless reveals its capacity to control spaces in which it

holds scant influence in terms of local social and cultural organisation – places that retain, in local terms, indigenous sovereignty.

Perera's narrative of Tiwi obedience to and subsequent instrumentalisation by the government is complicated by recent developments in the Islanders' response to arrivals from the north. In April 2009 Tiwi Land Council executive and ranger, Andrew Tipungwuti, made a request to the government for greater powers to patrol the coastline, stating, "Our marine rangers don't have adequate powers to help and secure these people until the right authorities arrive" (qtd in Toohey 2), and in November 2009, Tiwi Land Council Chairman Robert Tipungwuti made an offer to the government for Bathurst Island to become a site for a new immigration detention centre ("Seeking Asylum in Tiwis" 16). The Tiwi community's position at the maritime vanguard of unauthorised arrivals offers a alternative perspective on indigenous and asylum seeker engagement, reminding us that indigenous sovereignty can articulate as easily to defence of country as to solidarity and welcome.

Creative affects

In chapter four, I outlined Reynolds's characterisation of colonial authority in terms of spheres of influence or a gradual but incomplete encroachment of British territorial control: "Because of the vast size of the continent and the slow expansion of British settlement there were many systems of law and many sovereignties in nineteenth century Australia" ("Sovereignty" 211). Reynolds maintains that indigenous sovereignty must be linked logically to land title: "If, as the High Court declared in *Mabo*, native title was extinguished in a piecemeal fashion over a long period of time, the same clearly happened with sovereignty. If native title survives in some places then remnant sovereignty must also still exist among communities that still recognise, exercise

and accept their traditional law” (211). In the two creative works under analysis over the following pages, the operation of indigenous authority is imagined vis-à-vis the presence of unauthorised asylum seekers. In both *The HaHa Man* and *Lucky Miles* this authority manifests in geographically remote spaces. Territory, therefore, is positioned as a crucial element in the possession and negotiation of sovereignty; the areas that are beyond the reach of government biopower are places in which engagement between Aboriginal people and asylum seekers occurs, and in which the potentiality of indigenous sovereignty is seen to emerge – affectively and materially.

The HaHa Man

Sandy McCutcheon’s political thriller novel *The HaHa Man* was published by HarperCollins in 2003. Set in the months following 11 September 2001, it interweaves several interconnected plot lines. Karim Mazari, a Hazara Afghan man whose family have been murdered by the Taliban, enters Australia on a false passport, assisted by Australian Fossey Dutetre (operating under the alias “the Haha Man”), a former Department of Immigration media advisor ashamed of his pivotal role in the formulation of pejorative public statements on unauthorised boat arrivals. Fossey’s wife, Layla Khaleq, who fled Afghanistan with her father as a child and is intent on enacting her solidarity with her countrymen and women in the hostile climate of 2001, becomes part of a plot (under the name of the tenth-century Persian poet Rabia Balkhi) to organise a mass break-out at Woomera detention centre; she engages the help of several wealthy, well-connected white Australian women as well as a South Australian indigenous community. Neither Fossey nor Layla are aware of the other’s illegal actions. Meanwhile, a group of young Islamist terrorists in Sydney are involved in a plot to release a fatal haemorrhagic virus in Australia. While they are not the novel’s protagonists, the Aboriginal characters play an important role in McCutcheon’s

imagining of territorial authority within Australia: the plan to break fifty detainees out of Woomera is facilitated by Aboriginal associates, who possess practical knowledge as well as cultural capital (in the form of affective recognition and respect from government authorities) within the remote landscape in which the illegal action takes place.

McCutcheon portrays federal immigration authorities as engaged in a continual semi-public battle to uphold an appearance of control. Schisms appear in the form of Fossey and another former Department of Immigration employee, Ray Gilbert. A deeply disaffected former detention centre officer, Gilbert's employment has been terminated in the wake of his attempts to speak out in opposition to federal policy. Fossey is recruited into Gilbert's project of assisting the passage of asylum seekers to Australia on false passports while Layla / Rabia is independently embroiled with Gilbert in orchestrating the mass break-out. The two Australian men represent points of breakdown within sovereign power structures; both have been involved in the deployment and consolidation of biopolitical power in Australia, have become psychologically affected by the ethical compromises made in this capacity and have shifted their allegiances radically as a result.

Fossey, who is in many ways the novel's central figure, is an ambivalent character, especially because McCutcheon offers insights into the man's changing personal and political ideologies. Even when he has committed to acting outside the law, Fossey holds pragmatic reservations about the possibility for significant political change in Australia, and about the break-out plot as he (mis)understands it:

The notion of a truck crashing through the security fence ... Fossey tried to picture the scene: the water cannon and tear gas. No, he told himself, it was madness plain and simple. And if the polls were to be believed, the average Australian didn't care. Or worse, had swallowed the government rhetoric and

actively supported the detention policy for fear of being swamped by aliens. It was a geography problem too. Woomera was just too far away for ordinary Australians to be confronted by it. Locating the facility in the desert had been a masterstroke. (271)

Fossey recognises that the Woomera desert is simultaneously beyond the realm of Australian imaginative sovereignty, of most citizens' sense of the national community, and nonetheless a site of coercive biopolitical control. The Woomera area is a site with a history of displacement of the indigenous Maralinga Tjarutja and Yankunytjatjara peoples for strategic sovereign purposes, functioning variously since 1947 as a British nuclear weapon testing location, a site for Australian, British and Japanese aerospace and missile testing, an Australian and United States Joint Defence facility and from 1999 until 2003 a detention space for the containment of non-citizen bare life. In McCutcheon's novel it is the very remoteness of the South Australian desert landscape that enables paradoxical functions; on the one hand, Woomera represents a "masterstroke", masking prolonged extrajudicial detention in bare conditions within a democratic nation, and on the other it is literally sited in a space where an indigenous alternative authority can be asserted, in collusion with a defiant, illegal action by metropolitan Australians.

I have already noted the centrality of women refugee advocates in grassroots support capacities in Australia: Ros Horin's *Through the Wire*, discussed in chapter one, brings this dynamic to the fore, and it is apparent in the structures of organisation of the anthologies discussed in chapter two. In McCutcheon's novel, women represent an unequivocal opposition to the mandatory detention system. Layla / Rabia, who is a driving force behind the planned break-out at Woomera, is affectively involved in the project, identifying emotionally with the asylum seekers, especially Afghan men and women; as she writes in an email to "the Haha Man" (unaware, of course, that this is her husband): "I am planning an action to force a halt to the

imprisonment of my people in Australia” (188). While the project is overseen by Gilbert, Layla / Rabia forges the personal female connections that are crucial to it, organising a series of meetings with women in order to find individuals who are prepared to go on a “sanctuary list”, offering to take escapees into their own homes. She comes up with a list of fifty-three women, each of whom represents direct opposition to Moreton-Robinson’s “patriarchal white sovereignty” (87) with their preparedness to act decisively outside the law of sovereign Australia and to literally offer asylum to escapees.

McCutcheon utilises the narrative device of deliberate omission, leading the reader to understand that a small, committed and essentially radical group of Australian women (Mandy Bryson, Chloë Wright, Andrea Waxman, Kate Colbert and Wilna de Villiers), who set out to drive a truck and a bus from Brisbane towards Woomera detention centre, intend to carry out the detainee break-out themselves. Several of the women are wealthy and one of them (de Villiers) is married to a personal friend of the Prime Minister. This combination of realism and the improbable, with unlikely characters involving themselves in dangerous activities, is appropriate to the thriller genre, even if it offers unrealistic solutions to the issue of mandatory detention, and arguably, underestimates the impasse that socio-economic and power inequalities represent in refugee–citizen relations. There is, in fact, no particular reason why a thriller *should* offer realistic solutions to political issues, even if it is, like McCutcheon’s novel, a deeply politicised text. Of all the genres of creative work that I examine in this study, the thriller novel is, perhaps, the most *explicitly* affective in its function; it stimulates readers’ (often heightened) emotional responses (excitement, suspense, anger, relief, joy), and the political demands of these affects, which are generally experienced – indeed, *enjoyed* – privately by a reader, are of a different nature to the face-to-face affective demands of, say, Towfiq Al-Qady’s or Shafaei’s performances.

Certainly, the function of Aboriginality in *The Halfa Man* is affective, even wish-fulfilling. The women's role in the plot depends upon intimate and ingenious co-operation with Aboriginal friends and associates. In the South Australian desert, Andrea and Mandy stop for a night at Carriewerloo Woolshed, the home of Chloë's friend, Aunty Pearl, a Nunga woman (a generic South Australian Aboriginal identification), while the other three women continue in the bus, evading the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) officers that have been tailing the conspicuous two vehicle convoy. Aunty Pearl offers a sanctuary for Andrea and Mandy that is not only physically inaccessible to the officers, but outside their mobile phone coverage. The officers find the rough terrain difficult: "It was hard to imagine that such a road had a destination. On either side the land was arid, scrubby and seemingly empty of life with the exception of a few emaciated sheep" (293). Seeing the truck parked outside Carriewerloo and realising they have lost track of the bus, the officers, faced with embarrassing disempowerment within Aunty Pearl's territory, contemplate ways in which they might use their special investigative powers to punish the owner of the woolshed: "I'm going to find everything there is to know about the people who live here. I bet the local police would find some interesting drugs in there ... And the tax department. And do you reckon they have all the building approvals for their renovations?" (297). McCutcheon's representation of Aunty Pearl's home as a space apart, inaccessible to people she does not choose to welcome, invests her with territorial authority and personal sovereignty, although at the same time it risks framing her Aboriginality in stereotypical terms associated with isolation and disconnection from modern Australia.

The women's actions, flagrantly driving the bus towards Woomera, are designed to deceive federal authorities. Towards the end of the novel, the reader discovers that the break-out of Woomera detainees is to be carried out by Gilbert, assisted by a number of Australian supporters in private vehicles. The job of the women driving the bus, it transpires, is to pick up a

large group of Aboriginal women to serve as what might be called “cultural decoys” in the South Australian desert. As anticipated, the report of the detention centre break-out immediately attracts the full force of sovereign biopower, (mis)directed at the bus; Russ Dengler, a horrified and humiliated immigration official, barks orders: “By morning I want a complete description of the bus and every cop in the country looking for it. I also want helicopters on all the main interstate highways out of Adelaide” (308). The Minister for Immigration deploys the Special Air Service (SAS) Tactical Assault Group to locate and overpower the bus and its occupants; launching their raid the following day, the SAS are dumbfounded to discover the group of indigenous women, performing what appears to be a traditional smoking ceremony. The women strategically invoke the special status that their Aboriginality carries within the remote location to aggressively (and comically) confront the SAS:

We’re doin a rehearsal here, cause we’re gonna be on TV. You know ‘Message Stick’? On the ABC? Well, that’s what we’re going to be on and just now you mucked up our dance and we don’t take kindly to that. I’m gonna call our menfolk down and you can talk to them, cause I’m too cross with you fellas to keep a civil tongue in my head. (334)

In a double artifice, the federal authorities are cowed by a simulation of a simulation of indigenous ritual. The Aboriginal women here take advantage of their own cultural identity, specifically of the affective persuasiveness of “traditional” Aboriginality as commodity. In this way, they might be seen to challenge the objectification of their culture, appropriating the capital of the “traditional” – with its implications, as Pugliese notes, “of Indigenous culture as exclusively located or fixed in the past” (“Migrant Heritage” 11) – and incorporating it into the “continuing present” (Moreton-Robinson 98) in an explicitly political subversion. The chagrined SAS fly Dengler to the desert to personally apologise to the indigenous community.

The scene is of course fantastical; there is little reason to accept the notion that Australian defence and immigration representatives would be compelled to active contrition for the interruption of an indigenous cultural performance. It is perhaps in this that the affective work of the scenario inheres; it serves the purpose of shrewd hyperbole in which the territorial sovereignty of Aboriginal people commands respect at the upper echelons of state bureaucracy. In staging an apology to indigenous people, the scene also serves to imagine a version of the national apology which at the time of the novel's publication had been repeatedly requested by Aboriginal people but was not forthcoming from the Howard government. McCutcheon's portrayal of indigenous territorial authority is underpinned by irony. The Aboriginal women have been taken to the remote location – "wild and seemingly untouched by European hand" (319) – on the bus by Wilna, Chloë and Kate, specifically in order to construct an image of authority within it. The location is unknown to the indigenous women, who upon arrival peer out of the bus window "at the foreign surroundings" (317). Their contrived authority within the land serves its purpose as a distraction that facilitates the Woomera escapees' evasion of immigration authority. In McCutcheon's imagining, a liberal democratic Australian sovereign power that allows for the entrenchment of extrajudicial detention can be met with, and challenged by, a manipulated indigenous territorial authority. In this way, McCutcheon avoids reproducing stereotypes of tribal Aboriginality, even as he imagines their strategic and affective use value.

Lucky Miles

The Australian feature-length film *Lucky Miles*, released in 2007, was written by Michael James Rowland and Helen Barnes and directed by Rowland. A departure from typical representational practices in Australian cinema, it incorporates Asian, Middle Eastern and Aboriginal characters and several languages (English, Bahasa Indonesian, Khmer, Arabic, Gumatj and French),

relegating white subjectivities to the periphery. It is, as an opening subtitle states, “inspired by true stories” from the period of 1989-90, in particular an incident in which a group of forty people from southern China became lost in the West Australian desert for two weeks after being dropped off on the coast by people smugglers. *Lucky Miles* is set in 1990 and tells the story of a boatload of Cambodian and Iraqi asylum seekers who are abandoned on the remote Pilbara coast in north-western Australia by Indonesian people smugglers, who instruct them to walk over the sand dunes to a (nonexistent) bus stop in order to be taken to Perth. Rowland reconfigures Australia’s persistent paranoia over a threat of non-white invasion from the north, fundamental to the “psycho-geography” of nationalist white Australia (Ang 129-30), in terms of affective *arrival* anxiety with his portrayal of the newcomers’ fear and bewilderment.

The asylum seekers organise themselves into two groups along ethnic / national lines and set off in different directions into the desert, making the drastically erroneous assumption that the populated centres of the country lie in its interior. After most of the men are picked up by Australian police, *Lucky Miles* follows the trials of an unlikely remaining trio that stumble into one another’s company: Iraqi man Youssif (played by Rodney Afif), Cambodian man Arun (played by Kenneth Moraleda), and one of the people smugglers, Ramelan (played by Srisacd Sacdpraseuth) who has come ashore after accidentally setting his uncle Muluk’s (played by Sawung Jabo) vessel on fire. The men are pursued through the outback by a good-natured trio of army reservists, two of whom are Aboriginal, Tom (played by Sean Mununggurr) and Sgt. O’Shane (played by Glenn Shea), the third a white Australian, Plank (played by Don Hany).

Although *Lucky Miles* was produced in post-Tampa Australia, Rowland’s original concept pre-dated this inflammatory period; indeed, he did not wish to engage explicitly with the immediate politics of asylum because in his view this would have made the film “a reactionary piece rather than a visionary one” (qtd in Pomeranz np). The film’s setting two years prior to the

passing of the Migration Amendment Act 1992, which heralded mandatory immigration detention, ostensibly offers a means of imagining alternative responses to unauthorised asylum seekers. At the same time, the context of the more recent past is inescapable, as Rowland acknowledges with his suggestion that the film might provoke consideration of what “changed in us” in terms of a “hardening” of attitudes towards unauthorised asylum seekers (qtd in Pomeranz np). While it is perhaps unlikely that Australian (much less international) audiences would recognise *Lucky Miles* as pre-dating mandatory detention (the question of the asylum seekers’ fate after being intercepted by the authorities is not dealt with) the post-Tampa political landscape would, on the other hand, be familiar to Australian viewers, and therefore, any “visionary” capacity that the film might have is inevitably inflected through this lens.

Perhaps unexpectedly given its subject-matter, *Lucky Miles* participates in the successful comedic tradition of Australian cinema; like famous comic films, P. J. Hogan’s *Muriel’s Wedding* (1994), Stephan Elliott’s *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), Rob Sitch’s *The Castle* (1997) and Clayton Jacobson’s *Kenny* (2006), *Lucky Miles* is propelled by interactions between characters who are variously laconic, eccentric, foolish and wily. It incorporates moments of slapstick against the backdrop of a hot, harsh landscape, and indeed, has most in common with *Priscilla*, which also used the vast, isolated landscapes of the Australian desert as an incongruous counterpoint to non-belonging characters and their encounters with other people and the environment. *Lucky Miles* is oriented around the dual affects of anxiety (marked in the soundtrack by tense rapid drumming) and humour; this affective language has become a hallmark of several Australian films that, as Rowland observes, reflect an ability to laugh at situations that are “a little bit dire” (qtd in Pomeranz np).

While it connects broadly with established and successful modes of Australian cinematic representation in terms of humour and characterisation, *Lucky Miles* reterritorialises the dominant

image of the white comic figure (especially the larrikin male), recasting it in the figures of Asian, Middle Eastern and Aboriginal men. The deployment of non-white performers in roles that are identifiable to most Australians with reference to dominant tropes of mateship and larrikinism arguably serves the dubious purpose of underscoring homogenising national mythology; nonetheless, the significance of the film's multiethnic casting lies in large part with practical issues of professional opportunity and participation. While recent Australian films such as Khoa Do's *The Finished People* (2003), Tony Ayres's *The Home Song Stories* (2007) and Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr's *Ten Canoes* (2006) centred around Asian (in the case of the first two films) and Aboriginal (in the case of *Ten Canoes*) characters, representational practices in Australian film remain overwhelmingly Eurocentric; the actors that Rowland employed in the main roles had not previously been given the opportunity to lead an Australian film. In addition to the professional actors cast in the main roles, Rowland employed refugees to be cultural consultants on the project and to play minor roles in the Cambodian and Iraqi groups. In this way he utilised the collaborative possibilities of the long film-making process to engage with individuals for whom the narrative had intimate, personal significance.

The thematic centre of *Lucky Miles* concerns the difficulties of being and belonging in Australia. Rowland's imagining of Australia as a broad, featureless expanse of hot, arid and apparently uninhabited land is one that is notionally (and mythologically) familiar yet experientially unknown for the majority of Australians who dwell in or near the nation's coastal metropolises. In placing a group of asylum seekers within the remote desert landscape, the film coheres well-established white ideas of the Australian outback as a space of alienation and isolation with the paranoid psycho-geography of Asian or Middle Eastern invasion. But the paranoia Rowland is most interested in is that felt by the invaders: when Youssif asks, "Where are the people, these Australians?" – a question Helen Grace describes as a "kind of ironic terra

nullius moment" (208) – he offers his own answer in the next breath: "Maybe this is not Australia." Youssif's suggestion that the territory is "not Australia", not the western democracy that he seeks, aligns with Reynolds's observation about spheres of colonial influence; it identifies a modern territorial reality whereby some parts of the continent are not "Australia" in the sense that the asylum seekers anticipate. In other words, Youssif's fear that he is not in Australia is both unfounded and (humorously) well-founded. Rowland explains that the asylum seekers and the Indonesian smugglers are characters "for whom the landscape is a foreign place outside of history" (qtd in Pomeranz np). The history that the men would recognise – that of post-settlement sovereign Australia populated with English-speaking Europeans – is barely discernable in the landscape that they encounter. They struggle to find the sovereign authority from which they might request asylum.

Questions of defining, knowing and surveying the Australian continent are foregrounded in *Lucky Miles*. The opening credits are interspersed with topographical images – maps of the land, sketches, diagrams and descriptions of places written in the cursive script of colonial-era explorer diaries and (in one case) in Arabic. The invocation of colonial surveying suggests a parallel with Australian explorer narratives, of which, Rowland explains, the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition was foremost in his mind; he describes the film as a "revisiting" of this story with "unexpected" characters (qtd in Pomeranz np). The asylum seekers place their faith in maps and pre-conceived (inaccurate) knowledges of Australia; Arun carries a hand-drawn map of what appears to be part of South East Asia and the northern Australian coast and debates with Youssif how to interpret it and find the way to civilisation. Both men struggle to reconcile their respective psychic mappings with the brutal embodied reality of the land in which they have been abandoned.

For Arun, Perth is a point of focus and an affective image of hope; along with his map,

he carries as a sort of talisman a tattered business card that will help him find the Perth-based Australian father he has never known. Indonesian smuggler Ramelan, the troublesome third member of the central trio of foreigners, asserts that it will be impossible to walk to Perth, but that Broome is a viable option at two days walk. When Youssif later finds an accurate map of the west coast in a disused shed he calculates, to his despair, that neither Broome (300 kilometres away) nor Perth (2000 kilometres away) can possibly be reached on foot, and vents his explosive anger at Arun and Ramelan. The division between the men begins to mend when Youssif, a mechanical engineer, recruits Arun and Ramelan as assistants in the job of repairing an old abandoned ute (a plot turn that briefly brings the film in line with the masculine road movie genre). The three men cohere amid their differences and conflicts to form a type of cosmopolitan community built upon shared alienation and powerlessness in a foreign land (rather than upon the engaged, willing conversation of Kwame Anthony Appiah's cosmopolitanism); Grace observes that while the men's connection is "certainly not mateship", through "small acts of rudimentary hospitality and cooperation necessary for survival ... the possibility of society is formed" (208).

The relationship the foreigners have with the landscape is diametrically opposite to that of reservist troop and tracker Tom. For Tom, who is indigenous to the Pilbara region, the landscape is far from featureless and uninhabited; he knows it intimately and is able to read the land and interpret recent human activity upon it. The reservist group is a Regional Force Surveillance Unit (RFSU) modelled on the West Australian / Pilbara version of NORFORCE (North West Mobile Force). Approximately sixty percent of these remote surveillance troops are Aboriginal and they are a source of pride for Aboriginal communities; according to Torres Strait Island actor and director Rachael Maza, the troops represent indigenous territorial authority: "These soldiers are seen in their communities as protectors of Aboriginal land" (qtd in

“Norforce” np). Australian Army Lt. Colonel Clay Sutton observes of the RFSUs, “the Aboriginal soldiers have a sixth sense and they pick up if something’s unusual or not right out there in the environment. They can then pass on this information back through us and we can pass it on to our higher headquarters” (qtd in “Norforce” np). As Sutton’s comment unintentionally hints, the role played by Aboriginal people in RFSUs is complicated in terms of questions of sovereignty. In one respect, they can be seen as being appropriated for their indigenous knowledges, employed under Australian sovereign authority in order to serve the surveillance and security interests of the nation in locations that otherwise would not fall securely under a white sphere of territorial influence. In another respect they may be seen as embodying an indigenous authority over the territories in which they operate. In *Lucky Miles*, Tom is a quietly authoritative presence and his expertise as a tracker is invaluable in the hunt for the boat arrivals. In this regard, he serves a different function to the group of indigenous women in *The HaHa Man*, who utilise simulated territorial authority in remote Australia to undermine sovereign authority, to support an illegal act.

If the film’s characterisation of the observant, unflappable character of Tom risks reinforcing a stereotype of “authentic”, traditional Aboriginality (as, arguably, Sutton does in characterising the indigenous troops’ “sixth sense”), the other indigenous reservist troop Sgt. O’Shane balances the question of representation, both in terms of racial admixture (or the politics of skin colour) and cultural knowledge. Physically, O’Shane is paler than Tom; further, O’Shane is not familiar with the landscape and is as ineffective as Plank, the white Australian reservist, when it comes to tracking human activity and understanding the land. O’Shane’s lack of territorial knowledge is the subject of humour in the film; at one point he attempts to match Tom’s tracking skills by studying a patch of obvious campsite detritus left by Youssif and Arun – an extinguished campfire and a discarded biscuit packet – and sagely noting that people have

camped in the space. At the same time, the film occasionally satirises the perception of Tom as all-knowing: one morning when he announces what the day's high temperature will be, O'Shane nods respectfully at the presumed indigenous knowledge; Plank asks Tom how he knows this, and Tom replies nonchalantly that he heard it on the morning radio broadcast. Such exchanges serve to portray Tom as a character possessed of common sense that complements his indigenous territorial knowledge, rather than as an exotic or mystical figure. The differences between Tom and O'Shane undercut the notion of unitary Aboriginality; in the film's terms it is a complex and internally diverse ethnic, cultural and political identification.

The film's inevitable denouement comes when the reservists catch up with the asylum seekers and people smugglers. Youssif, the most serious and anxious of the group, has rehearsed his performance of identity: his request for protection under the 1951 United Nations Convention on refugees. He comes face-to-face with Tom and delivers the request, in clear and careful English. Tom's laconic response is both comic and poignant: he looks Youssif in the eye (a Levinasian recognition) and after a pause, replies, "Yeah, okay." Rowland constructs, in this deceptively simple moment of human encounter, a profoundly affective image of Aboriginal authority to welcome newcomers. Part of the affective significance of the moment of contact derives from the audience's awareness of the ambivalence underlying it. Tom is, as a reservist, under the authority of the Australian government, and his affirmative response is cannot, we know, be the end of the matter in terms of Youssif's refugee status; but at the same time, Rowland challenges the audience to consider the authority upon which Tom can offer the response that he does – an authority that is far removed from and in many ways independent of metropolitan sites of power.

Lucky Miles does not, it should be said, operate according to a contained fantasy of remote, non-metropolitan geography and authority; the film's final scenes, which wordlessly

follow an emotionally exhausted Arun on his final journey to Perth, direct the story toward the inevitable encounter between the newcomer and the metropolitan centre, an encounter that might be even more unwelcoming than the experience in the desert, but could instead offer the belonging for which Arun hopes. Olivia Khoo identifies a tendency within Australian cinema since the 1980s⁷⁴ for Asian characters to be “sacrificed” for the purposes of the main (white) characters’ emotional trajectory or journey, observing, “in dominant Anglo Australian [film] portrayals over the last two and a half decades, the question of how to deal with Asia has often been answered imaginatively with a reliance on death as providing the easy way out of having to sustain any deep or lasting commitment to Asia” (47). *Lucky Miles* concludes ambiguously at the moment in which Arun presents himself at the door of his Australian father’s Perth residence, where he may or may not be welcomed into the home and family. Rowland shoots the short scene from the perspective of the dim interior of the house looking outward to Arun on the doorstep, thereby placing the viewer in the position of the Australian father who guards the threshold, able to accept or reject the stranger at the door. In a film concerned with the alienation of newcomers in marginal, remote Australian landscapes, this conclusion – which might be either a new beginning and a kinship connection, or Arun’s rejection by an estranged father – moves tentatively beyond the sacrificial trope of which Khoo writes, offering the challenge of a sustained Asian–Australian engagement in the environment of an urban centre, literally at home.

Rowland perceived *Lucky Miles* as a means by which to reflect upon the contemporary global pressures under which forced migration occurs, explaining that the film functions in many ways as a metaphor for those people who “fall through the cracks” of globalisation (qtd in Pomeranz np). This observation coheres with Ghassan Hage’s comment that under globalisation “each nation is developing its own third world inhabited by the rejects of global capitalism”

⁷⁴ Olivia Khoo analyses four films: Peter Weir’s *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982); Stephen Wallace’s *Turtle Beach* (1992); Craig Lahiff’s *Heaven’s Burning* (1997); and Sue Brooks’s *Japanese Story* (2003).

(*Against* 18). Rowland's interests are more social than capital; he is interested in a global condition of human encounter and interconnection: "what happens when ... people from cultures that have hitherto had nothing to do with each other come in contact with each other and ... the conflict that precedes the harmony" (qtd in Pomeranz np). It has been argued that globalisation has given rise to "post-sovereign" forms of governance (MacDonald and Muldoon 210), and *Lucky Miles* bears this out to a certain extent in its portrayal of globalisation on the micro-level of interpersonal relations: the authority of the sovereign Australian nation over the movements of Youssif, Arun and the people smugglers within its territory is contingent upon an Aboriginal man whose loyalties must be said to be split between his federal employer and his homeland.

Of course, the concept of post-sovereignty in a globalised world must be approached cautiously in terms of the paradigm of asylum with which *Lucky Miles* engages: as I have discussed throughout this study, the mobility of capital and certain people under globalisation does not reduce the power of the sovereign state to control the bodies of the most disenfranchised – those seeking asylum within its territory. In Rowland's imaging, Aboriginal Australians have a stake in the new lines of connection and relation that are the condition of globalisation; there is no sense that the Aboriginal characters are also people who "fall through the cracks" in a globalising world. While it would be unreasonable to denounce the film's mode of indigenous representation on this basis, it is worth pointing to the similarities in the position occupied by asylum seekers and indigenous peoples in terms of vulnerability under economic globalisation.⁷⁵

In considering the film's implications in terms of globalisation, it is helpful to consider its cultural circulation within a global creative commodity market. Film is a medium with arguably unrivalled capacity to reach international audiences over an extended period of time, and in this

⁷⁵ Lindsey Te Ata O Tu MacDonald and Paul Muldoon offer a detailed discussion of this issue ("Globalisation, Neo-liberalism and the Struggle for Indigenous Citizenship").

regard, *Lucky Miles* has the capability of actualising the broader cosmopolitan context of its story. The film has been screened at film festivals across the globe, garnering several award nominations and winning the following during 2007: the audience award for best film at 2007 Sydney Film Festival; the grand prix at the ninth Rencontres Internationales du Cinéma des Antipodes in Saint-Tropez; best screenplay at the Vladivostok International Film Festival; the special jury prize at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival; best new director at the Middle East International Film Festival and best film at the third Asian Festival of First Films in Singapore. It was screened on Qantas international flights in 2007, thereby literally playing before transnationally mobile audiences, and as Grace notes, underscoring the fact that “the cinematic experience imagined in classical cinema studies has been replaced by a multiplicity of means of experiencing movies for most audiences globally” (196). *Lucky Miles* traversed borders and entered multiple sovereign spaces (in the case of Qantas flights, in a single screening), communicating and transacting successfully within international metropolitan centres. The film’s movement as global commodity represents a contrasting yet contiguous logic to that (of covert ocean and border crossings and fringe territorial movements) by which its protagonists travel. The film’s representation of vast, uncontrolled spaces within Australia, and of the local knowledge and authority of an Aboriginal character within these spaces, offer international audiences a context for deconstructing an imagined unitary (white, metropolitan) Australian sovereignty.

“Aboriginal laws live”

Irene Watson observes that “In the struggle for Aboriginal sovereignty ... the prevailing ‘reality’ is that the sovereignty of Aboriginal laws is an impossibility” (24). State sovereignty is, in terms of

this prevailing reality, exclusive and inviolable. And undoubtedly, in the context of unauthorised asylum seekers, the Australian government's biopolitical power does not permit structural challenge from Aboriginal laws or authorities. Yet, Watson articulates the paradoxical "reality" that in spite of their impossibility, "Aboriginal laws live"; they stand "elsewhere" to Australian sovereignty and law (24). This concept – which recalls Birch's assertion that Aboriginal "legitimacy does not lie within the legal system and is not dependent on state recognition" (5) – expresses something of the *aliveness* that I have sought to trace by foregrounding affective engagements and representations. James Thompson's identification of "a certain power of affect that is *more than the moment*" (120) seems to explicate Watson's and Birch's convictions regarding the "reality" of lives and laws "elsewhere", and indeed, underlines my argument that the affective dimensions of the relations and representations examined here offer more than momentary frisson; they are the continuing, cumulative basis of cross-cultural understandings and knowledges, producing, in however minor and incomplete a capacity, new landscapes of identity, belonging and community across Australia.

Conclusion: Making Ground

Some of the high-profile indignities and tragedies suffered by the world's displaced people in recent times offer a picture of a profoundly inequitable organisation of human life in a globalised world. In February 2009, Thailand's Prime Minister confirmed reports that Thai authorities had towed unprovisioned boats carrying several hundred Rohingya asylum seekers out to sea and abandoned them (Allard 11). In March that same year, a boat carrying African asylum seekers and migrants from Libya to Italy sank in the Mediterranean, resulting in the loss of over 200 lives (Kington 24). The following month, Roman police discovered more than 100 people, mainly from Afghanistan, including twenty-four children, living in the sewer system beneath the city's major train stations (Willey np).⁷⁶

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reports that in 2008 Australia recorded approximately 4700 asylum claims (distinct from its annual offshore humanitarian and refugee intake), an increase of nineteen per cent on the previous year ("Asylum Levels and Trends" 5). National public debate in Australia is intensifying in response to the Australian Navy's interception of more than twenty boats carrying several hundred asylum seekers since early 2009; in July of that year, a number of front-page newspaper reports deployed the familiar discourse of "the wave as metaphor for non-white migration" (Perera, "A Line" 27), warning of "as many as 10,000 asylum-seekers ... waiting in Malaysia" intent on coming to Australia (see, for example, Allard and Narushima 1). The dominant discourse of the unauthorised border-crosser betrays the anxiety that, as Sophie Nield observes, "the supposedly concrete and visible entity, the border itself, is vulnerable. The prevalence of terms such as 'porous' and 'permeable' in describing

⁷⁶ In 2008, Italy recorded a 202 per cent increase in Afghan asylum claims on the previous year ("Asylum Levels and Trends" 6).

borders, and the threats of ‘flooding’, ‘swamping’ and ‘overrunning’ all reflect a particular spatial imaginary” (68). Even as it deconstructs the idea of the unitary, bordered nation in the ways I have discussed, the biopolitics of asylum in Australia can function as an ideological unifier: widespread public support for the government during the height of the asylum “crisis” in 2001 indicates that the trope of imminent threat to the sovereign nation can galvanise the citizenry as an imagined community and ally them to exceptional methods of upholding binary border politics.

The creative work examined here functions to a significant extent in a responsive relation to this discursive fabric, its assumptions and categorisations of human legitimacy; this is one sense in which the works may be seen to be “making ground”. The five chapters of this study share a common concern with the capacity of the selected written and performative texts to construct engagements and dialogues, both literal and imaginative, between individuals and across communities and cultures. The importance of such affective interconnection is underscored by Ghassan Hage’s articulation of the dehumanisation and disconnection that enable the acceptance of mandatory detention in a liberal democratic Australia:

At first sight, this idea of a non-social space inhabited by non-people does not seem like a credible idea, but the message the government intends to convey is implicitly quite efficient and credible: dealing with the illegal refugee seekers in this way does not reflect in any way on the values Australians hold regarding how their society should be internally structured. (*White Nation* 106-07)

Explicating contexts for local human connection within an ethical global paradigm, the creative work discussed offers insight into how dealings with “illegal refugee seekers” both reflects and affects Australia / Australians.

In terms of efficacy, a concern that runs throughout this study, all of the work considered is limited, to a greater or lesser extent, by the possibilities of a listening community; to put it another way, all of the works are positioned, as political and often contentious pieces, to speak most directly to those who seek to engage with the issues and problems they apprehend, namely, “the converted”. This is a difficult issue to examine because, in the absence of quantitative analyses of theatre audience demographics or surveys of book purchasing patterns (neither of which are transparent indicators anyhow), the composition of audiences is impossible to ascertain in any detail. Moreover, efficacy or cultural work as I apprehend it is less concerned with a simplistic and unidirectional “conversion” of the so-called “unconverted” from one political position to another than with the various complex, subtle and often partial ways in which, in Baz Kershaw’s terms, the transaction of “ideological business” (29), the negotiation of political and personal relations and encounters, occurs in the creative spaces of the theatre or the written word. It is undoubtedly the case that some of the works I have analysed will have been seen or read by a broader cross-section of society than others and that some works transact their ideological (as well as cultural, political, social and therapeutic) business within a small sphere while others engage more diverse and extensive transactions.

Just as important as the issue of who hears is the issue of who speaks. I have endeavoured to discuss, side-by-side in roughly equal measure, work created by asylum seekers and refugees as well as work created by Australians. The diversity of the work gives some sense of the multivocality and heteroglossia that inheres in the terrain of representation concerning asylum in Australia. I have incorporated work that reflects a high level of artistic accomplishment and skill as well as economic and institutional support, as well as minor and non-professional work by people whose lives are instrumentalised by coercive power and who have limited opportunity for self-representation. In cases of the former, the problem of representing the

subaltern other is necessarily a crucial concern in terms of process / practice; in part, this problem can be approached in terms of ethical conversation and encounter amid difference; as Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo argue with reference to theatre, “an ethical and mutually constitutive model of cosmopolitan community would go some way towards stemming the trade in exotica that typifies many contemporary cross-cultural experiments” (211). Such a model of community might function on the intimate level of the face-to-face conversation – in the course of my research, interviews with refugees and other artists constitute a space where personal, affective connection intersects with critical, theoretical analysis – as well as on the level of creative practice in a public domain. However they are organised, arts projects by Australians dealing with asylum seekers and refugees are, just like this project, inflected in successive moments of process and circulation by differentials of power / social status / professional experience / access to economic resource, such that appropriation and creativity, business and friendship, are inevitably intertwined.

The significance of creative practice by asylum seekers and refugees can relate as much to the therapeutic affects of testimony, self-determination and the coherence of minority community as to engagement across borders, artistic production and / or politicised protest. The coherence of a minority community often involves an element of strategic essentialism whereby similarities – whether in terms of nationality, political status as asylum seeker or refugee, or socio-cultural position as persecuted exile – are underlined for the (sometimes pedagogic) purposes of representation. In 2008, a group of teenage refugees from Africa embarked upon a community arts project led by Shahin Shafaei (whose work as a theatre practitioner in Australia has been discussed at length) and supported by the Horn of Africa Communities Network Association in partnership with the Victorian College of the Arts. Continuing in 2010, the aim of the Melbourne-based project is to produce a number of theatre pieces and short films based upon

the young people's life stories, interwoven around the theme of journeys to Australia. Shafaei's approach as director-facilitator-collaborator combines artistic and therapeutic imperatives; he observes that the development of communication skills, personal confidence, friendship and resettlement among the young refugees, encouraged within workshops and rehearsals over several months, is as significant as the performance work presented on stage or screen (Cox interview np). Investing over an extended period of time in young people from a different background to his own Iranian context, Shafaei engages a heterogeneous refugee community for the professional purpose of performing arts training and the practical therapeutic purpose of assisting young people in becoming at home in Australia. Shafaei's career upon his release from immigration detention highlights the value of creative arts work in terms of both self-representation and community cultural development, and situates him as an exemplary figure of active membership of a cosmopolitan community within Australia.

Regardless of their scale, influence or therapeutic potential, the written and performative texts I have examined operate in terms of a common paradigm inasmuch as they involve the mutually constitutive forces of imagination and communication. While they cannot and should not be seen to present solutions to the complex local and international politics and inequalities with which they work, they offer the possibility of alternative thinking on these politics and inequalities, as they invite the belonging citizen to regard people whose lives are proximate even in their otherness and / or strengthen community links between marginalised non-citizens. The capacity of social imagination is central to the production of affect, and in turn to ethical cross-cultural or cosmopolitan conversation and political influence. The creative works articulate with a specific geo-historico-political period but do not encompass or encapsulate it; they are some of the ongoing transactions between human lives within and across societies and cultures that remind us that while "cosmopolitanism is yet to come, something awaiting realization" (Pollock,

Bhabha, Breckenridge and Chakrabarty 1), its imperfect sites of realisation ask us to read, hear, see and respond.

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