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Abstract

Migration to Australia creates a site of encounter. On this site, 'migrants' and 'Australia' respond to and become each other, as they negotiate forms and levels of responsibility for their newly shared site. Citizens and non-citizens who have been displaced from distant sites of violence and persecution respond continually to intersections of current events and previous displacements, of children's questions and revived memories. Such intersections recur in moments of eating, sleeping, working, driving, talking and media consumption, among others, as the meetings of past and present, self and other, 'here' and 'there' suffuse daily interactions. Interactions range from those with the effects of international media representations and government policies to the responsibilities of family relations, especially those between remembering parents and inquiring children.

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The mutable subjectivities of the displaced mother respond to familial, community, national and international responsibilities. These responsibilities overlap, but can make conflicting demands on migrant women. While responsibilities to one's 'communities', including those described as 'national' and 'ethnic', are often stressed in Australia, the necessary fluidity of any definition of a community usually remains unacknowledged. A prominent example of such an unquestioning assumption of community definition is the federal government's so-called 'National Security Public Information Campaign'. The campaign script claims that 'Australians are friendly, decent, democratic people—and we're going to stay that way.' The visual content of the television 'commercial' is pre/described on the 'National Security Australia' homepage in abstract terms: **'**IMAGES OF THE AUSTRALIAN WAY OF LIFE: RELAXED, OUTDOOR, FRIENDLY INCLUDE SHOTS OF HARMONY BETWEEN AUSTRALIANS' and **'**IMAGES OF INCREASED SECURITY'.[1] The abstractions *harmony* and *security* are fashioned into visible, recordable objects, as the subjectivities of 'the Australian community' are compressed into a fancifully imagined and limited space. In line with the dualities of most advertising and political rhetoric, the text implies that 'non-Australians' may not be 'friendly, decent, democratic' people. However, the absurdity of the definition begins with its application, in the present, simple tense (denoting essential, perpetual qualities), to any responsible subject, without consideration of the diverse potential objects of friendliness, decency and democratic response. One consistently 'friendly, decent, democratic' person is difficult to imagine, let alone 19,818,336 *en bloc*.[2]

Within 'the Australian community', groups defined by perceived ethnicity or 'country of origin' are subject to similarly sweeping descriptions, although positions within these communities are as diverse as those in the once celebrated 'multicultural Australia'. Two communities that have long evaded unambiguous definition are those identified as Jewish and Afghan, both of

which have histories of marginal representation in Australian texts. Jewish identity has usually been based on ancestors' ethnicity (as recognised by self, community and/or 'authorities'), cultural heritage and/or religious practice (including conversion of people of non-Jewish ethnicity or heritage). Afghan identity has been based on nationality, ancestors' ethnicity and/or association with groups collectively known as Afghan (such as the cameleers brought to Australian colonies in the nineteenth century). There are many tribes to which Jews and Afghans may belong and many languages and dialects they may speak.

Jewish and Afghan identities have faced questioning by Australian authorities at different times, especially when people seeking asylum have claimed one of these identities as a reason for or evidence of persecution. After the taxing process of migration into the broader Australian community, identification with the minority group entails family responsibilities, which intersect with ideological traditions and responses to national positions and international events. Minority group identities are often represented as overlapping with those of groups outside or on the outer limits of Australia, as they are seen to share (past) nationalities, religions or other historical and cultural sites. For example, some Afghan Australians may identify or be identified, on some level, with Afghan asylum seekers, bombing victims, warlords, widows, orphans, Taliban, mullahs, mujahideen, carpet-weavers, cameleers or Persian poets. Jewish Australians may identify or be identified with Israelis, US media representations or figures in European literature, history and psychoanalysis. Representations in popular media intersect with those produced by migrants themselves. Self-representation changes along with political conditions and with interactions between generations. Migrant women's self-representations, for instance, respond to those of family members, while negotiating responsibilities for their personal and national futures.

F.A. and Lily Brett are two Australian mothers who write about their own and other family members' responses to the effects of 'world' events on personal memories and on the assumption of personal, familial and national responsibilities. While they share these intersections of response and responsibility on Australian sites, F.A. and Brett represent different personal and community histories. Brett was born in 1946 to Auschwitz survivors in a German displaced persons camp and migrated to Australia in 1948 with her parents. F.A. belongs to a more recent group of displaced people and survivors of war and persecution; with her husband and children, she came to Australia as a refugee from Afghanistan in the 1990s. Both women's texts point to Australia's responsibilities to its citizens previously displaced and to its non-citizens who remain in a state of displacement, in some cases indefinitely. Unpublished texts of Afghans currently rejected and detained or granted at most 'temporary protection' share this Australian site, despite their discursive excision. The texts of Brett, Afghan Australians and Afghans in Australia respond to each other, as they enact and point to responsibilities of children, parents, citizens and governments. Their intersection represents a site of encounter that enables many levels of response.

Walter Benjamin wrote that 'only the meeting of two different street *names* makes for the magic of the "corner."'[3] The corner represents a site of response, a threshold on which remnants of previous encounters are trampled and/or recycled, while the opening strains of new relations are composed and improvised. Benjamin, the Jewish German refugee, often wrote of sites of encounter and thresholds—thresholds of waking and sleeping, of translation and of different temporal, social and political worlds. The extended threshold of arrival at a new homeland is a site of delayed encounter, sometimes a fatal delay, as was Benjamin's detention on the French/Spanish border in 1940.[4] For asylum seekers and others displaced by war or persecution, the delay can be prolonged by decades, whether physically, in camps, or psychologically, in the grip of persistent memories and paradoxical realities. All migrants to Australia carry previous points of departure onto the threshold of their destination and they create new 'corners' as they cross paths with and respond to members of groups with different names. Different groups may arrive from the same homeland or speak the same language. They may be different generations within one family. They may have known each other as friends or enemies in the worlds they have left, or they may never have heard of each other before meeting on and taking responsibility for their new Australian corners.

The meeting of the names 'Jewish' and 'Afghan' makes for a busy and revealing corner in Australian immigration. (I will use these two terms in their broadest sense—to refer to those identified by authorities and record-keepers as Jewish or Afghan and those who identify themselves as such.) Jews and Afghans share the diasporic experience and the questions around memory and representation that come with displacement and can persist through several generations. In recent years, Jews and Afghans have crossed paths in Australia as some have come together to resist current government policies on political asylum. This form of response and collaboration has inspired much sharing of memories and renegotiation of responsibilities.

To trace some shifts in Australian response, it is useful to look briefly at the history of the migration of these two complex groups. Jewish refugees from Europe made up the greater part of the first major group of refugees to be accepted by Australia, in the 1930s and 1940s. More recently, a major group of people to flee to Australia (and elsewhere) from the effects of war and persecution has come from Afghanistan, which has not seen peace or political stability since 1978. As displaced people and asylum seekers, both Jews and Afghans have arrived on Australian shores on boats, to hostile receptions from media, government policies and from within their respective Australian communities. The hostile reception of Afghan arrivals continues and remains in Australia's collective memory, but the somewhat similar reception of Jewish displaced people in the 1940s is largely forgotten by Australians not directly affected.

For some years during World War II, Shanghai had been the only port in the world that accepted refugees without 'authorisation', and many Jews had fled Europe and settled there. In 1946, 330 Shanghai Jews made it to Australia on a steamer barely fit to sail. Historian

Suzanne Rutland sees 'astounding' parallels with last year's government and public responses to the 438 mainly Afghan asylum seekers rescued by the Tampa. In 1946, the Australian press, the League of Rights, the RSL and the government promoted illogical fears of the Jewish refugees. Rutland explains: 'from the RSL point of view and from a general Australian perception, most Jews were Communists and as such security risks, and if they were not Communists, they were terrorists [as anti-British Zionists], or they were wealthy [and smuggling all sorts of things]...these were typical anti-Semitic stereotypes.'[5] A top-secret government report claimed, '[t]hese people have lived mainly by their wits and by selling their services to the highest bidder' and 'the personal integrity of foreign refugees, cannot be accepted at face value'.[6]

Of course, not all Jewish and Afghan migrants to Australia have been refugees. The First Fleet in 1788 carried Jewish convicts. After being pardoned, Jewish convicts followed diverse careers, ranging from bushranger to Sydney society lady.[7] Jewish 'free settlers' also came from England throughout the nineteenth century and small communities were established, mainly in the eastern colonies. After World War I, eastern Europeans began to migrate to Australia. With the rise of the Nazi Party in the 1930s, central Europeans fled in increasing numbers. At this time, popular anti-Semitism in Australia also spread. It was not until 1947, when the worst horrors of Nazism had ended and it was too late for the lives of around six million Jews, that Australia accepted large numbers of survivors and displaced persons. Most of these migrants were eastern European Yiddish-speakers and their arrival changed the nature of Australia's Jewish communities. Jews have continued to migrate to Australia, for various reasons, since the large group after World War II, but the survivors and their descendants make up the greater part of today's community. After Israel, Australia has the highest per capita number of holocaust survivors in the world.

Two of those survivors were Max and Rose Brett, as they came to be known in Australia. The Bretts married before the holocaust, in the Polish city of Lodz. According to their elder daughter, Max came from a wealthy family; Rose's background was not so wealthy, but she was studious and beautiful. They were separated during the war but were reunited after surviving Auschwitz and a daughter, later to be called Lily, was born two years before their migration to Australia. Lily Brett is now a New York-based writer, but she began her career as a rock journalist in 1960s Melbourne, where Australia's largest Yiddish-speaking community lives. I will refer to her poems set in Melbourne and published there in 1990.

Afghan Australians have so far had less opportunity to publish in English, due, among other things, to the much smaller size of their communities and to the circumstances in which Afghans have migrated to Australia over the last 150 years. From the 1860s, Afghans were brought to the Australian colonies to handle the camels that were found to be the only means of transport fit for use in the desert. The term 'Afghan' was used by settler Australians to refer to the diverse groups of cameleers, though several came from states outside Afghanistan. Of course, borders have changed since that time. Many cameleers came from what is now

Pakistan. There were Afridis, Durranis, Ghilzais and Baluchis.[8] Most spoke Pashtu and/or Dari, the languages spoken by today's Afghan Australians. Though never granted citizenship rights, these migrants made a vital and largely unacknowledged contribution to the growth of industries and wealth in the colonies. The cameleers were essential to the exploration, mining, pastoral and early communications industries. They transported mail, water, food and other supplies to stations, goldfields and other inland 'European' establishments. Their skills saved lives.

However, by the 1890s, the same period in which pogroms of eastern European Jews began, Afghans were the object of the worst of settler Australians' fear and resentment of non-European cheap labour. (As well as the Afghans, Chinese, Indian and Melanesian workers were 'indentured'.) Newspaper reports on the 'Afghan Camel Invasion' claimed that the Afghan was 'even more dreaded and detested than the ubiquitous Chinaman', that he 'earns little money and spends less' and 'drinks no grog'. A further complaint was that the Afghans' camels were 'disseminating foul odours in the fragrant bush'.[9] Led by an Asian-hating Queenslander, Western Australian miners formed the short-lived Anti-Afghan League in the mid-1890s. In 1901, the federal Immigration Restriction Act implemented the White Australia Policy. Despite exploitation and social isolation, which sometimes resulted in violence, or what press reports described as Afghans 'going berserk', some Afghans, like some Jewish migrants, were successful in business and 'society' around the turn of the century.

In the 1920s, motorised transport became more common, and demand for the Afghans' cameldriving skills declined. Some Afghans and their sons became hawkers. (In the same period, many eastern European Jews had also resorted to hawking to make a living in Europe. Travelling salesmen returning to their shtetls with stories to tell are frequent heroes of Yiddish literature, as in the classic tales of Sholem Aleichem.) It is perhaps in the role of hawker that Afghans are now best remembered in rural Australian communities. Evelyn Crawford, an indigenous NSW author, remembers 'the old Afghan hawker, Ahjune,' who carried 'heaps and heaps of beautiful silk material'. Like many impressed by the rich colours and textures of the Afghans' cloth, Crawford says she has 'never seen anything like it since'.[10] Some remember the Afghans as gentle animal-lovers, but most literary representations have more in common with press reports from the days of the Anti-Afghan League. In the 1920s writing of Vance Palmer, Afghans are gaudy, sinister characters, selling alcohol to Aboriginal men and fathering Aboriginal women's children. Undoubtedly, Afghan men, like their European, Chinese and Melanesian counterparts, did trade with indigenous people and father indigenous children. Stories of these relations suggest that the Afghans' ethics were as diverse as those of other groups of men in colonial Australia. Today, descendants of the Afghan cameleers and their Aboriginal and settler Australian wives continue to live around the country. While producing little literature themselves, some of these descendants appear in marginal roles in others' works. For example, without her training by one of Kandahari cameleer's son, Sallay Mahomet, Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* may not have become the international success it did.

Refugees from Afghanistan have been accepted in Australia since 1982. Australia has been selective, mainly choosing refugees with professional qualifications. The number of Afghans chosen to take refuge in Australia has been a tiny proportion of the millions displaced over the last two decades. In the 1982-83 financial year, when war was continuing to destroy families, homes and livelihoods, and Pakistan was hosting millions of refugees, 6 270 Afghans applied for asylum at the Australian Embassy in Pakistan. Eighty-seven were accepted.[11] This rate of acceptance barely improved over subsequent years. Those Afghan refugees who were selected have mainly found (non-professional) employment and settled in the larger cities. There are diverse and active communities in the outer suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne. These communities are now responding to increased attention and challenges since the US-led war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the Australian government's strategy of negative representation of asylum seekers, the effects of extended detention and the restrictive conditions of temporary protection visas (TPVs). On the lives of current asylum seekers, many of whom are Hazara and Shia Muslims unlike the majority-Sunni Afghan communities, Australia has effectively imposed a state of immobility. Whether still in detention or out on a TPV, the asylum seeker is no longer in a position to plan a future. For most, reunion with family members is of prime importance, but TPV conditions deny this initial priority in most cases and often make the asylum seeker dependent on the—sometimes ambivalent—community.

Relations between members of complex, displaced communities, especially those with histories of political extremes, represent often overlooked sites of encounter in popular memory. Transformations of political, social and familial roles, conflicting memories and realities, hopes, fears and discursive disparities combine to render the corner on which 'old' and 'new' (or 'young' and 'old') migrants meet a potential site of wonder or danger. It is often the children of the displaced who, having adopted 'Australian' accents, are in a position to represent such encounters to the popular imagination. Lily Brett represents a Melbourne case of road rage in her poem *I Was Waiting*:

It is 100 degrees in Hotham Street
an old orthodox Jew
crosses the road

he has the pale face of the devoted
his black hat coat and curls
soak in the strident light

my father revs his Chevy up
look at that silly Yid
what does he think
does he think he is in Warsaw or Lowicz

an idiot an idiot
my mother screams

he should have a sign on him
run me over I am Jewish

no wonder they didn't want us
the Jews here
no wonder they were ashamed of us

those who came before the war
were already speaking good English
they knew what it was a sandwich

look at him
a madman
and he is talking to God

there is no God Liebala
there is no God
I know this for sure

I was waiting for Him Liebala
in the ghetto
when my baby died

I was waiting for Him
when my mother was crushed
on the bottom of the cattle truck

I was waiting for Him
when little Hanka
went to the gas

I was waiting for Him.[12]

This poem points to several aspects of the displaced person's experience, common to many who survived 1930s and 1940s central Europe and to some who survived 1980s and 1990s Afghanistan. Firstly, the memories evoked by the sudden sight of something associated with a former life in an old homeland can arouse strong, feelings and direct them in new ways. In this case the initial sight is the nineteenth-century Northern European dress of the bearded orthodox Jew, as seemingly inappropriate in the Australian heat as a Santa Claus suit. The speakers' parents' eyes move from the suit, a ubiquitous sight in their 1930s Lodz, to the body language of the old man and finally to his praying lips. To them, the whole frighteningly familiar picture of the faithful pedestrian represents the powerlessness and betrayal of the Yiddish survivor. The orthodox Jew, like the observant Muslim, is stubbornly submissive to his God and his fate. His indifference to the upwardly mobile migrant's world of big cars and sandwiches confronts the migrant's new hopes and stabilities with the tragedy of their shared memories—of religious relatives betrayed and killed, of the survivor's own desperate, self-

interested acts and of the futility of attempting to act more heroically. The silent affiliation of the parents with the old Jew throws them from their newly acquired social positions back to the insecure threshold of arrival in the new homeland. As their 'Australian' identity is thus implicitly threatened and their desire to forget and change challenged, they respond in impotent anger.

Brett's praying pedestrian revives the bitterness of abandonment, taking the mother to a place in the past that rendered her immobile, as she waited. The slow-paced old man arouses an urgency in the mother, to teach her daughter the lesson he has evidently failed to learn. Her daughter then diverts the lesson, representing her mother as one who shares more than one corner with the 'Yid'. The Yid represents the archetypal holocaust victim and does not deserve further victimisation by his fellow survivors. However, this form of victimisation is not so unusual. It is yet another survival technique, common not only to trauma survivors, but to many who experience insecurity and are confronted by the show of security or resistance in others. While the revving Chevy threatens to run the Yid over, the politically powerful in Australia choose to blame victims, such as Hazara asylum seekers, not only for their own circumstances (what Philip Ruddock calls 'lifestyle choices'), but for several problems in 'settled' Australian communities as well. (According to Ruddock, 'unauthorised arrivals' take the places of needier refugees; people 'of that sort' threaten 'our' borders, freedom, space, mobility and, by implication, our children.) The 'unlawful non-citizens' grudgingly granted visas are set up rhetorically to impose on their fellow community members who have lived here longer. The greatest popular outrage, though, is directed at those who resist the pressures of victimisation and ridicule, who persist with their 'offensive' ways and refuse to desire 'appropriate' Australian pleasures. As Brett's couple in the car is powerless to change the old man's persistence with all that was despised and destroyed in Europe, so John Howard's The 'Australian people' remain impotent against the incomprehensible worlds they fear. These worlds include defiant, drowning, hunger-striking or lip-sewing Afghan asylum seekers, silk-clad nineteenth-century cameleers praying daily on Australian sands and twentieth-century orthodox Jews on the streets of Melbourne.

Children of holocaust survivors have produced diverse literature in Australia, while most survivors themselves did not write for publication until the 1980s, when much autobiographical material emerged. Similarly, most Afghan refugees have not yet had the opportunity to publish here (though some are authors of several books published in Afghanistan) and the next generation is still young. Writing by Afghan migrants appears on websites, in community newsletters and English-language class magazines. In November 2001, Sydney student F.A. was asked to write a piece for the end-of-year magazine. She wrote:

The feeling and pain that Afghan people have had for a long, long time, would other good people have it or not?

I have four children and a husband and I have a better life in Australia than I had in Afghanistan, but I feel very sorry for my country, especially for the children. They are without food or water. Some are orphans and they live in shelters, and they are worried about their parents. They seek shelter from bombs and many die alone. Sometimes they show the pictures on TV.

My children identify with the children they see on TV. In 1988 when Russia was bombing Afghanistan, my son and his cousin used to go under the stairs in the dark with a tin and a candle and a piece of wood. They banged the tin hard with the wood to try and block the sound of the bombs falling.

My son is confused because America helped us get rid of the Russians, and he can't understand why they are bombing us now and why Russia and the US and Pakistan are now all friends, and killing poor Afghans.[13]

Here in the classroom, rage does not scream as it does in the privacy of the family Chevy and with the assurance of the second-generation poet. The temporal and spatial distances from feared places of the past are different. However, like the displaced parents on the Melbourne street, this displaced mother also faces dilemmas of identity, representation of memories to the next generation and impotence in the face of injustice. Familiar images on television shake the security of the Australian lounge room, as they evoke memories shared by both generations. The family's Australian identity, affirmed by friendly citizenship ceremonies, is suddenly confronted with the fickle and asymmetrical nature of national friendships. The mother is concerned to make the paradoxes of an unjust world explicable to her son. She also gently asks the reader to appreciate the pain of survivors, to understand that betrayal and grief can no more be blocked from the memory than the sound of bombs can be blocked by hitting a tin with wood.

As F.A. writes, 'sometimes' pictures of endangered Afghan children are shown on Australian television. Usually Afghans appear only briefly, and often generically, in news and current affairs items. Little attempt was made to present the identities of the Taliban, for example, to the Australian public, let alone the historical context of their rise. The choice of the pejorative terms 'raghead' and 'towelhead' to refer to Muslims suggests that difference in appearance, especially when associated with religious codes of dress not understood by the fearful, remains a focus of aversion. As a woman in a chador seems to have become the personification of the Islam feared by parts of Australia's popular imagination, so the orthodox Jew was the exemplary object of fear for European anti-Semites sixty years ago. Australian Jewish communities encompass atheists, secular Jews and a range of religious groups with practices developed in many parts of the world. Ninety-nine percent of Afghans identify as Muslims,[14] but Afghan communities are also diverse, with a range of Islamic practices, developed in various theological, ideological and regional cultural contexts. Shia Muslims in Afghanistan share with Jews in Europe a minority status. At various times over the centuries,

Europeans were killed because they were Jewish and Hazara Afghans have been killed because they were Hazara or because they practised Shia Islam.

Australia has been represented to persecuted Jews and Afghans as a safe place, a site for restoration and new life. For some, this promise has proved true. For those who have sought safety and been denied their share in the apparent excesses of Australian life, the disappointment is bitter in its unexpectedness and initial inexplicability. To whatever extent they practise their inherited or adopted religions, Jewish and Islamic refugees have had cultural and theological reasons to expect Australia to fulfil its responsibilities of fairness, protection and hospitality. Australians 'are', after all, 'friendly, decent, democratic people'. Followers of Christianity (Australia's nominally dominant religion), Judaism and Islam together constitute the 'people of the book' (*ahl al-kitab*), also known as the 'Abrahamic coalition'. However, for centuries, Jews and Muslims have met with more fearful responses from 'Christians' than other groups. Among migrants to Australia, response to intersections of past persecution and local aversions to signs of 'different' religious faith is diverse. Brett represents her non-believing Jewish parents as relieved by the 'Australian' emphasis on the appearance and enactment of calm, secular good cheer:

Until I was six
I thought we lived in Paradise
this country is Paradise
my father said every night

when he returned home
after his double shift
behind a sewing machine

this garden of the Gods
where men painted fences
and birds never wept
and brown dogs yapped their happiness

we lived
new recruits in this blue kingdom
with Aunty Regina and Uncle Felek
two families in two rooms

my mother marketed and shopped
her hair grew
she hummed tunes

and although her number never faded
and she joined her dead family every night
she thought my father was right

we lived in Paradise.[15]

Paradise here is not monotheistic and some residents have more generous 'Gods' than others, but the daily performance of buoyant optimism enables grief to be put aside in daylight hours, or at least out of sight of neighbours who could respond with anxiety. Representation of painful autobiographical material to an Australian public that is indifferent or unwilling to hear either the content or the language of the survivors is not for these parents. This responsibility is entrusted to the next generation. Brett represents her parents' lives to a book-buying public, which may be expected to be sympathetic. Current Afghan asylum seekers are in a different situation. Intimate autobiographical details are demanded in unsympathetic circumstances. When given, their 'plausibility' is questioned or simply rejected by listeners whose ignorance is evident to the asylum seekers on several levels. These practices range from tribunal hearings to daily identification in detention. As one detained child tells, '[e]very day I have to give them my name, so they can cross it out.'[16]

Like the postwar Jewish survivors, many Afghans are now displaced persons (DPs) in need of a secure environment in which to attempt to resume violently disrupted lives. Since the fall of the Taliban, most Afghans are no longer recognised as refugees, or as 'engaging our protection obligation', in the words of Philip Ruddock. However, they and their communities have suffered such loss and destruction over the past decades that the situation for many is similar to that of the displaced Jews of the 1940s: there is no home to return to and some survivors have suffered trauma that leaves them unfit to assist with any reconstruction work until they have had a chance to rebuild their strength in a safe place. In many parts of Afghanistan, conditions continue to prevent reconstruction work. Persecution also remains a reality for some groups, just as it did for some Jewish survivors who returned to what they hoped was the security of postwar Poland, only to lose their lives in the final pogroms of the late 1940s.

Australia's refugee and DP acceptance programs have always been more self-interested than some governments have cared to admit. (The current federal government, of course, is proud to repeat that it acts only in 'the national interest', an object whose definition it controls and that may not be questioned.) In 1949, the Department of Immigration publicly celebrated the arrival of Australia's 50,000th displaced person. For this purpose, it requested the selection of an 'attractive female child under 10 accompanying parents who are suitable subject for publicity'. To the satisfaction of the then minister Arthur Calwell, a 'smiling, flaxen-haired girl of seven' was found. The Latvian girl and her parents had fled the Red Army in 1944 and been in Germany since then.[17] With the possible exception of the Fraser government's acceptance of Vietnamese 'boat people', Australian governments have been reluctant to admit refugees who show signs of poor health, lack of formal education, effects of violence or anything that the rational, attractive 'Australian people' may find problematic or ugly.[18] The current government promotes such anxiety in a manner not seen for decades and its effects are evident in comments such as those of a neighbour of an Indonesian Australian family raided in October 2002. The European Australian defended her 'ethnic but lovely' neighbours, repeating to journalists, 'They do their yard.'[19]

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Australian governments also have a record of failure to appreciate conditions in refugees' source countries and regions, and of confusion about asylum seekers' ethnic and national identities. Currently detained in Sydney, a young Hazara man greets new visitors with 'Welcome to my home, Villawood.' This home for the rejected is a place in which three 'non-citizens' have died, apparently at their own hands, in seven months. The Hazara man has been in Australia for nearly four years. He has only seen detention centres, with his first year spent at Woomera. On the basis of language tests, the Australian government determined that he was not Afghan, but came from Pakistan or Iran (though, when the Taliban fell, it offered to 'return' him to Afghanistan). In fact, the detainee has never been in Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iran. His particular homelessness has to do with the history of conditions for Hazara people, Shia Muslims and Afghan nationals in the Middle East. He speaks the Dari dialect of his Afghan parents and, because of his ethnicity, is seen throughout the Middle East as Afghan, but he is also fluent in Arabic. Largely because of his father's work and conditions in Afghanistan, he has spent most of his life in Syria and Iraq, where the authorities do not allow him to pursue a career. The Australian authorities' response to the complexities of such situations is usually to find them 'implausible'.

Similarly, in the 1930s and 1940s, Europeans fleeing persecution as Jews often found themselves interned in Australia, as their stories were considered 'implausible'. As Klaus Neumann has pointed out,

> Sheer ignorance about the situation in Europe by those charged with investigating the activities of enemy aliens extended to a lack of understanding about the application of the Nuremberg Laws. The Australian authorities did not always comprehend that somebody who did not identify as Jewish, who had been baptised, and who would not necessarily have been accepted as Jewish by an Australian rabbi, could face persecution in Germany.[20]

Asylum seekers were suspected of 'clever' schemes to damage 'Australian interests', of spying or falsely claiming Jewish heritage. Today, Afghan asylum seekers claim that the government sometimes uses interpreters from traditionally hostile groups in the Afghan community. The government's reliance on linguistic tests for Afghans, especially Hazaras, has also been found to be questionable, as assessors have demonstrated ignorance of the complexities of historical interactions between dialects and vocabularies.

It is well documented that current conditions of immigration detention in Australia compound asylum seekers' previous experiences of trauma. On top of memories of persecution in other countries, refugees released from detention live with memories of life in Woomera, Port Hedland, Villawood, Maribyrnong, Baxter, Perth, Curtin, Coonawarra and/or Christmas Island. Peter Mares tells of a mother and her three children, six months out of their nine-and-a-half-month detention. The mother usually cooks her children lightly fried, spicy rice, but one night she is home later than usual and to save time, serves up plain boiled rice. The children stare 'in disbelief, and then burst into tears'.[21] In detention, plain boiled rice had been served daily

at lunch and dinner. Mares writes that the rice 'symbolised...their lives in detention—their boredom, their complete lack of control, their absence of choice' and 'brought fear and uncertainty welling back up to the surface'.[22] Everyday objects have similar effects on the parents in Brett's poems. From the striking image of the orthodox Jew to a seemingly insignificant offer of a chocolate, in her poem 'Every Sunday Evening',[23] memories are constantly reawakened.

It is also well documented that people who have experienced persecution or grief benefit from opportunities to commemorate significant events and to ritually remember the lives of lost loved ones, if possible in a family or community context. In Australia, the anniversaries of many events deemed to carry significance, especially those related to war or otherwise involving the killing of young people, are regularly and publicly commemorated. For asylum seekers, however, such opportunities are often denied. Just one example is the Immigration Minister's withdrawal of permission for Afghan asylum seekers Musa Husseini and Sayyed Husseini to attend a memorial service on 8 November 2002. The service was held in memory of Musa's mother, Nurjan Husseini and Sayyed's wife, Fatimeh Husseini, who drowned at sea between Indonesia and Australia in 2001. Ruddock dismissed the service as 'essentially a stunt'.[24]

Current government policies reinforce implications that memory, like mobility, rightfully belongs only to Australia's 'lawful citizens', and to those of 'countries like ours', in the words of John Howard. However, many of Australia's lawful citizens choose to exercise their memories and mobility to show solidarity with asylum seekers, despite the government's obstacles. Many of these citizens are Jewish and some point to common sites and thresholds on the Jewish and Afghan paths that now cross in Australia. Sydney man Walter Bass is a former refugee from Germany. Every fortnight he meets his Afghan friend on the threshold of the Villawood visiting yard, the site from which detainees watch their mobile Australian friends go home and the site from which 'lawful citizens' get a glimpse inside their detained friends' worlds of uncertainty and nightmares. Having seen his father detained in Dachau and fled to Australia in 1939, Bass describes as a 'real surprise' the fact that he now finds himself 'queuing up outside a...camp all these years afterwards to visit the inmates there.'[25]

Melbourne writer Arnold Zable tells the story of his mother, the 'queue jumper' whose extended family was murdered in Poland and who was once deported by Australia, before returning to settle. Zable says he has 'heard many variations' of his mother's story in Maribyrnong detention centre.[26] Zable also suggests that Australia, now familiar with the meaning of xenophobia, could learn the benefits of the ancient Greek practices of the *filoxenia*, or 'friend of the stranger'.[27] Various groups around the country are enjoying such benefits. In counterpoint to government representations, playwrights such as Linda Jaivin are putting performances of life in and out of detention on stage. Released refugees are representing their own stories in such productions as the Fitzroy Learning Network's *Kan Yama Kan*.

However, government responses continue to prevail. The government's two most vocal 'poets' do not resort to 'un-Australian' words to make themselves clear. John Howard and Philip Ruddock reject notions of corners, as there are only two street names, 'Australian' and 'unlawful'. These two are so far apart that they will never meet. (Of course, to follow this geometrical logic, if the two streets never meet, they must be parallel.) Howard's favoured poetic structure is three similar statements with a cumulative subject, for example: 'I don't want that here. We don't want that here. Australians don't want that here.' This structure defines the name 'Australian' as identical to Howard. The unwanted 'that' is the unnameable, un-Australian thing that 'we' will never meet, as that would not be in the personal/national interest.

Ruddock's poetics feature heavy uses of abstractions. He reminds his public that '[p]rotection is not about immigration'.[28] Caseloads of implausible claimants unlawfully 'cheating migration outcomes'[29] are held under efficacious burden-sharing solutions, as bona fide protection entitlement requires demonstrated linkages for resettlement options. Border management requires lawful behaviour and the unlawful are by definition unable to assist and must therefore be 'available for removal'.[30] Ruddock's diction of legal certitude ensures the names of people with memories, with families, fears and hopes will not be heard in his zone of responsibility.

For some Jewish Australians, uncertainty is linked to turning the corner of the past. For many Afghans in Australia, it has to do with the corner of the future. In the discourses of Howard and Ruddock, certainty relates to a fear of any turn that might render the 'stranger' visible or audible. This anxiety was enacted by detainees who sewed their lips in 2001. It is a fear of a corner, a meeting place, which may become an excavation site, from which the screams of past and future nightmares, of mothers and children, will echo so loudly they can no longer be ignored. Such fear of responsibility and serpentine constriction of response are articulated in Francis Webb's 'The Song of a New Australian', first published in 1953:

> In the hamper of a fictive world this wordy darkness
> Is fed by the sick squeal of a truck moving
> Onto a stage where friendly word means a weakness,
> Safety hangs upon harlequin Hate with his gags
> That are hallowed and hideous mockery of loving.
> An interval – even armistice? But you only heard
> A crate's bruising or breaking on concrete, then the last word
> Of the damp, rolling, remorseless kegs.
> Darling Harbour, self-fashioned, queer dogmas postered to his wall,
> Discovers foreign all my words of defence,
> Cannot have me in his black book, Mateship; so I fall,
> Like the other thousands of mile-torn goods, to the phrases
> Of the account-book, dump and stowage at a glance.

No relief from a galvanised-iron sea, and impure

Mouths are the sky-colours. Bridge is a coil of wire

Slung on top of some upturned filthy cases.[31]

[1] <http://www.nationalsecurity.ag.gov.au> 15 January 2003.

[2] According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics population clock (see www.abs.gov.au), projected resident population of Australia on 27 January 2003 at 16:21:27 (Canberra time).

[3] Benjamin, Walter. 'First Sketches' in *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1999. 840.

[4] Benjamin fled from Berlin to Paris in 1933. When France fell to the Nazis in 1940, he fled to the Spanish border, where he committed suicide in detention. Now, over sixty years later, Europe has become a site of stability and prosperity. Refugees flee in the opposite direction, attempting to enter Europe from the Spanish coast. An estimated (and increasing) average of two asylum seekers die every week at Gibraltar alone. (See *Fortress Europe*, produced as *Fortet Europa* by Sweden's Sveriges Television in 2001 and broadcast on Australia's SBS on 24 January 2003.)

[5] Rutland's comments and other details of the Shanghai Jews' story were presented on ABC Television's *Compass* program on 27 October 2002.

[6] Transcript, ABC Television's *Compass* program, broadcast 27 October 2002.

[7] See Rubinstein, W D. *The Jews in Australia*. Melbourne: Heinemann 1986. 24-27. Bushranger Edward Davis or Davies (1815-41), known as 'Teddy the Jewboy', operated with his gang in the Hunter Valley in the 1830s, while Esther Abrahams married Lieutenant-Colonel George Johnston, became wealthy and lived in one of Australia's first mansions.

[8] Stevens, Christine. *Tin Mosques and Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*. Melbourne: OUP, 1989. 2.

[9] Mitchell Library, NSW, newspaper clippings, 'The Afghan Camel Invasion', Q980.1/N, vol.67, cited in Stevens, *Tin Mosques and Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Cameldrivers in Australia*. Melbourne: OUP, 1989. 141.

[10] Crawford, Evelyn. *Over My Tracks*. Melbourne: Penguin, 1993. 26.

[11] Cigler, Michael. *The Afghans in Australia.* Blackburn, Vic.: Australasian Education P, 1986.158.

[12] Brett, Lily. 'I Was Waiting' in *After The War*. Melbourne: MUP, 1990. 49.

[13] F.A.'The Afghan Situation and its Effect on my Children', Meadowbank TAFE Adult Basic Education *Student Writing 2001*, vol. 2, p. 38.

[14] <http://www.mdaa.org.au/contents/Ethnic Community/Afghani/Afghani Community.txt>

[15] Brett. 'Until I Was Six' in *After The War*. Melbourne: MUP,1990. 56.

[16] 'Kids Inside', *Street Stories*, broadcast on ABC Radio National, June 2002.

[17] Neumann, Klaus, *Providing a 'Home for the Oppressed'? Australian Responses to Refugees from the late 1930s to the mid-1960s*, Public lecture sponsored by the National Archives of Australia and the Institute for Social Research (Swinburne University of Technology), Melbourne, 11 July 2002.

[18] Menadue, John (Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs under Malcolm Fraser and Ian Macphee, 1980-83, and now a patron of 'Australians for Just Refugee Programs'), *Boat People Don't Displace Refugees In The Queue*, 15 July 2002: 'Dr William Maley recently recalled a story he had heard last year from a senior United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) official who was approached by an Australian bureaucrat wishing to discuss 'refugee resettlement'. Apparently over tea, the Australian official said to him confidentially 'You and I speak the same language. What we want are English-speaking engineers.' The UNHCR official replied 'There is a problem here. I can give you some non-literate women who have been raped.' These asides are seldom on the record, but I know from experience that they abound. The poor, unskilled, illiterate and non-English speaking refugee with no links to Australia and stuck in a squalid camp may be in the greatest need of resettlement and have superior claims to 'refugee status' but they are unlikely to be on our priority list.'

[19] ABC Radio, 30 October 2002.

[20] Neumann, Klaus. *Fifth Columnists? German and Austrian Refugees in Australian Internment Camps*, Public lecture for the National Archives of Australia, the Goethe Institute

(Sydney) and the Centre for European Studies at the University of New South Wales, presented in Sydney, 17 April 2002.

[21] Mares, Peter. *Borderline*. Sydney: UNSW P, 2002. 62.

[22] Ibid. 6

[23] See Brett, 'Every Sunday Evening' in *After The War*. 43-47.

[24] 'Ruddock defends barring relatives from memorial service' (AAP). *The Sunday Times* online, 8 November 2002.

[25] 'Worse Than Prisons? Managing Detention Centres', *Background Briefing*, produced by Tom Morton, broadcast on ABC Radio National, 6 October 2002**.**

[26] Zable, Arnold. 'A New World With An Ancient Past', Program for *Flight: A Concert for Refugees*, Melbourne Concert Hall, 14 July 2002.

[27] See Zable, 'Some are friends of the strangers'. *The Age*, 27 August 2002: 'Xenophobia means, literally, "fear of the stranger". Filoxenia, the lesser-known word, translates as "friend of the stranger". It is the practice of welcoming the outsider, the passing seafarer. In ancient times it signified the sacred bond between host and guest. First, the stranger is welcomed, bathed, fed and given a roof over his head. Only then is he asked for his name and business. The practice is described in Homer's epic tale of Odysseus, the great voyager, who spent many years trying to return to his native island of Ithaca.'

[28] Transcript, Launch of Afghan Reintegration Package, Media Centre <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/transcripts/transcripts02/afghanrein_240502.htm> (website of Philip Ruddock MP, Minister For Immigration And Multicultural And Indigenous Affairs), last update: 22 July 2002 at 14:06 AEST.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Webb, Francis. 'The Song of a New Australian', *Cap and Bells: The Poetry of Francis Webb*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991. 126-127.

Gay Breyley, *Displaced Mothers Respond: Intergenerational Responsibilities in and Around the Texts of F.A. and Lily Brett*, Altitude vol 3, 2003.