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## **"Kissing the noose of Australian democracy": Misplaced faiths and displaced lives converse over Australia's rising fences**

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**"Kissing the Noose of Australian Democracy":  
Misplaced faiths and displaced lives converse over Australia's rising fences****Gay Breyley**

University of Wollongong

*Jailer, you wear a ball-n-chain you cannot see  
You can lay your burden on me  
You can lay your burden down on me  
You can lay your burden down upon me  
But you cannot lay down those memories*

—Nick Cave 1984

*He who has once begun to open the fan of memory  
never comes to the end of its segments.*

—Walter Benjamin 1932

**Memory and conversation**

1. Conversational practice is conditioned by memory, as traces of previous conversations, sometimes distant in time and space, are reactivated. This essay examines some reactivated conversational traces in contexts of displacement, detention and release, sites that overlap in the memories of those who inhabit them and that jostle for effective space around the margins of current Australian conversation. It applies the conversational model to a reading of memory-based texts on the limits of national discourse, in particular those of poet and Iranian refugee Mohsen Soltany-Zand, the late Baarkanji author and educator Evelyn Crawford and child of holocaust survivors Lily Brett. Alongside recent writing by Soltany-Zand and other refugees, Crawford's 1993 oral history and Brett's late 1980s and early 1990s poetry represent conversations between displaced 'Australian' lives. Crawford was born in 1928 to stateless, displaced Indigenous workers on a New South Wales sheep station. In her text, she recalls her childhood escape from a life under surveillance on a mission, working for rations in the lucrative pastoral industries and later working in the education sector. Brett was born to Auschwitz survivors in a German displaced persons camp in 1946 and migrated with her parents to Melbourne in 1948. Her poetry addresses the displacement of her parents, the life of their Melbourne community of survivors and the ghosts of dead families that continue to haunt that life.

2. Memory - along with its counterpart, forgetting - is the primary form of luggage carried by a displaced person. It is a fluctuating piece of luggage, which can neither be disposed of nor fixed in a satisfactory situation. People, events and objects remembered may be intangible, but their memories slip in and out of the remembering subject's grasp. Memories jostle each other for airspace, as one act of remembrance demands another of forgetting. However, forgetting is not erasure, just as silence is not absence of sound, but rather a resonating space, teeming with ghosts, fears and the unspeakable. For those in Australia who remember (and forget) dispossession, displacement, betrayal and isolation, especially at the hands of government authorities, remembered losses often take the form of restive silences. Words do not shift these memories 'off their chests'; they cannot be laid down. The missing and dead are gone and can no longer be hugged (as Johnny Thunders put it, 'You can't put your arms around a memory'), but they are not 'properly' buried. Daily and nightly they perform for the remembering subject, mutating with each day's different resonances and with the questions that form endless folds on the fan of memory. Memories are thus contorted into airless discursive spaces that barely sustain movement. As 'Australia' loudly proclaims its 'democracy' and its 'sharing' of 'burdens', it maintains a discursive zone that constricts conversational possibilities for those whose burdens will not lie down. Meanwhile, Australia's 'national' burdens of the past lie still and muted, drowned out by the noisy forgetting of authorities' proclamations, while related current 'burdens' are misrepresented in what can only be described as lies.

3. 'We are innocents who have kissed the noose of Australian Democracy', wrote Mohsen Soltany-Zand during his fourth year in immigration detention. Soltany-Zand was released in

2003, but the 'noose', shared by generations of displaced people, continues to suspend him in precarious positions. This noose is not always lethal and may even grow comfortable, but it hinders movement between conversation sites, between past and future, self and other, 'here' and 'there'. Like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, propelled in one direction, with locked wings, many displaced people are positioned such that they can neither face the future nor awaken the past. However, the very limits of their positions and the damage all around and within enable other conversations. Though constricted by their 'noose', conversations such as those in and between the texts of Soltany-Zand, Crawford and Brett suggest possibilities for response to the misdirected kisses of 'innocents'.

### Displacement

4. A conversation's movements are linked to the nature of its performance space - to the conditions that interact with it. Benjamin represents history's conversation space as a stormy scene of destruction, in which the conversing angel 'would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed'. This desire is thwarted by the storm from Paradise, which 'has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them'. The storm 'irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward'. (1992: 249) Motion and stasis coexist in this Paradise-designed storm. Between the noise of the wreckers and the thunder of progress, the angel's voice/s may be heard as he is propelled into the future, but his conversational possibilities are limited by the force of the air that holds his wings open. He may not converse with the dead or share their air. Resolution is impossible. Voices on the boundaries of a national discourse find their conversations similarly limited. The nature of the air in which conversations are held conditions their possibilities.

5. Having been displaced from Berlin in 1933, Benjamin was breathing the air of 1940 Paris when he wrote on the angel of history. Later in 1940, he fled the Nazis' arrival in France, was detained on the Spanish border and 'released' there only by his suicide. (Now, over sixty years later, asylum seekers 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.) To the east of Benjamin's lost German homeland, Yiddish-speakers had a word for those who were dispossessed and survived on their wits - a Luftmensch, an 'air person', lived on air. Luftmensch denoted a wheeler and dealer, who moved about making something out of nothing, where this was the only chance for survival. Benjamin was not a Luftmensch in this sense; he was no shrewd survivor, but he was a Luftmensch in the sense in which the Australian writer and child of Yiddish-speakers, Arnold Zable, has adapted that term - he was uprooted and left dangling in thin air, in a space outside the conversation sites of 'his' time and place.

6. The process of 'becoming Australian' or of failing to 'become Australian', in its many different forms, can involve time as a Luftmensch, finding no homeland where 'Australian' discourse suggests there should be one or being dispossessed of that which was a homeland. Zable, whose family was left bereft by the holocaust, points out that an Indigenous person could be expected to be the Luftmensch's opposite - the Indigenous person has strong links to place and knows his or her homeland intimately. However, Zable speaks of a shock of recognition when he encounters the 'hovering' narrator of Kim Scott's *Benang* - all it takes is a generation of dispossession or constriction of conversation space to render even the Indigenous person a Luftmensch. Crawford's memories are also those of an Indigenous Luftmensch, although she rarely 'hovered'. She left her tracks on often familiar soil, but dispossession repeatedly changed the course of those tracks and with it the languages she could use. Crawford worked all over western New South Wales and southern Queensland, in shearing sheds, as a drover, nursemaid, housemaid, rodeo rider with the Tex Morton Show, teacher's aide, Liaison Officer and TAFE Aboriginal Regional Co-ordinator. While still excluded from the census of Australian citizens, she negotiated many forms of Australian English, including some used by migrants from England, Ireland, China and Afghanistan, as well as several Indigenous languages.

7. By 1988, Crawford's time as a pushed and shoved object of dispossession might have seemed to be in the past. Indeed, she accepted an invitation from the State Premier to meet Queen Elizabeth at a luncheon in Sydney that year. However, here too, albeit in a less serious form, Crawford met an attempt to block her path. She remembers the response to her decision to take a short cut to lunch over the red carpet, as she was feeling the discomfort and impracticality of her new, expensive shoes: 'A feller came over to me, all dressed up in some kind of uniform and said, so-o-o politely, "Excuse me, ma'am, the Queen hasn't walked on that yet. It's for the Queen to walk on."' As she had done many times before in other contexts, Crawford responded to this 'authority' with a counter-discourse of security and protection: "'I'm sure the Queen wouldn't want one of her visitors to be sitting in the dining room with a broken leg because she slipped and fell over, so will you please just move away and let me pass so I can go in and sit down.'" (1993: 308) As dispossession is carried out in the name of the 'security' of those becoming or being 'Australian', the dispossessed and uprooted fashion new, 'counter-protective' conversation sites.

8. Australian conversation sites are often concerned with their own perceived security. Discursive spaces are limited and require intervention, often from those previously silenced or 'detained', to maintain the possibility of motion. The post-bicentennial years – the late 1980s and early 1990s – saw such intervention, as Australia's relations with its past were unsettled and renegotiated. With minor roles in that premature fin de siècle, Crawford and Brett represent voices of some of those previously displaced and detained, while Soltany-Zand reminds 'Australia' that silencing, confinement and indifference continue with ferocity into the twenty-first century. Displacement entails separation and loss. Australian public memory often represents effects of displacement in terms of things kept, brought or left behind. However, boundaries between 'here' and 'there', between life and death, often blur. The texts of Brett, Crawford and Soltany-Zand suggest that things brought rarely remain the same as they were in other times and places and that things thought to be left behind re-emerge in different forms. This is not a question of presence or absence, but rather of transformations, of forgetting and remembering, of encounters and their aftershocks. Brett writes:

My parents  
were found  
in the camps  
almost  
lifeless  
almost  
indistinguishable  
from  
the corpses  
after  
six months  
they were re-united  
they  
had already  
discovered  
that  
they were no longer  
themselves  
or  
each other. (1992: 11)

9. Losses effected in the course of displacement and detention are recognised and felt most profoundly when the survivors are 'released' and 'reunited'. The impossibility of release from past states and of reunion with past selves is paradoxically evident only when release and reunion are, according to public and official discourse, achieved.

10. The DP camp of Brett's birth shared some characteristics with the station of Crawford's birth. Crawford did not find out until 1985 that she was born in 1928. Her birth, at Rossmore Station, out of Bourke in north-western NSW, was listed in a station book along with the births of nine calves, 28 lambs and two foals. Crawford's displaced parents worked and were effectively detained on the sheep station. She explains:

Back in those days Aboriginal babies didn't have to be registered. We weren't citizens so we was nobody. But if the parents worked on a station the baby could be entered on the station books. That made us what was called 'station kids'. At least it gave us some bit of protection from the Aboriginal Protection Board who couldn't move us without the station owner's permission. On the other hand, the owner could call in the Board to get rid of us if he wanted to. (1993: xi)

11. The word 'protection' recurs with increasing frequency on many levels of Australian discourse, from insurance to cosmetics to legislation. Crawford's repetition of the multifunctional word serves as a strategy to counterpoint the differing modes of and power relations between distinct, but asymmetrically overlapping, conversation sites. When Crawford speaks, 'protection' often reads as 'counter-protection'. As with 'release' and 'reunion', resolution is not possible.

12. In recent years, people seeking asylum in Australia have become familiar with government uses of the word 'protection'. Cruelty to asylum seekers on arrival, or prevention of their arrival, is explained as 'border protection'. Surveillance and isolation of detainees is 'justified' in terms of protection, as is the refusal of access to potentially listening 'Australian' ears. Most notoriously, 'protection' for refugees in Australia is now temporary. Futures are as insecure and unclear as the displacements and interminable detentions of the past. For those remaining in immigration detention, with no hint of a timetable for their futures, hope and its ensuing possibilities for conversation are crushed, as they were on other, distant but silently recalled sites of affliction. Outside the elaborate detention centre fences, 'lawful citizens' enjoy an abundance of scheduling strategies and the regular events of anticipation and gratification that advertising, sport and other cultural practices promise and provide. However, here too, memory and its conversational moves are sedated and disabled by the immobility of such 'protective' discourses as those of

'homeland security', 'freedom' and 'love' thereof, 'national interest', 'good', 'decent', 'right' and 'the Australian people'. Soltany-Zand's poem 'the wall', written inside detention, could be positioned on either side of Australia's many fences:

In the distance I can see a ruined wall  
 hear the whirl of the wind there  
 as I approach the wall I sense  
 that there are people behind it.  
 I get closer to the wall  
 I smell a perfume from the past  
 I reach the wall  
 My heart is beating faster  
 What's behind the wall,  
 why are they so quiet?  
 If there are people there,  
 why can't I feel their breath?  
 I look over the wall  
 Yes, as I guessed,  
 there are many people here.  
 But everyone is silent  
 They cannot even move  
 There are so many,  
 from every land of the past  
 So many, but they do not speak.  
 Awake, they might have been enemies,  
 But they lie side by side like lovers, all sleep.  
 with out breathing,  
 peaceful,  
 Together behind the wall. (2002)

13. The peace behind Soltany-Zand's wall is a complicated one. It is perfumed by the past, but these scents, blown in from many distant battlefields, mutate and overpower when combined in the confined space. Old foes forget their enmities in the face of a new hostility, or perhaps the old animosities too are merely sedated and repositioned for later action. Breath is indefinitely suspended behind this 'protective' wall, as is the possibility of extended conversation and any gesture towards resolution.

14. In the conversations of the displaced, resolution is achieved only on the brink of collapse. Susan Sontag writes of Benjamin's major essays that they 'seem to end just in time, before they self-destruct'. (1978) Within displaced subjects, disparate worlds coexist as traces and fragments. These worlds are complicated as they pass, in memory and representation, between generations. Consequently, family relations are also complicated. The mother is a significant figure in the texts of Soltany-Zand, Crawford and Brett. Each author addresses difficult love, disappointed hopes, misunderstood pain and separation. Soltany-Zand writes of the love and patience of his mother who continues to pray for him in Iran and he begs her forgiveness. Crawford remembers her sense of abandonment when her mother and sister left her father and her, after their eleven-day ordeal escaping from the mission: '... that's when my whole world, the world of living with my Mum and Dad and my sister, the world that I'd known all my life and cried for on those terrible eleven days walkin' to Enngonia, changed. ... I was cold inside for a long time. ... All I ever wanted to know was WHY, why I was left. And I still do.' (1993: 115, 118)

15. Brett mourns her mother directly after her death in 1986. However, this mourning is not straightforward. Brett presents her remembered family of four - the few Australian survivors of the former Polish Jewish clan. While massive bereavement should render these few more precious to each other, relations after 'release' (migration to Australia) are fraught. In contrast with the sleepy displaced 'peace' of detention, as portrayed by Soltany-Zand, Brett represents her continuing conversations with her late loved mother as a 'war', an 'ominous overture' (1990: 97). Brett's speaking subject also confesses to having 'evicted [her] sister'. (1990: 109) Doris Brett continues this conversation in her own more recent writing. (Doris Brett 2001). Mixed longings often pull displaced subjects in irreconcilable directions. Crawford tells of the effects of colonisation on her people, but she frames her invitation to meet the queen. Some longings in Benjamin's work read as signs of a messianic sensibility caught in a melancholy wait for redemption, others as articulations of a Marxist desire for action to bring about justice. This coexistence and interaction of apparent contradictions is a dynamic of displaced conversation.

### Detention

16. Detention and its after-effects also constitute a paradoxical site. The voices of the detained are rarely heard 'outside', mainly because of the high volume and limited range of conversations dominating outside airspace. Those in detention have limited choices about who they befriend or receive as guests, as Soltany-Zand's poem 'when it rains' makes clear:

Tell the ground to open its mouth and eat me.

I am alone now, cannot believe you are gone.  
 Just the same way that I did not believe when you came.  
 You came from the road without any warning,  
 And all my love and heart then belonged to you.  
 You leave without any warning and leave me  
 alone with my bitter silence and loneliness.  
 I have no control over the will and desire to see you  
 You come and go as you wish. My wounded heart  
 is counting the moments to see you again.  
 I had no will and control over this friendship and never will  
 You even stole my lonely life. Go and I wish you success.  
 But be sure when it rains it reminds you of my tears.  
 I wish that your loneliness comes to an end. (2002)

17. The final wish in this poem reminds the addressee that loneliness also persists in the 'free' world of the mobile visitor and that effective conversation requires the participation of the detained and the released, of temporary and permanent residents. The detention centre visiting yard, the setting for 'when it rains', represents one of the few thresholds on which such conversation might take place. This is the site from which detainees watch their mobile 'Australian' visitors go home, outside the external fence, and the site from which 'lawful citizens' get a glimpse inside the detainees' worlds of uncertainty and nightmares, inside the internal fence. It is a site of remembered fragrances, where previously dispossessed, displaced and detained visitors may recognise the friendship of the powerless. Such recognition is especially evident among Indigenous Australians and among former refugees and displaced persons. Just a few examples are Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue in South Australia, architect Harry Seidler in NSW and writer Arnold Zable in Victoria, all of whom have recognised similarities between the situations of detained asylum seekers and 'temporarily protected' refugees and situations previously experienced by members of their own families. O'Donoghue's friend Yazdan Jawshani, a 19-year-old refugee from Afghanistan, points to a few specific resonances:

Like Lowitja as a child, my official parent had been a Government minister - the Minister for Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. I had been under 18 and what was called a UAM, an unaccompanied minor. ... [T]he home in which Lowitja was detained as a child was operated by the United Aborigines Mission - UAM. ... I had my birthday, just like Lowitja, given to me by the State. Hers was on the first of August, the birth-date given to horses, and mine was, like most other Afghan refugees, the start of the year. (Jawshani and O'Donoghue 2003)

18. Harry Seidler fled Vienna as a teenager and then spent two years in internment camps in England and Canada before migrating to Australia. His memories also resonate with Jawshani's more recent experiences. He describes his response to viewing footage of Woomera detention centre on ABC TV's Four Corners program:

Well it brought back very parallel and painful recollections from my youth, when I was in a similar situation, being locked up for apparently no sensible reason [in England]. I didn't do anything to anyone. I had to run away from where I lived. The worst thing is, they wouldn't tell me how long it's going to take. ... I ran away from the occupied armies of Germany that walked into Austria in 1938. My parents just said, you'd better get out of here, and I went to England. Or they sent me to England - I don't even know how it was. I went alone. (2003)

19. While Seidler was in detention, Arnold Zable's mother, whose extended family was murdered in Poland, was deported by Australia as a 'queue jumper'. Zable has 'heard many variations' of his mother's story in Maribyrnong detention centre. (2002)

20. Detention is a site where breath may sometimes be caught. It is a site of uncertainty, deprivation, resignation and hopes. Primarily, it is a site where the subject is forgotten, where the outside - or inside - world has blocked its ears more effectively than ever and where the anger of the forgotten and subjugated awaits its release. Of the camp of her birth, Brett writes:

my earliest memories  
 are of  
 people weeping  
 we were  
 newly-arrived prisoners  
 recently-survived victims  
 we were  
 women still searching  
 we were men still hoping  
 we were  
 others  
 who had given up  
 we were  
 forgotten lovers  
 and lost fathers  
 we were  
 left-over daughters

and missing mothers  
 we were  
 awkward  
 and uncomfortable  
 angry  
 restless guests  
 in Germany  
 lists of the dead  
 and the living  
 were posted daily  
 there were  
 no lists  
 of those of us  
 stuck  
 between  
 lists. (1990: 70)

21. The liminality of this site conditions conversational possibilities. Refugees in Thai camps in the 1970s wondered, among other things, whether they should try to learn French or English as they faced the long silence of 'processing'. Asylum seekers in German hostels in the 1990s considered the possibilities of German or English as they waited, often for years, for administrative decisions. Conversations in current Australian detention centres are more agonistically interrogative, as punitive conditions raise different questions. In the DP camps of 1946, hopes were offered and some were fulfilled. In Australia in 2003, detainees are presented with many forms of rejection and constant attempts to destroy any lurking hope. A current detainee explains his consideration of a possible return to the country he fled, where he faces a jail sentence, as a final exercise in hope. The hope is that he might be given a date of release in that country and that his family might be able to find and see him there.

22. Incomprehensibly punitive conditions are also remembered by Crawford. At eight or nine, she moved with her family to Brewarrina Mission. Detention here was much harsher than on the sheep station, with closer surveillance, violent managers and demoralisation. Crawford describes her first impressions of relations with the manager:

The Manager talked quite reasonably to our dad, but when he came to Charles Zooch his manner was very different. I didn't know the word 'abrupt' then, but now I'd say he was very abrupt, because of the way Charles spoke. His English and grammar was much better than the Manager's, and you couldn't have an educated Aboriginal person on a Mission. You either starved him out, or boned him or shot him, but some way you got rid of him. It would never do for a white man to feel belittled by a full-blood Aboriginal, and Charles and Nellie were full-bloods. (1993: 60)

23. Conversation space here is strictly divided according to rules of a discourse of resolution that would exclude the displaced, apparently unresolved subject and that could do more than stick him 'between lists'. Charles Zooch was given this name by Syd Kidman, a station owner known as the 'Cattle King'. Kidman had sent Zooch, as a child, from one of his stations to a private school in Adelaide, where Zooch was educated with squatters' sons. Crawford presents this encounter as a positive one:

Kidman never made them feel that he owned them because he'd educated them ... The parents trusted him because he was a good man, a man of his word, and really looked out for the kids. In their minds he wasn't anything like the Aboriginal Protection Board. (1993: 48)

24. Kidman's gesture is directed from the security of his discursive space. It is a gesture towards various kinds of redemption and resolution, from a dominant site where these are narrowly defined truths. Zooch is conversant with a greater number of discursive modes than Kidman, but at Brewarrina he encounters, apparently for the first time, the acute obstruction of conversational possibilities that characterises a site unwilling to have its truths either questioned or revealed as unattainable. 1930s Germany presented such a site to Benjamin. Aspects of the displaced persons camp of Brett's birth and the Melbourne of her childhood similarly obstructed conversational possibilities, as did Soltany-Zand's Iran in the 1990s and Port Hedland and Villawood from 1999 to 2003. The unrelenting obstruction driven by current discursive practices on the site of 'Australian immigration' leads to many forms of despair, one of which is articulated in Soltany-Zand's poem 'Suicide':

Destiny, I am looking for you.  
 In the nights, in the sky  
 all day I follow you.  
 Where are you, in past memories or in the future?  
 Destiny, where are you?  
 I want to find you  
 I want to end your brutality  
 Hey, destiny, I will find you  
 I will face your brutality  
 With all my might  
 This word may be your last,  
 For know this, destiny

I can mark a full stop to your sentence  
 I could kill you  
 And will,  
 When I die. (2002)

25. Alongside the despairing and dying, Australia's detention centres hold the newborn and the children whose parents had hoped to send or bring them into a form of redemption. The long-term effects of these children's swift re-education in matters of hope and redemption are yet to become fully evident. Some observers of the differences between Brett's and her sister Doris's representations of their family point to the contrast between Brett's first two years of life in the displaced persons camp and Doris Brett's infancy in the comparative certainty of citizenship in residential Melbourne. Brett was a baby in a form of detention, but the DP camp of her birth offered greater hope than today's detention centres, as the dispossessed and displaced were presented with discourses that dared to imagine new forms of redemption. However, Brett represents her birthplace as another site where discourse lacked correlation. In her poem 'The D.P. Camp', Brett's speaking subject addresses her mother:

... you'd  
 practised  
 English  
 with  
 the  
 American  
 Military Police  
 and  
 were  
 pleased  
 to  
 be  
 able  
 to  
 say  
 have  
 a  
 good  
 day. (1986: 105)

### Release

26. The blankness of this learnt 'American Military' phrase does not sufficiently prepare the detained for release into Australian suburban space, though, or for release into the factory:

Three  
 days  
  
 after  
 arriving  
  
 in  
 this  
  
 blue  
 cloudless  
 country  
  
 you  
 were  
  
 sitting  
 behind  
  
 a  
 sewing machine  
  
 putting  
 parts  
 of pyjamas  
  
 together  
 together. (1986: 109)

27. This form of 'redemption' - release into the muted world of exploitation - emerges as somewhat hollow, especially in the eyes of the second generation. However, unlike today's TPV-holders, the 'new Australians' of the late 1940s and 1950s enjoyed the permanency of citizenship. Europe's mid-century displaced and bereft knew the slippery significations of 'security', but the shred of hope represented by citizenship removed from their conversations the constant threat of visa expiry with which current refugees live and move. The many other restrictions of the TPV leave its holder in a state of 'permanent uncertainty'

(Marston 2003), to which 'release' from detention makes a difference only in rhythm.

28. The rhythms of release are as unpredictable as the outcomes of detention. Release for Crawford was as complicated as it was for Brett's parents and for Soltany-Zand. As Crawford approached her teenage years, and with them the risks of removal to the girls' dormitory, rape by a manager's son and removal to a notorious girls' home, her parents organised a group escape from the mission. This involved a dangerous journey through the dry country of northwestern NSW. Parents and children were forced to move separately; one child barely survived. Release was finally achieved; the family returned to the Yantabulla sandhills (Crawford's early childhood home, now almost deserted, as the Depression deepened), but a new wariness pervaded its encounters:

If anyone mentioned goin' somewhere you said straightaway, "I don't want to go." After the Mission time, we were always afraid there were people waitin' to grab us and take us away. If we saw a strange person on a horse, or a policeman, we'd run for the scrub. If you saw a white person before he saw you, then he didn't see you. I suppose I thought I'd be doing that all my life, because I never thought that one day they'd let us be ourselves, just blackfellers wantin' to live on the creek without any bother. (1993: 99)

29. Crawford was able to spend her childhood years with her parents and sister, largely due to their combined efforts to outwit those who would separate them. However, she learnt at a young age to move in fear and to develop strategies of evasive behaviour. This restriction continued into the next generation, as Crawford was wary of those who would separate her from her children.

30. Release for these displaced subjects is a form of mobile detention. However silent and ostensibly peaceful the site of release, voices of those left behind or gone away accompany those now detained in the open space of 'free' conversation. Brett writes:

It was hard  
to be heard  
in our house

a loud chorus  
sang  
the main score

dead people  
with strong  
voices

... a  
scattered  
madrigal

... it's  
your aunty Fela  
your uncle Felix

your cousin Mara  
your sister Hannah

your brother  
your brother  
... (1992: 35)

31. Soltany-Zand's and Crawford's memories are often of the absence of an 'our house', but are similarly punctuated by the loud silences of separation. The new detention sites have an ineffable quality for the fragmented subject. Newly learnt languages offer no discourse other than that of resolution and redemption, those impossibilities that keep the released detainee on the borders of their ostensibly open conversation space. Some displaced subjects adopt this discourse and repeat its phrases, that they might become true:

Until I was six  
I thought we lived in Paradise  
this country is Paradise  
my father said every night  
... 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. (1990: 56)

32. Here, the embodiment of the experience of Auschwitz, the mother's unchanging (Polish/German/ Jewish) number on her changing Australian body, is an explicit trace of past identity. It is a trace of a previous national imagining, that of the German National Socialists, long defeated, according to Australian national discourse, but continuing to have its effects on generations of Australian subjectivities. The less visible traces are innumerable and they interact silently with each new site of remembrance.

33. The relocation of Brett's displaced parents to the 'Paradise' of Melbourne is, of course, historically possible in the context of the dispossession of Indigenous Australians. Crawford spent years working in the sheep and cattle farming industries, from which much 'Australian' wealth grew, but she was not included in the Australian census until her thirty-ninth year. Such inclusion in the 'community' of Australian citizens is sometimes represented as a form of resolution for the displaced. While citizenship and especially resolution often emerge as impossibilities, they are part of the discourse of release. Throughout her life, Crawford's Indigenous identity is that which constrains some possibilities for agency and enables others. She remembers her treatment as an object of national 'protection' as a time of tension and danger. Her childhood attitude to the white Australian nation that excluded her, while stealing from her people, was that of a walker towards the burrs that make walking unpleasant and painful, that prevent her moving at the speed and in the directions she would like:

... Me, after promising myself when I was a kid to kill every white person I could when I grew up, not because I hated them, but they were like a burr when you wanted to walk with no shoes. You just want to git rid of it. (1993: 271)

34. Crawford learnt about burrs as a child, on the escape route:

Burrs were startin' to worry me, my feet were so sore. All day while I was hidin' I'd try to pick them out, but I only made things worse. We were on a white clay and sand area – the kind of country the most terrible burrs love. Galvanised burrs grow on a grey bush, very sharp with orange points, very painful. ... There's another one called the cat-head, very bad burr, very bad. It could blood poison you in about twenty-four hours. (1993: 87)

35. As she made that track in the 1930s, Crawford was unable to strip bark for footwear, as she would have liked to, because the search party would have noticed the freshly-barked trees. In 2003, Soltany-Zand also finds the happy mobility of his release halted, as he joins his friends 'behind the fence':

I am running; east, west, north, south,  
I want to run until my feet cannot keep up,  
I run because it makes me feel free,  
There is no fence anymore,  
I want to shout,  
And celebrate this happiness,  
Sit with friends and drink together.  
Oh, pity on me,  
what kind of party will it be?  
Which friends?  
Still now some of my friends are detained behind the fence,  
Still now children sit behind the fence,  
looking away and dreaming of freedom,  
Still now mothers feed their babies, eyes full of tears  
from the pain of "Australian kindness",  
Still now children go to bed with frightened faces,  
the officer 's pager their lullaby,  
Still now there are children who light a candle for Jesus,  
and ask, "If Jesus is real, why doesn 't he listen?",  
Still now there are people who reassure them, every minute  
that they care,  
Still now people bleed from the knife of indifference  
plunged into their hearts,  
Still now some would rather kill themselves  
than face deportation back to their country.  
There may be no fence for me,  
But there is a fence that limits all my memory,  
This fence has enveloped all my heart, mind, existence.  
My work begins now,  
I have to run ...  
You, who are reading this,  
Come with me,  
Me and you make "we",  
Together we can all escape,  
I know that I can never forget,  
But come and run with me,  
You will give me the courage to  
take the black curtain from my memory,  
But first, let 's have a party,  
And "we" celebrate by wearing our shoes,

And "we" will never take off our shoes  
until we all reach true freedom. (2003)

36. ACM's fences do not stop at the detention centre boundaries. They plant burrs and create obstacles to movement across the remembering subject's space of release. The memories cannot be laid down, but they thrash about against their fences and their black curtains. They are constantly active, but unable to sit, remove shoes and converse. Even in dreams, memories must work hard to reduce the volume of the ACM pager 'lullaby' and overcome the noise of forgetting, of constriction, of the storm that immobilises the angel's wings. However, a hope in this poem is that a listener will join the remembrance working party, that at least in the form of escape enabled by embrace, movement will again be possible.

37. Soltany-Zand's fence, Brett's chorus and Crawford's burrs are echoed in the poetry of A-H, a refugee from Iraq who is also currently displaced in Australia. A-H was part of a group that knocked down a fence at the Woomera detention centre in 2000. He explains that that action was not so much an attempt at physical release, a will to expand his physical space, as a desire to extend the limits of conversational space. He acted in the hope that there were Australian ears beyond the space of his detention that were able to hear his voice. At that time A-H was a Luftmensch, living on air. Conversations are carried on air and form the only hope for the Luftmensch, but possibilities depend on the state of that air. A-H describes his 'legal' release from Woomera as one from a 'small jail to [a] big jail'. (2001) He may now breathe the air outside Woomera, but not a great deal else. In a poem translated from Arabic, A-H represents his relationship with Australia as one of unrequited love. His 'beloved', ever distant throughout his life lived among thorns, emerges surrounded by new thorns. Though these are denser and sharper in their unexpectedness than many of the old thorns, he is willing to endure their deep cuts while the 'beloved' remains attainable:

Oh Australia, my life is full of thorns  
But I am now happy because I found you, a flower, in the middle of these thorns.  
I am ready to cut my arms on these thorns just to take you and to hold you ... (2001)

38. The thorns take many forms, among them the same word Crawford laughs and cries over - 'protection'. 'Protection' necessitates a fence, a barrier between often undefined dangers and securities. A-H's temporary protection visa prevents him applying for citizenship, leaving the country or bringing his wife and children to Australia. The painful thorns of unrequited love are his translation of the TPV, which the immigration minister claims provides 'fundamental protection arrangements needed to meet our international obligations', while removing 'additional benefits that had been encouraging misuse of the protection process'. After stating that TPV-holders are refugees, the minister's website goes on to claim that 'TPV holders are taking the places in the Humanitarian Program from refugees and others who are often in greater need of resettlement'. (Vanstone 2003)

39. Can such translations meet in conversation? As Australia's legislative borders continue to shrink and our 'fellow Australian' John Howard's high-frequency, high-volume repetition of "the Australian people" forms another 'protective' fence, who may intervene on conversational borders? Paul Carter has described the modulations of meaning ensuing from such encounters as 'first contact', migration and improvised theatre as 'the sound in between'. (1992) Despite Australia's particular form of tinnitus, such a sound remains possible between the cramped spaces of detention and the 'open' spaces of public memory. Indeed, some kind of contrapuntal, dissonant conversation becomes necessary as people continue to kiss 'the noose of Australian Democracy', seeking asylum, 'Paradise' or simply to be left alone by the creek. The noose currently hangs the displaced beyond reach of the 'Australian' ground it has advertised. However, if that ground and its fences are rearranged by those on it, if curtains are drawn and motion enabled, future kisses of 'innocents' may possibly be received with memories that sustain hope. With extensive excavation and rearrangement, it may even come to pass that an initial kiss is extended from the ground. Such repositioning could render unspoken memories audible, from the joyful to the tragic, and make movement into new modes of remembrance and conversation possible.

*I came to Australia carrying bleeding wounds and now that I am out of the detention centre, I carry all kinds of other sufferings. I was released and there is no meaning for my release now that my mind can no longer function. Now I am outside, I am unable to think. I am frightened, terrified. I shake when I see an officer in the street. I know this will cause problems for me. But Australia says now I am free for three years. If I am free, does that mean I can speak? No, but what if something happens to me. I do not feel free. I am imprisoned. I am still in bondage because I cannot speak.*

*Stand beside me so that I can tell you the truth about what happens in the detention centres. If you hear my story and still do not help me, then maybe I did make a mistake in seeking help from Australia. (Amani\* 2000)*

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