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Anna Rutherford
University of Aarhus, Denmark

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Abstract
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Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet. Wherever possible the submission should be on disc (soft-ware preferably Word for Windows, Wordperfect or Macwrite saved for PC on PC formatted disc) and should be accompanied by a hard copy, please include a short biography, address and email contact if available.

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Cover: ‘Refugee’ by Jim Jarman. Photo by Sue Moore

IN MEMORY OF SIGNE FRITS
1946-1997

*Kunapipi* refers to the Australian Aboriginal Myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.
# Contents

**EDITORIAL**

Anna Rutherford, 'The Loss of Our Humanity'  

**FICTION**

Gaye Shortland, 'Harmattan'  
David Hutchison, 'The Poverty Bush'  
Aosaf Afzal, 'Southall to Leicester (As it Happens)'  
Jean Arasanayagam, 'The Crossing, I and II'  

**POETRY**

Saeed Ur-Rehman, Testimonies of Fiction  
Julian Croft, 'Australian Languages', 'Muck and Money'  
Ian Adam, 'The Witch: Central Albertaæmdnmø'  
'Amdul0ping-pongæmdnmø'  
Mary Chauhan, 'Betel nut'  
'Momma never say (to her little black girl)'  
Maura Dooley, 'Ten Letters, A Something Z', 'Synaesthesia'  
'Niagara', 'A New Phase'  
Alicia Stubbersfield, 'A Red Map', 'Unsuitable Shoes'  
Harjit Kaur Khaira, 'Come Dancing'  
'She Got Us To Dance On Her Ashes'  
Aosaf Afzal, 'Archaeology',  
Dewasundari Arasanayagam, 'Hibiscus'  
'Return 1', 'The Fighter', 'Away – Maine, 1986'  

**ARTICLES/STATEMENTS**

Noel Pearson, 'University Day Address, Wollongong, 5 May 1997'  
Betty Thøgersen, 'Expanding Horizons'  
Dorothy Jones, 'Post-colonial Families Reconfigured: a Discussion of The Bone People and Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow'  
Saeed Ur-Rehman, 'Brown Bleakness/Brown Greyness: A Textual Analysis of My Body in Australia'  
Mette Jørgensen, 'Islands: Literally and in Literature'  
Parvathi Arasanayagam, 'In a Refugee camp – Extracts from a Diary'  
David Dabydeen, 'Address to the UNESCO Executive Board, Paris 24 April 1996'  

**ILLUSTRATIONS**

Peter Lyssiotis, 'Montage 1'  
Mandy Graham, 'Cartoon – KKK'  
Bill Leak, 'Cartoon – The Bleak Picture'  
Peter Lyssiotis, 'Montage 2'  
Alan Moir, 'Cartoon – The Pain'  
Chris Newman, 'The little people are there but you can’t see them!!'  
Pia Arke, 'Imaginary Homelands'  

**NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS**

136
Photo montage by Peter Lyssiotis
EDITORIAL: THE LOSS OF OUR HUMANITY

When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and consequently at the time when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with destruction by our own discovery. Suddenly, it becomes possible that there are just others, that we ourselves are an ‘other’ among others. Paul Ricoeur, History and Truth

No-one is different without they have something wrong with them. Patrick White, Clay

It is by the failures and misfits of a civilization that one can best judge its weakness. Epigraph to Doris Lessing’s The Grass is Singing

The ultimate test of our worth as a democratic nation is how we treat our most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Sir William Deane, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

It is not often I write an editorial for Kunapipi. That is not because of laziness or lack of concern, though I have to admit that both the time factor (to get the journal to press) and the space factor (more pages mean higher printing costs), do play a role. Sometimes I feel constrained like Mrs Touchett in Henry James’ novel The Portrait of a Lady, when she said, ‘I never know what I mean in my telegrams – especially those I send from America. Clearness is too expensive’. In the case of this editorial I’ve decided that the issues are too important to lack clarity and so I’m hoping to win the lottery to cover the cost!

On this occasion I am breaking with my usual convention because I feel that the issues to be dealt with are too important not to warrant an editorial. Most of them, with the exception of the aboriginal issue, are relevant not only to Australia but to the world in general, and the Western world in particular, and in accordance with the policy of Kunapipi many voices from many countries are included to discuss these issues – aboriginal rights and the stolen generation, Hansonism, racism, migration, in particular Asian migration, refugees, multi-culturalism, the continued rapid and insidious growth of what Jim McClelland calls the new world religion, Globalized Economic Rationalism, whose main function seems to transfer the manufacturing industry, that is jobs, from countries that have a high standard of living to low-wage countries. Nike’s sweat shops in the Asian countries were exposed in the Australian papers but it didn’t stop an Australian youth being murdered for his new Nike shoes.

It is my intention to start with globalization, economic rationalism and dehumanization. This is not because I find the question of racism and treatment of our indigenous population secondary to the other issues. On the contrary. My reason is that I believe that the root cause of all the other evils we are faced with lie within the first group mentioned. To find a solution we must find a cause, and having found the cause try, by some
means, to eradicate it. Impossible — no — nothing’s impossible. I personally had a great deal of respect for Mother Teresa and her work but not for her blind adherence to the teachings of the present Pope. You see the question I would ask is, ‘Why were they poor?’ As Zillah Eisenstein said, ‘Since life activity in this society is always in process, in process through power relationships, we must try to understand the process. To understand the process is to understand the way the process may be changed’. The aim of this editorial is to try to provide some reasons why Australia is in the position it is in today.

In her 1997 NSW Premier’s Literary Award address, Drusilla Modjeska said, ‘a time of upheaval and conflict in ways of thinking, and perhaps even of writing, are being challenged and changed in the most painful of ways. I am sure I am not the only one to have had the sensation of waking up to find myself in an Australia I barely recognise. Or rather more to the point, an Australia I would rather not recognise’. Drusilla Modjeska is not alone in these thoughts. Because of illness I was unable to attend my mother’s funeral. I did however write the eulogy which was read by a friend of mine at the Requiem Mass. Somehow or other I must have felt the winds of change that were soon to affect Australia so violently for I concluded by reminding those present, of the Mayfield of old, that Mayfield of my childhood and of the well-known characters including my mother who had been so much a part of it. ‘It was’ I said ‘a harder world than the one we live in today, but in terms of love, caring and community spirit one could not have found a richer world’. Some readers might say ‘she’s just growing old (which I am) and sentimentalizing the past’. No I’m not. I am not adverse to change; on the contrary I am a firm believer in John Cardinal Henry Newman’s dictum, ‘To live is to change’. It’s not change that bothers me. It’s the changes that have and are continuing to take place that cause me not only great anger but great anguish and shame.

I left Australia when I was twenty-one, not because I didn’t like it but because I was curious and wanted to see what the rest of the world was like — if it really was like what for us were the almost mythical pictures we had seen in our history books. I had a fair idea of where each country was because I was taught to swim at a very early age by my father in a pool adjacent to Newcastle beach. The pool had a raised concrete map of the world in it, appropriately coloured, and my father would say, ‘Now swim from Africa to India’. A swim across the Indian Ocean was quite a swim for a five year old and I’d be pleased when I reached the shore — Bombay I suppose. Getting from India to Sri Lanka (Ceylon in those days) was much easier and the swim home to Australia no trouble at all. Actually I think that was the first time I questioned the term ‘the Far East’. Why far? England was a lot further and required another swimming season before I could struggle to reach its shores.

In 1955 I left for Europe, this time by boat, and apart from another short
period in Australia plus many visits I have literally wandered around the world, curious about other peoples, their cultures and their countries, finding out the realities of what lay behind those blocks of concrete in that pool. It is little wonder that an academic career led me into post-colonial studies, an area in which I taught for thirty years at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. Teaching post-colonial literature meant that I also taught Australian literature and I did my best to teach it warts and all, pointing out all the negative features as well as the positive. I discussed the White Australia Policy, the treatment of the aborigines using texts like Glenys Ward’s *Wandering Girl*, showing Tracey Moffat’s film *Nice Coloured Girls*, and using text by non Anglo-Saxon/Celtic writers such as Judah Waten’s *Alien Son* and Ania Walwicz’ ‘Wogs’. As I believe that colonization and feminism are linked, I used Henry Lawson’s ‘Squeaker’s Mate’ to show the hypocrisy behind Russell Ward’s Australian legend; Kate Grenville’s *Lilian’s Story* was a wonderful example of the fate of a person who was not only female but ‘different’ and there could be no better text than Thea Astley’s *It’s Raining in Mango* to put a lie to the old myths just as David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* and Alex Miller’s *The Ancestor Game* revealed all the flaws behind so-called historical ‘truth’ as found in the official text books. I was not ‘knocking’ my own country, for though by the time you read this I will have spent two thirds of my life in other countries, and I’m off to Chile, Peru and Easter Island in November and fly to England and Europe via Sri Lanka in January, however I am still a firm believer in a quotation from Horace much used by many post-colonial writers: ‘They change their skies but not their souls who sail across the sea’. Where I live and where I die will not change that. In the rather jingoistic last line of Dorothy Mackellar’s poem, *Australia*, a poem we all learnt at school, when the time does come to die, ‘I know to what brown country my homing thoughts will fly’.

When I taught Australian literature, in spite of presenting the ‘warts’ I was always careful to point out that in spite of everything else, I believed that we had created in a very short time the best ‘multi’-cultural society that existed. I also believed that the Mabo\(^1\) and Wik\(^2\) decisions had gone a long way towards reconciliation with Australia’s original population.

When I reached Australia in 1997 a great shock hit me and I was forced to ask myself the same question that Dr Lois O’Donoghue had asked; namely what had happened to that ‘moment of idealism’ manifested by 90% of the Australian population in that referendum of 1967? This was a referendum that decided that aborigines could be Australian citizens. There are indeed disturbing echoes today ‘of the black and coloured issues’ that were around when the nation’s framework was established. What had gone wrong?

Noel Pearson’s article explains very clearly what happened in the last Federal election and his opening paragraphs dealing with the Great
Mainstream of Australia are of course written with deep irony. Initially the massive coalition victory was perceived as an assertion of mainstream values – the triumph of 'ordinary people' over policies which had been perceived as favouring minority or even elite groups, a term bandied around to describe supporters of reforms in relation to women, ethnic groups and aborigines, to denigrate promoters of social reforms particularly with reference to gender, race and ethnicity. Such groups were accused of having, with the support of the previous governments, enforced a rigid regime of political correctness. The so-called 'chardonnay socialists' included of course the supporters of the arts, intellectuals, the Australian Broadcasting Commission, socialists and supporters of the Republican movement. The day after Paul Keating, Australia's former Labor Prime Minister, announced his support for an Australian republic he was lampooned in a cartoon in one of Australia's national newspapers as an IRA terrorist and underneath was written Irish Catholic Working Class.

Minority groups, being given too much support and encouragement were regarded as the privileged, whilst the Great Mainstream, 'all of us' was being victimized and deprived of its fair share of the goodies. According to Ms Hanson, multiculturalism is 'discredited and mean spirited'. Robert Menzies, former Prime Minister of Australia, was attacked over our White Australia immigration policy. His answer was, 'We don't import problems'. I wonder how Ms Hanson got in! I am sure that much of the racism that exists in Europe today stems from the same source as Betty Thøgersen mentioned. (Hence Mrs Thatcher's demolition of the London County Council and her making sure that Ken Livingstone was no longer in power.) In whatever way it was perceived, it was promoted and fanned to fever pitch by Pauline Hanson who set about to put the 'facts' right and speak for 'All of Us'. This is an issue which I would like to take up later.

In a splendid article in The Weekend Australian called 'The Business of Being Human' Richard Neville wrote among other things, 'The point of business is to provide profit. The point of culture is to provide meaning'. Later in this editorial I mention David Putnam's film The Mission. Earlier this year a debate took place between Peter Guber, the former chairman of Sony Pictures, a power in Hollywood, and the British film producer, Sir David Putnam, whose films include Chariots of Fire, The Killing Fields and The Mission. The event was a debate attended by 700 students at Boston University. The issue: 'Do social values figure on Hollywood's balance sheet?'

Mr Guber claimed they did. 'Films are a worldwide industry, America's second export ... This is show-business, not show-show.'

David Putnam replied: 'The medium is too powerful and too important an influence on the way we live, the way we see ourselves, to be left solely to the tyranny of the box-office or reduced to the sum of the lowest common denominator of public taste.'
Mr Guber replied: 'If you want religion, go to church.'

Sir David’s argument was that cinema is the church, that ‘to an almost alarming degree’ films shape people’s thinking and define social health.

Each of the film makers had foot-soldiers on hand to support their arguments. Guber’s was William Roth. His argument was: ‘As we know, Hollywood’s only goal is to make money ... The audiences define and control the product ... The product was neutral, utterly bereft of moral content, responsible only to market forces, like a Teflon pan. Not art for art's sake, but art for money’s sake.’

Putnam’s supporter was Tom Danon. After describing Hollywood as a cultural ghetto with a tremendous effect on world society he continued: ‘Films should do what great literature and art do: make us and elevate us and remind us that we are not alone.’

When the time came to vote it turned out to be a crushing vote for the Putnam camp. It is, as the article concludes, ‘ludicrous to say in 1997 that films don’t have an impact. But Hollywood’s failure to grasp the power the movies have on culture and thought, not only in America but worldwide, is not deliberate. It is ignorant and uncaring’.

I have dealt with this issue at length because I am able to see the direct effect of the lowest common denominator on the Australian population. As Richard Neville said in his article, ‘We recognize more labels and logos than we do birds and trees. We’ve come to equate our self-worth with our net worth’.

In most cases I am afraid he is correct. The power of films and commercial television, owned incidentally by Rupert Murdoch and Kerry Packer, who have just joined Vanity Fair’s sixty-four richest and most powerful people in the world, is enormous. As Barbara Drury reports in her article ‘Toys “R” Hell’, ‘the world’s toy markets and fast food empires have set their sights on your money and they are using your children to get it. This will be achieved by the wave of movies and marketing [films] that is about to break on Australia’. As she said, ‘It is a rare parent who can tough out their offspring’s relentless demands for Star War’s paraphernalia or the latest Barbie’.

Richard Neville also quoted the figures released by the United Nations in 1996 which revealed that the net worth of the world’s 358 richest billionaires is equal to the combined income of the poorest 45% of the world’s population. ‘After the first billion’, Neville asks, ‘how about the rest going into a global kitty for the super poor?’ This idea of course would seem preposterous to those who owned that first billion and whose aim was to own not only two or three but many more. Other figures of interest are that in Australia in 1993 the top 10% of households controlled 40% of Australia’s wealth, while the top 50% controlled 95% of Australia’s wealth. I’m sure the present day figures would reveal an even more depressing outlook. And whilst we’re on the subject of figures, 50% of the world’s refugees are children and an estimated 97% of refugees remain in Third World countries. Peter Nobel, Ombudsman for Refugees, Sweden, said, ‘The World needs change, new thinking and new people. Migration is change because it brings the new. What is good in the old will survive the change. What is bad I hope will not. In the meantime we
must continue our work for Human Rights and respect for all human beings’. Remember what John Donne said, ‘No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main ... Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind’ (Meditation 15). Richard Neville’s question reminded me of one raised by the former leader of Tanzania, Sir Julius Nyerere. I was fortunate enough to be present at an address he made at the Royal Commonwealth Society in London. Here was a humble man, making a plea for help and sacrifice for his poverty-stricken country and the equally poverty-stricken inhabitants, to a group, most of whom would have been regarded amongst the rich and elite of Britain. When he concluded questions were asked for and one woman stood up and said, ‘Sir Julius, are you really asking me to sell my country home?’ Sir Julius, a very gentle man, smiled wryly and replied, a reply I will never forget, ‘Madam, isn’t one home enough for you?’ His plea I am afraid fell on deaf ears.

A group of British coalminers pointed out that God had been replaced by Mammon. ‘The owners don’t believe in God because they’ve got their heaven here on earth’. This new world religion finds one of its firmest believers in the present Australian government, and it is with their blessing that the multinationals seek to introduce individual contracts and do away with collective bargaining; the old divide and rule principle is applied, and in spite of the defiant stand by the unions, ‘United we stand/Divided we beg’, one feels that they have little chance against such odds. With the gradual demise of the unions and with the subsequent loss of jobs there is an increasing social insecurity; human beings were described recently, by the leader of one big multinational, bidding for yet another state owned asset as ‘controllable market labour’, labour which can be dumped on a rubbish heap when no longer deemed of any use. Along with all of this one sees a whittling away of the welfare state, a high increase in jobless, particularly amongst the youth, an alarming suicide rate which not only includes the young but also the old, who no longer feel there is anyone or any institution to take care of them. In a ‘user pays’ society what happens when the user can’t pay?

‘Unemployment’, as Sir William Deane said, ‘presents a loser with the stark face of poverty – material poverty in the form of homelessness, inadequate clothing, sustenance, care or help. And so often the grim companion of disadvantage is the poverty of spirit’.

When you take away a people’s right to work you take not so much their money, though this of course is important, but even more important is the removal of their self-esteem and loss of confidence.

Our leaders have failed us. With full intent to destroy union power, to downsize the work field, a shift to casual labour and job insecurity, deregulated hours and the attempt to introduce a twelve hour day, the government had very successfully succeeded in dividing us along economic, life style, age and career lines. We have indeed become
Disraeli’s two nations. But where the leaders have failed us even more is that, as Helen Trinca stated, ‘they have also failed to fill the intellectual and policy vacuum left when Australia jettisoned the right to work. In her Larry Adler lecture given at the Sydney Institute on 13 August 1997 Australia’s distinguished novelist Shirley Hazzard remarked, ‘Years ago, in America, an elderly maverick in public life asked: “Does the economy exist for us, or we for the economy?” Who would be foolhardy enough to ask that question now? Humanism is being thrown over as yet another piece of outmoded baggage, without consideration of what is being given up, or fear of what this conversion will make of us’.

Shirley Hazzard’s is not a lone voice crying in the wilderness. Her sentiments were echoed by another distinguished novelist, David Ireland, whose latest book The Chosen has just been published. ‘Westerners have stripped the world of the sacred, the transcendent, and now have no centre, no stable place to stand, no point where the inside that makes us what we are can view the world about us and the world behind that. Behind bitumen and bricks, glass and concrete, rubber tyres, airports, McDonald’s ... we are restoring the sacred to those who value it, from whom we wrenched it away, yet we count nothing sacred ourselves. We live spiritually centreless lives with few meanings beyond food and family, comfort and career path. We have lost that central seriousness around which the rest orbits and to which it refers’.

And don’t think that economic rationalism dies with you. On the contrary even the dead are not free of it. Here I am referring to what is euphemistically called the ‘Revitalization of Sandgate’. In discussing the Sandgate issue I would stress that I have no desire to give offence to people whose relatives are buried there. Sandgate, I should explain, is the second largest cemetery in the State of NSW and there is no doubt that there are many historic aspects related to it which we are told that the Trust plans to capitalize on. The headlines tell it all. ‘New life for Sandgate Cemetery’. No need to wait for the day of judgement eh! No, Sandgate is going to be revamped and if the Sandgate Cemetery Trust has its way Sandgate is not only going to be ‘revitalized’ (facelifts are also provided) so that it becomes not only a major tourist attraction but also a place of ‘passive recreation’. Given the nature of its inhabitants I would suggest it will indeed be a place of ‘passive recreation’. But that’s not all. Oh no! Not for those who are going to flock to it as it is turned into a major tourist attraction. We have been assured that no existing graves will be recycled – think of the blood and bone potential – but more ‘income producing measures’ have to be introduced to make it a viable project. These include ‘a lawn cemetery’ (placed I might add on one of the busiest and noisiest corners in Newcastle – not much chance for ‘passive recreation’ there – ‘a commercial nursery, an annual open garden day, a columbarium, encouraging double use of single graves for couples, public tours, a computerised data base with a fee for people
compiling family trees, a service on Mother's Day and a Friends of Sandgate group'.

Then of course there is the question of tenure. I know many think of that term only in relationship to academics but the dead have now joined the academics. The draft plans of the Trust are full of references to 'the idea of limited tenure for grave plots', but so far the NSW Government has rejected this idea. You can be sure that the Trust will persevere in its demands and it will come as no surprise to you that the Chairman of the Sandgate Cemetery Trust is an undertaker.

All of this must provide good news for those who worried about ageing. There’s no longer any need to worry. Just leave it up to the market forces and if you feel like being revitalized I’m sure that for a fee the Sandgate Cemetery Trust will be happy to oblige.

By the way, if you think that the Sandgate Cemetery Trust has got the game sewn up, forget it. The papers have just informed us in an article entitled 'Foreign Bodies', that 'almost one in three Australian bodies will be laid to rest by an American-owned company'. Two multi-nationals head the list and one we are told would make it Australia's ninth largest, not far behind Rio Tinto. The president of the Australian-owned company is rather angry about it.

'There is absolutely no way we should be allowing the Americans to dominate our funeral industry,' he says. 'There is no export advantage - you can’t export bodies and there is no technology transfer - all you need is a back hoe. They have nothing to bring to the industry apart from their marketing techniques. They are adding to our foreign debt and looking to take advantage of Australians in their bereavement'. But then the Americans have always had the edge on dealing with 'The Loved One[s]', haven't they?

In the following section I would like to discuss racism, Pauline Hanson and in particular the plight of Australian Aborigines.

The catchcry for the last election was for 'all of us'. But who were 'all of us' or who are 'all of us'?

There is a particularly obnoxious game being played at the moment, especially by Australian youths. It's called 'Pick the Aussie' as if there is such a national identity. I happened to be party to a conversation between two women whom I knew to be of Irish Catholic descent. They were discussing the terrible state of affairs in Australia. The conversation ran something like this. 'It’s terrible all this violence isn’t it? You know there wasn’t any before “they” came!' I refrained from pointing out that violence had been an integral part of Australia’s history since the first white settlement. The conversation continued. 'They should bring back the death penalty don’t you think?' I said, 'No, I do not think so'. Then came the reply, 'Well they should be sent back to where they came from'. My question to that was, 'But what if they are Australian citizens?' 'Ah' back came the answer, 'but they’re not real Australian like us are they?' I was tempted to point out to them that the surgeon to the Port Phillip Association, Dr Alexander Thomson, claimed that the Irish were 'utterly
useless ... intellectually inferior even to the aborigines’, and Governor Arthur begged the Colonial office not to send Irish convicts to Australia, as they would lead to the impoverishment of the colony’s intellectual and spiritual life’, but I felt those pieces of information would have fallen on deaf ears and my suggestion that the ‘real Australians’ were the aborigines would only bring forth more ignorance and intolerance than I felt up to fighting. I decided to leave them ‘as ignorant as Paddy’s pigs’ (a common derogatory term about the Irish), blissful in that ignorance.

I am well aware that racism is not confined to Australia. Other countries have their Pauline Hansons, their Le Pens, their Ian Paisleys, their Enoch Powells, their Ku Klux Klans, to say nothing of the neo-Nazi groups that have arisen all over Europe. By mentioning these bodies I am not excusing Hanson. I am simply pointing out that Australia is not unique. Nor is it unique in its barbaric behaviour towards the indigenous population. Where Australia is unique I believe is in the continuation of that policy towards the aborigines today.

We all know that racism played a central role in Australia’s Federation (1901) with White Australia firmly nailed to its masthead. When Dr Lois O’Donoghue launched 1901 – Our Future’s Past she pointed out that ‘the Fathers of Federation had put indigenous people in the Constitution only to exclude us’, in any census taken aborigines were not to be ‘counted as
part of Australia’s population’. Aborigines were considered an inferior race which under the laws of Social Darwinism would eventually die out. It was not until the referendum of 1967 thirty years ago when 90% of Australians voted to make aborigines Australian citizens.

I quote from Alfred Deakin, one of the founding fathers of Australian Federation, an intelligent, cultured, widely read man. (Compare Thomas Carlyle and his essay on ‘The Nigger Question’.) Deakin objected not only to the Chinese but to all who could not become ‘Anglicized without delay’. This included ‘Southern Europeans of the lower Latin type’. What is perhaps most fascinating is his fear of the civilized ‘alien races’ with the Japanese singled out.

I contend that the Japanese require to be excluded because of their high abilities. I quite agree ... that the Japanese are the most dangerous because they most nearly approach us, and would, therefore, be our most formidable competitors. It is not the bad qualities, but the good qualities of these alien races that make them dangerous to us. It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance and low standard of living that make them such competitors ... the faculties that make them dangerous to us are those which make their labour so cheap and their wants too few. The effect of the contact of two people, such as our own, and those constituting the alien races, is not to lift them up to our standard, but to drag our labouring population down to theirs. It is the business qualities, the business aptitude, and general capacity of these people that make them dangerous, and the fact that while they remain an element in our population, they are incapable of being assimilated.

Already the economic fears and racism were inextricably linked. In a time of recession and unemployment racism is quick to raise its ugly head as the outgoing chairwoman of the NSW Ethnic Communities Council, Ms Angela Chan pointed out just recently. We forget very quickly that when we needed labour we very rapidly obtained it from any source we could, as was the rest of the Western world (see Peter Lyssiotis’s montages, pp. vi, 22). When we no longer need it we try to throw it back. Malcolm Fraser, himself a Liberal, pointed out to John Howard on the ABC television programme, Prime Ministers on Prime Ministers, ‘Now people say immigration takes jobs, but as immigration has been reduced unemployment becomes more entrenched’.

The other scapegoats were the Asians, particularly the Chinese, many of whom had been brought as miners during the gold rushes of the 1850s, just as migrants from Europe and eventually Asia were brought in after the Second World War to supply much needed labour for the great industrial boom that followed that war. Peter Lyssiotis’s montage reminds us, ‘To those lands which have machines labourers shall be given’.

The policy of ‘White Australia’ was firmly nailed to Australia’s masthead and the Bulletin had as its motto until December 1960, ‘Australia for the Whiteman’. Known popularly as ‘the bushman’s Bible’ the Bulletin supposedly represented the ideals celebrated in the legend of the 90s, (the 1890s), the bushman’s legend, namely egalitarianism and a fair go for all. The only catch to it was ‘for all’. Like Pauline Hanson’s ‘For All of
Us' the ‘all’ was far from being inclusive. ‘All’ meant being male, white and anti-intellectual and its values are perhaps best summed up by Harry in Thea Astley’s *It’s Raining in Mango.*

*I’m part of the established Australian social structure, he would say, and I can’t help it.*

*mate*

*horse*

*dog*

*missus*

*wog*

*poof*

*boong*

*that’s*

*the*

*pecking order.*

See, he would say, *a poem, a kind of poem of structure. And as many girls as you can get on the side.*

*Do they count? someone might ask.*

*You’re kidding, he would say.*

The idea of Australian and mateship was taken to ridiculous limits when T. Inglis Moore, an arch-nationalist stated in his book *Social Patterns in Australian Literature,* that Patrick White’s novel, *The Tree of Man,* was both undemocratic and un-Australian (for Inglis Moore the two were synonymous). The reason for his judgement? Stan Parker, the hero of the novel, didn’t have a mate!

We are told that John Howard takes with him to each office to which he moves, three pictures, Winston Churchill, Mrs Thatcher and Russell Drysdale’s painting *The Cricketers*. The first two I can easily understand, the third is no doubt attributable to Mr Howard’s declared love of cricket. But let me say to you Mr Howard, what you are doing to the indigenous people of Australia and to many other ‘ordinary Australians’ is ‘just not cricket’. While the positive features of family life have long been recognized, white Australians have actively promoted the fragmentation of black families. No doubt you would adhere to the dictum, ‘The family that prays together stays together’. Tell that to the stolen generation. Or are one culture’s prayers superior to another’s?

Is it true, as Pauline Hanson insists, that we are a Christian country (I wonder if she knows the etymology of Christian) and that the prayers of the heathens, pagans etc. go unanswered! By the way back to the Catholics again. When South Australia advertised for new settlers it assured them that it was a state free from pagans and popery!

You are on record, Mr Howard, as saying, ‘Personally I feel deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under past generations towards indigenous people. (He is referring to the stolen generation, see p. 14). [But] Australians should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions. But is it so hard to say ‘I’m sorry’ Mr Howard? I worked in Nigeria for some time and one custom struck me in
particular – namely, when any misfortune befell anyone the Nigerians, even though they had nothing whatsoever to do with what had happened, would always, and with genuine concern, say ‘Sorry’.

When it comes to Pauline Hanson, John Howard declares she is exercising her right to free speech. When it comes to the Australian actress Ruth Cracknell, who made the accusation that ‘this country [Australia] is being presented as racist, callous, and uncaring to our indigenous people’, John Howard’s reply was ‘Now, I find that offensive’. This is not to say that John Howard is not worried about the racist issue. He is. But not for the reasons we would hope for. His worry is that it will affect our trade and deter tourists and fee-paying students from coming to Australia. Recently a young Japanese tourist was murdered in Queensland. The Government worry was that this would have an adverse effect on our Asian tourist market. Not all Australians are so heartless. I quote from a letter from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 October 1997.

It is a sad day for this country when a Japanese citizen is murdered on our soil and our greatest concern is its effect on tourists. Where is our compassion?  

Sophie J. Kunze

Dr George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, on his recent visit to Australia after condemning Hanson’s policies stated he believed ‘that any modern nation has got to come to terms with minorities and allow them their place in society’. Continuing he said there was no point in trying to preserve a ‘pure Australian identity, whatever that is’.

Father Frank Brennan, a Jesuit human rights activist believes thirteen frustrating years of Opposition actually managed to blindfold Howard and his colleagues to fundamental changes that were being wrought on Australian society. Brennan is convinced Howard persuaded himself that the voices that came to the fore in Australian society during those years were aberrations, symptomatic of a trendy, Labor-induced political correctness. The more strident tones of feminism, the human rights movement, the High Court decision on land-title rights for Aborigines, the gay movement, the ‘Asianization’ of Australia ... these and other uncomfortable incursions into a better-understood Australian culture could be explained away as periphery to the mainstream. Once the Coalition got back into Government ‘political correctness’ would be sidelined and the Australian mainstream would reassert itself.

Of course there are many who say like Hanson and her followers, ‘Well you might think we’re racist but look at those other countries who are far more racist’. And even if they agree (which Hanson doesn’t) that we committed acts of genocide against the aborigines they point to all those other countries that have done the same and are still doing it. But they’re not really white are they. It was therefore almost I feel with a great deal of smugness and glee that Sweden’s forced sterilization program, was reported in the Australian press. The heading of one major article was ‘Swedish by Design’ with the subtitle ‘We thought of Sweden as the
The Loss of Our Humanity

perfect state – caring, fair and at the forefront of the international battle in defence of human rights’. And what have we found out? That over a period of forty years the Swedes forcefully sterilized people, not because of race or colour, but according to Majia Runcis, who has examined this state authorized programme as part of her doctoral thesis: ‘You [had] to behave yourself and act like a “typical Swede“. Judgements were based on “social behaviour that was deemed threatening because people were difficult or unusual … the victims were misfits in a collective society that cherished uniformity above all”’. (Remember nobody’s different unless they’ve got something wrong with them.) Like the massacres of the aboriginal people no mention of these sterilizations have, according to Dagens Nyheter, a major Swedish newspaper, appeared in Swedish textbooks or Swedish encyclopaedias. Incidentally, the victim featured in the article on Sweden was a woman called Maria Nordin. She had fallen hopelessly behind in her school studies and the doctor classified her as ‘feeble-minded’. No-one had bothered to check her eyes and Nordin, who had no glasses, could not see the blackboard.

‘See’, say the smug Australians, ‘what a so-called perfect social welfare state can do. Look what Howard and Pauline Hanson are saving us from’.

Japan too, like Sweden, has refused to acknowledge in its textbooks its dark history nor will it say ‘I’m sorry’. As the leader in The Sydney Morning Herald, 5 September 1997 wrote:

The case of the poisoned textbooks remains a constant proof that Japan, unlike Germany, continues to resist facing the truth about its war history. This resistance, along with the Government’s refusal to fully apologise for wartime atrocities between 1942 and 1945, must raise questions about Japan’s capacity to play a role in regional security arrangements. It should also be a warning to those who sneer at the so-called ‘black-armband’ interpretation of Australia’s history. Australia must also be prepared to confront ugly aspects of its own past.

I can’t agree more with the last statement. The notoriously racist former Minister for Australian Immigration, Arthur Calwell, defended the deportation of a Chinese refugee who, he claimed, was not eligible to become a permanent resident of Australia.

There are many Wongs in the Australian community, but I have to say – and I’m sure that the Honourable Member for Balaclava will not mind me doing so – that “two Wongs don’t make a white”.

No, two Wongs do not make a white. Neither do many wrongs make it right for Australia to ignore its shameful past. As David Ross, Chairman of the Indigenous Land Corporation, Canberra, ACT, wrote in his letter to The Weekend Australian, 26-27 April 1997.

We are about to enter a new age of squattting. The beneficiaries will not be struggling farmers on small holdings, but the pastoral companies and international corporations which have already benefited from a massive land theft and a century of exploiting Aborigimal labour.

The real history is a violent land grab by squatters whose killings or reprisal raids were tolerated or even actively supported by colonial authorities … The Commonwealth is poised to implement “effective extinguishment” to give pastoralists the “certainty and predictability” the Prime Minister says they deserve.
It is not just our intellectuals and ‘chardonnay socialists’ who are leading the fight for justice. I am on record as saying – and meaning – that it has always given me pleasure to beat the establishment. When it comes to the present situation in Australia I am forced to eat my words. And I’m forced to do so because some of the most outspoken opponents of the injustices to so many Australians today could not be called anything but establishment. They include amongst others Alec Shand QC; Michael Kirby QC; Malcolm Fraser, former Liberal Prime Minister of Australia; Archbishop Hollingsworth; Sir William Deane, Governor-General of Australia; Jesuit Frank Brennan and Sir Ronald Wilson. All of these men have been close to power, prestige and privilege in their lifetime and inside the door of the ‘establishment’. Some, indeed, have even been vilified as ‘Capitalist Pigs! The Patriarchy!’ But now they represent the radical fringe. All of them, in one way or another, providing a voice for the voiceless.

The New Zealand novelist, Janet Frame, once said, ‘They reduced us to nothingness, then scorn us for the nothingness’. There could be no better application of these words than towards Australia’s indigenous population. This next section will take up the question of the stolen generation.

Sir Ronald Wilson was appointed by the former Labor Prime Minister, Paul Keating to look into the question of ‘the Stolen Generation’, the title given to the Aboriginal children who had been forcibly removed from their parents and put into institutions or foster homes. Some were never
to see their parents again. Many were brutalized and treated as slaves. The council set up was known as HREOC, conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Community. The Inquiry took the form of interviewing and gaining evidence in public and private sittings from indigenous people, government and church representatives, former mission staff, foster and adoptive parents, doctors and health professionals, academics, police and others. People also made written submissions. Most hearings were conducted by Sir Ronald Wilson, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson. The Inquiry was not 'raking over the past' for its own sake. The truth is the past is very much with us today, and the continuing devastation of the lives of indigenous Australians. The results do not make for pretty reading.

Indigenous children have been forcibly removed from their families and communities since the very first days of the European occupation of Australia. In that time, not one indigenous family has escaped the effects. Most families have been affected in one or more generations by the removal of one or more children. Nationally, the Inquiry concludes that between one in three and one in ten indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970.

Perhaps the last words should be left to the Aborigines.

We may go home, but we cannot relive our childhoods. We may reunite with our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunties, uncles, communities, but we cannot relive the 20, 30, 40 years that we spent without their love and care, and they cannot undo the grief and mourning they felt when we were separated from them. We can go home to ourselves as Aborignals, but this does not erase the
attacks inflicted on our hearts, minds, bodies and souls, by caretakers who thought their mission was to eliminate us as Aboriginals.

The report called Bringing Them Home was submitted to the Federal Attorney in April 1997, and needless to say it did not please Australia’s present Prime Minister. Nor would he have been pleased when the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr Ramos-Horta, called Australia’s Aborigines one of the ‘most victimised and dispossessed people in the world’. Seemingly impervious to such criticism, John Howard says he wants Australians to feel ‘comfortable and relaxed about their past’. Hence his refusal to say ‘I’m sorry’. The man who wants Australia to introduce a national Sorry Day which would stop the nation for a few minutes like the Melbourne Cup (a horse race) does, has not been reappointed. Sir Julius Nyere would have approved of the sticker Sir Wilson once had on the bumper bar of his car. ‘Live simply so others may simply live’. He has just been elected unopposed to the presidency of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid. We can be certain he will carry on the battle for the disadvantaged and dispossessed. Political correctness has been invoked as a term of abuse for those people who have thought to bring marginalized people into the framework of a unified nation. Sir Ronald Wilson’s reply to that is, ‘I’m happy to be seen as politically correct if that means being sensitive to the problems of the disadvantaged’.

Not only has the Howard government tried to introduce its 10-point plan, it has also planned to reduce a support system for aboriginal children known as Abstudy. This reduction will come into effect on 1 January 1998. Abstudy’s aim was/is to give the underprivileged a chance to obtain a better education which will enable them to fight for their own rights. There are some Aborigines already in this position but they are very few and far between. It is not that the Aborigines fighting for their rights do not appreciate the support of the other Australians; Ron Wilson spoke of the bond that had been made with Mick Dodson, a bond he said that ‘cannot be severed’. But like all people when it comes to fighting for one’s rights, one always feels more secure if the person fighting for you comes from your own background. Whilst writing this I am reminded of the tragedy at a football match in Belgium where a surge of British supporters caused a wall separating them from rival Italian supporters to collapse. Many of the latter fans were killed and it was decided that the trial would take place in Belgium where the incident occurred. A hue and cry went up from the British because they said they could not expect the same sort of justice from the Belgian court as they would get from the British courts. I wonder how many of these British fans saw the film In the Name of the Father?

I have mentioned the intellectuals, the radical upper class – yes Australia does have a class system – the writers, artists and aboriginal leaders fighting for their rights and a better world. In Sydney on 10 August 1997 a Reconciliation concert was held as the first fundraiser for a people’s movement, Australians for Native Title (ANT) with the stated
The aim of ensuring that the 10-point plan of John Howard does not become law. Speakers included indigenous leader, Professor Marcia Langton, who said that if the bill became law, it would ‘render Australia’s first people as propertyless relics of the frontier wars’. Further, the ‘modern squattocracy’ would win land for themselves in which other Australians – not only Aborigines – have underlying rights, because it is Crown land. Needless to say, Noel Pearson was also one of the speakers. He said, ‘I always, even in moments of despair, find myself being reminded that we must not be gloomy about the Australian people. There are sparks of goodwill, and empathy and decency lies in the hearts of most Australians I have come across’.

Should Noel Pearson look for them he is sure to find such people in a town called Newcastle. This is not just hometown patriotism speaking. It is also a truth acknowledged by the aboriginal groups working in this area who regard the town most sympathetic to their causes. Perhaps it is because one group of battlers recognizes another. In an article written by Milton Cockburn he described it as ‘a city of myths, but the one great truth is its vibrant tribalism and indomitable spirit’. There are indeed many myths about Newcastle, a dirty, bolshevik, anti-intellectual town that would go on strike at the drop of a hat. Some of it true, some not. But there is one truth about it, it is a city that doesn’t know how to give up. It, more than any other city in Australia, represents the colonial syndrome. And as the Leader of the Opposition, Kim Beazley, said just recently, ‘Newcastle is a resilient symbol of the state of the nation and its residents are the embodiment of the Australian spirit’. That’s what a politician has to say, might be your response. But I would remind you that Newcastle is Labor’s Blue Ribbon seat. Today it is embroiled in a major dispute between the coal miners and the multinational company, Rio Tinto. The government support for Rio Tinto is a potent symbol in its attempts to use its legislation to ‘facilitate’ companies’ efforts to rein in union power. The landlords – the owners and managers of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company – were of course ‘absentee’ landlords, the smoke-drowned town was not for them. At that time a great part of the wealth of Australia was being produced by the industrial workers, The Unknown Industrial Prisoner as David Ireland described them in his novel, but little if any of that wealth was returned to the workers. The wealth created by the multinationals goes mainly to the multinationals. I have a friend, Felix Mnthali, who is professor at the University of Lesoto. He told me once that should he ever teach Jane Austen’s novels, especially Mansfield Park, the first question he asked his students was, ‘Why doesn’t anyone work?’ Now BHP has announced its withdrawal from Newcastle to go offshore to a cheaper labour force which means the loss of 10,000 jobs in all. What was to rub salt into the wound was on the day the BHP announced its decision the executive of BHP held a party for its manager. It seems that Nero still fiddles while Rome burns. The
average unemployment figures for Australia have just been announced at 7.3%; in Newcastle they are 13.8% and more than half the population live below the poverty line. Surprisingly enough, given the circumstances, the Aboriginal resistance movements have found greater support in Newcastle than any other town or city.

Finally to the question of history. And what a vexed question that is. Pauline Hanson wants us 'to start the fight to regain our history, our heritage, our land, our pride, our patriotism, and all "that has been taken from us by successive governments"'. 'History', Salman Rushdie reminded us, 'is the story of the winners'. Does Pauline Hanson really believe that 'the aborigines were cannibals [who] killed and ate their own women and children'? (Pauline Hanson: The Truth). Do we want to return to that sanitized history of the past, what the novelist Shirley Hazzard has called the 'toy-box' of history? Do we wish to remain ignorant and hence unable to understand what injustices were really perpetrated against Australia's original inhabitants? It would appear that that is John Howard's desire. Speaking in the Sir Robert Menzies Lecture on 18 November 1996, Mr Howard said:

This black armband view of our past reflects the belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination.

I take a very different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed.

It is little wonder that Salman Rushdie wrote, 'History has been the story of the winners'. And so it has been in Australia. I have asked over 100 young Australians what they learnt about the Aborigines. The reply of everyone was 'Nothing'. The truth has been hidden by a veil of silence. If Australians 'had known about this history', as NSW Premier Bob Carr said, 'they would have known about the stolen generation. This knowledge might have led to a greater understanding of the dysfunctional lifestyles forced on aboriginal families by government policies over many decades'.

I must admit that this editorial has cost me much effort and research and if I'm honest, anguish and sometimes despair, and I have to admit to times when I felt like saying, 'Well what the hell. What can I do
about it? Why don't I, like so many others, just sit back and say - well that's how it is'. But when I thought like that I was reminded of a conversation at the end of David Putnam's film The Mission. For the benefit of those who have not seen what I consider to be a brilliant film, it is set in the time of the Holy Roman Empire when the Pope dictated who owned and ruled the world. A cardinal was sent to South America to adjudicate between Spain and Portugal over land controlled by Spain which Portugal wanted. In this jungle there existed a Spanish mission run by Jesuits, who for once had a good press, and gave haven to the indigenous people who were at the mercy of slave traders, both Spanish and Portuguese, though the Spanish denied they were slave traders. Against his will and conscience the cardinal agreed to the destruction of the mission. When the destruction was over he turned to the courtier who was his advisor and asked the question, 'Was such destruction necessary?' The courtier replied, 'We must work in the world - the world is thus'. I have always remembered the cardinal's reply, 'No, thus we have made the world'. The cardinal then writes to the Pope. 'So Your Holiness, your priests are dead and I am left alive. But in truth, it is I who am dead and they who live. For as always Your Holiness, the Spirit of the Dead will survive in the memory of the living'. I was reminded of these words by a statement made by the indigenous leader, Lois O'Donoghue, 'We can and will forgive but we cannot forget'.

No, I am not personally responsible for the massacre and genocide of the aborigines, any more than my English relatives were responsible for the treatment of my mother's Irish ancestors. BUT I feel I would be not just heartless but lacking in humanity if I did not do my best to help to rectify the wrongs of the past and to provide equal rights for all human beings. In a recent protest march in Newcastle against Hanson, Howard's 10-point plan and racism, I carried a placard which read, 'Tolerance is not enough. We must fight'. Remember, 'Silence is the ancient language of the defeated'.

Being born and bred in Newcastle and fed during the long strikes by the unions, and having ancestors called Brady of whom it was said, 'if any of them drown in the river don’t bother to look downstream for the body as it is sure to have gone upstream', it is no wonder I am what I am. Defeat is a word alien to my vocabulary. It was only the other day that my lifelong friend, Sonia Walkom, reminded me that in squash, even if the final hung on the results I would, when it got to 8-8, always call 9. I can well understand why Sir Ronald Wilson carries Dostojevski with him, quoting Katerina Marmeladov, who is turned out of her home with her three children on the day of her husband's funeral: 'O Lord, is there no justice in the world? Who should you protect if not us orphans? All right, we shall see! There is law and justice on earth. There is, there is! I'll find it!'

And we will.
I would like to leave the final words to the children of Australia for it is in their hands our future lies. In a letter to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 1997, a Gareth Kimberley commented about ‘Aussie kids ... at Canterbury Boys High School being relegated to the status of a minority group’. On July 19th there was a reply to his letter. I quote:

As past and present students of Canterbury Girls High School, we would like to reply to Gareth Kimberly in defence of the multicultural nature of an increasing number of Sydney high schools.

Our school does not consist of an arbitrary division between 8 per cent ‘run of the mill’ Aussie kids and 92 per cent non-English-speaking background kids. We were under the peculiar assumption that we are all Australian and that coming from a non-English-speaking background does not exclude you.

While those from Anglo backgrounds are a numerical minority, their views and beliefs are by no means relegated due to this fact.

Our experiences at Canterbury Girls have affirmed our view that the policy of multiculturalism is indeed ‘wonderful’. If Mr Kimberley believes that a tolerant, open and bilingual student body will lead to support for Pauline Hanson, may we suggest that this is why we’re struggling to become the clever country.

**class**

A present day representation of a happy Australian Multicultural class. Courtesy of *My Macquarie Picture Dictionary*, 1990

**Housing Race Bias: So What’s New?**

One Birmingham (UK) letting agent, himself an Asian, had a special coding system for people seeking accommodation. The letter G on the client’s card meant West Indian or Asian, while the letters OYS stood for Irish, Chinese and students respectively. Reported in *The Guardian*, 16 September 1980.

An advertisement, on plain paper with no letterhead, described a house [in Sydney] as ‘highly desirable’ ... with a ‘lavish’ gas kitchen and ‘immaculate’ presentation throughout. And one more thing: it was in a street with ‘... no boarding houses or Kooris’. (Koori is an aborigine.) Reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 September 1997.
The Loss of Our Humanity

21

NOTES

1. The Mabo case – Eddie Mabo and Others versus the State of Queensland – was a decision of the High Court which found that Aboriginal Native Title was not extinguished – or wiped out – by the British invasion and that Australia was not terra nullius, Latin for ‘empty land’. It was the first major step in the restoration of Aboriginal traditional land rights and was finally settled in the High Court of Australia on 3 June 1992.

2. Wik is the name of an Aboriginal group which live in North Queensland. The Wik people’s land had been granted to a grazier as a ‘pastoral lease’ but for many years the land had not been used. The Wik people took the case to the High Court of Australia to find out if their Native Title still existed there. The High Court decided that the Wik people’s Native Title Rights were not extinguished and that the Aborigines have a right to use Wik land for traditional purposes, and to have a say in its future. This right co-exists with the pastoralists’ right to use the land for pastoral purposes. Under pressure from the pastoralists, rich individuals, Foreign Companies, Mining Companies and Land Speculators, John Howard has introduced a 10-point plan amendment challenging the High Court’s Wik decision. The winners – those just mentioned; the losers, not only the Aboriginal and Torres Strain Islander Peoples but all Australians concerned with our environment and even more so with reconciliation with Australia’s original inhabitants. Numerous instances have shown that Aboriginals and pastoralists and mining companies can work in harmony with one another. Wik and Mabo can and will work, and all groups can live in harmony given the willingness to try. John Howard, in his determination to push through his 10-point plan is willing to defy the Australian Law Reform Commission which has stated that Howard’s planned amendments will effectively extinguish native title on pastoral leases and is unconstitutional. If Howard succeeds he will make Australia a pariah. It is my own personal opinion that the majority of Australians will rise up against Howard.

On Australia Day Mr Bob Burgess, National Party candidate for the seat of Leichhardt in North Queensland described a naturalization ceremony as a ‘dewoggmg’ ceremony. The word WOG of course derives from the pejorative term applied ironically by the British to Western Oriental Gentlemen. In Australia the word ‘wog’ is a pejorative term used to describe Australians of Mediterranean background. When Mr Burgess applied the term ‘Dewoggming’ he implied ‘that candidates for citizenship are contaminated by and must be purged of their previous cultural and national identity, as if naturalisation ceremonies resemble the quarantine procedure whereby plane travellers arriving in Australia are sprayed with insecticide before being allowed to disembark – an idea reinforced by another meaning of wog as both a minor illness and the organism which causes it’. Mr Burgess thought he was being funny. Most Australians didn’t. Mr Katter, who holds the adjoining National Party seat to Mr Burgess attacked Mr Burgess’s critics as ‘little slanty-eyed ideologues’. As Dorothy Jones remarks, ‘substitute “degooking” [a gook is a pejorative term for an Asian] for “dewoggming” and the latent hostility in Mr Burgess’s remark becomes more obvious.'
Two weeks ago tributes flowed in the wake of the resignation as Federal Director of the Liberal Party, of Andrew Robb, mastermind behind the Howard landslide at the Federal poll of 2 March 1996. That Robb had devised and run a brilliant strategy based upon an acute understanding of the state of the psychology of the nation is not disputed. Robb knew which were the hot buttons and how to press them. He engineered an electoral victory using state of the art polling and communication techniques borrowed from the Republican Party in the United States.

For my part however, I still harbour grave reservations about the ruthlessness of the strategies that Robb employed to get John Howard the prize that had for so long eluded the conservatives. Let me say this: the ugly pall that hangs over the nation, known as the Hanson phenomenon, is the cat that Andrew Robb let out of the bag during the 1996 election campaign. And he knows it.

This was the campaign where the Great Mainstream of Australia rose up against those who for so long had kept its people outcast and dispossessed.

The Great Mainstream of Australia conquered all before it at that March poll. The Great Mainstream then embarked upon a relentless crusade against the appalling state of Aboriginal privilege. The wrath of the Great Mainstream was then visited on immigrants who had for too long been luxuriating in our dole queues. The Great Mainstream freed itself from the bondage of political correctness. The Great Mainstream tore off the black armbands that the former prime minister had foisted upon it. Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty we were free at last. And of course the Great Mainstream was indeed returned to its rightful place in the firmament with the delivery of the new government’s first budget. Or so we were told.

Since Pauline Hanson gave her maiden speech, there has been a lot of public analysis of the politics of blame that was for me, the true undercurrent of that election – not just of Hanson’s own resounding success in the once Labor stronghold of Oxley, but indeed the landslide Coalition success nationally. The recent release of her book *The Truth* has generated more analysis of the circumstances in our society that have given rise to the so-called Hanson phenomenon.
The historical context for the political and economic changes that have led to Pauline Hanson is of course most succinctly captured in the title to Paul Kelly’s seminal account of the Hawke-Keating era in Australian history: *The End of Certainty*. Kelly recently wrote in *The Australian* that:

Hanson symbolises an alienation within part of the community caused by a conjunction of forces – globalisation, economic restructuring and social changes – where people need scapegoats to explain their frustration.

This analysis is now familiar to us. However most of this kind of discussion is focused on Pauline Hanson. But did Hanson deliberately identify these hot buttons in the community as part of a calculated political strategy? The analysts avoid this question. My own view is no. Whilst now she is very much aware of how her scapegoat herding works for her politically, I do not believe that this was the case when she started.

Given her lack of analytical and political sophistication, I believe that Hanson’s identification of these hot buttons was the instinctive manifestation of primal and inarticulate grief. She resonated because she actually believed in the correctness of her complaints, and these complaints were shared and patently widespread amongst many other people in circumstances similar to her own.

This is why of course I am not inclined to support the notion that Pauline Hanson is evil. The ideas she espouses and the feelings she is cultivating and the controversy she is revelling in is certainly ugly and repugnant, but my feelings for her are more of sorrow than anger. I do not believe she knows what she is doing and she is caught in a tragic redneck celebrity vortex from which she does not want to escape.

I am not so concerned with Pauline Hanson. I am concerned with those who know the truth, who are not ignorant of the facts of Aboriginal disadvantage, Asian immigration and so on, but who nevertheless deliberately scapegoat minorities in the same way as Hanson.

There has been almost no analytical focus on the other beneficiaries of the politics of blame: John Howard’s Coalition. Not during the 1995 campaign or in its aftermath. Only when the Prime Minister gave that incredible speech which implied that Pauline Hanson was an issue of free speech was there any focus on the government’s role in the subtle and sometimes not so subtle cultivation and exploitation of the politics of blame.

Only Malcolm MacGregor in *The Australian Financial Review* had the insight and the courage to analyse the strategic exploitation of feelings of resentment and alienation by politicians and apparatchiks more seasoned and more cynical than Pauline Hanson. Read MacGregor’s coverage of the campaign and its aftermath. It is all there. It was brutally honest and foretold of the Australia we have endured over the past twelve months.

Most of the other social and political commentators were either oblivious to the real politik or unwilling to acknowledge its real dynamics,
both before and after the election.

I set out my own interpretation of the psychology underlying the Coalition campaign in a somewhat deranged address to The Sydney Institute in the third week of the campaign. I said that:

The subtle irony of the headline slogan for the 1996 Liberal campaign struck me with a visceral force: for all of us.

By alleging government favouritism and special treatment, unscrupulous people are generating racist sentiment and criticism of government largesse to minorities.

Why has Andrew Robb chosen for all of us as the Liberal’s headline campaign slogan?

It is because on a subliminal level they are seeking to exploit the very sentiment that Pauline Hanson has articulated.

The perception that there are minorities, and Aborigines are unmentioned exemplars, who are living it up, while we in Middle Australia remain unrepresented by the Government, is one which presses some buttons.

It presses buttons with decent Australians at a subliminal level, because they don’t necessarily follow through the nasty logic of the propaganda. These Australians will be repulsed if the logic was put to them in an explicit way, as Pauline Hanson’s comments have. It works however through subtle implication.

The clever and sinister thing about the slogan is that it can be used by different groups to focus resentment and prejudice against other groups.

If your beef was with the ‘Environmentalists’, if you hated ‘The Unions’, if you wanted ‘Asians Out’, if you don’t like ‘The Great Jewish Conspiracy’, if you loathed the ‘Femi-nazis’, if you were sick of the ‘Wog Multiculturalists’, if you wanted to stop black-fellas ‘getting free cars and houses and jobs’: well John Howard was going to govern for all of us.

I further argued that John Howard feigned disgust with Pauline Hanson’s explicit articulation of the subliminal campaign. He was able to have a publicly decent position whilst allowing Andrew Robb to run the nasty subliminal line. Given the overwhelming success of the Robb Campaign I concluded:

Ultimately, for the nation, what is more important than who wins the election, is whether in the process they have damaged the country in their drive for power by galvanising constituencies through projecting resentment and prejudice against minority groups in the community.

You will appreciate that I punctured more life rafts with that speech than a prudent man, feeling the good ship Paul sinking inevitably into the unforgiving depths, would have done in the circumstances.

Despite my foolishness, in retrospect I have to say that my views have not changed much. ‘96 was a very different election for Australia. I don’t know if we have ever had a national election, at least in the modern era, that has traded off the projection of resentment from the mainstream of the community against other sections of the community. For all of us begged the question: for whom had Paul Keating’s Labor government governed if it was not for us? The slogan implied a righteous sense of
deprivation and neglect in Middle Australia. Many uncertainties, frustrations, unfulfilled expectations and dashed ambitions could easily be attributed to government indulgence of minorities and ‘special interest groups’. Of course we in Middle Australia don’t count the numerous business, professional, recreational, religious and community groups that we are members of as ‘special interest groups’. It is only everyone else who are members of favoured ‘special interest groups’.

Andrew Robb’s ’96 campaign was very clever. He made the pet scapegoats groups – most obviously Aborigines, Asians and Unions – Paul Keating’s running mates, in much the same way as the Republicans had made the black prisoner Willie Horton, Michael Dukakis’ running mate in his failed presidential bid. Mabo and Asia had so coloured Keating’s leadership over the previous term – it turned out to be a more than subconscious albatross around Labor’s political throat. This is not to say that Labor was not on the way out for a host of other reasons, but Keating’s vulnerability on these fronts was ruthlessly exploited by Andrew Robb.

It was a watershed election because it seems to me to have been the first time we have employed wedge politics in Australia. Whilst elections in the Northern Territory have routinely generated and exploited white paranoia and racism in relation to Aboriginal people and land rights to secure CLP victories, I cannot think of an election in which Aboriginal Affairs and particularly questions of Aboriginal privilege and comparative white disadvantage, have featured at all in a national election campaign. It was a big part of the undercurrent of the last campaign – particularly in regional Australia – and in my view, it was deliberately so. Remember that John Howard’s senior advisers included a veteran of Northern Territory campaigns by the CLP. Remember also Alan Ramsey’s post-election observation in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that the most severe swings against Labor in the regions coincided with seats with visible Aboriginal populations and therefore Aboriginal issues.

Pauline Hanson, Bob Burgess and Bob Katter were instances when the putrid sewerage broke the surface and became explicit – their contributions were however not unhelpful to the overall strategy. They were instances when the dog whistle could be heard at normal frequency.

Remember the point in the campaign when Bob Katter complained that only Aborigines and the rich could afford to send their children to boarding school to get an education? The most telling thing was John Howard’s response. Whilst he continued to maintain his abhorrence of racism, John Howard said that what Bob Katter was saying was actually true: Aboriginal children did receive benefits that were not available to other country kids. Of course this was an untruth. The Labor Government had already lifted the assets test cut off for Austudy for country children to about three quarters of a million dollars, as part of their drought relief measures, and this agrarian socialism was thanks to
the lobbying by National Party backbenchers like Bob Katter. Furthermore DEET statistics showed whilst there were about 3,000 Aboriginal students on the maximum assistance under Austudy, there were about 11,000 non-Aboriginal students on maximum assistance under Austudy. So through untruth, John Howard was able to give his subtle imprimatur to Katter’s allegation of black privilege and white disadvantage. And Howard’s untruth penetrated.

I think that USA style wedge politics is now with us to stay. It is likely to become a part of election campaigning in our country in the future. The conservatives have struck upon how they can drive the wedge between the broad coalition of interest groups that had otherwise not voted for them. The projection of blame against minorities worked very well for them.

Let me make two points. Firstly, when I realised what the conservatives were doing and how successful and deceptive their strategy was, I resigned myself to accepting that this kind of ruthlessness is to be expected in elections. The drive for power can obliterate all principle and decency. I put myself in Canberra mode and said to myself: they would have been mugs not to do it.

Secondly however, I also hoped and in fact believed that, having been so ruthless in seizing power, that upon gaining government they would change tack. Conscious of the damage their ruthless button-pushing may have inflicted on society, I actually expected the new government to pause and seek to heal some of the wounds they had so vigorously agitated in the community. After all the business of government is not the business of elections.

But even this script for benign hypocrisy was beyond them. Andrew Robb was onto too good a thing. He could not resist pressing those hot buttons that had yielded such great success. Indeed the emergence of Pauline Hanson and the bandwagon that followed in her wake, was too good to miss. So from the earliest days we saw a sustained orgy of divisiveness and meanness about immigration, Aborigines, dole bludgers – courtesy of the new government.

Robb wanted the phenomenon that he had observed well before the election, and which he had successfully capitalised on during it, to become a fundamental cultural shift in the Australian community. He wanted the government to be seen to be tough against the scapegoats and to follow public opinion to the letter, whilst at the same time talking about a government for all of us and promoting concern for the disadvantaged as a matter of charity – not equality or right. The blacks and the Asians and unionists and the dole bludgers had to resume their place on the margins of society where they could be the recipients of a kind of frugal and ascetic charity and grudging tolerance.

Robb wanted to turn our ephemeral madness into a permanent psychosis by making the Howard Government a slavish devotee of the
data which Liberal Party headquarters is able to produce thanks to the techniques which have been learned from American politics.

This is most bizarrely evidenced in the Prime Minister’s constant line that he ‘understands’ whatever ignorant or offensive attitude, prejudice or anger registers in the polls and arises in public debate. Listen, it’s not nice to spit on Asians but I can ‘understand’ why some sections of the community might feel they want to. Listen, I can ‘understand’ that some sections of the community feel that Aborigines have been wasting taxpayers’ money. Listen I can ‘understand’ why you feel the Paxtons and other unemployed and disadvantaged people owe the rest of us. To ‘understand’ allows you to not take a position and indeed, it allows you to be interpreted as legitimising certain views expressed by other people without claiming them as your own.

The cultural shift which Robb set out to achieve, so that Howard’s battlers could remain Howard’s battlers, is what, in my view, has fuelled the racism and social division that so worries Australians today.

There is criticism of the Prime Minister’s failure of judgement last year and through the course of this year in not repudiating Hanson’s views. This is too benign and naive. The truth is that John Howard made very careful and deliberate judgements about how to deal with Hanson based on the advice of his courtiers. The tack was to ensure that those who supported Hanson’s views were not affronted by prime ministerial repudiation, to make clear to them that they were entitled to feel the way they did and to give the impression that the Prime Minister shared their views, and to assure them that the Prime Minister did not think Hanson (and therefore they) were entirely wrong. The objective was: to appropriate to the Prime Minister the resonance that Hanson had roused in the community and to consolidate the basic battler shift that had occurred during the election. These judgements were taken on the assumption that the Hanson phenomenon would eventually fizzle and John Howard would become heir to the constituency that was most compelled by her sentiments.

Of course Hanson has not faded as expected. She may well do so in time. But her resilience and indeed growth in notoriety has begun to worry the Coalition’s leadership team, if not the Prime Minister. The Howard/Robb plan for Hanson did not work out entirely as planned. Howard and Robb have played dangerous politics with the Australian community. They have done no small damage to important progress made in Australian society in recent decades.

If we have erred on the side of giving the Prime Minister the benefit of our doubt, then his exchange with David, a caller on Alan Jones’ talk back show on 2UE ruptures that hope. David said: ‘Alan, I’d like you to put something to Mr Howard. I want him to consider that you’ve worked all week, right up ‘till Wednesday afternoon to pay taxes – direct, indirect taxes and government charges. Now, I don’t want to see one more cent
of my tax dollar go to reconciliation. I believe there’s enough money allocated for, per head, of indigenous people to make every one of them well off, provided it’s administered correctly. There’s a hell of a lot of waste there, and I want it stopped. I’m sick of it’. John Howard responded: ‘But can I say, I agree with that first caller. There is a lot of anger in the community. There’s a feeling that millions of dollars have been wasted in the Aboriginal affairs area. I mean, just remember that I’m the Prime Minister who took money out of the ATSIC budget. I’m the Prime Minister who was attacked by the media of this country for doing so. I’m the Prime Minister who instead said we should direct money into areas that were really needed in Aboriginal affairs. I’m the bloke that’s been under constant attack from Aboriginal leaders for being insensitive to their situation. I’m also the Prime Minister who belonged to the party that voted against the Native Title Act in 1993. Now, I can understand why people feel like that. But I want to get the record straight: any suggestion that we have perpetuated the Aboriginal industry is wrong’. And all of this astoundingly, in the week he announced his ten point plan that is supposed to deliver fairness and justice to all parties involved in Wik.

Imagine the contempt with which the Prime Minister holds David and the mob who take their daily dose of psychological reinforcement from 2UE talk back, in order for him to talk like this.

When I see Hanson and her so-called followers, I can’t help thinking that sections of our society are willing themselves – defiantly – to ignorance. If you live at Kingaroy or Gatton it is as if reason and enlightenment must not count. Are we a society that is going to descend into a plethora of American-style enclaves that variously believe that space aliens control the One World Government and Elvis still walks amongst us? And our views and the well-being of our families and our children and grandchildren and our rights and our property and our culture and our history and our religion and our morals should be the only things that count?

This phenomenon of the obdurate citizenry where ideology founded on ignorance and prejudice assumes the immovability and righteousness of religion, is the product of manipulation. Woe betide us when the mainstream political machines feel they need this citizenry and must contend with and indeed exploit its voters. After all, as the stickers say: I fish and I vote. I shoot and I vote. I’m waiting for the next one: I hate blacks and I vote.

It is telling that even in it’s tribute to Andrew Robb’s success at the helm of the Liberal Party, The Courier Mail editorial pointed out that he ‘began a systematic polling schedule four years ago sounding out the electorate every weekend. This practice has persisted after the election victory’.

The editorial went on ‘Polling can be a useful tool to understand the
mood of the electorate, but it should never be a substitute for leadership and the hard work of policy development ... Our leaders have a responsibility to be interesting and original in how they speak with the community, something not found in focus group reports'.

And The Australian's editorial was to similar effect, pointing out 'Mr Robb's constant soundings of the electorate on a wide array of issues seem to have influenced the sinuous course of Mr Howard's policymaking to an unprecedented degree' and expressed the view that Robb's departure was 'an appropriate juncture for Mr Howard and his colleagues to consider the virtues of returning the polling and the focus groups to their proper role - winning elections - and get on with the business of good government ...'

It is not for nothing that two of the country's major newspapers have referred to this same problem with the style of our national government.

Let me say that in discussing my views on the way in which Andrew Robb and John Howard inflicted violence on the fabric of Australian society by the adoption of a strategic formula centred on mobilising resentment and capitalising on negativity, I have not balanced out this harsh assessment with an account of my views on the problems of the Labor legacy and the challenges that those who are concerned for the public good face in coming to terms with its limitations and outright failures.

In fact, apart from my own personal enthusiasm for Paul Keating's courage, intelligence, generosity, vision and achievements - which of course I wear on my sleeve in the unseemly but unapologetic manner of a political disciple - I also felt much good could come from the new vigour of a changed government. It was just the undertone of the election campaign that turned me Kamikaze.

John Howard's leadership is not irredeemable. I say this with no triteness or expedience: I have the greatest admiration for his leadership on gun control. The breadth of that achievement has been for me one of the truly great prime ministerial feats. I don't accept the grudging view that Port Arthur brought this achievement to him on a plate. At only a few junctures can personal leadership deliver such fundamental good, and John Howard and guns defies understanding.

I pray, along with The Courier Mail and The Australian that Andrew Robb's departure will indeed result in a change for the better and we will see less poll-driven leadership from the Prime Minister. Both Labor and the conservatives face a tremendous challenge in coming to terms with our volatile citizenry that is fragmenting, where group and individual self-interest has relegated the public good and community to the intellectual and policy scrap heap in our democracy. I am not convinced that either party has the answers to deal with the issues, both real and perceived, that Pauline Hanson has brought to the fore through her angry populism. I urge all of you concerned with the public good to strive for
these answers.

In conclusion, despite the tremendous challenges and the daunting problems we face, I maintain an exhausted optimism about our prospects. Australia is a good country, but we have the capacity to be better.

If you think that opportunity and success and achievement are just going to fall into our laps while we sit on our hands, you’re wrong. If you think that we’re going to have a great and prosperous nation without some pain and uncertainty, then you’re wrong. The potential which is inherent in all of us and which is our national inheritance will only be fulfilled with faith in each other, good will, perseverance and an unequivocal leadership.

As Australians we can continue to develop and define an inclusive nation founded on unity in diversity or we can go back to an Australia of old. We can affirm and consolidate or we can continue to unravel and dissimulate.

We can go backwards.

Concerning the fundamental question of our national culture and identity and the relationship between old and new of this continent – we as a country simply cannot afford to turn back. We now have the foundations upon which we can begin to build truly great things. The cornerstone that Mabo laid for us will withstand the most blistering cynicism that our national critics can muster.

Mabo is the correct foundation for our future no matter the frustrations we will all experience and despite the impatience, anger, arguments, misgivings and faithlessness that might afflict us from time to time. It is the correct foundation because without a foundation of truth no national structure can endure. We forsake Mabo and we will be bereft of our one chance at national coherence: an opportunity to come to terms with the past, take its prescriptions in the present and therefore map out a future.
The little people are there but you can’t see them!

by Chris Newman 1990
I have always valued the variety of course options we had as students at the English Department at Aarhus University. When I enrolled in 1989 I thought it was marvellous to be given a chance to lose myself in a particular time, place and situation through subjects like ‘Drama in the Elizabethan and Jacobean Period’, ‘America in the Great Depression’ or ‘Introduction to Caribbean Literature’. By the time we became post-graduate students most of us had come to specialize in one direction or another, and my interests had clearly developed within the field of post-colonial literature.

Afterwards, thinking about what spurs you on in a particular direction, it can be hard to pinpoint any concrete influences; either it touches you or it does not, just as a teacher can bring life into a subject to one student and not to another. Hence, the discussions I had with one of my fellow-students concerning our academic preferences were rather fruitless. She blankly refused to take any interest in post-colonial studies, asserting her disinclination to ‘feel sorry for all these oppressed and marginalised victims’. The question I asked myself was: were my interest in post-colonial literature then merely the result of an innate or socially conditioned aptitude for sympathizing with ‘victims’ and ‘losers’? A less simplistic study of post-colonial issues than identifying or even reversing the traditional dichotomy of ‘light – darkness’, ‘superior – inferior’ became related to an immensely fascinating and compulsive questioning of old certainties which inevitably called for the (re)construction of more complex truths and identities.

The gradual realization of how the colonial powers have monopolized history and culture in most parts of the world is indeed an unsettling experience – also to one who grew up outside the Commonwealth orbit – because in the process of understanding, one’s notion of universality tends to become reduced to ethnocentrism, or a power issue. My own cultural certainty as a blue-eyed European with deep roots in a homogenous, independent nation had never suffered any fractures or caused me any psychic unease comparable to what is typically expressed in post-colonial texts. Yet my national heritage is by no means unquestionable or unproblematic. On the contrary, ought I not to
question a cultural tradition which has relied as much on the Manichean
world view as any other imperialist power? The colonial discourse that
taught my parents’ generation about Denmark’s ‘proud’ history as a
colonial power is hardly unproblematic: ‘Now our only colony is
Greenland, and in this country we have carried out a great piece of work.
The indigenous population has been protected from ruin and also lifted
culturally’.

The days of old-time imperialism have long since been left behind us,
and even since the early days of decolonization much has been achieved
to correct the wrongs of the past. Marginalized voices are speaking back
alongside established discourses of power, and the theorists are speaking
of pluralism from various schools of thought prefixed with post-. As the
traditional polarities of ‘oppressor – oppressed’ have become less
marked, it is tempting to complacently ignore the pain, rootlessness and
injustice that still exist as a leftover from a colonial past. This applies in
particular to those of us who would like to think we live at a safe distance
from third world poverty and economic oppression, but looking at our
own cultural doorstep it appears that the power of social forces, culture
and history also works in more subtle ways here.

In Denmark, despite a general sense of homogeneity, of a proud
history and cultural certainty, there is a reservoir of fear and insecurity
that, if provoked, flares up and turns quickly into intolerance and
xenophobia. The objects of this latent racist hostility are the nation’s
refugee and migrant minority groups, who have recently been the targets
of a massive, aggressive campaign by one of the nation’s leading tabloids.
The strategy was one of emotional provocation and subversive criticism of
the governing system, bringing back the traditional cultural opposites of
‘advantaged and disadvantaged’, ‘weak and strong’, ‘ignorant and
ingenious’, but with an ironic reversal. Thus the mainstream Danes were
projected as being marginalized by the political correctness of ‘the
establishment’ (the Danish equivalent of the Australian Chardonnay
socialists) and being left to feel naive and foolishly kind as the shrewd
immigrants and so-called refugees are laughing at them, exploiting the
welfare system and services.

The noble, self-created role of the tabloid was of course to reveal the
reality of the economic abuse and the cultural threats linked to the
foreigners’ ‘invasion’ of Denmark. And the paper’s sales were booming!
When the beast within is let out in the profitable pursuit of easy targets
and scapegoats, there is no interest in exploring the reasons behind the
perceived problems. In fact, is it not possible to create myths by
formulating problems that are rooted in your own prejudice? Much of the
debate on ‘foreigners’ in Denmark has presented them and their cultures
in a negative light – as a negative image of western culture. Social in-
equality and chronic unemployment are dominant features of the (post-)
industrialized West that breed a personal and cultural sense of inferiority
among the disadvantaged, and then it is convenient to reassert one’s sense of self and place in the social hierarchy through negating relations with a perceived subordinate group.

In Australia, a nation that can be argued is founded on double guilt (dispossession of the indigenous peoples and extreme punishment of a significant number of Anglo-Saxon/Celtic convicts), there is a constant striving for reconciliation and unity that also bears witness to a problematic construction of (national) identity. Here I have experienced the white Australians’ difficulties in coming to terms with a painful past. Over the years the cultural sentiment has changed insecurely from deep shame of colonial/convict roots to excessive pride in and exhilarated celebration of the same roots (particularly in connection with the Bicentenary in 1988); from politically correct goodwill towards amending the ‘problems’ with the Aboriginal population to indignant frustration when this goodwill fails to create the desired result of silence. I remember overhearing a conversation a few years ago between two women in a theatre audience in Perth during the performance of Sally Morgan’s first stage play, which dealt with the forced removal of Aboriginal children that has since been labelled cultural genocide: ‘Well, surely it’s terrible what the whites did to the Aborigines, like taking their children away, but what can I do about it? Done is done’. The comment by that Australian woman reminded me of my fellow-student’s comment, and it suggested to me that one can never put a lid on the issues of marginalization and colonial discourses. The wounds from the past may never heal, but the insecurity they lead to in terms of identity, I am sure, can be eased as each individual learns to deal with his memory bank of place and history in a way that denies a monopolized construction of reality.

Post-colonial studies to me became more than simply an exotic subject to become absorbed in or a cause with which to ‘sympathize’. An inspiring teacher and opportunities to travel helped to expand my horizon by challenging the traditional notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’. I have come to appreciate the culturally multidimensional experience, and now as I have left my native country and become an immigrant, I shall myself have to learn to live at once with that which has been left behind and that which is here and now.

NOTES

1 My translation from a Danish primary school geography textbook, 1993
Artists play a significant role in processes of cultural transformation by revealing both the restrictive limitations of their culture and how these may be transcended through imagining the barely imaginable. This paper considers two novels which examine issues of race and national identity in a post-colonial context, drawing on myth to evoke possibilities and difficulties of reconciliation. Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* (1984) explores Maori/Pakeha relationships in New Zealand, while Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow* (1992) looks at the situation of Greenlanders living in Denmark and that country's relation to its former colony, incorporated as a province in 1953, with a system of home rule instituted under the crown in 1979. Each novel has been widely acclaimed in its own country and beyond. *The Bone People* won the Booker prize in 1986 and *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow* has achieved best-seller status in translation and been made into a film directed by Billie August. Both books focus on an abused child together with a man and woman who, although not related to him by blood, assume or have thrust on them, the role of parent figures. Through portrayal of these unorthodox family configurations, each involving a mixture of races, both authors challenge the dominant social structures of their respective countries.

Families feature in the mythology of many cultures, particularly in myths of origin, with the earth represented as mother and the sky as father of all living things. Mythologizing the earth as mother readily leads to envisaging one's native land as a parent. 'One of the most powerful ways the public and private are merged in the ideology of nationalism is the bringing together of the figure of family and nation (the motherland, the fatherland)' ¹ Such a metaphor yields ready political advantage. For example, nineteenth century British imperial ties were strengthened through representing colonies as offspring nurtured by a benevolent Mother England.

But the social institution of the family is itself a myth, part of what Luce
Ligaray describes as ‘a patriarchal mythology which hardly ever questions itself as such’.

Patriarchy, like the phallocracy that goes with it, are in part myths which, because they don’t stand back to question themselves, take themselves to be the only order possible. That’s why we tend to think of myths as representing secondary realities rather than as one of the principal expressions of what orders society at any given time.²

This is clearly manifest in the ‘family values’ rhetoric currently espoused by conservative politicians in many western countries, where ‘family’ is taken to mean a heterosexual married couple living together with their children, despite the prevalence of so many other types of family formation. But this very diversity generates anxiety which fuels the rhetoric. ‘Against this apparently amoral liberalism a hypothetical or mythological “family” serves as a strong metaphor of order and harmony’.³ It may also justify shifting certain economic responsibilities from the state to the family, expecting it, for example, to shoulder the burden of care for those with mental and physical disabilities. emphasis on ‘family values’ also reasserts ‘a top-down patriarchal chain of authority starting with God-the-Father’, reinforcing a traditional gendered division of labour ‘in which women are cast as creatures of nature and nurture and men are creatures of culture and competition’.⁴ The family model promoted by conservative politicians is also racially homogenous, with one fundamentalist preacher in the US comparing the home as the basic unit of society with ‘the flotsam and jetsam of the ghetto where young people don’t know who their parents are’.⁵

In the rhetorical evocation of the family by the New Right we can find an intricate marriage of race, gender, sex and class, in which all but the ‘traditional’ values are demagnified and devalued, and which effectively construct a white, largely male and middle-class view of what constitutes appropriate sexual behaviour.⁶

The Christian image of the Holy Family – Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child – underlies much of this rhetoric, although the marriage of a young, pregnant woman to a man who is not her child’s father hardly corresponds to the approved bourgeois ideal.

For all its political manipulation, the idea of family carries powerful emotional resonance, evoking for many Edenic memories of childhood. In The Bone People, Keri Hulme uses the motif of families shattered and reconnected in unorthodox ways to indicate the racial and personal conflicts colonization produced in New Zealand, while also invoking the possibility of creating a lost paradisial world, (assumed to have existed in a distant pre-colonial past) as a way of healing the nation’s division and injustice. The three principal characters, unrelated by blood and locked in conflict, eventually form a powerful family unit with strong mythic reverberations.
They were nothing more than people, by themselves. Even paired, any pairing, they would have been nothing more than people by themselves. But all together, they have become the heart and muscles and mind of something perilous and new, something strange and growing and great.

Together, all together, they are the instruments of change. 7

Artist Kerewin Holmes, ‘by blood ... an eighth Maori,’ feels all Maori ‘by heart, spirit, and inclination’ (p. 62). She has, however, quarreled with her family and used the wealth won in a lottery to build a tower where she can pursue the pleasures of art and intellect. Joe Gillayley, a factory worker, embittered by the death of his wife and infant son, is three-quarters Maori but feels ‘that the Maoritanga has got lost in the way I live’ (p. 62). The two are brought together by Joe’s foster-son Simon, aged about seven, the only survivor of a yacht travelling from Ireland and wrecked off the New Zealand coast. Simon, traumatized by previous ill-treatment, is mute when he comes into Joe’s care; he is a visionary, brilliant, but very difficult child whom Joe loves deeply yet bitterly resents, to the point of battering him brutally and violently when he is drunk.

Kerewin and Joe, both social outsiders, are drawn to one another, although no romance develops since Kerewin is uninterested in forming sexual attachments, describing herself as a neuter. In creating her character, Hulme deliberately shatters preconceived ideas of female behaviour.

she’s doing things which in New Zealand society are still considered to be masculine, or part of the masculine role. Being extraordinarily skilled in fighting, being able to drink anyone under the table, taking on the male ethos in its own terms, being financially independent and able to take care of herself physically 8

Kerewin has little maternal feeling and Simon overcomes her initial resentment at his trespass onto her property only through sheer force of personality. Symbol of her eccentricity and social isolation, the tower constitutes a rich world of the imagination as well as a material treasure house of artistic and intellectual riches. But, for all its fascination, Joe perceives the tower as inhuman (p. 101). Kerewin, having cut herself off from close human contact, signified by the rupture with her family, finds her artistic powers vanished and her tower a prison.

Despite his relationship with Simon, Joe’s existence is also lonely and considerably more Spartan than Kerewin’s: ‘I work in a factory, work in a factory, work in a factory’ (p. 89). Although he has met ‘All the good old pakeha standbys and justifications’: with money saved and the mortgage paid off, Joe’s house and garden are aesthetically impoverished and barren. ‘A neat lawn bordered by concrete paths. No flowers. No shrubs. The places where a garden had been were filled with pink gravel’ (p. 76). Such bleakness represents more than material poverty, indicating how heavily the social restrictions and suppression of spirit, which the novel
implies are endemic in New Zealand society, weigh upon Joe. His brutality to Simon allegorizes further aspects of that society— a propensity to violence, oppression of the weak by the strong, and a desire to enforce conformity with narrow, puritanical standards: Kerewin notes ‘how parents in our society tend easily to tyranny’ (p. 59). Yet, despite Joe’s cruelty, the novel also conveys vividly his love for Simon and the author states how, here too, she has challenged conventional stereotypes. ‘Joe has a lot of gentle, sensitive, nurturing so-called female traits. I deliberately set out, in the character of Joe, to turn the sexual stereotype on its head’.9

There is also a feminine aspect to Simon, who, with his long hair, is initially mistaken for a girl when Joe discovers him on the beach. His characterization is impressive, conveying a child’s delight in the world, his waywardness, destructive fury and moments of mystical awareness. An insight that he, Joe and Kerewin belong together inspires much of his demonic behaviour—flicking lighted matches at Kerewin, for example, when she proclaims her self-sufficiency (p. 105). At other times, he tries to deflect both adults’ rage onto himself in a desperate attempt to prevent them breaking apart as each gives way to bouts of bleak depression and anger, Joe through loneliness and deprivation and Kerewin from self-hatred and grief for her lost artistic capacity. Yet the image of family the novel presents is utterly convincing.

That ... is the imaginative strength of the work— that it creates a sexual union where no sex occurs, creates parental love where there are no physical parents, creates the stress and fusion of a family where there is no actual family. 10

But these emotional bonds are deeply threatened by violence and individual self-destructiveness. In a powerful climax, the precarious connection between all three is shattered when, with Kerewin’s complicity, Joe beats Simon almost to death.

Simon’s suffering and the horrific beatings he receives are graphically conveyed, but the vividly portrayed love between man and child and the novel’s sympathetic presentation of Joe have led critics to suggest it is complicit in the evil of child abuse.11 Hulme, however, confronts the painful issue of what society has to offer the abused child when removed from the abuser. Towards the end of the novel Joe reflects on his treatment of Simon.

I was ashamed of him. I wanted him as ordinarily complex and normally simple as one of Piri’s rowdies. I resented his difference, and therefore, I tried to make him as tame and malleable as possible, so I could show myself, ‘You’ve made him what he is, even if you didn’t breed him’. (p. 381)

Once out of hospital, Simon, his face badly scarred and hearing almost destroyed, is sent to a Hohepa children’s home and expected to conform to much narrower social stereotypes than those Joe sought to impose.
Hoehepa is the Maori form of Joseph and Hulme's point is that the home, in its own way, is equally disciplinarian, and, on top of that, unable to offer Simon genuine love and affection or even to communicate effectively with him. Those running it are powerless when the child proves totally resistant to all their efforts.

We could, I suppose, if we merely wanted to make him conform to our standards, be brutal to him. Take away all his small treasures, insist he does as he's told, and order things in such a manner that he's obliged to. Starve him, or beat him, or something disgusting like that ... But we are here to help him. He simply doesn't want to be helped by us. (pp. 404-5)

Simon continually runs away, attempting to get back to Joe and Kerewin, but each of the adults must undertake a spiritual journey before reconciliation can occur. Kerewin, apparently afflicted with cancer, dismantles most of her tower, kindling an enormous bonfire from the wreckage in which she fires a clay sculpture of three heads with hair entwined - her own, Joe's and Simon's - a sign that she now recognizes the importance of their connection. Abandoning the preoccupation with material possessions signified by the tower, she then retreats to the bush to confront death. There she undergoes a mystical healing process, assisted by a strange, androgynous figure who may or may not be supernatural. Then, prompted by a dream, she rebuilds a ruined Maori meeting-house symbolizing her commitment to an ideal of community.

Although the novel draws on a wide range of mythologies, Hulme uses Maori myth to resolve her characters' sufferings and to focus on what she has to say. After serving a prison sentence, Joe goes alone to an isolated stretch of bush to commit suicide. There he meets an old Maori wise man or kaumatua, who tells him he is destined to assume his role as guardian of the sanctuary of a god, a stone brought by one of the first canoes in which Maori people emigrated to New Zealand. According to the kaumatua, the divine presence or mauri which resides in the stone 'is the heart of this country. The heart of this land' (p. 364), the novel's implication being that the spiritual core of the country lies not in European, but in Maori spiritual tradition and belief. This spiritual presence is threatened by the loveless response to the land, shown by white New Zealanders in particular, comparable to the scarring inflicted on Simon's body:

Joe thought of the forests burned and cut down; the gouges and scars that dams and roadworks and development schemes had made; the peculiar barren paddocks where alien animals, one kind of crop, grazed imported grasses; the erosion, the overfertilization, the pollution. (p. 371)

Joe accepts the role of guardian and, when an earthquake dislodges the stone from its hiding-place, carries it back to the ruins of Kerewin's tower. Kerewin brings Simon back from the Hohepa home and, reunited
with her family through Joe’s help, builds out of the tower’s ruins a quite different dwelling-place where people can live in community with one another. The novel ends on a note of hope with the unity she, Joe and Simon represent restored once more, a symbol of healing for the entire country.

Although the novel validates Maori spirituality as a more appropriate agent than Christianity for the full realization of New Zealand national identity, Hulme, as Mark Williams points out, makes much use of Christian imagery, especially in relation to Simon. Kerewin first sees him ‘standing stiff and straight like some weird saint in a stained gold window ... haloed in hair, shrouded in the dying sunlight’ (p. 16). Later he gives Kerewin a jeweled rosary, ‘the making of a garden of prayers’ (p. 69). Attached to it is a signet ring engraved with a phoenix which, with its symbolism of rising reborn from the flames, is appropriate to all three major characters. In a more indigenous image, Simon and the promise he represents appear linked to the kowhai seeds which Kerewin identifies for him: ‘golden seeds for golden flowers, seaborne to make more sea-trees’ (p. 125). The novel’s concluding scene of harmony and reconciliation occurs at Christmas and, as Williams comments, ‘the novel offers us a complete version of the Holy Family with Simon as Christlike victim, Joseph as the celibate human father, and Kerewin as the virgin mother’.

The hopeful note on which The Bone People concludes is absent from Miss Smilla’s Feeling For Snow where reconciliation and hopes for social renewal are represented as only a remote possibility overshadowed by a grossly materialistic and unjust society. Although Hulme’s novel was not published until 1984, it was written in the 1970s, participating in the mood of a decade when hitherto silenced groups were finding a voice and progressive social change seemed more likely, whereas Miss Smilla is very much a response to the ‘greed is good’ 1980s. Høeg uses the thriller genre, with a touch of science fiction at the end. The action is fast-paced and increasingly violent as one mystery leads to another, while the tone is bleak, with betrayal on every hand. Unlike Keri Hulme, the author does not aim at forging a new ideal of national identity, but seeks rather, to define Danish society in terms of its limitations and injustices, particularly in relation to its treatment of Greenland and Greenlanders.

The novel opens with the funeral of a young Greenlandic boy, Isaiah Christesen. The narrator, Smilla Jaspersen, half Greenlander, half Dane, refuses to believe the police explanation that his fall from a rooftop was accidental and the narrative comprises her quest for the truth. Exploring a dark underside to the bourgeois prosperity of Copenhagen leads her into a world of dangerous criminality and a hazardous midwinter voyage up the West Greenland coast. Not wholly by choice, Smilla joins forces with a Dane, Peter Føjl, generally referred to as ‘the mechanic’, who rents a flat in her apartment block where Isaiah also lived with his alcoholic...
mother, Juliane. Although Isaiah had befriended both, Smilla and the mechanic come together in a distrustful yet passionate relationship only after Isaiah’s death. Isaiah’s connection with each adult is deeply important, but the familial grouping is considerably more tentative than in *The Bone People* and both man and child are revealed wholly through Smilla’s perceptions.

Despite her small stature, Smilla bears some resemblance to the larger than life Kerewin Holmes. Each displays a comparable array of encyclopedic knowledge – Kerewin of literature, mythology, religion and natural history, Smilla of snow, ice, mathematics, geology and life among the Inuit. Although lacking Kerewin’s martial arts training, Smilla proves amazingly competent in self-defence against innumerable savage and brutal attacks. Her skill in negotiating frozen surfaces, learnt in Greenland, means that, to the uninitiated, she even seems to walk on water. Smilla also has an androgynous quality, related in part to her Greenlandic origins. At school in Denmark, a classmate takes it for granted she is a boy. She refers to ‘the natural acceptance in Greenland that each of the sexes contains the potential to become its opposite’ (p.28) and recounts the creation myth told to the Danish explorer and anthropologist, Knud Rasmussen by Aisivak, a Polar Eskimo woman.

in the beginning the world was inhabited only by two men, who were both great sorcerers. Since they wanted to multiply, one of them transformed his body in such a way that he could give birth; and then the two of them created many children. (p. 28)

Although Smilla’s mother had fulfilled the traditional Greenlandic woman’s role, she also ‘shot and paddled a kayak and dragged meat home like a man’ (p. 28).

Smilla is a result of ‘the white hot energy’ generated between her Inuit mother and Danish father, Moritz Jaspersen, in Greenland on a scientific research expedition. After her mother’s death in a hunting accident, Smilla, at seven, is forced into her father’s custody in Denmark. Living in the fatherland, she yearns for her mother country remembering how, out on the ice, her mother would offer a brilliantly white breast, ‘with a big, delicate rose areola’, so she might drink ‘immuk, my mother’s milk’ (p.30). As a child, Smilla continually tries to escape back to Greenland, reflecting in adulthood on ‘the countless kilometres children have put behind them in search of a decent life’ (p. 55). For her, Greenland remains associated with the freedom and Edenic existence of early childhood. A society where personal possessions count for very little and people live communally is implicitly contrasted with the luxury, materialism and rapacity of bourgeois Danish life. But Inuit society has been deeply corrupted by that materialism.

Only ten years ago they were smuggling liquor and cigarettes up here. That’s already a thing of the past. That’s already the good old days. Now there’s lots of
cocaine in Nuuk. There’s a Greenland upper class who live like Europeans. (p.369)

Nevertheless, Smilla is forced to admit that however she may hate Danish colonization, it ‘irrefutably improved the material needs of an existence that was one of the most difficult in the world’ (p. 275).

Smilla, at thirty-seven, is on the margins, a rebel living on her father’s handouts. Despite her scientific distinction as a glaciologist, publishing a paper on ice research and the profit motive in relation to Arctic Ocean oil reserves has led to a defamation conviction and expulsion from the Danish Glaciology Society. From an official perspective she is someone, ‘Who is unemployed. Who has no family. Who has stirred up conflict wherever she has been. Who has never been able to fit in. Who is aggressive. And who vacillates around political extremes’ (p. 90). Ironically, the education which has developed Smilla’s profound insight into the physical structure of her mother country has removed her still further from her roots. But she remains dominated by a passion for geometry, snow and space.

Geometry exists as an innate phenomenon in our consciousness. In the external world a perfectly formed snow crystal would never exist. But in our consciousness lies the glittering and flawless knowledge of perfect ice. (p. 263)

She also possesses an intuitive sense of orientation, able to find her goal unerringly: ‘I have only to look at a map once and the landscape rises up from the paper’ (p. 71). This uncanny sense of direction, related to her sense of ‘Absolute Space – that which stands still, that which we can cling to’ (p. 38) also becomes, for Smilla, an image of moral purpose. The capacity to live and move amidst ice and not be frozen into immobility is an important image of moral integrity in the novel. Smilla aims to resemble supercooled water drops which remain liquid in high Arctic cloud at temperatures of -40C: ‘They ought to freeze, but they don’t; they remain stationary and stable and fluid’ (p. 332). Moving across the frozen surface of Copenhagen harbour, she contemplates Denmark as a spit of ice with its inhabitants all frozen in fixed hierarchies. ‘Isaiah’s death is an irregularity, an eruption that produced a fissure. That fissure has set me free’ (p. 204).

Like Simon in The Bone People, Isaiah represents hope for a new order. Although created for us out of Smilla’s memories, he is vividly present in the novel – a grubby, cheeky, neglected child, partially deaf from middle-ear infections caused by his mother’s failure to dress him warmly enough. Like Kerewin, Smilla is short on maternal instinct, telling Isaiah to ‘Beat it, you little shit’ when she first sees him lying on the stairs. His immediate recognition of their shared Greenlandic background startles her. Closer knowledge leads her to believe he might have been able to reconcile Dane and Greenlander within himself: ‘He would have been able to absorb Denmark and transform it and become
both’ (p. 68). Eventually she comes to feel as if he were her own child (p.358). Like Hulme, Peter Høeg draws on biblical imagery. The Old Testament book of Isaiah contains many references to a divine child who will bring peace and harmony to a troubled land so that wolf and lamb will live together, the leopard will lie down with the kid ‘and a little child shall lead them’. Such passages are often regarded as prefiguring Christ’s birth. ‘For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace’. Ironically, Isaiah is killed shortly before Christmas. As a child in Greenland, Smilla had imagined the three wise men travelling across the ice on dog sleighs: ‘They had grasped hold of Absolute Space. They knew they were on the right track. Moving towards an energy phenomenon. That’s what the Infant Jesus was for me’ (p. 107). Isaiah, too, represents ‘a column of energy in the universe’. He is envisaged, not as a supernatural phenomenon, but holding, like every child, a promise for the future, part of the mortality and continuity of all things:

he would still be here, and after him would come his children or other children, a wheel of children, a chain, a spiral winding into eternity. (p. 358)

But the promise of childhood may be perverted. As Smilla penetrates the web of intrigue behind Isaiah’s death, she learns of another character, Tørk Hviid a scientist, son of a failed composer, whose bitter, neglected childhood is described in a letter from a famous singer, formerly her father’s friend.

They [his parents] washed their hands of the boy. Holes in his clothes, red-eyed, never had a bicycle, was beaten at the local proletarian school because he was too weak from hunger to defend himself. Because Jonathan was supposed to be a great artist. You’ve all betrayed your children. And it takes an old queen like me to tell you. (p. 179)

Tørk develops into a ruthless, charismatic figure, whose very personality seems invaded by ice. In contrast with Isaiah, he is a demonic figure who has masterminded a criminal enterprise which involves commissioning a ship sailing to Gela Alta, an island off the West Greenland coast. It is also he who has terrorized Isaiah into jumping off the roof because the boy had possession of a tape with vital information on it. The mechanic, too, is involved in his schemes, though this is revealed only towards the end of the novel.

The mechanic is a morally ambivalent figure. His tenderness toward Isaiah is conveyed in a description of his workshop.

The place is a double world. Above is the workbench, the tools, the tall office chair. Below, under the table, the universe is duplicated half-size. A little masonite table with a coping saw, screwdriver, chisel. A little stool. A workbench. A little vice. A beer crate. A cigar box with about thirty cans of Humbrol. Isaiah’s things. (p. 43)
In this world, Isaiah's deafness is less of an impediment. 'In the mechanic he found someone with whom he could communicate in other ways than through language' (p. 43). But the mechanic was also on the roof when Isaiah fell, though, until Smilla eventually makes it plain to him, he believes the child's death an accident, unaware of Tørk's part in it. Despite his divided allegiance, the mechanic has a gentle, nurturing side to him. He also loves Smilla and seeks to protect her, but, believing the Gela Alta expedition will lead to treasure, he has fallen under Tørk's spell - 'Sometimes a person's charisma is such that it slips right through our façades, or essential prejudices and inhibitions, and goes straight to our guts' (p. 290). But, although Smilla must revise her estimate of the mechanic, she still maintains her alliance with him.

I look at him. I see his weight, his slowness, his vigour, his greed, and his simplicity. His need for a leader, the danger he represents. I also see his carefulness, his warmth, his patience, his passion. And I see that he is still my only chance. (p. 372)

The ship sailing north carries, for sale in Greenland, a new form of double-strength heroin, created by Tørk who is a microbiologist specializing in radiation mutations. But the voyage's principal purpose is to quarry and transport a gigantic stone located in an ice-cave in the Barren Glacier on Gela Alta, and the mechanic has been hired for his diving skills in relation to this project. This sinister stone, which generates heat even when surrounded by ice, may be of extraterrestrial origin, perhaps even an inorganic life-form. The surrounding water contains the larvae of a mutated form of the Arctic worm. This once relatively harmless parasite, which normally infests only larger sea mammals, has now adapted to attack the human body with disastrous consequences: 'It kills its host. It's a poor parasite, in terms of human beings. But an excellent killer' (p. 398). The mysterious stone, the mutated parasite and the heroin form a cluster of images reinforcing the novel's condemnation of greed and injustice. Human beings, like the mutant worm, are perceived as inefficient parasites destroying the earth on which they are totally dependent. Smilla's embarkation is preceded by a visit in search of information to the Casino which seems to encapsulate capitalist society and the parasitism on which it depends. An important money-laundering centre for drug money, the Casino is also a major source of government income, overseen by bureaucrats from the tax authorities and plainclothes police. As one of its owners explains to Smilla:

you remember what men look like inside. Heart, brain, liver, kidneys, stomach, testicles. When they come in here, a change takes place. The moment you buy your chips, a little animal takes up residence inside you, a little parasite. Finally there's nothing left but the attempt to remember what cards have been dealt (p.193)
Drug-addiction is yet another parasite devouring human beings.

Tørk gives a desire for money and fame as the reason he is so anxious to transport the stone back to Denmark and is indifferent to the devastation the worm might cause in densely populated areas: ‘In reality it’s unimportant whether the stone is alive or not. What counts is its size. Its heat. The worm around it. It’s the biggest scientific discovery of the century’ (p. 404). Smilla’s reaction is very different.

At this moment it becomes the crystallization of the attitude of Western science towards the world. Calculation, hatred, hope, fear, the attempt to measure everything. And above all else, stronger than any empathy for living things: the desire for money. (p. 404)

Tørk is eventually foiled by attacks from the mechanic and the ship’s captain whom Smilla has finally convinced of his treachery and dangerousness. As he crosses the ice, attempting to return to the ship, Smilla, with her knowledge of ice and intuitive sense of direction, leads him off course towards open water where the evil product of a warped childhood may meet the child whose potential was never realized.

Towards the spot where the current has hollowed out the ice so it’s as thin as a foetal membrane, and under it the sea is dark and salty like blood, and a face is pressing up against the icy membrane from below; it’s Isaiah’s face, the as yet unborn Isaiah. He’s calling Tørk. Is it Isaiah who is pulling him along, or am I the one who is trying to head him off and force him towards the thin ice? (p. 410)

Like Keri Hulme, Peter Høeg draws on a wide range of mythology. Smilla refers to various Inuit myths and, at times, the novel evokes a sense of the traditional Inuit belief in an environment governed by spirits and powerful forces. The ship voyaging to Greenland is called the Kronos, the name both of a god in classical Greek mythology who devoured his own children and of Time which eventually destroys all it has generated – appropriate allusions in a novel so concerned with cruelty to children and pervaded by a sense that humanity’s time is running out. Gaia, the earth goddess, mother to Kronos, is the name James Lovelock used as shorthand for his hypothesis ‘that the biosphere is a self-regulating entity with the capacity to keep our planet healthy by controlling the chemical and physical environment’ Tørk dismisses this theory in favour of a concept of ‘Life based on inorganic matter’ (p. 393). But the earth itself is his eventual destruction. Smilla foresees his death on the ice where ‘the cold will transform him; like a stalactite, a frozen shell will close around a barely fluid life until even his pulse stops and he becomes one with the landscape. You can’t win against the ice’ (p. 410).

Norse mythology also contributes to the apocalyptic tone. Smilla refers to Norse belief in the Fimbul winter which will extend for three years when sun and moon will be devoured and the gods destroyed, a disaster preceded by widespread criminality and cruelty among human beings.
She remembers hearing the legend at school, contrasting it with Greenlandic attitudes: 'Winter was a time for community, not for the end of the world' (p. 241). But the sense of a world threatened with extinction by human corruption is powerfully developed in the novel, although the Norse myth promises universal destruction will be followed by renewal.

> a new world was destined to rise from the old, and would emerge from the ocean after the fires of destruction had been quenched. This world was in fact the old one cleansed and renewed ... Out of the sea also came the rulers who were to bring peace and prosperity to the land. The image which men liked to form of them was of a little child voyaging alone in a boat^22

Høeg’s novel offers little promise of a new world although, in a sense, Isaiah preserves the one we have by drawing Tørk, potential destroyer of humanity, to his death through Smilla’s passionate desire to discover what actually happened to him.

Both Hulme and Høeg use the motif, found in many mythologies, of a divine child who plays a redemptive role. While emphasizing the child’s extreme vulnerability, each author suggests he offers hope for a way forward so oppression may be lifted and different races reconciled. Simon and Isaiah each draw a pair of parents into a family group. The Bone People celebrates this conjunction and, for all Høeg’s pessimism in Miss Smilla, he leads us to believe that Isaiah, had he lived, could have drawn on Smilla’s knowledge and the mechanic’s technical skills to integrate Dane and Greenlander within himself. These reconfigured families greatly modify traditional sex-role stereotypes, with Kerewin and Smilla assuming many masculine qualities while Joe and the mechanic display qualities of nurturance, even though in each case the man fails disastrously in his responsibility to the child. In both novels the child and the family grouping he creates are linked to land – to New Zealand as a country in The Bone People and to the environment generally in Miss Smilla. Each novelist has sought to imagine differently ways adults might relate to children and to one another.

NOTES

7. Keri Hulme, The Bone People (Auckland: Spiral in association with Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), p. 4. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
14. Peter Høeg, Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow, trans., F.David (London: Harvill, 1993), p. 45. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
17. Isaiah, ch. 11, v.6.
Saeed Ur-Rehman

TESTIMONIES OF FICTION

george says
i don't value his time maybe because i am used to siestas in long muggy monsoon afternoons of the indian subcontinent.

julia says
she would rather have a white boyfriend because i don't feel comfortable with heavy metal and do not enjoy going to macdonald's.

robert says
maybe i have an inferiority complex and that is why i cannot dance when they are raving on ecstasy and speed.

stuart says
i won't be considered a cultured person unless i become familiar with the characters of star wars and simpsons.

victoria says
she loves indian hot curries and the way they think. it is magic realism, she says. and those fabulous exotic saris and yogis.

blue eyes ask
do they have computers in pakistan?

gesturing pink chubby fingers of a white butcher ask
where did you learn english from?

a retired police officer asks
how do muslim men treat women?

and i want to write and write and write lots and lots and lots of lies about all races.
On an empty beach through afternoon salt
I can see them sitting where the first dunes start.
There is the midden of pipi shells, and behind ti-tree
where there is water and their camp.
This beach which I had always thought of as my own,
the beach where twenty yards away fibro and brick veneer mark out
the tribal boundaries of different gangs of kids has gone.
There is the shock of coming back to your house
and finding strange people in your bedroom
and in the backyard all you can hear are sounds
of games which made no sense, the sounds of a late
on-shore breeze, the soft sigh of vowels and rhythms
that made a music you didn’t understand, but sounded
just like the night-long rumble of the surf at dawn.
I suppose we are all like that, locked in our dialects,
our suburbs, the tribe we came from, estranged even from ourselves
alone in a bedroom having someone else’s dreams –
you’d know that in Europe, keeping our tribe alive,
making sure the stories aren’t forgotten, but telling them
now in languages no one had ever dreamt of.

MUCK AND MONEY

A collar lasted a day
by night black-ringed
it matched your cuffs
carried its tithe of soot
from the smoke fall
of Zaara St powerhouse
the school train
tugs, steam rollers, winter fires
and the Leviathan itself
the Works
casting its red and black
shadow over the city
red when the ore came in
bucketted out into the westerly
Muck and Money

a slipstream of Iron Knob
across Stockton's washing
and black
from smelting and refining fires
burning away all night
the iron's maculations
which found their way by day
into the armpits of our shirts
and gave the tincture to our hands
of others' labours and their sins

there were compensations:
they told us in this world
as part of Adam's contract
where there's muck there's money
so you got on your bike
and went to work, and got on
your bike and came home
wearing the red and black
of your trade with fiery furnaces
glad of the solid billet
of pay packet in your pocket

but when the ash-pit finally cools
the coke ovens are quenched
and the last arterial stream of iron
runs into sand,
the covenant of soot will be broken
the grimey cuffs removed
and the lucid air
of the old faith will cover the city,
and from smelter's beach the heath
will bloom with honey flowers
the bell miner sound the hours
around the abandoned pit
and the secret bush reclaim
the refractories and kilns

then with the harrowing
of this century, this millennium
the dark mills grind up their own
fresh fields return
and the three watches of the day
sleep the one shift of night

and when the smoke lifts
what will we be then?
'all along the coast of Denmark,' she said, 'you could see the flames at night from the boats, a row of candles on the shore.'

the pyre towers to tree level on the flat land, there have been celebrations with beer and barbecuing steaks and hamburgers and corn, for three midsummer hours, Danish families and friends, adults, swaggering teenagers, and children circling round the field, fascinated by the stuffed figure in a dress, life-size, at the top of heaped branches, bound on a pole, with face wax-like, indifferent.

'it is an ancient ceremony, going back long before Danes were Christians, when we gave our faith to the disappearing sun, keeping its light when darkness fell, with sacrifice. we are a pagan people still.'

the Lutheran pastor speaks in Danish, then torches light the heap as below the horizon the sun-God dips to rest.

flames gather, surge upward, a hot breath moves outward, spectators draw back, on top the solitary figure, woman-sacrifice, seems to glow.

older couples dance, men bound in tight dark suits, women with bonnets and ballooning dresses,
all lace-fringed,
they move to the rhythms of Europe,
shadows dark partners to their steps.

but there are no boats here,
only a conflagration
a wax face melting,

the spaces of land stretching away
the dancers moving, and the young
watching rituals that are not theirs,
talking in English, hearing no screams.

St Haus festivities: a Protestant tradition, c.15th century, when witches were hunted and burnt. It is John the Baptist, being St Haus, that gave the day its name. The ritual of bonfires and the burning of a 'witch', was the foreswearing of all evil. The story being, that when burned, a witch would fly to Bloksbjerg (an actual place in Germany), implying a long way off, there, on this particular night, they would meet with the devil. Nowadays children collect clothes and broomsticks to make a human sized 'witch' which is placed at the top of the fire. Although 'St Haus' is often connected with midsummer, it is actually June 23, not the June 21, and it is on June 23 that Danes stand around the fires in the evening, sing midsummer songs and listen to a 'bonfire speech'.

\textit{AMDULØPING-PONGÆMDNMØ}

danish people were concentrated to the north-west of town.
many had come not directly from Denmark, however,
but via the north-central United States,
which they had not found accommodating.
evertheless, with a truly Canadian sense of concessions to everyone,
they titled their district USONA,
the 'United States of North America,'
reflecting an aspiration not unexpressed elsewhere,
and established,
in competition with the 'First English Lutheran Church'
and 'Our Saviour's Evangelical Lutheran Church'
a third, the 'Danish Lutheran Church,'
with services in their own language.
father’s friend was one of the few
who had come directly from Europe,
he had served in the Danish army,
he brought to our heritage
amazing skills in table tennis,
and trained us in a manner which has served us well.
BETEL NUT

Mother, chewed the paan, chanut ni patra, until her tongue was burning bright, a curious shade of henna.

Chalk and sopari were bad for the teeth. Tobacco in small portions was used in, respectable form, along with the sweetened WALIARI.

She, she ... introduced me to the ritual of folding, massaging the chuno, until it outlined, thin cabbage veins of the stem.

I, I ... observed swimming movements of the hand, gliding like a fish, smothered in bewilderment.

I listened to her crack the cardamom pods, stuck in her tooth, looking like freckles of rye and, carry on talking to my father. A human in skeleton form, capable of living without lime.
MOMMA NEVER SAY (TO HER LITTLE BLACK GIRL)

Momma never called me, her sweet little black girl.

Momma never said to me, hurry up and wipe your skin clean child.

Momma never say, ‘Go cover up those brown stains and, hide behind white powder, just to save your pretty face’.

Momma never taught me that ‘lipstick’ was our ‘raw’ blood.
Momma never showed me ‘indifference’.

In my heart, I think that she protected me ... for when they, came a hunting, fire ... fire away, for ... I never understood a word and, like a baby, she cradled me, surrounded by her loving affection but, momma never sang a lullaby saying ‘hush now, my little black girl’.

Momma never told me that this was a ‘White’ world.

Momma never saw me as her little black child.

Momma never say to me, that today they will carry on hunting, long after she is gone and ... the guns they fire from their mouths are weapons that can shoot you to the ground.

Momma never say, give up hope.

Momma never say, don’t carry on fighting.

Momma never saw me, as her little black girl.
Harmattan

While the sun set she felt a longing so great that the fading light seemed to tremble with energy as if he must suddenly materialise and stand before her. As she gazed from the verandah the whole landscape seemed caught in a tension of expectancy. There was the road to the north, the road they had taken together, leading out of this grassland and into the desert. White and blue, the robes of homegoing men on bicycles gleamed phosphorescent. In one corner of her mind, far from the anguish, a lens-shutter clicked open and shut.

She stared at the road and in her mind sped along it, following the great sweeping lengths of it up to the border and beyond, far beyond to where the leather tents sprawled in the sand.

 Darkness fell with African abruptness and still she sat there, now staring up at the stars. They were brighter where he was. She shut her eyes and imagined it: cool water at the tent door - sand, straw mat and back muscles lean into each other - the eyes look up to brightness and darkness.

She had been there; she knew.

Ataka had taken her there, two months ago. It had been a beautiful and bitter experience. She had been too confused by her love for him to be single-minded about her photography, forming an emotional relationship with her subject which made her blunder about. Her cool photographer’s eye constantly saw startling, beautiful images but the great hot mess in her heart had made her shy away when she should have been closing in.

The women sat there, dark eyes glinting, draped in indigo cloth, their babies suckling at firm brown breasts. Placid, good-humoured, they chewed tobacco, drank sweet tea and chased for lice in each other’s glossy black hair. She was disgusted by the animality of it all. And envious, aware they were female in a way that made her lacking. Her fair skin began to burn and peel in the sun, as if to make her more alien.

‘Katerin!’ they cried. ‘Stay here with us and drink camel’s milk until you become a beautiful woman! Big!’ They made circles with their arms to show how big. They spoke to her in clumsy Hausa as she didn’t understand their language.

One laughing young woman was particularly energetic in this favourite game of begging Katherine to stay and become fat. Her name was
Kadijiatu, the mother of a retarded child they all cheerfully accepted as a changeling.

'Stay until you become beautiful like Aminatu!' she cried. 'She was so big she had to be carried about! You know, once she was carried to the well to wash and she put her earrings here so that they wouldn’t be lost...’ she demonstrated by pushing a hand into the fold between her thigh and her belly. ‘You know, she forgot where she put them! She didn’t find them until two months later when they began to itch her!'

Looking at the huge traditional earrings, thick silver rings some four inches in diameter, Katherine felt faint at the thought. 'I don’t want to be fat,’ she used to protest. ‘My people don’t like fat women.’ But this concept was too strange for them to absorb and the game continued day after day.

They rubbed the indigo dye into the insides of her arms, marvelling at how it looked on her pale skin. ‘Look! Good!’ The old men fretted at the way her hair hung about her face ‘like a madwoman’, and insisted on it being braided by the women. ‘Good!’ they smiled, running their gnarled hands with pleasure over the intricate plaiting which resulted. She was uncomfortable and self-conscious about her new hairstyle.

‘When the trader comes we can buy you a dye that will make your hair beautiful and really black!’ whispered Kadijiatu conspiratorially.

Katherine laughed and hid her feelings about all of this; in fact, she was intensely irritated at the assumption that their ideal of beauty was the only possible one. She began to wonder if Ataka secretly thought her ugly. She found herself wearing skirts instead of trousers, to disguise the fact that she lacked even a vestige of the great shelving buttocks of the women. Once he had commented on it as he lay with his head on her lap, one arm thrown backwards encircling her hips. 'No buttocks,' he had said almost dreamily to himself. She had frozen in embarrassment and the moment had slid past out of her grasp.

Yet the women of the neighbouring tribe, a different ethnic group, stalked stork-like through the landscape with graceful elongated frames, bearing their enormous calabashes of milk on their heads. She marvelled at this wonder of genetic survival, these two separate cultures living side by side over the centuries, never intermingling. It was but another symptom of the self-absorption of Ataka’s people which she found so threatening.

Four nights after she and Ataka arrived she looked up from her notebook, aware of a commotion in the camp. The children reached her first. ‘Radio! Radio!’ they cried, pointing behind them. With a sense of shock she saw in the distance a group of people and the figure of a man stretched out on the ground. Snapping off her torch and slinging her camera around her neck she followed the children who had borne her radio off.

Traditional music blared from the radio. As she watched, bewildered,
the man on the ground began to stir. Grotesquely he staggered to his feet and began to dance, knees bent, arms stretched wide, eyes closed, head back. His tagilmoust, the immensely long black cloth that served as turban and veil, had fallen off and trailed on the ground behind him. He moved slowly in a circle with tranced high-stepping movements, now surrounded by a throng of people. A hand gripped her elbow. It was Ataka’s friend Hamadin.

‘It is Ataka’s uncle,’ he shouted in her ear above the din. ‘The spirits have entered him.’

She looked about. ‘Where is Ataka?’ she asked.

‘He has gone in the Landrover to bring the drum from the next camp.’ His white teeth flashed with pleasure above the dark folds of his tagilmoust.

‘The drum?’ Her voice rose shrilly on the question.

‘Yes! They will sing the spirits out of him!’

The music on the radio had given way to religious discussion so they had shut it off and begun a fast-paced chant, clapping in rhythm. The Landrover was almost upon them before she heard it. The big flat drum was lifted out and she saw Ataka join the circle on the other side. Now, with two women beating out a heart-quickening rhythm with the flat of their hands, the men and boys began to chant in earnest. The wild and vigorous voices swooped and flew into the night.

She felt the drumbeat pounding along her bloodstream but also, inexplicably, the crawling sensation in the flesh which was by now a familiar prelude to anger. A hand tugged at her shirt-sleeve. Ataka’s mother smiled up at her, a tiny wrinkled woman whose actual age she couldn’t determine. She couldn’t smile back.

As she looked back to the possessed man, a woman suddenly threw herself into the centre of the circle and began to dance. Unlike the tranced, high-stepping dance of the man, this was frenetic, orgiastic, a frenzied shaking of breasts and hips. ‘The spirits have caught her, too!’ said Hamadin’s voice in her ear. Two women darted forward. One removed the huge silver earrings which swung crazily from the dancer’s elongated lobes, while the other fumbled at her back. As Katherine saw the baby being lifted from the mother’s back – the frenzied face of the mother, the fat little startled face of the baby, the two other faces intent on their task – she thought for the first time of her camera. What was she doing? She must record this. But to lift the camera was to acknowledge this spectacle, in a sense to accept it. She stood frozen, unable to make the commitment.

The old woman at her side, Ataka’s mother, fell to the ground like a stone and then began to roll frenziedly.

A powerful revulsion seized Katherine. She swung around and beat her way through the wildly excited people. Blindly she strode out of the camp and on into the sand. She heard a voice calling her but didn’t stop
until she was brought to an abrupt halt by a hand gripping her shoulder. It was Ataka, his hair making a wild halo around his head in the moonlight.

‘What happened, Kath?’ he asked, his eyes wide with concern.

She stared at him, speechless, thoughts darting around in her head.

He searched out a fallen tree and sat her down beside him on a withered trunk, an arm about her. He was silent. What was he thinking? Why didn’t he speak, give her some clue? Did he think she had simply been frightened? Did he think that as an ‘Infidel woman’ she had been offended by the flirtation with the spirits? Or that the spirits of his clan had themselves ejected her from the encampment? After all, for all his education, he had grown up with these beliefs. She didn’t know. She needed to know. But more than that she needed him to understand her. It was suddenly vitally important that he should know her, that he shouldn’t have a distorted image of her.

She struggled to find words to express something of what had shaken her but found she couldn’t analyse her own anger and disgust. She sat there, helpless. Then she remembered his mother.

‘Your mother? Didn’t you see what happened to her?’

‘It’s nothing, you know,’ he answered quickly. ‘I’ve seen it happen many times. She’s very sensitive—some people are.’

She searched his face. What was he thinking? Was he ‘sensitive’? Had it happened to him? Did he believe in ‘the spirits’? Why couldn’t she ask? She was afraid to be confronted with the answers.

‘It’s a great event, you know, for them,’ he said, a hint of apology in his tone. ‘They’re enjoying themselves.’

‘I know! That’s what made me so angry!’

He stared at her, perplexed.

It was true. She begrudged them the capacity for celebration, she resented their capacity for release. She resented and envied the powerful bond of community which led them so cheerfully to pander to the hysteria of one of their number.

What could she say to him? Would it be easier for him to communicate his thoughts if they were speaking Hausa rather than English? She cursed the fact that she hadn’t learned Tamajegh. She hid her face in his shoulder, marking time, searching for words. A rich heady smell came from his cotton shirt, a mixture of indigo dye, oil-based perfume and human sweat. She inhaled deeply. The smell of the tribe. The smell of their mothers when they were babies at the breast. Could Ataka truly, in his soul, feel at ease with anyone who didn’t smell like that?

He pushed her head back and grinned. ‘Your nose is blue!’ The indigo had come off on her face. ‘Wait! Don’t rub it off!’ Taking a corner of the tagilmoust he wore slung over his shoulder he gently rubbed it over her face and then more vigorously into her lips. ‘Wait!’ He took out a little pocket-mirror. ‘Look!’ In the clear moonlight she could see her face,
looking as if she had washed it in pale ink, her lips almost black.

'Beautiful!' he nodded, smiling widely in his delight.

She laughed. 'You're every bit as bad as the women!' She liked her blue face.

Laughing, he took the camera from her neck and pulled her to her feet. She went into his arms and clung to him fiercely. She loved him. With him she was complete.

'Let's go further out there and find ourselves a bush or something,' he said in her ear.

He slung the camera around his neck and, arms about each other, they set off over the sand. She tried to walk more easily by imitating his practised gait, erect and graceful. His eyes scanned the way ahead.

'I suppose you know all the suitable bushes around here?' she asked, carefully casual.

'Indeed I do.' he grinned, still looking ahead. 'And not just here. When I was younger I must have fucked every woman, married and single, in the entire country. Remember, we were nomadic.'

'Oh God, don't make me jealous tonight. I couldn't take it!' she groaned. But she felt curiously proud of his prowess.

They walked on under the glittering sky.

His voice broke into her thoughts.

'Did you get any pictures?'

She shook her head.

No, no pictures.

One evening, as she sat with two of the men watching the sun begin to tint the sand rose and listening to the hollow beat of the women pounding grain for the evening meal, a woman approached leading a small boy by the hand. The little boy was naked, as all the younger children were, however bitter the weather, and it was often bitterly cold at this time of the year, the cool season of the harmattan. A thin stream of blood, half dried, ran down his dusty brown leg from the tip of his penis and dried tears streaked his dusty face. The woman spoke vigorously with many gesticulations. The boy, six or seven years old, stood impassively.

'Hamadin, what has happened?' Katherine asked when she got a chance to interrupt.

'It's a dispute about some goats ...'

'But the boy!'

'Ah! The Mallam has just circumcised him. She's asking you for medicine.'

'Isn't Ataka around?'

'No, he has gone to the well.'

As Katherine rummaged about in Ataka's medical box, she felt the now-familiar tide of anger and revulsion begin to rise. She didn't want to
treat the boy. She didn’t want to be involved. If they chose to mutilate
their child in this casual way let them deal with it! Treating the wound
was like drumming for the possessed man: a collaboration.

She was uncertain what should be done. If only Ataka were here!
Should she wait for him? Antiseptic and a bandage she supposed. Or
would a bandage stick to the raw area? Should she wash the wound?
What would she do if it started to bleed again?

She sat the little boy on an upturned plastic basin and applied the
ointment thickly. He didn’t flinch. She had always thought circumcision
among the bush people a matter of great ritual and that groups of boys
were circumcised together. Yet here was this lone hero, no drum beating,
the whole thing treated as casually as a cut finger or a grazed knee.

So she had missed a circumcision. It would have given her some great
shots. But she could get a shot now at least. She squatted in front of the
boy, staring at her sticky fingers, her mind racing. If she put a bandage
on his penis it would spoil the shot. The yellow basin was out, too. She
and her yellow washing-up basin were extraneous and atypical. She
would have to wash her hands, get the camera and stand the boy up next
to his mother, as she had first seen him. The mother began to gesticulate
again, this time directly to Katherine but in Tamajegh. Katherine got up
and washed her hands hastily. As she fumbled with the camera she
muttered to Hamadin that she wanted to take a picture. Hamadin
translated this, deadpan. The mother stared, stony-faced. Katherine
couldn’t tell if she was displeased. They were always wary of the camera,
liking to appear only at their most formal. The trick was either to catch
them unawares or to appeal to their sense of fun. She took a preliminary
shot of the boy sitting on his plastic basin gazing up at her wide-eyed,
face streaked with dust and tears, little head with only a stubble of hair
except for a cockscomb running along the top like a Sioux warrior, his
small penis glistening with antiseptic. It was a superb picture, she knew.
But as a record of the primitive culture valueless. To get that she would
have to take the basin away and clean the antiseptic off again. The
enormity of the idea made her shudder.

She must get the gauze bandage
on the little creature.

A shadow fell between her and her subject. Ataka stood there, taking
in the scene incredulously. He moved in to pick up the bandage. She
hastily put away the camera and watched as he rigged up a sling around
the boy’s waist, feeling like a criminal.

That night, lying under the stars, she mustered up enough courage to
ask him. There was an ever-increasing barrier of unspoken things
between them.

‘Were you angry with me today about the boy?’
‘Yes, I was.’ He sounded relaxed and at ease.
‘But why should you be?’ She forced herself to press on. ‘You do the
same! You record the culture in a notebook, I record it on film. It’s my
'And your craft doesn't give way - even before suffering?'
'But the camera must seize the moment! Otherwise it's gone!'

There was a long silence. When he spoke again his voice sounded more distant. 'Isolated moments - partial truths.'

Katherine turned away from him, sick at heart.

As the days went by she suffered and grew more confused. One thing only was certain: she was in love. In love with Ataka and his people, with the place itself. It was all fantastic and fascinating: the veiled blue-skinned men, the bare-breasted women with their wads of tobacco poised on their lower lips, the quality of the light, the vigour of the language, the cool beauty of the nights, the harmattan dust that flung itself up and hid the sun - she might have been on another planet. The people captivated her. They laughed so much. She saw them as gaily heroic, in the face of the harshest of environments. Out of scrub and sand they had created a way of life that was deeply satisfying to them. They were hardly interested in any other; they were hardly interested in her.

She loved the way the men and women sat and laughed and played together. They paid lip-service to Islam but the old matriarchal culture was still strong. The women laughed, played, enjoyed elaborate courtship rituals, married whom they pleased unless they were very young and if dissatisfied walked out on their husbands with a toss of the head.

She often felt deeply at peace and in harmony with the place and the people; then she would turn the corner and pain would slap her in the face. In the course of a laughing conversation the women would point out some little girl, completely undeveloped, as somebody's wife and she would struggle to remain impassive and shy away from asking what this might mean. Or they would joke about their grandfathers buying the black members of the community in the slave market in Agadez. She had drilled herself to forgive them their caste-system though it was repugnant to her and took care not to discuss it in any depth with Ataka, fearful of what his received attitudes might be. Besides, it didn't threaten her personally. As a fair-skinned European - a 'red woman' - she was obviously one of the top-dogs.

Meanwhile they continued to beg her to stay, to drink camel's milk and grow fat and beautiful. One day, after a more than usually hilarious exchange, Kadijiatu caught her by the wrist and pulled her out of the tent. Katherine, preventing her camera from swinging against the tent-pole with her forearm, staggered out from under the low skin tent - a manoeuvre she was still unable to execute with any grace. Kadijiatu led her across the sand to a neighbouring tent and drew her excitedly under the low-hanging skin.

A chorus of voices greeted her. She was given a place on a wooden
bed, was fondled by an old woman and a glass of hot tea was pressed into her hand. She drank off the tea, nauseatingly sweet, yet welcome in that dryness.

‘Look! Look, Katerin!’

On the sand beside the bed a little girl of about nine or ten lay on her back, knees raised. Mouth open, an index finger in each corner of her mouth, her lips were spread in a grin.

‘Katerin!’ called the girl’s mother who sat beside her, a kettle poised in her hand. ‘Have you ever seen this before? Watch now.’ She tilted the kettle and a steady stream of milk began to pour into the girl’s mouth.

‘You see Katerin?’ asked Kadijiatu eagerly. ‘She will soon become a beautiful woman!’

Katherine fought to control the hot surging rage that rushed through her and set her body trembling. She felt the sweat spring out in her palms and the nerves in her face began to jump. Oh God, she thought, I mustn’t. I must keep control. It was degrading, obscene, her skin crawled at it. The little girl retched but struggled to control it, choking down the milk. Her mother righted the kettle, cutting off the stream.

‘Well, God punish you, open your mouth!’ the mother cried. ‘I don’t know what to do with her! Yesterday she vomited half her milk and today she wants to do the same! Open your mouth, wretch!’

The little girl pulled back her lips but began to whimper. The mother turned to Katherine again. ‘Look at her Katerin! She has no body at all yet and she refuses to drink! If you saw the girls over in the camp beyond the well! They have such fine bodies they are hardly able to walk! Old Raechita really knows how to force them!’

‘Wasn’t it one of her granddaughters died of drinking milk some years ago?’ asked one of the other women.

‘No, it wasn’t her granddaughter – it was a girl from another family. It’s true some girls she was feeding have died in the past. Sometimes it can be too much. But there’s no fear of that with this little wretch here!’

She slapped the girl vigorously on the head – once, twice – and the little girl dragged her lips wide into a grimace again. The mother poured until the kettle was empty while the girl gagged and struggled to control herself. Then the mother filled the kettle again.

The girl began to whimper helplessly and Katherine started as a man leapt to his feet. It was Chimbizat, one of the black slaves, a warm and dignified man who had been very friendly to Katherine from the start. He stood astride the girl and, pulling a leather whip from his sword-belt, brandished it threateningly over her. ‘Before God, I’ll beat you until your skin comes off if you don’t open your throat!’

Anger burst like a hot liquid inside Katherine, her hand shot out and slammed the kettle to the ground. She stumbled from the tent and plunged through the circle of withered trees and bushes that encircled the camp. She walked far out into the surrounding sand, now weeping.
violently. Her camera hung heavily, a useless weight. She stopped and held it in her hands, glaring at it as if it were the focus of her anger. Her hands were trembling.

She sat in a hollow behind a ridge of sand and tried to quiet herself. Head on her knees, she listened to the silence that was not really silence: distant cries from the camp, the lowing of the animals, the steady beat of wooden pestle on mortar, the indefinable sound of air moving among the dry grasses. The peace of the empty spaces was deep and tangible. She tried to relate this healing silence to the scene she had just witnessed. Man would have invented pain if it hadn’t already existed. Who had first conceived the obscene notion of force-feeding and who had brought it to birth? Man or woman? Why had they no consciousness of the cruelty, the gross indignity of it? Were they so callous, so inured to pain?

Then she remembered Hadiza, a friend of hers who had been divorced and whose young children were now hundreds of miles away in Algeria, a situation she had seemed to accept with equanimity. One day she was telling Katherine stories of how young people taken to France as children by their French soldier fathers had come back eventually to search for their Touareg mothers. Suddenly she had stretched out an arm and cried, ‘Look! The hairs on all my body are standing up with pleasure!’

Katherine had thought in wonder of Shakespeare – all those comedies of reunited husbands and wives, fathers and daughters – his audiences must have been like Hadiza. We have lost the capacity to feel that shock of pleasure, she thought, and feel it in the flesh.

Her thoughts shifted. What a fool she was! What had she accomplished? Nothing! She had done nothing but make a fool of herself. They would have no idea of what her violence signified.

Wearily she rose and wearily she made her way back to the camp. The women greeted her good-humouredly. She couldn’t guess what reactions, what judgements, what misunderstandings their relaxed faces concealed. No doubt they had shrugged off the inexplicable behaviour of the Infidel woman. She noticed the girl sitting in the sand, legs outstretched, her black wrapper loosened over her swollen belly.

When Ataka saw her approach he rose from where he was sitting with Hamadin and came to meet her. He made a gesture with his arm which she had come to recognise as a request to walk aside for private
conversation. They walked a little distance and stopped behind a withered tree. Her heart was in her throat. His eyes above the folds of his tagilmoust were solemn.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘I feel I’ve shamed you.’

‘It’s okay. They think you were just upset at seeing Zainabu cry.’ He pulled his tagilmoust down from his mouth.

‘But you know better?’

‘Yes! All these days I’ve watched you and seen you angry and miserable here among my family. It’s hurt me.’ He took her hands, gripping them tightly. ‘Kath, Kath, tell me! Tell me and whatever it is we will fix it up! Tell me now!’

She was appalled at the simplicity of his approach. How could she hope to explain anything about the springs of her anger? When she hardly understood them herself? How could she expose herself, strip herself in so radical a way?

Yet she must try, if they were to stay together.

That began it, the gruelling futile argument that went on day after day, destroying their trust in each other. It served only to convince her that she could never come to terms with the violence of her feelings. He could discuss his culture with her, point for point. What he could not hope to understand was the culture that had produced the strange twisted impulses in her own soul.

She left. His parting words were a promise to follow her south in three weeks time when he had finished his research. She hadn’t even acknowledged the promise. She felt as if a cloud hung over her mind, like the harmattan dust, which when it lifted would leave everything intelligible.

When she got back it seemed at first as if she might forget. The patient might yet live. Then the pain began again and grew. She worked, bitterly, without joy. Then she began actively to wait for him. Every morning and evening her eyes went to the road across the dry grass. Emptiness. Braying buses. Yellow taxis. Delusive voices. Imaginings.

Then she met the American. She liked him, his openness to experience, his democratic attitudes, his innocent assumption that despite all it was still the best of all possible worlds.

It was six weeks since she had left Ataka. He could still come. He would come, eventually. Time had little meaning where he was. She sat waiting for the American.

He brought a bottle of sparkling wine and they sat drinking it on the verandah, mosquito coils between their feet.

‘I must take a shower,’ she said. ‘Before we go out.’

‘Me too,’ he countered. ‘I’ve come straight from the Department.’ He was an Arts teacher.
'But we must finish the wine ...'
'Let's finish it in the shower ...'

She laughed to cover her unease and in a hair's breadth of thought, 'go straight to it or you'll flounder'.

He took the candle into the bathroom and turned off the light. She couldn't share his mood and felt his initial gaiety slip away like the water swirling down the drain. They washed, very respectably, he under the shower, she under the tap of the hot-water heater. She thought wryly of Travis McGee's 'enormous shower-stall' on the Busted Flush. Chastely they washed each other's backs. I'm no good at this sort of thing, she thought. I need to be in love. I want Ataka. Pain wrenched at her heart. She sat on the edge of the bath, a towel modestly about her waist, ill at ease and trying to disguise it. Trying to keep up with a Californian, she thought with a private grimace. Here she was a stranger in a strange country. In the goatskin tent she had been herself and at home.

He bent and touched his lips to hers. She stood up and went into his arms. She didn't want to kiss. She turned her head to the side and saw them embracing in the mirror above the sink, her paler face on his brown shoulder. And next to the mirror the calendar, with its pictures of gaudy traditional dancers, day after day crossed out in red, counting the days to Ataka's return.

When they coupled there on the bathroom floor she felt a certain pleasure but couldn't rid herself of that sense of detachment. It wasn't his fault. He had a fine penis and knew how to use it. She didn't come and when he did, it was with a wild prolonged cry which aroused a faint repugnance and contempt in her.

Later they danced in the village, in the open courtyard, on a cement floor glossy from the friction of any feet. Great bottles of Nigerian beer stood on the tables around, the green glass glinting. The music was modern Nigerian dance music. It flowed cool and powerful, layer upon layer, like the great river Niger itself: endless, seething on the surface, relentlessly calm in its depths. The river of life. It lifted her out of herself, her misery. Nothing mattered after all but to be borne along by the current. She let the music take her and on that journey she was not alone. She was part of a whole, together with her fellow-dancers and this man who was now her lover.

'I'm happy,' she thought exultingly, and threw back her head, and in that moment saw the stars set in blackness above her. The noise and movement fell away and she was drawn upwards into the stillness of the night sky. She tasted all the bitterness of loss and failure.
Maura Dooley

TEN LETTERS, A SOMETHING Z

He always grasps the wrong end now, searching for a light but almost had it then, the memory of something all gone up in smoke, and tries again. She wants to fill him in the way they used to crack the cryptic. Four letters, Another country, they do things differently there. She turns his cigarette around, strikes a match Now he’s the anagram she can’t solve.

SYNAESTHESIA

A white butterfly visits the rosemary bush. Its hesitation on the tricky leaves throws up a fragrance seen through glass.

When he opens the door on children's voices, the scent of remembrance, april sunshine, the air is shivery with promise. The second before the bomb was just like this.
NIAGARA

It's what I'd been looking for, I suppose,
a Force I'd have to give in to.
The speed of water, charged light,
that sudden drop

that makes you want to just step in
and let it carry you.

Brave enough to take the boat upstream
I'm drenched, caught in a storm

of sun and mist, dense as promise.
But at the hotel the pool is flat blue,

I make a tidy, regular pattern
moving from the deep end to the shallow.

A NEW PHASE

And I learnt how I mustn't write of it
must not (italics here), being a woman and wary,
being a woman and mad as a hormone,
mad as that princess - Alexandra? Alice?
- who thought she'd swallowed a piano. But no,
this was a baby. A baby, and the simple complexities
of the calendar, the waxing and the waning of the great
and of the tiny egg, these were to be avoided.
So that when this winter day soaks the sea
with a thin light and you extend an infant hand
with its fistful of bright, new crescents, I smile,
perplexed, to hear you chant: moon, moon, moon.
Alicia Stubbersfield

A RED MAP

She remembers throwing the glass, it shattering against yellow wallpaper, water dripping, splinters on the floor. Next the milkbottles, one by one, smacked on the doorstep, her hand bleeding as she aimed a stone straight through the window.

They took some notice: wheeled her baby out so she could rest, checked she was eating properly, asked about the doctor's visit.

No-one seemed to see bits of her were disappearing, understand how, each day, another part was missing, fingers worst of all so she couldn't fasten a zip or secure a nappy.

Her voice stuck somewhere far away so she rushed out of shops without asking. Now and then laughter bubbled, spilled out, on and on.

She knew what would help, looked for it daily in papers, on television and found it in car number plates, the perfect alignment of tree and lamppost, three magpies on her lawn.

She lit candles in every room, checked the doors five times only before sitting down with the special knife she knew was hers, silver like tonight's moon.
One sliver and then another,
clean and true,
red map-lines slowly forming
to show her the way,
and she’d find it now
she was sure.

UNSUITABLE SHOES

Sheep are the voices of the damned,
calling out to you as you stumble along,
demanding something you can’t give
in this flimsy dress, these crazy shoes.

You’re following him along a path
edged with the soft bodies of sheep.
It wasn’t what you expected tonight
or what you told yourself was possible.

There is the slightest curve of moon,
the sighing of wind through gorse
still yellow in the half-light, the day’s end,
when you are struggling over dried earth.

An owl cries out, searching for creatures,
your breath hurts in your chest, a fox slips
away knowing you are too close for comfort,
he slows, takes your hand across the stream.

Red shoes covered in dust, fine leather
holding your feet like ballet pumps
but you’re not dancing, only keeping up
while he takes you walking on the mountain.

It was never going to happen again,
you promised yourself after the last time,
this is the last time you said, wrote those
words on the inside of cigarette packets.

You got into the car just the same,
fastened your seat belt quick and tight,
not meaning to go this far, to jump out
lightly, skipping through the kissing gate.

How you pretend, how you stay silent
when your feet hurt and the sheep’s voices
remind you of where you should be, not here,
not ruining your pretty, unsuitable shoes.
The Poverty Bush

**Karen**

Collateral damage. Of all the terrible euphemisms of the Gulf War, this was the ugliest. I know the real meaning: that Sister Jeanne and thirty girls were blown apart and burnt. It may be the saddest phrase in the language: many unwritten tragedies are concealed between the c and the e. Most have ensued from evil intent and evil action, but – and this is the saddest thing – a lot have ensued from good intent and innocent actions.

I made love to a ghost. I had no evil intent, but I will never know what damage I did to the ghost. Indeed, I had no intent at all; I acted on an overwhelming impulse, deaf and blind to all else. The damage may have been no less, therefore, or I no less culpable.

Except for the too thin lips, his was a handsome face, although it appeared waxen in the bright cone of light. He wore gold-framed spectacles with circular lenses which made his eyes look smaller, meaner. There were others in the room, but I could see nothing beyond the narrow cone of light. There was music; playing at a low volume from a loudspeaker somewhere out there in the dark beyond the light. The piece was familiar, I thought, but I could not name it in my terror. I concentrated, desperate to assure myself that my mind was not disintegrating, until I could name it.

**Chopin; yes, Chopin.**

*One of the Etudes; but which one?*

*Which one? Oh God! Which one?*

Tremulous silences hovered between the notes, as potent as the notes themselves.

‘Why won’t you answer?’

His voice was gentle, coaxing. But my tongue was stuck to the roof of my mouth which was dried by terror. I had lost track of time. I had been questioned for hours, a day – a day and a night perhaps – without respite, by relays of SS officers. The others had been aggressive. They had shouted at me, slapped my face. There had been no music softly playing then.

He wore a black SS uniform. It was freshly pressed, but the top button was undone, as if he was preparing to relax at the end of a hard day. He
reached forward and pulled aside the rough grey cloth of the shift they had dressed me in. His hands were soft, white and beautifully manicured; his nails shone as if he used nail polish; perhaps he did. There was something androgynous in his voice, his manner.

My father was always fussy about the appearance of his nails; he always wore a dark suit and gilt-framed spectacles.

Despite the heat of the lamp, my exposed left breast felt cold. He stroked the nipple. I could not stop it becoming gorged with blood, but the sensation was painful as I tried to resist the stimulation. He touched it lightly with a long finger nail on his right-hand index finger. The sensation was almost like an electric shock.

'I would hate to have to make you talk,' he said.

He was almost courteous.

He leant forward and gently licked my nipple. I strained back in the hard chair – my arms were handcuffed behind the back of it – but could not escape the slimy feel of his tongue.

'It would be such a pity ...' He paused to smile. 'Did you know that one kind of champagne glass is supposed to be modelled on the breasts of Marie Antoinette?'

He gestured to someone beyond the flood of light. A hand appeared holding a glass of cold water. Beads of moisture condensed on the glass. My dry throat ached. He drank the water slowly, savouring every drop. He held out the glass and the hand came in to the light again and took it from him.

'Are you thirsty?'

'Ja!' I croaked.

The same in German and Danish. The same word.


'Tell us all you know,' he said. 'That's all you need to do. Then you may have water ... or wine if you would prefer ... Champagne, perhaps? In one of those specially shaped glasses.'

I could not speak. My mouth was so dry I believed that I had lost my tongue.

Will I ever be able to speak again.

I could only shake my head, but that was painful too; my neck had become stiff, almost rigid.

'Have you lost your tongue?'

He frowned and gestured to whoever stood outside the cone of light. The same hand appeared in the light again, holding a pair of small copper clips which trailed wires. I could not see what the wires were connected to outside the cone of light.

'It would be a pity ...' he said as he gently opened the clip and applied it to my nipple. The spring was not strong; the grip of the clip was not
painful, but it was cold. I winced. He unclipped it.

'I'm so sorry,' he said.

He breathed on the clip to warm it. When he reapplied it to my nipple I could feel the slime of his condensed breath.

'Can you imagine how it will feel when we turn on the switch,' he said. 'It may be pleasantly stimulating ... at first ... But when we increase the voltage ...'

He gestured again and the hand reappeared in the light with an electrical meter in a black bakelite case. I did not know whether it was an ammeter or a voltmeter; the dial had no numbers on it. Would I have been able to foresee the pain if there had been numbers? How many amps, how many volts would begin to cause pain? How many would burn the flesh? How much would kill? The dial had just three coloured segments: green, yellow and red.

I trembled uncontrollably, but my tongue clung more closely to my palate.

'Nej!' I managed to say at last.

My voice was so strained and husky I must have been inaudible. My throat burned as air passed through it, but at least I had found my tongue again, even if it felt like a limp piece of dry felt.

Klaus (it was his code name in the Resistance) had told us that, if we were ever captured, we should keep saying 'nej' to ourselves, drilling ourselves to say nothing else, whenever we were able; when we woke in the morning, when we were going to sleep each night. 'You may keep saying it, then, when you are losing control,' he said.

'I'm not a hard man,' he said, the thin lips opening in a smile which revealed perfect, but rather small, brilliantly white teeth. 'I will give you two days to think about it. Shall we say ten o'clock ... in two day's time?'

He removed the metal clip and handed it back to the hand which appeared again from the darkness. It was a large, thinly boned hand, the hand of a musician - or a surgeon. But the nails were in need of cutting, and dirty. I began to feel that it did not belong to a body.

'Such a pity ...'

He stroked my nipple again.

'I will make sure that there is a clock in your cell,' he said. 'I would be disappointed if you were late for our next meeting ... our next tryst.'

Someone untied my wrists. My arms were cramped behind the hard chair back and I could not, at first, move them. He moved with elaborate - elaborated - courtesy to help me stand.

'It would be such a pity ...' he said again.

In all my life I had not heard such a pitiless remark.

The clock was a cheap one, in a red enamelled metal case. When I next heard the screams echoing down the corridor, I hurled it against the wall
and smashed it. The shiny steel spring sprang from the frame and quivered in its death throes on the polished linoleum.

*It is possible that this is the room where my father worked.*

I thought that my father worked in a palace. It was one of the biggest modern buildings in Copenhagen. It had a yellow crown, which was lit at night, suspended from its facade. Only later did I come to know that it was a shell, a cockle shell. Perhaps the formal way my father dressed made me think that he was a royal courtier; in a black suit. He always carried a shiny black leather brief case. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles; the lenses were almost circular.

I liked to walk past the palace where he worked, especially in the early darkness of a winter afternoon, when the 'crown' glowed brilliantly against the snow which had gathered on the roof and the window ledges.

Later I knew that he had only a middle range administrative post. It made no difference. I loved this modest, caring and kindly man. His brief period of glory came when he joined the Resistance and displayed unexpected resolve and bravery. We never found out how he died at the hands of his captors.

It might have been marginally less terrible for my mother and me if we had known the details, rather than being left to imagine them.

How accurate are our memories? Are they more or less accurate when they are about ourselves?

I was an only child. We lived in a small apartment in an old building in the area between the Kastellet and the Østerport Station. The front door of our apartment block opened on to a courtyard. A block of larger apartments, for more affluent families, was on the other side of the courtyard. The steps up to the dark green door of that block had two large stone owls standing sentinel on pillars on either side. When it snowed, the grey owls became a ghostly white, softly luminescent, in the dim light of the single lamp that illuminated the courtyard. I imagined they might fly, paradoxically made lighter by the white burden of the snow.

Although I had chilblains frequently in winter, and felt trammelled by the several layers of clothes and the high laced boots, I loved the city when it was blanketed with snow. The verdigris on the copper roofs seemed a more intense green, a cold colour contrasting with the warm red and yellows of the warehouses by the canals, the flame of our coal fire and the red decorations at Christmas, and the red and yellow Shell sign.

Here, now, the landscape burns under the high sun: pale gold, grey-green and brilliant red. At noon the light lies like a thin deposit of ash, a white glaze over the colours.

Light is *skin*. The light lies like a skin on the landscape.

Only after rain are the greens ‘true’ green, a sharp, luminous green. At
the end of a very dry spell the grasses and spinifex are so bleached that, under moonlight, the white ash of noon gleams like a light brushing of snow. On some winter nights, when there is frost on the spinifex, nostalgia overcomes me like an old pain.

I pick up my worn copy of Anderson’s tales – the English version.

It was late in January, and a fearful snowstorm. The snow came flying in a drifting whirl through streets and lanes. The outside of the window-panes was fairly plastered over with it, and it plumped down from the roofs in masses, and caused a stampede among the people ...

In winter nights I loved to sit by a window, warm within the house, to watch the white snow flakes fluttering down to earth like moths.

Here the world is flooded with light. In January – when snow might be falling in Copenhagen – we live in a furnace, unless a cyclone is in the offing; then we live in a sauna.

It is a landscape for hawks and eagles. When my back gives trouble, I envy the effortless soaring of the eagles, the hovering of kestrels, and the swift planing flight of the falcons – perfect expressions of freedom.

Peregrine. The wanderer.

We wanted for little. The apartment was well furnished, in what I would now call a Victorian style: dark panels of wood on the walls, red velvet curtains on the windows, solid chairs and tables. My mother was a good cook, plump on her own rich dishes, with a skin like the cream she used lavishly. At Christmas we had goose roasted with a stuffing of plums. It did not occur to me even to think that this way of life would change, that this comfort might not be permanent.

I skated on the canals in the winter. In summer we went to a landing near the warehouses on those canals to buy fish directly from the boats. I pestered often to be taken to see the bronze statue of Anderson’s mermaid at the edge of the harbour; we could get to it by walking past the moats of the Kastellet.

‘Will the mermaid be safe?’ I asked my mother, when storms piled ‘porridge’ ice and snow along the shore.

I wanted to be like the mermaid when I grew up; not with a scaly fish tail, but slender and small breasted, with long hair. I asked my mother to give me smaller helpings of ellebøde for breakfast, and over that dark, luscious mush of rye bread and light ale I poured less cream. I learned to swim in a heated pool, and gloried in the freedom of a light costume and the sense of weightlessness in the water. If the water was just warm enough I lost the sense of having a boundary, became momentarily skinless, as if my whole being flowed out and became the pool. When I rested between swims I sat on the edge of the pool, with my legs tucked under me like a tail.

I found the water in the billabong strangely chill, when I plunged in late
on a day which had been searingly hot. I expected to shed my anxieties in the weightlessness of tepid water. The chill contracted the anxieties tightly into my body and made my skin strain tight over my flesh.

_Billabong._ So many words here ring like bells: _billabong, kurrajong, quandong_ ... 

It may have been the surprising chill of the water that disoriented me. I began to panic. When I looked up to see him offering his hand, his hair flaring in the late afternoon light. I cried out involuntarily, softly, a name. He probably did not hear it.

Sometimes the landscape here, in certain lights, is like a coloured negative made to appear positive under a glancing light: the reds bolder, the greens sharper. I was lucky to see it first in a good year, massed with the pink, white and gold of everlastings and the black and scarlet of Sturt peas. I had not expected such lavishness, such largesse.

I do not say, or think of it as, _København_ any more; it becomes more distant every year; as if distance in time equates with distance in space. It is _Copenhagen_ now. I wanted to escape from it – from Europe, rather, the Europe that was left after the war. If I ever went back – it may never be possible now – I would be a tourist. I have disconnected, but have I escaped?

When I left, I wanted to escape from the weight of Europe’s history, of its tragedies, my own tragedies. Here the landscape has a different, a stranger weight, the disturbing sensation of gravity in a vacuum. Sometimes, then, I long for human beings to have left a more substantial impression on these vast spaces. I have not escaped from the need for that gravity.

Although my parents were staunch Protestants (Billy Connolly spoke of his childhood in Scotland, where Protestants were always _staunch_ and Catholics _devout_), they sent me to a small convent school near the Shell building. The school had a reputation for strict, but not harsh, discipline, and high academic standards. Besides, I could travel with my father each morning. We came out of the Metro station close to the Shell building. I was proud to walk with him, hand in hand. He saw me across the street and then crossed back to Shell House. There came a time when my intimate knowledge of that part of the town helped to save my life.

I pointed out Shell House to my class mates.

‘That is my father’s office,’ I said.

I did not know which of the windows was his; I pointed to the largest.

‘He has a big office, because he has an important job.’

By then I knew it was not a palace. The yellow and red sign was a brave banner for the good times of my childhood. If I was not feeling happy I could glance out of the window and know that my father was
there. Sometimes I waved towards the building, hoping that he could see me.

As I fled down the street I heard the steady thrumming of an aircraft. I flattened myself against the wall as the Mosquito flew straight down the street, almost brushing the roof tops, its cannon firing.

I knew it was a Mosquito. I was too young for active service when I joined the Resistance after my father's death. As part of my training, I had to learn to recognise aircraft. I was to be found a job as a stewardess on the railways, so that I could be a courier for the Resistance. Being able to recognise a friendly plane might save my life. 'Friendly' was a paradoxical adjective; it was the 'friendly' planes that would bomb and strafe the trains. When the plane had passed I began to run again, hampered by pain in my back, which I had wrenched when I scrambled through the gaping hole in the wall of my cell. I came to a stone wall. As I searched for a way through, afraid to remain exposed in the street where there would soon be troops, I heard footsteps. I turned. A young German soldier came up to me. I raised my hands in surrender, but he brushed past and searched along the wall. He turned and beckoned me. Puzzled, still half in shock, I followed him to a hole in the wall. He dropped his rifle and scrambled over the stones where the wall had been breached. He turned and offered me his hand.

He was stunningly beautiful. His helmet had fallen off. His short cropped blond hair made him look childish. His eyes were large, deep blue. His skin was fresh, his cheeks bright pink with exertion. He looked like an angel in a painting of the Annunciation. My mind seemed to take a flashlit snapshot of him.

I took the offered hand and he pulled me up and over the rubble, a little roughly in his haste, and I could feel something else giving in my back. He ran on, not looking back. He may not have heard my shouted thanks. As he ran, he struggled to shed his grey jacket. A small booklet dropped from the jacket before he freed himself from it. I stopped to pick it up. It was his service book. I thrust it into my bosom and struggled on. One day, I will be able to thank him.

The nuns were good teachers. I enjoyed languages specially. One of the younger nuns, Sister Jeanne, was French. She was short-sighted and her blue eyes peered narrowly from spectacles with tortoiseshell frames. Her small round face was framed by a stiff white wimple which enhanced the glowing pink of her cheeks. She was young, and often surprisingly merry. From her I learnt good French, and French-accented English. I liked better the sound of French, but I liked the richness of English, and discovered how closely Danish and English are related; with many words in common: arm, under, land, frost ... But I also began to wonder at the
arbitrariness of language. Some words in Danish and English were similar when written but different in pronunciation - *broed* and *bread*, for example. One ended in a glottal stop the other in the thud of an English *d*. Other words were quite unlike: *kunst* and *art*. (After the war I heard an American soldier say, as he was staring at a large, explicit painting of a nude woman, ‘Now that really is kunst.’) I began to read English novels and poetry, glad to have access to a larger literature.

I was enchanted by the incantatory poems of the English romantics.

*Oh, what can ail thee knight at arms*  
*Alone and palely loitering?*  
*The sedge has withered from the lake*  
*And no birds sing!*

Such words could move me tears. I sometimes wept openly, listening to them in class.

‘It is not wrong to feel that sadness,’ Sister Jeanne said. ‘But do not let yourself become morbid.’

One of the bombs that were dropped to save me – I still think only of myself, having been isolated in my cell when I was not in the torture room – went astray and fell on the school. Sister Jeanne and thirty girls in her class were killed. I did not find this out until after the war, when I came home. I went one day to look at the Shell building, still in ruins. Across the street I saw the classroom, also in ruins.

‘What happened?’ I asked a bystander.

‘A plane crashed during the raid on the Shell building ... and some bombs went astray.’

‘Was anyone killed?’

‘Some girls ... a nun I think.’

I checked back on the files of old newspapers at the office. I found the list of the victims published a few days after the raid. Sister Jeanne and thirty girls.

‘It is not wrong to feel that sadness. But do not let yourself become morbid.’

The clasp felt warm on my nipple as the needle flickered in the green area of the dial. The almost imperceptible flow of current was not painful, even – against my will – mildly stimulating. I felt that I had been obscenely touched by one of his sharp nails again.

‘Nej,’ I gasped as the needle moved into the yellow segment.

He gestured to whoever operated the controls outside the shaft of light. The needle flickered back briefly to the green. I felt that a wasp had stung my nipple.

‘Nej!’ I could hardly force the word out. I did not know where it came from. I was barely conscious.

The needle moved slowly, inexorably, towards the red. I shut my eyes.
I was not conscious of screaming, but afterwards my throat was dry, rasped. The cone of light became a shaft of searing pain. Lightning burst in my brain.

I was brought to consciousness by icy water dumped on me from a bucket.

'It’s such a pity you will not cooperate,' he said. 'I’m afraid we will have to have another tryst.'

His voice came faintly to me from a mist of darkness. Slowly my vision cleared.

He gestured. The hand, its nails still dirty and untrimmed, was thrust into the light holding a copper tube trailing wires. It was shaped like a test tube, rounded at one end.

*It is shaped like ...*

But my mind would not let me confront the word.

It was barely an hour before the time set for my next ‘tryst’, when the bombs began to fall and the walls opened miraculously, with a loud crash. Fragments of stone rained on me. There was a sharp smell of burning. It was a few moments before I realised what had happened. I paused only to tie a handkerchief across my nose and mouth before I leapt over the rubble into the clouds of dust and smoke billowing in the empty street.

The young soldier – Frederic was his name in the small book – ran on ahead, too fast for me to follow as I was at first inclined to do. Then I recalled my danger, and hurried instinctively towards the entrance to the underground railway. A crowd had gathered, now that the raid was over, to watch the Shell building blaze. A few people even dared to cheer. Because they were looking upward at the building, I was able to work my way through the crowd without my grey shift attracting attention. The platform, now that the raid had ended, was deserted. I hid in a recess in the wall, in the dark beyond the end of the platform, where workmen could stand when a train passed. I waited some hours there, cold – mainly through fear – and with an aching back. When I guessed that night had come, I attracted the attention of a young woman who was alone on the platform.

She was startled when I called to her from the darkness.

‘Who is it?’

‘Please ...’ I pleaded, my voice still hoarse.

She walked slowly towards the end of the platform. I stepped briefly into the light and then returned to the shadow. I must have looked like a grey ghost. The grey prison shift was covered with the dust of the falling rubble.

‘Please help me,’ I called from the dark...

‘Who are you?’ She called back, softly, alarmed.

We were all suspicious, then, of strangers in Copenhagen.
‘Kar... No ... I am sorry ... It may be better for you and me if you do not know.’

She glanced around. As no one else had come, she came to me.

‘You are ill?

‘Ill? Yes ... I don’t know ... Terrified ... I was in the Shell Building ...’

‘Resistance?’

She glanced about her as she spoke. I thought that she might be too afraid to help me. I clutched at her arm; hung to her desperately.

‘Yes! But please help me.’

She nodded nervously.

‘I need clothes ...’

‘Yes ... You’re about my size.’

‘And I need dressings ... a salve.’

I drew open my shift and she peered at my burned nipples. Even in the dim, reflected light she could see the crimson wounds. She blanched.

‘The fiends! The Nazis?’

I nodded and began to weep. We heard voices. I drew back into the shadows of the recess. The young woman left. I was afraid that she would not return, or that she might betray me. I had to risk that my gut feeling, that I could trust her, would be justified.

She returned after half an hour with underwear, a blouse, a skirt and a short warm jacket. I was glad to see that they were plain garments. She also had dressings for my nipples, which she applied with gentle hands.

‘The fiends!’ she murmured, and added, ‘Where will you go?’

‘It is better you do not know!’

She nodded.

‘I would like to ask your name, so that I can see you again ... when ... when this is all over,’ I said.

*Will it ever be over?*

I touched her lips with my fingers before she could reply.

‘But you cannot tell me ... If I were captured again ... and tortured again ...’

She nodded again and turned to leave, as we could hear approaching voices. She turned back and handed me a paper cup full of hot coffee and a paper bag.

‘Some bread and some cheese,’ she said. ‘I could not spare more ...’

‘After the war ... I will look for you,’ I called after her. ‘Every morning ... By the Caritas Fountain ... Look for me.’

I watched her leave. I have never seen her again although, when I returned after the war, I passed by the fountain every morning for weeks.

I returned to the recess to change. I wolfed down the bread and cheese and scalded my throat, still rasped by unremembered screaming, by drinking the coffee too quickly. I made a pillow of the shift and spent a cold night trying to catnap in the recess. The salve had given me temporary relief from the pain in my breasts.
In the morning, I tried to summon strength to leave, to face the light of day, the crowds, and encounters with German troops. It was some time before I found that strength. At last, after the first train for the day had arrived and left, I followed after the departing passengers. As I stepped up on to the platform my trembling knees almost caused me to fall. I forced myself to walk up the stairs, to mingle with the early workers and shoppers.

I could not go home; that would have risked the life of my mother, although I hoped that the raid had destroyed the records so that the Gestapo could not trace me. I walked, quelling an impulse to run, down Strøget. I felt conspicuous crossing the old market square at the end. I stood for a while by the Caritas Fountain, now sufficiently calmed to realise that I was less likely to attract attention if I did not move hastily. As I stood by the fountain I remembered watching the golden apples dancing on the fountain's jets on festive days.

A German soldier approached. He stopped beside me and looked at the fountain. I nearly broke down again.

'Good morning. It is beautiful is it not?' He said, in stilted phrase-book Danish.

'Memory of the apples saved me.

'On festival days,' I said - my German was fluent - 'they put golden apples to dance on the jets.'

'Are you German? Do you have a cold ... Your voice?'

I shook my head.

'No ... I'm not German. Yes ... I have influenza ... I'm going home to bed.'

He turned back to look at the fountain. I forced myself to walk on leisurely, as if I was going to work. He called after me, but I pretended not to hear and let myself walk a little faster.

I resisted the urge to go home to tell my mother, to relieve her anxiety. I would try to get a message to her through the Resistance. I found my way to a safe house near the Kastellet, where I was hidden for several days until there was a dark, rainy morning when I could be smuggled aboard a fishing boat.

I wept as we passed the Little Mermaid, naked and stoically facing the storm waves of a leaden sea. The cold wind revived the pain in my nipples. I huddled deeper into the oilskins which had been lent to me. It was, despite my deliverance from torture and death, the lowest moment of my life. I imagined that I was back in the cold recess in the wall of the underground. I could see no light at the end of the long dark tunnel.

Somewhere near the middle of the Kattegat, in the shelter of the driving rain and sea spray, I was transferred to a Swedish fishing boat which immediately turned back towards the neutral haven. As we approached the coast, the cloud lifted, the wind eased and sunshine flooded the green land and the blue mountains beyond.
I remembered Frederic and was suddenly infused with hope ... and love.

My mother died before the war ended. She had mourned my father’s death deeply and had had to bear too much when I was arrested. I had been unable to complete the rituals for the death of either of my parents. We never did find my father’s grave. My mother went to her’s without the company of any loved one. It was a month after my escape before word got through to her that I was safe in Sweden. But grief, anxiety, the hard winter weather and starvation bore her down.

After the war, I found work as a journalist on one of the leading newspapers. After a few months, I asked if I could tour defeated Germany and report on the state of that nation. My German was fluent enough for me to pass as a German. I dressed plainly, even shabbily, and moved slowly, as if I too was shocked by the bombings, by the collapse of the Third Reich.

I saw Dachau, and vomited at the stench that rose from the uncovered corpses in the deep trenches; but I also saw bombed cities and wept for all that had been destroyed there.

I tried for months to find Frederic.

When I returned to Copenhagen I found the cold oppressive; it sharpened the pain in my back that kept recurring. There were times when I contemplated suicide.

Walking home one night, late, I stopped to watch the moth-like snowflakes whirling in the cone of light beneath a street lamp. Two men stood a little to each side of the cone. One thrust out his hand towards the other. The sleeve of his overcoat drew up and his white, well-manicured hand shone in the light. I knew then that I could not live any longer in Denmark, in Europe. I resigned from my job, after arranging to send regular articles from Australia. I sold the apartment, to prove to myself that I meant to stay in a new land where I expected the sun to shine most days. I assumed that there would be no dark nights when snowflakes whirled in the bright cones of light beneath street lamps.

I believed that, there, I would no longer be tortured by the exquisitely tremulous silences between the notes of remembered music. I did not expect to hear the old music in a new land.

I expected to find desert, but the ground was covered with prodigal masses of wildflowers. The air was radiant, drenched with light. It was full of the flight of birds and the sound of their songs.
Harjit Kaur Khaira

COME DANCING

The skin on the side of her thumb
Revealing the terracotta openings
Caused by printed words on paper
Paper cut infected that won’t heal
And still the world won’t take her dancing.

She stuck sunflower petals on her lashes
That lit highbone cheeks with shadows
The pollen drew wet from her eyeducts
Caused channels of crusted smeary tattoos
And still the world won’t take her dancing.

She smelt the passion on people’s bodies
Gave blessings before they went on cliffhangers
Left business cards in red phone boxes
While smelling the stale piss of strangers
And still the world won’t take her dancing.

They said she was and still is quietly pliable
Taking blue pills of crimes and punishment
Supplemented with the occasional glass of Aqua Vitae
Wearing velvet bowties for ornamental purposes
And still the world won’t take her dancing.

She sings mysteries to people who are longing
Has power marks on her chest in circles
The time for hearing confessions gets shorter
The queues’ increasing highlight her attachments
And still the world won’t take her dancing.

One, two, three, one, two, three
The swirling mass of people swaying
For Cinderella who doesn’t quite make it
Showing her ankles to too many audiences
And still the world won’t take her dancing.
SHE GOT US TO DANCE ON HER ASHES

Her last request  
For the celebration  
Play Paganini  
And defy the devil.  
Bring women with  
Turmeric coloured fingers,  
To conduct the finale  
in  
sin  
copation.

Look to the sky demand a tempest,  
Ask language to give her a name.  
A poet to give garlands of images,  
Invite an adventurer to give her a world.

She tried to see through her monocle,  
But the world put her in manacles.  
She stamped her feet in defiance,  
We broke heart strings with violence.

Play her the concerto, over the ashes,  
Read her the books you kept locked away.  
Give back her feather quill,  
The fire is still burning.

Look to the sky,  
Demand a thunder.  
Ask language to give her a new mirror,  
A poet to give garlands of colours.  
Invite an alchemist  
To turn her to gold.
Southall to Leicester (As it Happens)

On these Southall coaches during the migration they put Indian videos on, the real tacky ones – all singing, all dancing, the kind of movies only India could dare produce, the kind of films that have to be seen to be believed, but it’s comfortable, outside the coach windows you can see the ever dwindling countryside going rapidly by, inside you’re bombarded by a great big Stanipak Pakattack of insanity and colour and it’s horrific-terrific – the movie’s on, music’s blaring, folks’ are babbling in all manner of languages and dialects; Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil, Bengali, Urdu and Gujarati – a coachload of Babel, but sometimes it ain’t so great – sometimes the coach stinks and there’s bad traffic and some Bengali baby’s screaming its little head off in my ear and pissing on my pants, but still, there’s a teek taak quality to these coach trips, sometimes when you look out of the window you can see the racists in their white gowns, I can tell what they’re all wondering; ‘Where the hell are so many Pakis going to? and thank God they’re not stopping here to set up shop!!’, it’s so obvious that in the great scheme of things they’re not gonna add anything positive to the sum total of human existence (tee hee hee), besides, when it comes to sums and numbers and such, we outnumber them a hundred to one, we could take over this goddamn country anytime we want because nobody works harder or breeds faster than us (tee hee hee), but I tell you, I used to love them coach journeys, them mini-Mughal diasporas, especially in the mornings, I’d run all the way from Cranford to Southall, slimming down the folds of fat. Get on board the coach and roll.
At times we remember
if it can be called remembrance
ancestral villages
or the choked streets of Rawalpindi,
we talk long into the night
in coarse Punjabi
chewing the words slowly,
like a plug of tobacco,
before spitting them out
in a hail of invective and humour

These are the times  This is history
I’m eight years old, jumping
up and down on my grandfather’s back,
his back is sturdy as teak wood
and he laughs with tears in his eyes
at my attempts to break him

These are the times  This is history
We are lost on Hounslow Heath
a stones throw from the canal
fortified with six packs and strong weed
chasing shooting stars
long into the night

At times we remember
if it can be called remembrance
the sweet strains of an Urdu *ghazal*
or the muezzin’s call to prayer
we remember the ferocity of the sun
how it burnishes the face and we recall
the grace of sari clad women
as they ghost beyond the haze of our visions

and lost on Hounslow Heath
we suck in the weed
suck in the cold and damp
and try to remember
if it can be called remembrance
who we are and where we are headed
Brown Bleakness/Brown Greyness: A Textual Analysis of My Body in Australia

Do you know why one writes? To be loved.

Michel Foucault

I speak three languages, write in two
dream in one.

Kamala Das

Brown bleakness:
Every visible sign of this body is coloured by the imagination of the gaze of its civilizational others. This body suffers/relishes in its very brown visibility. Black hair, black eyes and very brown skin evoke exotic images of Indian monsoons and at the same time signify the ‘dark’ unhistorical and mythical times of the writers of kama sutra. This body is also a site of contestations where different discourses compete with each other for dominance. These discourses make a spectacle, an obscene spectacle that displays maimed possibilities, incomplete events, anxieties of the state apparati, victories of the legalities, thwarted subversions, half-born counter-strategies, dynamic negotiations and unpredictable teleologies of fictional desires or desires for fiction – a counter-reality that is always waiting to foreground itself and replace the authorized reality.

This is a body whose authorized, legalized, and monitored visibility in Australia, if one accepts the linearity of the bourgeois invention called ‘time’, can be traced back to the 8th of January 1996 with the technologies of surveillance, such as computers, photographs and other governmental and official apparati. This body has been subjected to (in)visible violence/coercion from the moment of its origin in Australia and the most notable sign of this violence is that this body is always sutured to a surveillance instrument called passport. Though the passport is an instrument which is external to this body, it operates in such a way that it infiltrates the material body and internalizes itself into memories and desires of the subject that inhabits this body. The internalization of this surveillance instrument is achieved through a battery of coercive practices, such as threats of deportation or removal from Australia and a complete rewriting/revision of the identity – from an authorized international/overseas student to an illegal alien. The process of
infiltration of the (de)humanized subject that is situated outside/inside this body is achieved with such insidiousness that the subject recognizes the validity of this instrument and often identifies itself with this and other state instruments and fears a complete dispersion and erasure of its identity at all public and private spaces without them.

Surveillance of this international student body aims at neutralizing all the possibilities of subversion and transgression in advance. It means that this body is subjected to/through its own visibility because it is monitored by the panoptical gaze of the state. The above statements operate on a certain amount of amnesia of the violence/coercion that this body has been subjected to before its visibility in Australia. I am aware of the difficulties to erase the continuities of coercion and surveillance that exist between the state of Pakistan and Australia but my purpose, at this moment, is to stage a textual analysis of my body as it enters a different racial and cultural discourse in white Australia.

Because of the laws of immigration and multicultural affairs in Australia, this body becomes a temporary and ephemeral body and the teleology of the (in)visibility of this body in Australia is fixed as well as revisable at the same time. If this body does not transgress the containing authorities and their prescriptive laws, such as a private health cover, and complies with the coercion, it remains unrevised but, still, always revisable. Because of the legal discourses regulating the overseas student body whose visibility in Australia is authorized with a temporary visa, this body has to be a ‘full-time’ student as long as it is in Australia. The number of working hours per week is also fixed as an international student body cannot work more than twenty hours in a week. Thus, the institutional and institutionalized sites where this body can remain visible and the temporality of the visibility are all measured. The cataloguing gaze monitors this temporal aspect of the institutionalized (in)visibility through the state taxation system.

If this body does not comply with the coercion it is always subjected to by the immigration laws of Australia, the identity and subjectivity of this body can be revised and the body can be rendered invisible from Australia in the similar manner as criminals are removed from public spaces. But there is a crucial difference in the ways in which a nativized criminal body is rendered invisible from public spaces and the ways in which an international student body is rendered invisible: an international student body can be deported or expelled out of Australia; whereas, a nativized body remains within the same state surveillance. The subject of this body can be dehumanized and objectified into an unwanted, unauthorized, fallen and contaminated body that must be expelled out of Australia. If this authorized visibility turns into an unauthorized visibility, the cataloguing gaze of the state assigns this body the status of an alien, a leper, a source of disease in the state of Australia. The institutional sites where this body can remain visible (i.e. a university
or workplace) can also change and this body can be put under even more obscene surveillance which will end only with deportation.

The (in)visibility of this body is coercively linked with the economies of a bourgeois state. These economies of authorization of visibility turn the visibility into a consumable product which the subject of this body can buy and consume by paying an upfront student fee as an international/overseas student. But despite the fact that this body consumes its visibility in Australia, the visibility is never fully possessed by it. The legal discourses that regulate and monitor the consumption of the visibility that this international student body has in Australia also brutally consume this body through non-educational state machinery by extricating more capital through medicines, train and bus fares, and health insurance.

The subjectification of an international student body by immigration and legal discourses of the Australian government and educational institutions happens in a different and more brutal manner than the subjectification of the nativized and immigrant bodies. It is this contradiction and brutal visibility of violence that I want to broach in this essay. I will continuously draw upon my body because my perception of my own body has changed after my arrival in Australia. There is another reason why I am performing a textual analysis of my body rather than anyone else’s body or an abstract body. I do not want to speak on behalf of another body because representing or speaking for an-Other is a form of colonization. Colonial discourses often speak on behalf of the natives in such a way as if they were representing the Other only because the Other wants to be represented by them. This position is expressed in Karl Marx’s sentence that Edward Said has used as an epigraph to his book Orientalism: ‘They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented’. Though the desire to represent oneself does not place oneself in any extra-discursive space even if one desires to, there are still some possibilities of recuperating some unmapped or problematic spaces to exorcise the ghosts of the authoritative discourses that inscribe one’s body and make (un)erasable grooves on its inside and outside. I speak with the awareness that this ‘I’ is a historical and cultural effect of my subjectivity and subjected ontology.

As an international student body from Pakistan, an ex-colonized country, in a white Australian university, this body experiences a web of discursive differences and relationships of institutional powers. It is in this abject subjectification of this body that all the post-Enlightenment discourses of humanist education of the West reveal their noble lies as they proceed onwards with their (post)capitalistic brutalities and coercions. Through its very brown visibility, this overseas student body ruptures the monolithic discourses of humanism as it experiences the unashamed violence. The postmodern decadence of Western civilization becomes even more visible when institutional sites of liberal-humanist
education have to create excessive laws, regulations, offices to monitor the trajectories and teleologies of a foreign body.

Brown greyness:
Though an international student body is subjected to an army of legal discourses, it is also a source of ruptures on the horizon of white Australia. During its temporary and temporal visibility, this brown international student body and the subject of this body can cause some ruptures in the dominant and homogenizing white Australia.

Though the threats of identity (such as the title of tag of an illegal alien and/or deportation) are extremely powerful, the possibilities of the mobilization of a counter-discourse also exist within the same discursive spaces. 'International Offices' in almost all Australian universities, which operate to ensure the consumption of a certain number of educational units by an international student body, are one of the many sites where a counter-strategy originates. There is an International Office at the University of Wollongong which this body has often frequented since its arrival in Australia. As this very brown body approaches the counter of the International Office, the subject of this body observes a metamorphosis in a white body when its civilizational Other suffers a momentary amnesia of all other vital bodily functions and turns into a gigantic Ear, an Auditory body, to receive the different accent and tonalities of intonation from this Other non-English speaking body. It is at such moments that the violence of the bourgeois state and its educational institutions turns upon its own instruments of power and turns their bodies into post-human dismembered bodies: only ears (coming forward to fully understand the spoken words), fingers (pointing silently to a direction), heads (nodding instead of saying 'yes').

The subject of this body can often rupture the syntactical and phonetic tyranny of the English language, the vehicle of colonialism, in different institutional sites to carve out a space for the visibility and arrival of the Other tongues. Though the state has measured the degree of fluency the subject of this body possesses before and for granting a visa through the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the state cannot force the subject to speak 'proper' English in all social contexts. Thus, language, the instrument of the law, the curriculum, the state and the moral code, becomes an important source for recuperating and asserting the radical otherness as it conjures up its own fictions and lies. The traces of other languages contaminate, infiltrate and disrupt the lingual and linguistic hegemonies through speaking their personal fictions which assert and empower their agency. The affected stutters, the conscious hesitations of the accent, the literal translation from native languages (Punjabi and Urdu) and fictional narratives about the culture of original country can all be used to subvert the monolithic structures of the bourgeois state of white Australia. The lie, as Spivak has illustrated in *The Postcolonial*
Critic, can mobilize a disruptive discourse that can help the marginalized subject carve out some (un)mapped territory. The functionality of the moral goodness of truth as an instrument of surveillance is suspended through fictions and lies that the subject of this body can create. Foucault has also pointed out the possibilities of mobilizing counter-strategies. He illustrates how the power that inscribes our bodies also turns our bodies into desirable bodies:

once power produces this effect, there inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one’s own body against power, of health against economic system, of pleasure against the moral norms of sexuality, marriage, decency. Suddenly, what had made power strong becomes used to attack it. Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in the same body. (Foucault Power/Knowledge 1980, p. 56)

The fictions that this body can give birth to during its ephemeral visibility are not only the limit experiences of the subject of this body. The awareness of one’s body also changes when one encounters the contingency of one’s body in social situations. The relationships, interactions with class-mates and their awareness of the ephemeral visibility of this body in Australia are all the sites to launch counter strategies. The subject of this body is aware of the stereotyped image of the duplicity of people from the Indian sub-continent. This duplicity is a testimony that the technologies of surveillance of civilizational others cannot fully map all the possible actions of this body.

Ron Tandberg, The Age
Islands: Literally and in Literature

It was thus, sitting in the air-conditioned calm of an exclusive library, that I began my strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events.

Amitav Ghosh The Shadow Lines

My aim is to present a reading of islands as places and resemblances, including an understanding of map-making both as the drawing of contours inhabiting figments of the imagination and of map-making as the creation of spaces in which the familiar can be established. In addition, I will draw on the importance of spatial rather than temporal settings in connection with literature and art invested with what one could call autobiographical elements; the reason, it seems, being that places – in a kind of imaginary map-making – can reveal an indexicality of the past rather than being merely representational of a certain reality. This is to some extent also where I see a difference between theoretical modes of postmodernism and post-colonialism which I’ll touch upon briefly at the end of this paper.

I grew up not on an island, but on a peninsula1 which in Danish, my mother tongue, translates into ‘half an island’. This half-island is the main land of a considerably small nation attached to Europe with some fifty kilometres of unnatural border. I believe that with small-size land masses, as with singular clouds; they can be surveyed and imagined in one optic glance whether from above or below and they are often given words of description far from the attempted accuracy of cartography. My half-of-an-island homeland looks like a nisse, a pixy, in profile, pointed hat and big nose dripping islands of irregular sizes, its body would then of course make up the rest of Europe, except for Great Britain and Ireland which are but islands off the continent. We have a saying in Danish that the pixy moves along even if the problem remains despite the apparent attempt to solve it.

In the Sri Lankan born, Canadian writer, Michael Ondaatje’s memoir, Running in the Family, the contours of his childhood island are described as follows: ‘Ceylon falls on a map and its outline is the shape of a tear. After the spaces of India and Canada it is so small’.2

In Satendra Nandan’s The Wounded Sea, the autobiography of the Fijian born writer and academic of Indian descent, the shape of Fiji is presented thus; ‘Fried goat meat, hot and spicy, was passed around in an enamel plate: we took a piece each and the plate stopped on a table on
which a crude map of Fiji was carved, it seems, by one of Ratu Reddy's geography pupils. It was upside down. Vitilevu appeared like a lump of turd, and Vanualevu a hungry crocodile waiting for it to fall into its grinning mouth'.

In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, subtitled *a geografictione*, by novelist Aritha van Herk, 'the first Canadian-born child of post-Second World War Dutch immigrants to Canada', the rediscovery of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina coalesces with the imagination of Ellesmere Island in the Canadian north, mapping it as an islanded woman: 'The ears of Ellesmere lie beautifully folded, flat back against the head of the island. They curl in quiet listening, they are comely as conch-shells, as seductive as the small gurgles of the many streams, the mossy tussocks growing out of permafrost ... These unread islands, these Annas all'.

In the Spring of 1995, when graduating from the Danish Academy of Fine Arts, the art photographer, Pia Arke, presented an essay entitled 'Ethnoaesthetics' which was later published as a small booklet by a Danish art journal. Pia Arke is half Danish, or half Greenlander, or we could say half of both, which is not really my wording, that is, it is not my intention to sound diminishing. The art of balancing between halves was very much the subject of Arke's essay, as it is of her art.

Pia Arke thinks that her childhood island, Greenland, from a specific angle resembles the distorted head of the Elephantman. In figure 1 of an old school map, the inserted lines indicate both the relationships between Denmark and Greenland and Arke's personal history; the bodily grotesque image of Greenland as the dismembered head of the monstrous Elephantman satirizes these relations. However, the topography of the hyperbolic image applied to the map also transforms and transgresses the traditional limits of what the map conveys. The connection between the natural phenomenon of the island of Greenland and the head of the Elephantman links the world with the body of the individual, or rather signals the double signification of the lines inserted on the map. The official history of the relations between Greenland and Denmark is degraded through the bodily grotesque image, generating an interchange with the personal story of Pia Arke.

Some years ago, Pia Arke built, in Denmark, a pinhole camera, a *camera obscura*, the size of a small shed which she moved to Greenland where she placed it on the spot where her childhood home had once been and photographed the view from what had once been the kitchen window, while she herself was inside the camera, surrounded by the developing picture. The whole project seemingly mocked the early explorers, ethnographers, natural scientists who had come equipped with measuring instruments of all kinds; her camera a bastard in its field, monstrous and grotesque in size, big enough to swallow the human operator – who could, additionally, manipulate the input of light because of the long exposure time – and to provide a moveable home for its
bastard-creator. Again, bastard is not a name given by me, but a name Pia Arke has adopted herself and in doing so, she is pointing both to her mixed cultural background and to the fact that 'Greenlander' was a name given by the Europeans: being a Greenlander is thus within Said's concept of orientalism; the Other as defined by the colonizers. Thus, when Pia Arke tells the story about herself, which apparently is what her art is about, she is in a way telling another's story, the story about the one she is not. In the conclusion of the aforementioned essay Pia Arke defends the value of an 'ethnoaesthetics', because

Even when one realizes that to engage oneself with the marginal is in itself marginalizing, there are still some of us who belong neither in the West nor in the thereof delimited rest-world. And if we are going to belong in a place, we will have to create it ourselves. We need an expansion of the boundaries in order to create a third space, even if it disturbs the logic of the relation between the First and the Third World. The creation of a third space, for those of us who belong neither in the ethnographical object nor in the ethnographical subject, becomes thus more than just an intellectual possibility. There is a certain element of compelling necessity in our game with the pawns of the different worlds.7
Arke’s photographs do not appear to attempt an exact representation of the autobiographical project, neither do they long for a recovery of authenticity. The focus is not on loss, but on the possibility of an imaginative inventiveness that can take form in the photographs, as in a space that lies between their quality as documents and what they distil as art; they are neither artificial nor real. The merging of the operator or photographer, the picture taken by the pinhole camera, and the camera itself partially reveals this space in the mellowed look of the picture; the distance of time between memory and projection has paradoxically been inverted, and exposed, so that the conversion of distance comes to include that of the viewer to the memorized landscape represented in the photograph. The view of the landscape is a palimpsest of time.

In a series of four photographs entitled ‘Imaginary Homelands’, the eye of the viewer is led to circumvent a solitary house in a Greenland landscape, repeating, in front of the photographs, the past actual circumvention of the photographer. The photographs were taken (with an ordinary camera) in 1992 in Thule, another of Pia Arke’s childhood places. Each photograph on its own is pure representation, it has no metaphorical meaning, except stating that someone was there. However, next to each other they divide and multiply; the image of the photographs, all very similar, a house in a landscape, now become very distinct. The photographer’s attentive investigation of the house is presented in the different views, but instead of unifying, they fragment
the object. Furthermore, the views multiply the spatial perspective in the landscape itself, including the perspective of the viewer who is now no longer watching from a distance but has been emerged in the photographs, retracking the movements of the photographer. The house in the landscape as an image becomes a picturing that describes the impossibility of grasping the truth of the place, the identity if you will, even at the moment of the shots taken. At the same time, the gaze of the viewer which duplicates the photographer's past presence may create what Roland Barthes calls a longing to inhabit. 'It is fantasmatic, deriving from a kind of second sight which seems to bear me forward to a utopian time, or to carry me back to somewhere in myself ... The Photographer's "second sight" does not consist in seeing but in being there'. 8 That the photographer was there is attested in the photographs, although as a past reality, a pastness which furthermore is exposed by the decay of the house. However, the photographs do not call for a restoration of the past; but the past reality exposes to the viewer a presence of someone who was once there, resembling what the Danish critic of photographic art, Mette Sandbye, in relation to Barthes' reflections on photography, calls 'an "alternative" realism which is not founded on a mimetic representation of reality, but rather on the indexical aspect of photography'. 9 The title, 'Imaginary Homelands', relates specifically to that temporal defeat in the photographs rather than referring to the place represented, and, if one should attempt to
situate 'Imaginary Homelands', they may lie somewhere between the photographic work and the reality of either viewer or photographer.

Iceland, a typical mispronunciation by the Danes of the English word island, is a small country, though twice the size of Denmark, is situated in the northern part of the Atlantic Ocean. In ancient geography Iceland was conceived of as the island Thule, a cold place in the furthest north of the inhabitable world. *Ultima Thule*, in Mercator’s *Atlas* from the 16th century corrected to *Islandia*, later came to signify just that, a place far away from civilization, ice-cold and desert: ‘I have reached these lands but newly / From an ultimate dim Thule – / From a wild weird clime, thatlieth, sublime, / Out of SPACE – out of TIME’.\(^\text{10}\) I have heard that Icelanders believe they live in the middle of the world (or, at least, in the middle of the Icelandic end of the world, where the US is west and Norway east), and that on Iceland nothing is considered to be small, either places or people. The shape of Iceland reminds me of a sheep, the edges in reality steep cliffs, fjords and rockfaces fluffy like wool, covering the legs, a head held high.

There seems to be two lines of literary tradition on Iceland. One is, of course, the Icelandic Sagas, the other, the 20th century writer, essayist and social critic, Halldór Laxness who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955. As with any other tradition these too have become literary histories, or burdens perhaps, for the contemporary Icelandic writers. Halldór Gudmundsson, a publisher from Iceland, recently wrote
an article about the contemporary Icelandic novel, in which he contemplates the much discussed postmodernism of the novel in the sense that even though modernism has now become a tradition the novel cannot just return to former traditions as if nothing has happened. One of his comments reassures us that the problem concerns the literary critics more than the novelists, but instead of approaching the theoretical issue from a conceptual point of view he does something which he claims is typical of an Icelander; he tells a story which is the Icelandic replacement for philosophical thinking. Since Iceland didn’t develop an urban culture until this century they have not yet developed a language for abstract thinking.11 Telling a story is also part of the oral tradition of the island’s literary history, including the paradox of viewing the sagas as both history and literature, which reminded me of a remark in Ondaatje’s memoir Running in the Family: ‘in Sri Lanka a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts’ (p. 206).

Briefly, I would like to present the work of two contemporary Icelandic writers, Einar Kárason and Einar Már Gudmundsson, both of whom write about places on Iceland, the most profound feature of which is that they are places on an island confined more by its own borders than by the borders of others.

Kárason writes about the area in Reykjavik, capital of Iceland, where the barracks that the US army left behind after World War II became the
homes of the poorest section of the new urban population, a place which has now disappeared. And Gudmundsson writes, among other things, about the emerging new areas of Reykjavik, filling up the places where the barracks once were, places embedded with stories and anecdotes. Gudmundsson seemingly consolidates a traditional narrative form while, at the same time, disrupting both the referentiality to any reality and the fictionality of the stories; lived experiences are no less illusory than stories, just as stories are no less real than lived experiences.

In *Epilogue of the Raindrops*, the stories are set with elements of the grotesque mixing the world of very tangible concreteness with the world of the obscure, or even inhuman: when the silent, sea-smelling ghosts of drowned fishermen, ‘cold as corpses in their oilskins, blue-headed in a fatigued trance’, arrive in town, they leave wet footprints in the church having rung the bells. Afterwards, they encounter the summoned Reverend with their arms raised, and the Reverend Daniel is wondering what all these arms are supposed to represent when oh yes, they are going to take off their hats, for now they are putting their hands on the brims of their sou’westers. And Daniel, as if to present them with something in return, fishes a crucifix out of his jacket pocket as they tug at their brims, but not only take off to their hats to bow but their heads with them as if stuck on, and the moment that the Reverend Daniel faints on the gravel by the belltower outside the church they vaporize and vanish. (p. 99)

Additionally, the multilayered organization of stories – three parts each with two chapters containing one to four subchapters and 69 subordinate subchapters in all – repeats literally both the titles of the different parts in the chapters and subchapters, and as well this movement of parody in a double perception which the reflection, or deception, of mirrors conducts:

For it is a fact that the configuration of large rectangular mirrors gives the barbershop an effect of being as much as twice its actual size and the most perspicacious of people have even been known to believe that there are two barbershops in the basement of the house on the corner of the slope, run by identical twins. (p. 115)

Gudmundsson’s latest novel, *Universets engle*, is a first-person narrative of a schizophrenic boy (and later man) who tells the story of his own life and death. Parallel to the narrator’s balancing between the supposedly real world and his own perception of the world, abnormalities gradually become commonplace and acceptable within the universe of a more or less ‘claimed’ realistic setting. This is further strengthened by e.g. the reference in the author’s footnotes to the existence of a ghost that can usually be seen on the road to Keflavik (where the US military base is situated). But the conflict is not carried through as a simple opposition, because, just as the lived experiences of the narrator is both illusory and concrete, his sense of space is fluid. The walls between Kleppur, the mental hospital, and the life outside may be
solid: ‘That wall [the Berlin wall] may fall, but the walls between me and the world will never fall; they are immovable and solid, even if nobody can see them with the naked eye’,\textsuperscript{13} but the walls are not necessarily concrete:

Kleppur exists in many places, it is not only a hospital, not only a castle, but a pattern woven of threads so fine that no one can unravel them, either the emperor or the children, either you or I. (p. 145)

Likewise the darkness that surrounds the narrator is described as fluid, something that for a while can be poured into a cup, or on the day he dies, poured down the drain as cold coffee. And again the opposite of that darkness is not transformed simply by light, but by a clear blue that ‘knocks on the window’ (p. 218). The blue colours the landscape, the air, the sky, the sea; it is in this landscape that the narrator, like the birds, or like time, ‘Outside time floats on wings’ (p. 218)), can find no confines and loses himself:

Now the birds fly deitywise.
Now God’s angels glory in Paradise. (p. 15)

Káráson’s writing follows a more oral tradition, the \textit{telling} of stories, as for instance in his novels which form a chronicle about the family in ‘the old house’, situated in the area where the barracks once were.\textsuperscript{14} By telling the stories of the place, Káráson manages to make room for it in the imagination though the place itself has now disappeared. And though his setting is realistic he also implants a certain element of the obscure, or the grotesque, in the text which doesn’t dissolve the familiarity of a realistic setting, but which \textit{becomes} a reality. For instance, one of the younger brothers, a pilot, dies in a plane crash and afterwards he keeps appearing in the dreams of the women of the house. In the dreams, he urges the women to help his older brother, though it is not clear why this brother should be in need of any help. Then unexpectedly an insurance check from the pilots’ union arrives, and the women understand that the money must be spent on a new television set for the brother in need: the old set was destroyed during one of his drunken parties, and his happy addiction to ten hours of watching a day had been unwantedly and distressingly stopped.

In my view, what both Káráson and Gudmundsson reach, in very diverse ways, is a literature that has made concrete figments of the imagination occupy the landscape itself and not some geographical map, personal or not. This is done without claiming the truth of facts because the basis for their literature is in both cases stories, whether transported by a written or an oral mode.

Iceland, like Greenland, as well as the former Danish West Indies and the Faroe Islands, are islands all marked by the Danish imperial past. The West Indian islands were sold to the US at the beginning of this century,
Iceland became an independent republic in 1944, and both Greenland and the Faroe Islands now have homerule, though Greenland is still subordinate to Danish foreign policy.

The imperial past, of course, links the contemporary art and literature from Greenland and Iceland to the discussions on post-colonialism, but more than reiterating the historical past, the present is telling another story. And this telling of stories does not necessarily negate the historical past, but it is not necessarily a continuation of it either. History may be embedded in the places described, but it is in relation to the imaginative remembrance of the places that the contours of the stories are drawn. The stories do not as such represent the places; rather the stories incorporate in their structure the layered substance of the places.

Last winter in the High Alps in the centre of Europe, right where the borders of three countries, Italy, Switzerland and France, meet, I crossed a pass, Colle de Lys, at an altitude of 12,000 feet. I had walked there on skis following the instructions of a map and the appended written description of the landscape, created on the basis of what was supposed to be my point of view. In other words, I used a map constructed by someone else in order to orient myself, but the construction of the map made it necessary to constantly check that the description corresponded with the actual landmarks of the landscape, otherwise I could have easily got lost. Contrary to a map of a city for instance, which is constructed to navigate the user from one point to the next, the extreme being the map of the underground, metro, subway, or bus system, where lines, dots and names become an obscure representation of the city; the underground, metro, and subway an even further extreme in being exactly under ground, below the landmarks of the city itself.

In his article 'Allegories of the Atlas', José Rabasa shows in his analysis of Mercator’s Atlas (1569) that Eurocentrism depends on a semantics of space that makes cartographical representation correspond to the signs Europeans projected onto the world: ‘The possibility and the significance of the map depend on history. The inscription of the map gives place to its silhouette, but its silhouette is historical and only meaningful when it evokes a European history’. Rabasa shows that Mercator’s Atlas claimed a certain objectivity, an open-ended guide one could say, which was not understood as representing a univocal meaning; the meaning emerged when subjected to the reading of the user according to specific interests: ‘Mercator proceeds by abbreviation: he expurgates the personal experience from the sources of information; he also omits the problems involved in the production of information. Parallel to a method of navigation from one spatial point to another that a Mercator projection makes possible, the data stocked in the Atlas become isolated points of reference to be interconnected by means of particular interests’ (p. 8). Mercator’s world map consisted of the representation of islands and continents that had up until then been discovered by a Europe that held
both knowledge and history and thus power. The regions not known, or regions found uninteresting, such as the interior of America, islands like Iceland, and desert areas in for instance Africa fell under the same illusions of logic and objectivity and were pictured as populated with monsters, barbarians and other horrors in opposition to European civilization, and to balance or totalize this ordering of the world the map was also inscribed with the contours of a southern continent (*Terra Australis Incognita*). Travelling by use of the map and the mapping itself seems thus to have been a search for places that had already been imagined, predefined. Also, Rabasa’s analysis is based on the palimpsest nature of the *Atlas* the duplicity of which is exactly what permits an allegorical reading, where the different layers occupy contrary meanings and thus allow an element of irony. Rabasa concludes that since the *Atlas* is open-ended ‘the universal address of the *Atlas* includes readings not confined to a Eurocentric point of view ... as its ultimate irony’ (p. 12).\(^{17}\)

The partly autobiographical project in Pia Arke’s photographs, in ways similar to much so-called post-colonial art, focuses both on a cultural specificity and on a colonial past which inevitably creates a culturally fragmented subject, but the photographs also adopt a subject which is not only placed in historical time, but more so in a spatial positioning that resembles a geography. Or, one could say that the source of autobiography, memory, is manifested through a merging of the distance in time to the actual act of remembrance, creating a space in which the telling or projection of the pictures positions an ‘I’ whose memory, then, is transmitted not as recognition but as repetition with its force of irony. Pia Arke’s photographs remember the ‘blind spots’ of the European mapping.

In my readings, I have literally drawn a map of an imagined island both because its outline and natural limits allow me to maintain the illusion of comprehending the whole of which this map belongs, but more so because it is the point from where I have a view of Pia Arke’s art work
which in itself is a kind of mapping; it is the reverse of the prefigured European map of the unknown places that were believed to inhabit monsters and other abnormalities, - figments of the imagination. At the same time, I would claim that the imagined island of my mapping is parallel to the island of Iceland onto which Kára­son and Gu­mundsson have shown it is possible to attach a certain specificity without insuring the territorial authority of authenticity in a singular place.

The investment of my own position, which also began this paper, relates thus both to the cartographical map, to geography, and to the illusory creation of identity by mapping space, but my attention to the autobiographical element is, as such, not to insist that autobiographies create identities, but to demonstrate that the form can be used for critical reflections by people whose identity has been defined by another authority, by using a generic form in an opposite move. The autobiographical aspect is thus my methodological approach to a set of analytical and theoretical problems.

Arild Linneberg, a Norwegian professor of comparative literature from the University of Bergen, presented, in a recent article, a reversed repetition (i.e. invested with a certain element of irony) of an earlier critique of the genre of biography, warning against the glorification of what Theodor Adorno called a pseudo-individuality: 'If there is a connection between authority and the oppression of the individual there is as well a connection between authority and the defence of the individual'. Adorno’s critique of the genre of biography was pointing to a problematic of authority in a society that tended towards fascism: biography was a reification of the human accentuation. Linneberg explains that according to Adorno, ‘the prohibition of critical thought showed the most oppressive tendency in capitalist society because of the reification of thought that made speculative thinking a taboo if it exceeds apparent facts’ (p. 48). Also, with reference to Gertrude Stein, Linneberg shows that the basis of art is not the experience of identity but of non-identity and that the prerequisite for and realization of identity is, again, non-identity. An autobiography that becomes antibiographical is in this sense then based on a non-western view of subjectivity which manifests itself by disappearing into something other. Linneberg places autobiography within western tradition as a sub-genre of biography which finds its generic background in the Bildungsroman and in history writing both of which again constitute the history of literature.

But, if the ‘I’ of the telling has already been defined as someone else, as the Other, the ‘I’ must inevitably direct the perspective outwards and not inwards (as the expressionists did) which means that the movement in the text does not follow a traditional process of development, i.e. in the linear time of history, but assumes the mapping of spaces that have been denied a place; a place not as territory but as a place of the imagination.

What Pia Arke does in her photographs, similar to the way Ondaatje
constructs his memoirs in *Running in the Family*, is to signal a pre-defined form which then becomes its own counter-discourse and thus counter-discourse to Eurocentrism because the authority of the form is questioned by its own mode. Both of them construct their island with a view of the ocean, a construction which moves towards a passing of the posts of both postmodernism and post-colonialism.

Post-colonialism resembles postmodernism in the sense that they are both theoretical modes questioning the speaking subject that dictates, i.e. speaks about the Other in order to find a self. In other words, a western understanding of the self which is built on the understanding of the object as generated by the creative subject. An idealism which Hegel tried to dissolve by transforming self-reflection to an understanding of the other in the self, i.e. an identity which is both the self and the self of the other; an identity of identity and difference: a negative dialectic. Deconstruction focuses on difference: neither/or, dissolving not only the dichotomy of subject/object which the Hegelian dialectic leans against, but also the possibility for the Other to be self. This move in deconstruction has complicated the discussions on referentiality for the post-colonial critics, because without the dichotomies, 'reality' seems to lose its validity, and the 'reality' which western imperialism left behind (and in some sense still does), is often one of the strongest arguments in the critique of western self-reflection in its exclusion of the Other. Likewise, poststructuralism and deconstruction have as relational epistemologies encountered difficulties in relation to moral or ethical answers to concrete political and historical circumstances and events. An issue which, for instance, is elaborated on by the Canadian critic, Stephen Siemon, in his article 'Modernism's Last Post' in a special issue of *Ariel* on post-colonialism and postmodernism. Siemon argues that 'post-colonial cultures have a long history of working towards 'realism' within an awareness of referential slippage', and that this dual agenda is what distinguishes post-colonialism from the postmodernist crisis of representation in that the post-colonial 'theory', presenting itself 'in literary texts and as social practice', is grounded in a positive referentiality which 'operates alongside a counter-discursive parodic energy'.

Still, the question, it seems to me, remains if the crisis of representation can be solved at all, whether attempted within the theoretical critique or by concrete measures. Rather, the photographic art of Pia Arke and the literatures of both Einar Már Gudmundsson and Michael Ondaatje from different ends of the world allow for the possible pleasure in getting lost in a landscape not known of beforehand.

The series of photographs, 'Imaginary Homelands', were part of Pia Arke's contribution to the exhibition *Remote Connections - Media Art in the Era of Displacement* (curator: Amnon Barzel from Berlin) at Nikolaj, Copenhagen Contemporary Art Centre, March 1 - May 11, 1997. This is a revised version of a paper of the same title presented at ACLALS tenth triennial conference in Colombo, Sir Lanka, in August 1995.
NOTES


6. This reading is in part based on Bakhtin’s analysis of the grotesque image of the body in the works of Rabelais. See Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 303-367.


12. Einar Már Gudmundsson (1986), Epilogue of the Raindrops, trans. from the Icelandic by Bernard Scudder (London: Shad Thomes Books, 1994), p. 86. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.

13. Einar Már Gudmundsson (1993), Universets engle (Copenhagen: Vindrose, 1995), p. 15. All further references are to this Danish edition and are included in the text. (My translation).


15. I am indebted to my colleague, Marianne Ping Huang, for drawing my attention to the features of this kind of map in her analysis of the cityscape in the works of the Norwegian writer, Jan Kjærstad, and the Danish writer, Svend Aage Madsen.

16. José Rabasa, ‘Allegories of the Atlas’ in Europe and Its Others, ed. Francis Barker et. al. (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985), p. 5. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.

17. In more recent times Mercator’s map has been challenged by other projections the most prominent being Arno Peters’.


JEAN ARASANAYAGAM

The Crossing. I

'O bhikkus ... the teaching is similar to a raft, which is for crossing over and not for getting hold of.'

Parable of the raft

MAN:
I began my journey at dead of night. In pitch darkness. Set out from Nallur where my home is. A voluntary journey. I come and go from the South to the North of the island. I return as often as I can to see my father and my younger sister. My only sister. I'm studying for my engineering degree in the south. The only people who matter to me live in the Peninsula. I have to assure myself of their safety. They long to see me too, my father and my sister. That's all they have to look forward to. My arrival. A journey fraught with risks and hazards. To reach the mainland the crossing has to be made across the lagoon in a motor boat or fishing vallam. We can no longer take the accustomed routes. It is a time of war. But the crossing grows familiar with these repeated journeys.

Neither the arrival nor the departure are easily accomplished. There are innumerable checkpoints along the way. Part of the journey is in an overcrowded tractor. Walking through what we call the 'Dead Zone'. Desert land. A no-man's land. At either point where we embark or disembark there are no quays. We have to wade out into the water, waist high, shoulder high. The Peninsula is now different territory. Divided from the South. A de facto state exists in the North. Under the rule of the most powerful militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam fighting for a separate state for our people. Described by many as Fascist rule. There are Baby Brigades, Regiments of Women, the militants, the 'Boys'. The war has been going on for several decades. A never ending war which has resulted in the displacement of thousands of the different ethnic communities on the island.

The journey out of the Peninsula is a costly affair. Everything has a price. Every stage of the journey means money; thousands of rupees. Guarantees are needed. Someone stands surety for you when you leave the Peninsula. The militants are informed of all our movements. They exact their tolls and taxes too. Money. Gold sovereigns. Yet nothing deters the traveller. Children living in the South, studying or working return to visit their parents. Parents leave the North to see their children in the South. No journey is taken irresponsibly. The same imperatives
exist. It's only the routes that have changed.

There's an army camp on the mainland. At Palay. It's a separate world there with the Security forces of the other, the ethnic majority, encamped there. For them it's alien ground where they face attack from the militants. Two worlds exist in the North. They're hemmed in within that army camp. Supplies flown in by helicopter. Cargo planes. Or by boat. Each one has separate routes.

In the Peninsula people go about their business as best they can but they are cut off from the South. From the rest of the world too. Experience hardship. Embargoes imposed. No electricity. No petrol. Manage with natural light and oil lamps in their homes after dark. Can't see the newspapers from the South. Letters carried by friends, relations or the ICRC. Books too. The famous library in the town of Jaffna burned down. Political burning. A long time ago. Invasions. Military occupations. The diaries are invisible. Engraved on the mind.

I can't spend the rest of my life here. I am young. I have no intention of being a martyr to a cause. It's not that I am a traitor or that I have no sense of loyalty to my people. I'm not prepared for the great sacrifices, for showing my valour on the battlefield, for biting on the cyanide capsule. Once I get my engineering degree I will make my plans to join my brother in Switzerland. Arrange a marriage for my sister with someone who lives abroad. Hundreds of thousands of my people are part of the diaspora and are scattered all over the world. Asylum seekers. Political refugees. I know my father has aged beyond his years after my mother's early death. It's too much for him to plan my sister's marriage by himself. He's already given up on life ... it's difficult to say goodbye to the two of them when I prepare to leave my home in Nallur. But it's got to be done. What's most painful for them is not to be sure, never to be sure when they will see me again. For them to be left alone when the darkness descends early on the land, when they light the small oil lamp that will be their beacon.

My father and sister stand at the doorway, silent watchers, reluctant to go indoors until they know that my figure has vanished completely out of sight. Once the shadows swallow me up, they bolt and bar the doors and return to the silence, the darkness, the loneliness, each deeply absorbed in their own thoughts. But still, the Peninsular is home to them. My father will never be happy in any other part of the island, nor in any other part of the Peninsular except for Nallur. His history and the history of his ancestors lie here.

When will we see each other again? The question is engraved in our minds. Yet their minds are at ease that I spend the greater part of my days in the hills. The hill capital in the interior of the island is safer than Colombo. Horrendous happenings have taken place there. Ethnic and racial conflict between the majority community and the ethnic 'other', the minority Tamils. Destruction. Conflagrations in the city. Bomb blasts,
assassinations, suicide bombers have led to thousands of deaths, deaths
of innocent civilians of all communities. Arrests. Detention camps.
Torture and interrogation. Radical movements of the majority community
too. Bodies fished out of waterways. And now with the problem of urban
terrorists subtle paranoia of fear and suspicion. Mysterious deaths.
Strangled with plastic handcuffs. Starved and tortured to death. History
goes backwards and forwards. The Subversive movement and the
Terrorist Movement swing like a pendulum between the eras. The whole
city is caught up in that terrible feeling of insecurity. When will the next
bomb go off and where? Where will the suicide bomber choose to strike?
Whose body will be shattered in the explosion?

Other disruptive forces exist too in the universities. The ragging of
Freshers. Strikes. Lectures and examinations postponed. University
closures. Yet, there, in the South we are not separated by our racial
identities. We live together in the Halls of Residence, follow the same
lectures, sit the same examinations, gain the same qualifications. We are
not seen as ‘the enemy’. So, I return as I always do. The risk of the
crossing is part of the journey. The return to that other life.

I wait for the arrival of the mini-bus to Kilaly, the embarkation point.
The crossing will begin at midnight. There’s no quay or dock for
anchorage. We have to wade out in the waters of the lagoon.

The mini-bus arrives. Other travellers emerge out of the shadows. We
begin the next stage. Everything is strategically planned. Quite a number
of us tonight. All setting out for the South. Men, women, a few children.

The tide is high tonight. We get off the mini-bus and prepare to wade
into the waters. Shoulders high. I carry my possessions in a urea bag. I
feel the chilliness of the water creep up my thighs. Clothes already
Dangerous. No moon. Good for us. Helps lull the senses. Avoid
detection. A motor boat awaits us. Tosses and rocks in the high tide. A
Nameless. All of them ordinary people with duties and obligations,
leaving the Peninsula. Temporarily? Who knows? Sometimes the
guerrillas get into the boats. Not this time.

The children are carried on the shoulders of the adults. Not a murmur
from them. Absorbed. Each one intent on one purpose. Comfort in the
silent presence of bodies. Wait your turn to clamber into the boat.
Everyone will eventually get in. Not easy. Trying to grip the edges of the
rocking boat, tossing your possessions in with one hand, clambering after
them. Helping hands are needed.

We settle ourselves in. ‘Nobody left out?’ Talk in whispers. ‘Yes,
everybody is in’. Only the sound of breathing, laboured, agonized. Sighs.
But no talking. Silence. Parents soothing young children. Stoical. Many
have made the journey before. Know what it entails. We go on different
missions. No discussions about their personal nature. No easy chatter.
No garrulous wagging of tongues. The journey becomes meditative. The usual questions leading to knowledge of your neighbour are absent. Questions like. Which area of the Peninsula, which island, village, do you come from, are you related to such and such a person? Have you got anyone abroad, sons, daughters? Anyone in Germany, Canada, Sweden, Australia, USA, UK? Are you married, widowed, lost any of your children in the conflict; sons, daughters in the Movement? Are you coming back to the North? Settling down in the South? Then what about your house and property? Have you had to give the house over to the militants? Any children in the university in the South? Did you pay in money or gold to leave the Peninsula? Anyone standing surety for you in the North? Medical treatment? Departure to 'foreign'? Unasked questions. Unanswered questions.

Huddled bodies. Taking up cramped positions in the crowded boat. An old man wheezes. Tremors of chilled bodies. Touch mine. Motor boat. Engine not in the best of condition. Speeding. Rocking from side to side. Thoughts ... in between ... Ananda ... my room mate in the South ... Buddhist conversations ... samsaric ocean ... ocean of sorrows ... life's journey ... man has to cross over ... to the other side ... this side ... it's dangerous ... other side ... safe ... builds his own raft ... crosses over ... Ananda ... interprets ... talking of the dhamma, the Buddha's teaching journey to enlightenment, after journey ... leave it ... leave the raft behind ... non-attachment ... also ... a changed person, leave hatred behind ... Ananda ... friend ... to him ... I'm ... no terrorist ... just myself ... human ... wish ... I ... hadn't ... a ... name ... is disguise cowardice ... anonymity deception ... ? To be followed only when we are with 'the other'?

Counting the hours of the passage. To reach the other side. Can't distinguish any object in the dark. Only sounds. The heaving of the boat ... the chugging of the motor ... the boat is overloaded. Hope it's seaworthy. A high wind tonight. The waves rise as the boat cuts a swathe through the waters. Spray engulfs us. Drenched to the skin. Shiver. Lips, skin, crinkle and pucker. Touch my face. Damp. Wet. Chill. A slight cough from out of the shadows. Quickly stifled. Words have no utterance. Choked on phlegm. Pity? No we feel no such pity for the other. Individual missions must be accomplished. Learn to be survivors. Protect my books and valuable lecture notes within their files in the urea bag. Study even when I come to the Peninsula. What else is there to do? Make use of every bit of the natural light. Conserve the small amount of kerosene oil for the one brass lamp we light at dusk in order to eat and find our way about the house. Although by now, each household object provides a familiar landmark. Even a blind man can feel his way about ... but now, the wind, the wave, the churning sweep of waters carry a message to each one of us, this is no ordinary crossing. A sliver of moon lays a white wing across the dark clouds. For a moment, I'm able to
discern the faces of the occupants in the boat. A middle-aged woman. A journey to see a son, a daughter? Who knows. All faces share one, common, expression. Devoid of individuality. Of expression. Anonymity. That's the garment everyone wears. Draped and concealed in those uniformly drab, grey, garments. Only our human lineaments are recognizable. We part as strangers, going into a greater anonymity. Leaving our familiar terrain. With fears of being thought 'the other', the terrorist, when the huge explosions take place and the innocent are buried beneath the debris, their bodies charred beyond recognition. When sometimes only the ashes remain. Guilt. It is as if we committed the act for are we not identified with 'the enemy'? There are martyrs too in these acts of destruction whose only statement of their cause is in death. For them there is only a brief acknowledgement of life. There are others to take their place in the enactment of the myth, of martyrdom, of that sacrificial offering.

I observe the middle-aged woman peering at my urea bag, the familiar symbol of the student. In a young man like myself there are only one or two masks of identification needed, the urea bag and the cyanide capsule worn round the neck. The more obvious sign in the AK 47. Tonight, no one bears a weapon in his hands, or hers either, although among your own no disguise is necessary. Unless? Yes, there are always informers.

The movement of the boat is irregular. An ancient motor in need of repair operates it. Thankful for it anyway. I am enclosed within the temporary refuge of my own thoughts. But alert. Alert for other sounds. We look up from time to time at the sky. Helicopters may suddenly appear out of the skies. We're an easy target. We have to take the risk. The Security Forces are well aware that the guerrillas take the crossing too. They mingle with the citizens of the Peninsula. Risks, hazards, dangers on all sides. Fired on by militants and the Sea Tigers; planes and helicopters have plummeted into the waters of the ocean. No survivors. Or again, our boat could be fired on by naval vessels on suspicion that the ordinary citizens provide a blind for the guerrilla.

At the moment there is only one preoccupation in our minds. A total and absolute concern with our own survival. We have to be put to the test to discover whether we care about each other. We either make the crossing. Or don't. Perhaps we may this time. Fate. Destiny. Life. Death. Exchange my life for that of the other? Sometimes I have hallucinations. I see the man with the black mask. His body in a black diving suit leaps into our boat from another vessel and with a sharp bladed knife slashes at our throats. Death at sea. An empty boat left, bobbing on the waves. Death on land. In the jungles. The Border villages. Hacked to death. Shot. Mass graves. Burned houses. Ashes. The dead and the groans of the dying fill my mind. On either side. Laid out like dead fish. Obsessions. How much longer will this journey last?

Mind goes back to the campus in the South. Conversations with the
others in the Hall of Residence. Ananda, Sandun Raj Kumar, myself. Some of the Sinhala students are radicals. They try to understand the reasons for this conflict. Try to see our point of view. What is unacceptable to them is when the massacres occur in those remote border villages.


‘Reprisal killings too,’ I interject.

‘And the suicide bombers? The cyanide capsules?’ Ananda questions.

‘That’s because they are fighting for a cause they believe in, not because they are unemployed youth, no chances for a better life, our village boys ...’ Sandun persists ‘Not that patriotism doesn’t come into it. Before the soldiers go on their forays they are exalted by their commanders. “You are the heroes of the hour. Brave soldiers. Fighting to protect your motherland. Don’t have any fears that you fight alone. We will follow, be with you”, but your Boy’s are fighting for a separate Homeland in the North and East ... yet you come and live among us in the South’.

Sometimes theories override explanations. The theory that the island will become a vassal of the subcontinent. We are surrounded by theories. They grow as thick as trees around us. Saplings sprouting up among the hoary old veterans. Most of my colleagues are highly politicised. With the exception of Ananda. Sometimes he says he wants to give up his studies and ambitions to become an engineer. Wants to become a bhikku. Things happen on the campus too. Ragging. Really extreme. A form of torture? Testing? There are some who say that the subversives, the Radical political parties are looking out for recruits for their Movement. The likely ones are those who do not break under the ragging, the physical the mental degradation and abasement they’re subjected to. Strange though, even our people from the North do not abstain from ragging. Sometimes they are even more brutal in their methods. Power. That’s how I see it. Gives some people pleasure to see others cringe beneath the whip.

My mind goes back to my room in the Hall of Residence. I share it with Ananda. My comrades – and here we do not drag the cumbersome baggage of identity – have been through their own struggles. Took place before I entered the campus. I listen. To their whisperings about the disappearances during the insurrection. The arrests. The detention camps. Torture and killings, the remains of bodies exhumed from the mass graves, shreds of cloth, bones, skulls. Many of the witnesses are still alive. Question. Answer. The aftermath. Recounting. Recounting. The beating to death with iron rods, the tyre burnings. An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. I give ear to them. We don’t belong to different camps here. But they’re curious about our coming and going. The North is a closed world to them. The terrain is only familiar to armies of occupation. They know that we make our journeys, use different routes.
'Machan, how do you get across?'
'You cross the lagoon, no?' Sandun asks.
'Fishing boats, motor boats ...' I don't disclose too much.
'Tigers also come to the South, no? Others - how do all these suicide bombers operate? And you, how did you manage to keep out of the Movement ... they come to the schools to recruit their cadres, don't they?' Sandun is the most persistent questioner, always. I begin to feel caged. Too much interrogation.

Ananda usually comes to the rescue.
'When you come to the South, we see you as another colleague. Not as a Tiger. A koti. You're like the man who builds a raft to cross the sea of samsara,' he continues.

'Ah, bana preaching'. Sandun lolls on the bed clad in his sarong, drinking a mug of plain tea. Barebodied, relaxed. Sandun's eldest brother was arrested. Disappeared during the uprising of '89. His mother still believes he may be alive somewhere and will return home one day. Perhaps still locked away in an underground prison.

Ananda has not been deterred by the interruption.
'The man builds his own raft. Uses grass, wood, branches and leaves. Gets across. But he's got to leave it behind once he has crossed from this shore to that. From danger to safety. Can't carry the raft on his shoulders. Can't get too attached to it, to change too ... leave all that hatred behind.'

That's the way Ananda sees it. Or else he could not accept me; he has to see me as one who is no longer 'the other', living among them. He doesn't hate me. Nor do I see him as the enemy. I can't recognize myself for what I am ... but within myself I know how divided I am.

I think of my father and younger sister in Nallur. My father was once a wealthy business man. Dealing in gold. He had craftsmen working for him, creating traditional jewellery for every occasion, birth, attaining age, betrothals, marriage. All that had to be given up. We are now being supported by our brother who has sought political asylum in Switzerland. My sister weeps when she sees me. She feels so insecure, living alone with only my father. He too is now her responsibility. My mother had an untimely death. She never recovered from an attack of asthma. The necessary drugs and hospital treatment were not available to save her life. She was only in her early forties when she passed away.

When I go back to the North, to my home in Nallur, my father and sister know some measure of happiness. My sister cooks what she thinks I like and we share our simple meals by the light of a small oil lamp set on the table when dusk falls. There hasn't been electricity in the Peninsula for some years now. We use every bit of available light, rising early, at dawn. Even light is a resource to be utilized and conserved these days.

The chugging of the motor boat slows down. We are close to
Alangkerni, our point of disembarkation. Once more we have to step out of the boat into the water and wade to the shore. The landscape here is nothing but sand, sand, sand. There are others too who are waiting in scattered groups, resting for a while before the next lap of the journey. We have accomplished one part, the most important so far, in our crossing. Those who sit and wait for the tractor to arrive wear a patient and resigned expression on their faces. We bide our time. The woman whom I seem to have recognized in the boat appears to have vanished into a kovil that I glimpse before me. I had helped her out of the boat, her teeth were chattering with cold, her clothes clung wet to her body. We will all meet later on in the tractor. No other way to travel across this sandy waste. Sometimes there are as many as fifty people in it. All of us are wet to the skin. We have got to get to Omanthai from Alangkerni and from thence to Vavuniya, a three kilometre walk. The tractor journey takes about fifteen minutes. There are checkpoints to be gone through along the way. Militants on one side. Security Forces on the other. Once we reach Vavuniya we can take a bus or train to continue on our way to the South. It is only in Vavuniya that we can get any refreshments to assuage our hunger or thirst.

But here in this expanse of sand, it is all wasteland. A desert without hope of either oasis or mirage. No vegetation to inspire any kind of philosophy. A nullified, negated existence. Even a solitary cactus would offer some kind of symbol. Some kind of landmark of significance to the lost and solitary traveller. There's this temptation to give in. Stop here. Bury yourself in the timeless tumulus of sand. Let the sand cover you. Close your eyes. Sink into a hollow ... an eternal sleep.

But no the journey must continue. The raft, the boat in which I have travelled has served part of its purpose. I have used it as the voyager, whom Ananda spoke of, on the samsaric ocean of life but I have yet to fulfil the obligations towards those among whom I will live in the South. 'Leave all feelings of enmity behind and come as a human being to this side'. There will be other journeys. I do not know what impediments I am still to encounter on the way but firstly I've got to leave all this hatred behind.

We've got to listen to each other's grievances. For the moment I think mechanically in terms of movement, movement, movement - mini-bus, boat, tractor, mini-bus ... checkpoints which open flaps in the body, in the mind, with eyes, eyes of strangers that peer into the complex nerve structure within me. Sometimes through fear those conduits and arteries either race with a molten stream of blood or grow sluggish, forming a turgid pool.

Memory recurs. My sister's tearstained face in the faint glimmer of an uncertain and wavering flame, shadowed grotesquely. The lines of age on my father's sagging brow. Deep furrows etched like some archaic script for me to decipher on its surface. An old man. A young girl. Sharing a

Where is home, then, the true home, except in memory. Homes, that one day, will be empty of even our shadows.

My mind lapses into a wasteland too, with no recognizable landmarks in the uniformity of the shape of grains of sand, pebbles. Crushed over and over again by tractor wheels.

The stretch of water I have crossed separates my double lives. My double roles. Yet I cannot renounce either of them. I travel with my double identity but as I journey nearer South, I shall assume the one which will enable me to live with others. How can I say 'not of my own kind'? We share the same lineaments. Yet we are divided. Does anyone question the reasons for killings, the weight of history behind each of them?

I rub my skin absentmindedly, still feeling the saltiness of the briny water stinging those innumerable bruises as well as the slight scratches and tears, the surface lesions that abrade the skin on the boat journey. The pain somehow makes the senses more alert. Ah, what if bridges spanned that expanse of water? As a student of engineering I am always thinking of construction. I have been taught the ways to construct things that will endure. That are meant to endure unless the elements overcome the puny endeavours we make, or war destroys them. Routes that will lead to destinations. For whoever wants to make that journey – for the ordinary traveller, for the pilgrim, for the soldier, for the militant, the guerrilla, the terrorist. I see no distinction in each one except in the imperatives of the mission. Unless they are so overcome by the forces of evil that the malformations of hatred light up those crazed expressions. I cannot predict the end result of either the individual journey or the individual mission. Victory? Defeat?Holocausts, engendered out of unresolvable conflict? In this desert land all man-made construction is laid aside.

Whatever existed in the past, whatever we thought real, takes on the illusion of that longed-for mirage to erase out the emptiness. We seek even within the thought of that illusion the memory of that raft, that boat, the tractor, the mini-bus to carry out that endless journey. If nothing exists any longer we will walk, walk, walk however many miles are required of us, through a trackless pathway. Then we reach reality but by then that reality has lost all significance. We have lived most fully only within those moments of danger in the crossing. The wasteland too has its risks and hazards. When the peace negotiations failed Suresh and the others were off-loaded from the tractor and asked to run for their lives as the planes came over like a covey of birds.

All my intricate drawings, those notes in my file, the drawings in the lecture rooms on the whiteboards, of what use are they to us now? I have drawn with the most meticulous care, mathematically calculated, those routes, the roads, bridges, tunnels, like the blueprints of architects. To
build those soaring towers and solid structures.

Bridges will be blown up. Roadways mined. Those huge concrete structures cave in with the violent explosions that rock them. Glass splinters blind the eyes, sever necks and leave decapitated truncated bodies. Bodies buried in debris. A mutilated landscape. Bodies mutilated and crushed beyond recognition.

There’s a church somewhere or other, they say. At Kilaly, where we began the crossing. A miracle had taken place in that spot during the occupation of the Portuguese invaders in the North. Long, long ago. Sixteenth century. One of the generals, one of our own kind, fighting on the side of the Portuguese forces was on a march with his band of troops. March? What kind of march? To attack his own kind? He was weary. So the story goes. Took some time off to rest and fell asleep. Beneath a tree. Dreamed a dream. A warning dream of an ambush. Forewarning. If he proceeded along a certain route he and his men would be annihilated. In his dream a saint, was it Sebastian, appeared to him and indicated that there at the very spot buried deep in the soil was a miraculous statue of a saint. Together with sacred relics. When the General awoke, he related the dream to his men. They unearthed the statue and the relics. He left his uniform and gear and took another route and ambushed the others, his own kind. A traitor? To commemorate the escape from certain death, a church was eventually built at that very spot by the General’s family.

Until these troubled times came upon this land centuries later, long after the Portuguese power had been violently dislodged by the Dutch invaders and then again, the Dutch by the Imperial power of the British, the statue and the sacred relics were taken in procession at the annual church Feasts. The statue remained in the church. The older folk recounted the legend of the dream to us when they spoke of the crossing which began at Kilaly. The family had moved to the capital of the island long ago. They would never now return. The church is probably in ruins. The relics may still be in the possession of the General’s descendants. And the statue? Ambushes are a common occurrence now. There is this talk though, which I hear, carried through the grapevine that the forces that have moved up to the North carry sacred words from the Bible before they go on their forays, sacred words that will protect them. There’s this legend that a particular battalion which carries these words has the least losses. Must be like our sacred mantras. ‘Om’. I say to myself too. ‘Om’. Perhaps unconsciously the sacred mantra is embedded in my mind for protection.

No there was no church in sight. The landscape was enshrouded in darkness at any rate. There were other churches too in Kilaly. Built centuries before. But the pews were for the higher castes. The lesser in hierarchy had to sit on the floor. No such inequalities are followed in the boats or the tractor. Here at this moment, as we feel the press of bodies until every lurch, jerk and jolt, the wedged in bodies provide us with a
sense of security. A shared humanity.

At one point of the journey we had paused to rest briefly. I had seen my friend’s mother slip into a kovil. I lost sight of her at that point. Who knows when, if ever, I will see her again? When we reach, finally, the South? Such encounters do take place, sometimes.

From Omanthai I prepare to walk to Vavuniya. It is something we must all do. It is a distance of three kilometres until we reach the main road and take a conveyance in which we travel to the South. But first, the checkpoints ... Ananda’s raft has brought me on the most important stage of my journey. I leave that raft on the shore, continue the journey as a new being, a human one, leaving whatever hatred I have behind? Before the huge expected exodus begins where the millions will be enveloped in the dust of their own footsteps or be crushed to death. And when they arrive at the expanse of water, what raft will carry them across?

The Crossing. II

WOMAN:
My clothes clung to my body. Wet with the water of the lagoon. The pink satin underskirt was like fishskin against my limbs. Slithery with smoothed down scales. Fish. Is my body undergoing some form of metamorphosis? Myths and legends surface in my mind. I have emerged from the lagoon, from the boat that has carried me to this point. From Kilaly to Alangkerni I have to disembark for the next lap of my journey. Fish. Recollections of fish struggling on the shore as the fishermen pile them on the sand, flung from their wide nets. And turtles too, lying upturned, the flesh within the cave-like shells, exposed to the sharp knives of slaughter. Clustering in my mind, images, their nebulous shapes floating, surging, fish shoals beneath the surface of the waters. Remembered myths, symbols, emerge from buried and hidden recesses of consciousness. Fish. Womb. The Yoni. Ancient source of birth, rebirth, regeneration. Words, phrases, stir in memory. Other tongues. Vesica Piscis. The vessel of the fish. The womb of Mary that bears the Christ Child. Ichthys? Greek word. Fish? Representing Christ? Fish. Feel their swirling movement against my body. My clothes wet, soaked. Smell of fish. My nostrils flare. Whiff of lagoon water. I must change into dry clothes ... but where? I take a few steps, apart, from the rest of the travellers who have alighted from the boat. Walk almost blindly along the sands, stumbling and half dazed. Fish. Hardly human. Wish I can slip back into the waters of the lagoon. Submerge myself in the waves.

I see a kovil. Enclosed in silence it appears to be empty of humans. Perhaps here I can change into dry clothes before I join the others for the next stage of our journey out of the North. Out of the Peninsula. I walk
towards the kovil. I push open the doors. I have to use some physical effort to do so. The doors are of carved, heavy wood. Fortunately for me, they have not been padlocked. My sandals, which I carry in my hands, are soaked and sodden, with grains of sand adhering to their soles. I place the sandals on one side of the entrance. I enter barefoot into the cool, womb like darkness. The stone flagged floor is smooth beneath my blistered feet. A strange feeling, some unknown emotion enters within me. I feel I enter into the body, the house of deities. The worshippers must now be few and far between but this is still the habitation of those sacred deities. The spirit of bhakthi, of love, pervades it.


The kovil. Temporary halting place for a transient like myself. For others too perhaps. This was the first time I was leaving the North in this manner, crossing by boat. Across the lagoon. In the past I had taken a train or bus. Special air-conditioned buses with piped-in music to enliven the journey out of the Peninsula. I had always passed through those familiar landmarks until, after all the predictable stops and changes, we reached the South of the island. Used to be such a long journey. We would take food wrapped in plantain leaf – red rice, stringhoppers, vegetables, fried fish, fish curry, a container of sodhi flavoured with dill seed to assuage our hunger. In the baskets woven from dried palmyrah frond. There were thermos flasks of hot coriander flavoured coffee and
bottles of drinking water from our wells, cooled in clay pots. And for our friends and relations in the South, the fruits and vegetables culled from our gardens - the different varieties of mangoes, nectar sweet when ripe, hand plucked from laden branches. Bundles of murunga with their tender flesh; odial kelengu, the crisp, hard and fibrous dried palmyrah root which we could break off into pieces like dried stick and crunch between the teeth, tiny woven baskets of jaggery made of palmyrah juice, the dark brown particles moulded into the plaited strips adding to that distinct flavour. Curd pots too. Gold jewellery crafted by the family goldsmith. I would sit by the window of the compartment watching the changing colours of the terrain, white, sandy dunes of Chavakachcheri giving way to the red earth of Chunnakam; palmyrah groves, their tall, straight palms with flourishing crests of fronds. Clusters of palmyrah fruits, dark brown, like polished mahogany, shading into a golden yellow. The palmyrah palm. Part of a familiar landscape. The 'Kalpa tree' - Tree of Life. Transplanted from Paradise to earth by Brahma directed by Shiva; 'Eight hundred and one uses'. A familiar landscape and one I could return to at will then, in the past; laden mango trees; vegetable and tobacco plots; the kovils and kerneys; the wellsweeps and the farmers working on their land in the early morning light before the hot sun came up. Scorching their bodies, scorching the earth; herds of goats wandering about searching for grass and leaves, fences made of the huge fan like fronds of dried palmyrah, the murunga trees with feathery branches. Like delicate green filigree. Murungas dangling their thick green whips. The past. All that was in the past. Reach the southern boundary of the Peninsula. Elephant Pass where once the elephants crossed the ford. Elephant herds from the mainland. To eat of the ripening palmyrah fruit that grew on the other side of the estuary. I remember the glistening white salterns and the old Dutch fort in the distance, converted into a resthouse, the waters of the ocean lapping the sides of the walls. Forts - this and others which are at close proximity to each other. Reminders of a different kind of conquest when the Dutch were in power ... now we have to take alternate routes out of the Peninsula.

My eyes, after the brilliance of the sun outside, take some time to focus their gaze in the darkness within to my surroundings. As I look round the temple I feel a great silence envelops me. I divest myself of all mundane thoughts such as changing my wet clothes and taking dry ones out of my small bundle of belongings. It is strange that no one else has followed me into the kovil. The others do not seem to mind the discomfort. Although I am wet and shivering, my throat is parched with thirst. I look at a single coconut in a corner of the kovil and wish I could drink of the water within it, search for the sharp blade that will crack it ... a single coconut brought for a pooja that was to be performed by the priest in attendance. Where was he anyway? The priest? The place was empty of any other human being but myself.
I pause to think of where I am. I have some time to be by myself. My jewels? My money? I have taken precautions. They have been secreted away in little pockets sewn into my bodice. These few things that are of some value to me are still intact. I need to purchase food, drink, tickets for travelling to the South.

I am a Christian but a place of worship whether it be the kovil or the church will always be sanctuary. The deities surround me here, so a part of my sense of loneliness begins to disperse. What is it that the believer comes in search of here? Moksha? The realization of the Absolute? Or to fulfil a vow? Or to pay penance for wrongdoing?

I myself am aware that I have several tasks to fulfil before I attain peace. For me, as a Christian, the path to salvation is one that is fraught with suffering; I see Christ as the Good Shepherd. Myself the lost sheep ... yet ancient racial memories arise within me. When I look upon the face of Shakthi, Dewi, the Great Mother, I think of my own motherhood which draws me on to endure all suffering on this journey. It is this great desire to see my younger son who lives and studies in the South and to be with him, look after him, to be re-united with him. My maternal instincts grow stronger with each step I take. I wish I could make an offering to Shakthi, the Great Mother. I know that I am not the only mother who does so, for the safety and protection of their sons, many of whom they will never see again. Both sons and daughters. For them, it is sometimes not the taste of nectar of the gods but of the cyanide capsule they bite on.

Each one of us has an individual mission. I know what mine is. But those young people, those whose bodies become the live explosions? Their missions become historical. Their names are sometimes a matter for conjecture but the act is recorded for all time. Then it is that the Great Mother becomes Kali, Kali the Destroyer who devours all existence. In the South too. Outside the Peninsula. In those remote villages where both mothers and their children die, hacked to death ... poojas ... for whom then? Avenging reprisals ...? In war is there all loss of humanity?

There is no one here, in this kovil to chant the Sanskrit slokas for the poojas. I would have listened as I used to, to the church litany and drawing comfort from that sacred chanting. No worshippers to sing thevarams. All I do is to sing, very softly, beneath my breath, hymns to the deity I worship. Stanzas, lines, words which share the same emotion of bhakthi. True, the deities were here, long, long ago. Before the Christian missionaries brought the worship of a Christian Saviour to the North. My own people were proselytised by them, yet I feel no sense of division, for within this temple, I attain the same kind of realization that the worshipper within a sacred sanctuary comes upon. That I too can become one with the Divine, with Dewi, with Shakthi, with the Great, the Universal Mother.

In the dim half-light of the temple, an invisible lamp seems to glow. I
do not know from what source the flame begins to glimmer unless it is
the memory of flames that once burned brightly in the tiered brass lamps.
But a strange glow illuminates the faces and limbs of the deities so that
they are no longer concealed in darkness. They appear almost to breathe,
to be gazing at me. I feel they are alive, yet their expressions possess a
calmness and stillness devoid of the turmoil, the sadness and pain I had
observed on the faces of my fellow travellers in the boat. The deities are
silent yet they appear to be listening to the echoes of the chanting of
Sanskrit slokas and singing of the thevarams whose memory clings to the
walls of this temporary sanctuary. I try to learn, even at this stage of my
life, something from them. In the churches where I worship I have gazed
long upon the face of a crucified Christ who bears on his head a crown of
thorns, whose hands and feet are nailed to the Cross. I gazed at the
agony of the Mother of Christ, the Agony of the Pieta. My mind fills with
emotions of pain, agony, sin, penance. Hope lies only in the thought of
the Resurrection and of the knowledge that a living Christ walked with
us in all our travails. The Christian missionaries imparted those messages
to my people from churches which had been built by colonizers and
conquerors. The pulpits were the pulpits of a different kind of conquest.
Earthly conquest. Temporal power. The conquerors had invaded this land
but the invasions had been for a limited space of time. Now we read
historical documents to gain knowledge of their tenure. Wonder what
kind of sermons they preached. All ghosts those preachers. Where I am
concerned the Peninsula is my home but I go to the South. My return will
perhaps never be assured. My home may remain empty, the rooms echo
with hollowness but I make no predictions.

I am just one speck, one dot in this vast desert. If my life is snuffed out
there will only be a few left to mourn my once existence. Everyone who
has lived here, in the Peninsula, has known grief and loss. As they have
in the South too. Those mothers in the South, do they even have the
mortal remains of their sons for burial? But death makes heroes of the
ordinary man, the man who would have been a farmer or perhaps a
student. Heroic speeches are made to stir up the patriotic emotions of
those who go out to battle and then we see the dead, the maimed, the
mutilated. We see the rows so neatly laid out, of sprawling bodies with
the grimace of death on their faces ... and we forget, except for those who
have lost a son, a daughter who has meant everything to them – father,
brother, son, daughter ... there are posters in the Peninsula to remind us
of the martyrs. And in the South? When I go there, I will perhaps
discover other names on white flags and banners. Where are some of
those bodies? Lost in the depths of the ocean, boats mined and sunk in
the deep, helicopters and planes shot down with their irretrievable cargo
of humans.

The highways and byways mined. My consciousness becomes a crater
which swallows up all thought of those deaths, burying them deep, deep
within its very depths to surface only in nightmares. I shudder for an instant. My two sons are not militants. They are ordinary young men although I do not know what thoughts they harbour in this struggle for a separate Homeland. My younger son has somehow managed to study, pass his examinations, enter a campus in the South, follow an Honours course in Engineering, win a coveted Class in his degree, become an assistant lecturer in the Faculty. What if he had been like one of those who had to bite on cyanide capsules at so young an age? Who prefer death to arrest and interrogation? Sacrifice. Isn’t it part of all our religions? They say so much about these suicide bombers who detonate themselves? What if I had a daughter? What if she had joined the movement? The young girls too have broken away from all the constraints imposed on them by tradition. There are regiments of women. There are the suicide bombers. There are the Sea Tigers. Women now fulfil different roles. Yet they are someone’s children. They have parents. They have suckled from the breasts of their mothers ... we have to try to understand them, their missions, their sacrifice of life, of youth ... we have to try to understand why such choices are made. We have to question ourselves. Why someone else’s child and not mine? But within this space of time in which my thoughts wander endlessly, exploring different routes, alternate routes of the mind, my life has undergone a sea change. For perhaps the first time in my life since this war began, a sense of peace steals over me as I stand here, feeling the ancient rites which have permeated every part of this abode as well as my whole mind, spirit and body, reaching the core of my inner being.

I have forgotten that I entered into this kovil feeling a sense of self-pity, so chilled to the bone as if mortal rigors had overcome me. I have to change my wet clothes before I emerge to continue along the land route. Wouldn’t it be an act of sacrilege to change before the gaze of the deities? What could I do? What shall I do? Find the darkest shadowed corner, conceal myself behind a pillar and unwrap the folds of my sari in such a way that nothing of my flesh would be seen? Wearing all these clothes, arranging each pleat and fold meticulously, I realize how constricting they have been all my life. Especially when I had to step off the sandy verge of the lagoon, wade shoulder high through the water for about a hundred yards and when I reached the rocking boat throw my cloth bundle into it; after which I clambered in with the others as best I could, clinging first onto the edge and then being helped in by willing hands. There was no other way for us travellers to reach a desired destination. Not at a time like this.

A time of war. Some of the travellers carry their possessions, bags, suitcases, baskets, on their heads. Others tuck up their clothes as high as they can, even draping their veshtis on their shoulders but that doesn’t prevent our bodies from being soaked. I’ve made the wrong choice. Now, as I look around at the deities, I remember the great temple festival at
Nallur when they are all decked out in silks, satins, velvets and brocades embellished with silver and gold, gem encrusted padakkams, heavy gold chains, sovereigns dangling from every inch of their bodies, garland upon garland of fragrant flowers round their necks. Towards the end of the festival, they are taken out in the chariot, along the temple veedhi, the precincts which represent the real world to them. A refreshing airing out of the incense and camphor filled sanctum, their ears assailed by the incessant pleading of the penitents. Hasn’t their view of the real world changed after the wars, the invasions, the occupations? Once, the penitent paid his vows and penance, rolling and rolling his body along the temple veedhi, clothed only in veshti, barebodied, limbs coated with the white dust stirred up by that movement. At his side stood the patient and silent comforter. Will that veedhi one day be empty of all worshippers? Who will blow the conch to echo over the deserted plains. And the ancient rites and rituals? Who will perform them? The gods will remain within their sanctum and perhaps the echoes of the slokas will still remain within it. But till then who will carry the pooja trays to them in a ghost town where shells rain down like bursts of lethal fireworks, where the bombs fall and the exodus begins, as someday it will. Perhaps an ancient poosari will remain to help the new conquerors to carry out the rites and rituals which they too believe in, sacred rites that still have significance to these warriors. And ourselves? We can only live from day to day. We predict time through light, through dark. Dawn. Midday. Dusk. Nightfall. And the passing of the seasons. The seasons of drought and rain. We keep moving. The guerrillas keep moving. They operate from the thick jungles. They have their hideouts, their strongholds, their underground networks. Everybody is constantly moving, within the Peninsula and out of the Peninsula. But the deities remain. Will always remain. Haven’t moved off to Kailasa. Their ears are now accustomed to more than the chanting of the slokas. The bursting of the shells reverberate like the conches of the past to announce the commencement of each new battle ... but the deities are still the guardians of this land. They do not make the same crossings as we do, their garments drenched in the waters of the lagoon but the worshippers still carry them in the chariots of their hearts. Bombs fall on churches, kovils. Walls shattered by shells, but those whom we worship remain in spirit. Perhaps their presence even in the ruins are a solace to those who are left behind. For me, now, this kovil is a place of refuge. The face of Shakti engenders in me a feeling of power. Shakthi. The Mother of the Universe. The Mother of all creation. But there are two poojas for her. Durga pooja. Kali pooja. Terrifying image of her. Stamping on the symbol of evil, a wreath of the heads of the giants she had slain and a string of skulls round her neck. These are the images that the believer bears. Life. Death. For me it is Shakti’s image as the Universal Mother who reminds me so forcibly of my own instincts of motherhood, that impels my journey to the South.
Now that we have to move away from the well tried paths and the convenient routes, the familiar passage which impedes our journey with obstructions and obstacles we have no other alternative but to find our way out. Somehow war transforms the safe road. It is now fraught with all kinds of dangers visible and invisible but we travel along it. There are no alternatives to reach a desired destination.

My mind turns to those biblical times when the waters of the Red Sea parted for the Israelites to make a passage to the other side... ‘Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong East wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground and waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.’ But it has not been an exodus for us, not yet. Perhaps very soon, that event will take place. Perhaps the crossing is an intimation of what will come to pass. I leave one son, a daughter-in-law, a grandchild, behind. I leave my home behind. I hope to return one day but the question I ask myself now is where do I really belong? We have the *de facto* rule of the militants in the Peninsula. My son remains in the South like many others whose homes are in the North but returns to see me. Does that make me a renegade when I want to leave my home in this manner, take the crossing? An illegal crossing. Though physically I belong to this terrain, I have to make this journey with all its attendant risks and hazards. Let me survive for as long as the time allotted to me. I have come through one part of the journey. The waters did not part for the passage of our boat but I reached somehow, dry land. This time, there was no drowning, no death at sea. I am not the only one, by no means the only one to brave this crossing. We who make our journeys must brave fire and ice, ocean and desert, whether it be here, in our own terrain or elsewhere in a far country where the millions of asylum seekers and refugees from their own war-torn zones trek into an unknown future. Many will never reach the Canaan land. Perish they will on the way. Bodies piled into mass graves. Frozen. Suffocated. Arrested. Deported. There is now no country which can be called Home if you become a perpetual wanderer on the face of the earth. I haven’t moved out of this island ever but now I feel I have. Within this one country, two exist, one of them engendered by new imperatives, historical imperatives. We are divided by these forces. Too late to efface them. The conflict grows daily into monstrous proportions. Death and displacement are the inevitable results. Will the chasm be closed in one day by the piled up bodies of the dead?

Even a simple journey, which in the past needed no new philosophies yields such self-interrogation? Is it because I have been a teacher of history who always felt that I must question even the ready made answers and interpretations provided by the research of other scholars? Life in the past centred round journeys which were easy to take – family
reunions, marriages, births, death. When we were summoned, we went. No one looked upon us as if we were a different breed of people. Now we have to re-examine, re-assess our identities and ask ourselves the questions about those first beginnings – inroads, incursions and invasions and how we even arrived here. The documentation lies in those history books from which I myself once taught … are we descended from those first colonizers from the sub-continent? Were those same colonizers responsible for the collapse of ancient civilizations and the drift to the South West of the island? Did the invader become one with the invaded? The conqueror with the conquered? The subjugator with the subjugated? Or will ancient grudges always remain? Submission is not easy for anyone to accept. To be under the yoke. ‘Sub iugum’, as I learned in my Latin class from the missionaries. To be sent under the yoke? The young anywhere in the world will not accept it. Have they been taught that all people other than themselves are seen as ‘the enemy’. Each one calls the other, enemy. Displacement. Alternative routes. Departures. These new journeys must take place. We have to move from the North to the South to see our children set out on their own journeys as asylum seekers. But not our people alone. Others too. Their motives may differ. But for the moment we will seek out, in spite of all obstructions, the route to where we want to go. Towards that desired destination. The ordinary journey now ceases to be a commonplace, everyday fact of life. The journey becomes a mission. Just as the mission undertaken by the man who sets the ambush or the man who on his individual mission is caught in that ambush.

No names. Anonymous people. After capture, aliases. Women. Sea Tigers. Martial women. Women in battle. Nothing new. Throughout history armies of the past had women fighting side by side with the men. Armed women. Bearing swords. Uttering magical battlecries. Struck terror into the hearts of the enemy. The Bible. Book of Judges. Barak’s army with its ten thousand men. Refused to go into battle without Deborah the prophetess. Wife of Lapidoth. To her Barak had spoken those words. ‘If thou wilt go with me, then will I go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then will I not go’. And Deborah went with Barak to Kadesh. Gave him knowledge that the hour was right for battle. Defeated Sisera who fled, his men all put to the sword. What an end for Sisera with his nine hundred chariots of iron … taking shelter in Jael’s tent, she gave the battle weary Sisera a drink of milk … fell fast asleep … drove a nail into his temples … fastened it to the ground … Think of the young women in the movement in the Peninsula … joined the armed struggle … no distinction between men and women fighters, dressed in battle fatigues, shorn of their wealth of hair, forehead adorned not with red kum kumum but with blood, embrace the gun … not a man … the new women generated by war … the traditional roles … wives … mothers … rituals ceremonies of marriage … not for them … round their necks, the
thali, that marriage bond ... no, no, wear instead a kuppi bearing a cyanide capsule ... bite into it ... when they have no other recourse ... sacrifice, sacrifice, ... death, martyrdom ... both sides ... when will there be reconciliation? Eyes that envision the tombs of the dead ... the vermilion silk marriage saris spill from the hands of their mothers ... streaming like blood in the supplicating hands.

And when I was young? Years and years before I became a woman of austere habits after the death of my husband. I wonder what I would have made of my life in these times, if I was a young woman? Probably widowed or in exile. Up to now I have stayed behind. Because my two sons remain here. I must go to one of them. I conceal myself in the darkest niche, hidden in the shadows. I begin to shed the garments that have clothed me for the lagoon crossing but as I do so a strange force takes over my body. I feel my flesh being transmuted into another substance. One other than this mortal flesh. The substance of which Shakthi’s image is composed. I seem to share the same breath. I had become one with her. I would share her power. Even her name. Born out of this calamitous journey. I felt that the deities in this sanctuary had taken me in, accepted me, made me feel at home. It did not matter to me that there was no one to carry the pooja trays. They would return, the worshippers. I had lost, forgotten, my mortal hunger and thirst. I no longer needed fruit or nectar to keep me alive. The fragrance of those past rituals still lingered, the staling scent of a few flowers, now withered but no, there was no longer need for any of these things. The rites and rituals had taken place many times over and this was so sacred a place that my ordinary flesh and blood body had miraculously changed. I had come inside quite light-headed with exhaustion and hunger. I had thought of the white flesh of the coconut kernel, the coconut water that had poured from it, the ripe combs of plantains, the feel of silky hibiscus flowers against my fingers. Now everything had changed. I seemed to have become one of them. My hunger and thirst vanished. I heard a voice travelling from very near, soft, speaking in syllables that I could faintly understand, not the language of ordinary speech which human beings used in their raucous interchanges but the language in which the priest addressed the deities. I had to translate it, through my mind and imagination into that which could be comprehended for now we shared the same breath although I was the newly born one and they were the ancient, ancient deities. I was no intruder here. I was welcome.

‘Make yourself at home within this sanctuary. We understand you are after a long journey. To us you have travelled through time, through memory, to reach us. We can create a space for you too here. Sometimes travellers enter and search for a plantain or two or even a little of the sacrificial offerings of milk in the vessels. The worshippers come seldom now yet they remain and when they come it is not empty-handed. People cannot forget their deities even in a time of war’.
I touched my body. The tremors that had shaken my limbs seemed to have passed. It was as if invisible hands had very gently unwrapped my wet clothes and out of the bundles I carried, taken out fresh, dry clothes which covered me. The wet clothes, still dripping with water lay humped about my feet. The money I carried with me was sewn in little pockets in my underclothes. Would I still need it? I wondered. I looked up at the faces of the goddesses. Which one had been speaking to me? Was it Shakti, the consort of Shiva? They would belong to time without an age here. No hazardous journeys for them across the lagoon in a boat which at any moment might capsize, sink from either being overloaded or attacked. These journeys were not peacetime journeys. What patience they had cultivated day after day, month after month, year after year while the penitents themselves grew old and died; while the priests and poosaries changed. The slokas never changed, only the human voices that chanted them.

They were watching me, all of them. I did not importune them for anything for I did not feel myself a penitent. What a feeling of peace and tranquillity filled my spirit and yet did I not have my own God to turn to? And what about the rest of my journey? 'Take up your abode here', the voice continued. 'No shells fall here. You will be safe. There are no mines laid where you stand, take a few steps, walk towards that niche that stands empty and remain there for all time'. The idea was tempting to remain here, a deity among the divine. This was familiar landscape to me. I had known so much human suffering, widowed young, bringing up two sons alone, shells falling on the house. In fact one day the shells had landed on the roof of the house but fortunately the room in which we usually slept and had taken refuge in, escaped. When we found food we ate. Sometimes we would all rush to the church to take refuge. Ah, yes, I know the deities too are taken into the outer world at certain seasons, during the times of the ritual ceremonies. They too are accustomed to the sounds of battle. Yet, they endure. Always. They will always endure.

But time passes. I have to make my decisions. I had prepared myself in a different way to face the hazards of the crossing. I had first to prepare my mind and then my body to face it. Age did not matter. The aged ones, the ancient ones climb Adam's Peak in their pilgrimage for that is the Sacred Mountain where the Buddha has placed the impress of his foot. It is the inner strength of faith and belief that sustains each one of them. Here it is the passage through water, arid plain, jungle and the journey to the South. And my son at the end of it. Will he miss me if he never sees me again? But he is young. He will continue to live his life.

'Stay' the voice says, 'stay with us'. I stoop to pick up my clothes. My limbs feel warm. I have stopped shivering with cold. I feel a different kind of life flowing through my body. I am human again but I have a strange new strength to carry me through the next stage and the next and
the next of my journey as I walk out into the starkness of white sunlight and white sand.

GLOSSARY
p. 107 vallam – Tamil word for fishing boat
p. 111 urea – fertilizer
p. 112 bhikkhu – a Buddhist monk
p. 113 koti – is the Sinhala word for tiger. Now a term used to describe the Tamil militants who are sometimes called the Tamil Tigers (LTTE)

p. 114 kovil – a Hindu temple
p. 117 the yoni – symbol of the goddess Shakti or Shakti
p. 117 Ichthys – Greek word for fish. Claimed by some to be the acronym for Jesus Christ
p. 118 bhakthi – deep and intense quality of spiritual devotion displayed by the devotee in worship of the deities
p. 118 manaverai – ceremonial wedding platform/dais where the nuptial seat for the bridal couple is placed. Used at Hindu marriage ceremonies
p. 118 sodhi – a gravy in which coconut milk is generally used
p. 119 murunga – a vegetable Anglicised term ‘drumstick’

p. 119 pooja – worship, rituals
p. 119 odial kelengu – the dried root of the palmyrah palm
p. 120 Moksha – state of nothingness/ an ideal in which no rebirth recurs
p. 120 slokas – Sanskrit verses
p. 122 veshtis – waist cloth worn by Tamils
p. 123 padakkams – elaborate appendage to a throatlet or necklace approximating to a locket. Studded with gems.

p. 123 veedhi – passage/route/area, encircling a Hindu temple
p. 123 Kailasa – the celestial abode of the Hindu deities
p. 123 Durga pooja – rituals performed in the worship of the goddess Durga
p. 125 kum kumum – the Tamil name for saffron powder worn on the forehead. An auspicious symbol. Used in temple rituals too. The red variety is the most popular. The mark on the forehead is called kum kumum pottu

p. 126 thali – Hindu marriage necklace
p. 126 kuppi – small vessel or container
p. 127 poosaries – Hindu priests who carry out the pooja rituals
Dewasundari Arasanayagam

HIBISCUS

Red eyes
is that all I
can show of
my feelings?

Bright red eyes remember
the hibiscus I used to pick
from that wild garden
place in glass decanters
watch them sparkle

red eyes reflect you
on red earth we scratched
out squares played hopscotch
screamed and shrilled
nearby limestone quarries
gape like craters on
a surface scarred

and Kandathe’s red porial
which we ate in her
mud walled house
floor clamped clean with
dung goats wandered
in the garden

Suramanium picked glass
today white, fresh
and the wailers crying
out professional tears
as trod on shallow seas
washing over pots and ashes

those of our fathers and now
our brothers while we slip through
life, non-persons shadowless
red eyes
RETURN I

What awaits me when I go back
to that place called home
bitterness and guns from which
blood flows frothy streams
I ride clouds air sky below
figures dance in war formation

It was different then there
people danced in marathons
went rafting dangerous waters while
I stood in subways, music, listening
others in basement bookstores searching
and I sprawled out on sun cemented

steps shadows feet heads hands voices
coins tinkling a guitar fingers toes
tap while I find myself drifting
war formations to games in sun shine
squares you fought with real guns
real fodder little beings toppling

heels over heads absurd creatures the
dead and the killers blood seeps out
confused colours reds and swollen purples
blaze on sands then seas while a tired
sun brings me back home.

THE FIGHTER

Terrorist
conjure up a
vision
gun-toting
insane
assassin
beast/coward
combined

terrorise the
good
evil force
stalks its prey
on concrete paths
lurks behind

glass windows

bombs planted

in high-rise

buildings

minister's gardens

but why is it

that all I can

see is a young man

legs blown off

hands crushed

head intact

lying on a pavement

seconds before he
died?

AWAY – MAINE, 1986

My thumb reeks of garlic

my body feels heavy with

wondering 'are you dead?'

I walk, slide slip

rain beats down on head uncovered

I taste it drips into

mouth tears dampen

thoughts of you

and I distanced

cannot do much

but race into a

nowhere place with

imaginary messages bearing

'Are you alive?'

Standing over a table

slicing ginger talk of

home sounds of ping pong

balls bouncing jolting

my thoughts back to you

But they roll away.
28 July 1983
Reach the refugee camp dazed and weary. The refugee camp is a school, everything is silent. We sign in at the entrance our names and address. I wonder whether our house still exists. Through the dark and gloomy exteriors of the building, I see a long queue of people holding tin plates. They all look inmates of a concentration camp and I want to run away. They look at us with dazed and sunken eyes, dressed in shabby clothes. Our new home is a classroom on the first floor, overlooking a square, which is a hive of activity. Rice is being cooked in a large cauldron over a wood fire, while refugees are holding out plates and being served boiled rice and sambar from buckets.
Our fellow refugees greet us with sympathetic smiles and listen to our dilemma of being hunted out of our house. It’s a relief to be surrounded by friends.
Soon we too are invited to partake of this late lunch. I’m thirsty, but have no tumbler to drink from, however a reserve policeman offers us a glass of plain tea which I take up to mother.
Night is setting in. We have received terse orders to remain silent and keep all windows shut. The glaring rays of a flare fixed on a tree outside lights up the whole room.
At about eleven p.m. the dinner call resounds through the corridors. We hastily awake and join the long queues. Not hungry, but everyone is enjoying the rice and sambar. I see children eating rice off the palms of their hands. There are not enough plates.
12.00 p.m. Two men who introduce themselves as Douglas and Janaka from a sangaramaya have brought a pail of milk. They say their society is against the use of violence on Tamils. Everyone is suspicious of them and are reluctant to drink the milk. Father however goes forward and has a glass of milk. The milk test has passed. Soon all drink the hot sweetened milk.

29 July 1983
Got up at about 5 o’clock. There are only a few toilets for nearly a thousand refugees.
There’s no breakfast. We are hungry. One of our friends has brought
a bag full of bread, which we cut into hunks and distribute among the children. The adults have to manage without breakfast.

Lunch is served at about four o’clock. We have lost our appetites.

Night. – Tension and fear of an attack on the camp. Someone has seen something move up the grassy embankment. Soon a policeman is sent up to investigate, he returns to say that there’s nobody. It is only a branch of a tree blowing in the breeze.

30 July 1983
Negative feelings are kept at bay. During visiting hours there’s a steady stream of visitors, who bring food and lunch packets. Someone tells my mother that he has brought some food and clothes for the refugees, but there is no-one to distribute them. Soon the room becomes a centre for refugee clothes. New life is infused into us. The apathy and lack of motivation is dwindling and the inmates cook and work hard all day. A kind of order prevails – a new spirit seems to have taken over, the desire to live, to find a new meaning to life, existence ...

A doctor has brought tins of infant milkfood. We then boil a cauldron of water and prepare the milk. We do not have firewood and so we use broken up desks and even chairs. Parents line up to get their infant’s share of the milk. The bottles they clutch are filthy and need to be sterilised. We finish at about 5 o’clock. Walk back to our ‘new home’. It is even more crowded today. Families huddle together listening to the BBC news broadcast on Sri Lanka. Later on we prepare to sleep. Many sleep on the bare floor. It is cold tonight.
DAVID DABYDEEN, GUYANA

Address to the UNESCO Executive Board, Paris, on 24 April 1996

I wish to pay a brief tribute to a man, a noble and distinguished African, whose work was of utmost relevance to many of UNESCO’s concerns as expressed in the Director-General’s Report – concerns such as the freedom of artistic expression, or the freedom from political persecution, or the rights of minorities, or the right to be protected from activities, on the part of governments or private companies, which lay waste to the environment.

The man of whom I speak was a fine poet and novelist. I knew him as a writer and as a friend. I use the past-tense because he was killed last year: his name was Ken Saro-Wiwa.

I first met Ken Saro-Wiwa at a Writers Festival in 1990 and I was quickly impressed by his character. He had a ready spirit of friendship about him. He was of gentle manner, and the modesty and quietness of his speech indicated not only a man who was lacking in vanity, but also a man who possessed an advanced sense of his own mortality. He knew that by challenging a multinational oil company and a military regime, he was liable to be assassinated.

Tyrants and writers are natural enemies. The tyrant cannot endow words with beauty and truth and spirit, and so the tyrant is eternally envious and fearful of the writer’s power. What the tyrant cannot control, he seeks to exterminate.

Ken Saro-Wiwa had a special and dangerous gift as a writer, which was his sense of humour, the quickness of his wit. He had a talent for ridiculing and parodying the strut and pomp of the elite. A very effective way of deflating the ego of tyrants is to laugh at them. And in his writings Ken Saro-Wiwa laughed at their grandiose ambitions, their overweening egos. He laughed at the shiny medals they pinned on their chests, and the pompous titles they gave themselves. He showed them to be foolish, and all the more dangerous because of their foolishness.

It grieved me to learn of his imprisonment, and when he was killed I felt stained, almost blighted. I believe that the killing of a noble human soul can have this inward effect on all of us, irrespective of our race or gender or nationality. We feel that our own individual humanity is diminished by a loss such as that of Ken Saro-Wiwa’s life.

I believe that the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa is as significant as that of
Lorca at the hands of Spanish fascists or the death of Mandelstam at the hands of Stalin. Ken Saro-Wiwa's death was only different in that he met his fate partly because of his environmental concerns.

It is clear to me that environmental concerns, which are relatively new, will find expression in relatively new modes of violence. In Britain where I spend part of my life, I have already witnessed the ransacking or burning down of shops which deal in environmentally unfriendly products. The spectacle of veal crates and cruelly caged animals arouses a passion among many British people, a passion so intense that sometimes I wonder whether we are all suffering from mad cow's disease! A new phenomenon in Britain today is that of the frail and elderly pensioner confronting bulldozers or burly bailiffs and policemen, all in defence of some beautiful parkland threatened by road-building. The spectacle of the lone, unarmed student confronting a tank in Tiananmen Square is refashioned, with typical British eccentricity, in the image of pensioner confronting bulldozer. People in Britain who are not normally activists have become highly charged and politicized because of the environmental factor.

In Britain, such activism expresses itself in low-level violence and it rarely leads to loss of life. In South America, where I originate, we tend to do things with less decorum. In a very short period of time we have killed thousands of Amerindian indigenous peoples whose only crime was that they stood in the way of bulldozers, in defence of their land and their forest environment. As a writer I can understand why the literary form of 'magical realism' originated in my region. 'Magical Realism' has to do with a certain grossness or exaggeration of proportions. The idea of the grotesque lies at the heart of the literary form of 'magical realism'. And the practice of the grotesque lies at the heart of our behaviour towards our indigenous peoples. No Indigenous Peoples Fund, however welcome, can ever recompense these peoples for the robbery of their culture, their lands and their lives.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

IAN ADAM is Professor at the University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. He has written two volumes of poetry and articles on Victorian and Post-colonial Literature and with Helen Tiffin is co-editor of *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-colonialism and Post-modernism*. He edited *Ariel* from 1980 to 1990.

AOSAF AFZAL is a young London poet published by *Krax, Pomes*, with two *Poetry Now* anthologies.

All ARASANAYAGAMs were interned in a refugee camp in Kandy, Sri Lanka during 1983. This was due to the conflict which still continues today between the Tamil and the Singalese. DEWASUNDARI is a Tamil, JEAN ARASANAYAGAM is of Dutch Burgher family descent married to DEWASUNDARI and PARVATHI is their daughter. They were eventually released and now live in Kandy. All three are writers. Jean Arasanayagam has published one book of poetry and Penguin (India) are going to publish the history of her Dutch Burgher ancestors. She was a contributor to *Unbecoming Daughters of the Empire* and Dangaroo Press will publish her next collection of poetry. Parvathi’s short story ‘Six Matching Cups and Saucers’ was published in *Kunapipi* No. 2. 1995.


MARY D. CHAUHAN bi-lingual Gujerati writer and performer for both adults and children she won the East Midlands Arts Writer’s bursary in 1990, and in 1996 came joint second in the Asian Playwright Festival, Kalam Kahe run by the B.B.C. Sampad and the Leicester Haymarket Theatre with her play *Red Skies*.

JULIAN CROFT is a graduate of the University of Newcastle. He worked in West Africa for several years and has published eight books including poetry, fiction and literary criticism.

DAVID DABYDEEN, novelist and poet, is Professor of Literary Studies at Warwick University. His last novel was *The Counting House* (Cape) 1986, his forthcoming novel *A Harlot’s Progress* will be published in 1998. His poetry collections include *Slave Song* and *Coolie Odyssey* both published by Dangaroo Press.

MAURA DOOLEY is a poet and an editor who lives in London. Her latest poetry collection is *Kissing A Bone* (Bloodaxe) 1996, she is editor of *Making For Planet Alice* (Bloodaxe) 1997.

CATRIONA ELDER is a lecturer at the University of Wollongong, where she teaches Australian Studies and History. Her research interests at the moment centre around fictional fantasies of assimilation in twentieth century Australia.

MANDY GRAHAM, Design Editor at *The Newcastle Herald*, studied at the Newcastle College of Advanced Education and has a Bachelor of Arts – Visual Arts. She also has a postgraduate diploma in Plant and Wildlife Illustration. She is a winner of numerous industry awards including the Journalist of the Year in 1991.
Notes on Contributors

DAVID HUTCHISON engineer, historian, Physics teacher, adult educator, first Curator of History at W.A. Museum. Writer of poetry, short stories and translator of these from Greek. Author of a book about the Benedictine Monks of New Norcia, the extract ‘Karen’ is from his novel The Poverty Bush.

JIM JARMAN cover artist. Jim Jarman’s father was a stockman on a station, his mother, the cook. When he was seven he was put in a boys’ home. He rejoined his mother and stepfather when he was ten but because of cruelty he ran away and became a street kid at the age of twelve learning to live off his wits. At the age of fourteen he was made a ward of the state and released when he was eighteen. No one ever visited him so he had plenty of practice at being a loner. He became a driller and worked in Australia, Indonesia, Borneo, Iran and the Persian Gulf. After a sting drilling in the Bass Strait he was given a job in Pakistan with the Australian Development Assistance Bureau and the United Nations to train the local people in drilling water bores for Afghan Refugees. He was sent by the United Nations to Afghanistan to drill for water to hold back the flow of refugees in the middle of the warzone between Russia and Afghanistan. After six weeks leave/counselling in Australia Jim was sent to Burma, first to Rangoon then to Mandalay, where he supervised three massive water projects. He always gained the respect and admiration of the people and refugees he helped and lived with. Not surprisingly Jim suffered traumatic experiences which remain with him today. Now he lives a quiet life in beautiful country near Stanthorpe. These are the base outlines of a quite remarkable life. On his return to Australia he began to experiment with pieces of metal and today is recognized as a major sculptor in this art. His figure ‘Refugee’ seemed a very appropriate cover for this issue. The photograph was taken by Sue Moore, a photographer from the same area.

DOROTHY JONES is a New Zealander who is a graduate of Otago, Adelaide and Oxford universities. She has published widely in the field of Post-colonial literatures focusing particularly on women’s writing.

METTE JØRGENSEN holds an MA in English and Modern Greek from Aarhus University, Denmark. She is presently working on finishing her Ph.D. at the Department of Comparative Literature, Aarhus University, Denmark, where she has also been teaching. She is co-editor of two Danish literary journals and has published articles, primarily in Danish, on contemporary anglophone post-colonial literature.

HARJIT KAUR KHAIRA born in Leicester a writer of poetry and short stories she recently won a poetry competition and was funded by the Arts Council on a creative writing course at Lumb Bank, Yorkshire. Both teacher of English and post graduate student at Warwick University.

BILL LEAK is a cartoonist for The Australian.

PETER LYSSIOTIS, born in Cyprus he is a photographer and photo-montage artist combining image with text.

ALAN MOIR is a cartoonist for The Sydney Morning Herald.

CHRIS NEWMAN is a graphic designer artist who studied at the University of Technology NSW and is now continuing his studies in Spain.
NOEL PEARSON born at Cooktown and was educated at the Hopevale Lutheran Mission of which he speaks kindly, he is of aboriginal descent and a leading activist for Aboriginal Rights. He graduated in Law from Melbourne University and is Chair of the Cape York Lands Council and advisor on Native Title to ATSIC (Australian and Torres Strait Islander Commission).

GAYE SHORTLAND was born in Bantry, Eire. After reading T.E. Lawrence’s Seven Pillars of Wisdom she decided she wanted to chase nomads. ‘Not being male or Joan of Arc I couldn’t hope to lead them.’ Having obtained a first class MA in English from the University of Cork she got a one-year lectureship in English at the University of Leeds. She decided that she didn’t want to end up as a permanent member of staff in one of the forty-nine staff cubicles with a tea-kettle so she left in search of her nomads who she was able to find when, through Derry Jeffares, she got a job at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Northern Nigeria. It was here that she found her Touregs and where I first met her and we became good friends.

She continued her pursuit of her nomads, had a daughter, Maryam, with a Toureg. By then she was teaching at the University of Niger, and living with the Touregs. When the university ran out of money she ran a restaurant and recreation centre for the American Embassy in Niamey. She had married a Toureg and had two children by him, Adam and Rali. She, her husband and children eventually returned to Cork. Can you imagine a nomadic Toureg in Cork? No. Well neither could he. So with Gaye’s blessing he returned to the Sahara. She and her family were penniless but that is nothing new. She wrote a book, Mind That lis My Brother. It became a bestseller both in Ireland and the U.K. She has just published another, Turtles All the Way Down. She’s still penniless and still wonderful. Our paths didn’t cross for a long time but as she wrote in the inscription of her first book, ‘Dear Anna, How wonderful to say “With love” after more than twenty years.’ She’s a remarkable woman.

ALICIA STUBBERSFIELD lives in Wales, her first full poetry collection is The Magician’s Assistant (Flambard).

BETTY THØGERSEN is a graduate of the University of Aarhus, Denmark where she specialized in post-colonial literature and the University of Aalborg, Denmark where she did a degree in International Studies. Since her graduation she has travelled widely and worked almost exclusively in the field of humanitarian work, including service with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Sydney, Australia and in refugee camps in Nepal. In addition she has completed the following courses: Cultural Sensitization, Kathmandu, Nepal; People-Oriented Planning, Sydney, Australia; and a Study trip to the United Nations European Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland. She currently does voluntary work with CARITAS.

SAEED UR-REHMAN comes from Pakistan and has a Masters degree from the University of the Punjab.
KUNAPIPI

EDITORIAL
Anna Rutherford

FICTION
Aosaf Afzal, Jean Arasanayagam, David Hutchison
Gaye Shortland

POETRY
Ian Adam, Aosaf Afzal, Dewasundari Arasanayagam
Mary Chauhan, Julian Croft, Maura Dooley, Harjit Kaur Khaira
Alicia Stubbersfield, Saeed Ur-Rehman

ARTICLES/STATEMENTS
Parvathi Arasanayagam, 'In a Refugee camp - Extracts from a Diary'; David Dabydeen, 'Address to the UNESCO Executive Board, Paris'; Dorothy Jones, 'Post-colonial Families Reconfigured: a Discussion of The Bone People and Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow'; Mette Jørgensen, 'Islands: Literally and in Literature'; Noel Pearson, 'University Day Address, 5 May 1997'; Betty Thøgersen, 'Expanding Horizons'; Saeed Ur-Rehman, 'Brown Bleakness/Brown Greyness: A Textual Analysis of My Body in Australia'

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Pia Arke, Mandy Graham, Bill Leak, Peter Lyssiotis, Alan Moi
Chris Newman

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