

Conclusion

This thesis has examined representations of Arab and Muslim Australians in Australian literature and film from 1890-2011, focusing primarily on the historical narrative of the Afghan cameleers. The upsurge in interest regarding the history of the cameleers has opened up new ways of imagining Australian history and contemporary society, as well as providing alternative pathways of belonging for Muslim-Australians whose feelings of belonging have suffered due to the after effects of 9/11. The fictional representations of the cameleers have not previously been examined yet they add another important chapter to this historical rediscovery. The texts examined provide an insight into the ways that Arabs and Muslims have been imagined in White Australia (1890-1940) and how this imagining relates to current day discourses of Islamophobia. They provide an opportunity to see how Arab and Muslim stereotype, prejudice and caricature became transposed into literary representations from media and political discourses, thus naturalising these prejudices into the Australian imaginary and modes of representation from this initial contact. This has meant that while superficial discourses change according to contemporary politics, current events and changing societies, the underlying structures through which Arabs and Muslims are perceived and the ways in which they are imagined in relation to the Australian national body, have largely remained the same. Literature has played a vital role both in this imagining of Arabs and Muslims as absent from, and as a menace to, the nation, as well as the attempt to counteract and respond to these imaginings.

The overt and often crude racism of texts from White Australia (1890-1940), while often confronting, allows for an exploration of how the prejudicial attitudes of White Australia continue to inform contemporary discourse and consequently allows for the

detection of similar prejudicial attitudes in modern-day Australia where such overt racism is not accepted. As explained by Ien Ang (2001) and James Donald & Ali Rattansi (2005) the increasing unacceptability of racial prejudice has led to permutations in the expression of racial prejudice, which are often far more covert and difficult to identify – sometimes framed in terms of ethnicity, culture or national pride (Ang 2001, p.104-111; Gilroy 2005, p.2). Donald & Rattansi (2005) have described the development of this discourse in Britain as a “new racism, based not on ideas of innate biological superiority but on the supposed incompatibility of cultural traditions” (Donald & Rattansi 2005, p.2). Britain’s discursive shift holds parallels within Australian society, particularly in the creation of a “coded language” (Gilroy 2005, p.53) which is able to express racial prejudice yet elude detection by masquerading in a different form:

We increasingly face a racism which avoids being recognized as such because it is able to link ‘race’ with nationhood, patriotism and nationalism, a racism which has taken a necessary distance from crude ideas of biological inferiority and superiority and now seeks to present an imaginary definition of the nation as a unified *cultural* community. It constructs and defends an image of national culture – homogeneous in its whiteness yet precarious and perpetually vulnerable to attack from enemies within and without. The analogy of war and invasion is increasingly used to make sense of events. This is racism that answers the social and political turbulence of crisis and crisis management by recovery of national greatness *in the imagination*. Its dreamlike construction of our sceptred isle as an ethnically purified one provides a special comfort against the ravages of decline. (Gilroy 2005, p.53)

The examination of Australia’s repressed and elided histories can help to avert a similar and dangerous recourse within Australia to White Australian mores (regardless of how they are framed) by revealing the mythology of a ‘White Australia’ free of other races, by

debunking the myth of White Australia as inherently 'Good' (Rutherford 2000) and by revealing the various ways in which non-white people have contributed to and enhanced the Australian nation since its colonial inception. Literary depictions of Afghans from White Australia, a time in which racism was widely accepted if not encouraged, can therefore reveal the more honest face of racism while potentially de-naturalising what have become naturalised beliefs.

Chapters One and Two discussed texts and media representations of Afghans which through their bilateral relationship reflected some of the most predominant fears of the late nineteenth to early-twentieth century – racial invasion, cultural take-over, religious war, racial miscegenation and sexual violence – all of which still feature largely in Islamophobic rhetoric. Adding to the potency of this demonization was the absenting, or elision, of the cameleers from historical record and popular memory, enabled by their displacement in narratives of outback life and nation-building, as explored in Chapter Three. The development of literary tropes such as the 'fake Afghan' and the metonymic supplanting of Afghans with camels, reveal the specific ways that this elision was enacted within fictional portrayals while also revealing the place of these tropes within a tradition of the elision of subversive histories in Australia's grand historical narrative.

From the conjoined processes of demonization and elision in Australian fiction, Arab and Muslim history in Australia has been forgotten in popular memory, while Arab and Muslim stereotype has been naturalised and accepted. It has been my contention that fundamental to these processes of demonization and absenting is the desire to construct a 'Good' 'White' Australia – one built upon the supposedly superior nature of the white British race and one whose history, free of racism and inequality, acts as proof of the untouchable moral standing of a humanitarian and egalitarian society. Afghan history exists in opposition to both of these things, in its revelation of racial prejudice,

violence and social inequity, and its narrative of non-white economic and infrastructural development which enabled the development of the Australian nation.

I have also argued that the significance of this historical treatment is increased by the location of this history in the Australian outback, a landscape imbued with national, political and historical meaning. As the 'heartland of Australia', the outback remains the land against which true 'Australianness' is measured and from which true 'Australianness' can be obtained. The treatment of Arabs and Muslims in this space is consequently telling of their perceived place and function within the Australian nation. From the texts studied in Chapters One to Three it is made obvious that Arabs and Muslims were not given enough regard to be afforded a place within the nation and their function was seen as largely disruptive and subversive, working against the interests of the nation and its 'true' (read white) people. Common to all of these works is the desire to supplant the story of Afghan contribution and success with the story of white contribution and success, a narrative that only really came under scrutiny with the historical revisionism (aka critical history or 'the history wars') beginning around the 1970s (MacIntyre 2003; Clark & MacIntyre 2004; Reynolds 2000, 2006; Stanner 1969).

The counter-discursive texts explored in Chapter Four provide an opportunity to access an alternative tradition of Arab and Muslim representation in the outback, one that runs counter to practices of demonization and elision. These texts offer a sense of hope amongst a hostile atmosphere of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment and may even provide a pathway forward for modern day Muslim-Australians seeking to reconnect with Muslim heritage in Australia. The effect of such texts, where White Australians seek to defend the Afghans and portray them with humanity and care, cannot be overestimated for the impact they can have upon a sense of hope and joy to be found in a history otherwise marked by prejudice and discrimination (Deen 2011, p.122, 128, 156).

Both Mena Abdullah & Ray Mathew's text *The Time of the Peacock* (1992) and Eva Sallis' novel *Hiam* (1998) are important texts of Australian-Muslim *self*-representation. These self-representations by Australian Muslims challenge a monocultural imagining of Australia and work to counter the effects of absencing and elision. In these works the outback changes from a reified construct of 'Australianness' into a subjective space reflective of individual experience. This is an explicit rejection of divisive mentalities that seek to reject the 'Other' and an effort to embrace difference, ambiguity and complexity as aspects of the human experience that are to be celebrated and explored.

Eva Sallis' text *Hiam* (1998) reveals a contemporary evolution in the symbolic meaning of the outback which continues to be deployed as a national icon, but is simultaneously complicated by the re-emergence of forgotten and elided histories of racism, violence and inequality. In this work the outback represents a 'void' or 'lack' where the Australian Good has failed and its mythic nature is revealed in the uncovering of forgotten histories. The unresolved anxieties regarding Australian history manifest in the portrayal of the outback as a site of doubt and uncertainty. This relationship between the 'Great Australian Silence', a term coined by W.E.H Stanner (1969) referring to the construction of Australia's grand historical narrative that in its positivity neglects and excludes Indigenous Australians, and the outback reflects Australia's uncertain relationship with itself and an ever-revealing history of racism, sexism and violence. In *Hiam* (1998) this anxiety regarding the Australian nation is overtly linked to themes of racial prejudice, social division and cultural disharmony in contemporary Australian society, all of which are interwoven heavily into the outback landscape which becomes a figurative repository for Hiam's anxiety, alienation and experiences of prejudice. This representation of the outback as a troubled space that Hiam must negotiate culturally and spiritually, as well as psychologically, reflects both a re-envisioning of the Australian

nation away from monoculturalism as well as the disruptions and challenges that such a reimagining of the national Self can cause. The text's engagement with cameleer history suggests a direct link between Australia's past, its present and implicitly its future.

Despite the presence of these histories of prejudice and inequality, however, both *Hiam* (1998) and *The Time of the Peacock* (1992) offer hope through a re-envisioning of the outback as an all-encompassing space that needn't be fraught with the destructive effects of an 'us and them' mentality. Instead the outback is represented as a mosaic, made up of infinite stories, and as a space that can be experienced, enjoyed and travelled according to individual subjectivity. They offer a vision of the outback and the nation as an inclusive space that escapes, although does not forget, its own troubled history. Hanifa Deen (2011) shares this vision of the Australian nation, comparing it to:

...a giant caravanserai: an enormous walled in medieval caravan inn where strangers met for shelter and company while travelling through remote areas. When the huge dark shape of the caravanserai wall loomed into sight weary travellers were heartened – they'd soon be safe – and welcomed. According to tradition there was an unwritten law that whoever entered would enjoy asylum, food and shelter. Even blood enemies locked inside the gates together were safe from each other. (Deen 2011, p.160)

This vision has most recently been challenged by the newest evolution in Arab and Muslim presence in the Australian outback, in the mandatory detention of asylum seekers in outback detention centres. Many of these asylum seekers (or as they are commonly referred to, 'boat people') are Arab and/or Muslim and there is a heavy focus upon Arab and Muslim refugees in media and political discourse – particularly refugees from Afghanistan. This current social climate and its reflection in literary and filmic works will

be briefly examined here as the most recent evolution in Arab and Muslim history and artistic portrayal in the outback.

Within anti-‘boat-people’ discourse there is a recurrence of the pattern of demonization and elision that has been repeatedly enacted against the Other in Australian society, including the cameleers and modern-day Muslim-Australians. The extension of Arab and Muslim stereotypes into the discussion surrounding asylum seekers has led to perceptions of asylum seekers as potential terrorists, threats to women, underhanded criminals and drains on the national economy (Burke 2008; Gelber 2003; Griffiths et al 2008; Manning 2004; Sallis 2003). Mandatory detention, in the name of border defence, also parallels the “manifestation of aggression at the very moment we set out to do good” (Rutherford 2000, p.10) that has similarly produced hostility against “the Aboriginal, the immigrant, and the feminine” (Rutherford 2000, p.177) – and specifically in this study, against the cameleers and modern Muslim Australians. This aggression represents another ‘void’ – the point at which the Australian Good fails in its aggressive rejection of the Other, conceptualised as threat and thief (Rutherford 2000).

The location of the detention centres in the outback continues the outback’s symbolic and actual function as the locale for Australia’s repressed, elided and subversive histories – histories that reveal the failure (or absence) of the Australian Good. Suvendrini Perera (2002) links the detainment of asylum seekers within the outback with Australia’s historical treatment of Indigenous Australians: “[In detention centres] Australia’s history reappears in unfamiliar yet still recognisable guises. Indigenous Australians remember other internment camps from the not-too-distant past: children’s dormitories encased in chicken wire; grids of regulation housing cutting through complex interweavings of kin, language and place.” (Perera 2002, *n.p.*) The similar treatment of ‘non-white aliens’ in Australia through “segregation, immigration control and internment, from the quarantine

stations and so-called Japtowns and Chinatowns throughout the country in the 1900s to the internment camps of World War 2" (Perera 2002, *n.p.*) are also linked to asylum seeker detainment. Perera (2002) proposes that all of these groups are joined through their treatment "as populations needing to be contained within the spaces of the camp and located outside the limits of the Australian nation." (Perera 2002, *n.p.*) The social segregation of Afghans in Ghantowns can also be added into this history, particularly given the contemporary focus upon Afghan asylum seekers in public debate.

The development of refugee literature coming out of Australia's outback detention centres in response to this discourse of 'deviance and absence' (Dunn 2004) also represents the most recent development of Arab and Muslim *artistic* representation in the outback. Within these texts refugees exist as "non-belonging bodies" in the "non-belonging space of detention" and the Australian desert (Cox 2010, p.288). Inherent to this state of 'non-belonging' is a spatial paradox whereby refugees inhabit Australia's 'heartland' yet they exist on the margins, as those who are 'not a part of Australia' and who threaten 'national borders' (Abood 2011; Cox 2010; Kim 2009; Gifford & Rodríguez-Jiménez 2010; Szörényi 2009).

Refugee literature provides an opportunity to hear the voices of refugees and counter their dehumanized treatment in political and media discourse. The compilation of various anthologies of refugee literature such as *Dark Dreams* (Dechian et al 2005), *From Nothing to Zero* (Amor & Austin 2003), *Jumping to Heaven* (Goode 2003) and *The Milk in the Sky: Writing from the Centre* (Hutchinson 2006), provide an avenue of self-expression for refugees who otherwise join a history of repressed and silenced Others in Australian history. A special issue of *Southerly*, 'Asylum', was also partly dedicated to refugee literature in the section 'Another Country' edited by Tom Keneally and Rosie Scott, and aimed to bring these works into the public sphere of literary writing. The

introduction states: “When we read this collection, we are entering another country – a shadowy, unfamiliar country with its own laws, language and borders...this is a nightmare country they’re mapping for us, and it lies in the heart of Australia.” (Scott 2004, p.5) Refugee voices represent the effects of segregation, detention, demonization and marginalisation – such as loss of identity and hope, depression, despair and self-mutilation – in an opportunity that has not been available to many other repressed groups. Many works by refugees call out for a recognition of their most basic humanity and in that function act as an important intervention into a heavily politicised and often fear-imbued conversation about refugees: “We didn’t come from another planet/We have our own deserved place on earth.../I am a human being, I said/ You are a refugee, they said” (Al Sharifi 2004). These voices not only importantly represent the ‘other side of the conversation’ about refugees, they also act as “the most ardent supplicatory of our ethical responses” (Tascón 2009, p.54).

The representation of refugee voices is also particularly important given the ‘invisibility’ of refugees within Australian public discourse: “the voices of [refugees]...are pushed to the margins and reduced to an aversive embodiment of otherness” (Abood 2011, p.2). This treatment places refugees within a “zone of indistinction” (Perera 2002, *n.p.*) in which they are alternately invisible and highly visible:

...asylum seekers have effectively disappeared in several ways. Linguistically, they have disappeared behind bureaucratic acronyms and idiomatic insults; legally, their rights have diminished; visually, they have been absented from the press; physically they have been displaced, dispossessed and on occasion, exposed to death. Yet, asylum seekers also reappear from time to time, most notably during election campaigns, meaning that they

oscillate between 'hypervisibility and invisibility' (Gilbert and Lo 2007, p.189). (Wake 2008)⁹²

The marginalisation and silencing of Australia's refugees is most overtly portrayed in refugee literature through artistic self-portraits of refugees unable to speak or with their mouths sewn shut, a grim reflection of the lip-sewing that some refugees have done in protest of their treatment in mandatory detention. The prevention of speech, or of being heard, reflects the political inequality of the refugees and what appears as their fruitless attempts to counter the dehumanising discourse that surrounds them.⁹³ Some examples include the poetry of Omeima Sukkariéh (2001), "My lips sewn together with a thread of life", and Samila Hatami (2001), "I scream out to the world but no one hears my voice". An anonymous poet (2005) from the Baxter detention centre wishes for his silence in life to trouble those who silenced him after his death:

I do not know
what will happen after I die.

...

But I would like the Potter to make a whistle
from the clay of my throat.

May this whistle fall into the hands
of a cheeky and naughty child

and the child to blow hard on the whistle continuously

with the suppressed and silent air of his lungs

⁹² Wake (2008) quotes Gilbert & Lo (2007) *Performance and cosmopolitics: Cross-cultural transactions in Australasia*, Palgrave Macmillan, London

⁹³ Angel Boujbiha's (2002) poem 'My name is Asylum' speaks to the consequent erasure of humanity and identity of the refugee within this discourse by replacing her name with her 'status': "The higher fence/ Which stops birds coming inside/ Stops thoughts and imagination/ Which stops the world outside/ The higher fence which becomes/ The border between me and Australia/ My name is asylum" (Boujbiha 2002).

and disrupt the sleep
of those who seem dead
to my cries. (Anonymous 2005)⁹⁴

In these works, the desert becomes the recipient of unheard songs and voices. The silence of the refugees permeates the space around them, increasing the desert's sinister aspect and transforming it into a symbol of oppression and death. Silence not only represents the political inequality of the refugee, it also represents the psychological and emotional 'emptying out' of refugees who live suspended in a world between life and death, existing as 'living ghosts', as described in *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* (2008), a co-authored auto-biography by Robert Hillman & Najaf Mazari: "...the poem each man and each woman and each child carries inside is being forgotten...The ghosts sit on their beds and stare at nothing. When you look into their eyes, you see only emptiness, like a room from which all the furniture has been removed." (Hillman & Mazari 2008, p.30) The emptiness of the desert landscape amplifies the psychological and emotional desolation of the detained asylum seekers, often transforming the outback into a site and source of pain. This is present in Shahin Shafaei's play *Refugitive* (2004), the music and poetry of Mohsen Soltany-Zand and various other refugee authored texts. In Soltany-Zand's poem 'Dream of Freedom' (2004), for example, the red of the sunset and the outback is equated with the colour of blood which comes from a suicide attempt: "I'm looking for a sharp razor...the red of nature's sunset/and God on the sharp razor/Red is the only colour

⁹⁴ In *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* (2008) a co-authored auto-biography by Robert Hillman & Najaf Mazari, Mazari also describes detention centres as a place of death and forgetting: "The desert air was so clear that the fences of Woomera stood out sharply against the blue sky and the sandy soil. [It looked] like a place where dreadful scientific experiments might be carried out. Or where people might be put to death silently. Australia was a modern country. Maybe this is what they built in modern countries – big, shining prisons where you could be left and forgotten...to a refugee like me, it looked inhuman." (Hillman & Mazari 2008, p.69)

I can see/The hand is cutting...I want to present this red of my life to nature” (Soltany-Zand 2004a, p.84).

The limitless expanse of the outback also acts as a source of mental and emotional torture for the refugees who seek the freedom they witness in this space and the animals that move within it. Birds feature heavily as a part of the theme of immobility in refugee literature, either as beings that are observed flying outside of the razor wire of the centres, or in the desired metaphorical transformation of the refugee into a bird. Birds are unequivocally symbolic of freedom and highlight its absence in detention. This is demonstrated in Jasim al Alibaddi’s (2004) poem ‘A lesson in drawing’ when his son asks him to draw him a bird but instead he draws a “square with a/ padlock and bars”, telling him “I don’t remember the shape of birds” (Al Alibbadi 2004). In Hassan Sabbagh’s (2004) short story ‘The Bird’ refugees are portrayed as injured birds that have dropped into Australia’s ‘garden’, only to be viewed with suspicion: “While I was watering the garden a beautiful bird fell in the middle of it...he couldn’t fly...I asked him, ‘What’s wrong with you? Why don’t you fly? How did you come here? You are a queue jumper, criminal, illegal, potential spreader of disease, possible terrorist – you are not allowed to enter this country even if you are a bird.’” (Sabbagh 2004) The play *Citizen X* (2003), similarly described refugees as injured birds: “We are the birds the arrows of faith have pierced through the heart.” (Sidetrack Performance Group 2003, p.31) Repeated imagery of being bound or trapped is often juxtaposed with the outback space and speaks to a common theme of immobility – physical and political:

Will you please observe through the wire

I am sewing my feet together

They have walked about as far

as they ever need to go.

...

I am sewing my heart together

It is now so full of

the ashes of my days

it will not hold any more.

...

I am sewing my lips together

that which you are denying us

we should never have

had to ask for. (Al Assad 2002)

In Mohsen Soltany-Zand's poem 'Drought' (2004b), the desert takes on the imprisoning features of the detention centres, acting as its enforcer and as a mass grave for those detained:

There is no green place to rest the eyes

and the scorching wind of destiny lashes at our backs

...

Hope, like black clouds, building in our thirsty hearts

turns quickly into grief

...

And still we follow the illusion of democracy and liberty

A mirage, tempting and alluring...

The mirage; a swamp of turmoil and deceit

Madness clawing at our souls, we struggle just to keep

breathing

To stay still, only to sink?

To agitate and tire? (Soltany-Zand 2004b, p.91)

This theme of immobility and death reflects the refugees' lack of access to the politics of movement as site of expression and resistance, self-agency and self-determination. The play *Citizen X* (2003), based on refugee letters from detention centres to external correspondents, also imagines detention centres as a grave: "Sometimes I have a sense that no help will come, I feel like I'm in a grave with four walls." (Sidetrack Performance Group 2003, p.36) Immobility is particularly evoked in the portrayal of the outback and the detention centres as places that exist outside of space and time. This removal from movement – physical, temporal and spatial – often takes the form of a sameness and monotony that permeates refugee works, and which is only exacerbated by the landscape:

I stand under the same sky I stood under yesterday and look out on the same dry land.
The tall fences that keep me inside this very small piece of Australia are the same fences that kept me inside yesterday, and the day before and for weeks stretching back. Has anything changed? Has my application moved from one desk to another somewhere in the city of Canberra? (Hillman & Mazari 2008, p.21)

This liminal and paradoxical space sees refugees suspended between different worlds and states, such as that of life and death, freedom and imprisonment, safety and danger: "...immigration detention is a space of inherent ambivalences: it is a hostile place, but at the same time one tied to offering some form of shelter to asylum seekers who may be identified as refugees; it is also a site where people can be held for years, but from whence people can be suddenly and forcibly removed." (Browning 2007, p.78) This paradox manifests in the treatment of refugees under law as they are "deemed to have

no claim on the nation but...are brought even more firmly under its control by virtue of their exclusion from its laws. (Perera 2002, *n.p.*)

Suvendrini Perera (2002) describes this ambivalent space as 'Not-Australia': "Not-Australia is a place of strange oxymorons and uncanny repetitions. Here, space confines and vastness isolates. The desert and the ocean alike become prisons...'Border Protection' becomes (again) the order of the day." (Perera 2002, *n.p.*) The outback centre of Woomera, for example, is "another world: a landscape of the known, yet chillingly alien...The outback as prison is confined, sequestered, uncannily ordered space; but still vacant of life, extraterrestrial in its emptiness." It is a place within which refugees occupy the "empty ungoverned space of their bodies" (Cohen 1993: quoted by Perera 2002, *n.p.*) and nothing else.⁹⁵

Hope comes in limited forms in these texts that are nonetheless powerful and important. As in the case of the cameleers the strongest form of hope comes from the support of Australians from the broader community – those who defend others suffering persecution and recognise their humanity. This appears in refugee literature in the form of Australians outside the centres who write letters or visit those detained. Their care and recognition of the refugees' humanity is represented as the nourishment and succour that refugees are otherwise denied both in the act of detention and its reflection in the arid desert.

Significantly, some texts, particularly those Afghan authored, find a sense of comfort in the history of the cameleers. This cultural ancestry is presented as a validation of their right to belong and make a home in Australia. In *The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif* (2008) by Robert Hillman and Najaf Mazari, Mazari connects the song he sings in detention with the history of the cameleers:

⁹⁵ Perera (2002) quotes: Cohen, B. (1993), 'Aliens', *Westerly*, 4, pp.33-38

In this mood that combines despair and rapture, I begin to sing.

The song that finds its way to my lips is one that is sung at New Year by the Hazari of Afghanistan...I lift my head and send the words of the song into the air of Woomera. Perhaps this is the first time that these words and this tune have been heard in this land, unless some earlier Afghani attempted it. Afghani came to Australia many years ago; they came to work – more than 100 years ago, so I have heard.

I sing. (Hillman & Mazari 2008, p.4)

This evocation of the cameleer history provides a connection between Mazari and Australia that he is otherwise unable to access in the non-space of detention. It also connects him to a history of persecution while revealing the presence of Afghan cultural traditions in Australia.⁹⁶ The positive potential inherent to this connection is also being explored by the Victorian Police Force in their attempts foster a sense of belonging in refugee youths who are having trouble settling in the community. An initiative is planned in 2012, in conjunction with cameleer Russell Osborne, to take ten refugee children into the outback to train camels and embark on a two month camel trek from Beltana to Alice Springs. The initiative, named 'In the tracks of camelmens: the road to resilience' aims to connect troubled refugee children to the history of the cameleers and consequently create a bond and familiarity with Australia: "...we want this as an anchor point for these young men. So if they ever get through difficulties in life they can look back at this trip..." (interview with Kemal Brkic: Brain 2011). The project seeks to bringing together youths from countries with a 'camel culture' (such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Sudan), and

⁹⁶ Historical narratives of mobility are also utilised in the film *Lucky Miles* (2007) by Michael Rowland where a group of asylum seekers, abandoned on the shores of Western Australia by people smugglers, must make their way across the outback in order to find help.

create a connection with Australia's own camel culture.⁹⁷ The evocation of this history also has the potential to bring to light the continuance of anti-Afghan prejudice from White Australia (1890-1940) into anti-asylum seeker rhetoric, and consequently to counter this stereotype.

Non-refugee authored texts, such as the film *Unfinished Sky* (2007) by Peter Duncan, the novel *Nights in the Asylum* (2007) by Carol Lefevre, Karen Hodgkins film *Amanda and Ali* (2003) and Tom Zubrycki's film *Molly and Mobarak* (2003), explore the thematic of hope by trying to reconcile refugee trauma through romantic love. These texts signal an emerging theme of romantic union between refugees escaping detention and the Australians who give them asylum in their homes. There is an attempt within these texts to heal the rift between Australian society and refugees in mandatory detention by promoting a spirit of love and healing, in what Sandra Tascón (2009) refers to as a "discourse of national redemption" (Tascón 2009, p.58).⁹⁸ Within this redemptive discourse romantic love "embodies a personal attempt to correct what is happening politically" (Tascón 2009 p.56), offering "love's redemptive and healing strength" (Tascón 2009, p.55) alongside "a personal gesture of love and the gift of hope" (Tascón 2009, p.56).

These texts and interventions represent an important contribution that speaks back to a predominant atmosphere of fear and prejudice. They signal an important contribution towards building a discourse of hope and humanity similar to the counter-discursive texts portraying the Afghan cameleers in White Australia (1890-1940), by

⁹⁷ Information regarding the expedition can be found on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5hcGdSGvI> and on Russell Osborne's website:

<http://www.russellosborne.com/apps/blog/entries/show/9959552-russell-osborne-camel-project-2012>

⁹⁸ Tascón (2009) notes that throughout Australian cinematic history, stories of interracial and intercultural romance have acted as a reflection of the predominant views of mainstream society.

representing “the possibilities inherent in loving encounters across difference.” (Tascón 2009, p.55) The importance of recognising and analysing the traditional construction of Arab and Muslim ‘deviance and absence’ (Dunn 2004) is highlighted by current fears regarding these arrivals. By drawing parallels between historical and contemporary discourses it is possible to illuminate the current ‘moral panic’ of Islamophobia and anti-asylum seeker rhetoric and understand the mechanics of fear and prejudice from which it is constructed. This provides an opportunity to escape the historical pattern of the failure of the ‘Australian Good’, repeatedly echoing within the outback ‘void’, and to explore an alternative mode of relating to difference through the mechanics of love, compassion, care and humanity.