

# Bonegilla: A Case Study

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Research in the Faculty of Arts, Department of English, Macquarie University.

The work presented in this thesis is to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been admitted either in part or in whole for a degree at this or any other university.

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## Abstract

Bonegilla was Australia's first, largest and longest-lived post World War Two migrant reception and training centre, chosen because of its remote rural location. Bonegilla was designed to delimit interactions between Non-English speaking immigrants and the Australian population. The Bonegilla camp's purpose was to provide a tractable, mobile labour force, and to assimilate a large population of immigrant aliens and naturalise them, to use the vernacular of the post-war period. English was asserted as a *lingua franca*. Central to Australian concepts of assimilation are isolation, segregation and containment. This thesis investigates the loss of émigré voice, agency and subjectivity evident in literature, subsequent to the political processes of the assimilation era. This thesis researches Bonegilla using the methodology of site-specific reading, to engage with the tropes and narratives emergent at the heritage-listed site. Two canonical texts whose authors have a direct relationship to Bonegilla are examined. Close readings of Les Murray's poem 'Immigrant Voyage', and Christos Tsiolkas's short story 'Saturn Return' are undertaken. The scenes of reading implicit in each text and how each text is in dialogue with texts from Bonegilla specific to immigrant and Anglo-Saxon relations, are examined. This thesis proposes that contemporary transnational literary studies neglect the assimilation era, which remains a marginalised discourse, over-written by tropes of celebratory multiculturalism. This thesis demonstrates that assimilation policies created a lacuna evident within the texts examined, and in the contested discourses present at the Bonegilla site.





## Chapter One: Introduction

Get rid of him. If he's allowed in there will be millions of them. They don't speak the language. They don't mix. (Brian Castro *Birds of Passage* 37)

This thesis uses the site of Australia's first, largest and most long-lived migrant reception and training camp as a portal to examine the ideological shaping, defining and framing of migrant literatures within the Australian cultural imaginary, during the era of assimilation (Dellios 'Exchanging Memories' 39). The aim of the case study is to research select literatures of post World War Two non Anglo-Saxon immigrants to Australia in three ways: first how texts and tropes are represented at the geographical site of present-day Bonegilla and second, how texts related to Bonegilla migrate beyond its borders into the Australian cultural imaginary, and third, how they represent assimilation-era camp origins. The study of Bonegilla is therefore a study of the interrelationship of place, time and literature. The assimilation era is taken as a focal point as it encompasses the first arrivals of Displaced Persons, henceforth named D.P.s, at Bonegilla in 1947 to 1961 when significant Italian riots at Bonegilla forced an amelioration of conditions on site. Nineteen sixty-one is also the year when the author's family left remote migrant internment at Bonegilla. It alone of all migrant camps survives as a public space bearing witness to the initial Australian treatment of émigrés in the era of assimilation.

One of the reasons for embarking on the present thesis has been the author's own connection with Bonegilla and personal family anecdotes. Bonegilla was spoken of as a remote otherworld. The author until her early adulthood believed it to be so far away as to be situated overseas. Family memoirs of Bonegilla were unreservedly dystopian, and focussed largely on isolation, illness, poor food and aesthetic ugliness. This creates a textual frame from which to move outward conceptually, to not only

examine backstories of personal migration, but also the Australian nation's story-world of mass migration, recorded at and through Bonegilla. The author's mother is an Ingrian Finn, someone living in 1941 within a minority language community on the outskirts of Leningrad, and because of the Second World War, lost home, family, languages, and eventually country. Her father, working for the Soviet army, died, it is thought, in the Siege of Leningrad, between 1941-1944, killed not by starvation, but at the hands of the Red Army. Snyder in a 2010 history records the mass violence visited on this area of Europe, which he calls the 'Bloodlands'. From an extended period between 1933 to 1945 fourteen million people were killed in the Bloodlands, external to the Final Solution enacted by Hitler (Snyder 225-52). Snyder names the victims, none of whom were soldiers, as "chiefly Jews, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, Russians, and Balts, the people native to these lands' (vii-viii). My mother was twice displaced by the time she and my father, and myself, arrived at Bonegilla in February, 1959, as result of living centrally, within the Bloodlands. It is from the Bloodlands that the majority of Displaced Persons, or D.P.s, who arrived at Bonegilla post war, were drawn. While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine in detail personal memoirs, it is significant to note that they are the imprimatur for all literature examined within this thesis, and for the existence of the site of Bonegilla. Many micro-memoirs record trauma in pithy recollections decades later on the Bonegilla 'Quiet Room' walls: 'My great grandmother came here with her 2 siblings 1 sibling was left behind and her mother was hit by a bomb' (*sic* Derkenne, Lila Hanvai). Bonegilla is at the confluence of migrant journeying and remembering, and their collision with Australian national mythologies.

As Ozolin explains, an understanding of the concept of assimilation is crucial to an understanding post World War Two Australian government policy (10).

Assimilation as publically enacted was a 'hard' line which implied the discarding on arrival of émigrés' languages, values, customs and affiliations, and replacing such affiliations and cultural markers with those derived from the then aggressively British-defined host culture (11). In 1958, the Labor Party leader H.J. Evatt stated 'Australia is basically and fundamentally a British community and must remain so' (Ozolins 42). This clearly implied a two-way political discourse, of which then Immigration Minister Calwell was well aware. In his statements Calwell paid attention to the negative attitudes the Australian community held toward émigrés, and the necessity to 'condition' the public in an extensive ideological exercise (Ozolins 11-12). Marjorie Barnard, in her 1963 *A History of Australia*, still wrote about the arrival of migrants, that in a 'generation or two...they are likely to sink into the population with barely a trace of foreign origin, even their names weathered to more easily pronounced variants' (Ozolins 13). With the so-called White Australia policy<sup>1</sup> still being contemporarily debated, Bonegilla falls into an intensely contentious political and social discourse at the time of its establishment.

Central to this thesis is a site specific examination of Bonegilla itself, drawing on recent interpretative work by Alworth, who challenges the relegation of site in narratology as a passive container, occupying a secondary role (22). Site reading is not only a 'determinant of sociality' but it also creates a 'dynamic network of *actants*' which revivify textual readings (*sic* 2). Alworth describes site reading as a combination of 'environmental criticism and textual materialism' which enriches the encounter between sociology and literary critique (2). Drawing on the sociological work of Latour and referencing Jameson, Alworth outlines the 'rich potential' such

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<sup>1</sup> The Bulletin kept as its masthead 'Australia for the white man' until 1961, (G. Jones, 'White Australia, National Identity and Population Change' 113).

transdisciplinary critiques allow by utilising gaps, elisions and repressions contained within a literary text (3). Alworth describes site reading as a combination of ‘environmental criticism and textual materialism’ which enriches the encounter between sociology and literary critique (2). Australian precedents for such an integrated study of place and text is evident in the related methodologies employed by Muecke. Muecke asks ‘Is *everything*, then, a text?’ (sic, *Textual Places* 4). Answering this question Muecke states:

Even the country (‘landscape’) can be read as a text, but only if it is treated with that intensity which assumes meaning can be derived from it (Muecke *Textual Spaces* 4).

Muecke describes such an approach as ficto-critical, and its application to Indigenous place is evident in his study of Mt. Dromedary (‘Gulaga Story’ 83-91). Muecke’s study of the Indigenous Yuin people on the south coast of New South Wales, and their being overwritten by colonisation at the site of Mt. Dromedary, notes the ‘unresolved contradictions’ and ‘strange contingencies’ brought forth by his ficto-critical engagement with the mountain (‘Gulaga Story’ 4). Muecke’s practice is thus site-dependent and discursive, engaging with place, history and Indigeneity. As Stadler and Mitchell also note:

... literary studies and literary geography enable a more complex discussion of relationships between language, representation, space and place (‘Geocriticism, interdisciplinarity, and (re)mediated geographies’ 57).

Further, Azaryahu and Foote, commenting on the interplay between memory and place, engage with the potential complexity of spatial narratives, and discuss the ‘configuration...[of] buildings, markers, memorials, and inscriptions’ which create a ‘spatial story-line’ (‘Historical space as narrative medium’ 180). Doloughan also engages with the intersection of place and narrative by examining the ‘places in which characters are located and the spaces that they traverse’ (2). Such critically

sympathetic epistemologies of place align with Alworth's development of site-reading as a literary critique. Site-reading as an analytical methodology allows an investigation of how the 'palpable world' is 'imbricated with the question of social form' at Bonegilla (Alworth 10). The Bonegilla site visits by the author in July 2013 and February 2016 were active investigative processes at an unstable scene of reading, where:

... persons, things, texts, ideas, images, and other entities (all of which are considered actors or actants) form contingent and volatile networks of association (Latour, quoted in Alworth 3).

Bonegilla, the 2016 site, combines a geographical locale deliberately chosen by post World War Two government policy for its isolation, but which through complex processes since 1947 has become a public memorial. Bonegilla exists in a fluid and liminal space, a teleological confluence of geo-political and literary discourse. This thesis engages with Bonegilla as an ongoing problematized point of rupture in the Australian national narrative about immigration. The thesis proposes migration narratives position the assimilation era as an unvoiced lacuna in literary criticism, and as an imaginatively placed void within post-multicultural literatures. The terms 'lacuna' and 'void' have their coupled use and derivation in astronomy, where they are used to describe the vast emptiness of starless regions (Wolf 838). This will be seen in Chapter Four to have an uncanny significance to the short story by Christos Tsiolkas which intertwines a chaotic universe with a personal history of migration. In contemporary literary discourse lacunae and void refer to the signification and materiality of language. Messina and Bruns discuss Blanchot's 'passion for the void' in the simultaneous desire to write, and the impossibility of doing so (205, 79-95). In a reference apt to this thesis, Messina discusses the lack of wholeness and the 'absence of the book' in Blanchot's grappling with mortality in his fiction (206). Appropriating

this signification, Bonegilla is the site about which there is a lack of wholeness and a holistic inability to grapple with its meaning.

Bonegilla is considered as a 'founding place of multicultural identity' while it simultaneously and paradoxically memorialises the practises of assimilation, the prevailing political policy extant at the peak of its operation (Persian 'A failed narrative' 64). Bonegilla was placed on the National heritage list in 2007, and is now titled in museum literature 'Block 19, A Migrant Experience' (Derkenne). Pugliese notes that being made a heritage site is a process of 'making visible' ('Migrant Heritage' 6). This thesis proposes that being made visible in the cultural imagination in 2007 suggests the corollary, invisibility and elision in the past. Much critique of Bonegilla has foregrounded its social and historical failings. In recent public discourse Bonegilla is represented unequivocally as a 'failed narrative' (Persian 64). Sluga titled her influential 1988 monograph 'Bonegilla, A Place of No Hope'. Dellios situates Bonegilla as a contested 'monument to multicultural Australia' ('Exchanging Memories' 37). Ashton has questioned the apparent policy success of multiculturalism and regards Bonegilla as a site of 'retrospective commemoration' (Dellios 'Exchanging Memories' 37). Plunkett further discusses the 'unreflective and uncritical...discourse of successful multiculturalism' within Australia (42). Bonegilla has however been positioned as 'Australia's Ellis Island' and held to be a celebratory model of immigration policy and multiculturalism (Dellios 'Exchanging Memories' 39). Spivak, in 'Can the subaltern speak' queries the possibility of a speaking position for alterity from within incompatible political spheres (Elliott Attridge *Theory After Theory* 8). The latter question, of the critical space available for immigration literature emerging from within experiences of assimilation, is a focus of this thesis.

Bonegilla sits within a controversial historical time frame, that of the so-called

White Australia policy, which fed into the site's placement and control mechanisms (Calwell 103, Dellios, 'Exchanging Memories' 38, van Krieken 7). Bonegilla represents a unique historical point when large scale immigration became a nation building imperative, as the Chifley Labour Government acknowledged the necessity to build a malleable post-World War Two work force (van Krieken 7). Ien Ang states, the post-war immigration policy was 'primarily negatively motivated, inspired by fear and an urgent sense of necessity' ('From White Australia to Fortress Australia' 61). As Australia's largest migrant reception and training centre, it is estimated that 320,000 migrants were received at Bonegilla, from 50 different national groups (Pennay *Sharing Bonegilla Stories* 81). The sheer size of this post war migration, focussed in scale at Bonegilla, was a two-way process of confrontation, enacted between émigrés and the local population.

The Chifley Labor government, creating a new portfolio, appointed Arthur Calwell as the first Australian immigration minister in 1945. The first cohort of émigrés chosen for Australian entry were hand-selected by Calwell in 1947, described in his memoirs as a 'choice sample' (Calwell 103). These displaced persons, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian, were 'quality' migrants who were young, 'handsome' and 'beautiful' (Calwell 103). The language of both commodification and eugenics colours the Post World War Two immigration debate. Choice of 'types' of migrants was a deliberate strategy to sell migrants as a healthful and wholesome commodity to a more than sceptical Australian public (Dellios 'Exchanging Memories' 38). Calwell believed that it was 'not hard to sell immigration to the Australian people' once the photographs of early émigrés were released to the press (103). However,

I failed to realise the number of bitter people in our community who were suffering from xenophobia, the hatred or distrust of the foreigner. (Calwell 103)

Remote migrant camps such as Bonegilla were designed to assimilate a large population of immigrant aliens and naturalise them within a hegemonic cultural nationalism. English was asserted as the *lingua franca*. Fusion of immigrant cultures within the mainstream was expected, and unique émigré cultural differences were to submerge. Ang notes Australia's formation of a 'white' culture drew on 'self-protective parochialism ... provincialism and anti-cosmopolitanism' (58). A Gallup poll in 1947, the year D.P. immigration to Bonegilla began, revealed 65% of Australians preferred to have British rather than Australian nationality (Moore *Speaking Our Language* 132). As late as 1969, the then Liberal minister for immigration, Billy Snedden, stated, 'we should have a monoculture, with everyone living in the same way' (Rickard *Australia: a cultural history* 222). Successful assimilation was predicated on a diminution of differences to a point of invisibility:

An externally assimilated immigrant in Australia is an immigrant who outwardly resembles Australians and differs little from them. (Johnston 5)

The dominant cultural imagining therefore when Bonegilla existed as a migrant camp was of Australia as a white Anglo-Saxon nation (Elder 170). Carter names the 'core concepts' of Australian society organised around 'whiteness and Britishness' (Pavrides 5). Price, writing in 1968, predicates the national self image as 'British-Australian' (22). Price further states that the 'prevailing sentiment was anti-immigrant and particularly hostile to dagoes' (*sic* 22). The expectation of immigrants was to assimilate into the British/Australian mainstream, and lose cultural markers such as language, customs and political affiliations. As an Australian academic demographer published internationally in peer-reviewed journals during the assimilation era, Price baldly states that there was no expectation of an equal, two-way dialogue between



introduced cultures and ‘British/Australians’: ‘There is no ... general drift to cultural pluralism’ (22).

Further, the flow of literary discourse surrounding migrant, NESB<sup>2</sup>, diasporic, postcolonial, or ethnic writing, as it has been variously defined, has been irregular and multivalenced (Ommundsen ‘Multicultural writing in Australia’ 74-75). At the time of Bonegilla’s establishment as a migrant reception and training centre in 1947, Australian literature and its critical interrogation was ‘committed to Australian nationalism’ (McKernan *A Question of Commitment* 5). *Southerly*, in the mid Twentieth Century, ‘considered the possibility of an Australian tradition with a “distinctive” national flavour, dominated by the “bush” rather than cosmopolitan themes’, with a need to achieve ‘manhood and nationhood’ (McKernan *A Question of Commitment* 6, 7). In addition, Ommundsen conjectures that because of belated critical attention given to Indigenous writers, Australian national culture could not ‘move on to properly acknowledge its wider multicultural heritage’ (79). Further the ‘superficial and celebratory notions’ of multiculturalism, as Ommundsen describes them, overwrote ‘serious literary engagement with cultural differences’ (79). Since 1996 and the Howard government, Ommundsen states, political discourse has centred on a return to the ‘prominence of “old” Australia: the centrality of British-derived heritage’ (74). Bonegilla, as a site and as a source of literature, therefore sits in a liminal space between competing Australian senses of nationhood, between the Anglo-Saxon, the advent of multiculturalism, and the eventual discrediting of multiculturalism. Concepts of migrant literature remain complex and paradoxical, and most significantly, poorly enumerated and defined. Willis states clearly that the ‘idea’ of Australia as a place is

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<sup>2</sup> NESB equivalent to non English speaking background.

determined by ‘assemblages of people, economic activity and cultural forms from elsewhere’, a statement which itself elides Indigeneity (31). If national identity is, as Willis believes, ‘cobbled together’ the very mechanism to include migrant literatures in that hybrid identity has yet to be definitively examined (31, Ommundsen 79). For the purposes of this thesis specific texts in English, which reference Bonegilla and the émigré experience form the core of the study.

Gunew in ‘Scenes of Reading’ notes little attention has been paid to Australia’s multilingualism (1). Huang and Ommundsen posit literature in languages other than English as the ‘last literary margin’ (‘Towards a Multilingual National Literature’ 1). Bonegilla texts and sites of reading in this thesis are shown to be multidimensional, existing in multiple locations, in multiple languages, and indicative of diverse reading positions. Leah Price discusses notions of production and circulation of English literature in the lee of post-colonialism, as the ‘geography of the book’, reinforcing notions of ‘multiple geographies’ within which texts circulate (Walkowitz 919). Integral to comparative literary studies is the defining of texts within such spatially and temporally designated discourses, as well as recognising forces that delimit circulation of literatures of migration. Totosy de Zepetnek outlines these ‘forces of exclusion’ as ‘local, racial, national’ and gendered (261). The delimiting aspects of literary mobility and agency are significant in situating the literatures of Bonegilla.

If texts of migration circulate in complex systems of production and reception, how is migrancy defined? The political policies of assimilation and distrustful community attitudes in Australia posit a simple hierarchical binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’. However, binaries within the migrancy discourse are suspect, or fail all together. There is no unity of émigré definition. Indigeneity is elided as a discourse, and separated from ‘Anglo-Ethnic relations as two separate spheres’ (Pavrides 7). ‘Whiteness’ is a

problematic discourse as some migrants were white enough (northern European D.P.s), while other Europeans from Mediterranean states were ‘dagoes’ and vilified (*sic* Price 22). Van Krieken notes the tension inherent in Australian narratives of assimilation, and the overstatement of the ‘cohesiveness of any given society’ within the Australian context (500). Represented at Bonegilla are many community languages, complex multilingualism, diverse levels of education, and diverse cultures (Pennay *Sharing Bonegilla Stories* 81). Pavlides outlines the problematic discourse of Australians trying to assess the ‘foreigner’:

‘They’ stand outside the group identity, the glue that binds the ‘us’ together. Who is Subject and who is Other? ... what do you do with the ‘foreigner’? Should you subjugate the Other or be subjugated by him/her...? Who, after all, is empowered to define the Subject and the Other? In whose interests are such identities, who profits from these definitions and who suffers? (Pavlides 4)

This thesis shows that complex multiple identities, discourses and multiple sites of reading and reading positions have been little investigated, if at all, in relation to Bonegilla.

Prior framing of a Bonegilla discourse has primarily been by historians and sociologists. This thesis shows that the social and historical discourse of assimilation is in critical dialogue with literary texts both on-site and off-site. As Darian-Smith and Hamilton explain, the existing dichotomies between historical practices and memoir, on which migrant literatures so heavily rely, are ‘not explicated sufficiently’ (12). Central to this thesis and to Australian Post-World War Two concepts of assimilation are segregation, isolation and consequent loss of émigré voice, agency and subjectivity. Assimilation policies publicly and vociferously denied a speaking or a writing voice to immigrants. In the mid twentieth century there was no ‘speaking position’ for a migrant writer, and hence no way in which a migrant writer could

‘intervene’ in the cultural economy (Carter 76). The Bonegilla case study examines how the historical and social restraints enacted on émigrés is evident in immigrant literatures. ‘Migrant writing’ did not exist during the assimilation era, was critically ignored and little anthologised (Carter 76). Canonical texts such as Raimond Gaita’s 1998 novel *Romulus, My Father*, Les Murray’s 1977 poem ‘Immigrant Voyage’ and Christos Tsiolkas’ 1996 short story ‘Saturn Return’ all focus on assimilation era narratives, but all are published after the advent of multiculturalism.

Chapter Two is a site-specific examination of present day Bonegilla, ‘Block 19, A Migrant Experience’. Bonegilla still remains a heterotopic panopticon, a site in Foucauldian terms where asymmetrical power relations were and are enacted to marginalise migrant voices. A specific focus will be on narrative tropes on site, and how they construct narratives which conflict with the micro-memoirs and testimonies also present on site.

Following a close site-reading of Bonegilla in Chapter Two is an interrogation of those transnational authors whose canonical texts have a close interrelationship with Bonegilla. Close readings of Les Murray’s 1977 poem ‘Immigrant Voyage’, and Christos Tsiolkas’s short story ‘Saturn Return’, from the 2014 collection *Merciless Gods*, are undertaken. The scenes of reading implicit in each text and how each text is in dialogue with texts from Bonegilla, are examined.

Chapter Three examines Les Murray’s poem ‘Immigrant Voyage’, written in 1977. Its provenance and emergence during the political aegis of multiculturalism is a focus. Immigration literature has a political position with which Les Murray readily engages. The poem ‘Immigrant Voyage’ is drawn from a collection called *Ethnic Radio* which is a discursive poetic exploration of aspects of Australian Anglo-Celtic

heritage as well as those aspects of migrancy with which Les Murray is intimately connected. The relationship of Murray's poem and unattributed Dutch poetry at Bonegilla is a lens through which to examine not only sites of reading but also the sites of production of migrant literatures.

Chapter Four is a close reading of Christos Tsiolkas's short story 'Saturn Return', from the 2014 collection *Merciless Gods*, which also interrogates assimilation era migrant experiences at Bonegilla within the narrative. Tsiolkas engages with racism as endemic within Australian culture, an inherited violence which he states to be 'difficult and complex' (Taylor-Johnson 2). Anger, melancholy and exile will be examined as core aspects of Tsiolkas's immigrant narratives (Taylor-Johnson 3). Genre is problematized and multiple in Tsiolkas's writing. Tsiolkas also shares a melancholy reflection with journeying and destruction, parallel with Sebald's 2011 text *The Rings of Saturn* (Syson 26). Tsiolkas's palpable anger at racism and alienation within Australian society carries the themes within his texts into a transnational literature, in multiple languages and read across multiple sites.

The final chapter shows contemporary Australian transnational literary studies' neglect of the assimilation era, which remains a marginalised discourse, subsumed by celebratory multiculturalism. Key aspects of migration literature will reveal processes of 'writing back', a re-engagement with an overlooked period of socio-political and literary discourse (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 198). Texts emergent from Bonegilla re-present and re-establish diasporic traumas of exile and exclusion.



## Chapter Two: Bonegilla, a site-specific reading.

Silence. No echo. No resonance. Transparent swirls: this is our speech.  
Us, immigrants...people with a past- we silence our past as we have learnt this  
cruel rule: immigrants have no past.

(Catherine Rey, 'To Make a Prairie it Takes a Clover and One Bee' 240)

Bonegilla is a complex site. It exists as a geographical, isolated place with specific map coordinates: 36° 9'0" South, 147° 0'0" East. As a source of literature it is as defined topographically as an island. Bonegilla's placement 'out of sight and out of mind' was politically deliberate (Pennay *Remembering Bonegilla* 57). As Sluga states, new migrant arrivals were 'dispersed' between 1947 and 1961 to areas where they were least likely to 'confront' the established population (Darian-Smith, Hamilton 'Bonegilla and Migrant Dreaming' 195). Bonegilla is a place which has a specific historical genesis, a geographic site created from particular ideological and pragmatic political motivations. Further, Bonegilla was to intern only non-Anglo-Saxon émigrés. United Kingdom émigrés in contrast were allowed to settle in city-based enclaves, and were eligible for immediate Housing Commission assistance (Pennay *Remembering Bonegilla* 50). Bonegilla's complexity is evident in the way diverse commentators have named the site: a heritage site<sup>3</sup>, a migrant cage<sup>4</sup>, a living national treasure site<sup>5</sup>, a museum<sup>6</sup>, a memorial<sup>7</sup>, an 'ancient memory palace'<sup>8</sup>, a 'government-sanctioned

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<sup>3</sup> Pennay, *Remembering Bonegilla* 44.

<sup>4</sup> 'ethnic caging', Wills, 'Between the hostel and the detention center' 271.

<sup>5</sup> see the National film and archive project, 2009. [fsa.gov.au/collection/film-australia-collection/program-sales/search-programs/program/?sn=9330](http://fsa.gov.au/collection/film-australia-collection/program-sales/search-programs/program/?sn=9330), Penny Robs and H. Piper, producers, 'Bonegilla Migrant Camp'.

<sup>6</sup> Bonegilla becomes a museum project, without funding, in 1994 (Sluga in Darian-Smith, Hamilton, 'Dreaming' 207)

memory place'<sup>9</sup>, a 'migrant experience'<sup>10</sup>, a festival site<sup>11</sup>, an uncommon war memorial<sup>12</sup>, a 'living plaque' and a 'failed narrative'<sup>13</sup>. The *Albury–Wodonga Border Mail* of November ninth, 2005, has an article naming Bonegilla as a 'tourist mecca' (Jones n.pag.). A further newspaper article quotes the Mayor of Albury Wodonga calling Bonegilla, Block 19, as 'Wodonga's Big Pineapple', and a 'national and international drawcard' (Worrall 34).

As a site Bonegilla is also four-times settled, an archaeology of habitation. The Dhudhuroa, Minubuddong, Wiradjuri and associated clans settled at Bonegilla, 'where the waters meet' of the Mitta Mitta, Murray and Kiewa rivers (Skowronska *To Bonegilla From Somewhere* 9). The area also has a colonial agricultural settler base, and a nineteenth century German presence (Spennemann, Sutherland 75). The third iteration of settlement and occupation at the Bonegilla site is that of the army. POWs were also stationed at Bonegilla during the war, but the last to arrive were the 'Beautiful Balts' or DPs, the displaced persons accepted by the Chifley Labor Government in December 1947 (Sestokas 71). As the Victorian Heritage Database report states in its 'Statement of Significance', Bonegilla has a unique status, as 'the first, the last and the largest migrant reception centre in a system of camps in all States' (2). Dellios affirms that Bonegilla 'has emerged as a key part of [the] national immigration story' ('Exchanging Memories' 34).

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<sup>7</sup> Discussion with site curator 2013, preferred title stated as memorial, because of the frequent visits from internees and descendants (Derkenne).

<sup>8</sup> Sluga, in Darian-Smith, Hamilton, 'Dreaming', 201.

<sup>9</sup> Pennay *Remembering Bonegilla* 43

<sup>10</sup> On official signage, web site, posters, stickers and diverse tourist paraphernalia (Derkenne).

<sup>11</sup> 'Back to Bonegilla' December 1987, Sluga in Darian-Smith, Hamilton, 'Dreaming', 207

<sup>12</sup> Pennay *Remembering Bonegilla* 58

<sup>13</sup> Persian 'Bonegilla, A failed narrative', 69, 64



The 2003 feasibility plan by Cox Sanderson Ness names the ‘primacy of the migrant story’ as one of the leading principles underpinning the proposed development of the Bonegilla site (7). The feasibility plans note both the importance of a revived Bonegilla to ‘Australia’s recent collective memory’, and the desire to create a celebratory and commemorative site (9). As a memorial site Bonegilla purports to recreate an authentic witness experience about non-Anglo-Saxon immigration to Australia after World War Two (Cox Sanderson Ness 9). On-site pamphlets and story boards use the tag line ‘If you were here, you know. If you weren’t, you can imagine’ (Derkenne). The emphasis is on the visitor’s imaginative and collaborative engagement with the physical site of Bonegilla. Cox Sanderson Ness are instrumental in framing Bonegilla as ‘the beginning place’ of many Australian post war migrants, and go on to develop and refine the idea of a new entry portal on site, called the ‘Beginning Place’, capitalised and given primacy as a concept within the development proposals (19). It is at the present day site of Bonegilla, at Block 19, that an effort has been made to create an imagined ‘migrant experience’ from the remnants of the superseded army camp on the shores of Lake Hume, 13 kilometres from the regional centre of Albury Wodonga.

To use the site of Bonegilla as a portal to critically examine the ideological shaping, defining and framing of migrant literatures within the Australian cultural mythopoesis is to acknowledge that ‘representation is...both performance and semblance’ (Iser 226). It will be demonstrated in this chapter that present-day Bonegilla is a hybrid space. Bonegilla exhibits not only contested multiple narratives of migrant displacement after the Second World War, but also narratives focalised from the Anglo-Saxon gaze. The scope of the study limits the critical investigation to predominantly English language literatures, while acknowledging the significance of

bilingualism, Dutch and Greek, on the Bonegilla site. Texts flow to, through and from Bonegilla: the site is a living text which contains and displays poetry, micro-memoirs, associated artefacts and memorabilia which accrue greater significance, resonance and meaning because of their coalescence at Bonegilla. Intersecting and transdisciplinary methodologies used to examine the Bonegilla site will draw from contemporary literary theories examining spatial narratives, and epistemologies of reading. Because the case study also examines Bonegilla as a site of asymmetrical power relationships, the camp as a Foucauldian heterotopic panopticon is instrumental. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to examine the genesis of the site in detail, or to enumerate its individual ethnic literary histories. It is also beyond the scope of this study to examine the burgeoning digital repositories which presently contain multiple, publically uploaded immigration narratives (see Dellios, 'Exchanging Memories' 50-52).

Prime foci of the case study are how narratives and tropes of migration are constructed on the Bonegilla site, and from which discourses they are drawn. From whose agency are narratives on site marshalled? Who creates texts on site? How collaborative and how collective are the texts on site? Do narratives on site influence or develop into literatures emergent from within the site's boundaries? Bonegilla, according to Cox Sanderson Ness, had a stated purpose, to celebrate and give primacy to migrant narratives (7). The consultancy gives significant interpretative status to the 'Beginning Place' which is central to the design team's focus. Do the resultant narratives at Bonegilla give credence to the narrative of the beginning place, or problematize it in terms of Bonegilla's geo-historical temporality? Whose 'Beginning Place' is it? Is it national, local or individual? The geo-locating of critical investigation is a contemporary issue regarding the study of transnational literatures in Australia:

Is it to be undertaken at the level of the local, the regional, the national or the global, and what does rescaling across these different levels reveal or conceal?

(Olubas, Rooney 4).

Contemporary critical investigation is moving to the larger cohort of linkages that Australian migrant writing creates, through the lenses of multilingualism, scenes of reading and global connectivity (see Huang and Ommundsen, Gunew, Polack, Spittel, JASAL 15:3). The Bonegilla case study demonstrates that the outward movement in critical engagement, valid though it is, neglects and overlooks the era of assimilation, and the local narratives that emerge from Bonegilla.

Strategies used to examine the Bonegilla site include two site visits, undertaken in July 2013 and February 2016. Extensive photographic and written records were taken on both occasions, and an archive of some 500 documents accrued. Memoirs, poetry and ephemera were documented on site. The Bonegilla site includes self-contained, static conventional museum displays and story-boards, archival black and white photographs, and reified objects, particularly suitcases. Also represented at Bonegilla are commissioned and donated sculptural pieces, film and sound recordings, installation art works, tourist items and commemorative plaques. As a performative site-in-landscape, composed of scattered buildings, and the demolished foundations of former buildings, within an area of several acres, there is no predetermined manner in which to approach the Block 19 precinct. Visitors are encouraged to interact with the memorial site, by leaving comments at either the 'Where Waters Meet' exhibition room, or at the small, contemplative 'Quiet Room'. A critical examination of the 'Beginning Place' will be the geo-cultural lens from which to critique the establishment of migrant narratives at present-day Bonegilla.

That the boundaries of Bonegilla are porous is self-evident, with the conjectured connection to over 1.5 million present day descendants (Cox Sanderson Ness 9). Stories, memoirs, poetry, plays, and dance performances continue to proliferate about Bonegilla (Pennay 'Wodonga's Bonegilla' 18-19, Sluga 'Bonegilla and Migrant Dreaming' 200-206). Significantly, most of these diverse texts develop after the demise of the policy of assimilation, and the introduction of multiculturalism, both largely accomplished during the brief span of the Whitlam Labor Government, 1972-1975 (Sluga, 'Bonegilla Dreaming' 200-201)<sup>14</sup>. However, most scholarly investigation has been through the discipline of history: Sluga, Pennay, Dellios and Persian approach Bonegilla from differing historical perspectives. Pennay has had a close, long-term relationship with both the Albury Wodonga area, and with the development of the Bonegilla site, being listed as a historian and community representative on the Project Steering Committee, assisting Cox Sanderson Ness (*Master Plan 1*). Dellios examines the development of Bonegilla as a heritage site, investigating the sanctioned story-world of Bonegilla from a museology perspective. Persian examines the relative success or otherwise, of the narrative of multiculturalism, and places the history of D.P.s within public policy. Persian also examines the hierarchical selection processes of émigrés in a provocatively titled paper, 'Chifley preferred them Blonde', noting correspondence by Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell in 1947: 'there was also a number of platinum blondes of both sexes', lauding the blonde Displaced Person's acceptability to the Australian press (80). Pugliese references the complexity of colonial and settler interactions at Bonegilla in the face of indigenous absence, suggesting that migrants can be seen as 'complicit agents in the

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<sup>14</sup> See also Dellios, 'Bonegilla Heritage Park: Contesting and Coordinating a Public History Site', *Public History Review* 19:2012 21-42. Dellios notes that the era of multiculturalism was also the era that trivialized multiculturalism by adopting the 'food and folklore' model, 27.

reproduction of contemporary colonialism' by erasing Indigenous people from the Bonegilla narrative (8). Palombo also notes recent manifestations of the camp in Australia as usurping Indigenous sovereignty, and being 'constitutive of white sovereignty' (614).

The text which first interrogated Bonegilla within a historical context, and simultaneously placed it within a dystopian discourse, is Glenda Sluga's *Bonegilla: A Place of No Hope* (1988). In a later article Sluga positions Bonegilla as a site of 'migrant dreaming':

Sketched out as a particular shared experience of geographical displacement, a 'migrant dreaming' encapsulates, contains, and engulfs distances of class, gender and authenticity, as well as of diverse individual pasts and divergent futures. ('Bonegilla and Migrant Dreaming' 195)

Sluga suggests that such a dreaming place relies on the survival of memories through 'obscurity, ambiguity, contradiction and irony' ('Migrant Dreaming' 201). These memories are further caught within the interstitial space between the dream and the lived experience (Sluga, 'Migrant Dreaming' 201). Examining remote Bonegilla as a site is to enter this liminal space, the in-between of the past and the present, and efforts to represent it. Most associated literary works emerging from Bonegilla have either not been critically examined, or have been examined under the rubric of generalised migrant literatures. Many of these works are in community languages or are self-published in very small editions not readily available to a wider reading public. Little or no work to the author's knowledge has been undertaken examining site literatures in situ, how they are 'framed' at present day Bonegilla and their meaning co-opted into dominant cultural discourse, or how texts on site accrue or lose meaning. The contemporary literary strategy used by Alworth, to investigate texts by examining the sites specific to them, has to the author's knowledge not been used at contemporary

Bonegilla. Sluga does discuss Bonegilla literatures extant in the ‘bathetic gap between the dream and the experience’ but does not delimit her comments to the relationship between the site actants and the resultant texts (‘Bonegilla and Migrant Dreaming’ 201). Sluga’s commentary notes the significance of Bonegilla images being constructed ‘on the fringes of the literary mainstream’ and is the only author to draw together literary interpretations of the Bonegilla experience (‘Migrant Dreaming’ 201-206). Sluga’s commentary recalls the trope employed by the current heritage site, in drawing together memory and imaginative collaboration:

In the context of a diverse range of literary settings, the migrant camp, like some ancient memory palace, houses the treasures and skeletons of that past. Its stories draw us in as if we were returning, even for those who were never there.

(‘Bonegilla and Migrant Dreaming’ 201).

Alworth discusses the current critical ‘methodological flux’ regarding reading, distant, surface or symptomatic, raised by Moretti, Best and Marcus, and Love *et al* as a ‘newly productive encounter between sociology and literary studies’ (*Site Reading* 2). Alworth cites such a transdisciplinary approach, allied with sociology, as opening up the complex relationship between assemblages of human and non-human actants: ‘sites...mediate sociality’ (18). Bonegilla as a discursive series of ‘texts’ requires a critical movement away from the specific and canonical, to the multiple and ephemeral. Bonegilla does, however, contain one canonical text, marketed as an object emanating from the Bonegilla experience, Raimond Gaita’s 1998 memoir *Romulus, My Father*. Also on site are texts which have been privately published and of little public literary currency, such as Stefan Klepiac’s *The Bonegilla Kid*, self-published,

from 2007<sup>15</sup>. Both books are marketed from the public kiosk within Block 19. They are presented as commodities alongside coffee mugs, tea towels and small jig-saw puzzles<sup>16</sup> which have the Block 19 logo, black and white photographs and marketing logos emblazoned on them. Dellios notes the ‘fetishization’ of Bonegilla through the marketing of ‘refrigerator magnets, other souvenirs, and in promotional brochures’, which began in 1993 (‘Exchanging memories’ 46). The marketing of such objects is a close fit to Huggan’s notion of postcolonial literatures being commodified and serving a ‘booming alterity industry’ (*Postcolonial Exotic* vii). Holistically, as Cox Sanderson and Ness envisaged, Bonegilla carries a ‘narrative’, but that discursive narrative belongs to the ‘periphery of the literary system’ (Moretti 58). The emergence of alternative units of critical analysis Frow states is a necessary precondition to a sociological understanding of literary analysis (Frow ‘On Midlevel Concepts’ 239). The smaller units considered by Frow as a precondition of a sociological critical analysis are analogous to Alworth’s discussion of ‘actants’ assembled within a narrative site, whereby:

persons, things, texts, ideas, images, and other entities (all of which are considered actors or actants) form contingent and volatile networks of association (*Site Reading* 3)

To examine Bonegilla as a site of claimed narrative and memorial stature is to also become a flaneur, to walk and interrogate the dispersed site. W.G. Sebald adapts the concept of the flaneur and uses a walking consciousness within the novel *The Rings of Saturn*, as Tsiolkas and his protagonists also do in ‘*Saturn Return*’, as they

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<sup>15</sup> No scholarly work has been undertaken on this text, to the author’s knowledge. Using Google Scholar as a metric analysis brings forward no entries.

<sup>16</sup> A Wentworth wooden puzzle purchased by the author February 2016 shows a scene of Bonegilla migrant children playing at Block 17, described by the manufacturer as a ‘unique Wentworth whimsy’ piece, made in the U.K., [www.jigsaws.co.uk](http://www.jigsaws.co.uk)

interrogate the Bonegilla site. Sebald's fictional anonymous homodiegetic narrator walks, observing and documenting sites of European historical significance, 'geo-cultural' terrains, and the 'topography of places and spaces' which within Sebald's novel preserve European melancholic memories (Horstkotte 29, Norman, 92, Pieldner 66-67). Crawshaw and Fowler note the implications of the flaneur, as a 'socially significant poetic trope...applied...both to patterns of movement in space and ways of seeing' (456). Bonegilla, as with many terrains Sebald examines, is also a problematic geo-cultural terrain of 'disquiet and... disorientation' (Norman 92).

Firstly, Bonegilla is still isolated and its road access poorly signposted. The non-descript entryway to 'Block 19: A Migrant Experience' no longer mimics that of the original large Foucauldian camp. There are neither armed guards or sentries, nor a large boom gate at present-day Bonegilla's periphery. All the loudspeakers which, according to 'Beginning Place' signage, ran announcements from seven in the morning until seven in the evening, are also gone. The original reveille was the call of a kookaburra (Derkenne, Persian, 'Failed Narrative' 76). Block 19 has been noted as in better condition than the largely demolished camp used for the original cohorts of immigrants: Dellios refers to the unrepresentative nature of the 'refurbished huts' at Bonegilla ('Exchanging Memories' 48). Peter Stolp writes about his arrival in May 1954, 'I don't remember our huts as being as luxurious as this' (Derkenne). Block 19 was used for administrative and schooling purposes during migrant camp days, not to routinely house émigrés (Pennay *The Army at Bonegilla* 19). Bonegilla signage noted states it was 'better appointed than the other blocks at the camp' and used and maintained by the army into the 1990s (Derkenne).

Memoirs on site persistently note aspects of the 'concentration camp' that Bonegilla originally called to mind: 'Soldiers were standing guard at the gate with



guns. We thought that we'd arrived in a former concentration camp' (Derkenne, Herman and Geesje Blom, arr. 1958). A 'Quiet Room' memoir notes: 'my parents did not enjoy Bonegilla as it was talked about as a concentration camp' (Derkenne). Arie Vermaas, arriving from Holland in 1952, writes in the 'Quiet Room', 'We thought we'd been sent to a concentration camp' (Derkenne). Arrival originally was by a train which disembarked émigrés in the dark, in a paddock:

We were ordered out from the train by Immigration Officers but people took a while to digest the idea to get off the train with all their belonging in the middle of nowhere.... some women were crying. (*sic.* Derkenne, E. and M. Ferfoglia, arr. 1955)

'Beginning Place' story boards note that Bonegilla 'carried frightening echoes of European internment camps with endless queuing, loudspeaker broadcasts and military presence' (Derkenne). Further, the 'Where Waters Meet' on-site exhibition, curated by joint cooperation between the Prince Bernhard Fund of the Netherlands, and the Victorian Multicultural Commission, records the following:

The sight of soldiers with guns standing at the arrival gate was a shock. ...For the Dutch, it was an unwelcome reminder of the German occupation from which they had just been freed. (Derkenne)

A Dutch migrant, anonymous, who arrived in 1956 noted the 'Commandant' who ran Bonegilla as a 'little Hitler' (Derkenne).

Any claims to an authentic migrant narrative therefore do not survive the visitor's arrival at Block 19, as features of physical containment and army presence are not retained, nor are original features such as communal cess pits (Pennay *Albury Wodonga's Bonegilla* 13). The features of control by bureaucratic agencies which marked Bonegilla are also no longer present. There were Block Supervisors, Camp Patrols, and an emphasis on queueing (Pennay *Albury Wodonga's Bonegilla* 7). The Foucauldian lens of the heterotopic panopticon is particularly apt in framing the

elaborate bureaucracy which managed the migrant camps. Sluga notes the distressing ‘sense of being coerced or manipulated’ at Bonegilla, along with the belief that émigrés were being ‘locked away’ (*Bonegilla, Place of No Hope* 127). Neumann notes that refugee settlers had to work and live as directed, otherwise risk deportation (121). Neumann also notes that Australian authorities were believed to be monitoring private correspondence by DPs, back to Europe (121). Finane notes ‘finger printing all aliens’ was on the Australian police agenda (459). While Bonegilla signage suggests an imaginative engagement with the Bonegilla site as a practice to enter into its past, and to affectively read it, that is clearly an impossibility when key aspects of the post war émigré experience are elided. An immediate reading of the entrance is of a lacuna, a void, an omission. This is consistent with fictional interpretations such as that by Christos Tsiolkas, in ‘Saturn Return’ which will be examined in Chapter Four, where Bonegilla is represented as a derelict void.

In place of the boom gates and other paraphernalia of surveillance, the visitor is instead met en-route to the ‘Beginning Place’, by rusting, mild-steel, silhouetted figures. Life size, they are stylised representations of a man and woman, sheltered by a stylised architrave. At their feet is the first representation of a suitcase at Bonegilla, albeit in steel. Suitcases are the most common object used as a trope repetitively throughout the site, and throughout migrant literatures (Elboubekri 262, 7, Basu and Coleman 316, 324). The suitcase suggests transience, mobility and impermanence, ‘travelling light’ (Elbouekri 262).

The relief sculptures standing at Bonegilla were created by Ken Raff and Stephen Anderson (Derkenne, also Pennay, *Albury Wodonga’s Bonegilla* 19). Pennay calls them ‘evocative groups’ but the figures create a sense of isolation, placed outside the defined precinct of Block 19 (*Albury Wodonga’s Bonegilla* 19). Using steel and

corrugated iron, with an architectural form redolent of settler cottages, the trope the figures use suggests a much earlier narrative, ironically that of the first agricultural colonists. Carey references the Bulletin cartoonist Livingstone Hopkins, or 'Hop', and the latter's take on the 'average Australian Christmas' celebrated in 'blazing heat' in 1900: 'Perhaps to a corrugated iron church to hear a corrugated iron parson preach a corrugated iron sermon on a Material hell' ('Bushmen and Bush Parsons' 9). Australian novelist Murray Bail in his satirical 1980 novel *Homesickness*, has a 'Corrugated Iron Museum': 'Built appropriately from corrugated iron the ...museum housed a superb collection of corrugated iron: history of, uses, abuses' (145-146). Stadler, Mitchell and Carleton call corrugated iron the 'iconic Outback building material' (*Imagined Landscapes* 64). Les Murray, in his 2015 collection *On Bunyah*, also includes an abstract image of corrugated iron (105). The Bonegilla figurative sculpture, intended to be representative of migrant émigrés, has a curious double valency, suggestive of those critiques such as Pugliese's, which refer to the overwriting of other, older narratives written within the landscape at Bonegilla (7-8). The rusting Bonegilla figures suggest older settler narratives, decay and isolation, and endless transition. It is difficult to read these sculptural pieces as celebratory, as Cox Sanderson Ness intended the site to be.

The 'Beginning Place' is the newest and most prominent feature of present-day Bonegilla. Whose 'Beginning Place' does it purport to be? The name Bonegilla is noted in a plaque as being of Indigenous origin and a reference to the meeting of the rivers at Bonegilla, once an area of Indigenous settlement (Derkenne). Bonegilla as a site therefore ironically, and negatively, conforms to Pugliese's contention that Aboriginality should not be reduced to some 'toponomic sherd of history ossified in a wall plaque' (16). Pugliese in discussing national heritage's 'blind spot' reconstitutes

Bonegilla as a 'symbolic terra nullius', because it elides and overwrites the Indigenous presence. Pugliese charges that prior Aboriginal social, economic and political histories are reduced to a level of 'invisibility' at Bonegilla (7). Arias states that in the rewriting of Australian history 'from a settler colony to a migrant nation', 'Terra nullius' becomes instead 'terra nostra', a land 'emptied of historical trauma' in the formation of an Australian celebratory model of multiculturalism ('Resettlement' 24).

Apart from overwriting other cultural traces at the site, Bonegilla is at best only an ambivalent 'Beginning Place' for D.P.s and later migrant arrivals. Bonegilla was a transit place, a stopping point along a varied series of journeys which marked the often complex life stories of all émigrés. Most immigrant journeys traversed Australia by ship from Fremantle, thence to Melbourne, which was an embarkation point for the special trains which arrived at Bonegilla some eight hours later (Sluga *Bonegilla, A Place of No Hope* 14). The Australian legs were preceded by European journeys of often great complexity and travail, as is evident in the author's mother's story, and in Valerie Murray's memoir *Escape from The Brothers Grimm*, which will be examined in the following chapter.

The 'Beginning Place' perhaps most potently refers to the bureaucratic processes that were enacted on site, where New Australian aliens were to be naturalised into the Australian way of life, using the common vernacular of both the White Australia policy and of the assimilation era (Elder 'Invaders, Illegals, Aliens' 221, 246, Finane 'Controlling the 'alien'' 444). Bonegilla is where New Australians, or 'aliens' were to become Australian, as quickly as possible. Assimilation policies were designed to 'engender sameness by destroying difference' (Murphy *The Other Australia* 135). Les Murray's poem 'Immigrant Voyage' notes the 'Fresh Start music' with irony, where émigré subjectivity was reduced to 'physician's nailing crates', and

learning ‘the Wang Wang language’, imagery of control and limitation (*Ethnic Radio* 59). Official credentials were routinely ignored by immigration officials on site and doctors *were* employed as labourers (Sestokas 218, Sluga *A Place of No Hope* 16).

The ‘Beginning Place’ itself shares architectural features in common with Australian vernacular buildings, such as skillion-roofed lean-tos and partially enclosed sporting sheds. In the February 2016 site visit, it offered indifferent shelter from the 40° heat. The open shelter houses historical data, historical time lines, an installation art work and sound wall, and a selection of archival films on a continuous loop<sup>17</sup>. The display walls are polished steel, and are engraved with images of cascading gum leaves, another commonly invoked trope in Australian literary culture. Sharp notes the use of the eucalypt in Australian literature as an early signifier of the Gothic and the melancholic (‘The Artistic and the Literary Imagination’ 356-357). Sharp also notes Marcus Clarke’s description of the Australian environment as redolent of the ‘Grotesque, the Weird’, written in the ‘strange scribblings’ of straggly gum trees (‘The Artistic and the Literary Imagination’ 357). Martin notes the recent ‘fixation’ in recent Australian narratives with eucalypts (81). Martin makes the observation that eucalypts are signifiers of two contrasting tropes in Australian narratives, ‘white Australian masculinity’, or absence, a stand-in for Indigenous populations who ‘haunt the landscape’ (81, 82). At present day Bonegilla towering river red gums line the reduced margins of Block 19. They were not present in the past iteration of the camp, which was stark and treeless at its inception; Sluga notes that the landscape at Bonegilla had

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<sup>17</sup> The subject matter as follows: ‘Arthur Calwell’s promotional campaign: our national vulnerability; Pride and Prejudices: the selection process; *A hard coming they had of it*: the journey, and the arrival; Trials, tribulations, celebrations: camp Life; *No English, no Job*: civic instructions; The riots: the work bond, and when it went wrong; Good neighbors: migrants and the wider community’, *sic*, ‘Beginning Place’ signage, Derkenne.

been ‘denuded’ (*Bonegilla, Place of No Hope* 7). Contemporary accounts mark the landscape as itself *Unheimliche*, or uncanny. Cigler, writing of his night time arrival at Bonegilla in 1950, says:

...imagine you’re in a new country. You didn’t know anything. We arrived in the night time. We could see all those dry and dead gum trees. You know those big ones. They look like monsters against the moonlight. (*A Czech-Australian Story* 59).

Cigler also notes other migrants’ horror at seeing ‘dead gum trees’ (60-61). To Raimond Gaita’s mother a dead red gum became a ‘symbol of her desolation’, and the straggly gum trees in the landscape, to which his father also could not be reconciled, as ‘symbols of deprivation and barrenness’ (*Romulus, My Father* 23, 14). On his own memories as a child Raimond Gaita writes, ‘...if the moon was out, the dead red gums looked ghostly in its light’ (*Romulus, My Father* 30).

One of the significant installations at Bonegilla’s ‘Beginning Place’ is a sound and visual installation wall, designed by Thylacine Design, and commissioned by the Bonegilla Migrant Experience Steering Committee (Cox Sanderson Ness 1). Placed within the long open pavilion of the ‘Beginning Place’, the sound wall is intended to invoke migrant voices, and to echo ‘the journey to and through Bonegilla’ (Pennay ‘Framing block 19’ 28). Built in 2005, Thylacine Design call the interactive piece a ‘listening wall’ (Hobbs 66). From a distance many voices merge into a cacophony, however moving closer, individual voices and individual narratives emerge. Visually, the piece builds on tropes of migrant journeys by using overlapping deep blue seascapes, diminishing in detail along the length of the wall. Conceptually complex, Persian describes the piece as the ‘unintelligible soundscape wall’ (Dellios ‘Bonegilla Heritage Park’ 32). Pennay comments on Bonegilla’s contestation of memories, and refers to Desforge’s and Madden’s description of Ellis Island, New York as a ‘multi-

vocal and fragmented heritage landscape' site, akin to that of Bonegilla ('but no-one can say he was hungry' 62). Pennay further refers to Block 19 as 'mute remnant buildings' ('but no one can say he was hungry' 44). Sluga refers to an October 1971 *Sydney Morning Herald* article written about the imminent closure of the migrant camp, where Bonegilla is described as 'being a Babel of different tongues' ('Bonegilla and Migrant Dreaming' 200). The multivocality of the sound installation speaks to the notion of Bonegilla being an experiential site representative of a community experience of migrancy. However, the juxtaposed Babel of voices, like the 'whispering voices' Tsoolkias' immigrant-son character hears at Bonegilla, speaks more eloquently to narratives in competition, or voices not heard: 'ghosts murmuring in a discordant chorus of many languages' (Tsoolkias 'Saturn Return' 111).

Standing adjacent to the 'Beginning Place' is the newest outdoor sculptural installation, the 'Arc' as it is named on a bronze plaque. Privately commissioned in 2015 by Ken and Vicki Luke, the larger than life size rusting steel parabola forms incorporate small commemorative plaques for which individual émigré families have paid. The present sculpture 'commemorates the journey of the Bonegilla residents from 1947 to 1971' (Derkenne). The donors note on the explicatory plaque that the 'connection with boats and the Ark of the Bible is intentional' reflecting opportunities to seek 'new horizons and a new life' (Derkenne). The appropriateness of layering a metanarrative from biblical Genesis at Bonegilla is debatable, and it is not known whether that narrative was approved by any of the families whose plaques previously lined an objective blank wall<sup>18</sup>. In the King James *Bible*, Genesis 6:19 records: 'And of

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<sup>18</sup> The author's family would have found it offensive, being atheists. Anecdotally the 'Arc' piece has met with some incredulity and is deserving of further investigation, beyond the scope of this project. It is spelt both 'Arc' and 'Ark' on the commemorative plaque.

every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark'. Noah under 'God's command' fashioned an ark which is 'creation in miniature', replete with 'zoological diversity' (Brown 55). Noah's mission was to populate a 'new earth' (Brown 56). Critical interpretations of the Bonegilla 'Arc' also accord with Pugliese's discussion about the overwriting of Bonegilla as a site of prior Indigenous habitation (24). The Noah's Ark metanarrative imposed at Bonegilla returns the discourse to a landscape which is empty, a putative terra nullius, a land in need of repopulation by the Christian righteous. It also creates an ironic discourse indicative of colonialism and continues the discourse of an empty land, without Indigenous settlement.

The Bonegilla discourses suggested by the 'Beginning Place' narratives are, as Dellios makes clear, complex, 'multiple and often contradictory' ('Commemorating migrant camps' 256). Persian openly calls Bonegilla a 'failed narrative' (64). Dellios states Bonegilla stories can be 'dominated or silenced by state-sanctioned narratives' ('Commemorating migrant camps' 253). Further, the latest iterations of management begin what Dellios calls 'commoditised Bonegilla', which establish a tourist site enabling a particular celebratory representation of multiculturalism: the steering committee has no personal experience of the migrant camp and creates what Dellios calls a 'national cuddle' ('Commemorating Migrant Camps' 266, 'Bonegilla Heritage Park' 35). The tropes and actants at contemporary Bonegilla constitute an institutionalised remembering, which draw on colonial Judeo-Christian imagery and metaphors. Gum leaves, corrugated iron, and 'Arcs' of settlement overwrite not only prior Indigenous heritage, but also the era of assimilation as Dellios herself acknowledges: 'Bonegilla's history as a site of assimilation, surveillance and containment is silenced' ('Commemorating Migrant Camps' 263). The actants on play at Bonegilla so far discussed are focalised from an, ironically, Anglo-Celtic gaze.



The void or lacuna extant at Bonegilla is evident in the literature which is on site and which emerges from the site. ‘Quiet Room’ publically posted micro-memoirs at Bonegilla note, ‘My husband is too moved by this room to leave a message’, on remembering a father who was a Displaced Person at the Bonegilla camp (Derkenne, Margot Alaba, 4/11/15)<sup>19</sup>. Olga Makar writes, ‘A place of loneliness, and culture shock’ (Derkenne, 27/5/15). Francesco Fralonardo notes of his arrival in 2 April 1952, ‘If I’d had the money I would have gone straight back’, (Derkenne). Dharma Kotzur writes ‘Bonegilla is such an emotional and disturbing place’ (Derkenne). Sieglinde Fulop notes of her arrival at the camp in 1951, and her subsequent return ‘I found this visit very emotional’ (Derkenne). One emphatic message, all capitalised, states ‘SEASICK BONES CARRY MY SEASICK HEART HOME’ (*sic*, Derkenne). Such messages or mini-memoirs contribute to an active, ongoing record of life-experiences at Bonegilla by the original inhabitants or their immediate descendants. Not all of them are melancholic, but many do reference experiences such as those quoted. The tropes of alienation, silence, and loss of agency are further evident in the work of Les Murray, and Christos Tsiolkas, both of whom have direct connection with Bonegilla. Pinto notes that acknowledgement of loss and melancholia are absent in current local literary studies (204). Damousi further writes of Australia’s past being written without a ‘recognition of the trauma its history has created’ (8). The author suggests that not only are loss and melancholia overlooked in mainstream literary culture but are particularly absent, or overwritten, in investigations of migrant literatures emanating from the assimilation era at Bonegilla.

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<sup>19</sup> All micro-memoirs mentioned here photographed by the author in February 2016.



### Chapter Three: Les Murray and ‘Immigrant Voyage’

There must lie behind the eyes of nearly every person one sees in an Australian street the shadow of some earlier voyage. (Yasmine Gooneratne *A Change of Skies* 151)

Bonegilla is a most apt site to contain the following lines: ‘schepen op ’t droge, / tussen het prikkeldraad / waarvan sommige nooit zouden landen.’ They are the Dutch translation of the lines ‘the dry-land barbed wire ships from which some would never land’, from Les A. Murray’s poem ‘Immigrant Voyage’ (Derkenne). A nine-line sequence of the poem exists in parallel English and Dutch translations in the ‘Where Waters Meet’ exhibition room at present day Bonegilla, and has done since the room’s opening in 1997 (Derkenne). This exhibition room is a detailed primary source record of the Dutch migrant experience and arrival at Bonegilla, and has been co-sponsored by a coalition of Australian and Dutch interests.<sup>20</sup> Les Murray himself was unaware that his poem is exhibited at Bonegilla as a fragment, a site he has never visited, despite the intense poetic identification with migrant experiences his own poem ‘Immigrant Voyage’ expresses<sup>21</sup>. First published in a collection called *Ethnic Radio*, by Les A. Murray, in 1977, ‘Immigrant Voyage’ is a poem for which Les Murray now expresses little affection, being a mid-length, narrative poem, a length and style from which he says he has moved away in recent decades (Derkenne 18 September 2016). Les Murray was also unaware that ‘Immigrant Voyage’ has been recently anthologised in a 2013 collection centred around issues of migrancy, where the editors Scott and

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<sup>20</sup> Oce-Australia, The Prince Bernhard Fund of the Netherlands, Netherlands Emigration Fund and the Victorian Multicultural Commission. The memorial exhibition coincided with the publication of a monograph, similarly titled, also published in 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Direct conversations, or ‘yarns’ as Les calls them, and correspondence over the course of 2016 between the author and Les Murray form the basis of much of this chapter. Valerie Murray also gave the author a pre-publication copy of her memoir *Escape from the Brothers Grimm* which will also be referred to. The pagination refers to the pre-publication copy of that text.

Keneally sought authors 'to bring a different perspective and depth to the public debate on asylum seekers', and so deliberately link the past treatment of assimilation-era migrants with the travails and political complexity of the present 21<sup>st</sup> century era, as they are expressed in Australian literature (*A Country Too Far* 1). Sluga, who is aware of Murray's poem at Bonegilla, mused, in *Bonegilla and Migrant Dreaming*, whether Murray, a 'mainstream Australian poet' would read 'Immigrant Voyage' with the cadence of the migrant, 'Bon-a-gilla', rather than the local Albury vernacular, 'Bone-gilla' (206). Loyalty to linguistic camps has been very pronounced, and remains conflicted, but Les Murray, possibly because of his wife Valerie's internment, uses the migrant pronunciation<sup>22</sup> (Derkenne 18 September 2016).

Stylistically, 'Immigrant Voyage' is an elegiac and melancholy historical account of Les Murray's Hungarian wife Valerie's immigration to Australia, on the ship the *Goya*, in 1950. Asked how he came to write such a narrative piece in such personal detail, Les Murray succinctly stated 'I married into it', and that few Australian poets to his knowledge had adopted migration themes, although they are common within the immigrant community (Derkenne 18 September 2016). This chapter will include a close textual reading of 'Immigrant Voyage', and also interrogate ethnicity as expressed by Les Murray in his wider writings. This is pertinent to this case study as Les Murray's oeuvre is largely situated within a very particular heritage, the Anglo-Celtic, and is site dependent, by his own and critical admission, at Bunyah. Aspects of spatial and situated reading are pertinent to the larger investigation of site reading that the Bonegilla case study entails. Such

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<sup>22</sup> Pennay uses 'Bone-gilla', Lee Mylne, 'Return to Bonegilla', *The Australian* 25 August 2007. The author uses the migrant intonation, unaware until recently of any other, but found the Block 19 staff, Albury locals, all used the Bone-gilla pronunciation, and used it to all visitors.

acknowledgement of ‘place’, and site actants in the Alworth model, have many precedents in the critical engagement with Murray’s poetry (see Alexander, Fenn, Furstenburg). Also interrogated are to what extent the themes evident in ‘Immigrant Voyage’ are also interrogated at the ‘Bonegilla, Block 19’ site.

Little attention has been paid to the collection of Les Murray poems which centre around European ethnicity, as most critical attention is centred around Murray’s intense focus on the vernacular, and the rural. Hergenhan and Clunies-Ross position Murray as a ‘paradigmatic instance of mature postcolonial writing founded on the settler condition’ (quoting Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 155). Ruth Brown quotes Davis and Wark, who align Les Murray with a ‘conservative and implicitly “white” nationalist project’ (‘Cyberspace and Oz Lit’ 25). Critical attention has been paid to Les Murray’s literary reception in Germany and England, where he has noted himself that his readership is very strong<sup>23</sup> (see Furstenberg, Petersson). Murphy engages with resonances between Les Murray, Brodsky, Heaney and Walcott in a what he titles a ‘poetry Superleague’ (‘Local Habitations’ 139-160). Petersson notes Murray’s transnational status, his poetry having been translated into Catalan, Danish, Dutch, German, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish (2).

Aspects of site and ethnicity are integral to the *Ethnic Radio* collection, Murray’s fifth, as it is within this collection from 1977 that one of Les Murray’s most frequently anthologised, controversial and discussed poems emerges, ‘The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle’ (Pollnitz 54-56, Bradstock 63-65, Clunies-Ross 109-110,

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<sup>23</sup> Les Murray is also very aware, and involved with, the aesthetics of book-making and is very conscious of a good book, its images, design, and its quality paper. He notes in particular the beauty of the books produced by his Swiss publishers, Ammann Verlag. See also the 2015 Les Murray collection published by Black Inc. *On Bunyah*, which features a cover photograph taken by Murray, and includes photographs he also chose. Some of these function as those by Sebald in his novels, in that the photographs are often black and white, archival and not always identified see 3, 23, 35, 61, 71, (Derkenne 18 September 2016).

Cranston, Zeller 25). Murray appropriates Indigenous song-poetry, referencing the *Song Cycle of the Moon-Bone* (Bradstock 65-66, Clunies-Ross 109, 110, Pollnitz 55-56). Further, Murray's Anglo-Celtic heritage forms the centre-piece of the collection.

Les Murray stated he was very pleased with the *Ethnic Radio* collection in its entirety, not only as a collection of poems, but also as an aesthetic production, a designed object (Derkenne 18 September 2016). The cover design, frontispieces, endpapers, and typography reference complex Celtic designs. The title *Ethnic Radio* refers to the recent establishment of the precursor of the SBS, or the Special Broadcasting Service. A network of 'so-called ethnic radios' was established in the 1970s, to recognise the increasing diversity of the Australian population (Matthews 75). As Matthews cleverly notes, the collection in its aesthetic production was 'intent upon tuning in to those influences which had formed Murray's distinctive perspective' (76). Matthews further conjectures Murray's 'take' on ethnicity is 'contentious', as Murray 'reinflects 'ethnic' to include strains of lineage within the white, English-speaking, population' (75). The *Ethnic Radio* collection of poetry engages with a continuum of Celtic and Gaelic strands of identity, Indigeneity, and larger ethnicity within Les Murray's own family line, and his wife Valerie's Swiss-Hungarian antecedents. This 'integrative stance', or the potential to reconcile opposites within Murray's poetic oeuvre, is also acknowledged by Senn (272). Murray in conversation is precise in his acknowledgment of his and Australia's Indigenous, and ethnic heritage, and disavows imprecise terms such as 'English' or 'Australian', openly vouchsafing the change from Anglo-Saxon, to the more correct Anglo-Celtic (Derkenne 18 September 2016). Rickard states it was an established myth until the Second World War that 'Australia was a racially homogenous society, basically of British stock' (*Australia, A cultural history* 35). Murray himself claims that his lasting

contribution to 'socio-political' issues is 'to get the term Anglo-Saxon altered to Anglo-Celtic' (*The Paperbark Tree* 301). Murphy records Les Murray on this distinction:

Whilst acknowledging that 'English law, English tradition, English literature' have been 'central in forming our culture', he feels that their continued study in Australia is part of a 'colonial hangover'. Rather, his people should return to thinking through their particular inheritance, for 'from the beginning white Australians have been an Anglo-Celtic rather than an Anglo-Saxon people'. (*Ethnic Radios* 76)

Murray acknowledged that his early poem 'Immigrant Voyage' owed its debt to his wife Valerie and her immigration experiences arriving at Bonegilla, but that the collection in toto aired the complex issues of place, origins and regionality which have continued to engage him as a poet. Murray was insistent that this interrogation of ethnicity, place and belonging was evident in the title, *Ethnic Radio*, which acknowledges the growth of multiculturalism politically, and the book's design, which acknowledges the underlying allegiance to Anglo-Celtic family origins of many Australians. The tension inherent in reconciling indigeneity, Anglo-Celtic and other ethnicities speaks to the tensions inherent at present-day Bonegilla, addressed by critics such as Pugliese, Dellios and Persian.

Many critical interpretations acknowledge the significance of site and place in interpreting Les Murray's oeuvre: Alexander openly describes the countryside traversed by the 'Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle' simply as 'his Country', and includes a map to clearly delineate 'Les Murray's Country' (*A Life in Progress* 1). Alexander further enumerates Murray's intimacy with the landscape, its shape, form, inhabitants, flora and fauna, all of which could be considered as actants within a site-reading practice consistent with Alworth's socio-literary concepts (246-247). Alexander quotes Murray, stating 'Bunyah was heart's blood to him' (247). Senn

confirms Bunyah as Murray's own 'spirit country' (273). Ulla Furstenburg discusses in book length *'Les Murray Country'*. Yet a small collection of Les Murray poems exists which contain an intensely empathetic understanding of historical migrant experiences, and which sit outside the geo-spatial confines of Murray's almost mythologised Bunyah. As Senn elaborates, these mostly narrative poems on 'historical topics ... are comparatively rare' (273). Included in Murray's *Collected Poems*, are 'Immigrant Voyage', and 'Jozsef', which relate specifically to Valerie Murray's family (2002 ed. 156-160, 77-79). A few other poems such as the nostalgic 'Tanka: The Coffee Shops' relate to a more generalised, and nostalgic, experience of food-and-folklore multiculturalism, about which Murray himself is mostly equivocal (*Ethnic Radio* 18). In 'Trade in Images' Murray challenges the 'graven images' of public debate, which are 'meant to be admired, to become the touchstones of debate, to be influential' (*The Paperbark Tree* 296). In amongst these touchstones, Murray includes past immigration policies and multiculturalism:

If you suffered under White Australia, you may yet be maladroit enough to get run over by Multiculturalism. Or by the Creole idea, which I predict will be its successor. (*The Paperbark Tree* 296).

Murray, writing about migrancy and the travails of the assimilation era, takes a personal and nuanced stance which confronts the political debate but coheres with the historical context of the poetry of migration and trauma under discussion in this chapter. *Dog Fox Field*, from 1990, deals with the Nazi mistreatment of the disabled (Alexander 241-242). *Fredy Neptune*, a 1998 verse novel, thematically fits within Murray's non-Bunyah, non-vernacular oeuvre. Called by Murray 'his secret autobiography' *Fredy Neptune* confronts genocide and what Murray regards as 'creeping nihilism', the indifference to human life in modern times (Alexander 286, 289). As with 'Immigrant Voyage' the critical response to *Fredy Neptune* was



polarised. Of *Fredy Neptune*, Australian reviewer Peter Craven in 'Neptune off the Planet' called the verse novel a 'grand, lame wombat of a book', and a 'very cracked, very amateur work by a man of genius who is like that' (Petersson, 'Odysseus from the Outback' 9). In contrast Petersson notes its enthusiastic critical reception in Germany, where *Fredy Neptune* was published in a bilingual edition in 2004, by 'all prominent German papers', and also by the wider English language press in Europe, America and Britain ('Odysseus from the Outback' 1-2). Critical response to the earlier work 'Immigrant Voyage' has also been divergent - John Leonard calls the poem 'a fine piece of writing which says absolutely nothing' ('Reading Les Murray's Collected Poems' 84). Haskell states in contrast 'Immigrant Voyage' is 'one of his very best' ('Memories, Jokes and Inexhaustible Patterns' 54). Matthews comments at length on the Celtic and Gaelic strands intertwined within the *Ethnic Radio* collection, in a chapter devoted to that collection, but does not mention 'Immigrant Voyage' at all ('Ethnic Radios' 57-83). These varied and paradoxical readings of the same works speak to the 'dynamic oscillation' of meanings in the text (Iser 'Representation: A Performative Act' 219). The author believes that the varied referents in Murray's poems dealing with migrancy speak ineffably to a transcultural context, and establish a transnational reading space, where the 'core' of the work 'does...explode into its plurivocity' (Iser 'Representation' 217). This provides a significant backdrop to 'Immigrant Voyage' and its inclusion as a multi-vocal and multi-lingual text at the site of present day Bonegilla, where it participates in a dialogue with assimilation era narratives. The conjectured and actual audience at the site is also largely former internees and their descendants, who have an invested past and interest bound to Bonegilla narratives (Persian 'Bonegilla' 79). The placement of Murray's poem at Bonegilla and its comparative critical neglect reinforce the author's thesis that

literature exposing problematic issues of migration has been overwritten by later more celebratory aspects of multiculturalism. As Murray himself mused, contemporary aspects of multiculturalism are problematic (*The Paperbark Tree* 296). Further, the critical response as outlined to Murray's poem's such as 'Immigrant Voyage' and *Fredy Neptune* suggests that less attention has been paid to Murray's small collection of immigrant-themed poetry, and that the vernacular aspects of Murray's oeuvre, centred around the issues of Anglo-Celtic heritage and rural life experience, have been privileged by comparison. It is beyond the scope of the present thesis to examine this in further detail, but Murray himself acknowledges that both the form of 'Immigrant Voyage' and its subject matter are comparative outriders in his extensive output, and as stated he was unable to name other Australian-born poets who had undertaken such themes in relation to the Assimilation era<sup>24</sup>.

The poem 'Immigrant Voyage' is Les Murray's wife's story. Valerie Murray, nee Morelli, was on board the ship the *Goya* in 1950, in transit to Australia from a D. P.s' camp in Bremerhaven with her family. The poem begins and ends with two sets of near-repeated lines, 'My wife came out on the Goya/in the mid-year of our century', and 'friends who came on the Goya/in the mid-year of our century' (*Ethnic Radio* 56, 59). The poem begins with the specific and familial, and moves throughout its length to the general and social. Bookended by historical time, the poem conforms with many of Murray's journey poems, a theme and a motif which Bradstock engages with as the 'springboard for exploration of the self or society' within Murray's work ('Les Murray's Journey Poems' 61). Bradstock however, links the journey motif

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<sup>24</sup> In personal correspondence during 2016 Murray did add another ethnically themed poem to his oeuvre, 'Steam Bath World' of which the author holds an original draft. Based on sauna culture, the poem arose as a result of discussions about sauna, which as an ethnic Finn the author enjoys. The poem has subsequently been published in the January 2017 edition of *Quadrant*.

thematically with Bunyah, as a 'centre of the world' rather than investigating its centrality to Murray's poems of migrancy ('Les Murray's Journey Poems' 61). Senn also notes the significance of traveling to Murray's oeuvre, where the poet adopts the personae of a 'detached outside observer' ('Les Murray' 273). The poetic voice within 'Immigrant Voyage' is a sombre third person omniscient narrator, travelling within and across time, from where 'the DP camps were being washed to sea' to the playground, 'the Deep End of the schoolyard' (lines 5, 107 56, 59)<sup>25</sup>. Murray maintains the imagery of a sea journey in the evocative imagery of post World War Two D. P.s' camps being washed to sea as by some inexorable tidal wave, and the destabilising deep end of a metaphoric swimming pool in which immigrant children, it is implied, will be thrown.

The poem proceeds in seven irregular stanza increments, and with a consistent teleological narrative, which journeys with the *Goya* and 'many hundred ships', from 'the bombsites and the ghettos' of old Europe to '...Israel/to Brazil, to Africa, America.' (lines 6-8). The scale of Murray's Odyssean poem moves from the immediate family member, Valerie, to the fleets of diasporic subjects imbricated within the poem. Murray suggests the unimaginable scale of human movement post World War Two by the insistent use of plurals in the first five stanzas: ships, camps, bombsites, ghettos, cities, and old castes (lines 4, 5, 6, 10, 14). Murray uses the imagery of the internment camp as the *Goya* moves across the 'Middle Sea', the ship 'was a barracks:/ mess-queue, spotlights, tower, /' (lines 28-29). Reminiscent of Foucault's discussion of *Oedipus The King*, the ship is the city-state, 'a ship that must be lead to safe harbour', but one that is at risk of 'disappearance' contingent on its

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<sup>25</sup> All line references to 'Immigrant Voyage', 56-59, *Ethnic Radio, poems by Les A. Murray*, Angus and Robertson: Sydney 1977

governance (*Security Territory, Population* 123). Similarly, the metaphor moves within Murray's poem from the individual, Valerie, to the populations that are the diasporic, governed subject.

The formality of Murray's language, 'in the mid-year of our century', 'did eat of their heave offerings' creates an ironic, elegiac mood (lines 2, 27). Such a level of formality, even when describing Valerie's propensity for seasickness, is fit for a theme of historical significance, journeys which are inclusive of one of the largest population movements in contemporary times, and of Australia's role within that diasporic narrative (McConville 'Migration and belonging' 7). 'Immigrant Voyage' is also a visceral poem, of sweat, heat and emotion, which imaginatively links ancient and historical tax regimes with the salty sweat the 'Nordics and Slavonics' paid en route to Australia, travelling across the Red Sea (lines 38-40). Post World War Two survival by the émigrés is dramatized by Murray as an act against a dark universe in which laws of existence are likened to an inexorable force of physics, 'that gravity' of the 'collapsed star Death' (lines 82, 80).

'Immigrant Voyage' moves to landfall at Port Phillip, and the encounter of the émigrés with the 'dour/Australians' (lines 74-75). Les Murray's poetic interpretation of the encounter and subsequent movement to Bonegilla is succinct: 'They say, another camp-/ One did not come for this-' (lines 85-86). Valerie in her memoir recalls the shock of being confronted by:

...tarp-covered trucks, which were desperately uncomfortable, ...The trucks made us feel, at the very least, that we were foreign undesirables, but they also had a resonance of Jewish deportation, or something that was just good enough for cattle. (Valerie Murray *Flight from the Brothers Grimm* 66-67)

Another Bonegilla Displaced Person, Nina, recalled 'We were just like cattle, here follow us...We were just treated like stupid sheep' (Sluga *Bonegilla, a Place of*

*No Hope* 15). These testimonies are consistent with Bonegilla ‘Quiet Room’ mini-memoirs and also those contained in the ‘Where Waters Meet’ exhibition room, where several stanzas of Les Murray’s poem are placed (Derkenne). Scodel, discussing performative Homeric poetry, states that ‘audiences...[are] implicit in the poems’ (*Listening to Homer* 3). I propose ‘Immigrant Voyage’ has allegiances with a performative epic in theme and cadence, if not in length, and in its implied readership: as the public signage and pamphlets at Bonegilla attest, ‘If you were there you know’ (Derkenne). Being life-writing in the closest familial sense, Les Murray’s ‘Immigrant Voyage’ is a poem very much about something, but presumably to the critic Leonard, the experiential lines indicative of suppression, containment and restraint, of camps and barbed wire, are the void or lacuna which he is *unable* to imaginatively read. Leonard is unable to complete the second half of the Bonegilla sign, ‘you can imagine’ (Derkenne). Reading positions, to educated multi-lingual D.P.s, such as Valerie Murray’s family were in 1950, would have seemed absurd, but much contemporary diaspora criticism has, as da Silva posits, created out of dislocation an allocated subject position in which ‘the binary itself remains intact’ (*Life Writing* 49-50). The ‘other’ is always a symmetrical position as Murray suggests in the lines ‘facing/encounter with the Foreign’ (lines 75-76). Critical of Gunew’s text *Framing Marginality*, da Silva points out the deficit reading position, a binary of subaltern and the ones who belong, is however, lacking (*Life Writing* 50). Perhaps a poem such as ‘Immigrant Voyage’ is a form of early and prescient ‘writing back’, what the author calls Neo-post colonialism, along the lines posited by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (198). Murray lays bare the asymmetrical power balance implicit in the relationship between the immigrant and the practice of assimilation when Valerie Murray’s family landed in ‘the dry-land barbed wire ships’ (line 98). Murray never names the

‘encounter with the Foreign’ but capitalises the latter as a semantic signifier of mutual incomprehension (lines 75-76). Power structures as assimilation practice are also within the poem a lacuna, but a force capable nonetheless of instigating the ‘Fresh Start music’, the diminution of agency that saw ‘physicians nailing crates, / attorneys cleaning trams,’ (lines 101-102). The linking of music with the percussive sounds of labouring, striking nails, and trams, is a powerful lexical reinforcement of a clash between expectations, and the enactment of a Foucauldian level of control over émigrés. Foucault, in a series of lectures in 1978, in *‘Security, Territory, Population’* engages with the concepts of ‘governmentality’ (116). In these lectures Foucault expounds on what he views as a ‘technology of power’, or the various semantic iterations of the notions of governance (117). Foucault emphasises that ‘Those whom one governs are people, individuals, or groups’ but also states, ‘in the end is not confinement a typical operation of the state...?’ (122, 119). Throughout Murray’s poem ‘Immigrant Voyage’ the anonymous and multiple ‘they’ and ‘those’ are repeatedly moved from a past of containment, to a long futurity of contained adaptation, from the ship-board barracks, to the ‘dry-land barbed wire ships’ (29, 98). Each of these teleological movements is ‘Ahead of them’, repeated three times, and then even ‘farther ahead’ lies the food and folklore ‘Renaissance’ of which Murray himself is openly equivocal, and which is clearly ironic; Murray links the sixteenth century cultural rebirth with ‘Coffee’ and ‘Smallgoods’ (lines 106, 111, 114, 118, 119, 120).

The cadences of the poem move from the seemingly light-hearted, the mentions of foodstuffs, to the immediately sombre and melancholic: the concluding lines of the poem are an elegy for those who were consigned to ‘early funerals: / the misemployed, the unadaptable, / those marked by the Abyss,’ / (lines 121-125). This constitutes a

recognition of those aspects of migrancy which are little recognised or little recalled, and fall outside of the celebratory model of migrant autobiographical writing, such as that critiqued by Huggan as ‘the recuperative articulation of lived experience’ (‘Ethnic Autobiography’ 37). ‘Bonegilla, Block 19’, mentions only briefly those children who died of malnutrition at the site, or the young Italian labourers who committed suicide because they were not able to be given employment (Derkenne). ‘Bonegilla, Block 19’ does not record the twenty-one still-born children, the forty children under two who died, the twenty young men who drowned at Lake Hume, often caught in the barbed wire left when the dam was created, or the numerous men whose cause of death at Bonegilla is given in the record as ‘dead’ (*sic*, Maljers, Hillier and Smith, ‘Deaths Recorded in Bonegilla Reception Centre, 1948-1962’)<sup>26</sup>. Of these deaths, twenty-five deceased are recorded as ‘no name’ and sixty-two have no recorded burial site.

The author contends that ‘Immigrant Voyage’ has been recognised by the Dutch community represented at Bonegilla as speaking to an as yet unacknowledged narrative of melancholia, hence the poem’s bilingual adoption within the ‘Where Waters Meet’ room. Much of ‘Immigrant Voyage’ speaks to restraint, loss and namelessness, as the immigrants are ironically to learn ‘...refinements: / Thumbs hooked down hard under belts / to repress gesticulation’ (lines 111-113). These lines follow the emphatic ‘learning English fast’ and create an elegant chiasmus with English as ‘the Wang Wang’ language. Valerie Murray also recalls the ‘urgency to get on top of English’, and that ‘I moved my hands when I talked’ (*Brothers Grimm* 76, 77). Murray emphasises not only the loss of patterns of speech, but of cultures of

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<sup>26</sup> Figures prepared by John P. Maljers from information supplied by Mr. J. Hillier, Ebden (Bonegilla) Historical Society, and Ann Smith, maljers@pipeline.com.au. This five-page spread sheet is held at the Bonegilla Collection at Albury Wodonga Library Museum; when documented by the author it as yet had no catalogue accession number (Derkenne).

language and speech-making, the loss of ‘beloved meaningless words’ (line 69). Murray’s line on ‘beloved meaningless words’ is consistent with Paul Carter’s discussion of migrant instability arising from ‘not being at home in language’, and also with Gunew’s engagement with the *aphanisis* resultant from the ‘repression of the whole language’ when passing from ‘one actual language system to another’ (‘Theoretical Perspectives’ 12, ‘Stammering “country” pedagogies’ 74).

The ‘Where the Waters Meet’ room has one of the few collections of multilingual poetry displayed on site, including the excerpt from Les Murray’s poem, as well as ‘Things They Did Not Tell Me’ by Rids van der Zee, also in English and Dutch<sup>27</sup>. Both poems express a sense of longing and loss: They did not tell me / I would ache / for the colours of my homeland / for the familiar streets / and buildings / for the ageless age of history / before my eyes, (Derkenne). Both poems speak to heritage, loss and homeland. Bhabha coalesces many of the arguments of this chapter into one multivalenced question:

What of the more complex cultural situation where ‘previously unrecognised spiritual and intellectual needs’ emerge from the imposition of ‘foreign’ ideas, cultural representations, and structures of power? (‘The World and The Home’ 371).

The author suggests that Les Murray’s lines, suggestive of archival black and white dockside confrontations, where each symmetrical group of people, on-shore and on-board, ‘were facing/encounter with the Foreign’ is such a complex cultural situation as Bhabha posits (lines 75-76). This theme, of the imagological confrontation, will be further discussed in relation to Christos Tsolkias’ ‘Saturn return’.

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<sup>27</sup> Neither poem has an accurate attribution at Bonegilla. Rids van der Zee noted, in correspondence to the author, noted that his poem was included in his memoir, *The Juggler*, Adele Davies, Melbourne: 198 (Derkenne 19 September 2016).



## Chapter Four: Christos Tsiolkas, ‘Saturn Return’, and the ‘hateful place’

...in retrospect I became preoccupied not only with the unaccustomed sense of freedom but also with the paralysing horror that had come over me at various times when confronted with the traces of destruction, reaching far back into the past, that were evident even in that remote place. (W.G. Sebald *The Rings of Saturn* 3)

This chapter examines Christos Tsiolkas’ 1995 short story, ‘Saturn Return’<sup>28</sup>. It is the most recently published text to be considered in this thesis, having been collected in the anthology *Merciless Gods*, and the collection published twice in close succession, in 2014 and 2016. Christos Tsiolkas is an Australian-born transnational and multi-lingual author and a literary figure who transcends Australian cultural borders and reading positions. Widely translated, Tsiolkas works across multiple genres and media, including film scripts, photography, plays, reviews and long-form journalism such as opinion pieces. ‘Saturn’s Return’ (*sic*) has also been produced as a short film in 2000, for which Tsiolkas wrote the screenplay<sup>29</sup>.

The *Merciless Gods* collection engages with multi-ethnic, or polyphonic, voices and from authorial positions challenging a privileged monolingual Anglo-Celtic reading position. While it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine all the works within the *Merciless Gods* collection it is noted that Tsiolkas’ representation of multiple ethnicities challenges conventional readings of migrancy, gender, sexual expression and familial relationships. Tsiolkas uses confronting language and explicit

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Saturn Return’ first published in *Blur*, ed. James Bradley, Random House, 1996. First published in *Merciless Gods*, 2014. All references to ‘Saturn Return’ 2016 edition, Allen and Unwin 108-132

<sup>29</sup> Listed by Screen Australia under the genre of ‘history and national identity’, the 26-minute film won eight national and international awards at various film festivals between 2001 and 2002. Screen Australia <http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/the-screen-guide/t/saturns-return-2000/16971/>

descriptions of sex to confront and destabilise reader expectations. His stories reference a diverse and often conflicted Australian community of ethnicities, situated within different socio-historical milieus. 'Petals' is narrated from within an Australian prison, immediately post World War Two, identified by the abusive vernacular used by the English-speaking prisoner: 'What's that shit you are singing, dago?' and 'Speak English, you reffo cunt!' (*Merciless Gods* 79, 84). 'Dago' and 'reffo' were in common usage in Australia after the 'reluctant admission' of immigrants post-war (Baker 405). Tsiolkas also represents contemporary urban multicultural Australia, with Greeks and Italians, Muslims, Tongans, Vietnamese and Turks all sharing a beach-side scene in the short story 'Sticks, Stones' (221-222). However, it is in 'Saturn Return' that Tsiolkas acknowledges history as the 'great subject' (Padmore 459). Within 'Saturn Return' Tsiolkas examines the assimilation era and the unresolved past, both of his protagonists, and Australia's immigration history. Of history, Tsiolkas says:

...philosophically: what is the notion of time? ...history is not something that is finite, ... the past is not finite, ... it is part of the here and now. (Padmore, 459)

Vaughan situates Tsiolkas asserting 'the impossibility of an end to history' echoing Tsiolkas' own desire to write a contiguous fiction which combines social actants from the past and the present (1).

Bonegilla the migrant camp is situated in a forgotten backwater in Christos Tsiolkas' 1995 short story 'Saturn Return'. Bonegilla is represented as a desolate lacuna, *unheimlich*, uncannily empty, within a remote geography of displacement and marginalisation: 'There is fuck all there' as the narrator states (Tsiolkas 113). In the story two young gay<sup>30</sup> men, lovers, one named Barney, and the unnamed narrator,

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<sup>30</sup> Tsiolkas defines a gay man as 'someone who has been informed by gay politics or by gay commercial

from whose point of view the diegesis is focalised, travel between Melbourne and Sydney and visit the Bonegilla site en route, 'the hateful place', where the narrator's father was interned as a migrant long ago in 1959 ('Saturn Return' 116, 126).

Tsiolkas merges various genres. One genre integral to 'Saturn Return' is that of the contemporary buddy road-trip, which is freely adapted as a vehicle to subvert reader expectations of a 'paradigmatic narrative of coherence and closure', the trajectory of nostalgia when migrants return to 'beginning places' (Gunew 'Stammering "country" pedagogies' 74). Huggan describes as an archetypal trope of migrant writing the desire to authenticate a 'recuperative articulation of lived experience', a movement from exile to belonging (*Postcolonial Exotic* 37). However, Tsiolkas' text reverses the trope and makes of the road journey in 'Saturn Return' an unresolved and open-ended 'imagological' study, concerned with 'the image one nation or culture has of another' (Nicklas and Lindner 3). Bonegilla within Tsiolkas' epistemological and allegorical framework is socio-historical pivot, isolated far from the coast and stranded between the large cosmopolitan centres of Melbourne and Sydney. The two young men, the main protagonists within Tsiolkas' narrative in 'Saturn Return', represent a complex cultural chiasmus within the text, Australian<sup>31</sup> and migrant, rural and urban, with back stories that Tsiolkas is careful to explicate throughout the narrative. Bonegilla, as this chapter will show, is positioned in Tsiolkas' short story as a contested and 'empty space', redolent of 'vacated subjectivity', which none of Tsiolkas' protagonists is able to comprehend. Gunew and

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culture, or gay forms of aesthetics and representations in coming to an understanding of himself' (Vernay 38)

<sup>31</sup> Barney is never explicitly defined as Australian, but the numerous cultural markers and linguistic mores, such as 'mate' suggest he is. He terms the city of Sydney, a 'shithole', while the narrator is excited to be back in 'this furious, massive city' (111,112).

Mycak both theorise the loss of subjectivity endemic to the migration experience, the *aphanisis*, or silencing, which results in a ‘decentred, fragmented, splintered and split’ self (‘Stammering “country” pedagogies’ 74, ‘Australian multicultural Literature’ 80). Reflective silence, and miscommunication are a feature of the ‘Saturn Return’ narrative. Tsiolkas suggests human communication is fragile and contingent, and often fails: ‘I don’t answer him’, ‘We are both silent on the phone’, ‘There is nothing I can say or do to stop the tears’ (‘Saturn’ 112, 116, 117).

Bonegilla functions within Tsiolkas’ story world as a site of inexplicable personal significance to the narrator, a site of anxiety established between his father and himself: a ‘hauntology of place’ (Wylie 176). After touring the Bonegilla site, the narrator receives a disappointing response from his father in a brief telephone call, when the older man, resident at Bonegilla in 1959, refuses to engage with his son: ‘They should burn the whole of it down. It was a hateful place’ (‘Saturn Return’ 116). Historical places as subjects of narrative focus have recent contemporary critical resonance. Ryan discusses the range of responses within narrative theory ranging from the spatial situatedness of museum commentaries, undertaken by Azaryahu and Foote, to investigations of cartographic mapping by Piatti of landscapes ‘heavily populated with literary texts’ (30). Because time has been privileged over space in narratology, Ryan further states ‘narrative space remains a relatively unexplored territory’ (31). Alworth discusses sites being of literary significance, where place and history create ‘determinants of sociality’ within a ‘dynamic network of actants’ (Alworth 2). Alworth’s critical process begins with a specific site and examines how the palpable world is imbricated within and through the social, and then how that process is expressed textually (10). The significance of such a narratorial lens to the Bonegilla site, and any literatures emerging from there, is of key import to this thesis. The

actants in question within 'Saturn Return' are complex and layered, and revolve around the protagonists' decentred selfhood, and their culturally located incomprehension about Bonegilla's existence and its epistemological significance. Any remnant meaning Bonegilla may hold, Tsiolkas reveals, is guarded by a blond, blue-eyed army sentinel who states explicitly 'there's shit there now' ('Saturn' 112-113). The guard is implicitly Anglo-Celtic or Aryan. Tsiolkas emphasises the persistence of Foucauldian surveillance that has been integral to historical post World War Two migrant camp life, and by extension, secure cultural identity formation as a naturalised New Australian. Bonegilla's meaning, as expressed within the story world of 'Saturn Return', is never determined and remains silent, an uncanny void, a 'shithole' (Tsiolkas 116).

Bonegilla is neither a secondary element within 'Saturn Return', nor a geo-social site functioning as an incidental plot 'container' within the narrative (Alworth 2). The migrant camp is instead a paradoxical centre of emptiness, and a primary driver in the protagonists' search for validated subjectivity. Rutherford in *The Gauche Intruder* addresses the void or lacunae extant in Australian literature as emerging from the 'fantasy of a good nation', the 'mistaken premise of cultural unity' (15, 13). This unity, Rutherford states, has its premise in the overly optimistic reading of a new culture:

...the culture par excellence of a new inclusionary, multicultural and sexually equitable state. Despite its plethora of cultures and cultural forms, its seeming polyvalency and multiplicity of cultural voices, Australian culture continues to sustain collectively held fantasies of nation and national character that regulate subjectivity at the level of the quotidian, the micro-gesture, and the policing of self. (12)

Using a Lacanian lens, Rutherford further discusses the problematic and missed encounters with the 'real' which are 'always connected with a mistake, with an

impossible encounter' (38). Reading 'Saturn Return' as such a missed encounter interrogates the elements of racism, xenophobia and sexual identity that the trajectory of the narrative traverses. Bonegilla is where Tsiolkas centres the mistake, the missed engagement, the hollow 'encounter with a void' (Rutherford quoted in McCredden 18). McCredden confirms Rutherford's reading of Australian cultural identity as 'riven':

All the *bonhomie*, mateship and self-reference to Australia as the good neighbour and the great white land of the 'fair go' reduces to a fantasy, papering over 'a sustained aggression to alterity'. (18)

Plunkett further suggests Australia's 'riven' and 'profoundly ambivalent' immigration stories have been mediated 'through a discourse of self-congratulation' (41). This discourse began with the tight Australian-British cultural nexus in place during the period of assimilation, the beginning place embedded within Tsiolkas' 'Saturn Return' narrative:

Australia is an English colony. Its cultural pattern is based on that fact of history.... Direct English inheritance determines the general design of our living and much of its detail (A.A. Phillips 297).

Tsiolkas himself has described his writing as condition of Australia texts, which question identity formation caught between 'old modes' of community, and multiculturalism (Authers 143-144). In an opinion piece in *The Monthly*, Tsiolkas acknowledges his own identity, as a child of Greek immigrant parents, 'has been formed partly through my experiences with racism' ('Why Australia Hates Asylum Seekers' 27). Tsiolkas asks how do you 'disavow' Australian culture but be 'embedded within it?' (Padmore 449). Tsiolkas challenges the 'complexity in mapping our racial and immigrant histories' by somebody who is a self-identified wog: 'Wog, wog, why don't you go back to your own country, dirty wog?' ('Why Australia Hates Asylum Seekers' 22).

The embedded aspects of racism focalised from across the Australian ethnic divide within 'Saturn Return' form its imagological critique:

... one side monarchist, nationalist and proudly Anglo-Celtic; on the other, republican, cosmopolitan and equally proudly multicultural ... (Tsiolkas 'Why Australia Hates Asylum Seekers' 22).

Tsiolkas frequently discusses the nature of Australian literature and its lack of appeal, 'it didn't really speak to me' <sup>32</sup> (Padmore 449). His cultural influences feed from literary, film, music and theatre sources. For these reasons, the new critical concept of the 'mash-up', called by Gibson "the characteristic pivot' of the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century", is an apt methodology with which to interrogate 'Saturn Return', and an appropriate term to apply to its embedded layers (Gunkel 4). Tsiolkas' oeuvre has been placed within various literary genres, including grunge and trauma writing. Syson, describing Tsiolkas' alienated 'wog poofter' characters, places them in a tense narratorial space between 'disgust, sympathy and familiarity' (21, 24).

Taylor-Johnson's review of *Merciless Gods* likewise emphasises the characters 'fuelled by anger, who do shocking things' within Tsiolkas' short stories: they confront with 'racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, pornography, drug use and hard-core sex' (1-2). Vaughan places Tsiolkas' novel *Dead Europe* within the genre of trauma writing because the conflation of the 'painful past is first accessed through its haunting and troped echoes in the present', reminiscent of Tsiolkas' own statement about the ever-presence of history (1). Trauma writing returns the discourse to silence, and 'the unsaids and willed forgettings' of assimilation that are the core of Bonegilla within 'Saturn Return' (Perera 187).

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<sup>32</sup> In an interview with Kapetopoulos Tsiolkas acknowledges his indebtedness to European and American culture but feels stifled by Australian culture, 'for all its larrikinisms, its still on England's teat' [www.bookslut.com/features/2009-09-015115.php](http://www.bookslut.com/features/2009-09-015115.php)

Anger and silence are counteracted within the narrative by Tsiolkas' use of a complex confluence of extra diegetic narratology, incorporating multiple references to popular culture from the 1950s to the 20<sup>th</sup> century *fin de siècle*, embodied within borrowings from literary and film genres. Tsiolkas acknowledges his writing 'is dependent on the cultural practices of queer, of experimental writing, of... popular culture and music' (McCann x). 'Saturn Return' is not only a buddy road trip, but also a *bildungsroman*, a coming of age narrative. Kerouac, writing *On the Road*, published in 1957, said its premise was to be 'two guys...in search of something they don't *really* find, and losing themselves on the road, and coming all the way back hopeful of something *else*' (*sic*, Alworth 78). That précis encapsulates the narrative trajectory of 'Saturn Return' where the road trip moves from the unknowable Bonegilla, which the protagonists don't 'really' find, to the denouement, the 'something else', Barney's father's death by deliberate overdose. Tsiolkas in interview acknowledges Kerouac's novel as one of the books that most influenced him (Palfreyman *et al* 67-68)<sup>33</sup>. Tsiolkas' use of the road-trip genre is doubly complex as imbricated within it is also the hidden story of the narrator's Greek father, his immigrant journey and displacement.

Tsiolkas' short story therefore mashes up, or combines and recombines, elements from different genres and popular culture. Tsiolkas embeds songs, films, political protest movements, historical ruptures such as the Vietnam war, and actor's biographies to create a vivid ontological space where 'texts feed off and create other texts' (Nicklas and Lindner 4). Tsiolkas' narrative within 'Saturn Return' does not create an enclosed and orderly story world moving within a coherent chronology.

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<sup>33</sup> Kerouac himself grew up amongst 'les blanc negres', as a marginalised, immigrant French-Canadian Canuck (Trudeau 159).



Instead, by its use of extradiegetic and intradiegetic referents the narratology draws attention to its ‘complexity, incompleteness, and brokenness’ (Hyvarinen, 170). The numerous cultural and temporal markers in ‘Saturn Return’ can be interpreted as devices to short-circuit the narrative out of more traditional narrative structures (Gunkel 2). The very specific cultural markers are an extradiegetic discourse to destabilise characters and push the narrative spatially and temporally beyond the delimited pages of the story world, and beyond the ‘naturalness’ of the text (Zalloua 6).

The referents used by Tsiolkas are predominantly American and use a neo-postcolonial strategy to enlarge the textual space from a discourse about migrant belonging, to the loss of Australian national cultural integrity. The postcolonial history of the migrant and colonial-settler interface within Tsiolkas’ discourse is thus re-colonized anew. Each extradiegetic referent also takes the story-world of the narrative out of the frame, out of the enclosing page and into a vivid discourse about popular culture which is closely integrated with the narrative *within* the frame. There is no orderly teleological movement within the narrative, as it moves backwards and forwards across time and across a complex cultural topology.

An example integral to Tsiolkas’ use of mash-up is the textually significant title of the collection and the short story ‘Saturn Return’. The gods are indeed merciless. Saturn in ancient mythical and contemporary astrological terms is a dangerous force, capable of creating chaos. Saturn is ‘malevolent, unpropitious and unlucky’ (Mercier 18). Present in literature in many manipulative and influential manifestations onwards from the original archetypal Greek myths, Saturn has also been imagined as the ‘cannibal god’ devouring his own son (Scott-Morgan 40). The dark and disturbing painting, ‘Saturn Devouring his Son’ by Goya, from 1820-1824, of

a possibly aroused god eating a partially devoured body suggests the chaos and violence associated with the mythology of Saturn (Scott-Morgan 41). Saturn is the ‘Great Malefic’, an archetype for castrating, child-eating father authority (Greene 8 Sullivan 8). In Christos Tsiolkas’ short story ‘Saturn Return’ such inherent violence at first reading may seem exaggerated but embedded within this complex, layered short story is also the chaos of an atypical *bildungsroman*, within an era of unresolved ethnic belonging, of two unresolved father/son relationship and of the ‘Grim Reaper’<sup>34</sup> era of AIDS. By foregrounding Saturn in the title of the story Tsiolkas therefore intimates a narrative trajectory imbued with melancholy and disrupted subjectivities, *before* the site of Bonegilla is introduced as the ironic lacuna central to the text. The specific reference of the ‘return’ of the troublesome planet is to popular culture and contemporary astrology’s belief that as the planet Saturn reappears in a person’s star charts, approximately 28-29 years after their birth, a reckoning occurs<sup>35</sup>. Barney addresses the narrator on the morning of the latter’s birthday: ‘Saturn return. Big cosmic year for you. Your karma is coming home to roost’ (‘Saturn’ 116).<sup>36</sup>

Tsiolkas’ story begins in the first emphatic sentence with an animated conversation between the narrator and his co-traveller Barney concerning the beat poet William Burroughs, who made an advertisement for Nike Air Max shoes in 1994<sup>37</sup>, ‘I wish William Burroughs had never done the Nike ad.’ (Tsiolkas 108). The detail is

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<sup>34</sup> Saturn’s alter egos are Kronos, time, and Death, whose common medieval image was the hooded skeletal figure carrying a scythe. The image was appropriated for the AID’s awareness television campaign of the late 1980s by Siimon Reynolds. The controversial Grim Reaper advertisement was first screened on 5/4/1987. [www.abc.net.au/news/2007-07-23/the-grim-reaper-from-aids-ads/2510912](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2007-07-23/the-grim-reaper-from-aids-ads/2510912)

<sup>35</sup> By inference Dan, Barney’s father is also caught in Saturn’s return, as a second reckoning takes place later in life, at mature age.

<sup>36</sup> As the narrative road trip takes place in 1994, the birth year implicated is Tsiolkas’ own, 1965.

<sup>37</sup> an article in 1994 describes Burroughs as a ‘decrepit 79-year-old beat writer known for his heroin addiction, manslaughter conviction and cut-up writing’ (Colman n.pag). [www.openculture.com/2013/02/beat\\_writer\\_william\\_sspreadsculture\\_cool\\_on\\_nike\\_sneakers\\_1994.html](http://www.openculture.com/2013/02/beat_writer_william_sspreadsculture_cool_on_nike_sneakers_1994.html)

extradiegetic, off-screen and out-of-frame, as Tsolkias does not give any specific information about who Burroughs may be, but places the reader within a confidential reading of the story-world within the text. The reader is placed in not only a specific time, 1994, but also within a socio-political framework with which the narrator has identified. A counter culture icon, Burroughs had a violent anarchic life whose writing was described as without 'stable identity' embodied within 'paranoia' (Russell 30). Further, each of the portraits, 'faces that stare down at me', hanging on the bedroom walls of the narrator, died young, 'Monroe, Clift, Rainer Werner, Janis, River and Jean Seberg',<sup>38</sup> (Saturn 108-109). Each of these film and music icons lived with self-destructive behaviours, died in tragic circumstances, often of drug overdoses, and often with withheld sexual personas. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to enumerate all of Tsolkias's numerous intertexts<sup>39</sup>, each referent comments on the complex relationships within the story world. One example is Tsolkias' reference to German auteur film maker, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who died of a drug overdose in 1982 (108). Peucker explicitly names him as a 'queer auteur', and refers to the extreme intertextuality of his films which 'straddle ... high and low culture' (2). The extreme intertextuality and references to high and low culture apply directly to the text of 'Saturn Return'. The protagonists within 'Saturn Return' are therefore established by these detailed intertexts as caught within an arc of self-destruction, and contained by an unresolved and possibly malevolent or disturbing past. That disrupted past as the short story makes clear is the lacunae of Bonegilla.

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<sup>38</sup> Marilyn Monroe, Janis Joplin, River Phoenix all died as a result of drug addictive behaviours. See [www.washingtonpost/wp-srv/style/features/joplin.htm](http://www.washingtonpost/wp-srv/style/features/joplin.htm), ( Hendrikson n.pag) and [www.nydailynews.com/news/national/actor-river-phoenix-dies-23-1993-article-1.2762206](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/actor-river-phoenix-dies-23-1993-article-1.2762206) (Evans and Siemaszko n.pag).

<sup>39</sup> Tsolkias refers to 7 T.V shows or films, 10 songs, 10 actors and musicians, 4 historical events, and one writer, Burroughs, within 'Saturn Return'.

Central to the constellation of extra diegetic referents, is the paradoxical void of Bonegilla, the site of the pilgrimage road trip, Barney's obsession:

Barney wants to see the skeleton of the migrant camp. It is an obsession for him. Many nights at dinner at my folks' he would spend the evening asking my father about his life in the camp, his voyage to Australia. ('Saturn' 110).

This positioning of Bonegilla by Tsiolkas within this complex narratology as a decayed remnant, ostensibly in 1994, is significant. Historically, Bonegilla had already been the site for a successful reunion of former internees in 1987, at which the then Federal Immigration Minister Mick Kelty voiced support for a museum on site (Pennay *Albury Wodonga's Bonegilla* 37). Barney within the text also expresses the same wish 'I can't believe they haven't put up some kind of museum here. Think about the fucking history' ('Saturn Return' 110). The majority of the Bonegilla site was demolished by the army between 1978 and 1982. Block 19, the one block extant in 1987, was retained after most of the remnant city-sized site was demolished (Pennay *Albury Wodonga's Bonegilla* 36). The creation of a derelict, 'decrepit' Bonegilla, overgrown by an invading landscape of long yellowing grass, 'dirty, ramshackle, with broken windows,' and smelling of 'urine', is largely an imaginative not mimetic creation within 'Saturn Return' (114, 113). The anachronistic dereliction of Bonegilla that Tsiolkas creates is mirrored by the hip-hop lyrics from 'The Message', by Grandmaster Flash, referred to in 'Saturn Return':

Broken glass everywhere,  
People pissin' on the stairs, you know they just don't care  
I can't take the smell...  
(Jenkins,7)

Another of the many extradiegetic referents throughout the 'Saturn Return' narrative, 'The Message' is one song on the 'final list' chosen by Barney's father Dan, which

constitute his desert island discs, and by extension the soundtrack of his funeral (130). Bonegilla is thus tied to the melancholy trajectories of all the four main protagonists, the two chiasmic father/son pairs.

The unnamed narrator in 'Saturn Return' parallels that of W.G. Sebald in his 1995 novel *The Rings of Saturn*. A reflective consciousness, Sebald's narrator walks around European sites of historical significance and is a flaneur of decay (Horstkotte 29). Sebald's 1995 novel contains small black and white photographs which are unattributed and unnamed. They may or may not refer to the text Sebald narrates. This recalls not only the photographs at the present day memorial site of Bonegilla, but also the strategy Barney and the narrator attempt at Tsoolkias' imagined derelict Bonegilla: record it on film. Sebald and Tsoolkias use film as a ghostly 'thanatographic burden', to imaginatively record images of the dead or the unobtainable past (Shek-Noble 2). Sontag, discussing the nature and significance of photography, says:

a photograph is not only an image....an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask. (*On Photography* 154).

Photography is therefore never a strategy of the real, but an 'emanation' which is unstable, mediated and temporal (Sontag 154). Crownshaw discusses the 'phototextuality' of Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* and emphasizes not only the text's relationship with trauma, but also the resultant 'contagion' to the readers of the text, as the trauma is revived (12-13). Reliant on sight, film, video and photography are thus not only transient and contingent, but also threatening:

...seeing is irrational, inconsistent, and undependable. It is immensely troubled, cousin to blindness and sexuality, and caught up in the threads of the unconscious. (Elkins 11).

Horstkotte raises the question, 'What happens if we treat culture not as a text,

but as a repository of images?’ (26). Tsiolkas within the narrative arc of ‘Saturn Return’ poses a similar question. Is the gaze of Barney’s video camera factual, or erotic? What stable information is recorded? Do the images confirm either love or belonging? Barney’s mode of understanding moves beyond wanting to initially ‘see’ the Bonegilla site, but each narrative step toward the site is problematized: ‘we *can’t see any signs* showing where it might be’ (author’s italics, ‘Saturn Return’ 110). Barney and the narrator move around the derelict camp, as Barney films: ‘Barney films me as I walk up to the battered doors. I peer through the windows secured by wire mesh and *try to see* inside’, the narrator is thus captured enmeshed within the dereliction of his father’s migrant past (author’s italics, ‘Saturn Return’ 114). Barney’s video camera tries to capture what can’t be seen. Keeping his video camera on the narrator, Barney captures his lover, ‘He keeps his camera on me’, ‘He keeps filming’, despite the narrator’s insistence he stop (‘Saturn Return’ 115). The narrator’s final declamation to Barney’s camera is a resolute ‘Wog’s rule!’, which Tsiolkas emphasises is instead swallowed by the ‘deep blue emptiness of the sky’ (‘Saturn Return’ 115).

It is the focalisation of the narrator which specifically ties the site of Bonegilla to the thanatographic burden Shek-Noble discusses, the photograph as ‘a grave for the living dead’ (2):

I Imagined Bonegilla in black and white, imbued with a melancholy mid-century European sadness. The sharp summer colours of the land and the sky do not fit the images in my head. (‘Saturn Return’ 112)

Sounds and images imagined by the narrator conjure ghosts and long-lost voices at Bonegilla, ‘ghosts murmuring in a discordant chorus of many languages’ (‘Saturn Return’ 11). Bonegilla is a ‘skeleton’ replete with ghosts and voices caught in the landscape, ‘I thought I heard the whisper of a voice not speaking English’ (‘Saturn

Return' 109, 114). Redolent of the anonymous photographs which are a standard trope of the present day Bonegilla memorial site, and of the hubbub of recorded voices at the so-called Bonegilla 'Beginning Place', the new entry portal to the memorial site, the narrator's memories speak to the *aphanisis* of the migrant experience: the failure of language and memory to articulate belonging (Gunew, Plunkett, 74, 43). Padmore, Shek-Noble and Vaughan all refer to narratives of haunting and spectrality within Tsolkias' writing. Padmore discusses the ghost images in museum photographs invoked in *Dead Europe*, while Shek-Noble references Freud's concept of the *unheimlich*, or uncanny, to denote 'what is hidden and kept out of sight' within the same text (54, 3). Vaughan discusses the 'haunting of the ghoulish past' via photography also within the same text. Tsolkias uses the same tropes, the unspeakable and non-representable past within 'Saturn Return' as within *Dead Europe*, though these aspects have as yet to be examined within current critical examination of the short story, to the author's knowledge.

Within 'Saturn Return', the placement of the narrator's attempt to comprehend, to see and hear the history of Bonegilla is indicative of a haunted past, an immigrant's indeterminacy, their 'homelessness and wandering' (Mycak 'Australian Multicultural Literature' 95). Tsolkias further places the discourse at an imagological societal level. The video tape taken at Bonegilla is unable to be understood by either Barney's dying father, or the group of friends who assemble back at the small Glebe inner city terrace, the end point of the young men's road trip. Dan, Barney's father, watches the video footage of Bonegilla and addresses a series of staccato questions and statements at Barney: 'What's this?', 'When was that?', 'Never heard of the bloody place', 'I've been all over this country and no one ever told me about this place.' (Saturn 126-127). Bonegilla remains suspended as a silent, voiceless and non-existent historical

phenomenon: 'The video images falter, the screen goes black and disintegrates into static' ('Saturn Return' 127). Other unnamed guests also ask about the Bonegilla images, and the narrator resorts to subterfuge, 'to make it up as I go' ('Saturn Return' 128). The immigrant Greek narrator's testimony, however, is denigrated as he is of a race of stereotyped 'Born bullshitters' ('Saturn Return' 128).

Situated reading is a necessity to encompass 'Saturn Return' as there are multiple reading positions from which to interrogate this text, and specific interpretative communities whose reading positions vary, as Tsiolkas demonstrates within the text. Bonegilla as a historical marker within the text of 'Saturn Return' is constitutively and viscerally significant to a reader such as the author, whose family experience encompasses internship at the migrant camp, and who has visited the site, photographed it, and experienced it *in situ*. Many readers however, are imaginatively parallel to Barney, who attempts to interrogate the site, and despite finding it, walking through it, and filming it, is never within the text of 'Saturn Return' able to explicate its discourse. The elision of the camp experience is evident in reviews of the short story. Bell reviews 'Saturn Return' and describes the 'trauma, cultural memory and loss' associated with the derelict camp but does not explicate it further (201). Sornig's review focusses on the sex tape the young men film. Lever, Ley and McMillan do not mention the Bonegilla camp in their reviews of *Merciless Gods*.

Tsiolkas also demarcates the difficulty in establishing secure reading positions:

Writing for the world is exciting, tempting, but I think it is an imperialist dream. There are people who can't read, people who don't much want to read, there are people who read in different ways to me. (McCann x)

Tsiolkas by using an imagological strategy within 'Saturn Return' foregrounds the epistemological difficulty in reading the site Bonegilla by disallowing it meaning within the



text. Bonegilla within 'Saturn Return' remains a silent centre which creates tension and inferred anxiety between the narrator and his Greek migrant father. To the 'others' within the text, culturally assimilated Australians, ironically situated within an American subtext, the elaborate chiasmus functions to create a division. Not only is gender a cultural divide within Tsolkias' text, but so too is the unvoiced and unimaginable migrant past contained within the 'hateful place' which no-one understands or is able to voice within the story ('Saturn Return' 116). Of all the epithets applied to Bonegilla, the ones Tsolkias uses most often within 'Saturn Return' are 'shithole', 'shit there now', 'Fuck-all really to see', 'fuck-all there' (112-113). The scatological language, the piss, urine and shit create a palpable emotional negativity circling around the old migrant internment camp. Attridge narrows down the ambivalent affect that feelings of repugnance and fascination create within works of fiction, and pinpoints the 'paucity of our vocabulary in dealing with affective experience' ('Once More with Feeling' 330). Bonegilla is beyond words.

The first seminal text to study Bonegilla was Glenda Sluga's *'A Place of No Hope'* which uses as its title a banner which hung at the site, originally in Italian, *'Lascia speranza voi che entrate a Bonegilla'* (Derkenne). The sign referred to the effects of the recession which resulted in no available work placements. Migrants of this era voiced their dismay at arriving post-war in what they described as no better than concentration camps. *Neos Cosmos, The Complete Hellenic Perspective*, a bilingual Melbourne Greek newspaper, features historical articles quoting responses to Bonegilla. Zangalis notes, 'Bonegilla was a concentration camp where fear and daily

denigration of human dignity reigned supreme' ('The Bonegilla Experience' n.pag.)<sup>40</sup> Alekos Panayiotopoulos arrived at Bonegilla in 1955, and as the *Neos Cosmos* article quotes he 'was so badly traumatised that he refuses to this day to visit what's left of Bonegilla', (*Zangalis* n.pag.). Thanassis Koukias, an immigrant from 1954, describes Bonegilla as 'that strange isolated place where the heat, dust, mosquitoes and flies made our lives unbearable' (*Zangalis* n.pag.). Giovanni Sgro calls Bonegilla a tragedy, and has written an eyewitness account of the army's intervention during the first Bonegilla riot in 1952 (*Zangalis* n.pag.). This resulted in the confrontation of the migrants by four tanks and 200 soldiers. *Zangalis* states that at Bonegilla:

... people were humiliated, treated as a herd and discriminated against, as they didn't fit the trusted Anglo-Celtic prototype ... Migrant and refugee reception facilities are euphemisms for detention or concentration camps. (n.pag.)

Tsolkias suggests in 'Saturn Return' that the Bonegilla site contains a haunted historical world that is held apart and inaccessible from the multicultural and cosmopolitan world within which his protagonists move. Bonegilla is of the past but Tsolkias' text infers the lack of a secure contemporary cultural schema within which to organise the migrant camp's destabilising memories. Within 'Saturn Return' Bonegilla is neither able to be seen nor its discourse able to be communicated.

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<sup>40</sup> see [neoskopos.com/news/en/memories-of-bonegilla](http://neoskopos.com/news/en/memories-of-bonegilla), 12 April 2013

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

I have journeyed back in thought – with thought hopelessly tapering off as I went – to remote regions where I groped for some secret outlet only to discover that the prison of time is spherical and without exits. (Vladimir Nabokov *Speak, Memory* 18).

The aims of the Bonegilla case study, to critically examine the relationship between an isolated migrant reception and training camp, geo-spatially and socio-historically, and assimilation era migrant literatures has confirmed the original thesis. First, the assimilation-era origins, between 1947-1961, of migrant literatures have been little examined contextually or critically. Contemporary theory of transnational literatures is focussing on connections on a globalised scale. Australian migration literatures are poorly defined or confusingly defined in past anthologies of Australian literature. In some anthologies, migrant literature as a concept is not extant. Most post-World War Two literatures of migration have been examined under a generalised rubric, or interrogated somewhat uncomfortably within the concepts of multiculturalism. Migrant literatures can be as broad as those texts written by first generation émigrés in community languages, or those texts written in English by Australian-born authors. An update of and a substantive overview of migration literatures is a future project yet to be definitively attempted. No site-specific studies have to the author's knowledge been undertaken at the Bonegilla site.

Second, the case study also confirms that Bonegilla-related texts further interrogate and thematically reveal the post-World War Two political strategies of silencing, by isolation, control mechanisms, and by an emphasis on coherence to hegemonic English monolingualism and British cultural values. These were deliberate political strategies which denied a critical space for languages other than English, or for the public expression of multi-ethnic cultures, until political policy changes led to

multiculturalism. This confirms the case study proposal that the assimilation era exists as both a thematic lacuna, and a critical void within the Australian literary mythopoesis.

The Bonegilla case study's use of a critical methodology, site-specific reading, a transdisciplinary process proposed by Alworth, has productively engaged literature with its socio-historical sources. Beginning at the isolated Bonegilla site and examining the tropes, narratives and literatures enacted on site, interrogates how the site either confirms or refutes the literatures of migration which refer back to the original migrant camp. The site reading model suggested by Alworth is a particularly useful transdisciplinary methodology. The primary research it entailed reveals a dynamic snapshot in time of both historical, social and literary processes at play, described by Alworth as actants (*Site Reading* 3). The extensive primary documents, photographs and texts collected in February 2016 have been not only an invaluable resource for this case study, but informative of future research directions. A close examination and documentation of the Bonegilla site confirms the multiple and contested agencies involved in its makeup, each of which presents assimilation experiences from diverging points of view. Multiple agencies, from specific ethnic communities, such as the Dutch, to Albury Wodonga Council, to State and National heritage bodies, and local volunteer steering committees, are all noted to have enacted differing narratives on the Bonegilla site. Indigeneity is only marginally noted, and a future line of research could be to investigate immigrant and Indigenous cultural interactions: Pugliese, while critiquing the overwriting of Indigeneity on the Bonegilla site, is unaware of any government literatures which may have been disseminated to immigrants on site about Indigenous culture. Archival research and community language library contacts so far reveal at least one source of Lithuanian poetry which

does however engage with Indigenous culture, as yet critically unexamined.

The 'Beginning Place' sound-wall 'babel' of voices speaks uncomfortably to the discursive discourses still being played out on the Bonegilla site. Further, the tropes and imagery accessed and documented on site in February 2016 reveal the conjectured conflict between continuing representation from an Anglo-Saxon viewpoint, and the narratives of migrancy these strategies purport to celebrate. The 'Beginning Place', corrugated iron figures, cascading gum leaves and Judeo-Christian references to a Biblical 'Arc' (*sic*) are uncomfortable reminders of the narrative contestation on site, which Persian has unequivocally named a failure. Contrasting attitudes are also present in the micro-memoirs present in the 'Quiet Room', some of which now engage with very contemporary aspects of asylum seeker policy in the twenty-first century, and are endemic of the continuing and fluid role Bonegilla plays, as a site from which to 'write back' about aspects of Australian migrant narratives. Many memoirs, however, note those aspects of the Bonegilla camp which the celebratory model of multicultural integration tries to overwrite, including the containment, the isolation, the deep emotional distress people felt at being forcibly kept at Bonegilla. The overwriting of more dystopian narratives of migrancy are particularly evident in the stripping from the present day Bonegilla site all physical aspects of containment such as boom gates, perimeter fencing, day-long loud-speaker announcements and representations of the armed guards which were on site at all times in the assimilation era. These aspects are however another significant void, which represent the overwriting or eliding of original narratives of authentic testimony.

Close reading of two transnational texts emerging from the site, undertaken in the Bonegilla case study, Les Murray's poem 'Immigrant Voyage' and Christos Tsiolkas' short story, 'Saturn Return', are shown to reveal the void or lacunae which

assimilation era migrant experiences speak to. The assimilation era can itself be considered the theoretical void or lacunae which these texts directly address. There was no acknowledged critical space called ‘migrant literature’ from which to write during the era of assimilation. At the time of Bonegilla’s establishment in 1947, Australian literature and its critical interrogation was committed to Australian nationalism (McKernan *A Question of Commitment* 5). Both ‘Immigrant Voyage’ and ‘Saturn Return’ imaginatively engage with the silencing of language, and the inability to metaphysically confront or voice diasporic migrant experiences. Both Murray and Tsiolkas also reference assimilation era practices at Bonegilla such as containment, through references to barbed wire and armed guards. Both texts create an imagological confrontation, where the putative ‘other’ confronts the pre-existent settler culture, and neither is able to apprehend the other’s cultural signification. Critical responses examined in relation to both texts confirm posited, situated reader responses: transnational critical responses have critiqued different issues to those within the Australian literary imaginary. Differences between critical responses between local and European critical responses are noted in relation to both texts. For example, few Australian reviewers or critics to date, to the author’s knowledge, have noted in more than passing reference the significance of the Bonegilla camp within Tsiolkas’ short story ‘Saturn Return’. Bonegilla, as a site and as a source of literature and critical study, therefore sits in a fluid, liminal and complex teleological space placed between competing Australian senses of nationhood, between Anglo-Saxon and migrant literatures, the advent of multiculturalism, the eventual politicised discrediting of multiculturalism and the deficits of postcolonial critical discourse. As this case study reveals, the era of assimilation itself has been little studied and even less acknowledged.

A deficit of the present case study model has been the scope of the material available, even for an investigation which is delimited to one site: the availability of self-publishing, public digital archives, and ethnic community language libraries means only a portion of available Bonegilla materials have as yet been accessed and studied. Contemporary transnational literary strategies acknowledge mining archives of literature in languages in other than English, as a new frontier of literary critical investigation, beyond the scope of the present case study. However, archival study did reveal aspects of assimilation migrant experiences which further confirm the study's conjecture that the era is one of overt if not covert silence, and an as yet under-investigated lacuna. The little-reported Bonegilla death notices speak to critically under-examined issues such as representations of Post World War Two trauma and mental illness in Australian literature. Sestokas uses the same terminology as this case study, describing as a 'void', Australia's post-war immigration history (*Welcome to Little Europe* 258). Sestokas charges a lack of interest in this era for neglecting significant issues such as immigrant mental health and suicide. Seemingly a self-evident need in dealing with a mass migration of D.P.s exiting concentration camps and displaced person's camps, little attention seems to have been paid to mental health issues, and the evident stresses in placing émigrés in isolated and segregated circumstances (Sestokas 253). Raimond Gaita's novel *Romulus, my Father* has been largely read as a paean to his father, but it also contains an under-examined study of his mother's mental illness. As Damousi acknowledges, little attention has been paid to emotion and trauma in post World War Two Australian literature ('On the Crisis of Representation' 8).

The transdisciplinary methodology of site-reading adds positively to the literary study of the co-evolution of place and literature within Australia. The isolated

Bonegilla site is unique in the Australian socio-historical context, being the only extant migrant reception centre and training camp to exist, even in its vestigial state, and as such an ideal place to interrogate. However, the strategy has extensive implications for wider site investigation. Alworth uses supermarkets, asylums, and ruins, among other sites, to collaboratively read canonical Twentieth Century American novels. Australian cultural mapping has been a significant recent development, particularly in relation to Indigenous literature, and in ficto-critical readings such as that undertaken by Muecke at Gulaga, or Mt. Dromedary (*Gulaga Story* 83-91). Australian precedents therefore exist which combine innovative critical engagement with landscape and literature. The site-reading methodology has potential to investigate beyond the strategies of cultural mapping, and engage with the volatile interactive socio-cultural aspects Alworth calls actants.

Literatures of migration are in the author's estimation, as a result of the case study investigations, a discursive and complex site of literary investigation. By focussing on one site, Bonegilla, and a select sample of texts, the thesis proposal has led to further productive and critically significant areas of research. As the author was made aware, and as Sestokas has stated, psychiatric issues relating to the mass migration to Australia after World War Two are under-investigated. Combining a socio-historical study of this marginalised area of study, with the liminal margin of migrant writing at this time, a gendered study of alterity in literature has the potential to reveal 'gaps, elisions, repressions' (Alworth *Site Reading* 3). Women at the Bonegilla site are largely represented in archival black and white photographs, mostly anonymously. These archival strategies conform with Sebald's use of unattributed images in examining European melancholic subjects, and with Sontag's expression of photographs as the 'pathos of looking at past time' (71). Women did occupy a liminal



space in both migration history and within literary critique. Women were mostly absent in the first cohorts of D.P.s arriving in Australia, as it was young unattached men who were first selected as choice types. Segregation by gender was the bureaucratic rule, as it still was when the author's family arrived at Bonegilla in 1959. Women were eventually chosen by Immigration officials and objectified, as blonde, beautiful and marriageable (Persian *Chifley Liked Them Blonde*). The *Adelaide News* in an article in 1951, '70 Australians Want to Marry Her' describes 'blue-eyed honey blonde' émigré Eva Hajek by her detailed body measurements, including her bust, her hip circumference and her weight. The *News* notes her numerous, daily marriage proposals. In literature drawn from the assimilation era, women are represented, in parallel, as desirable objects, indifferent angry mothers, or sexually dangerous. As early as Judah Waten's 1952 novel *Alien Son*, the figure of the immigrant mother is problematised, and represented as emotionally remote and unstable. Raimond Gaita's mother in *Romulus, my Father*, is represented as both an absent and neglectful mother, and a sexually dangerous wife. Lily Brett's poetry engages with her immigrant mother with inchoate anger. Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun* speaks to the depression and melancholia imbricated within the loss of the maternal subject. Further, Kristeva's characterisation of 'asymbolia', the loss of language, is resultant from the loss of the mother as a symbolic object (Doane, Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva* 55). The intersection of a gender-specific literary critique of migration literature, with a Kristevan lens, would allow for a productive interrogation of the texts mentioned.

Bonegilla still remains isolated, and its significance and role, both in the past and in the present, contested. The lacunae explored within this study point to the need for further primary and literary research of Australia's problematic assimilation era immigration history, its influence and expression within literature.



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## Appendix: Ethics Committee Approval



**MACQUARIE**  
University

DANJA DERKENNE <danja.derkenne@students.mq.edu.au>

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### Final Approval - Issues Addressed - Ref. no. 5201600518

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Faculty of Arts Research Office <artsro@mq.edu.au>

Tue, Aug 2, 2016 at 11:07 AM

To: Dr Toby Davidson <toby.davidson@mq.edu.au>

Cc: Faculty of Arts Research Office <artsro@mq.edu.au>, Mrs Danja Irene Derkenne <danja.derkenne@students.mq.edu.au>

Ethics Application Ref: (5201600518) - Final Approval

Dear Dr Davidson,

Re: 'Bonegilla Case study'

Thank you for your recent correspondence. The Committee appreciates and accepts your explanation of the preference not to record the discussion. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval of the above application has been granted, effective 2/08/2016. This email constitutes ethical approval only.

If you intend to conduct research out of Australia you may require extra insurance and/or local ethics approval. Please contact Maggie Feng, Tax and Insurance Officer from OFS Business Services, on x1683 to advise further.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

[http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/\\_files\\_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf).

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Toby Davidson  
Mrs Danja Irene Derkenne