A White Writer's Ethical Uncertainties: Writing African Australians, Self and Whiteness

A novella, *Fragile Skins,* with accompanying exegesis

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

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by

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Contents

Novella

Abstract

This creative writing thesis reflects the journey of a white Australian writer grappling with the ethical uncertainties of writing about African Australians and of placing the (white) self into the racial problem. The exegesis moves its way progressively from asking questions about the 'other' to interrogating the 'self' as this white writer tries to establish a writing position which paves the way towards writing an ethically nuanced and racially balanced novella concerning the intercultural relations between white Australian and black African Australian characters.

Drawing on the highly historicised and racialised context of 'white' Australia, Chapter One investigates the lack of presence of African Australians in Australian literature and teases out the tension between this white writer's original simplistic and idealistic desire to 'make visible' the African Australian community through her writing and the disturbing fact that a white writer's cross-cultural work would be received more readily than an African Australian writer's work.

The focus then shifts slightly from the other to the self in Chapter Two to ask whether white Australian writers have the right, and the competence, to write African Australian fictional characters. Chapter Two examines the way in which whites have represented Africans in the past in colonial literature and in the Australian media today, and draws upon current debates in Australia concerning white writing other to determine whether white Australian writers even should, ethically speaking, write about African Australians.

Chapter Three then turns the gaze from the other to the self to scrutinize the influence whiteness has on this white writer's practice. This chapter analyses the way this writer had been unthinkingly narrativising (and maintaining the invisibility of) whiteness in the novella, and how she came to 'see' and re-narrativise it through the dialogical process of writing between the exegesis and the novella. Chapter Three ends by questioning whether white writers can, by re-narrativising their whiteness, actually fracture whiteness, or will they only ever become perpetually white through the act of writing.

The novella, *Fragile Skins*, then follows, implicitly reflecting the ethical uncertainties explored in this exegesis as it teases out racial issues and intercultural relations at a visceral and affective level.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled "Fragile Skins, a novella with an accompanying exegesis: A White Writer's Ethical Uncertainties: Writing African Australians, Self and Whiteness" has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: HE31JUL2009-D00045 on 27 August 2009

Filipa Bellette (41400933)

Signed _____ Date: _____

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Writing Other, Writing Self

> I believe that…someone who is a writer is not simply doing his work in his books…but that his major work is, in the end, himself in the process of writing his books. The private life of an individual…and his work are interrelated…because the work includes the whole life as well as the text (Foucault, 1983 cited in Miller, 1993, p.19).

This exegesis is ethically driven, reflecting the premise that "ethics begins when one's certainty is disabled" (Slater, 2005, p.148). It arises from my anxieties and uncertainties, as a white writer, over my representations of African Australian fictional characters in *Fragile Skins*, the novella written for the creative part of this PhD project, and also from my sense of self which has shifted through the writing process, a shift which has pressured me to also ruminate on how I should be representing my self and my whiteness. During this cross-cultural/racial project, I was, on numerous occasions, "pre-reflectively addressed by the other person in a way that calls me into question and obliges me to be responsible" (Critchley, 1999, p.48). It was through the writing of the novella and of this exegesis, as well as through my embodied intercultural encounters with Africans in Kenya and in Australia, that I was pressed to consider the moral responsibilities of writing both a cross-cultural/racial novella and exegesis.

It is these considerations that have come to form the research questions examined in this exegesis – and, to an extent, implicitly explored in the novella. The overarching question which drives this project is: as a white Australian writer, how can I establish a writing position whereby I can ethically write a creative piece of fiction exploring the intercultural/racial relations between white Australian and black African characters? What must I consider – and do – in order to approach my novella with a dual awareness of the African other *and* of the self and of whiteness? I explore these questions, not by looking at the artistic modes and forms in which I can ethically convey the intercultural relations between my white and black characters (hopefully the novella speaks for itself in this regard), but rather by examining the "circumstantial reality of its creation" (Said, 1983,

p.35); that is, the ethico-political issues that white writers must consider when writing about the other in 'white' Australia's historically racialised society.

Africans in Australia

As this thesis includes, within its exploration of race and white representations, the constituency of the African Australian community, I would like to begin by giving an overview of this migrant group who have largely gone unnoticed in Australian public (and, until recently, within the last decade, academic) discourse. I do so knowing that by focusing in this section on my 'other' I may run the risk of appearing to 'fetishise' and make an 'object' of the African Australian subject; but I hope that as this introduction – and this thesis – unfolds, that this assumption becomes if not redundant, then at least complicated.

Before moving onto an overview of the African Australian community, I'd like to make a note of how I use the term 'other' throughout this exegesis as the term is not only theoretically entwined with this racial project but is also crucial in the subversion of the black other and the white self which this project attempts to do. Adapted from Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory of the way in which the 'Self' is constructed against the self's 'O/others,' postcolonial theory uses the term 'O/other' to refer to the way in which the identities of the colonised other – with a lowercase 'o' – and the imperial Other – with a capital 'O' – are constructed in the gaze of the Other (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p.p.169-70). Through imperial discourse, the colonised other becomes "identified by their difference from the centre" and in so doing is constructed as a "'child' of empire and a primitive and degraded subject of imperial discourse" (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p.171). During this process of 'othering,' the imperial Other, set against the subjugated colonial other, dialogically becomes a dominant and superior force (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p.171). It is important to understand how the use of the term 'O/other' is used in a racial and postcolonial context (as demonstrated above), and I draw further on this throughout the exegesis. However, through my use of the term 'other,' I do not wish to perpetuate the degrading image of a primitive, child-like African; rather I hope to show through the course of this thesis that it is through my (the white self's) relationality with my racial and cultural African other that my own whiteness becomes subverted, thus also subverting imperial narratives of the African other.

Interviews with African Participants

As a white Australian writer incorporating in my creative work representations of African Australians, a cultural and racial group different to my own, I knew from the outset that it was imperative, if I were to try to represent them with a degree of accuracy, that I do my research on this constituency. The research conducted throughout my PhD and before my candidature has varied between scholarly forms of analytical research and more experiential and lived experiences, some of which will become evident (both implicitly and explicitly) throughout this exegesis. One form of research I would like to highlight now is the formal face-to-face interviews conducted with African participants during my PhD candidature, for which ethics approval[1] was given from the university Ethics Committee (the importance of this will be discussed further on). Segments of the data collected during these interviews are quoted throughout this exegesis, including here in the introduction. As well as significantly informing and providing evidence for parts of the discussion in this exegesis, the interviews have provided rich material concerning African culture and intercultural experience in Australian society for the accompanying novella and have also worked to enhance the development of my fictional African characters.

Between September 2009 and December 2010 I interviewed fourteen ethnic Africans residing in Sydney, Newcastle and Tasmania, all of whom are diverse in age, gender, religion and educational and vocational status. The countries of origin which the interviewees originally came from include Kenya, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ethiopia and Cameroon; the reasons for coming to Australia vary from seeking refuge from war and political persecution, to gaining an international education. As my novella includes as one of its primary characters a Kenyan girl who is relocated to Tasmania, recruitment of participants targeted Africans who were either Kenyan living in Tasmania or in my residing state, New South Wales, or ethnic Africans living in Tasmania. The reason for the broad 'ethnic African' demographic is that it was very difficult to find Kenyans living in Tasmania.

The interviews, lasting for approximately one hour, were "open-ended, ethnographic (in-depth) interviews" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p.659), which focused on the participants' African culture and on their experiences as Africans in Australia.[2] Although the participants' backgrounds are diverse in many ways, commonalities arose for both questions focusing on

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[1] For a copy of the Ethics Approval Letter, see Appendix I.

[2] For a list of questions asked during the interviews, see Appendix II.

the interviewees' culture and experiences in Australia, which have been useful when applying data to conversations in this exegesis, and to the development of my African characters. For example, while each participant comes from a different tribe in Africa with its own unique customs and traditions, and from different regions and religions, all participants spoke of the importance of collectivistic communities and families in their specific culture, and also the challenges of keeping alive collectivism in Australia, a society which endorses an individualistic way of living. Needless to say, the differing backgrounds and individual personalities of each participant also produced diverse and sometimes contradictory responses which have also been taken into account when writing this exegesis and the novella. As Ruth Frankenberg highlights, "what makes interview narrative readable, analyzable, open to questioning and critique...is that they contradict themselves and each other. They are self-reflexive, and they confirm as well as contradict other accounts of the social world outside of the project" (1993, p.42).

It should be emphasised that as a white researcher interviewing ethnic Africans, the conversations during the interviews may have been constrained by the power imbalances that come from researcher/subject and white/black hierarchies (Frankenberg, 1993, p.29). For example, African interviewees' responses may have been selective and/or guarded not only because, in most cases, I was a stranger in a research position, but also because I was culturally and racially different. If the same questions were asked by an African researcher to the same cohort of participants I would not be surprised if different and more open responses were offered. Similarly, my own probing questions and responses were at times constrained when it came to talking about uncomfortable issues (for both myself and the participants), such as participants' experiences of racism for which my own white culture is the instigator and in which I am therefore implicated.

Due to my cultural difference, it is possible that I might have also at times misinterpreted interview material. Lana Rings highlights that "communicating successfully is not an easy task, even when people share the same native language. When human beings from different cultures and languages of origin interact, they run an even greater risk of misinterpreting one another's meanings" (2006, p.43). Rings suggests that some of the key problems arise not from lack of grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation (although these also play a part) but from not knowing or understanding the other's cultural values, cultural knowledge and/or culturally-specific ways of interacting, including non-verbal communication (2006, pp.43-44).

As a cultural outsider, these culturally-specific and often subtle ways of communicating may have been missed by me during the interviews and during my interpretation and analysis of the data. As a white subject, I can't help feel somewhat uncomfortable by the fact that I may have distorted interviewees' meanings by placing my own white cultural interpretations on the data; perhaps this is largely due to the disturbing resonance with the way whites have historically captured the non-white subject within white frameworks for their own purposes (Ashcroft et al., 2006c, p.93). These cultural/racial constraints and the ethical uncertainties which arose during the actual interviews and interpretation and analysis of the data will be further explored throughout this exegesis.

Fortunately (for the underlying ethics of this project) I was required by the university Ethics Committee to complete an ethics application before I was given approval to conduct interviews with Africans in Australia. While it was a lengthy and meticulous process, it helped me to think about, among other things, how best to ethically approach conducting and interpreting the interviews in a way that would decrease the risk of coming across as the 'powerful white researcher' and of misinterpreting participants' responses. During the interviews I tried my best to establish rapport with participants by disclosing in lay terms what my research was about and how I would be using their interview material[3] and also by trying to "see the situation from their viewpoint, rather than superimpose [my] world of academia and preconceptions upon them" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p.655), including, most importantly, my preconceptions of whiteness. As part of one of the university ethical requirements, I also gave each participant a copy of their transcribed interview and asked them to check that I had recorded their comments correctly and gave them the opportunity to change or add to their responses. To ensure I hadn't misinterpreted interviewees' comments quoted in this thesis I also made the effort to check with participants that I had used their responses in the right context, and once again gave them the opportunity to edit or even withdraw their responses from the final version of this thesis.

As participants' right to privacy is of the utmost importance in research involving human beings, my interviewees were given the choice to either be identified or to remain anonymous in the acknowledgements and referencing in this thesis. As such, quotes used in

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[3] For a copy of the Information and Consent Form which details the nature of the research and what participants should expect during and after the interviews, see Appendix III. The Information and Consent Form was given to each participant prior to the interview and was further explained and clarified before the interview began.

this exegesis by interviewees who wish to be identified have been referenced with the participant's last name, while quotes by those who want to remain anonymous have been referenced as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, etc. Out of the fourteen participants, only five wished to remain anonymous (two of these participants chose anonymity strictly for security reasons as they were wary that family back in Africa might be persecuted for the information disclosed, or that their interview material might hinder the relocation process of family members to Australia). There was a strong feeling among many of the participants, however, not only for their voices to be heard, but also for asserting their identity and taking claim over their experiences relayed in this exegesis and in the novella. This is not surprising, considering the African Australian community has been, for a long time, and continues to be, an obscure constituency within mainstream Australian public discourse for which whiteness is at the centre. I would now like to explore this, drawing upon scholarly and public documents, as well as comments made by African interviewees for this research.

African Immigration and Contemporary Issues for African Australians

There has been a long history of migration between Africa and Australia; in the past two decades, however, due to the growth of the humanitarian intake from 1990, this emigrational pattern has accelerated and the presence of African arrivals in Australian towns and cities has now become more discernable (Jakubowicz, 2010, p.6). The 2006 Census showed that a total of 248,699 people born in Africa were living in Australia, representing 5.6% of Australia's overseas born population and 1% of Australia's total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).[4] Since then, between 2006 and 2010, 50,000 more migrants born in Africa have arrived in Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010, p.3). According to the 2006 census, around 100,000 people (41%) of the total African population in Australia were born in South Africa, while other large communities include Zimbabwe (8.1%), Sudan (7.7%), Mauritius (4%), Kenya (4%) and Ethiopia (2.3%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). As this thesis focuses on black Africans, it is important to note that nearly half (41.9%) of the African-born persons in Australia are English-speaking migrants from South Africa of European-descent, as determined by Graeme Hugo from the

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[4] While the 2006 Census provided statistical information for African-born people living in Australia, I was unable to find statistical data for second-generation African Australians. This information would have conveyed a more accurate picture of the African Australian community in Australia. With the growth of this constituency, however, this information may be available in the 2011 Census, or in future censuses.

2006 Census (Hugo, 2009, pp.15-16, 21-22). This further conveys that the black African Australian community is a very small minority group in Australia today.

It is also important to recognise the diversity of the African people living in Australia; too often "Africa" is thought of as a monolithic unity in public discourse (Ashcroft et al., 2006b, p.426) and fails to take into account differences not only in nationality but also in ethnicity and tribalism, and can often lead to discrimination against African people based on homogenous negative stereotypes. A comment from one of the interviewees for this research is evidence of this when she spoke of the way Africans are discriminated against in Tasmania's workforce because of employers' negative preconceptions of a homogenous 'African': "We are capable to do a lot of things. But if they not try us they can't know. Not just see because of the other African people they have seen...They think all the Africans are the same – no! We are not the same. We are black but we are not the same" (Braslane, 2010).

Africans in Australia come from a continent "sporadically cluttered with different nations, colours, races, and cultures that have evolved over millions of years" (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.viii). Populations from different regions and ethnicities have less in common with each other than do Europeans, being differentiated by physiognomy, language, history, religion and cultural practices. They have also come for different reasons, including economic, educational and social reasons, as well as escaping war, famine, revolution, political persecution and authoritarian regimes in their own countries, hoping to find peace, freedom and political stability and democracy in Australia (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.viii).

Although much of my discussion about Africans in this exegesis encompasses the general African Australian population, in that I am not focussing on one particular ethnic group but rather looking at issues that affect the general African Australian community, I am aware of the diversities within this group, and also that the broad continent-wide label 'African Australians' used throughout this exegesis does not adequately represent the multiple migrant and refugee communities collapsed within this label (Phillips, 2010a). I have made a conscious effort, however, to identify specific people (i.e. interviewees, African Australian writers, etc) using their country of origin when necessary, as well as any other defining factors which might create diversities in their experiences in Australia such as their educational status or residing state. I have also strived to identify specific ethnic groups

when specificity is required, such as when I discuss the intensive media coverage of a few small violent events involving Sudanese youth in Chapter One and Chapter Two.

The term 'African Australian' has also been used with some caution throughout this thesis. For one thing, not all Africans in Australia are Australian citizens, nor do they plan to stay in Australia permanently. This is the case for two of the interviewees for this research who are international students from Kenya; in such cases, I describe these people using their nationality. Ien Ang also suggests that hyphenated identities (i.e. Chinese-Australian, African-Australian, etc) are developed over time and are attached to people who have been living in Australia for a number of decades or who are second and third generation migrants (1993, p.6). As a large percentage of Africans in Australia (due to the increase in humanitarian intake since the 1990s and 2000s) have been living in Australia under ten years, would it be accurate in labelling this fairly new migrant group, then, as 'African-Australians'? Perhaps not, but on the flip side, taking away the label 'Australian' could be seen as denying migrants (including newly arrived migrants) their right to be in Australia. After spending time talking with interviewees and other African people, I noticed a strong and often zealous sense of pride and assertion amongst those who are Australian citizens that Australia is their home. Upon asking one of the interviewees whether it is Liberia or Tasmania which feels like home, she answered with conviction: "Tasmania's my home!...Yes. I'm here, I'm here. I would be here. I can't move from here. Except death take me from here...I'm telling you, I'm here, it's my country" (Braslane, 2010).

On the other hand, the interviewees were also proud of their African ethnicity and what they could contribute, as Africans, to Australian society. In the context of multicultural Australia, hyphenating one's ethnic identification to an Australian one (such as African-Australian) could be seen as signifying the inclusion and equality of all Australian identities (Nicoll, 1999, p.125). In this sense, using the term 'African-Australian' could be seen as both politically correct and empowering for the African subject in Australia. However, Fiona Nicoll also argues that "in spite of this appearance of hyphenation, Australian multiculturalism tends to reinforce a binary distinction between Anglo-Celtic and otherwise hyphenated Australians" (1999, p.125). Ang also highlights that this identification of "'where you're from,'" despite its ability to be empowering, "is also often a sign of, and surrender to, a condition of actual marginalization in the place 'where you're at'" (1993, p.12).

Considering these arguments, it appears that none of the variant terms of describing people of African descent in Australia is sufficient. To use the term 'Africans in Australia' ignores African migrants' rights to *be Australians.* Alternatively, using the hyphenated identity 'African-Australian' denigrates and marginalises people of African descent into a subclass of Australian identity, ensuring that they will never quite be 'Australian.' Although it is not ideal, I lean towards using the term 'African Australian' (interchangeably with other more specific descriptors when specificity is required) as it acknowledges African migrants' identity as Australians, but also tries to avoid reducing them, by taking away the hyphenation, to subclass Australians. It is with this in mind, that I continue this dissertation using the term with caution.

Contrary to popular beliefs that African presence in Australia is a relatively new phenomenon (a belief that arises from the fact that African Australian history is largely ignored by mainstream historians), African migration to Australia actually dates back to the First Fleet – it is as old as the Anglo-Celtic Australian population itself. In *Founders of Australia,* Mollie Gillen identifies eleven black convict men (including Australia's first bushranger, Black Caesar) as being on the First Fleet which landed in Botany Bay in 1788 (1989, p.424). Cassandra Pybus also provides a detailed account of Australia's first black settlers (most of whom were former slaves or escapees from the USA, or sent as convicts by the British) in *Black Founders* (2006)*,* highlighting the way the settlement of Australia was a multi-racial process from the start. Other early black settlers included East African sailors who manned the windjammers, and later worked below decks on the steamers that ploughed the Africa to Asia to Australia routes (Ghosh & Goodall, 2009).

Black Australian novelist and long-time advocate of Aboriginal rights Mudrooroo (Colin Johnson) draws upon the multi-racial history of Australian settlement in his novel *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991) which traces early intercultural contact between Indigenous, white colonialist and African convict characters shortly after the time of white invasion. Five years after the novel was published, the legitimacy of Mudrooroo's claim to Aboriginality was questioned when no trace of Aboriginal ancestry was found in Mudrooroo's family; genealogical findings instead found Irish and African American ancestry (Laurie, 1996a, 1996b). While Mudrooroo remained silent on this matter, Maureen Clark suggests that *Ghost Dreaming*'s accompanying vampire novels – *The Undying* (1998), *Underground* (1999) and *The Promised Land* (2000) – reflect the author's personal dilemma on his own cultural

hybridity; this is most clearly manifested in the seafaring migratory African character, Wadawaka who has the "ability to transcend boundaries – geographical or racial – without declaring allegiance to any" (Clark, 2004, p.20). Mudrooroo's novels, and his own questionable ancestry, only further highlights and deconstructs the illusion of a white founded Australia.

While African people did not arrive in great numbers before the twentieth century, they were sufficient enough to add to an underlying fear of non-whites (Jakubowicz, 2010, p.4). This perceived fear drove the political agenda for Federation and the White Australia Policy which refused any further entry to non-whites into Australia and also excluded from the colony any non-whites who remained, such as Aboriginals, Chinese and presumably Africans (Curthoys, 2003). In regards to the *Commonwealth Migration Restriction Act* of 1901, Freeman and Jupp argue that "racial appearance was the important criterion rather than country of origin or culture, and exceptions were made for Asians of 'predominately European heritage and appearance'" (1992, p.5). It is clear to see that bigotry was enshrined in Australia's constitution and laws, devising the nation as a white man's country. "Given the 'whiteness' of migration policy during this period, black African migration and permanent settlement in Australia was completely out of the question" (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.5).

After the conclusion of World War II, non-British (and later non-European) immigration was encouraged as the key to post-war recovery and development. Assimilation was, however, Australian Government policy in the decades following World War II, reflecting Anglo-Celtic-Australian expectations that migrants should give up their own heritage and adopt the white majoritarian culture. According to Anna Haebich, "the discourse of assimilation was carefully constructed around imagined narratives and outcomes designed to sell the vision of White Australia" (2008, p.120). It wasn't until the 1960s and 1970s that a new era in Australia's history took place. In 1967 the Indigenous population was recognised in the constitution following a referendum and was now considered part of the Australian population with a right to vote. Assimilation policy had also become both unrealistic and undesirable; the increasingly high rate of immigrants returning to Europe was evidence of this (Jakubowicz, 2008). In the early 1970s under the Whitlam government a 'non-white' migrant intake was also to begin, which gradually opened immigration opportunities for black Africans and also instigated "subsequent allocation of humanitarian places to internally displaced and refugee applicants in Africa" (Jakubowicz, 2010, p.10). Alongside non-white migration strategies, a

new migrant settlement policy of multiculturalism was also instigated. Australian Ethnic Affairs Council's 1977 *Australia as a Multicultural Society* report called for

> a society in which people of non-Anglo-Australian origin are given the opportunity, as individuals or groups, to choose to preserve and develop their culture, their languages, traditions and arts...while at the same time they enjoy effective and respected places within one Australian society, with equal access to the rights and opportunities that society provides and accepting responsibilities towards it (p.14).

From 1978 to 1981, following the *Galbally Report* into post-arrival programs and services for migrants, the Fraser Government expended close to $50 million implementing multicultural enterprises such as aiding settlement, English tuition, establishment of multicultural resource centres and the ethnic television task force, Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) (Collins, 1992, pp.117-18). Collins highlights, however, that after a decade of funding directed to multiculturalism, migrant disadvantage in terms of standard of living was not overcome; reasons for this were that "multicultural policy has tended to concentrate on the 'cultural' aspects of life in Australia" rather than concentrating "greater resources on migrant disadvantage in the labour market and in the other areas such as education" (Collins, 1992, p.123). Multicultural theorist Wenche Ommundsen argues that the lack of interest in providing assistance in vital areas, such as the labour market and education, highlights the way multiculturalism merely acts as "a facade for a politics of assimilation" (2000, p.9). Support for migrants only became bleaker in the mid-1990s, when the multicultural momentum in public discourse began to wane following the backlash against multiculturalism. The policy was attacked by anti-multicultural rhetoric, most memorably employed by Pauline Hanson whose "conservative social and cultural agenda" was later "taken up by the Howard government" (Ommundsen, 2007, p.80). According to Ommundsen, under the Howard government, departments and government officials were encouraged to avoid the term multiculturalism whenever possible and funding for multicultural programs was significantly cut (2000, p.5). In the early twenty-first century, Jakubowicz argues that "integration returned to policy rhetoric...[as] conservative politicians became increasingly intolerant of what they saw as the tribalisation of society consequential on the policies of multiculturalism" (Jakubowicz, 2008).

With the increased offshore humanitarian intake from Africa in the 1990s and early to mid-2000s, this new policy rhetoric left ethnic African migrants – in particular, African refugees – in a bleak situation. While it has been said that the increase of offshore humanitarian intake of African refugees post 9/11 was seen to 'balance out' the decline of unauthorised onshore arrivals (due to the Pacific Solution policy of 2001-2007 which was implemented following the terrorist attacks, deterring unauthorised asylum seekers entry into Australia), when Africans arrived in Australia there were insufficient resources and services to effectively assist them in settlement (Jakubowicz, 2010, pp.19-20). This was voiced numerous times during the interviews for this research, as can be seen here:

> We are happy John Howard brought us here because that was his government. He encouraged us to come here. So we really happy, we appreciate, we tell him thank you for that. But the other thing now we have come, we are really happy, but we are not working, we are not doing nothing. That is really hard. So if you know that you help someone, just help the person for everything. Don't just leave them. Just help the person to help themself, you know? (Braslane, 2010).

According to Udo-Ekpo, in 1999 the African community "constitute[d] one of the most disadvantaged groups in Australian society in terms of income, health, education, unemployment, poverty, and racial discrimination" (p.xv). A more recent investigation highlights that African Australians continue to experience "widespread discrimination – both direct and indirect" in relation to the above areas (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010, p.8). While this is not surprising for the group of refugees who come semi-skilled, with little English and meagre material wealth (especially in light of the insufficient services set up for migrants), many of those African refugees and migrants who arrive with university degrees and established professions still face discrimination in employment, housing and social life, leaving them to feel socially excluded – and in many cases, financially unstable. Ashcroft et al. argue that diasporic communities, such as African Australians, tend to be "cultural minorities, in social power if not always in number" and as such are often subjugated by the "'majoritarian' rule" (2006b, p.426). Such is the case in particular for ethnic Africans who are racially visible as 'other' and therefore cannot easily blend in with majoritarian white Australia (Wakholi, 2008, p.5; Ang, 1993, p.7). Frantz Fanon speaks of this when he compares racism against himself as a visible Negro to the discrimination a Jew might experience because of his religious beliefs and cultural traditions:

In my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my appearance...I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed* (1967, p.116).

This very visibility marks/fixes the African subject as other (along with all the imperialistic stereotypes, fears and assumptions that come with the label), and through the physical visibility of his skin, he becomes invisible in the public sphere in the sense that he is ignored, subjugated and discriminated against.[5] Numerous accounts provide evidence for the challenges African Australians face in a society which privileges whiteness. From the 200 African migrants interviewed for his thesis *The Africans in Australia*, Udo-Ekpo found that:

Newly arrived migrants see themselves as feeling 'oppressed,' 'discriminated against,' 'isolated,' 'forgotten,' ' unemployed,' or 'under-employed' in what they, generally, perceive as 'low status' jobs. There is a feeling of deprivation and hopelessness and rejection; and being rejected is probably one of the most difficult realisations for the migrants to accept, because it undermines their self-esteem and confidence in their new environment (1999, p.xiv).

More current studies, including the interview data for this thesis, reflect Udo-Ekpo's findings, testifying that similar issues still persist today. Before I explore some of these issues, I should note that all of my interviewees did express that they had received support from numerous organisations and individuals such as migrant resource centres, Centrelink, churches, teachers and neighbours, and that they are grateful for this support. One Sierra Leonean Australian interviewee in particular spoke of having a very positive experience in Sydney: "I've had support like financially, psychologically, especially when they knew that we come from a war-torn country...One of my teachers was...really, really helpful...Overall I find the people are really, really good actually...I feel very much a part of this society" (Interviewee 2, 2009). Research shows, however, as do other comments made by the interviewees for this research, that Africans face considerable challenges in regards to human rights and everyday living, as well as social inclusion within Australian communities. I would like to briefly explore some of these issues, drawing upon the areas of employment, housing and education; as a

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[5] For a more detailed analysis of the oxymoron of the visibility/invisibility of the coloured subject in a white centred society see Lauren Berlant's article "National Brands/National Body" (1993).

white researcher and writer writing about African Australians it is extremely important to be aware of the daily challenges facing this constituency – challenges, it should be emphasised, that arise from my own white racist culture. As hooks says, "all black people in [white Western countries], irrespective of their class status or politics, live with the possibility that they will be terrorized by whiteness" (1992, p.173).

In regards to employment, one interviewee from Liberia expressed her frustration at not being able to get a job in Tasmania despite having completed certifications in Liberia and in Tasmania:

> A lot of African that came here, they have their own things that they are capable to do. Some people are really educated, but when they came, they can't even look at their paper. That is the problem. I have about eleven certificate – different, different courses that I did...But if you put in application, they will say, 'ok we'll get back to you.' No, no, no, they can't. And we really want to work, we are hard working, we African we are hard working. But the only thing that I'm thinking they can do for us is the farm work (Braslane, 2010).

Another participant who did pharmaceutical work in major hospitals in Kenya also spoke of the demoralising fact that many Africans, despite their qualifications, are only employed for menial or 'low-status' jobs:

> If I go to a chemist and request a job, they would just give me an assistant job which would require me to place the drugs where they should be placed, put things in drawers, you know, the minor dumb jobs to just arrange the shelves. And you feel like they are really putting you down (Manga, 2010).

For some, overt forms of racism are also experienced in the workforce: "when I got a job and I went to that work, and yeah I was being treated really, really harshly. But cause I needed the money, I needed the job, to maintain my income, I just stayed there, stayed there, stayed there" (Okumu, 2009). Interviewees perceive employment issues as stemming from racial factors such as "colour" (Braslane, 2010) and accent – "I don't speak like other Aussies...It would put employers off and they wouldn't give me a job" (Manga, 2010). Kiros Hiruy,[6] an interviewee in Tasmania from Ethiopia also highlights that employment issues

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[6] Hiruy investigates employment issues and other challenges facing African Australians in Tasmania in his Master of Environmental Management Thesis "Finding Home Far Away From Home" (2009).

stem from "structural barrier[s]...in the system," such as the employer's perceived need to hire someone with "Australian experience"; this becomes extremely challenging for African migrants who "will never have equivalent local language compared to a local person" (Hiruy, 2010).

As well as employment, African Australians face difficulties in securing decent and affordable housing and accommodation. According to Hiruy, "the increase in rental prices and intense competition in the market has...created a climate in which it appears acceptable for house owners to discriminate against humanitarian entrants – although clearly it is not" (2009, p.88). Mungai found that young Sudanese men in particular experience racial discrimination in housing and accommodation, and argues that negative media coverage on 'Sudanese gangs' is largely to blame (2008, pp.8-10) (this is further explored in Chapter Two of this exegesis). Hiruy, during our interview, stated that often discrimination against Africans come from rental property owners' fears of "not know[ing] what to expect," and as a result "they might prefer a tenant who is Tasmanian or an Australian – like a white Australian – compared to an African family...even though many Africans keep their house much more better than some locals" (2010). For larger African Australian families (which encompass a significant number of African migrants) securing affordable and appropriate housing is also an issue and is often used as a reason for rejecting rental applications (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010, pp.24-27). One Sudanese Australian interviewee in Tasmania expressed this issue: "for me particularly with a large family, getting rent is a problem – getting house. Because normally they ask how many people and I say I have five kids. And they say, no sorry, you can't have. So that's really very hard for us, so hard" (Peter, 2010).

Another instance of discrimination described by African Australians included recurring events of real estate agents and landlords failing to properly attend to repairs and maintenance of properties (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010, pp.24-27). An interviewee in Tasmania testified to this when she spoke about the owner's delay to fix her leaking roof: "We were in the room there and it was raining and the place started to get mould. I called them on and on to come and fix it when it was raining. And they waited until the place has become bad before they went to fix the holes" (Interviewee 3, 2010). According to the Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading, urgent repairs, such as a serious roof leak, "must be made as soon as possible"; furthermore, if "repairs are needed, and the tenant is not at fault, the owner must make the repairs at his/her own cost" (2009,

p.5). Not only did the owner fail to repair the roof immediately, but he/she also forced the interviewee to pay for the damage the leaking roof had caused the house, despite the interviewee's best efforts to clean the mould – "I brought somebody to clean the carpet and everything" (Interviewee 3, 2010):

> They told me that because of the mould up, they are going to call their cleaners to come and clean the place and pay the person out of my bond, which is, you know, it is, it is unfair! Really unfair! Because you know, it wasn't my fault. I don't have anything to do with this ceiling. I don't go on top of the roof to wash my clothes and throw the water on top of it to make that place damp. But it was the raining that made the place damp. And when they refused to fix the holes, the water passed through it (Interviewee 3, 2010).

While it is not uncommon for rental property owner's to dodge or even breach legal residential tenancy obligations (even when the tenant is a white Australian), this particular interviewee felt that it was because of her vulnerable status as a new African migrant, and the assumption that she lacked knowledge concerning her rights as a tenant, that the owner took advantage of her. Such a feeling is echoed among other African Australians in the Australian Human Rights Commission report (2010, p.24).

Acquiring an education in a white centred society has also proved challenging for many African Australians. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, many "schools and education institutions generally lack the cultural competency and the flexibility to properly meet the needs of African Australian students" (2010, p.14). This reflects that white Eurocentric ways continue to be at the centre of educational systems, despite the growing cultural diversity in Australia (Ahmed, 2007, p.274). During the interviews, almost all participants claimed that they had problems understanding teachers, both at university and at TAFE (including, quite disturbingly, teachers employed to teach in the Adult Migrant English Program), as too often the teachers spoke very fast and slurred and taught in ways that were inaccessible to newly arrived African migrants. Hiruy argues that "while reasonable funding is allocated for English learning, there is less focus on results: that is, there is no 'proper teaching' [i.e. culturally-specific methodologies] to enable someone to communicate and function better in the community" (2009, p.86). Quite shockingly, an interviewee from Liberia who upon arrival knew not a word of English, claimed that her

children, who themselves could not read English, had been placed in classes to match their chronological age, rather than ones that reflect their educational attainment. Concerning this she said: "the children can't study because they can't read...here if you're sixteen, seventeen, you going to High School; either you know how to read, or you don't know how to read, you are going" (Interviewee 4, 2010). This interviewee was acutely aware of the fact that if her children – especially the older ones – did not receive the additional help they needed to improve their English, their future in Australia would be very bleak indeed: "What sort of job could she do? Who at the office would hire someone who can't read?...Tomorrow, tomorrow is problem for you because if your child not working, it's not good...Look at me, no work, because I can't read" (Interviewee 4, 2010).

Such issues facing African Australians within a white dominated society will be further explored in the following chapters, with particular focus on the challenges faced by African Australian writers, and on the way African Australians are represented in mainstream Australian media. With the succession of the chapters, the gaze will also shift from the African Australian other to the self, to explore my own complicity in the race problem, making particular reference to the shortcomings of my own cross-cultural/racial representational practices and my (white) attempts to rectify them. I would like to now shift the focus for a moment from the other back to the self, to document the unique approach of this project.

The Approach: Self, Other and the Body

As a project that is driven by a need to find a way to write about African Australians without 'colonialising' or 'fetishising' them, it is crucial that I approach this exegesis from a personal standpoint. As Candace Vogler suggests, "it may be impossible to do ethics without engaging the individuating question, What should I do? Or, more generally, How should I live?" (2002, p.625). Brewster argues that "the (re)entry of the first-person address into scholarly writing...is an index of the ethical dilemma and the discursive crisis of neo-liberal whiteness" (2005) – an "ethical dilemma" which I as a white Australian fiction writer experience as I write about the intercultural relations between my African and white Australian characters, and which I am impelled to explore in this investigation. My enquiry, then, is not simply from an 'objective' academic perspective, rather it is from the personal angle of a writer who

'experiences' through her practice and as a writer who is invested in finding an ethically rigorous position from which she can write. The shift to the self and to the first-person address is an imperative move if I am to extricate my self from a white 'colonial' authoritative voice, a voice which gains power through the 'objective' passive perspective (Nicoll, 2000, p.372), a voice which ultimately I am trying to avoid/give-up.

Through her discussion on white representations of Indigenity, Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues for the necessity for white critics to place the self back into their scholarly writing. Moreton-Robinson rebukes the way in which so many white postcolonial scholars approach their study of the Indigenous other from an objective standpoint, arguing that such an approach, even despite the white scholar's best intentions, restages "primitivist discourse" as it causes "the primitive" to become "the body, while the white intellectual is the mind" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, p.80). Moreton-Robinson argues that this hierarchy constructs the "writer-knower" subject as "racially invisible, while the Aboriginal as object is visible" and separates "the racialised white body of the knower from the racialised discourse and knowledge produced by its mind. In this way the body, which is the marker of race, is erased leaving only the disembodied...racially neutral mind" (2004b, p.81). In doing this, the white critic "effaces his own identity as an object of power and knowledge and acquires the power of subject by making Indigenous people the problematic objects of his theory" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, p.83).

By (re)turning to the self, to my own ethical uncertainties that arise during my cross-cultural/racial writing practices, I am led, it seems inevitably, to mark my body and its whiteness as an index of white power and privilege which are the underlying causes for my uncertainties of writing other. It is through the dynamic of practice-based research projects (in that the researcher is both critic and index of her creative practice and enquiry) that I am able to put my body back into the study. Anne Brewster states that "the term 'practice' yoked to the term 'research' usually signifies the inclusion of bodily experience in writing" (2009a, p.128). The "bodily experience" – what Brewster later terms "embodied research" (2009a, p.138) – has informed my creative research in a number of ways and insists that my racialised white body (and thus, my racialised white mind) is made visible throughout both this exegesis and the following novella. I would like to briefly explore the significance of the "bodily experience" in my research as it was through the experiential that this project was born, and it is also the experiential which drives the project's ethical enquiry.

As suggested in the opening paragraph, it was my practice – the writing of the novella – which informed the ethically based questions explored in this thesis; however, it was not simply the 'cognitive' act of writing which pressured my feelings of uncertainty surrounding my ability and authority to write African characters. If I were to trace back to where these feelings of uncertainty stemmed, I would be led to a multitude of memories of my own bodily experiences involving my intercultural encounters with others; it is through bodily experience that we come to acknowledge our "relationality to other subjects and the world of things" (Brewster, 2009a, p.129). Some of these bodily experiences which significantly inspired my novella, and also, more implicitly, the ruminations of race enacted in this exegesis, occurred in 2007 during my four-month stay in Ukwala, a rural village in Kenya, six-months before I began my PhD.[7] It was during this condensed period of *being* with the Kenyan people that I became viscerally aware of my taken-for-granted white privilege and also the disturbing realities of the persistence, and privilege, of the global dominance of white subjects. I talk further about the significance of this experience in Chapter Three. But what is important to note here is that it was through the affective bodily experience of being in Kenya (an experience that viscerally produced guilt and uncertainty about my white privilege and power) that generated not only the racially thematic ideas explored in the novella, but also the ethical drive in this project to understand the political, material and moral implications of representing African migrants in my own country. Such an effort was, in the end, driven by a need to find an ethically rigorous writing position which would help me to explore, in a racially 'better' way, the intercultural relations between my white Australian and black African characters. It was also through my everyday encounters with others that occurred throughout the period of doing my PhD that my need to find that writing position continued to be fuelled. As Gail Weiss argues, our desire to act ethically does not only derive from cognitive reasoning

> rather, it is an embodied ethics grounded in the dynamic, bodily imperatives that emerge out of our intercorporeal exchanges...Moral significance, which is itself continually changing, depends not on detachment from others but can only arise in and through our relations with others (1999, p.158).

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[7] For further reflection of the influence and contribution of the journey to Kenya on this project, see Appendix iv.

It is evident, then, and perhaps not entirely surprising, that my bodily experiences with Africans in Kenya and in Australia prompted and propelled this project forward. What I found both interesting and enlightening is that it was through this text-based creative writing PhD project that I was able to not only evoke these bodily intercultural encounters throughout both this exegesis and the novella (see Brewster, 2009a, p.142), but that through the process of writing my personally-situated and fictional intercultural encounters – through the textual "handling" of bodily experiences and ideas – I came to realise in more insightful and affective ways the racial problem in Australia and of my own complicity in it (see Barbara Bolt, 2007, p.34). (Again, this will be explored further in Chapter Three.)

But why is this so? How does the 'symbolic language and forms' of creative writing evoke the bodily experience and move and enlighten us in ways that traditional analytical research cannot? Firstly, there must be an understanding of the intrinsic connection between the body and creative writing. Nigel Krauth argues that "the [creative] writing process is located, partly or wholly, somewhere in the body beyond the brain" (2010). To illustrate this, he quotes English author Rebecca West, who claims her memory, which is a source of inspiration for her writing, is situated in her hands: "My memory is certainly in my hands. I can remember things only if I have a pencil and I can write with it and I can play with it. I think your hand concentrates for you" (1992 cited in Krauth, 2010). Novelist Isabel Allende also states that

> books don't happen in my mind, they happen somewhere in my belly. It's like a long elephant pregnancy that can last two years. And then, when I'm ready to give birth, I sit down...When I sit...I don't know what I'm going to write about because it has not yet made the trip from the belly to the mind (Epel, 1993, p.8).

Bodily affects – such as increased heart-rate and breathing, or a warm tingling sensation – and the feelings and emotions they produce – such as fear, guilt, joy – also become significant to the writing (and the reading) process (Freiman, 2009). Freiman argues that bodily

> responses might act as an impetus for writing; they create images in the mind; drive entire projects; inform voice, give life to characters; and as proposed by cognitive theorists, they enable readers to discover and to re-create for themselves, emotional and intellectual experiences in response to their reading (2009, p.4).

Laurel Richardson also suggests that poetic and evocative language "re-create lived experience and evoke emotional responses...touch[ing] us where we live, in our bodies" (2000, p.931). In an ethically-based project such as mine which hopes to *prompt change* in social and political areas of racial discourse, employing creative writing strategies to explore and theorise issues of race is not only affective in its ability to "touch us," but is also *essential*. As Brewster argues, in regards to scholarly enquiry on race:

> the experiential has entered into academic discourse in response to urgent social and political imperatives. Performative research in this field enables the academy to engage directly with emergent intercultural imaginaries. It seeks to accommodate the volatile affective dispositions and equivocation which accompany social change (2009a, p.129).

Through my novella, *Fragile Skins*, I have tried to recreate intercultural contact between my white Australian and black African characters and their environments using literary devices such as character focalization, allegory and defamiliarising and evocative language, in an effort to explore racial relations at a visceral and affective level.[8] To an extent, I have also deployed, alongside the more 'traditional' scholarly writing, literary techniques (through experiential and personally-situated writing, as well as literary works by African Australian writers, and, in their colloquial and often rhythmical nature, African interviewees' comments) in appropriate parts of this exegesis in an effort to not only anchor the bodily experience and its significance in this project, but to also, and more importantly, affect change by touching and moving the reader.

It should be noted, however, that while this exegesis does employ, at times, narrative content in an attempt to demonstrate the significance of the bodily experience, and while it is written from a personal standpoint whereby I investigate my ethical uncertainties surrounding my cross-cultural/racial writing practices, there is also – and must be – a thorough investigation of the African Australian community who are represented in my fictional work, as well as an interrogation into the long historical dominance of Africans in white literature and in other modes of representation, such as the media. As a white writer questioning her cross-cultural/racial representational practices, it is imperative, then, that I

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[8] For further explanation of some of the creative choices (with a focus on the focalization and tonal choices) made in the novella, and the way in which the novella evolved from, and because of, those choices, see Appendix v.

focus both on the self (and on whiteness for which I am an index) and the other if I am to undermine both black and white racial constructions. To exclude one or the other would end up in a disturbingly unbalanced piece of cross-cultural/racial work: to focus only on the self, the project would end up being narcissistically white and spotted with awkward, inaccurate portrayals of African Australians (see Ahmed, 2007, p.284); or, as Moreton-Robinson would argue, if the focus of the project were only on African Australians, I would fail to mark my body and mind as white and thus fail to interrogate the implication my whiteness (and my white representations) has for the race problem; by doing so I would further perpetuate a "primitivist discourse" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, p.80). The organisation of my exegesis – the focus and movement of each chapter from other to self – is thus reflective of my attempts to find a balance for writing a cross-cultural/racial piece which includes both white Australian and black African bodies. I would like to turn now to discuss the progression and theoretical basis of these chapters and highlight the way in which I tried to work towards a writing position whereby I might ethically write about, in my fiction, a set of intercultural encounters between my white Australian and black African characters.

Theoretical Foundations: Postcolonial Theory & Critical Whiteness Studies

The theoretical foundations and the development of each chapter in this exegesis reflect the trajectory of my journey in trying to establish an ethically sound writing position in which I can conduct my cross-cultural/racial writing practices. While Chapter One and Chapter Two are more heavily focused on the African Australian other (as well as, to varying degrees, the implications of white writing other) and are informed by postcolonial studies, Chapter Three draws upon the more recent field of critical whiteness studies and in so doing turns the gaze on the self and on whiteness. The shift from the other to the self can be traced through the sequence of the chapters: while each chapter is framed by my – the self's – ethical uncertainties and individuating questions, there is a narrowing of focus from the other to the self in the sequence of chapters as I come to understand and answer these questions of uncertainty. As a white writer whose knowledge production and representations are informed by her racialised subjectivity, this progression is necessary and reflects my coming-to-consciousness of my own whiteness which was brought about by this project, and of the marginalising effects whiteness has on non-white people. I'd like to spend some time now

outlining the relevant theories which underlie this project and highlight the way in which they inform the chapters in this thesis.

Postcolonial Theory

The questions explored in this exegesis derive from the issues and debates concerning white representations of Africans primarily in Australia, but also in the African continent. To date, postcolonial theory has dominated scholarly discussions over the debates about representing the other (most significantly, the Indigenous other) in Australian literary studies (Brewster, 2008b, p.428). Postcolonial literary studies arose as a reaction to colonial discourses in an attempt to dismantle European monocentrism and assumptions (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p.12). It is interested in analysing, among other things, the way in which the forces of colonialism constructed the colonised subject in literature as subordinate to Europe (and thus creating a mirror-image of the European subject as superior) both in the minds of the subject culture and in the hegemonic culture in an attempt to gain power (Ahluwalia & Nursey-Bray, 1997, pp.3-4). In the 1960s and 70s, African critics and literary writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Frantz Fanon were amongst the first to bring to light and deconstruct colonialist representations of the African subject; both their critical and creative works have been influential in postcolonial studies. The scholarly literature of these African critics has provided a sound foundation for my enquiry into how I can write more accurately and ethically about Africans without falling, unwittingly, into the trap of perpetuating colonial (and more contemporary neo-colonial) stereotypes, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Postcolonial studies is not only interested in analysing the colonial period, but also the way in which Western imperialistic ideologies continue to dominate the globe; as Ashcroft suggests, "'post-colonial' does not mean 'after colonialism'…It begins when the colonisers arrive and doesn't finish when they go home" (1997, p.21). This is because "post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination" (Ashcroft et al., 2006a, p.2). The contemporary settler/invader society of Australia – the context within which much of this investigation circulates – is a nation heavy with the burdens and effects of neo-colonial domination (Ashcroft et al., 2006a, p.2). As was conveyed in the earlier section, the white settler, during colonisation of Australia, worked hard to create a 'white' Australian nation, ruled by and centred on white imperial values.

The harsh treatment of the Indigenous people – including the dispossession of land, cultural erasure, silencing of Indigenous perspectives and removal of Aboriginal children from families – was integral to the white Australia project. The oppressive and oft inhumane treatment of Indigenous Australians continues to affect and cause pain for many Indigenous people today. Not surprisingly, the white values and discursive strategies which governed (and continue to implicitly regulate) Australian laws and structures also impact and work to marginalise non-white migrants. As Brewster states: "Contemporary Australia is a nation formed by colonisation and immigration; it is a stage for the disinheritance, displacement and dispossession of both indigenous and immigrant peoples" (1995, p.1). While colonial myths of 'discovery' and 'terra nullius' ignored the histories of Aboriginal people and the violence of the colonising project, migrant histories were also excluded from 'Australian' history as a result of assimilationist discourses (Brewster, 1995, p.15). In the field of Australian literature, both constituencies have also been largely ignored by mainstream publishers and also misrepresented, often negatively, by others.

It should be emphasised here that although both Indigenous and migrant constituencies have been marginalised in a white centred Australia, their histories, experiences and political agendas are very different. During the 1970s and the 1980s, when multiculturalism was considered government policy, the government, and other institutions, tended to lump together migrants and Indigenous people under the multiculturalism umbrella (Scott, 2005, p.19). Gunew, during an interview, argues that the inclusion of Indigenous Australians under multiculturalism was deployed as a way of negating and defusing Aboriginal claims for land rights and to advance assimilationist projects (Rajan & Mohanram, 1995, p.211). Following this, in the arena of Australian literature, much debate ignited during the 1980s concerning the alignment of Aboriginal writing with migrant writing under the term 'multicultural literature.' Indigenous writers opposed being included in the category of 'multicultural literature' as it "carries the 'immigrant' connotation and thus does not recognize their special status as the Indigenous culture, and original inhabitants, of the land" (Ommundsen, 2007, p.75). Therefore, Indigenous writing is now treated as a separate category in Australian literature, "a category that clearly belongs to the multicultural fabric of contemporary Australia but at the same time marks the long and distinct heritage of Aboriginal cultures as well as their history of dispossession and deprivation" (Ommundsen, 2007, p.75).

It is within the context of postcolonial settler/invader Australia – a nation which continues to operate through white neo-colonial ideologies – which Chapter One begins as I explore the ways in which the African Australian community and African Australian practitioners have largely gone unnoticed in mainstream Australian literature. This investigation is significant: while there has been an increase in scholarly attention towards the African Australian constituency in the last decade, particularly in the field of Social Studies, there has been very little consideration about African Australian practitioners in the arts. While my original desire (a desire which was also, in its own way, morally driven) was to write this chapter and my cross-cultural/racial novella (which is itself new territory in that it is among the first creative works to explore intercultural encounters between black African and white Australians in Australia from a white perspective) with the intent of 'making visible' the much ignored African Australian community, I soon realised that this intention, because of my white subjectivity, had disturbing ramifications.

Drawing on African Caribbean Canadian writer M. Nourbese Philip's premise that "*white people*, writing *about* another culture, rather than *out of* it, virtually guarantees that their work will, in a racist society, be received more readily than the work of *writers* coming from that very culture" (1997, pp.106-107), I go beyond my original simplistic and idealistic desire to 'make visible' a marginalised community and instead explore *why* white cross-cultural/racial work might be received more readily than an African Australian writer's work by examining past and current political climates in Australia which work to marginalise non-white writers and communities. In this discussion, I focus specifically on the challenges African Australian practitioners face in Australia's highly historicised and racialised society. As a white writer writing about African Australians, I feel that it is not only ethical to interrogate white discourses (of which I and my representations are an index) and the marginalising effects these have on non-white writers and communities in Australia, but it is also crucial for me to recognise and acknowledge these discourses and their effects if I am to resist perpetuating them by 'speaking for' African Australians and 'white-washing' their lived experiences in my writing.

The focus shifts slightly from the other to the self in Chapter Two as I turn to ask questions surrounding my own white authorship: do I, as a white Australian, have the right, and the competence, to write African Australians in my fictional work? Such a question derives from a body of postcolonial scholarly enquiry that was popular in the 1980s and 1990s which

explored "the anxiety and indignity of white theorists 'speaking for' their others" (Brewster, 2005). Gayatri Spivak's work is central to this field of enquiry, challenging white subjects to interrogate their own historical subject positions rather than avoiding an engagement with the other. White people, Spivak argues, must

> develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced...Then you begin to investigate what it is that silences you, rather than take this very deterministic position – since my skin colour is this, since my sex is this, I cannot speak. I call these things, as you know, somewhat derisively, chromatism: basing everything on skin colour – I am white, I can't speak...To say 'I won't criticise' is salving your conscience, and allowing you not to do any homework (1990, pp.62-3).

Accepting Spivak's challenge, I investigate why I am filled with anxiety about writing African Australians in my work by tracing the way Africans have been negatively represented in the past through white colonial literature, and how African Australians continue to be misrepresented in contemporary white centred mainstream Australian media. I also draw on current debates of white writing other (the Indigenous and the migrant other) in Australia, and on white Australia's social, political and historical relationship with the African Australian community, to determine whether I even should, ethically speaking, be including representations of African Australians in my work.

Critical Whiteness Studies

Throughout the course of researching and writing Chapter One and Chapter Two, and through my ruminations of what I had written of my novella-in-progress thus far, my focus and my anxieties began to shift more so from writing about the other, to writing about the self – the self's whiteness, which I interrogate in Chapter Three. Though the marginalising effects of whiteness on non-white people is contained both implicitly and overtly in my investigation in the first two chapters of this exegesis, I fail thus far to examine the influence whiteness has on *my own* ways of 'being' and on *my* representational practices and I thus fail to fully mark my own complicity in white centred discourses. My failure to do so reflects the premise that

> little attention is given to the impact of whiteness on white writers and their craft. Unlike 'Aboriginality' [or in relation to this thesis, the 'African other'] the presence of

whiteness in texts has rarely received scholarly scrutiny because it is often invisible and normalised by its producers. Yet 'race' does inform assumptions and influences the work of white academics (Moreton-Robinson, 1999, p.31).

It was through the course of my PhD candidature, as I worked my way through postcolonial theory and back and forth between the novella and exegesis, that I was led to the critical work on whiteness (thanks to my supervisor who referred me to some of Anne Brewster's articles on whiteness) which pressured me to 'see' my whiteness. Working through critical whiteness studies, I realised that it was crucial for me to interrogate the impact whiteness has on my own writing practices if I hoped to establish a writing position which would allow me to write an ethically nuanced and racially balanced novella about the racial relations between my white Australian and black African characters which locates "*whiteness* as being at the centre of the 'race problem'" (McKay, 1999, p.3).

Critical whiteness studies, which forms the theoretical basis of Chapter Three, grew out of (as one of its genealogical sources) postcolonial theory (Probyn, 2007, p.334), and offers a new perspective and reorientation on the debates surrounding white representations of the other (Brewster, 2008b, p.428). It is within Chapter Three that I 'try out' this new perspective. Moreton-Robinson states that critical whiteness studies makes the "privileged subject position, structural location or cultural practices of whiteness" the object of its study rather than the "racial oppression and discrimination of non-white 'others'" (2004a, p.vii) as is the focus in Chapter One, and to an extent in Chapter Two. Along the same trajectory, Brewster argues that

> new critical whiteness studies in contemporary Australia reformulates the scrutiny of racialised intersubjectivity, recasting it as an investigation into the limits of neo-liberal whiteness. In this way we move away from setting the other up as the frame of reference, and fetishising it (2005).

As critical whiteness studies is a fairly new field of scholarship, and as it significantly informs this thesis, I would like to spend some time discussing its aims and objectives as relevant to my topic. First established in North America in the early 1990s with the aim of generating "new intellectual and practical approaches to living in a multi-racial community" (McKay, 1999, p.3), critical whiteness studies emerged in Australian 'race' scholarship at the end of the 1990s, at a time when "the political and social climate in Australia regarding race and

immigration [had] taken a reactive and conservative turn" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004a, p.vii). While the American literature located race and whiteness with the development of slavery and immigration rather than the dispossession of Native Americans and colonisation, Australian scholarship on whiteness engages with relations between migration *and* Indigenous dispossession and "contributes to international literature by revealing that, historically, whiteness erupts and transforms itself depending on the colonising nature of its arrival and relationship to the British empire" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004a, p.viii).

Moreton-Robinson contends that

> Whiteness in its contemporary form in Australian society is culturally based. It controls institutions, which are extensions of White Australian culture and is governed by the values, beliefs and assumptions of that culture and its history. Australian culture is less White than it used to be, but Whiteness forms the centre and is commonly referred to in public discourse as the 'mainstream' or 'middle ground' (1998, p.11).

The literature argues that whiteness is an invisible position, existing beyond categories of 'race': "Debates in Australia around native title, reconciliation and immigration demonstrate that…'race' is reserved for those deemed to be 'other'" and as a result "whites as a racial group remain invisible" (McKay, 1999, p.3). Moreton-Robinson highlights that

> white people in Australian society are not coerced into or required to have a consciousness of, or to define what is, their culture…It remains invisible and unnamed, but familiar and common. White cultural values are taught to children, not as if they were alternatives from which to choose, but as the right and only values (1999, p.30).

This leads to the assumption that white ways of thinking, seeing and being are 'normal' and are the benchmark for all other racially marked ways of being. Dyer argues that "as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people" (1997, p.1). Dyer continues by showing the power that comes from associating whiteness with normality: "the equation of being white with being human secures a position of power…White people set the standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to fail" (1997, p.9). Because of the power that comes from being white,

whiteness is resistant to and discourages being questioned: "Whiteness, it is argued, has been resistant to analysis precisely because its reproduction maintains a system of authority, privilege and entitlement, in which white subjects and power structures are heavily invested" (Brewster, 2009a, p.130).

It is from this purview – of whiteness as invisible and as associated with privilege and power – that I begin my investigation in Chapter Three into how whiteness informs my knowledge production and creative practice. From the standpoint of a white subject who now 'sees' her whiteness, I expose and analyse the way I had been unthinkingly narrativising (and maintaining the invisibility of) whiteness in my writing and thus enacting my white privilege and power over my African characters. I also trace the way I came to 'see' my whiteness through the dialogical process of writing between this exegesis and the novella and how this enabled me to move towards re-narrativising whiteness in this thesis. To expose whiteness is crucial to critical whiteness studies and "is a necessary stage, for without visibility there is no way of marking the responsibility for white people to acknowledge the fact of their privilege" (Donald, 2000, p.158). Homi Bhabha argues that 'seeing' and acknowledging whiteness will work towards displacing "the normativity of the white position" as it unmasks it "as a strategy of authority rather than an authentic or essential 'identity'" or way of knowing (1998, p.21). By making visible and theorising the impact whiteness has on my craft, I hope to extricate myself from the holds of unconscious whiteness which I had been writing through in an attempt to establish a writing position whereby I might be able to fracture whiteness rather than unconsciously perpetuate it.

It is crucial to note, however, that undertaking intellectual work on whiteness runs the risk of "recentering" whiteness and its "inhabitants" rather than "decentering" it (Frankenberg, 1997, p.1). As Richard Dyer states: "My blood runs cold at the thought that talking about whiteness could lead to the development of something called 'White Studies'" (1997, p.10). There's also the contestation of whether 'studying' whiteness in institutions which are centred in whiteness can lead to 'unlearning' one's privilege and power. Sara Ahmed argues that "studying whiteness can involve the claiming of a privileged white identity as the subject who knows...We cannot simply unlearn privilege when the cultures in which learning take place are shaped by privilege" (2007, p.277). Voicing a similar concern, Cynthia Levine-Rasky asks, "how can whites name, yet sidestep their claim to knowledge so as to avoid reaffirming their social domination?" (2002, p.319). It is from within these concerns, that I

conclude my final chapter by questioning whether white writers such as myself, by learning to 'see' their whiteness and by exposing and re-narrativising it, can actually fracture whiteness, or will the white writer only ever perpetually reflect her whiteness through the act of writing?

As I consider this question, I return back to my overarching research question to consider whether, through the course of my PhD candidature and through the examination within this exegesis of the ethico-political issues that arise from white writing other, I have been able to reach an ethically rigorous writing position whereby I can write a racially balanced novella about the intercultural relations between white Australian and black African characters, or if in fact this is even ever possible.

To Become

Before moving onto Chapter One, I must admit (and I will be the first to admit) that neither this exegesis nor the following novella are perfectly complete, at least to a publishable standard. This is partly due to the restricted time-frame of my PhD candidature, but also, and more significantly, to the way in which this project has developed. I'd like to go into this a little further, not just for the sake of excusing the at times clumsy and insufficient parts of this thesis, but also because the development of the piece reflects the overall ethical aims of this project and of my PhD journey.

This project developed along the same lines as Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's "Iterative Cyclic Web," a model which sheds light on the dialogical processes involved in the creation of creative research projects (Smith & Dean, 2009). Through their model, they convey the way in which both the research and the creative practice inform each other: the practice can lead the research (as implied by Brad Haseman when he argues that practitioners "'dive in,' to commence practising to see what emerges" (2007)), just as the research can generate the practice (see Brewster, 2009a). Smith and Dean also show that there is no one correct approach and that you can shift, iteratively, back and forth between the practice-led research and research-led practice processes as determined by the emergence of new ideas and insights:

> The structure of the model combines a cycle and several sub-cycles...with a web...created by many points of entry and transition within the cycle. One intention of [the model] is to suggest how a creative or research process may start at any point on the large cycle...and move, spider-like, to any other (Smith & Dean, 2009, p.19).

While the writing of the novella, as well as my 'embodied research,' prompted the ethical questions that are explored in this exegesis, the researching and the writing of this exegetical component also significantly informed the re-writing of the novella – a re-writing which tried to achieve a more ethically balanced exploration of race that deconstructs both black *and* white binaries and which goes hand in hand with the ethical reflections in this exegesis. This follows Inez Baranay's proposition that in creative research projects, the creative and the critical work "derive from the intention, and the position, that writing is produced for something formed *in the writing*. That is, writing is not, or not only, a *recording* of thoughts and ideas, but a process of *producing* them" (2002, p.314). Due to the web-like way in which this thesis has developed (an iterative process which very often led the research and/or the practice off in opposite or new directions) there are still areas, I feel, in both components of this thesis which need further exploration and development in light of the insights and knowledge that have emerged from both the exegesis and the creative work in the later stages of my candidature.

Research on critical whiteness studies, and my implementation of it in Chapter Three as I examine the impact whiteness has on my craft, is a primary example of this. Not only did it cause me to reflect and pressure me to go back, during the later stages of my PhD candidature, to re-write whiteness into the racial exploration in the novella, but it also put into question the previous two chapters which have their focus on the other. While the chapters in this exegesis may appear to contradict each other, they do so, I hope, in a way that conveys my growth as an early career white researcher/writer grappling with the uncertainties of writing about race as I try to find a writing position whereby I can ethically write about the intercultural relations between my white Australian and black African characters.

As for the novella, looking back on the earlier versions and the development of the characters, themes and the storyline, there is no doubt that the current version submitted for this thesis is a far better ethically and racially nuanced piece than what it was before. I

firmly believe that the racial aspects – both concerning the other *and* of whiteness – explored in the novella would not have matured if it were written in isolation to this exegesis. Such is the iterative and organic nature of creative arts research projects. While the novella is still not perfect, and while it still needs further cultivation (the creative process, after all, is ongoing) it *is* a better piece – and was that not the whole purpose of this project? As Michel Foucault says, when ruminating on the work of writers, "the main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning" (1982 cited in Miller, 1993, p.328).

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Chapter One

Phantoms in Australian Literature:
African Australian Writing in a White Nation

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Existences!
Existences!
Existences!
We don't know them
living with us in the same space
sharing breaths with us;
amongst us they are walking
but we never see them!
They never care about our ignorance of them
because they don't know us
and they call everything
except themselves phantoms.

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(Ismail, 2009, p.55)

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I should begin by being honest (with the burden of embarrassment that such retrospective frankness carries). It was with the best of intentions that I began this project; the 'good' in me driving my desire to shed light on the much ignored African Australian community through this exegesis and the cross-cultural/racial novella. (At least that was the story I was telling myself at the time). I was – and, mind you, continue to be – affected (saddened perhaps; or is it discomfort I feel, or shame?) by words such as the Sudanese Australian poet's: "They don't know us / and they call everything / except themselves phantoms" (Ismail, 2009, p.55). During the interviews with African participants, I was also constantly moved – at times angered – by stories of racism. One such story reflects, at a micropolitical, everyday level, the words spoken by Ismail. The story recounts an interviewee's experience in Tasmania, sharply bringing into focus the feeling of invisibility that many Africans in Australia share:

> You enter a bus, there will be Westerners in front of you, you meet the bus driver, you greet him, they don't respond well. As soon as they see the African face they turn away. I don't say all of them, no...But at least about out of a hundred you get twenty that will behave like that. When you are coming down, you say, "thank you" – some other people who say, "thank you," they respond well, they do hear – but when the African say thank you: no word, mute...It makes us get a bitter heart (Interviewee 3, 2010).

bell hooks' statement concerning the way in which black people go unnoticed in white centred Western societies provides insight into this invisibility phenomenon:

> Since most white people do not have to 'see' black people (constantly appearing on billboards, television, movies, in magazines, etc.) and they do not need to be ever on guard not to observe black people to be safe, they can live as though black people are invisible (1992, p.168).

Moved by hooks' words, I thought, rather naively then, that I would work towards making an invisible constituency visible, that I would 'do good' for the other and for anti-racism. (This desire to 'do good' will be further explored in Chapter Three). There I was, hoping my work would shed light on the issues black African Australians face, becoming actively informed and informing others through my writing, learning to see my cultural/racial other as more than just a foreign face on the street, more than just a "phantom." I was soon to learn, however, that this intention, because of my white subjectivity, had disturbing ramifications. In short, I got knocked off my do-gooder white pedestal. (Mind you, it took awhile until I got knocked off good and right, as will be shown later in this exegesis).

While it is because of my white privilege (a privilege that affords me with the ease of middle-class opportunities such as this Higher Degree Research position) that I am able to bring exposure to the issues faced by African Australians in my writing, this very same white privilege is also the instigator for the oppression of non-white people in Australia. It is well-documented that literature was (and continues to be) a source for such oppression; one such way in which this occurs is by the white writer speaking for and in the voice of the other. In this case, not only does the white writer risk misrepresenting the other, but by speaking for the other, the other becomes silenced (Philip, 1997, p.101).

African Caribbean Canadian author M. Nourbese Philip argues that "*white people*, writing *about* another culture, rather than *out of* it, virtually guarantees that their work will, in a racist society, be received more readily than the work of *writers* coming from that very culture" (1997, pp.106-107). During an interview, white South African author Nadine Gordimer talks about being confronted by a black South African playwright concerning this matter:

> I talked recently to a young black playwright called Moise Maponye, and he was very bitter. He had got up at a writer's meeting. His remarks were directed against white

writers generally. He said, 'whites take our lives and make their books out of them, and these books are published and everybody reads them and nobody wants to publish my play' (Cooper-Clark, 1986, p.81).

With the disproportionate ethnicity of writers being published, this inevitably means that some are heard while others are not, and that literature about non-white cultures runs the risk of becoming white-washed. My first reaction, after reading the views of writers such as Philip's and Maponye's was to argue for the positive things that my (white) writing could do for African Australians (the 'do-gooder' in me popped her head up again); for how I would ensure that I would not 'speak for' or 'white-wash' African Australian experience; for how I would work towards gaining the right to write about the other. But Philip soon put me in my place again: for the white writer to insist on his or her right to write about another culture, "as so many writers have, while remaining silent on the equal rights of other writers to be heard, is fundamentally undemocratic and unfair" (Philip, 1997, p.105).

A nerve is pricked, my white privilege ruffled. Reflecting on Philip's words is not an experience encouraged by my white race privilege (see Nicoll, 2004, p.30); however I must think about these issues – as should any white writer engaged in cross-cultural/racial writing – and think about them hard. While I do go into an examination of whether white writers have the right to write African Australian fictional characters in Chapter Two (in a much more critical way, thankfully, than my first response), for this chapter I have chosen to accept Philip's challenge and first examine the issues that African Australian practitioners, and other non-white writers, face in a white dominated nation, and to the "equal rights" that they too have (or should have) "to be heard." Such an examination brings to light not only the issues that African Australians are confronted with, but also of the white centred discourses which encourage discrimination against non-white writers and which permeate in Australian literary spaces. This chapter also draws to attention the dire real-life consequences that the lack of African Australian writing in Australian literature can have on the inclusion/exclusion of the African Australian community in society.

I now realise that such an investigation is integral to the overall research aim of this project which seeks to establish a writing position whereby I can write an ethically and racially balanced novella concerning the intercultural relations between my white Australian and black African characters; it enables me to approach my writing practice with more

awareness of not only my other, but also of the white discourses for which I and my representations are an index. Such awareness, I now realise, is crucial if I am to resist perpetuating whiteness by 'speaking for' African Australians and 'white-washing' their lived experiences.

Australian Literature, Whiteness and Non-White Ethnic Writing

> ...and they call everything
> except themselves phantoms
>
>   (Ismail, 2009, p.55)

I wonder, how much does Ismail's poem apply to literature as well? Is there a ghostly lack of black African Australian writing, a phantom presence? Is there white ignorance of the creative and artistic works of the non-white practitioner, an ignorance born from a sense of pompous superiority or a learnt fear of difference? I went searching through Australian literary databases and library catalogues, surfing through countless pages, typing in keyword after keyword, to find the answer. And what I found (in regards to quantity) was not much – an answer in itself. Very few texts by African Australian writers, as my long and scrupulous hunt showed me, have been published and circulated within Australian literary spaces. Writers such as Afeif Ismail, Sekai Nzenza-Shand, Cola Bilkuei, Maxine Beneba Clarke and Edison Yongai are just the small handful of names circulating in this sphere, with most of their work being published under the radar of mainstream (white centred) literature, either in small independent publishing houses or through self-publishing modes. Although these works are powerful pieces and often sites of resistance, on the whole there is a phantom presence, an almost invisibility of African Australian writing in Australian literature. They are a community of voices almost muffled down to silence.

It is very possible that the lack of black African Australian presence in literature today stems from the fact that the African Australian group is still a young, emerging community, making up less than 1% of the total population of Australia, as demonstrated in the Introduction of this exegesis (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Hugo, 2009, pp.15-16, 21-22). It could be argued that issues such as literacy, opportunity and time could also be factors affecting the lack of African Australian writing – many African migrants and refugees may simply be too busy trying to settle in and survive in their new environment, leaving little time to even think

about writing their next play or novel. In contrast, it is clear to see that many white Australian practitioners, who benefit from the comforts of white privilege and middle-class life, can more easily take the time to indulge in their practices and draw on the necessary resources and networks to assist them in their work.

However, applying Brewster's assumption that race relationality is foundational to the formation of the settler nation and is central to state ideology (2008b, p.429), I suggest that the lack of African Australian presence in Australian literature is not as simple as the fact that the African Australian community is a young, emerging one, nor that it is simply a time or literacy issue (although both of these are intrinsically involved). Rather it is the racial discourses upholding whiteness which permeate into Australian literary spaces that marginalise non-white ethnic writers and their works. It is not difficult to see this process of marginalisation occurring at all levels of the non-white ethnic writer's creative output: from lack of community structure and support, to editing and publishing issues, to difficulties in distributing work in a competitive and predominately white market.

Before discussing the lack of African Australian presence in Australian literature and the specific issues that this constituency faces in the literary domain, it will be useful to take a look at the history of non-white ethnic writing in Australian literature in a white centred market as the policies and discourses enforced in Australian society in the past continue to affect the treatment of such writing today. But first, I must make a note on the use of the term 'non-white ethnic writing' which is used throughout this chapter.

A number of different terms have been used to designate writing from non-Indigenous backgrounds other than English and Irish mainstream such as multicultural writing, migrant writing, non-Anglo-Celtic writing, ethnic writing, NESB (Non English Speaking Background) writing and diasporic writing. Ommundsen points out that "all of these terms have, for various reasons, proved problematic" (2007, p.75). For instance, 'migrant writing' does not accurately cover the experience and work of second-generation writers (Ommundsen, 2007, p.75). The term 'multicultural writing' also has its problems: Gunew states that "to call them 'multicultural writing' is to homogenise the very differences which are demanding to be analysed" (1994, p.23). Furthermore, the term 'multiculturalism' "has come to mean much more than an empirical description. It refers to the officially-sanctioned philosophy of the place of migrants in their new country" (Collins, 1992, p.108). Thus, the term 'multicultural

writing' would carry with it the current ideology of migrant settlement, reflecting government attitudes and policies towards migrants in Australia.

Gunew prefers the term 'ethnic minority writing' as it positions such writing to ethnic *majority* writing, which "ensures that cultural majority groups no longer remain invisible," while at the same time it encourages the analysis of cultural differences (1994, p.23). I lean towards using this term for this project; however, I am also wary that because this is a project largely focused on race there is also a need to mark and make visible whiteness as a racial construct (see Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, pp.79-80). I'm dubious as to whether the positioning of the word 'minority' against the word 'majority' does this – the word 'majority' itself is not explicitly associated with nor does it name whiteness. The term I favour, then, is 'non-white ethnic writing' as it carries with it the discursive construct of whiteness which marginalises non-white people. Including 'ethnic' in the term, also sets the writing apart from Aboriginal writing. As discussed in the Introduction of this exegesis, it is important and necessary that the two contain their own separate categories. The term non-white ethnic writing, then, will be used in the general discussion about the works of non-white ethnic writers, while the term African Australian writing will be used when speaking specifically about this constituency.

As was discussed in the Introduction, the White Australia policy, introduced soon after Federation in 1901, ensured that Australia became an immigrant nation almost exclusively British in character; this was the case, also, for the field of literature. Deana Heath argues that between 1901 and the Second World War, Australia had "the severest censorship laws of any democratic country: laws that were designed to protect the racial strength and purity of the Australian nation from the threat of a predominately imported literature" (2001, p.70). The Commonwealth Customs Department established to enforce censorship laws "had the power to handle undesirable migrants, authors and books in the same fashion" (Heath, 2001, p.81). After the Second World War, restrictions on non-British immigration eased, allowing migration from other parts of Europe. During this time, migrants were expected to assimilate into the Anglo-Celtic mainstream and abandon the languages and cultures of their homeland. Alongside this policy, Australian literature was used in an attempt to construct and validate a national Australian identity with whiteness at its core. As Toni Morrison highlights, "cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation's literature" (1992, p.39). Critics have argued that the quest for the mythical 'Great Australian

Novel' which would represent 'the Australian way of life' encapsulates such a nationalistic project. Stewart suggests that "the search for a novel that in some way combines 'greatness' and 'national representativeness' is characteristic of colonial and post-colonial cultures" and assumes a "special self-assertive urgency" (1983, p.39). This urgency, Hodge and Mishra contend, derives from the white man's need to assert authority for his being in Australia:

> In the past the Australian obsession with legitimacy has been translated into the project of establishing a distinctively Australian tradition, complete with a Great Australian Writer and a Great Australian Novel, whose manifest greatness would at last prove the colonists' right to belong (1991, p.x).

The several contenders for the Great Australian Novel which have received the most recognition, as identified by Stewart (1983, p.41), are Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874), Patrick White's *The Tree of Man* (1955) and *Voss* (1957), Thomas Keneally's *Bring Larks and Heroes* (1967)*,* and Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* (1938) and *Poor Fellow My Country* (1975) – all of which have been written by white Australian men, and all of which focus on the white settler and/or convict bush life. In recent times the search for the Great Australian Novel has been contested on the grounds of cultural gate-keeping. For example, Cooney writes that

> while any published work written by an Australian or about Australia contributes to the vast blob we call our 'national consciousness,' when one book is held up above all others it has an unproportionate weight in dictating who we are as a whole, even if we disagree with it entirely (2009).

Furthermore, the fact that we live in a constantly evolving era of globalisation and transnationalism makes the idea of one book coming "to represent an entire nation" pretty much impossible; "in such a world, the very idea of 'national identity' is thrown up into flux" (Au, 2009). Au argues, however, that it is for this very reason that we tend to cling to the idea of a Great Australian Novel in the first place, "because we are scared of this uncertainty, and because of the old fear that if we can be everything then perhaps we are really nothing" (2009). Au's words echo back to the xenophobic sentiments underlying the White Australia Policy and early censorship laws. A century gone and still the dominant group clings to the notion of preserving not only 'Australian' literature, but also whiteness.

Although the Great Australian Novel still pokes its nationalistic head from time to time into literary debates, it appears that since the 1960s and 1970s the influence it exercised over the practice and criticism of the novel in Australia has diminished (Stewart, 1983, p.43). In fact, the decline of the Great Australian Novel coincided with the rise of multiculturalism in the mid-1970s under the Whitlam government, and also with the 1967 Referendum which constituted the inclusion of Aboriginal people in the census. As multiculturalism replaced assimilationist homogeneity, non-white writing began to emerge in Australian literary spaces, thanks to researchers, such as Sneja Gunew, who were interested in cultural diversity and bringing such works out of obscurity (Raschke, 2005, pp.21-2). As non-white ethnic writing emerged, the very definition of Australian literature transformed irrevocably, making "that literature no longer a homogenous entity (if it ever was one) but a heterogeneous practice marked by a variety of often contradictory tendencies" (Hodge & Mishra, 1991, p.202). Following the wake of the government rhetoric and hyperbole that surrounded the introduction of the official multicultural policy, and as a response to the lack of non-white ethnic writing in Australian literature, around thirty state-sponsored 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' writing anthologies were published between the late 1970s and mid 1990s, as well as small press magazines such as *Migrant 7* and *Outrider* which promoted work by non-white ethnic writers (Raschke, 2005, p.23). Ommundsen notes, however, that "whether this research, along with the efforts of numerous individuals and organizations to promote cultural diversity in Australian literature, has fully succeeded in bringing multicultural writing in from the margins is still a matter for debate" (2007, p.77).

Multicultural literary critic Sonia Mycak argues that even during the earlier decades of literary enthusiasm for non-white ethnic writing, much of Australia's enormous amount of culturally and linguistically diverse writing went unnoticed by Australian literary studies and, she maintains, this continues to be the case (2005, p.146). In a nation that pushed for ethnic equality and cultural diversity, it would seem surprising that this was the situation. Jakubowicz argues, however, that the rhetoric of multiculturalism was a clever strategy for the containment of migrants as political force: "It is essentially about sustaining the existing social order and the existing core values, however sexist or oppressive they may be" (1984, p.43). This ideology Hage calls "White multiculturalism," arguing that "the White multicultural 'we' which appreciates diversity seems continuous with the old Australian 'we' that did not appreciate it. Diversity simply does not affect the nature of the White 'we.' It

remains extrinsic to it" (1998, p.140). It is reasonable to suspect that the facade of multiculturalism can be reflected in the $1.3 million distributed to ethnic and multicultural artistic organisations and individuals by the Australian Government's major arts funding and advisory body, Australia Council, in 1986 – the distribution being a mere three percent of total allocations (Jupp, 2001, p.269). It's a pittance when you consider that around this time the 'ethnic' (those of non-English-speaking background) population of Australia encompassed at least one-fifth of all Australians (Jupp, 1990, p.4).

It is in a world of these conversations that the rhetoric of multiculturalism continues to marginalise non-white ethnic writers. Commenting on the neglect of non-white works in Australian literature, Auslit Multicultural researcher Michael Jacklin contends that non-white ethnic writing circulates beneath and beyond the level of the nation

> in that their publication and circulation occurs below the radar, so to speak, of the national infrastructure of Australian literary studies. Because, in many cases, these works are not lodged in state or the national libraries, they have remained unrecorded by Libraries Australia and by the AustLit database. They operate beyond the level of the nation in their publication overseas in diasporic communities or in the writer's country of origin, again with the result that they have eluded the attention of most researchers in Australian literature and, therefore, go unrecognised and unremarked in critical studies (2009, p.5).

This was not simply a matter of ignorance or of an unawareness of non-white ethnic writing being produced in Australia; many multicultural critics instead assert that non-white ethnic writers "were actively shunned by the Australian literary world, and that their work was in the main met with cold prejudice by commercial publishers" (Raschke, 2005, p.22).

The backlash against multiculturalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s also worked to discredit non-white ethnic writing, "making it less visible than it might have been within the body of Australian literature" (Ommundsen, 2007, p.79). Ommundsen suggests that in the field of literature, the most significant "moments" of the backlash against multiculturalism occurred in 1991, with the publication of Robert Dessaix's essay "Nice Work If You Can Get It" (1991), and in 1994, with the infamous "Demidenko affair" (Ommundsen, 2007, p.80). In his essay, Dessaix wrote that he did not accept the view that non-white ethnic writers are marginalised because Australian literature excludes non-white cultural perspectives; rather

the reason why the writing is overlooked, he argued, is that "it's often not very good," and for the obvious reason that the writer's English is not good enough to produce texts of sufficient complexity and sophistication (1991, p.26). His attack, not surprisingly, prompted a heated debate (Ommundsen, 2007, pp.80-81). Non-white ethnic writing also made headlines in the media after the "Demidenko affair," when Helen Demidenko, author of award-winning novel *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1994) – a story about a Ukrainian family during the Holocaust – was found out to be Helen Darville; her cultural background not, as she had claimed, Ukrainian, but British. Ommundsen highlights that

> while opponents of multiculturalism gleefully cited the case as 'proof' of the corrupting influence of political correctness and its promotion of ethnic minorities, others were more inclined to regard it as a demonstration of the pernicious effects of stereotyped and simplistic perceptions of minority cultures (2007, p.82).

In regards to funding for multicultural arts, the backlash of multiculturalism and the closing down of discourse regarding cultural diversity affected all areas of life, with the arts taking the biggest brunt of it. Generally speaking, funding for the arts was reduced under the Howard Government, but for the multicultural arts the Commonwealth virtually withdrew all funding (Jupp, 2001, p.274). Responsibility instead for multicultural projects moved towards state governments and non-governmental institutions such as churches, clubs and associations (Jupp, 2001, p.270).

Anti-multicultural rhetoric only strengthened in the wake of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks such as the 2005 London bombings. Georgiou claims that

> after the terrorist attacks on Western targets, strong concerns were voiced that multiculturalism allowed the propagation of radical Islamist ideas and undermined social cohesion. More effort was seen to be needed to promote commitment to Australian values and institutions (2008).

According to Jupp, the fear of terrorist attacks occurring on Australian soil, along with the growing fear of the arrival of 'unauthorised' asylum seekers, led Howard to make "many changes in immigration and security practices and relatively massive increases in budgets and staffing" (2006, p.701). A new anti-terror legislation was also put into place to hamper the activities of any potential terrorists in Australia. Jupp believes that the major race riots in Cronulla, Sydney in 2005 also helped to shape public policy in Australia towards the 'war on

terrorism' as it "alerted authorities to the deterioration in ethnic relations created by these previous events" (2006, p.699).

The African Australian community has not been exempt from the public debate of internal security, ethnic relations and immigration. The intense media attention regarding a series of violent events involving Sudanese youth in 2007-08 provides a disturbing example of the way politicians and those in authority spin stories for their own fundamentally white agendas, always at the detriment of the ethnic group in question (Windle, 2008). Following the violent events, Jakubowicz shows that along with Muslim Arabs, "the greatest attention in relation to 'capacity to integrate' has been imposed on...Black Africans" (2008). This view was heightened when the then Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews, a member of the Howard Government, publicly declared his concern that African refugees "don't seem to be settling and adjusting into the Australian life as quickly as we would have hoped" (Topsfield, 2007). Jakubowicz argues that Andrews' comments may have signalled to some that Africans were "unacceptable and dangerous – and that assaults on them could be defended as expressions of righteous nationalism" (2010, pp.18-19).

In response to Andrews' comments, the Refugee Council of Australia contended that "Mr Andrews has linked ability to settle in Australia to a person's race, rather than his or her individual circumstances" and that "[s]uch a sweeping generalisation about an entire racial or national group is unjustifiable – and far more dangerous than the Minister realises" (2007, p.1). Windle highlights that this 'failure to integrate' was given as justification for the cut of humanitarian visas allocated to Africans from 70 to 30 percent, and resonates the framing of the Tampa Crisis of 2001 in which "the government used the plight of refugees attempting to reach Australia to play on xenophobic fears and win that year's Federal election" (2008, p.2). In reaction to the media coverage and public debate of the violent events involving Sudanese youth, West Indian Australian slam poet Maxine Beneba Clarke writes:

Last month a black child was beaten to death
three suburbs from where we live
neighbour stared
the letters in the age said this:
If you think these people can assimilate, you're wrong,
let's round them up, lock them down
and send them back to where they came from
and *I'm not a racist or anything*
but if you let in even a few of them, they will breed like rabbits:

dole-bludging five-baby-to-four-daddy mammas
hands outstretched to a welfare habit
damn it
we didn't come to this country
because we liked the flowers
we're here because they annihilated ours...

(2008b, p.20, excerpt)

According to novelist and human rights activist Eva Sallis, the current political climate has real and disturbing impacts on who and what gets published in Australian literature. Sallis highlights that under the new anti-terror legislation, Australians can be detained without charge if suspected of being involved in terrorist activity, and can be tried without ever knowing the evidence being used against them (2008, p.4). She argues that "this legislation reactivates and expands archaic sedition laws, making clear that this government fears the influence of the written and spoken word," and that theoretically writers must watch what they write so as not to appear suspect (2008, p.5). Rosie Scott also agrees that this time of 'terror' has created "a fearful and conservative literary climate," made worse by government appointment of right-wing ideologues to important cultural institutions like the ABC and the Australia Council (2008, p.32). To back up these statements, Sallis states that following the new anti-terror legislation, in 2006 "the attorney-general took over the Classification and Review Boards from the Office of Film and Literature Classification in order to secure the banning of eight books which had not been banned through all the usual processes"; of the eight books, two were banned, and "the attorney-general proposed tougher laws in order to secure the banning of the remaining six books" (2008, p.9).

It's not hard to imagine, in this current conservative literary climate, that the few 'multicultural' projects supported by the Australia Council would be chosen selectively on the grounds of those that are deemed 'safe' to distribute to the public; this raises all sorts of censorship and freedom of speech barriers, and only further marginalises the work of non-white ethnic writers who often have political and dissenting elements in their writing. I wonder if the current political climate had any influence over the lack of non-English migrant writers' works in the *Macquarie Pen Anthology of Australian Literature* (Jose, 2009). While the anthology, which spans over 225 years of Australian writing, included (quite rightly) a large amount of Aboriginal writing, it failed to cover sufficiently the generations of writing of migrant cultures which record their adaptations to a new land and culture (McLaren, 2010).

McLaren notes that there are no letters in the anthology from "twentieth-century Afghani boat people, nor does [the anthology] offer any petitions from the centres in which they were detained" (2010). This corresponds with Sallis' argument concerning anti-terror legislation which gags "terror suspects" and their families so that they "cannot even talk about rumours of degrading treatment in Australian prisons" (2008, p.9).

With the change of government in 2008, the future looked brighter for multiculturalism. Kevin Rudd, leader of the Labour Party, restored the term when he reinstated the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council that was abolished by the Howard government in 2006 (Yusuf, 2008). The Gillard government, however, rejected Rudd's "call for a 'Big Australia' formed by continuing large-scale immigration," and instead "sympathises with the concern that large-scale immigration and multiculturalism are threatening Australia's core values and identity" (Phillips, 2010b). As for the boats of asylum seekers, Gillard made clear that she wanted to be even more effective in stopping them in order to protect "our sanctuary" and "the Australian way" (Phillips, 2010b).[9] Things in the arts sector do not look any more promising. Boland shows that the joy of leading figures in the arts at the change of government quickly turned to disillusionment at the perceived lack of support from the Rudd cabinet (2010). She states that "it's true the Howard government never had an arts minister in cabinet, but the position is diminished if the arts sector doesn't have the support of the Finance Minister, Treasurer and PM" (Boland, 2010).

It is clear to see, from the above examination, of the impact white centred values, discourses and policies have had, and continue to have, on non-white ethnic writers in the domain of Australian literature. Such an examination paints a very bleak picture indeed. I would now like to look more specifically at the challenges African Australian practitioners face in a nation which is dominated by whiteness.

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[9] Just recently, however, the Gillard government had to reconsider the way in which asylum seekers are being dealt with, proposing the Malaysian Solution which planned to send 800 boat arrivals back to Malaysia in exchange for accepting 4000 refugees currently in Malaysia over four years (Gordon, 2011). The Malaysian Solution was rejected by the High Court, however, leaving the Government with no choice but to process all asylum seekers onshore (Woodley, 2011).

Challenges Facing African Australian Practitioners Today

In the domain of multicultural Australian literary research there have been a number of communities of Australian ethnic writers that have had a considerable amount of attention, such as writers and writing from eastern European heritage and Asian Australian writing (Jacklin, 2009, p.5). In this chapter, I focus on a community of culturally and linguistically diverse writers – that is, African Australian writers – who have not yet received any treatment in Australian literary studies, and discuss the specific challenges that these writers (and other African Australian practitioners in the arts) have in a white centred sphere.

As discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, the African Australian community constitutes one of the most disadvantaged groups in terms of socioeconomic status and racial discrimination (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.xv; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010, p.8); this is no doubt the case when it comes to producing, publishing and circulating their creative works. Producing and publishing creative writing in Australia is a tough endeavour for any aspiring writer regardless of race or ethnicity, so for the African Australian writer, particularly one that has come from a refugee background, and also considering the lack of government assistance in both settlement and the arts, the challenges could seem insurmountable. During my search for African Australian literary texts, I came across a small handful of critical essays and autobiographies written by African Australian authors which, very often, outlined the difficulties they have experienced writing in Australia. I noticed common themes arising, themes which echo those discussed in the previous section: lack of government and community support, 'touristic' multiculturalism, xenophobic fears of the 'other' and overt racial discrimination. All of these issues, I believe, are interrelated, and all are products of white centred enterprises that continue to influence the treatment of non-white ethnic writing in Australian literary spaces today. In the following discussion, I would like to highlight and explore these issues as spoken by the African Australian authors.

In the closing chapter of his autobiography, Sudanese Australian refugee Cola Bilkuei contends that one of the biggest challenges facing African refugee youth – youth who already lack education and resources – is the shortage of structure and support from the community. Bilkuei laments that the youth "have so much talent...but they don't have structure in their lives. They have the stories, but with nowhere to tell them they get bored and go to the train station and do drugs and commit crimes, and down it goes from there"

(2008, p.227). Listening to Bilkuei's account here, I am reminded of the Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews' concern about African Australians' 'inability to integrate' and I am compelled to wonder: if Mr Andrews was so 'concerned,' perhaps it would have been more productive and sustainable to urge the development of on-going projects that could provide opportunities for African refugees to build on their skills and talents and ultimately strengthen their self-worth, rather than cutting back humanitarian intake and defaming a whole community with his words.

Obviously, however, someone's out there helping the marginalised give voice to their stories – the Macmillan publication of Bilkuei's autobiography is evidence of that. According to journalist Malcolm Knox who assisted in the writing of the memoir, Bilkuei "was working with Phillip Ross, an arts officer at the Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre, under an Arts NSW scheme to fund migrant arts projects" (2008). This is evidence that non-white ethnic writers are being supported by state and independent institutions. Despite my argument that non-white ethnic writing is predominately published by small publishing houses or through self-publishing means, Bilkuei's autobiography was picked up by Macmillan, which according to its website is "one of the largest and best known international publishing houses in the world" (Macmillan Publishers Australia, 2010). Based on the information I have gathered, it is reasonable to assume that the network of writers and associations helping Bilkuei had a lot to do with getting *Cola's Journey* published by Macmillan. Malcolm Knox, who assisted Bilkuei and who also checked into the credentials of Bilkuei's story, is himself a successful journalist and novelist and would probably have used his connections in the publishing world. While the success of *Cola's Journey* is to be commended, there are many more African Australian writers out there who have not been as lucky as Bilkuei in attaining such a supportive and established network. As Bilkuei points out in his book, there needs to be more assistance from the community to the many who are wandering without "structure in their lives" (2008, p.227).

Even for African practitioners who were successful in their home countries, finding support from the host community in regards to their practices can be difficult. The experiences of Afeif Ismail, whose poem introduced the beginning of this chapter, are examples of this. Ismail, a well-established poet, playwright, artist and activist recounts that in his home country Sudan "to be a writer is a huge responsibility because, in our culture, the poet is the voice of the nation" (2008, p.12). Arrested as a prisoner of conscience twenty-four times

between 1990 and 2000, Ismail bore the responsibility with brave determination, even in the face of military governments who would "touch a pistol whenever they hear[d] the word culture, because they kn[e]w the power of words in our community" (Ismail, 2008, p.12). One can only imagine, then, how Ismail must have felt upon his arrival in Perth in 2003 when he asked a social worker where he could find a writers' union or writers' group, and he got this response:

> [The social worker] was shocked and looked at me as if I came from another era. He replied, 'You can't be serious mate? I've worked in this job for 11 years and no one has asked me this question before'…He did a great job helping us to settle in but he was gone before he had answered my original question (Ismail, 2008, p.13).

The social worker's response, I suggest, is a reflection of the Commonwealth's withdrawal from multicultural arts to areas considered to be more pertinent to the majority and to the governments – such as immigration settlement and welfare (Jupp, 2001, p.274). Now compare this: a poet, the voice of the nation, to a poet, an archaic Shakespearean thing-of-the-past. The cultural differences in the value of the poet between the two countries would have, I assume, appeared to Ismail enormous. Gone from "the voice of the nation" to a refugee in a place where the arts (and even more so, the non-white ethnic writer) droops low on the list of priorities, Ismail was left to wander by himself in the streets "looking for a sign of people with similar interests" (Ismail, 2008, p.13). It would be another four months before stumbling upon an arts organisation's office who helped him get in touch with other writers (Ismail, 2008, p.13).

Some of these writers showed Ismail great understanding and acceptance, however, others – and here I borrow Ghassan Hage's metaphor – treated Ismail as if he were on display at a multicultural fair, an object for "the real Australians, bearers of the White nation" to look at and "enrich themselves" (Hage, 1998, p.118). This is what hooks would call "eating the Other," in which cultural, ethnic and racial differences are "continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate – that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten" (1992, p.39). Ismail recalls that one well-known poet in particular met with Ismail and before they started any conversation the poet began taking photos of Ismail. On enquiring what the photos were for, the poet said, "for his writing group. When they knew he was going to meet a Sudanese poet, they had asked him to bring a photo so

they could see what one looked like" (Ismail, 2008, p.13). This ignorant act is what Ommundsen calls "touristic multiculturalism," where the "appeal to minority cultures as exotic turns them into objects of desire, commodities to be consumed, experienced or played with but set aside when the serious business of living in the modern world has to be faced" (2000, p.7). In her autobiographical novel, Zimbabwean born Sekai Nzenza-Shand also expressed similar frustrations: "At times in Australia I felt I was in a museum where people could gaze at me and ask questions. Being black, African and a woman was enough for people to feel they could ask about my personal life in public" (1997, p.25). Reflecting on the event with the happy-photo-snapper poet, Ismail says: "He didn't ask anything about my poetry or books, he was just looking for someone coming from the Dark Continent of Africa – perhaps he was hoping I would write poetry with my tail!" (2008, p.13). Such an encounter also echoes Gunew's argument that too often the literary merits of non-white ethnic writers' works are disregarded, instead their writing (or, in Ismail's case, the writer himself) is perceived as a form of sociology or oral history (1990, p.113).

Playwright and performer Sheela Langeberg is another practitioner who after experiencing success in her home country Tanzania and in Sweden was confronted with racial discrimination when trying to find work in Australia. First arriving in Australia in 1989 during the backlash of multiculturalism, Langeberg was met with open hostility from a well-known creative arts agency when she tried to register herself as an artiste (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.146). Upon seeing Langeberg, the agent exploded:

> 'Another black girl, what am I going to do with all these black girls popping into my office?' At that point, the agent became hysterical. She absolutely refused to even look at Sheela's portfolio. 'I can't register you,' the agent said. 'We don't have work to give to African girls' (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.147).

Fortunately, Langeberg didn't let the hysterical agent's attitude kill her determination or passion for writing and acting. Despite facing racial discrimination, Langeberg, now residing in Adelaide, is "one of the most influential and written about Africans in Australia today"; a multi-award winning artist, she has composed a proliferating array of music albums, children's books and stage productions, as well as touring year after year around the globe and working with school children and adults in Adelaide to produce their own productions of drama, dance and design (Langeberg, 2011).

Unjustified racist responses, such as the agent's in Langeberg's story, resonate with xenophobic attitudes that framed White Australia and assimilation policies, and echoes through now to current public debates of large-scale immigration and its perceived threat of undermining 'core Australian values.' Langeberg's experience also rings true with Bertone et al.'s report that examines the representation of Australian artists and characters of non-English-speaking background (NESB) in film, theatre and television in Australia. They found that

> NESB artists are under represented in all three sectors [. . .] NESB artists are numerically under represented relative to their proportions within the general Australian workforce and population [. . .] NESB artists are largely restricted to minor, tokenistic or stereotype roles [. . .] the failure to present positive and accurate images of NESB people in the arts, or to explore issues relevant to them, sends a powerful message of exclusion to the NESB communities (2000, pp.viii, ix, x).

In her article "White Australia Has a Blackface History" (2010c) Clarke examines the masked racism that occurs in Australia, with a specific emphasis on the negative representations of black people in the arts, and how these negative representations impede the efforts and ambitions of African Australian writers. She begins the article by discussing the blackface skit incident that occurred on *Hey Hey It's Saturday* in 2009, in which a group of men dressed up blackface, imitating Jackson Five. One of the guest judges, American musician Harry Connick Junior, voiced his disgust: "If they turned up looking like that in the United States, it would be like, 'Hey, hey, there's no more show!'" (Clarke, 2010c). Host Daryl Somers reluctantly negotiated an on-air apology, but when it came, "the apology was issued specifically to the musician himself, rather than to people of colour or any offended viewers" (Clarke, 2010c).

This incident caused uproar in public debate. Clarke contends that on one hand, the politicians and the mainstream media defended the right of Australians to bear blackface, using humour as the backbone for their argument. Not realising that considering the incident as humorous was, in itself, the problem, Julia Gillard said, "whatever happened was meant to be humorous and would be taken in that spirit by most Australians" (Clarke, 2010c). Clarke on the other hand, and many like her, assert that what happened was patronising, racist and full of disturbing historical connotations and denied the increasing presence of people of African descent in Australia.

In her article, Clarke shows that this masked racism profoundly affects the African Australian practitioner in very real and grave ways. Clarke recalls her attendance at the African Artists Articulate Conference held at the Blacktown Arts Centre in Sydney's west in 2009 where she listened to a young Sudanese panellist talking enthusiastically about her writing. Sixteen-year-old Akoi Majak was one of the co-writers of the play *My Name is Sud*, an eloquently written and moving examination of the Sudanese refugee experience in Australia. Clarke observes the way Majak spoke with shining optimism about her future as a writer, but sitting there in the audience, Clarke is painfully aware of the obstacles facing the black marginalised writer. As Deranty says, "if someone is not of the prevailing Anglo-Saxon culture, the chance that their achievements and their contributions to Australian society will be recognised is very low" (2001, p.191). Watching Majak, Clarke wonders:

> how long before Akoi Majak learnt about writing black in Australia?...How long before the sentiments of that 69 per cent – the 69 per cent of Australians that, according to News Limited, considered *Hey Hey*'s blackface skit fun family entertainment – crush her aspirations? (2010c).

The World, the Text, and...Where Did They Go?

Gone unrecognised, aspirations crushed, manuscripts dumped in the recycling bins of white money-hungry publishing houses: "They call everything / except themselves phantoms" (Ismail, 2009, p.55). I have arrived to ask: could the lack of African Australian writing in Australian literature possibly affect the inclusion/exclusion of the African Australian community in society? Do words really have such power?

To explore this question, I must draw upon Edward Said's theory of the text as "worldly." Said believes that "texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly" (1983, p.35). This suggests that texts have a strong (if not inherent) connection to the world and to the society in which they are produced. I would argue that this connection is a two way phenomenon. Not only does the world and the circumstances, discourses and events circulating within that part of the world influence the making of the text, but so too does the text in a cyclical fashion affect its readers living and operating within the world. Terry Threadgold contends that narratives "do affect the ways bodies are

lived and imagined...and how those interactions construct and craft in turn the hegemonies and the regularities of the social" (2005, p.267). Threadgold goes on to argue that in this way, narratives can "come to make only certain bodies *matter*" (2005, p.267). I would also add that the lack or silencing of particular narratives by the dominant white culture come to make certain bodies *not* matter. This implies that when a group of people, such as the African Australian community, are largely absent from Australia's literary language, they become absent from our consciousness, invisible as social members, and repressed in society. It also implies that the reverse could be true.

David Malouf illustrates how this process works in relation to our belonging to the land. Malouf maintains that we begin to belong to a land when that land appears in our works of imagination – in and through the written word – as the acts of writing and reading are "interiorising activit[ies], a matter of 'taking things in'" (1998, p.36). He contends that these acts are a matter of

> enriching our consciousness...increasing our awareness of what exists around us, making it register on our senses in the most vivid way; but also of taking all that *into* our consciousness and of giving it a second life there so that we possess the world we inhabit imaginatively as well as in fact (1998, p.35).

Eva Sallis uses Malouf's idea above to show that through works of imagination, such as literature, a community can also begin to "imagine the lives of others," or in other words, they can begin to have "a shared capacity to think and feel with others" (2008, p.4). However, she also argues – and I touched on this a little earlier – that with the new anti-terror legislation and with the fear of large-scale immigration, the government discourages Australians from "imagining" others; the government instead encourages the wider public to be suspicious of all. As this capacity to imagine others diminishes, "more and more Australians will cease to recognise some Australians as human...Exile from the common imagination is the most terrible thing ever to happen to a group of human beings and has irreparable consequences. We should know this from history" (Sallis, 2008, p.11). In "Open Letter to the Prime Minister (a poem)" (2010b), Maxine Beneba Clarke explores the way Australian election media strategies exile coloured minorities with their overly saturated white images, and in so doing alludes to an "irreparable consequence" of history:

dear julia

i will vote for you
when you put *my* child on your knee

& by *my child* i mean *our children*
& by *i* / of course / i mean *we*

bt chubby brown babes / r not
prime photo opportunities
& your careful selection / of
translucent bouncing babes
r like recruitment ads
for the hitler youth brigade

the right kind of migrants
for a sustainable Australia

(Clarke, 2010b, excerpt)

In this poem, Clarke's comparison of the Australian election media strategies to the media strategies employed by the Nazis alludes to what Sallis means by the "irreparable consequences" that may come from exiling a group (or groups) of people from the common imagination. About this, Clarke says:

> When mass media images are so intentionally white-washed and racially specific. When we, as a wonderfully mixed nation, are bombarded with pictures of politicians holding Anglo children, in Anglo homes etc etc etc to the exclusion of all other images...when most of us fail to even NOTICE this carefully marketed subliminal messaging, are these not the same techniques that may one day lead to a catastrophe we would not want to see in this world again (Clarke, 2010a).

Raschke asserts that in Australia's realms of power and influence, Australian publishing and literature are also imbalanced towards white or Anglo tradition, thereby projecting (whether intentionally or not) these very same predominantly white images (2005, p.26). Inez Baranay argues that the lack of non-white ethnic representations in literature works towards creating the "illusion of an Anglo nation" (2004b, p.120). In her poem "fairytale" (2009), Clarke shows that this fantasy of whiteness in children's literature not only excludes non-white ethnic minorities from Australian society and from the public imagination, but also deludes those who are coloured in very real and tragic ways:

the teacher reads snow white
in our fairytale
my daughter will scar herself
with household bleach tonight
crying *mirror on the wall*
erase this face as black as night

(2009, p.34, excerpt)

We see here that the lack of African Australian writing then is not only a matter of inequality in the literary and publishing world, but that it can have very real and serious consequences for the African Australian community in everyday life. Considering this, it becomes crucial that their voices are heard. But how can this be achieved? How can their writing break-through the overly saturated whiteness of Australian literature and life?

Let's go back to Said's concept of the text as worldly. In their examination of Said's concept, Ashcroft and Ahlwalia argue that "the political necessity of the text's worldliness is crucial for the post-colonial text in particular, not only for its capacity to represent the world but also for its aim to actually *be* in, to intervene in, the world" (2009, pp.21-2). Non-white ethnic writing in Australia, such as the African Australian texts, are distinctively postcolonial in nature as they exist culturally and racially on the outskirts of the white colonial nation of Australia. Working from the fringes does not mean that they have little power: as Ashcroft and Ahlwalia suggest, such postcolonial texts have the potential to intervene with and deconstruct white discourses.

Deleuze and Guattari use the term "minor literature" to describe minority writing written in a major language and suggest that "everything in them is political" (1986, p.17): "If the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (1986, p.17). This suggests that non-white ethnic writing – because of its minority status – can reshape and recreate new discourses within Australian society. Upon discussing Deleuze and Guattari's idea, Gunew highlights that a minor language's own political construction of the dominant language has the ability to destabilise the dominant language from within, causing the dominant language to lose "its power as a kind of Adamic naming and hence possession of the world" (1994, p.12). Brewster, in her discussion on Indigenous protest poetry, also

argues that marginalised writers use their "invisibility" – their 'phantom' presence – to defamiliarise and deconstruct white privilege through "an element of surprise" (2008a, p.68). For example, "if Indigenous people are perceived as invisible, this condition is appropriated as 'camouflage'...The Indigenous body/voice 'will rise' from invisibility and silence, from within the 'familiar' hegemony of the English language and the white nation" (Brewster, 2008a, p.69). Akin to Indigenous writing, non-white ethnic writing, then, is not just an oppositional or counter-discourse: it actively works to undo the power of dominant white discourses (Gunew, 1994, p.42).

We have come to see that though there is an immense lack of African Australian writing in mainstream Australian literature, what is circulating (even if it is below the radar) does have an effect on its readers and on society at large. In a scholarly sense, the impact such writing can have can be seen by Udo-Ekpo's ground-breaking thesis, *Africans in Australia* (1999), which was one of the first projects of its time to research the lives and experiences of Africans in Australia. Although his book was self-published, it is now one of the most widely-cited studies on African Australians. I believe that literary texts can also have such an impact. Every person – white or other – that picks up a poem of Maxine Beneba Clarke's or a short story by Sekai Nzenza-Shand will, in some way or another, be influenced by the words and the images that they take in. Of Afeif Ismail's poems, Haskell says: they "jolt us into thinking about the world anew, even – perhaps especially – those aspects of it we thought we knew already" (2009, p.8). And it isn't just Ismail's poems that cause us to see "the world anew;" many of the other works by African Australian writers challenge the way readers' perceive the world: they cause discomfort, they jolt us with electric shocks, they not only force us to see the world anew, but also ourselves, our whiteness. In a sense, the white reader becomes 'othered:' an unfamiliar being to one's own self.

While the works of African Australian practitioners who were discussed earlier have worked to destabilise whiteness, there have also been other projects operating at grassroots levels which have opened up spaces for young African Australians to share their stories – and as a result, have jolted their readers' to think about the world, and themselves, anew. It is with the younger constituency and second-generation African Australians that we may begin to see a greater emergence of African Australian writing being produced and published. In 2006, a series of workshops were held in Bankstown for children and young people from emerging African communities in Sydney to create and present both traditional African tales

and personal poems and writings about their experiences as refugees. The workshops were part of a community cultural development project funded by the Australia Council for the Arts and Bankstown City Council, Community Grants Program. The stories and illustrations were compiled by Arab Australian writer Paula Abood and Sierra Leonean Australian writer Edison Yongai into a children's picture book, *The Book of African Stories* (2006a). The editors of the book state that one of the primary aims of the project "was to provide a space for young people and children from emerging African communities to create" stories that "not only spoke to children from African communities, but to a wider readership" (Abood & Yongai, 2006b, p.58).

Grassroots association, Australians Against Racism, established by designer Mariana Hardwick and novelist Eva Sallis, also instigated two nationwide writing competitions in 2002 and 2004 which encouraged young writers to use an interview with a refugee or an Indigenous Australian or a direct personal experience of displacement as a starting point, and imaginatively recreate the story as fiction or essay. Resulting from the competition, a collection of confronting and poignant stories was compiled into two anthologies: *Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories* (Dechian, et al., 2004) and *No Place Like Home: Australian Stories* (Dechian, et al., 2005). Of the anthologies, Sallis claims that they are "both an extraordinary record of young people's literary talent and a collection of important controversial Australian stories that need to be heard and read now" (2004, p.1).

Sallis highlights that "for many writers, this was an opportunity to make their voice heard" (2005, pp.1-2). Among the stories in the anthologies are the side-swept voices of young African Australian writers, Deng Elia, Kuach Deng, Atem Jok and Lual Makuei Deng all of whom speak heart-wrenchingly of their escape from Sudan and their lives of both safety and discrimination in Australia. Lual Makuei Deng writes: "Being a refugee is never a good thing, it will guarantee you racism no matter what race you come from and it will deprive you of humanity. When you see a refugee have heart, for what they have experienced is of the lowest pits of humanity" (2005, p.148). Another young writer ends her composition by saying: "It's up to the children of today to stop this" (Hann, 2005, p.8) – to stop the racism, to stop the discrimination, to stop this "silly colour believing" (Hann, 2005, p.8). Sallis states in the conclusion of her foreword in *Dark Dreams* that the creativity that has sprung from the making of these stories is "profoundly transforming," and she hopes that the stories "will have a slow but direct impact on Australia's evolving community" (Sallis, 2004, p.6).

Another young Vietnamese Australian writer concludes her own refugee story by pleading that "perhaps, as a society, we should focus...more on words – words of compassion, words of kindness and words of human value. Most importantly, we should listen to their words, hear their voices and document their stories" (Nguyen, 2004, p.204). In line with this, Sallis believes that "such a leap of creative imagination makes individual people visible and imaginable. Such a leap is all it takes for us to have a right compassion, not compassion that lumps people together as victims, but one that sees each human life as unique and irreplaceable" (2004, p.2).

Where Does This Leave the White Writer?

The suggestion made by Sallis above (and earlier in the chapter) about the potential and necessity to "imagine the lives of others" through our works of imagination (2008, p.4) brings me back to my original desire to help 'make visible' the African Australian community through my writing. Sallis' proposition, however, goes further than my simplistic idea of 'making visible,' in that imagining the lives of others means more than just 'doing good' for the other; rather to imagine the other encourages transformation – a change in one's perceptual frameworks and treatments of those with whom we come into contact. In relation to this project, to imagine, think and feel with the other would also, one could assume, prompt the white Australian writer to counterbalance negative representations of African Australians in this current conservative and bigoted political climate, by offering more accurate and dynamic representations, ones which deconstruct negative stereotypes.

Sallis' proposition for the necessity of imagining the other, then, provides a justifiable and worthy reason for the cross-cultural/racial work which I am doing. Failing to imagine the other in my creative work would, as Baranay argues, work to perpetuate the "illusion of an Anglo nation" (2004b, p.120), and thus "exile" other Australians from the "common imagination" (Sallis, 2008, p.11). Furthermore, as Philip highlights

> If all the white writers interested in this type of writing were voluntarily to swear off writing from the point of view of persons from other races and/or cultures, it would not ensure that writers from those cultures or races would get published any more easily, or at all (Philip, 1997, p. 101).

It is possible, also, in regards to my project, that white writers' works about African Australians may open spaces for more African Australian writers to publish their own works; "that is, writing opens a discussion; it does not end it" (Quigley, 2011, p.59).

While I whole-heartedly agree with the possibility of the imaginative and real-life affects that can occur through imagining the lives of others in writing, I also feel that as a white writer, I must approach my cross-cultural/racial writing practices both critically and with caution. To become more aware of my white subjectivity and the white discourses which continue to oppress non-white people will, one would hope, limit the risk of 'speaking for' and 'white-washing' African Australian experience. This brings me to my next chapter in which I explore the way Africans have been negatively represented in the past through white colonial literature, and how African Australians continue to be misrepresented in the media. In the following chapter, I also draw on current debates of white writing other in Australia to determine whether I, as a white Australian, have the right, and the competence, to write African Australians in my fictional work.

Chapter Two

White Representations of African Australians

and the Haunt of Ethics

At the end of the day, they fail to realise that African people are also just as normal people as Australians.

(Interviewee 1, 2009)

I sat opposite a Kenyan man in a small university classroom. The interview for my PhD research had been going along quite cordially, the conversation light with memories of his country and his tribe and his life back home. I paused to take a look at my next question. *How do you feel about Westerners making movies and writing books about Africans?* The quiet buzz of the voice recorder pulled at the air. I knew from my conversation earlier with this man, that his answer was not going to be all that cordial. With a fervent flip of his hand he replied, "of course anyway I'm negative about that" (Interviewee 1, 2009). The bluntness in his tone made me shift in my chair, and in my awkwardness I fumbled with the paper to keep my hands busy. "I'm very sceptical about the activities," he continued – his tone not easing, my hands still fumbling – "because a lot of Westerners, when they go to Africa all they focus on is on the negative. I mean that's not what they do in Asian countries. You see they just go there and they want to collaborate with them. But when they come to Africa everything is in disarray. It's disorganised. We need civilisation. We need this…At the end of the day, they fail to realise that African people are also just as normal people as Australians" (Interviewee 1, 2009).

Later, as I played back the interview on my computer, I wondered if I had fallen (or would fall) into the trap of representing African people in such an unrelenting negative way. I also wondered if the man's candid response was somehow a dig at my own novella that I was writing. Was his answer a challenge to me, to this white girl, to my competence and my authority to represent African people in my fiction? It was probably just my imagination – there was probably nothing at all personal in his zealous answer – however it made me seriously question not only the way in which I was representing the African Australian

community, but also my right and my ability to include representations of Africans in my novella.

As a white cross-cultural/racial writer, I believe it is imperative to examine the issues alluded to above and become aware of the representational 'traps' that I may (subconsciously) fall into. Some of these representational 'traps' include perpetuating and constructing stereotypes and projecting power over the appropriated culture by divulging information about that culture "through the lens of white supremacy" (hooks, 1992, p.1). Such an examination is synonymous with Ellison's call for white subjects to carry out "the double task of unlearning one's own dominance by acquiring specific knowledge about others, and then, using this knowledge, continuously undoing generalizations about the Other" (1996, p.369). In my attempt to work towards establishing a more ethically and racially nuanced writing position, I aim to explore in this chapter some of the ethical issues involved in white representations of African Australians from a creative writer's perspective. By tracing the way Africans have been negatively represented in the past through white colonial literature, and how African Australians are represented now through contemporary, widespread modes of the Western media, I show why white writing black (with particular reference to an Australian context) is such a contentious and complex issue today. As I am a white writer writing from a position of privilege and power, it is important – one could even argue, mandatory – that I respond to these representational issues and become critical of my role as a cross-cultural/racial representer. hooks succinctly highlights what the consequences would be if one does not do this: "If the many non-black people who produce images or critical narratives about blackness and black people do not interrogate their perspectives, then they may simply recreate the imperial gaze – the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and colonize" (1992, p.7). I am also interested, in this chapter, in exploring whether white Australian writers should in fact write the African Australian other; are they 'allowed' to do so, and how might African Australians feel about such a project? To do this I examine the debate of white writing other in an Australian context, as well as white Australia's social, political and historical relationship with the African Australian community.

Ethics of Authorship: Colonial and Contemporary Representations of Africans

Throughout my PhD candidature I have at times been haunted, as conveyed by the experience recounted above, by issues of authorship: do I have the right and authority to write about and speak for the African Australian community, a cultural and racial group vastly different from my own? I hear this haunting question as I cautiously write African characters into my novella. I hear it as I delve deeper into scholarly works by Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'O, J.M. Coetzee and the bluntness of bell hooks. I hear it in the tone of a Kenyan interviewee, a man who has been forced to deal with the repercussions of white representations of Africans from the very first moment he set foot in Australia. Such haunting feelings – sentiments of anxiety, guilt and blame – could be categorised as instances of 'liberal guilt' which dramatises the suffering of others to oneself; it is "bound up with the feeling of being implicated in systems of domination and with the subsequent awareness of the emotional instability produced by this ambivalent position" (Ellison, 1996, p.350). Such liberal guilt can paralyse the white subject and any engagement she has with her racialised other.

To be haunted: disturbed, made uncomfortable, uncertain, anxious of one's "position of power, pen in hand" (Morphet, 1987, pp.461-62), of the toes one might step on and crush. In his *Spectres of Marx*, Jacques Derrida begins with the presupposition that "haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony" (2002, p.37). This suggests that within every dominant discourse or world system (such as white supremacy) there is a repressed alternative discourse which threatens insurrection (Jones, 2006, p.16). Gail Jones argues that Derrida's premise of "haunting" is fundamentally a justice claim: it "requires us not to forget the wrongs of history and to work for reparation in the future" (2006, p.16). To be haunted, then, does not necessarily lead to destructive or paralysing ends – perhaps, even, it is essential to be overcome by feelings that haunt. Yes it could cause a white writer to cower away from representing the other, but it could also elicit the need for one to examine – to actively become aware of – the way the other has been represented in the past, and to interrogate one's own position of privilege and power from which one is writing, and work towards making amends.

So let's examine, let's interrogate. What is this position from which I, a white writer, writes? And why am I haunted – made anxious, uncertain – of representing African Australians in my

writing? According to D'Cruz, in identity politics and speaking rights there is a common view that "more often than not, *before confronting any other qualifying prerequisite to speak*, a speaker must satisfy the criteria of bearing the marker of identity that one is speaking about" (2001). This argument would suggest that I, a white person without, to my knowledge, African heritage in my blood, would never meet the prerequisites for speaking about the experiences of, and the issues facing, African people living in Australia today. Such an argument is partially positioned in the fact that I have not lived and experienced life as an African Australian and therefore I would not understand their experiences. On this point, Keeshig-Tobias remarks that

> Stories...are not just entertainment. Stories are power. They reflect the deepest, most intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture, thinks. Such wonderful offerings are seldom reproduced by outsiders (1997, p.71).

Keeshig-Tobias' reference to stories as "power" alludes to an even more ethico-political reason why, according to identity politics and speaking rights, the representer must carry a similar identity to the represented. In regards to representations of the other, postcolonial critics trace the way white writers have, through their positions of privilege and power, spoken for and about the other in ways that have reduced the other's sovereignty. Ashcroft et al. contend that those in power always "have control of what is known and the *way* it is known, and those who have such knowledge have power over those who do not" (2000, p.72). This power-play is exercised through discourse, wherein language, the systems of signs, is manipulated to construct social 'texts' that serve the ideological purposes (such as colonial enterprises) of those in power; "in discourse something is formed... along with all that a society may produce....there is the formation and transformation of 'things said'" (Foucault, 1978, p.18). It is through discourse, Edward Said argues, that "European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (1978, p.3). Because discourses are formed – and transformed – through language, Ashcroft et al. contend that literary texts and textuality played a major part in both conquest and colonisation as they "captured the non-European subject within European frameworks which read his or her alterity as *terror* or *lack*" (2006c, p.93). Africans are one such constituency that has been "captured" by European discursive representations.

Stereotypes of Africans in Colonial Literature

It is not possible to consider the discursive white position from which I write, nor my questionable authority to include representations of African Australians in my writing, without reference to the long historical dominance of Africans by colonial writers who held discursive power over the colonised African. Such a discussion will not only shed light on why white authorship in cross-cultural/racial writing is such a contentious issue, but will also highlight the origins of stereotypical images of black Africans which continue to influence Western perceptions today. I do this not merely to 'stereotype spot'; such an endeavour is limited if I were to only stay within the 'fixed' bounds of black/white binaries. Rather, by becoming aware of stereotypical images and binary oppositions, I not only hope to avoid perpetuating them in my novella, but I also aim to establish something more syncretic and creative through the intercultural relations between my white and black characters. Such an endeavour is synonymous to Stuart Hall's idea of cultural identity as a "production," as a matter of "becoming" through engagements with other cultures in a powerful, creative and transformative way (Hall, 1994, pp.392, 394). This is explored further in Chapter Three, but for now, it is necessary to establish what these binary oppositions are.

Although African writing in English began in the eighteenth century with the black African slave narratives (Griffiths, 2000, p.7), it was those from a 'privileged' European background who were constructing and controlling representations of Africans in the English speaking world during the colonial period. Kenyan author and literary critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that there were two kinds of colonial literature which "captured" the African other. The first "body of literature was the one that tried to define the colonized world for the European colonizer. This was downright racist literature and often made no effort to hide it" (Ngũgĩ, 1981, p.16). The second body of literature "set out to sympathetically treat the African world either to appeal to the European liberal conscience or simply to interpret Africa for the Africans. But even among these, the African image is still in negative terms" (Ngũgĩ, 1981, p.19). From these works, several stereotypes of the African arose.

Most prevalent of these images was the stereotype of the African as "primitive, cannibalistic, barbaric [and] abject" (Ashcroft, 1997, p.11). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) is an example of this. While Conrad's novella was considered by Conrad a well-intended critique of the evils of colonialism, Nigerian author Chinua Achebe famously argued in the 1970s that

the text is full of racist undertones: "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by the triumphant bestiality" (1988, p.3). According to Achebe, Conrad's primitive representations dehumanise Africans, deny them language and culture and reduce them to a metaphorical extension of the dark and dangerous jungle into which the Europeans venture; it is "a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question" (1988, p.15).

Another popular stereotype in colonial literature was the "childlike African" whose "ignorance and need for guidance appealed...to the British sense of moral responsibility for the enlightenment of the 'benighted'" (Milbury-Steen, 1981, p.16). Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen) is one such example of a European writer who was caught up in the racial language of her time, portraying Africans in her memoir *Out of Africa* (1937) as faithful, childlike blacks who "take their first tentative steps, under her tutelage, towards civilisation" (Hamilton & Modisane, 2007, p.116). These childlike representations are contrasted with colonialists' egocentricity and self-interest as leaders, allowing them to play their "ultimate role – that of God" (JanMohamed, 1983, p.64).

The representation of the "Europeanised African" who foolishly "imitated or aped Western ways" also proliferated in colonial literature (Milbury-Steen, 1981, p.15). The creative African in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1952) exemplifies such an image as he is "presented as a clown/buffoon" who "perceives himself as an English gentleman yet cannot avoid breaking into wild, impoverished song and dance at the slightest provocation" (JanMohamed, 1983, p.32). According to Milbury-Steen, these Africans were "especially ridiculed because of their impudence in presuming that they could attain the level of British civilisation" (1981, p.15).

Through the discussion of discourse above, we see that textual representations do have powerful, real-life effects. The negative stereotypes spoken of here no doubt affected and constructed the white consciousness, filtering warped perceptions of Africans in the European mind. What is also disturbing about these stereotypes is that they also influenced the way Africans saw themselves. Ngũgĩ states that colonial literature was a subtle imperialistic weapon as it worked "through influencing emotions, the imagination, the consciousness of a people in a certain way; to make the colonized see the world as seen, analyzed, and defined by the artists and the intellectuals of the western ruling classes"

(1981, p.15). These negative notions of "the African" (as defined by the ruling classes) were so wide-spread, with colonial literatures being the only texts prescribed in many African schools, even up until a decade or so after independence (Ngũgĩ, 1981, pp.3-5; Lefevere, 1995, pp.466-67). The effect of this "was to produce an African permanently injured by a feeling of inadequacy, a person who would look up with reverent awe to the achievements of Europe; a person, who...has no faith either in himself, or in the capacity of his people for total liberation" (Ngũgĩ, 1981, p.23). It is important to reinforce, however, that "it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence" (Fanon, 1963, p.30). Without the white settler's intervention the word "native" would not exist or function the way it does in European languages – without the colonisers, the negative connotations of "blackness" or of "Africanness" would not have been born. Such colonialist texts, then, do not represent African reality, in contrast they reflect (and can only ever reflect) imperial ideologies and their racist undercurrents.

With this brief historical summary of the way Africans have been portrayed in colonial literature (and the *effects* of those representations), it is clear to see why African writers, critics and Africans in general today are contentious about who represents indigenous and diasporic African communities. It is also clear to see why a white writer such as myself – one who has become informed of the issues of white authorship, one who is a conscience-stricken writer – is tentative, made uncertain by her representations of Africans and the discursive position from which she writes. Here, white writing black becomes a deep-seated ethical issue, tied up in discursive power struggles between the privileged white subject and the marginalised black object. The power-struggles involved in representations extend in time and place, from colonial Africa to contemporary Western societies such as Australia in which diasporic Africans continue to be constructed by "the European imagination" (Ashcroft, 1993, p.162).

Like many parts of Africa, Australia too, because of its postcolonial status, is constructed by white imperial ideologies. During the period of colonisation, colonial frameworks worked to construct both Africa and Australia as primitive, uncivilised worlds "not yet brought into the light" (Ashcroft, 1993, p.162); worlds which were in need of European Enlightenment. For example, Ashcroft highlights that Africa was considered "the dark place of the human psyche," while "Australia, *Terra Australis*, is the land to the South, Terra Incognita, the unnamed, the Nothing beyond the boundaries of the uncivilized world" (1993, p.162). Like

the colonial representations of Africans explored above, Indigenous Australians too were represented (in starkly similar ways: as childish, primitive, noble, cunning and savage (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b)) through the imperial gaze – a strategy employed by the British in an attempt to maintain power over the Indigenous populations and "to sustain the foundation myth of settlement" (Miley, 2006, p.9).

As discussed in the Introduction, the British worked hard to create the idea of a 'white' Australian nation through its oppressive treatment of Indigenous Australians – and later, in its handling of non-white migrants. In contemporary Australia today, more subtle strategies are in operation to maintain the idea of a 'white' nation. Just as Australians continue to 'see' and represent Indigenous Australians through a white neo-colonial lenses, so too do they 'see' and represent Africans in Australia in a similar way. As Australia has "a closer relationship with the [European] 'center' than with" Africa, Australia's perceptions of Africans are always filtered through the 'center'" (Ashcroft, 1993, p.162). As Hall states, for many diasporic Africans, the European presence "is a matter not of too little but of too much. Where Africa was a case of the unspoken, Europe was a case of that which is endlessly speaking – and endlessly speaking *us.*" (1994, p.399). I will return to the issues involved in white representations of Indigenous Australians and its connection to writing about African Australians later in this chapter. But what I would like to look at now are some of the more contemporary neo-colonial representations of African Australians and the impact these have on perceptual frameworks in society today.

Contemporary Stereotypes of Africans

In the twenty-first century, colonial representations of Africans continue to be constructed and perpetuated by whites across the world, however a different manifestation of stereotypes have become more "fashionable" in the West: that of the "poor starving African" perpetually fighting wars and dying of AIDS, "in need of salvation by the West" (Adichie, 2008, p.44). In his satirical article "How to Write About Africa" Kenyan author Binyavanga Wainaina plays on these new "fashionable" stereotypes, providing the (white) beginner writer with some 'insightful' tips on writing contemporary African characters:

> Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these...

> Among your characters you must always include The Starving African, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West. Her children have flies on their eyelids and pot bellies, and her breasts are flat and empty. She must look utterly helpless… (2005).

It has been argued by many cultural critics that the mass media has become the most powerful medium in constructing representations of race and shaping public perceptions of blackness (hooks, 1992, p.2). According to hooks, just like the representations of Africans in colonial literature, contemporary images of blackness circulating in the media continue to "support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people," thereby preserving "white supremacist patriarchy" in Western societies (1992, p.2).

As in other Western countries such as America, the Australian media has an increasingly powerful influence on how the public perceive African migration and African presence in Australia today (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.150). It is a potent force, directed, as we have seen in Chapter One, by those in governmental power, defining who belongs (and who does not belong) to the nation. As very little has been written about or by African Australians, especially texts circulating in the mainstream sphere, the media becomes the *sole* representing mode. According to Udo-Ekpo most media correspondents know very little about Africa and spread a lot of falsehood in the media (1999, p.153). How frightening it is to think, then, that the public's perception of African Australians is shaped by such a dominant and potentially misleading force. We see here that white representations of Africans in Australia is still just as contentious (and ethical) an issue as it was in colonial times in Africa, having real effects, both psychologically and materially, for the represented.

Even though I am a writer informed on problems of race, I am not immune to the saturating, and often insinuating images of Africans in the media. Having grown up as a white Australian in a very white centred society, having been exposed to stereotypes of Africans from a very young age, it is imperative, if I want to include representations of African Australians in my novella, to become critically aware of contemporary stereotypes circulating in the media – to identify what those stereotypes are and how they are used to maintain white domination, and to examine the effects they have on the lives of African Australians. If I do not critically analyse these representations then I run the risk of subconsciously perpetuating negative

stereotypes and recreating "the imperial gaze" (hooks, 1992, p.7) – the very thing I seek to avoid, the very thing I ultimately hope to destabilise.

In Australia, there are a number of media entities through which these stereotypes are transmitted. These include (and this is not an exhaustive list): fundraising campaigns, mainstream news reports (both on television and in text), Hollywood movies and travel brochures advertising African travel destinations. While researching this topic, including analysing the African participants' interview transcripts for this research, it has become apparent that through the Australian media's representations of Africans, three main assumptions about African Australians have been constructed in the general public's eyes: Africans as 'victims,' Africans as 'archaic and exotic' and Africans as 'violent.' I would like to look more closely now at how some of the different media entities construct these stereotypes and the real-life implications they have on the African Australian community.

As highlighted at the beginning of this section, one of the most prevailing images of Africans in the Australian media is the stereotype of Africans being victims of famine, war and disease, "in need of salvation by the West" (Adichie, 2008, p.44). Perhaps the most prevalent media entities which project this picture of Africa to Australians are the myriad fundraising campaigns displaying advertisements of poverty-stricken people, malnourished, destitute and quite often displaced by war. One interviewee from Liberia was keenly aware of this when she pointed out: "That one, the people of Australia, the only thing they see is poverty" (Interviewee 4, 2010). While some Australian charity organisations strive to convey more humanistic (or at least neutral) representations of Africans (Oxfam, for example, is one of the more sensitive charity organisations whose images still convey the crises in Africa, yet do not shed the dignity of the African people), there are many more that use the most helpless images of Africans in the direst of circumstances to play at the heart-strings of potential Western donors. World Vision, Australia's largest charitable group, is one such organisation which is particularly adept at doing this, as can be seen in the three drought-stricken photographs below from their website:

Fig. 1. *Bilku & Nesredin*, 2009. Source: www.worldvision.com.au.

Fig. 2. *Imuse*, 2009. Source: www.worldvision.com.au.

Lucy & Musa, 2010. Source: www.worldvision.com.au.

World Vision's captions to these photographs of despair only enhance the vulnerability and helplessness of the African people (who most often are children, the most vulnerable of humans: a marketing strategy to tug once again at Western donors' heart-strings). The caption for *Bilku & Nesredin* (2009) paints a bleak future for the mother and her skeletal baby: "Almost all of Bilku's crops died because of drought and now she doesn't know how she will feed her baby, Nesredin." A similar story of despondency is heard in the caption for *Imuse* (2009): "In Kenya, children like Imuse cry from the pains of hunger."

I must not overgeneralise, however. There are some World Vision Australia photographs which do convey Africans in a more positive light – images of healthy, happy people in fertile lands – but always these more optimistic representations come *after* assistance from the West. An explicit example of this is evident in the two photographs below where we first see the malnourished, apathetic Mwansa in 2005, followed by a happy picture of her family in 2010 after receiving maize and bean seeds and tools from World Vision:

Mwansa in 2005, 2010. © Copyright World Vision Australia [2011]. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Source: www.worldvision.com.au.

Mwansa & Family Now, 2010. © Copyright World Vision Australia [2011]. All rights reserved. Used by permission. Source: www.worldvision.com.au.

Such juxtaposing 'before and after' representations further convey the underlying presupposition that without the West, Africa will never be able to rise above poverty and famine. A current fundraising campaign by Save the Children Australia positions the Western viewer to see just that. In an attempt to gain more donations to help treat children in developing countries from potentially fatal illnesses, Save the Children places a sense of privilege and importance on the Western viewer through its bold slogan "YOU + HEALTH WORKER = THE SOLUTION" (2011), thereby erasing the agency of the 'victim' and of her being an actor in her fight for a better future.

Although this discussion places charity organisations such as World Vision and Save the Children in a critical light, I must stress that I am not, by any means, against the efforts and intentions of these organisations. I'm quite sure that they do believe they are doing the right thing helping 'less-privileged' people, and that using the more shocking images is just one way of growing their humanitarian efforts (i.e. the more shocking the image, the faster and more generous response from their donor audience). Even I was affected by such images, igniting my desire to do 'volunteer work' in Kenya. But the fact of the matter remains that

although there is some truth in the representations of Africans in fundraising campaigns (yes, there are people devastatingly malnourished and stricken with disease), and although the campaigns have been effective in raising awareness of human rights abuses and poverty in Africa and building up foreign aid for those less fortunate, there is no doubt that these stereotypical images circulating in Australia have also lead to negative consequences for Africans – particularly for those who have migrated or resettled in Australia (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.163). Udo-Ekpo argues that "over-emphasising the negative aspects of African development" leads to stereotyping all Africans as needy, uneducated victims "waiting for aid" from the West, stressing "their inability to rescue themselves from the tragic consequences of war, famine, natural disaster, ethnic conflict and political and religious persecution" (1999, p.163). In Australia, it also constructs the assumption that all Africans are refugees, that they are "problems in need of solutions" (Phillips, 2010a, p.1). One interviewee from Kenya, an international student who is in Australia to complete his PhD, expressed his frustration of constantly being categorised, because of his African ethnicity, as a "desperate" refugee:

> You meet an Aussie, the first thing [they say] is...'Hello, where are you from?' 'I'm from Kenya.' 'Are you a refugee?' And I'm like, well, I just have to tell them: 'Every black person you see in Australia you think is a refugee?'... At times I really feel offended... I guess it's like a stereotype. Oh, we have a refugee here, he's desperate. It doesn't really make much sense (Interviewee 1, 2009).

Adichie contends that the portrayal of Africans as hopeless 'victims' reduces "Africa to a simple story and often neglect[s] human actors. So we see Africans receiving, we see Africans who are limp with gratitude or limp with hunger, but we do not see Africans who act, although there are many who do" (Adichie, 2008, p.45). In line with Adichie's argument, victimised images of Africans fail to show the African people's "pride in their survival, their knowledge of their land, their commitment to the wellbeing of their children, or their willingness to learn" (Macdougall, 2007, p.73). Like the stereotypes that dehumanised Africans in the colonial period, these contemporary portrayals of "limp" Africans who are unable to act also empty the African of human qualities, suggesting once again Africa's inferiority to the West.

The images of Africans used by Australian charity organisations also lead to another public assumption: that all Africans are archaic; that all Africans live in poverty and in mud huts with no electricity or running water; that all Africans are uneducated and therefore ignorant of things like healthcare, trade and infrastructure. Here we see echoes of another colonial stereotype: that of the uncivilised, primitive African. One interviewee from Liberia expressed her frustration at the media's predominant portrayal of an 'under-developed' Africa, fervently emphasising that "we have good things over there, we have good houses, we have good things, good living...big beautiful buildings, nice houses" (Braslane, 2010), but rarely do these prosperous, urbanised images surface in the media. The idea of Africa as an 'under-developed' country lies in connection with the "ideology of capitalist 'development'" which McClintock highlights has impacted not only the world's natural resources, but also on people below the poverty line who now suffer irreparable damage in health, nutrition and education (1993, pp.301, 302). There is, then, an undeniable portion of truth in the portrayal of an 'under-developed' Africa, however what lies hidden is the fact that it is capitalist countries, such as the United States of America, and the ideology of 'progress' and 'development' which has caused Africa to be so.

Australian travel agencies advertising African holiday destinations also play on archaic depiction of Africans, however rather than brandishing images of the poor, starving African, they take a more exotic approach. In almost all of the brochures advertising African destinations, photographs of exotic-looking Africans are used – from Samburu warriors in Kenya to Zulus in South Africa, draped in traditional dress, half-naked and decorated with bright beads and spears in hands (for examples, see the following ebrochures: Gecko's, 2011-2012; Kumuka, 2011-2012; Creative Holidays, 2011). Like the victimised representations of Africans, these exotic, 'tribal' portrayals further project the image of a primeval African. While some African communities continue to live in their traditional tribal ways (with a mix of the West), not all Africans live in this way, nor do all Africans live in remote, under-developed areas. There are many city-dwelling, well-educated Africans; the Australian media, however, fails to represent this cohort. Pickering argues that such stereotypical representations of a group of people cause all sorts of inaccurate assumptions and judgements to be placed on individuals associated with that group because stereotypes "portray a social group or category as homogenous" (2001, p.4). One interviewee who grew

up in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon, was confronted by this fact when he arrived in Tasmania and found that many locals thought Africans were:

> the kind of people who haven't been exposed to the world...They [Australians] believe there are certain things that have not yet reached Africa, so many aspects of life...So even sometimes in the way you dress, if you dress like a European or like a Westerner, they're like, 'gee, is it now that he started dressing that way or have you been doing this in Africa?' (Interviewee 5, 2010).

The problem with the homogenising nature of stereotypes is that one story becomes "the only story" and straightjackets "our ability to think in complex ways" (Adichie, 2008, p.43). Wakholi is aware of this fact when he contends that many Australians internalise stereotypes of Africans circulating in the media so much so that they are unable to see beyond the homogenising representations and therefore develop certain attitudes and behaviours towards African people (2008, p.2). For African migrants in Australia, this can have particular impact on their every-day life as their social relations with the rest of the community become dictated by the popular stereotypes of the day (Wakholi, 2008, p.2). One interviewee from Ethiopia, now living in Tasmania completing his PhD in the Social Sciences, gives an explicit example of how the stereotype of the archaic, exotic African has adversely affected his settlement process and his attempts to obtain a house to rent:

> I had someone ask me to write a page to show how my experiences and my skills of keeping a house, and I was angry cause I said, listen, I lived in a bigger and better house than this, I'm renting this because I'm just starting. It was not a good house. But that was their perception of maybe this guy was living nowhere so he would not be able to run...This is like their own perception of what sort of life you have had, and your capacity, and like the fear of the unknown. They don't know what to expect (Hiruy, 2010).

Hiruy brings up an interesting point about "the fear of the unknown" – or more precisely, the fear of the other. Papaellinas states that "exoticism is just a boutique form of xenophobia" (1992, p.166). This suggests that the archaic, exotic stereotypes of Africans were not just constructed by and for white people to culturally "enrich themselves" (Hage, 1998, p.118), but that they were also constructed by whites in a way that superimposed white ideals over other cultures for the purpose of instilling fear of the unknown in the white

population, and in effect, maintaining authority over the other (Colmeiro, 2002, p.129). This complex process can be seen in Hiruy's experience with the Tasmanian rental agencies: they see an African, they assume, because of the archaic, exotic stereotypes, that he does not have the skills nor ability to rent a house, they become doubtful – frightened – and because they have the power they can leave him houseless, homeless, out in the cold.

A less subtle stereotype circulating in the Australian media which also attempts to elicit a fear of the other is the representation of African migrants as 'violent.' This depiction of African Australians arose in the late 1980s when black African immigration humanitarian programs were being established by government bodies. Right-wing conservatives who were against non-white immigration used negative representations of black South Africans based on violent stories of the apartheid era to argue against Africans migrating to Australia (Jakubowicz, 2010). Right-winger Bruce Ruxton, the Victorian State President of the RSL, was often sought after by the Australian media for his abrasive and colourful views. For example, in 1987 *The Weekend Australian* recounts Ruxton's explicitly racist description of a black African refugee: "Is it a black man who has hung a burning tyre around some poor devil's neck and is trying to skip the country to evade legal justice? Do we want those kind of people here?" (cited in Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.150). Although most Australians, according to Udo-Ekpo, rejected Ruxton's criticism of black migration to Australia, it still constructed the perception, thanks to the media, that Africans are violent and therefore not wanted in Australia (1999, p.155). Such simplified stereotypes of Africans, and the apparent risk they posed in undermining social cohesion, were part of the right-wing agenda to abandon multiculturalism and return to the monocultural definition of a white Australian national identity (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.151). The stereotypes also distanced "Africa from Australia" and played "into the deeply held notions of a 'savage' and 'wild' Africa" (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p. 155).

A similar story can be seen today. As discussed in Chapter One, intensive media coverage and politicisation of a small number of violent events in 2007-08 in Melbourne involving Sudanese youth have perpetuated once again the negative stereotype that all African Australians are "gang members, criminals or terrorists...who are unable to settle into Australian society" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010, p.37). In response to these assumptions, an interviewee from Sudan suggests that it is "because of this war going on more than twenty-two years" that the Australian public has come to believe "that we in

Sudan are like that" (Laker, 2010). Laker makes a very valid point here. Subjected to a myriad of international news reports on political and ethnic conflicts in Sudan and in other African countries, combined with popular Hollywood movies (such as *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *Blood Diamond* (2006)) revolving around brutal, bloody wars in Africa, it is no wonder that the general Australian public have come to associate violent behaviour with African culture and ethnicity.

Windle illustrates how descriptions of Africans in news reports on the 2007-08 violent events in Melbourne played on assumptions that war-ravaged Africa shapes culturally violent people (2008). For example, in *The Age* Assistant Commissioner Paul Evans is attributed as saying that investigators are dealing with refugees "who had come from a culture of boy soldiers and social violence" (Evans, 2007). Elsewhere the commissioner explains "this is a cultural thing. A lot of these people are brought up as warriors in their own country" (Mitchell, 2007). Such obscured perceptions were also projected by conservative newspaper columnists; for example, in the *Herald Sun* Andrew Bolt claims that "Sudanese men come from a warlike culture and arc up more quickly than most when in a group" (2007). These representations of culturally violent Africans were not restricted to the 2007-08 attacks. They continue to be displayed across newspapers, as evidenced by Bolt's article "Attacks Have African Appearance" (2011) in which he cites, derisively, twelve separate news reports on different crimes that occurred across the country involving Africans in the month of April 2011. What I find extremely disconcerting is the way in which Bolt moulds his article around the disclaimer that "many African refugees are peace-loving," yet based on his twelve crime citings, he (somewhat paradoxically) says that "anyone who closes their eyes to what I've listed or cries 'racist' is irresponsible and dishonest. There is indeed a problem here" (Bolt, 2011).

Windle argues that the violent events "themselves offer little support...that African refugees are prone to violence as a consequence of racial and cultural attributes" (2008, p.1), however the sweeping generalisations still have dangerous repercussions for the African Australian community. Many of my own interview participants expressed their frustration concerning these stories in the media, the way they stereotyped all African Australians – and in particular, the Sudanese people – to be violent criminals, when only a very small minority of Africans were involved in such events. One Sudanese interviewee claims that the media's generalisations have

made the situation even worse for all Sudanese who are here, even those who have never been following those kind of acts. No, they are all becoming victims because...people here like ask you questions, and when you say you're from Sudan, they go, 'hmmm, really?' Even if they didn't tell you they are thinking that bad thing, you know (Piripiri, 2010).

The stereotypes of African Australians discussed above – whether it is the desperate refugee or the exotic, archaic African or the violent suburban delinquent – all serve an ideological purpose. According to Udo-Ekpo, such representations of African Australians waver

between the investigation of the African condition and, indirectly, a sentimental appraisal of the Australian way of life. [They draw] a sharp distinction between 'us' and 'them'; or between Australia's stability and the volatile political and economic situations in most countries of Africa (1999, p.166).

Just like in the days of colonisation, these representations – set against the 'stability' and 'norm' of white Australia – are used to maintain white domination. As Edward Said has argued, the West defines itself and gains "strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient" (1978, p.3). Perhaps this is the reason why very little media attention is focused on the positive things Africans are doing in Australia and their equally 'human' characteristics and achievements.

The few constructive stories being told in the media are predominantly broadcast by SBS (and, on the odd occasion, ABC). The one hour documentary, *Ayen's Cooking Class for African Men* (2007), for instance, has been aired on SBS multiple times in 2007, 2009 and 2010. The documentary is a fascinating and inspiring exploration of how Ayen Kuol, a Sudanese health worker, assists in the settlement process by working to change hundreds of years of Sudanese custom and culture by educating Sudanese men in Adelaide to prepare and cook food – a task which is considered taboo in Sudan and has lead to many problems in the settlement of Sudanese men in Australia. *The Mission* (2009), a four-part documentary about three Nigerian Catholic priests sent to save Tasmania's struggling church was also broadcast by ABC Compass in 2010. This documentary is interesting not only in how the Nigerian priests cope in Tasmania, but also in the way it reverses the usual 'white missionary' paradigm. A recent four-part documentary *Go Back To Where You Came From* (2011), aired by SBS, indirectly traces the hardships and successes of an African refugee

family (originally from Burundi and the Congo) as six 'ordinary' Australians (five of whom are 'white') live the life of a refugee for 25 days. The documentary offers a more sensitive and compassionate view of refugees, and aims to deconstruct negative preconceptions. SBS have also established an online interactive documentary *Africa to Australia* (SBS Online, 2011) which tells the stories of African immigrants and refugees living in Australia and their successes in shaping – and being shaped by – Australian society.

While there has been some media attention on more constructive African Australian stories, in the mainstream media there "appears to be almost a conspiracy of silence" (Udo-Ekpo, 1999, p.157). A few interviewees commented on this fact: "You know there are quite a number of Africans in Australia who are really doing well. But you always listen to those ones who maybe fought someone in Melbourne. There is nothing good that comes out from the media" (Lenga, 2010). Another Sudanese interviewee from Tasmania expressed her frustration that "when we do good events, like good things, like integrating into the community, they are not really represented in the media, like not taken forward to the media, only the bad things" (Peter, 2010).

West Indian Australian poet Maxine Beneba Clarke makes an interesting observation about the lack of positive representations of African Australians in the media, linking her argument to Barack Obama's presidential win in America (2008a). She observes that "newspapers across Australia failed to cover, or even mention, the euphoria of African Australians" when Obama became "not just the first black president of the United States of America" but "the first black president of any Western country" (Clarke, 2008a). Clarke boldly argues that the lack of acknowledgment in the mainstream media and from Australian politicians was used for the purpose of having African Australians (and I would add, all Australians) "believe that Obama's victory, the possibilities his journey holds, was an American thing," a feat incapable of occurring in Australia (Clarke, 2008a). Clarke's argument does not only relate to people of African descent, but also to all non-white Australians, including Indigenous Australians who are intricately connected to the assumptions and attitudes about black African Australians in the political and historical context of Australia. I would like to now turn back to the connection between Indigenous Australians and African Australians, in regards to the way both are constructed by the white imperial gaze that was suggested earlier, and explore the repercussions this connection has in the current debates about white writing other.

Ethics of Authorship: White Australian Writers Writing Other

As can be seen by the discussion above, I have strived to become more fully aware of the way Africans have been represented in the past by colonial authorities and how they continue to be represented in a white centred society today. I am more informed of white ideological purposes in constructing these stereotypes and to what effect they have had (and continue to have) on African communities. I am aware, then, of the ethical issues of white writing black – of the real-life implications representations have for the representer and the represented. Because of this knowledge, my writing should (one would hope) lead to more accurate portrayals of African Australians and attempt to "breach and dismantle" racial binaries and colonial discourses (Kossew, 1996, p.2); (this, as stated above, will be explored further in Chapter Three). But does this mean, then, that I am now 'allowed' to, as an 'informed' white writer (yet still a cultural outsider), write about African Australians? Knowing what I now know, should I still even be engaging in such a task? And how might African Australians feel about me including representations of them in my novella – because really, is that not the most important thing? These questions, I feel, can only be adequately answered in reference to the context from which the writer writes and to the white writer's social, political and historical relationship with the cultural community in which she represents. As Hall highlights: "We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context,' *positioned*" (1994, p.392).

So firstly, let's look at the writer's context from which she writes – the postcolonial settler/invader nation of Australia. Although I am not writing about Indigenous Australians, it is nevertheless important to consider the current debates surrounding white representations of Australian Indigenity as they form the political and ethical climate in which white Australian cross-cultural/racial writers are working today and will undoubtedly have implications on their representational practices. As Australia is a settler society, meaning that "the colonisers have remained, there has been no return to the metropolitan centre" (Harris, 2003, p.71), there continues to be a persistence of "tension between those who have been displaced and those who have replaced them" (Harris, 2003, p.71). It could be argued that Australia, because of its unique colonial/Indigenous history, is among one of the most contentious contexts in regards to white writing Indigenous, as nowhere else has seen such intense cultural erasure.

One of the first attempts to erase Indigenous presence in Australia was through the tenet of land rights. In his article examining the Australian postcolonial landscape, Mark Harris highlights that "from the earliest point of the white invasion of Australia the process of colonisation has been inextricably interwoven with an attempt to deny or erase any signs of Indigenous presence in the landscape" (2003, p.71). The central doctrine of the British claim to sovereignty over the continent was that the land was *Terra Nullius* ('land belonging to no man'), the country a blank slate for colonialists to fill in. The colonisers deemed that the Indigenous people had no claim upon the land, as the Indigenous people were too primitive to be actual owners and sovereigns, thus unable to improve the land by virtue of their labours.

The forced removal of Aboriginal children between the 1890s and the 1970s is also an epitome of the colonial project to expunge Indigenous race and culture. This official government policy, later termed the 'Stolen Generations,' involved approximately 100,000 Aboriginal children who were taken from their families and adopted into white families or placed into government institutions to be brought up as 'civilised' white society members. While this policy appeared, at the time, to be benevolent (i.e. rescuing Aboriginal children from the 'aimless and immoral' life on the territories, and giving them a better start at life), it was, in actual fact, designed to 'assimilate' and 'breed out' Indigenous people and Aboriginal way of life (ReconciliACTION Network, 2007). In line with this ulterior intent to 'breed out' the Aboriginal race, many Indigenous people and non-Indigenous commentators and academics have alleged that the Stolen Generations was nothing less than a form of genocide and bore strong similarities to the Nazi's project in the 1930s Nazi Germany (Manne, 2008).

The project of 'breeding out' the Aboriginal race is closely linked to the colonialist representation of the Aboriginal people during the colonial period as 'a dying race.' While the Stolen Generation project sought to erase Aboriginality, the discourse of 'a dying race' that circulated through the public domain also aimed to ignore the existence of Aboriginal people and thus enable white settlers to validate their own genealogy of ownership to the land. Harris highlights that monuments erected to Indigenous Australians around the country is a testimony of the view that Indigenous people had ceased to exist (2003, p.86). For example, in the New Cemetery at Ballarat, Victoria there is an obelisk that marks the last resting place of 'Frank, last of the Ballarat Tribe of Aborigines.' At Coranderrk, near

Healesville, Victoria, there is also a monument to Barak, who is named as the 'last of the Yarra tribe' (Harris, 2003, p.87). Such representations of Aboriginal people as 'a dying race' not only worked to erase Aboriginal culture, but also led to the idea that mixed-race Indigenous Australians were less than 'real' Aboriginal people.

Australian history, too, sought to write Indigenous presence out of the past; this occurred most predominantly in historical accounts during the first half of the twentieth-century (Reynolds, 1984, p.1). In essence, 'the history of Australia' meant the history of the white people who had lived in Australia. This silencing of Indigenous perspective was termed by the distinguished anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner as the 'Great Australian Silence' (Stanner, 1972). Henry Reynolds argues that one of the major reasons that Aborigines were written out of historical records relates back to the overwhelming opinion that the blacks were 'dying out'; "with only a minor black role in the present and none in the future, the Aboriginal past could be discounted" (1984, p.4). In seeking to explain how non-Indigenous Australians have erased, and continue to erase, Indigenous Australians from Australian history, Stanner states:

> What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so (1972, p.25).

In regards to the dominant literary historical narrative, Aboriginal writing was also largely absent up until the 1970s. In the arts sector, Aboriginal culture has also seen its fair share of appropriation by white practitioners, most noticeably in instances where white Australians have pretended to be Aboriginal for commercial purposes. Such was the case for white Australian painter Elizabeth Durack who painted under the pseudonym Eddie Burrup, an Indigenous man from Western Australia, whose paintings won awards and were selected for Aboriginal exhibitions. White Australian Leon Carmen also published an award-winning novel, *My Own Sweet Time* (1994), under the pseudonym Wanda Koolmatrie, which was purported to be an autobiographical account of her time being raised by white foster parents, and led to much uproar among Aboriginal practitioners and critics.

While it was in the 1960s that Aboriginal and white Australian activists began to protest for Aboriginal rights (which led to the landmark 1967 referendum that recognised the Indigenous population in the Australian constitution, as well as the first Aboriginal novel to be published: Mudrooroo's *Wild Cat Falling* (1965)), it was not until recently that the atrocities against Indigenous Australians were publicly acknowledged through Aboriginal peoples' legal reclamation of former lands in the 1990s and 2000s as influenced by the Mabo case, and also through Kevin Rudd's 2008 formal apology to the stolen generations.

When one considers Australia's 'dark' history – the dispossession, the cultural erasure, the silencing of Indigenous perspectives – as well as contemporary hoaxes in the arts and the appropriation of cultural images and artworks, it is no wonder that Aboriginal people today are sensitive about who tells their stories. While debates concerning who represents Indigenity have been going on for many decades (included in this is the on-going criticism, which grew in prominence in the 1970s, over the alterations to Aboriginal writing made by white publishers and editors (Jones, 2009)), it was the 1990s which saw an "increased discussion, both within and outside the Indigenous community, on the issue of non-Indigenous writers" incorporating representations of Indigenity (Heiss, 2002, p.197). Indigenous writers and critics in particular have generated a developing body of material which avidly defines the theoretical, conceptual and ethical parameters of the field of Indigenous representation (Miley, 2006, p.8). Not only are Indigenous critics and writers sick of being represented negatively (even by – and perhaps especially by – those 'well-meaning' non-Indigenous writers), but they are also "tired of competing with white writers for the opportunity to write and be published in the area that is particularly and specifically related to their lives, that of the Aboriginal experience" (Heiss, 2002, p.197). In line with this argument, Baranay recognises that "there is an understandable position here – historically some people have taken it upon themselves to speak and decide on others' behalf and these others now insist on speaking for themselves" (2002, p.187). Likewise, white Australian poet Margaret Bradstock acknowledges that "Aboriginal people feel they're their own best spokespeople, and rightly so...Our forebears have stolen everything else, so why should we steal their cultural material for white people's literature" (2001b, p.19).

In response to the heated debates about representing Indigenity, a set of protocols were developed in 2002 by government authorities in conjunction with Aboriginal legal advisors that articulate and protect the conditions under which Indigenous cultural material might

become available to non-Indigenous writers (Janke, 2002). While the protocols "encourage ethical conduct and promote interaction based on good faith and mutual respect" (Janke, 2002, p.3), the rigmarole of the protocol procedures, and the ethical and political implications attached to them, can also have the effect of 'scaring-off' non-Indigenous writers from engaging with Indigenous themes and characters. White Australian poet and critic Noel Rowe also argues that the protocols may

> encourage an assumption that the possibilities of writing are dependent on and determined by the racial identity of writers, so that discussion of who owns story could become a displaced exercise in identity politics, an exercise that privileges ethico-political over aesthetic values (2007, p.6).

When ethico-political concerns begin to exercise "an improper authority over aesthetic concerns" (Rowe, 2007, p.6), detrimental effects may occur in regards to what is produced in the arts as it implicitly discourages cross-cultural/racial syncretic transformation that can occur through creative cross-cultural/racial works. Such an emphasis on the ethico-political fails to take into account that the "primary concern of writing is to make from words something so possible and so beautiful that it convinces a reader to accept it as if were true in itself and good of its own accord" (Rowe, 2007, p.6).

The hype and seriousness of the debates, sensitivities and anxieties surrounding non-Indigenous representations of Indigenity in the Australian literary field undoubtedly have carry-over effects on white Australian writers writing about non-Indigenous, non-white cultures. I would argue that one of the major reasons for this surrounds the feeling of 'white guilt' which proliferates in Australia over the treatment of Indigenous Australians. Because both Indigenous and non-white migrant Australians have been (and continue to be in neo-colonial ways) constructed by the "European imagination," the 'white guilt' surrounding the treatment of Indigenous Australians might also, particularly for the writer who is consciously aware of these issues, be transferred onto the non-white migrant. For a consciously aware white Australian writer such as myself, I cannot help but feel that trace of 'white guilt,' which has been contextually instilled in me from a young age, towards people of African descent who have also been caught in the white gaze and who continue to be marginalised in a white centred society. I'd like to explore this now below.

Inez Baranay, an Australian author who was originally born in Italy to Hungarian parents and migrated to Australia when she was a baby, is one such author who experienced the ethico-political effects of representing the other whilst writing *Neem Dreams* (2003b), a novel set in India which has as one of its protagonist an Indian woman. Baranay, aware of the "fraught territory" of writing about "identifiable Others" (Baranay, 2003a, p.225), found that many Australians questioned her authority to write an Indian character: was she "allowed" to do so? What would "they" (the Indian people) think? (Baranay, 2004a). In response to these ethico-political questions, Baranay states:

> We live in an age of anxiety about representations of the Other: in Australia, Indigenous writers have made clear (understandably, I should say) that non-Indigenous writers need to observe certain protocols, including consultations and permissions, to write Indigenous characters and stories into their works, and they're better off leaving these themes alone (2004a).

Baranay recounts that her application for funding for one of her own projects (another novel set in the Torres Strait) was rejected because of the setting and presence of Indigenous characters – just one of the many examples of the "resulting anxiety" of writing the other in Australia (2004a).

Australian poet Margaret Bradstock also experienced this "resulting anxiety" whilst writing poems for her book *The Pomelo Tree* (2001a) (winner of the 1999/2000 Wesley Michel Wright Prize for Poetry) which focuses on the Chinese presence in Australia, from immigration and settlement, to cross-fertilisation of the two cultures. Because of the debates and sensitivities surrounding representations of Indigenity, Bradstock was constantly plagued with contradictory and doubtful thoughts about her representational practices: "Is it ethical or desirable, since I'm not Chinese, that I utilise their literary heritage for my writing? Is this an act of presumption and appropriation, or artistically justified?" (Bradstock, 2001b, p.19).

What writers, critics and the general Australian readership need to remember, however, is that white Australia's relation to Indigenous Australia is historically very different to white Australia's relation to non-white migrant communities. While both Indigenous and non-white migrant Australians have both been constructed by the "European imagination," and while both constituencies share a common experience of marginalisation and oppression by

white Australia, the two "do not stand in the same relation of otherness to the metropolitan centre" (Brewster, 1995, p.16). Because of the dispossession of Indigenous land, culture and spiritual roots, as well as the removal of children from Aboriginal families, the relationship between Aboriginal and white Australia is fraught with feelings of hatred, shame and guilt, and revolves around struggles with sovereignty claims (Cohen, 2003, p.68). Because migrants did not suffer cultural domination and decimation on the same scale as the first Australians, many Aboriginal people feel that migrants are not as disadvantaged as they. Bundjalung author Ruby Langford Ginibi emphasises this when she says: "My people were forced to give away using our language and culture, and adopt the ways of the white man, but the people who migrate here don't give away their language or culture to become Australian citizens" (1994, p.52). As mentioned earlier, there has also been extensive negative representation of Aboriginal people in white Australian literature, much more extensive than the representations of migrant groups who are more often left out completely in white literature or who feature as minor two-dimensional characters. In this sense, because there is not the same brutal history of cultural erasure and appropriation, one could assume that even though non-white migrants are marginalised in Australia, and even though their relationship with white Australia is problematic – a relationship based on unequal power relations (we saw this, no doubt, in Chapter One) – writing about the non-white, non-Indigenous other may not be *as* contentious as writing the Indigenous other. A different set of questions arise, affecting both the way the white writer approaches her representational practices and also the response from the represented constituency.

Returning again to Margaret Bradstock's poems on the Chinese presence in Australia in *The Pomelo Tree* (2001a) we see that despite her previous anxieties of writing the other she continued with her project, driven as she was by her strong empathy for the Chinese people and by her meticulous research of Chinese culture and history (2001b). As Frank Moorhouse argues in an interview, a writer's imagination

> can go across centuries, genders, ages and cultures with the only limitation being the self-recognised limitations of the writer. Empathy and intimacy are obviously two tools of a type of inquiry into the other…having intimacy…having empathy and having the distance that comes from not being a member of whatever groups can be a powerful tool for observing (McDonnell, 1998, p.721).

What is most interesting about Bradstock's work is that in some of her poems she boldly adopts Chinese perspectives and voices (Baranay too enters the mind of her Indian character through close subjective third-person); a writerly technique which I doubt many 'informed' white Australian writers would easily consider doing when writing about the Indigenous other. Whilst writing *The Secret River* (2005), a novel about the early clashes between the white settlers and Indigenous Australians, Kate Grenville, for example, felt that she, as a white Australian, could only ever write from a white perspective: "Their [the Durag people's] inside story – their responses, their thoughts, their feelings – all that was for someone else to tell, someone who had the right to enter that world and the knowledge to do it properly" (2006, p.198). Referring to her novel *Sorry* (2007), a story which implicitly explores the issues surrounding the stolen generation, Gail Jones also feels she – and other non-Indigenous writers – have no right to speak from an Aboriginal perspective, especially in regards to such controversial and sensitive topics:

> Since the narrative force of testimony in this case can only ever be Indigenous, non-Indigenous writers wishing to engage with 'stolen' matters must write from another perspective and perhaps use forms of indirection that will signal a refusal to 'claim' the experience of others (2008, p.79).

Bradstock, however, found that the contested issue of cultural ownership – of who owns story – was not as evident in the Chinese Australian community. Bradstock recounts a conversation she had with Chinese Australian academic Yiyan Wang about the issue of white writing other. In regards to the Chinese, Wang commented that "no culture has exclusive rights to its own material when it comes to writing about it" (Bradstock, 2001b, p.19). Baranay too, with her novel *Neem Dreams*, found that such prohibitions of white writing Indigenity found in Australia were not, in her experience, expressed by the Indian people (2004a). *Neem Dreams*, turned down by Australian publishers and taken up in India instead, became a critical hit: "Reviews from India were glowing. Almost all of them admire Baranay's skill as a foreigner to capture an authentic 'India'" (Bartlett, 2007, p.111). Margaret Bradstock's work was also received well by the Chinese Australian literary community, a poem of hers being taken up by Ouyang Yu for the Chinese Australian magazine, *Otherland*: "A sign that what I'm doing is acceptable and welcome" (Bradstock, 2001b, p.19). Bradstock does admit, however, that if "the day comes that someone says to me, 'This is ours, butt

out,' I probably will...In the meantime, I find that Chinese people are happy for me to show an interest in their culture and history and contribute to knowledge about it" (2001b, p.19).

As there has been very little creative writing done by white writers on African Australians (to date, I have only found one published poem, "Meeting Mary at the Supermarket" (2009) by Esther Ottaway, which has not been critically looked at by African Australian writers/critics), I am unable to provide published evidence on how the African Australian community feels about white Australians incorporating representations of them in white Australian literature. During my interviews, however, and also through my informal interactions with African Australians, I have found that this community is generally happy for me to engage, as a white Australian, an outsider, with their culture and with the issues and experiences that they face[10]. Perhaps, as suggested above, this is also because white Australia's relation with the African Australian community is not fraught with a long history of mistrust, violence, guilt and fear – a past not easily forgotten by Indigenous Australians (Huggins, 1994, p.12). Nor is our historical relationship like that of, for example, white and black South Africa – a precarious relationship shaped by the oppressive regime of apartheid, where white South Africans dictated at every level "what it means to be black" (Brink, 1984, p.432). It should be highlighted, however, that certain conditions do apply for the white Australian writer who wishes to engage with the African Australian community, which I would like to explore below.

Because African Australians, as a collective, are a fairly new migrant community in Australia, many Australians know very little about them or about their migrant history. Australia's relationship with the African Australian community is one of distance and difference. One Sudanese interviewee from Tasmania is keenly aware of the invisible presence of the African Australian community, and as such he feels that a cross-cultural/racial project such as mine is a positive step forward as it raises a greater awareness of Africans in Australia:

> It's good to read...something that's physical, written in Australia here, perhaps in Tasmania, and that will really attract publicity, the local, you know, everyone will be impressed and want to read this book because we always see these people and we

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[10] Disclaimer: These findings were based on a small cohort of Africans in Australia, and I would assume that those who agreed to participate in my project were those who were generally supportive of what I was doing (if they had reservations, it is possible that they may not have felt comfortable saying these to my face). There is an enormous pool of voices that I have not yet heard – some of which, I would assume, may contradict these findings.

don't know much about them. This would be another big opportunity for those who come, I mean, talk to us, who can maybe have time to have a conversation, to at least read and to have some information (Piripiri, 2010).

Beneath Piripiri's words I hear someone, a fellow human being, who has been largely ignored by society, someone who earnestly wants to be understood, to be known, to be respected as an Australian citizen. His sentiments subtly resonate with those of Valentino, the Sudanese narrator in Dave Eggers' novel *What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2006). Although the novel is partly set in America – the place that Valentino is relocated to after enduring the atrocities of war in Sudan and the dire conditions of the refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya – Valentino's experiences with his host community are starkly similar to that which the African community encounter in Australia: a life lived on the margins, "celebrated one day, helped and lifted up, and then utterly ignored by all when we prove to be a nuisance" (Eggers, 2006, p.218). I would like to take some time now to explore Eggers' novel and its making as much can be learnt from his project about writing the contemporary African other.

Throughout *What is the What*, there is a constant tug of tension between Valentino's burning desire to be seen and heard, and between the realities of life lived on the margins, of going by unnoticed and uncared for. This tension is symbolically played out after Valentino has been robbed by a group of African Americans and is left tied-up with phone-cord in his flat, bruised and bleeding from their beatings. Lying there, bound and helpless on the floor, Valentino wonders if anyone can hear him:

> Christian neighbours below, where are you tonight? Are you home? Would you hear me if I called?...In a furious burst, I kick and kick again, flailing my body like a fish run aground. Hear me, Christian neighbours! Hear your brother just above! Nothing again. No one is listening...You have no ears for someone like me (Eggers, 2006, pp.130-132).

Despite the general indifference of the host community, Valentino perseveres in making himself heard:

> I speak to these people, and I speak to you because I cannot help it. It gives me strength, almost unbelievable strength, to know that you are there...I will tell stories to people who will listen and to people who don't want to listen, to people who seek

me out and to those who run. All the while I will know that you are there. How can I pretend that you do not exist? It would almost be as impossible as you pretending that I do not exist (Eggers, 2006, pp.474-75).

The production and publication of *What is the What* is a testament of Valentino's perseverance. Valentino wanted his story told, to illuminate what the Sudanese had gone through during the war, and what they were now facing in America, but he felt he "was not proficient enough in written English at that point to write the book himself" (Eggers, 2007). After being approached by Mary Williams, the founder of the Atlanta-based Lost Boys Foundation, American writer Dave Eggers agreed to help Valentino write his story. Originally Eggers chose to write the book as a strict biography, but during the initial drafts he soon realised that "my telling of Valentino's story, in my voice, would be distracting and tonally incorrect...I knew I had to disappear completely" (2007). A solution to the problem was to re-write the biography into fiction so that Valentino narrated his story: "His voice was so distinctive and powerful that any other way of telling it would be criminally weak by comparison" (Eggers, 2007).

A number of critics have felt uneasy about Eggers' 'appropriation' of Valentino's story. For example, Siegel calls Eggers' "expropriation of another man's identity...a post-colonial arrogance" and argues that Eggers' fictionalisation of Deng's autobiography overpowers Deng's voice and exploits his story:

> Eggers could just as well have transcribed Deng's extraordinary story without fictionalizing it. The unadorned story, the true story humbly recorded and presented, would not have been lacking in force. The eerie, slightly sickening quality about *What Is the What* is that Deng's personhood has been displaced by someone else's style and sensibility – by someone else's story. Deng survived his would-be killers in the Sudan, only to have his identity erased here (2007).

Although Siegel has quite a convincing point, the fact that Deng worked so closely with Eggers on the novel and that he was more than supportive of Eggers' writerly choices works to recontextualise Siegel's argument. Brooks highlights that many "reviewers generally praise Eggers for his deft handling of Deng's story" (2010, p.36) and argues that readers should not "get hung up on the question of authorship" as Egger's collaboration with Deng has been an open, acknowledged collaboration, and one that has been exhaustive and

extensive (2010, p.40). For four years Eggers and Deng spent time together doing interviews and research and going back to Sudan, gathering information for the novel (Deng, 2006, p.5; Kirschling, 2007). Eggers states that after such extensive collaboration, he got "to know Valentino well enough where I knew the rhythms of his speech, and his outlook...I know his life story better than I know anybody else's but my own, probably, and I thought I knew his voice well enough to write a version of it in the book" (Kirschling, 2007).

What is the What, as a cross-cultural novel, and the making of it, stresses the importance of research and collaboration when writing the other. It also stresses the significance of the writer's motivations: the importance of acting with respect towards the represented, of working towards re-writing social narratives and opening spaces for other stories to enter the discourse. These sentiments are echoed by my own African Australian participants. A number of interviewees expressed the necessity for white writers to thoroughly research and collaborate with the African people before writing about them, a consultative act based on "good faith and mutual respect" similar to that outlined in the protocols for producing Indigenous Australian literature (Janke, 2002, p.3). Understandably many of the participants in my project held negative views about Westerners writing books about Africans because of the offensive ways Africans have been portrayed (as evidenced by the opening quote to this chapter). Too often white writers, and the media, approach their representational practices with very little respect and understanding of the African people, their culture and their life experiences. A number of interviewees, however, acknowledged that if the book is well-researched and based on real evidence, and if the writer takes the time to know and understand the African people, then such a project can be credible. As Ellison highlights, "you must 'do your homework' so that you will have earned, through your intellectual work, the right to talk about oppressed persons" (1996, p.369). One interviewee provided an example of this when she spoke about British writer Anthony Sampson who worked alongside Nelson Mandela to write Mandela's biography, *Mandela: The Authorized Biography* (1999):

> I don't think there's a problem with Westerners writing about Africans if there is collaboration between the two. For example, there was a white author writing a book about Nelson Mandela. Over three years, the author actually took time to sit with Nelson Mandela before he wrote his book. He sat with Mandela, studied him, asked him questions. He saw the way Mandela was living before he wrote his book.

So I don't think it's a bad thing if you do the research. If you do the research it's ok. But I don't think you should just write your own things from the head, such as, 'they are primitive'...Sit with them, get to know them, then write what you have to write (Manga, 2010).

Another interviewee also speaks of the importance of research in writing a cross-cultural/racial book, of basing the writing on "real evidence," on the "true stories," rather than writing from one's own obscured assumptions:

Perhaps, you know, you are writing a book, and you write really what you think is the best and what you think will be good also for the other people...Some people are really good. They write their books based on the true stories and they really present the real evidence. But some people really write something different, what they think without really writing the true stories (Piripiri, 2010).

Although this statement is referring to non-fiction writing, it can also be (and must be) applied to fiction in that the writer must work towards constructing an accurate picture of the cultural group she represents based on the cultural group's lived realities. It is through imaginative fiction – the "narrative act of creating and imagining" – that truth can be found (Sutherland, 2010), that the writer can, and should strive to achieve, an element of truth and empathy for her characters, to try and capture the essential qualities of the cultural group's life. Sutherland states that it is through imaginative fiction that "your understanding of your world, and your fellow men" is deepened (2010).

If the research has been done, and if the writer has made a strong effort to get to know and understand the people she is writing about, then such a cross-cultural/racial creative work can have beneficial outcomes for African Australians and for the wider community. As Eva Knudsen suggests, "old relationships will never change except through dialogue and the exchange of perspectives" (2004, p.xii). One interviewee suggests that such a project can convey to its Australian audience a more truthful and empathetic picture of Africans in Australia, one which will help rid prior prejudices and assumptions:

I always like people who are doing these kind of things – research like this kind of one. Because you get issues from the real people, their feelings, what happened to them, you know, and you put that thing to writing so that everybody goes to read. I think it may shape certain perception outside there about Africans, you know, what

exactly who are they. Because sometimes like we say we are two people moving in different directions, you know. So that if the book is there, so sometimes it helps, you know, to understand what's happening on the other side. All the prejudices, the assumptions – the community relates through this kind of thing (Lenga, 2010).

To Be Haunted

Should I, a white writer, a cultural outsider, incorporate representations of African Australians in my novella – am I 'allowed' to do so? We return again to the original question, that one that causes the uncomfortable squirm of anxiety, a haunting shadow hanging over the white cross-cultural/racial writer's head. There is no doubt that white writers have oppressed the African subject with their pens, and there is no doubt that Africans continue to be negatively stereotyped by the Western world, particularly in the media. These realities have ethical implications for the white writer working in Australia today. But what I have also learnt is that there is a general feeling of support from African Australians towards white writers engaged with African Australian issues, as long as the research has been done and in a collaborative manner.

During the four years of working on my PhD, I have had ample opportunities to learn about and engage with the African Australian community. The research I have conducted has varied between scholarly forms of enquiry and more experiential or lived experiences, such as (and this is not an exhaustive list) reading and processing research papers, studies and articles, exploring African Australian literature, attending African festivals and awareness programs, speaking with people who work with African migrants, personal travel in East Africa, social encounters with African friends, conducting face-to-face interviews with Africans in Australia and meeting ethical requirements required by the university to conduct those interviews. Although I am far from knowing and understanding everything about this diverse and dynamic community in Australia, I do feel that I have done enough research to enable me to approach my representational practices of the African Australian people in an ethical and culturally sensitive and respectful manner.

But still, the question must be asked: do I have the right to include representations of African Australians in my novella? Well, I'm not too sure I can confidently answer, with one hundred percent assurance, 'yes' to this question. And perhaps, just perhaps, this is a good

thing, to still be fraught with anxiety. Because to recognise these feelings, to acknowledge the fraught territory of white writing other, to keep that in the back of the mind when writing a cross-cultural/racial piece, will, one would hope, lessen the risk of white writers, such as myself, falling into the trap of perpetuating stereotypes and the imperial gaze, and in effect will improve the integrity and quality of the writer's cross-cultural/racial representations. It will also push the white writer to examine her own whiteness and the privilege and power from which she writes. It is this idea – this push for the white writer to turn her gaze from the other and instead examine her own whiteness and her own white representations in an attempt to find a more ethically and racially balanced writing position that I turn to now in Chapter Three. Such a turn to the self, a realisation of one's own whiteness, was only made possible through examining the anxieties I felt writing the other. To be haunted: disturbed, made uncertain. Never forget these precarious feelings, most especially during the writing process.

Chapter Three

Shift to the Self: Interrogating Whiteness

> ...I wish you would start –
>   asking yourself the same questions
>   you ask of me
>   and focus
>   more on the 'self'
>   rather than 'the other.'

<div align="center">(Heiss, 2007, p.13, excerpt)</div>

In the previous chapter, it was suggested that for a white writer to ethically and accurately represent her cultural/racial other there must be a certain amount of respect and cultural awareness of and sensitivity towards those she represents, as well as a comprehensive degree of research about and collaboration with that cultural group. As a writer and a researcher I stand by this, however as a white subject coming-to-consciousness of my position of privilege and power I pause to wonder: is this enough? Is it enough to solely try to convey an accurate and dynamic picture of African Australians, one which is anti-racist, one which seeks to subvert stereotypes, one which tries to paint a more empathetic depiction of this marginalised group so discriminated against? Knowing that whiteness is "at the centre of the 'race problem'" (McKay, 1999, p.3), I wonder if such writerly conduct is really being ethical to my cultural/racial other – or is more needed?

Perhaps I need to take a step back, distance myself to a certain degree from my anxious enquiry into the other, and take a leaf out of Anita Heiss' book: how about you start focusing "more on the 'self' / rather than 'the other'" (2007, p.13)? In her article "Indigenous Sovereignty and the Violence of Perspective" (2000), Fiona Nicoll, a self-confessed "white" academic, ruminates on the Indigenous call for white Australians to shift their perspective from the other to the self; she also examines white people's avoidance of making that shift. While at a national conference in Brisbane, *Unmasking Whiteness: Race Relations and Reconciliation*, Nicoll noted that many "well-intentioned" white academics cited their "anti-racist credentials," emphasising the "good deeds" they were doing for the other and for the cause of anti-racism (2000, p.381). Nicoll observed that for many of these anti-racist

academics the problem of racism could be solved by showing forth greater "generosity of spirit and understanding" towards Indigenous and non-white Australians (2000, p.381). Such a sentiment is somewhat similar to the one expressed in the previous chapter of this thesis: that positive change can be prompted through white cross-cultural/racial writing which has been well-researched and which represents a marginalised cultural group in an empathetic and respectful way.

While I still believe it is essential for white cross-cultural/racial writers to conduct their representational practices in a manner which strives to be "understanding," Nicoll observed (as did the Indigenous academics present) a very disturbing pattern among the white anti-racist academics at the *Unmasking Whiteness* conference which challenges my original thinking. While the Indigenous scholars at the conference located "whiteness as the source of their experience of racism," the white anti-racist people argued that "whiteness is not a monolithic thing" and cited their 'virtuous' "anti-racial credentials" to back up 'the fact' that they were "not racist" (Nicoll, 2000, p.380). In essence, they were not looking deep enough – they were too focused on looking at the other rather than at the self. "When white people claimed to respect Indigenous experience in the same breath as they disputed the existence of whiteness, problems arose" (Nicoll, 2000, p.379). Nicoll argued that by citing their "anti-racial credentials," the white academics avoided "taking responsibility for the effects of their whiteness" (2000, p.381); there was no significant shift from the other to the self, there was no interrogation into the very cause of the whole racial dilemma: that of whiteness, that of self, that of *me* as an actor in a racialised system which privileges whiteness. It is through an engagement with whiteness that one is able "to focus on the racialised character of the Australian social formation in ways which focus on the 'self' rather than the 'other', thus inverting how whiteness usually identifies itself – through non-whiteness" (Schech & Haggis, 2000, p.232). For this crucial reason, I strive now to go beyond how "accurately sound" I can represent African Australians and how "understanding" I can be about their culture and instead examine whiteness, my whiteness, with closer scrutiny in this chapter.

Much of this thesis, thus far, has stemmed from my postcolonial anxiety of "speaking for" the other. Although the questions in Chapter One and Chapter Two surrounding African Australians were foregrounded through the purview of whiteness (i.e. the marginalising effects that whiteness has on African Australian practitioners, and the ethical implications white representations of Africans have for the white cross-cultural/racial writer) much of the

discussion has been predominantly focused on the other. Blanchot argues, however, that ethics is possible only when the other puts the self into question to the point of being able to respond to it (1988, p.43). In an effort to find an ethical balance in this project of representing the intercultural encounters between my white Australian and black African characters, then, I turn the focus on the self – on this white writer researcher – repositioning my anxiety about "speaking for" the other into my uncertainty around "speaking as" white (Brewster, 2005). I transfer those feelings of being haunted by questions about representing the other to questions about representing myself and my inhibited struggle with my whiteness: how do I think and act white in relation to others? (see Larbalestier, 1999, p.154). Do my representations of the other serve white centred purposes? And how to expose whiteness? How to dismantle it? How to interrupt the narrativisation of it through an alternative narrative of one coming-to-consciousness of her whiteness? (See Brewster, 2005). It should be emphasised here that turning the gaze onto the white self does not mean a complete disengagement with the other, for "white mobility is primarily relational, engaging and being engaged by our racialised and etichised 'others'" (Brewster, 2009b, p.233).

In this chapter, I draw upon Katrina Schlunke's call for white writers to interrogate their whiteness in order to establish a writing position whereby they "can actually fracture [whiteness] rather than become":

> it is important to go on showing at what particular moments something called whiteness is able to appear...and at what moments we might stop writing our own reflections [of whiteness]. But the narrator, the writer of such events, has also to acknowledge their own fractured and flawed self that lets them write such a story. Only when we question the epistemological basis of what constitutes knowledge and the ontological basis of what lets us write knowledge will the writing position be established that can actually fracture [whiteness] rather than become (Schlunke, 1999, p.179).

In an attempt to establish such a writing position, I strive to make visible and theorise my own whiteness and the way it informs my knowledge/creative production. During this interrogation, I return back to Kenya in order to analyse the way in which this experience prepared my creative mind for the writing of the novella and how it shifted my white-subject

position which led me down the path to 'seeing' my whiteness. I then trace my PhD journey to analyse the way in which I had been unthinkingly narrativising (and maintaining the invisibility of) whiteness in my writing, and how through the dialogical process of writing between the exegesis and creative piece, I was able to 'see' my whiteness and move towards re-narrativising it. I end by questioning whether white writers, by learning to 'see' the epistemological and ontological basis of their whiteness and by exposing and re-narrativising it, can actually "fracture" whiteness, or will the white writer only ever "become" perpetually white through the act of writing?

Before moving on to my experiences of 'feeling' white in Kenya, I would like to comment on the more personalised, autobiographical approach used in this chapter which is adopted from a sub-category of critical whiteness studies called *personalised* critical whiteness writing. Brewster claims this "personal address of whiteness writing" is "in part predicated rhetorically upon the ethical imperative to reply" to first-person writing by Indigenous and other non-white Australians (Brewster, 2005) and strives to "open up the cultural reproduction of whiteness and the white subject to scrutiny" (Brewster, 2009a, p.130). The personal turn in whiteness writing encourages the white academic to personally situate herself into the theorising of whiteness and race and works to problematise the "universalising tendency of whiteness" (Brewster, 2009b, p.232), forcing the white subject to acknowledge and interrogate the impact that her whiteness, that her agency, has on others (Nicoll, 2000, p.379). Probyn argues that "because we are very much part of the problem that we are trying to articulate...doing critical whiteness studies as a white *necessitates* that we place ourselves in it, otherwise we've missed the whole point" (2007, p.330). By personally situating myself and my cross-cultural/racial representational practices – which is an extension of my white subjectivity (see Baranay 2004a) – into the theorising of whiteness, I aim to "reply" to the scores of non-white accounts that highlight the "traumatic pain and anguish that remains a consequence of white racist domination" (hooks, 1992, p.169) and hope to acknowledge and interrogate the construction of my own whiteness and the impact it has (the impact that my thinking and acting and representational practices have) on others.

Feeling White, But Not Yet Seeing Whiteness[11]

As highlighted in the Introduction of this exegesis, one of the aims of critical whiteness studies is to expose whiteness in an effort to dismantle its power and privilege: "Whiteness studies seeks to make whiteness visible insofar as that visibility is seen as contesting the forms of white privilege, which rests on the unmarked and the unremarkable 'fact' of being white" (Ahmed, 2007, p.262). In this section, I draw upon my experiences in Kenya with the aim of marking my whiteness by examining the ontological basis of my whiteness and how I had been performing it in Kenya. My experiences in Kenya, as I will demonstrate below, were pivotal in shifting my white subject-position and led me down the path towards being able to 'see' my whiteness. Kenya, too, significantly influenced the creative writing processes involved in the construction of the novella. As Sue Woolfe's investigation on neuroscience and creativity found, "the creator's prepared mind is emphasised as an important prelude to creation" (2007, p.2). As such, I feel it necessary to explore and theorise some of my experiences in Kenya (which occurred six-months before commencing my PhD) as it sets the stage for how I was exploring race in the earlier versions of the novella, and relates to how I failed to fully make whiteness visible in my writing.

Before I discuss my experiences in Kenya, it should also be noted that I am (re)telling/(re)forming my memories of my first steps towards self-consciousness of my racialisation through "racial lens[es]" that now (or at least now try to) see whiteness (Frankenberg, 1996, p.5). As such I have tried to remain true (as true as memory allows) to my perceptions during the events (re)told, but through the purview of my present racial consciousness which is aware that it is embedded in "and defined by its relationality to its others" (Brewster, 2005).

Before 'i' began my PhD 'i' had spent four-months predominantly in a little village called Ukwala in Kenya. It may sound cliché, but 'i' returned home from Kenya 'changed.' To put my finger on just how 'i' had been 'changed' – how the 'i' had been shifted, partially re-made – however was quite a difficult task. (Why this use of the lower-case, quoted 'i'? Adopted from Frankenberg, this strategy signifies the provisionality and non-sovereignty of the 'i'; "not 'i'dentifying means knowing there is an infinity beyond history" (Frankenberg, 1996,

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[11] Subheading adapted from Ruth Frankenberg's personalised critical whiteness article, "'When We are Capable of Stopping We Begin to See': Being White, Seeing Whiteness" (1996). Frankenberg's article significantly influenced the shaping of the self-reflection in this section.

p.4). Frankenberg is quick to note, however: "And yet. We live in our version of reality, its conventions, its violence. So [we must] plunge back into the 'I'" (1996, p.4) if we are to do the work of self-realisation within the context of the 'I'). So how had the 'I' changed? For one, I don't think it was in the romantic way alluded to by the travel brochures: *Go to Africa and find yourself.* My shift in self was a much more uncomfortable, at times confusing one, more of a "disidentification from what *appears* to be" (Frankenberg, 1996, p.3).

After growing up and living in Tasmania, a predominantly white state of Australia, for twenty-three years of my life, arriving in Kenya was more than a cultural-shock; it was a racial-shock. Suddenly I was the odd one out with my pale skin and wispy hair. I was the foreigner, the different one. My initial reaction, surrounded by all those black bodies, was fear; a classic white reaction "to any intrusion into our cultural capsule" (Howard, 1999, p.11). This was one of the few times I had *felt* starkly white. But it was different this time; there was no getting away from it, no safety-net of white majority to dissolve into like there had been in Australia. This time I was forced to think about it.

At first, I thought my initial feeling of *being white* was simply a physical thing, attributed to the obvious visibility of my pale skin. But it took only a few hours in the hustle and bustle of Nairobi, where I was swarmed upon by street kids and *matatu*[12] drivers demanding my money, where I was proposed to by a Kenyan man I had only known for thirty minutes, where I was dropped off at a ritzy hotel where 'almost-all' of the guests were white (or close to) and all of the workers were black, that I realised, viscerally, that this feeling of being white went deeper than the skin; having a white complexion symbolically meant that I had a "passport to privilege," power and wealth (Dyer, 1997, p.44, p.52). Moreton-Robinson is quick to clarify that whiteness is not only "found in societies inhabited and dominated by white people...Whiteness is not just about bodies and skin colour" (2004b, p.78). Whiteness instead "is more about the *discursive practices* that, because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and sustain global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric views" (Shome, 1999, p.108). I personally felt whiteness as alive in the predominantly black independent country of Kenya.

Through my psychic and social encounters with the Kenyan people, my white subject-position began to shift as I began to see my taken-for-granted privilege which was (is) so

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[12] *Matatu* = a mini-bus, the most common public transport in Kenya and in neighbouring countries.

insidiously part of my white identity. As Slater argues, "one's self is composed from encounters with otherness...The image of subjectivity is not one of self-consistency or fixity, but rather of fluidity and porosity" (Slater, 2005, p.149). I'd like to relate just a couple of these encounters to further convey the realisation of my privilege and the effect it had on my sense of self, shifting what I had previously known as the 'I.' It should be noted that my feeling of being white and seeing my privilege was not yet cognitively associated with race but rather with having grown up in a Western developed country which I thought my pale complexion signified. Moreton-Robinson argues that in most postcolonial work, whiteness is not explicitly associated with 'the West'; "glossed as 'the West', whiteness remains invisible, unnamed and unmarked" (2004b, pp.79-80). Although at the time I believed my privilege was associated with 'the West' rather than with whiteness, my experiences in Kenya enabled a shift in self which paved the way for me to later 'see' my whiteness in Australia and in my representational practices.

In Kenya, it was a daily occurrence to be showered by attention and flattering comments from the locals: "*Mzungu* [13] how are you?" "Such beautiful skin, *Mzungu*." And even, often from complete strangers: "*Mzungu*, I love you!" While in the beginning I was amused by (and even privately enjoyed) the attention, the novelty soon wore off and I began to see the sickening undertones of these comments. For what made me so admirable? Was it simply my foreignness – a fetishism with the exotic in reverse? Was it my assumed wealth – flatter her, smile at her...then get some money out of her? Or did it have something to do with the way imperial discourses constructed a 'reality' that whiteness is associated with beauty, morality, aesthetic superiority, and thus, with racial superiority? (Dyer, 1997, p.70). I remember sitting in a cafe one day when a middle-aged man came up and stroked my bare arm. "Angel," he said in his very little English. And then he touched his own. "Me, monkey!" And he burst out laughing and walked away; leaving me with my mouth gaped open, confused and disturbed, my skin stinging where his finger had touched. Was he mocking himself, or had he in fact been mocking me? African American writer James Baldwin, in imagining the way in which Africans might have reacted to the first white man in their village, the way they might have "marvell[ed] at the colour of [the white man's] skin," argues that "the white man takes the astonishment as tribute, for he arrives to conquer and to convert the natives, whose inferiority in relation to himself is not even to be questioned"

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[13] *Mzungu* = Swahili for white person.

(1949, p.155). Perhaps I was not as 'admired' as what I had previously assumed. Although I did not go to Kenya to conquer or convert (although perhaps I did in neo-colonial ways? Perhaps I still do?), I did bring along with me my inbuilt unconscious ontology of white superiority, a mind-set which assumed 'admiration' from my others. Perhaps like Baldwin, the Kenyan man in the cafe saw right through the construction of my white race privilege, my supposed 'aesthetic beauty' and 'racial superiority,' something that through his touch and his parodying English words I was only just beginning to see?

This ten-second contact with the Kenyan man produced an "experience of defamiliarisation," an occurrence, Brewster argues, that can come from intercultural contact (Brewster, 2005), "an embodied encounter between different and often incommensurable knowledge systems" (Brewster, 2009a, p.132). I was both perplexed and challenged by the Kenyan man's words and actions, the meanings and intent behind his gesture culturally and psychically beyond my understanding. He provoked me to question my being in Kenya – my motivations, my doings, and what the other might see when they looked at my skin, and were they right. Brewster argues that defamiliarisation produced by encounters with the other "shifts us into a space of uncertainty because the 'self' to which we return is not a fixed site. Defamiliarisation reminds us of the inability of identity to remain identical to itself" (2005). In his study of Foucault, Deleuze elaborates on the way in which the self shifts when encountered by others. He calls this shift a "doubling back" on self from "the outside" whereby "the relations of the outside[,] folded back to create a doubling, allow a relation to oneself to emerge" (1988, p.100).

This shift of self, this doubling back to the self from the outside, was more evidently experienced by my physical and geographical movements in Kenya. Most of my time was spent doing volunteer work (read: 'doing good' for those 'less privileged') at a school in a small village with little electricity or running water. However, because of my "white passport" I could *choose* to leave whenever I wanted if things got too heavy or monotonous. Unlike most of the villagers, I could get 'respite' in a hotel in Nairobi or go white-water rafting down the Nile or dine at an expensive restaurant that served 'real' food without making a huge impact on my financial situation. While I enjoyed and acted out this privilege (who wouldn't take pleasure in these luxuries?), I also remember feeling extremely guilty when I went back – "doubled back" – to the families in Ukwala who could hardly scrounge together the shillings they needed to send their kids to school. Going back to the village to

'do good' after living the (white) 'tourist life' felt like hypocrisy. Each time I left the village, each time I went back, the self I found when I "doubled back" was not the same as the self I had originally left: she was shaken, uncertain, filled with guilt about her privilege, doubtful as to whether she was in fact doing any good at all blustering in there with her 'Western' ways of teaching and being, her own neo-colonial enlightening and civilising. As highlighted in Chapter Two, this affect is what Ellison calls "liberal guilt"; a guilt which "is bound up with the feeling of being implicated in systems of domination and with the subsequent awareness of the emotional instability produced by this ambivalent position" (1996, p.350). As such, the place I found myself was an awkward space: "On one hand it offer[ed] an unlimited possibility of connection and transformation and on the other seem[ed] to suggest the loss of a precarious particularity and the threat of an uncomfortable relativism" (Schlunke, 1999, p.173). While my experiences in Kenya and the guilt I felt brought to light my privilege and 'Western' ways of being, and in that new-found awareness opened the door to affect change in the way I perceived and behaved, the thought of change – the 'giving up' of privilege – was also, in itself, confronting.

When I left Kenya, I was of course sad to leave; I had made some good friends, created good memories, I wanted to see and do and experience so much more. On the other hand, I was also privately relieved as I thought my arrival back to the 'developed world' would rid the unsettled thoughts – the unsettled 'I' – from my mind, that I would lose my white skin and my privilege (and along with them, my guilt and confusion) in the whiteness and Westernness of Tasmania once again. Frankenberg states that in parts of the world dominated by white bodies, "race privilege is the (non)experience of not being slapped in the face...a privilege enjoyed but not acknowledged, a reality lived in but unknown" (1996, p.4). Being once more the white majority in a place where whiteness and race privilege is invisible and thus functions as the human norm (Dyer, 1997, p.1), the unsettled 'I' settled (at least for a time). Retreating from ruminating and speaking about how the self had been challenged in Kenya (for one, it was both uncomfortable and off-putting to do so, for another, I couldn't quite put into words just how the 'I' had shifted – it was also easy back home to feign forgetfulness that it had), I turned to ruminating and speaking of the other, telling and re-telling stories of the people I had met and heard of in Kenya, stories that shocked my listeners, brought them to tears, made them gasp, laugh, tsk with distant sympathy. Had I begun fetishising the African people in an attempt to dissolve the self? Or

had this act always been part of my white ontology? Moreton-Robinson states that "the development of a white person's identity requires that they be defined against other 'less than human' beings whose presence enables and reinforces their superiority" (2004b, p.76). Had I only just begun noticing my participation in something that 'didn't-quite-feel-right' because I had begun noticing the self, the not-yet white self, but a self that was not as it had *appeared* to be?

As much as one tries, the self can never return back to its original site.

Six-months after I came home from Kenya, I enrolled in a creative writing doctorate. It seemed like the next best thing to do. The idea of having the luxury to write full-time was enticing, so too was the idea of getting paid for it (even if the scholarship allowance was meagre for bourgeois standards), as was having a well-equipped supervisor to assist me along the way. I would write a cross-cultural novella that would indirectly explore some of my own experiences in Kenya through the intersecting lives of my African and Australian characters. I was still caught up in the buzz (in the fetishising?) of telling stories about Africa; the guilt of my privilege and my implication in neo-colonialism was also still there, however, niggling away at the self. So after doing some preliminary research into postcolonial theory, I decided to write a novella that would capture the 'real stuff' of Africans both in Africa and in Australia, not those stereotypical stories – I would debunk those stereotypes, I'd go 'postcolonial,' create 'hybrid' characters and complicate dichotomies of race relations between Westerners and Africans. Ultimately through my more 'empathetic' and more 'accurately sound' representations I would 'do good' by the other. So I set off writing the novella over the next year or so, 'doing good' with my pen.

Had I forgotten so quickly that perhaps my ways of doing things were not all that helpful after all? Maybe it was some kind of double-bind attempt to redeem my white self from the privilege I had enacted in Kenya (that I was still enacting at that very moment; that I'm still enacting now?), a way to rid my guilt. To 'do good' here means that "I am a good person, racially. I am, it claims, not racist" (Frankenberg, 1996, p.6). Ahmed argues that "the claim to the performativity of anti-racism would be to presume that 'being anti' is transcendent, and that to declare oneself as being something shows that one is not the thing that one declares oneself to be [i.e. racist]" (Ahmed, 2007, p.281). This positioning of the self as "benign," Frankenberg argues, "has some sickening aspects. We are frequently complicit with racism

even when we are absolutely confident that we are not" (1996, p.6). Moving towards "a narrative deployment of Others in such a way as to secure one's own 'redemption'...[is] a 'wrong turn,' taken frequently by antiracists and self-analysts of whiteness" (Frankenberg, 1996, p.6).

Perhaps I began to be aware (albeit indirectly) of this "wrong turn" by the anxieties that arose as I wrote my African characters. Was I competent enough to accurately portray them? What if I stuffed up, what if I did something wrong, something that would harm their cultural identity? Ethically, considering the long historical negative representations of Africans by whites, should I even be allowed to represent them? While these questions were still concerned with representing the other, they worked to once again knock the 'I' off its white benign perch by forcing me to analyse the present implications of white writing black (as was discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two), which through the course of my research lead me to question not only my representations of the other, but also to question my representations of the self – of my whiteness.

Seeing Whiteness, Exposing Whiteness

Critical Whiteness Studies

After a year and a half of working on the novella, I moved to work again on the exegesis. Early on in this stage of my PhD I came across, rather fortunately, the field of critical whiteness studies which caused the 'I' to once again shift in subject-position in a similar way to that experienced in Kenya. Reading critical theories of whiteness by both black and white critics, alongside the reading of African Australian literary texts by authors discussed in Chapter One, and listening to and engaging with African interview participants, pressured me to not only *feel* once again white (this time in a predominantly white society) but to also *see* my whiteness as a discursive construct, "a set of institutionalised practices which legitimate and privilege [white] ways of knowing, seeing...and being at home in Australia" (Nicoll, 2004, p.18). Brewster argues that reading non-white texts "rapidly produce systemic or qualitative – that is, cultural – change" in the white reader as the texts are highly charged zones of contact "where opposites and contradictions co-exist and coalesce, jostling and interacting with each other in infinitesimal movements" (2008b, p.430). I would also suggest that the 'texts' produced by the African interviewees for this research are themselves highly

charged zones of contact projecting alternative ways of seeing and knowing which have confronted and unsettled this white listener/reader.

As I listened to the African interviewees speak openly and affectively about their experiences in Australia, I witnessed whiteness through their stories of the difficulties they had in acquiring jobs or a house to rent (this being the case for all participants regardless of their previous experience and educational status, some of whom had Masters and PhD degrees), and of other varying forms of white racism that is a part of their daily experience. I realised that the privilege I had experienced in Kenya (the privilege I continue to perform now) was not only linked to the fact that I live in a 'developed' country but to the more arbitrary construction of my whiteness. To illuminate this connection, I return to James Baldwin's rumination of the way in which black Africans may have "marvelled" at the first white man in their village. Baldwin compares this reception to the way in which white Swiss people reacted to him when he first visited their Swiss village:

> I, without a thought of conquest, find myself among a people whose culture controls me, has even, in a sense, created me, people who have cost me more in anguish and rage than they will ever know, who yet do not even know of my existence. The astonishment with which I might have greeted them, should they have stumbled into my African village a few hundred years ago, might have rejoiced their hearts. But the astonishment with which they greet me today can only poison mine (1949, p.155).

Howard names this highly selective poison "whiteness" which "continually steals the lifeblood from those people who have not been marked with the genetic code of Whiteness" (Howard, 1999, p.19); a poison which is global.

At the time of the interviews, and for a period after, I rebuked the racist acts of whiteness and the poisonous effects that come from exercising white privilege and power. I took on an anti-racist position and wanted nothing to do with whiteness. It wasn't until I began reflecting on the 'I' for this chapter – on *my whiteness* – and on the words written and spoken by Africans and other non-white critics and writers that I realised "racism was, among other things, about me" (Frankenberg, 1996, p.15). Dyer puts it quite straightforwardly when he says: white people, even those who consider themselves 'anti-racist,' are not "immune to white racism. It comes unbidden, when [we are] off guard...Racist thought...is part of the cultural non-consciousness that we all inhabit" (1997,

p.7). At this stage of my research, then, I couldn't help wonder if I had perhaps (unconsciously) written whiteness into my novella. As Moreton-Robinson argues, "racial superiority becomes a part of one's ontology, albeit unconsciously, and informs the white subject's knowledge production" – including her creative production (2004b, p.78). Having experienced an unsettling of my white subject-position from both my experiences in Kenya and during my PhD journey thus far, I was at a point now where I was ready to interrogate my whiteness, and in particular (for this project) the role my whiteness plays in my writing practices and in my creative processes.

Exposing Whiteness in My Novella

After over a year of working on the exegesis I turned again to the novella-in-progress (which had been quietly, though not statically, occupying the back-seat of my PhD working space) in order to re-read and analyse the text to see whether I had been unthinkingly projecting my ingrained reflections of whiteness onto my characters and themes. By doing so I hoped to try to understand the workings of whiteness in my creative practice. This process is part of the re-drafting of the novella, but it's also a process of re-drafting the self, of re-writing my self out of 'unassumed' whiteness so that I can take charge over my representational practices rather than blindly write through the gauze of whiteness. As Gordimer appeals: "If the white artist is to break out of [her] double alienation, [she] too has to recognise a false consciousness within [herself], [she] too has to discard [her] white-based value-system" (2010, p.308) which is an integral part of her unconscious ontology and informs her knowledge production (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, p.78). By recognising and exposing my white-based mind-set I hope to establish a writing position whereby I can actually "fracture" whiteness in my writing rather than perpetually and unconsciously reflect it (Schlunke, 1999, p.179).

It should be noted that it is beyond the scope of this chapter to look at all the ways I had been writing whiteness in the earlier versions of my novella (such as feeding on African stereotypes in character and in setting, as well as my presumptuousness in meddling in African cultural aspects that I have very little knowledge about, and of white fetishisings of the other). As such, I have decided to look at how I had been enacting the invisibility of whiteness through the white Australian protagonist, Avie, and the detrimental impact this

had on the development of one of the other main characters, Akinyi, a sixteen year old girl of Kenyan and Anglo-Australian descent.

Firstly, let me give you a (very brief) rundown of the earlier version of these two characters and their stories. Upon the discovery of Avie's father's illegitimate daughter Akinyi, Avie and her parents go to Kenya to 'collect' Akinyi, whose Kenyan mother has passed away, and bring her 'home' to Tasmania. While in Kenya, Avie finds out about her own kept-secret adoption which sends her sense of self spiralling and which mysteriously results in her contraction of psoriasis, a motif reflecting her 'shedding' identity. The story continues back in Tasmania as Avie struggles to cope with the knowledge of her adoption and with her severe skin condition, and also as Akinyi tries to come to terms with the death of her mother and with her new existence in a white family in a white town.

It is interesting, and rather disturbing, to note that while I set out to write my cross-cultural/racial novella with the vague intention of complicating racial dichotomies, and while there are numerous opportunities in this storyline where the construction of race could have been exposed and destabilised, whiteness, as it so characteristically does, remained invisible (Ahmed, 2007, p.261). In fact, race – or at least 'blackness' – was only superficially explored through the coloured character Akinyi (I had perhaps only two chapters devoted to Akinyi's experience of being 'black' in Tasmania, and a couple more where Avie reflects on Akinyi's racial makeup). This brings up two important points for my discussion. One is the way in which whiteness remains invisible as it is images of the other – African stereotypes, for example – which are more often under the process of being subverted in, say, white postcolonial writing, rather than images of whiteness. Moreton-Robinson confirms this premise when she says:

> Techniques through which other racial categories are deconstructed, reconfigured, subverted and changed, elided and embedded, have not been applied to whiteness...this ensures that race continues to belong to the...other and whiteness remains hidden (2002, p.82).

The second point is that race (or at least the construction of blackness) was only superficially explored, which upon reflection I think had something to do with Avie's storyline of her adoption and psoriasis. Originally, one of the reasons, among many, that Avie's character was given the elements of her adoption and psoriasis was so that she could to some degree

empathise with and experience just a little of Akinyi's own sense of dislocation and destabilisation of self that derived from being uprooted from Kenya and placed in an unfamiliar (white) family and community. Avie's peeling skin, its outward 'difference,' and the discrimination she felt because of it, was also used as a way to promote understanding of Akinyi's own experience of racial difference. It's difficult to say whether these elements of Avie's character emerged consciously or unconsciously; as Baranay says, "writing fiction makes discovery and invention feel like the same thing" (2002, p.151). I will go into this matter a little further later on, but what is important to note right now is that my attempts to liken Avie's sense of displacement because of her adoption and psoriasis to Akinyi's sense of displacement that comes from being black was a wrong turn to make in trying to undermine (or even to understand) constructions of race; Avie's experience of displacement had nothing to do with race, while Akinyi's had everything to do with it, which only further masks whiteness and its marginalising effects on non-white people. Furthermore, Probyn argues that "ressentiment (weakness) supplied by other subject positions" (for Avie such ressentiment derives from her adoption and psoriasis) also fails to tackle whiteness as it re-contextualises the white subject "in more palatable (less privileged) terms," making the white subject appear to be on a similar 'marginalised' level to the other (2007, p.332). I should have instead conveyed through my white and black characters that "the order of [one's] experience as a white...differ[s] completely from the order of black experience" and examined why this is so (Gordimer, 2010, p.308).

To compound my dismal (white) attempts of exploring constructions of race by using Avie's adoption and psoriasis as tools to understand blackness, Avie's angst over her adoption and skin condition had begun to metamorphise and take over the novella. Not only did this thwart any further interrogation of race relations, but it also seriously crippled the development of Akinyi's character. While Avie's character acquired considerable depth through my preoccupation with her story, Akinyi's character got left behind, diminishing to a superfluous two-dimensional character lurking in Avie's shadow. I realise now that Akinyi had become an 'object' in the novella-in-progress, existing only to enrich my narrative with an exotic flavour. Through my representations, I had perpetuated white supremacist ideology that constructs the assumption that "the dominant White culture merely and unquestionably *exists*" while "migrant cultures exist *for* the latter" (Hage, 1998, p.121). In my intentions to complicate racial dichotomies I had only reinforced them.

Kate Grenville and The Secret River

I'd like to divert from my novella, for a moment, and turn to Kate Grenville and her journey in writing *The Secret River* (2005), a cross-cultural/racial novel which "reassess[es] what it means to be a white Australian" (Wyndham, 2006), as some of her experiences writing this novel sheds further light on the role whiteness plays in deflecting an interrogation of itself, thus remaining invisible in a white writer's creative work. Examining Grenville's writing journey is also useful as it provides a model for how I might continue with my own novella *differently* in a way that interrogates racial constructs rather than deviates from them, and more importantly, in a way that I might be able to destabilise whiteness rather than unthinkingly narrativise it.

Grenville was first driven to write *The Secret River* (2005) on the day of the Sydney Harbour Bridge walk for Aboriginal Reconciliation. During the walk, Grenville recounts that she made eye contact with an Indigenous woman and shared "one of those moments of intensity...we smiled, held each other's gaze" until "it sent a sudden blade of cold into my warm inner glow" (Grenville, 2006, p.12). Like my experiences in Kenya articulated earlier, this interracial encounter caused Grenville to undergo a shift in white subject-position, unsettling, perhaps unconsciously, her own whiteness. Immediately she knew that what she was doing on the bridge was inextricably connected to her settler ancestor Solomon Wiseman – "In that instant of putting my own ancestor together with this woman's ancestor, everything swivelled: the country, the place, my sense of myself in it" (Grenville, 2006, p.13) – and she realised that she urgently needed to know what her great-great-great grandfather

> might have done when he crossed paths with Aboriginal people...Until I knew that, it felt like nothing but wilful blindness – even hypocrisy – to go through the symbolic motions [of a walk on the bridge]...what I had to do was cross the hard way, through the deep water of our history (Grenville, 2006, p.13).

Grenville's investigation into her family's settler past, and her interrogation of "what *white sovereignty* does to Indigenous rights" (Nicoll, 2004, p.19), inevitably leads her to a recognition of her own white 'false consciousness.' In her writing memoir *Searching for the Secret River* (2006), Grenville says that as she researched into the past and into Aboriginal culture, she realised "how blindly I'd been embedded in my own culture. I'd never recognised it as a culture – a learned thing" (Grenville, 2006, p.129). Adam Gall highlights

that as Grenville moves "from one side of the frontier, to the 'other side'" during her research and reflections into the past, her identity as a "contemporary liberal settler subject" becomes "defined and redefined" (2008, p.95). However, what is interesting about this process is that even though Grenville experiences a shift in her white subject-position, she does not become immune to 'white' thoughts that come reflexively and unbidden, which, I will soon show is significant for what happens when she begins writing her novel. This persistent nature of her whiteness is exposed when she first encounters people of unmixed Aboriginal descent in Kimberley. Having never known or even seen anyone like the Aboriginal characters she was describing in her novel, Grenville went to Kimberley to observe the Aboriginal people there. Overhearing them talk in their Indigenous tongue, Grenville's first (white) thought was "*they're speaking a foreign language*" (2006, p.194). Having undergone a destabilisation of whiteness, she quickly realised that

> *No...It's me. I'm the one speaking the foreign language.*
>
> I was ashamed. My first reaction had been to think they were the foreigners. That was how backward I was, underneath those fine sentiments. In spite of my good intentions and high-minded thoughts, I didn't understand a thing (Grenville, 2006, p.194).

Grenville's experience only illuminates just how difficult it is to untangle ourselves from the consuming invisibility of whiteness that is so much a part of the white subject's non-consciousness and offers some insight into the workings of whiteness in a white writer's creative work, which I would like to tease out now.

Although Grenville intended to explore the white settler/Indigenous encounter on the Hawkesbury River, when she came to writing her book she gradually drifted from her original aim. After years of researching and writing her manuscript, she sat back to read the text from start to finish only to find that there were two separate stories unfolding on the Hawkesbury River unceremoniously competing with each other: "One was a story about settlement – Wiseman and his family and their relationship with the Aboriginal people. The other was a classic revenge-and-romance story" based on Wiseman's love affair with his childhood sweetheart Sophia (Grenville, 2006, p.181). "The first was a sombre story based on real, tragic events. The second was a lightweight, contrived thing" (Grenville, 2006, p.181) and threatened to overshadow and make light of the real issue at hand: that of the "the

morphology of colonialism" and its poisonous effects on the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia, and how it continues to "persist in discursive and cultural practices" today (Moreton-Robison, 2002, p.24).

Finding no "way to knit [the two stories] together" (Grenville, 2006, p.178), Grenville eventually realised, after a moment of insight, that she had to cut the "romance-and-revenge" story out.

> Straight away it was as if chains had dropped off the story. The Wisemans and the Aboriginal people were left alone to get on with it...It was just the two of them, working it out together, and that was what the story was. White meeting black, black meeting white, and everyone trying to decide what to do (Grenville, 2006, pp.181-3).

By "everyone," I think it would be safe to assume, Grenville's not just talking about her characters of the past, but also about herself and what she must do – was doing through the writing of her novel – to understand and acknowledge what white sovereignty did and continues to do to Indigenous rights. The "chains" (of whiteness?) had "dropped" from Grenville, allowing her to meet face-to-face with her insidious white colonial past and neo-colonial present.

The meandering, round-about way in which Grenville wrote her novel could be seen as the creative mind simply (or not so simply!) doing its job by "let[ting] the writing go where it will" (Brophy, 1998, p.198). Many writers speak of this organic process. For example, Helen Garner, when beginning a novel, says, "I never have a theoretical idea for a book. What I write...emerges organically...I try it this way and I try it that way...at any given moment I don't know where I'm going" (Grenville & Woolfe, 1993, pp.61, 64). Isabel Allende also says that when she writes a book the story unfolds "itself, slowly, in a long process. By the time I've finished the first draft I know what the book is about. But not before" (Epel, 1993, p.8). I don't wish to argue here against the organic nature of the creative process, rather I want to suggest that perhaps this elusive, unconscious part of creativity is implicated with and feeds on that unconscious ontology of the white cross-cultural/racial writer's whiteness.

I suggested earlier that as whiteness inhabits the white subject's unconscious mind, it must play a part in the white writer's creative output. Considering, then, that whiteness is also "resistant to analysis" (Brewster, 2009a, p.130) and that white race privilege discourages an interrogation of whiteness (Nicoll, 2004, p.30), would it be so far off the mark to wonder if

Grenville's lightweight "romance-and-revenge" thread which threatened to supersede (to colonise) the settler/Indigenous story in her novel, was perhaps an unconscious white defence mechanism, an accomplice with whiteness, stalling the author and her characters from tackling head on the poisonous effects of their own whiteness? Was following the "romance-and-revenge" story "a kind of deflection away from [her] own complicity" (Probyn, 2007, p.339) in the impact that whiteness has on Indigenous people, a complicity which is painful, confronting and challenging to the white subject's privilege, power and sense of self?

Dropping the 'Chains' from My Own Novella

In questioning Grenville's writing of *The Secret River*, I must turn back to question my own novella-in-progress. Like Grenville's "romance-and-revenge" story, I had also let Avie's adoption and psoriasis narrative supersede an interrogation of racial constructions; not only did this further mask whiteness but it also perpetuated racial dichotomies through my poorly nuanced Kenyan character Akinyi. I had deflected away from my own complicity in the race problem, I had avoided (albeit unconsciously) coming face-to-face, through my characters,[14] with the impact my whiteness has on non-white people. After learning about Grenville's own struggles in writing *The Secret River*, and after having researched critical whiteness studies and incorporating it into my critical discussion on white representations of African Australians, it became clear, finally, what I had to do. Kill off Avie's adoption, release her from her overdramatic and blinding angst, and let Akinyi out of the shadows. It was clear that if the central story – Avie's story – could be told *without* an African character, then having Akinyi in the novella was in many ways ethically problematic. While it would've been easier – aesthetically, ethically, politically – to cut Akinyi out, free her from the oppressive hand of whiteness and focus the novella solely on the complexities of adoption, I would've been, once again, exercising another "form of White privilege" by turning away from my whiteness rather than looking, scrutinizing and destabilising it (Howard, 1999, p.21).

It was about the same time that I cut the adoption narrative out, and only after I had struggled, blindly, painstakingly, in the writing of the earlier versions of the novella, trying to

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[14] Baranay suggests that fictional characters are an extension of the writer's self; as the writer is both the "creator" and "manipulator" of the character, the character inevitably adopts the writer's "own experience – including observation, imagination and fantasy" (2002, p.144). As such the characters (regardless of their race) would adopt the white writer's own whiteness and her consciousness – or non-consciousness – of her racial identity.

work out who my characters were and why they had been jostled together in this make-shift story, and only after I had gone through the long and difficult process of recognising, exposing and interrogating my whiteness in this exegesis, that I also realised the significance of the motif of Avie's peeling skin. It seems that it is not until we have experienced "a high degree of difficulty and frustration" that "the most intense insights" come to us (Woolfe, 2007, p.50). The motif was about whiteness: Avie's and her parents' whiteness, my whiteness, an exposing and undermining of 'assumed' whiteness pressured to the surface by Akinyi and the other African characters in the novella. It was so blatantly obvious now, embarrassingly obvious. I guess I had just been so blinded by my own white race – it is "invisible for those who inhabit it" (Ahmed, 2007, p.261) – that I had failed to see the thematic principle of undermining whiteness in Avie's shedding skin that had been there all along.

But how and why did this thematic principle of undermining whiteness emerge within my writing despite not intending it and, more puzzling, despite whiteness being suppressed from my consciousness at the time that the motif of Avie's psoriasis emerged? In *Mystery of the Cleaning Lady* (2007), Woolfe explores a similar question to my own when she tries to find out how writers can create a fictional work of thematic coherence if they write without intending this or that theme. During her exploration she comes across the idea of 'themata,' or 'gut' assumptions, which act "as the guiding, visionary elements leading to creativity" (Woolfe, 2007, p.99). Woolfe contends that themata "emerge of their own accord, in their own time," however they are implicit in the writing, "they inherently belong to the work, to what has already been written" (2007, p.100). Baranay also considers the way in which certain elements emerge organically and unintentionally in one's writing when she discusses the development of her character Pandora in *Neem Dreams.* Although Pandora's character transformed dramatically over time, Baranay contends that there were certain aspects about Pandora which remained unchanged: "Those initial and unchanging elements of this character arise from impenetrable depths of the unconscious...and from these givens much has to be discovered, or invented" (2002, p.151).

Three things stand out to me in Woolfe's and Baranay's statements which are important to this discussion: one, that there is always a themata, most often implicit in the beginning, guiding a creative work; two, that these themata – or important elements in the writing that personify the themata – arise from the unconscious (and will themselves to stay); and three,

that what these themata/motifs mean is not always apparent when they first appear, but becomes evident through the writing process (for my project, I include in this process the dialogic writing of the novella and the exegesis). As suggested above, the thematic principle – the themata – in my novella became an exploration and undermining of assumed whiteness symbolised through the initial motif of Avie's peeling skin – a peeling away of blind whiteness, a peeling away of self as one knows it, a peeling away of whiteness itself. The motif was always there, brought up from the unconscious, its significance waiting to be discovered along the way.

Johnson argues that "through metaphor, we make use of patterns that obtain in our physical experience to organize our more abstract understanding" (1987, p.xv). In retrospect, it is no surprise, considering the concentrated embodied intercultural experiences I had in Kenya which led to an acute awareness and rumination of the colour and symbolic meaning of my skin, that the metaphor of Avie's own peeling skin appeared very early in my writing – in fact, in the very first penned sentences of my first draft, as can be seen here: "This pen will save me it will. I rub it between my fingertips and a film of skin rolls off onto its plastic covering. 'Willow, my skin, its shedding off!'" (Bellette, 2008). But what is intriguing with this image of the peeling skin is that it brought about the element of Avie's adoption. I thought that Avie's shedding skin, then, symbolically reflected the 'shedding' of her identity that came about after the revelation of her adoption, not, as one would expect after my experiences in Kenya, a 'shedding' of self caused by Avie's intercultural encounters with the other African characters.

Upon reflection, I think it is reasonable to assume that the adoption narrative spuriously stemmed from my first memories[15] of 'blackness': of my two aunties who are both coloured and adopted, of the stories told by my mum in a tone of taboo about the time her sisters were spat on at school, the names that stung – "dirty nigger," "blackie"; of the time she found one of her sisters tucked up in bed, asleep and dusted thick with talcum powder because she hoped to wake up white like mummy. These haunting second-hand memories are ones that visit my conscious mind unbidden and quite often, and were certainly present during the writing of the earlier drafts of the novella. Perhaps unconsciously, through the adoption narrative, I was in fact trying to explore and understand something about race;

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[15] For an examination of the role that spurious memories play in creative ideas see Woolfe (2007, pp.63-4).

perhaps unconsciously I was trying to subvert the usual black adoption narrative, and the white power and privilege that is enacted in such a narrative, which is so common in the white imagination about Africa, by attributing the adoption narrative to my white character. At the same time, however, I failed to fully investigate the racial issues that were circulating in my original memories, just as I failed to subvert ideas of white power and privilege enacted in the adoption narrative. It was as if my creative unconscious mind, since the shift in the 'I' that occurred in Kenya, had become both an accomplice with, and mutineer against, whiteness; it was both unaware and aware of my whiteness, or perhaps it was always aware yet suppressing that awareness. Nicoll describes this tension as the "mental gymnastics of unconscious whiteness" (2000, p.382) which occurs in the white liberal subject who is sympathetic towards the other yet is still in denial about their whiteness.

If my speculation into my own creative ideas is correct, I could assume that I was perhaps always already unconsciously aware of my whiteness, that each time my racial identity was shifted – each time my whiteness was fractured – through my intercultural/interracial encounters (even if I was unconscious of that shift/fracture) I moved that little bit closer to consciously 'seeing' my whiteness. Perhaps, then, this is why the themata of exposing and undermining whiteness which was embodied in the motif of Avie's peeling skin was always already implicitly there in the earlier versions of the novella, waiting to be discovered through the researching and writing of the exegesis and through the further re-writing of the novella itself. As Woolfe suggests, themata, although they come unbidden, "express the writer's psychological and spiritual relationship with the world" and are not "known until they're written down. Writing them is knowing them" (2007, p.100).

This insight into the way themata emerge in one's writing is powerful evidence for the way in which writing (and extensive re-writing and reflection) brings suppressed thoughts, feelings and beliefs to the surface, and of its transformative and syncretic possibilities. White South African novelist Nadine Gordimer, who for the majority of her life fought against apartheid, bears witness of this when she says that "the 'problems' of my country did not set me writing; on the contrary, it was learning to write that sent me falling, falling through the surface of 'the South African way of life'" (2010, p.119). She characterises her early efforts at writing as a "clumsy battle to chip my way out of shell after shell of ready-made concepts and make my own sense of life" (2010, p.120). For Gordimer it was writing that woke her up

to her whiteness; that fractured her "false consciousness"; that led her to unsettling the "realities" of apartheid and the exploitation of blacks (2010, p.308).

Although I'm wary of likening myself to Gordimer, the Nobel Literature prize-winner and ardent political activist, I do feel that through the dialogical process of writing between the exegesis and novella, I have in my own naive and clumsy way begun, at least, to chip my way out of my own "false consciousness" and work towards re-narrativising whiteness in my writing by making it visible and strange rather than unconsciously reflecting it. I have tried to convey this through my theorisations of 'feeling white' in Kenya and through my exploration of becoming aware of the ontological basis that was influencing my writing of whiteness in the earlier versions of the novella. I must pause here to question, however, whether through this investigation I have been able to establish a writing position whereby I "can actually fracture [whiteness] rather than become" whiteness (Schlunke, 1999, p.179). What does it really mean to "fracture" whiteness? And can I cease "becoming" white by exposing and re-narrativising whiteness in my writing?

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter it has been implied that to "fracture" whiteness means to unsettle whiteness, to make its power and its privilege visible, to "wrest [it] away from its naturalised effects" (Schlunke, 1999, p.175). It has also been suggested that to fracture the invisibility of whiteness by explicitly engaging with it will weaken its hegemonic power (Hage, 1999, p.x). As Dyer argues: "The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge us/them from the position of power" (1997, p.2). It has been my aim throughout this chapter to make my own whiteness visible, to fracture its invisibility by revealing its workings within my mind and in my creative practice. In a way, it could be seen that the writing of this chapter, and the re-writing of the novella, has "weakened" the hold whiteness has on my knowledge production in that I am now able to witness whiteness and its marginalising effects on non-white people rather than practice it unthinkingly; that in this witnessing I can now consciously refuse to perpetuate whiteness in my cross-cultural/racial representations. In refusing to maintain the invisibility of whiteness in my novella (combined with the greater awareness of African Australians gained throughout the investigations in Chapter One and Chapter Two), it should follow that I have now established a writing position whereby I can more ethically explore

issues of race and the interrelational, yet clearly distinct, realities of both my white and black characters; that through my now conscious understanding of whiteness as being at the centre of the race problem (including my own whiteness as both a writer and a self living and acting in the world) my representations of my characters will be dramatically transformed in a collaborative effort to change the racial order. Why then am I not at last 'free' from these haunting feelings of uncertainty? I can 'see' my whiteness now, can't I? Doesn't that mean I can now fracture it through my writing practice?

Ahmed knocks me back into place: there is an "illusion," she says, "that social hierarchies are undone once we have 'seen through them'...But race, like sex, is sticky; it sticks to us, or we become 'us' as an effect of how it sticks, even when we think we are beyond it" (2007, p.280). Ahmed argues that "declaring one's whiteness, even as part of a project of social critique, can reproduce white privilege in ways that are 'unforeseen'" (2007, p.265); hence why race is "sticky" even when we think we're beyond it. Ahmed contends that whites studying their whiteness (and I include in this, writing a novella which explores whiteness) can reconfigure white privilege by producing a fantasy of white "self-conscious and critical" people (2007, p.277).

> This is a progressive story: the white subject, by learning (about themselves?) will no longer take for granted or even disavow their whiteness. The fantasy presumes that to be critical and self-conscious is a good thing, and is even the condition of possibility for anti-racism...[However] racism is not simply about 'ignorance', or stereotypical knowledge. We can learn about racism and express white privilege in the very presumption of the entitlement to learn or to self-consciousness (Ahmed, 2007, p.277).

On a similar vein, Probyn describes the impossibility for a white subject to "give up power" through articulating and challenging their whiteness. She argues that

> there is no 'giving up power' without power being taken/transmuted into another form; taking responsibility, taking a good hard look at yourself, taking care, taking part, taking on ressentiment, taking up the challenge, taking time, taking task, taking over (Probyn, 2007, p.324).

It seems as if I am stuck in a "double-bind" here (Brewster, 2009b, pp.232-33). It seems that I will be performing some form of white privilege, or transmuting power into another form,

whichever way I proceed: whether it be turning away from my whiteness and my own complicity in racism, or by turning to whiteness, to the self, and learning to 'see' and unsettle the workings of whiteness in my knowledge production. It is not so simple, then, to establish a writing position whereby I can "fracture" whiteness rather than "become" whiteness. By learning to 'see' the epistemological and ontological basis of my whiteness, by exposing and re-narrativising it, I will, if Ahmed and Probyn are correct, be reconfiguring my white privilege and power rather than, as Hage suggests, weakening its hegemonic power. In this act, I may in fact "become" another type of whiteness.

It is clear that "we do not yet have a language to challenge privilege from within privilege" (Probyn, 2007, p.330). But this doesn't mean that we should stop trying, even in our clumsy attempts, to find that language, nor should we stop trying to persistently interrupt our narrativisations of whiteness (Brewster, 2005) – of "white racism and white privilege that are not [yet] undone," as well as white racism and privilege that are "repeated and intensified, through declarations of whiteness, or through the recognition of privilege *as* privilege" (Ahmed, 2007, p.283). As Ahmed argues, we need to begin to live with the "stickiness" of race: "To think it, feel it, do it, is about creating a space to deal with the effects of racism. We need to deal with the effects of racism in a way that is *better*" (Ahmed, 2007, p.280).

Ahmed suggests that whiteness studies must involve a "double turn" if it is to clear some ground "upon which the work of exposing racism might provide the conditions for another kind of work" – a work which can *better* deal with the effects of racism (2007, p.284). This "double turn" would involve whiteness studies turning

> towards and away from those bodies who have been afforded agency and mobility by such privilege. In other words, the task for white subjects would be to stay implicated in what they critique, but in turning towards their role and responsibility in these histories of racism, as histories of the present, to turn away from themselves, and towards others (Ahmed, 2007, p.284).

In a progressive fashion, this exegesis has shifted its focus from the African Australian to the white Australian self, driven by the ethical imperative, as a white cross-cultural/racial writer representing Africans in her fictional work, to respond to the long historical dominance of Africans by white supremacy, a domination which continues neo-colonially in the present. Moving the focus from the other to the self has pressured me to locate whiteness – and thus

myself as a white subject who inhabits it unavoidably – as the source of racism, and has opened my eyes to the ways in which I had been performing my whiteness (and will continue to do so in transmuted ways) in my writing practices and in my everyday life. Although I cannot avoid performing some form of whiteness, I can refuse "to go along with certain practices and expectations" of it (Frankenberg, 1996, p.16) in an effort to *better* deal with the effects of racism. I hope that in my tentative reflections here in this exegesis, as well as in the re-written version of the novella, that I have been able to explore the source of racism and its effects in a better (albeit, I will be the first to admit, flawed and insufficient) way than what I could have done before embarking on this project.

As I turn this thesis now to the second component, to the fictional work of *Fragile Skins*, I turn away from the self and towards my fictional others, to Avie and Akinyi, and to their parents who have also become central characters in the story, and towards a charged imaginative "zone of embodied [racialised] intersubjectivity" (Brewster, 2009b, p.233) where the effects of racism are teased out at a visceral and affective level. "Imagining is not merely looking or looking at; nor is it taking oneself intact into the other. It is, for the purposes of the work, *becoming*" (Morrison, 1992, p.4).

Pages 119-241 of this thesis (creative component) have been removed for copyright purposes.

Appendix I

Ethics Approval Letter

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY
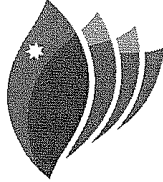
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27 August 2009

Mrs Filipa Bellette
1/3 King Street
Mount Kuring-Gai
NSW 2080

Reference: HE31JUL2009-D00045

Dear Mrs Bellette

FINAL APPROVAL

Title of project: Stories and cultural transformations: representations of African migrants in an Australian novel

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Ethics Review Committee (Human Research) and you may now commence your research. This approval is subject to the following condition:

1. Please advise the Committee of the outcome of discussions with the University Solicitor regarding the IP issues raised by your application.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is **conditional** upon your continuing compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*.

2. Approval will be for a period of five (5 years) subject to the provision of annual reports. **Your first progress report is due on 01/09/2010.**

    If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report on the project.

    Progress Reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:
    http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. Please notify the Committee of any amendment to the project.

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
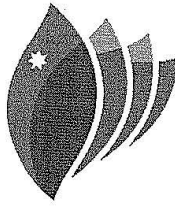

ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN RESEARCH)
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics

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6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at: http://www.research.mq.edu.au/policy.

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide Macquarie University's Research Grants Officer with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. The Research Grants Officer will not inform external funding agencies that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Officer has received a copy of this final approval letter.

Yours sincerely

Dr Karolyn White
Director of Research Ethics
Chair, Ethics Review Committee (Human Research)

Appendix II

Interview Questions

1. Background Information

- Can you tell me about your background?

  - Probing questions: What is your country of origin? Where did you live in Africa (e.g. village, city, etc)? Tell me about your family's background? Why did you come to Australia? How long have you been here?

2. Questions about participant's African culture

- I realise that Africa is made up of many countries and many more different tribes, but what would you consider are some of the core things that make an African culture?

  - Probing Question: If no unifying feature, can these tribes/countries be unified in Australia? Are you friends with/do you associate with African people in Australia that you wouldn't in Africa? Why do you think that is so? Is keeping your culture important to you? How do you keep your culture in a place where other cultures dominate?

- How important is naming in your culture?

  - Probing questions: Can you tell me about the origin of your names? Is it common to have a Christian or Islamic name as well as an African name? Are these Christian/Islamic names given at birth or adopted later on in life? Why do some Africans adopt an English name? Are African names chosen based on meaning, or simply because the parents like it?

- Is religion important in African culture? What are the main religions?

  - Probing questions: Do African indigenous religions still exist? Do traditional African religions meld into Christian/Islamic ones? How do you feel about tribal religions being lost, and foreign religions now dominating in Africa? What is your religion? Is religion important to you? How does it affect your life? How do you feel about being in a country (Australia) that does not place particular importance on religion?

- Can you tell me about family relationships and the community in African culture?

  - Probing questions: Is the family important in African culture? How do family members generally treat each other? How is the family unit different/same in Africa compared to in Australia? Do you think the African family unit is affected by Australian culture? How? Is Africa a more community-based culture or an individualistic culture? What makes this community-based culture? Is there sometimes a blur between the distinctions of family and community? How do you feel about coming to an individualistic culture (Australia)?

- How do Africans deal with death/grief? Do you think it's different to how Australians deal with it?

- What are some common perceptions of Westerners in your home country? (I will not be offended if there are some negative perceptions!)

  -Probing questions: For Africans who have never been to a Western country, how do they generally perceive Western countries? Is there a general desire to go (live) in a Western country? Why?

3. Questions about participant's experiences in Tasmania (or other residing state, depending on the interviewee's location)

- What were your first reactions/thoughts of Tasmania?

  - Probing questions: What are some things that you found were very different/strange? What about things that you found where similar that you didn't think would be? Did you have any prior assumptions about Australia (or Tasmania) that you found were untrue when you got here?

- Did you have a problem with the language, or the Australian accent, or Australian mannerisms or body language when you first came here?

  Probing question: How did you deal with that?

- How do you feel people have been receptive of you (and the African community) in Tasmania?

- Probing questions: Do you feel like you have equal opportunities here? Have you experienced any racism? Do you feel like you've had support here from people outside of the African community? What do you think are some of the assumptions that Australians have about Africans? How can these assumptions be demystified?

- What are some challenges or difficulties you have encountered since being in Tasmania?

  Probing questions: Have you felt lonely? Isolated? Homesick? Misunderstood? How do you deal with these things? What do you miss most about Africa?

- What are some positive things about being in Tasmania?

  Probing questions: What are some things that have lifted you up or inspired you?

- There's a common saying that when you travel, you change as a person. Do you feel as though you have changed since coming to Tasmania?

  - Probing questions: Can you identify one or two major things that have caused this change?

- Does Tasmania feel like home to you, or is it Africa that is still the place that you call home?

  - Probing questions: Do you think Tasmania could ever feel like home? What is missing that is stopping you from feeling as though Tasmania is home? Where do you feel that you belong? Do you think you can belong in more than one place? Do you think you could ever identify yourself as both African and Australian? Do you think in time you could consider yourself Australian? Do you feel a connection with this place?

- Why do you think a lot of Africans move from Tasmania to the mainland? From an African point of view, what is different about living in Tasmania compared to living on the mainland?

- How do you think Africans are represented in the Western media and literature?

  - Probing questions: How do you feel about Westerners writing books and making movies, etc, about Africa and Africans? Do you feel they have a right to do so? Is it

any different to an African writing a story about Australia and Australians? Do you think there are any positive possibilities of cross-cultural writing (e.g. Westerner including representations of Africans in their writing)? Do you believe that sharing lived experiences can help to inform and enrich the community?

- So many different races and ethnic groups that have migrated to Australia have made fantastic and diverse contributions to our Australian way of life. Do you feel as though the African community's contribution is recognised and respected in Tasmania?

  - Probing question: Do you feel as though the African community is visible in Tasmania or is the community often overlooked? Do you think it is part of the Australian culture? What does African culture have to offer Australia? What do you think needs to be done to greater improve the African community's standing in Tasmania? How can other Australians help you and the African community?

4. Conclusion

- Do you have anything you would like to add?

Appendix III

Information and Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study of intercultural story sharing.

This research investigates the power that stories have in promoting cultural understanding. From a white Australian point of view, the study explores the need to re-imagine our social narratives so they include *all* cultural communities. Engaging with the stories of minority groups can achieve this. Through these proposed interviews, I (the chief investigator) aim to gain the knowledge that I need about African culture and African experiences in Australia in a collaborative manner, so that I can authentically represent African characters in Kenya and in Australia in my own novel.

The study is being conducted by Filipa Bellette (Chief Investigator) of the Department of English. Contact details are as follows:

Phone: []

Email: []

This research is being conducted to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy in English (Creative Writing) under the supervision of Dr Marcelle Freiman ((02) 9850 6892, Marcelle.freiman@humn.mq.edu.au) and Dr Jane Messer ((02) 9850 8738, Jane.messer@humn.mq.edu.au) of the school of English.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to:

1. Take part in an approximately one hour pre-scheduled interview with the chief investigator where you talk about your country of origin and culture and about your experiences in Australia.
2. Maintain some phone or email contact and confirm the details obtained during the research.

Interviews will be recorded via audiotape solely for the purpose of transcription. Recordings and transcripts will be stored securely in a locked cabinet and on a password protected computer. Only the chief investigator and supervisors will have access to the data. At the completion of the project, recordings will be discarded and destroyed.

During the interview, you will be asked about your experiences in Australia. There is a possibility that you may feel anxiety, anger or distress on recounting these experiences if they are adverse. If this be the case, you have the right to pass on any question. If follow-up support (e.g. counselling) is required, free services are available in your area. You can contact [insert relevant service] via phone [insert phone number] to make an appointment.

As this is a funded project, you will receive $50 for your participation.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of results unless the individual wants to be acknowledged.

Please tick the relevant box:

I wish to remain anonymous in the publication of results ☐

I wish to be acknowledged in the publication of results ☐

Prior to publication, participants will have the opportunity to review information directly pertaining to their own data, such as transcripts and quotes. Information will not be published or used in this research if the participant objects or withdraws their consent.

Information obtained from this research will be presented in the Creative Writing PhD Thesis. A novel will be written as part of the thesis, which will draw from the information obtained from the research. There is a possibility that this novel will be published. Information may also be published as conference papers and/or journal articles.

A summary of overall findings relating to the interviews will be sent to participants as soon as the data is analysed. For further feedback, or for an electronic copy of the thesis, contact the chief investigator via phone or email.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

I (the participant) have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participations in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name (block letters):_____

Participant's Signature:_____ Date:_____

Investigator's Name (block letters): _____

Investigator's Signature: _____ Date:_____

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Review Committee through its Secretary (telephone 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.aa). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

(INVESTIGATOR'S [OR PARTICIPANT'S] COPY)

Appendix IV

Journey to Kenya

Although my travel to Kenya occurred before my PhD candidature, the journey itself is intrinsically intertwined in the empirical research map of my PhD project, setting the context for both the critical and creative work. While my experiences in Kenya are explored more fully in Chapter Three in relation to my coming to an awareness of my whiteness and white privilege, I felt it appropriate to add some additional material in this appendix in regards to the way the journey fundamentally influenced and contributed to this project.

After completing my Honours year in English Literature in 2006, I took a year's break from my university studies to do some travelling and experience the world outside my culturally and racially insulated home state of Tasmania. Part of this travel included a four-month stay in Kenya to do volunteer work at a secondary school and at a school for disabled children in the remote village of Ukwala. Being an ethically and socially minded individual, I did not want to go to Africa merely as a tourist. Rather I wanted to engage with the African community at a more personal, meaningful level; taken by the romanticised brochures for volunteer work, I hoped, ultimately, to 'make a difference' to the lives of the children and young adults I would be working with. Already, then, some of the reasons for going to Kenya had ethical underpinnings – ethical in the sense of contributing in making a wiser and better global society – which consequently carried over to this ethically nuanced PhD project. What is significant, however, is the way my ideas of 'what is ethical' (in relation to intercultural relations and creating a 'better' society) were deconstructed and transformed during my stay in Kenya and also during my PhD candidature, as is explored in the main body of the thesis and indirectly through the novella.

Perhaps my (seemingly) benevolent reasons for going to Kenya were tainted from the beginning as I also went to Kenya (indirectly) as a writer searching for ideas. As a creative practitioner, one goes about the world, in the words of Graeme Kinross-Smith, with a "tuning fork in your head," tuning into events and details that might make "good material" (1992, p.32). Knowing that I wanted to do a Creative Writing PhD after my year of travelling, I privately hoped that I might find some inspiration – some "good material" – in the 'dark heart of Africa' for my own PhD creative work. Perhaps I might meet some destitute family

surviving against the odds in the slums of Nairobi; or maybe I might be taken by a vibrant and exotic community living in a strange and colourful village in the depths of the interior; for all I knew, it might have even been an elephant or a lion that would prove to be the source of inspiration for my soon-to-be-written novella.

Reflecting back now on what could only be called my naïve (and, although it's hard to admit, xenophobic) fascination with the exotic, it is clear to see that any 'benevolent' motives for going to Kenya were quickly thwarted by the way I thought about and planned to use the African other in my creative work. Fortunately, it was during my stay in Kenya, as I began to question my status as a white person and my relationships with the African other (as is explored in Chapter Three), and also throughout the process of researching and writing my thesis, that I began to realise that I could not focus solely on the other in my creative (or critical) work. Any idea I might have had to write a novella focusing exclusively on a poverty-stricken family or on an exotic Luo community was quickly discarded. The self too must be examined – the white subject and the African other and their intercultural encounters. Both the critical and creative work, then, were transformed to not only examine white representations of African people, but also to represent the self and whiteness.

Appendix V

Focalization and Tonal Choices Made in the Novella

The focalization and tonal choices made in the novella both occurred on a subconscious and a conscious level and were significant in exploring the racial relations between my white Australian and black African characters at a visceral and affective level. While I explore to some degree some of the creative decisions made with two of the primary characters – Avie and Akinyi – in Chapter Three in relation to black and white racial representations, the main body of the exegesis does not explain the focalization and tonal choices made in the novella which were used to explore racial boundaries in the Australian-African context. A brief analysis of this will be done in this appendix with the aim of further strengthening the link between practice and critical understanding.

Very briefly, the storyline of the novella involves a white Australian family – Patrick and Kay and their 12-year-old daughter, Avie – suddenly coping with the fact that Patrick finds he is father to a 16-year-old girl, Akinyi, living in Kenya. The family travel to Kenya to collect Akinyi and bring her back to their home in Tasmania. The journey to Kenya shifts the white Australian family to uncomfortable places in which their racial identities are subtly challenged. But it is not until they return home to Tasmania with Akinyi in tow that their covertly 'white' lives become tangled up and confronted by the other. Focalized through Avie, Akinyi, Patrick and Kay, the novella follows the challenges each character encounters and the transformations that follow.

Originally, the novella was written solely in first-person point-of-view through Avie's focalization. Enjoying the child's subtle and unknowing voice in other works such as Tim Winton's *That Eye, The Sky* (1986), I decided to try my own hand at it. Along with this, I felt the child's focalization, with her naivety as to what is going on around her, would lend itself to a layered text of implication which would help deal sensitively with the racial issues in the story. It became clear, however, that Avie's internal focalization limited me, as the writer, to explore other vital perspectives – that of the father and the mother and the marginalised character of Akinyi. To only see the story events through Avie's focalization, which offered a naively sympathetic and malleable perspective on racial relations, meant that I could not fully explore other ideologies of race and culture in a way that the exegesis does.

With the encouragement of my supervisor who, as an external reader, could see these limitations, I decided to re-write the novella using an omniscient third-person external narrator-focalizer (who has her own implicit anti-racist ideology), with the aim of entering the minds of the four main characters, each of whom have their own racial attitudes and ideologies. This not only provided variation of voice and tone in the text, as well as a layered and subtler story, but it also enabled a plurality of ideological positions in the novella (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p.83). Such plurality allowed for a more nuanced teasing apart of racial prejudices and unpacking of issues that the exegesis handles.

Alongside Avie's more naively sympathetic and malleable perspective on race, the text opens up to explore Patrick's exoticist ideology as he clumsily attempts to build a relationship with his aloof new daughter. Juxtaposed to these views is Kay's ideological position in which she becomes confronted by and tries to overcome her closet racist self. Written from a marginalised African standpoint, the fourth character, Akinyi, provides a very different way of seeing and being in the world and challenges the other three white characters and the adverse effects of their whiteness. By juxtaposing these four conflicting characters' views and ideologies through the narrator-focalizer, and thus prompting readers to consider the multiple ways of seeing and acting out race, I was able to deconstruct race and racist ideology more effectively than if I had kept the novella exclusively in Avie's first-person internal focalization. In so doing, I hope that readers will be challenged to examine issues and ideas – and themselves – just as I the writer has had to challenge myself.

A creative writing technique closely associated to focalization is that of tone, which is also significant to comment on in relation to this ethically driven project that hopes to prompt individual and societal change. In the final version of the PhD novella, there is a lightness of voice and tone, which, on the surface, lends itself to an elemental engagement with the world. In the beginning, the novella appears to be relatively easy and familiar in terms of narrative plot, setting and family and adolescent dilemmas. However, as the novella continues, it becomes apparent that there are larger issues at hand, issues that force each of the characters' sense of comfort to become dispelled.

The lightness and subtlety of voice and tone came about indirectly, carried over from the earlier versions of the manuscript that was, as highlighted earlier, written exclusively through a young adolescent's first-person focalization. In the final PhD version of the

novella, Avie remains the principle narrative viewpoint. The novella evolved this way partly because I had already done so much in the way of character development for Avie – she was, and always would be, a central figure in the story. I also, however, wanted Avie to be the primary focalizing position as she embodies, because of her malleability, the transformative possibilities that I hoped my thesis could bring about.

Because Avie is the primary narrative viewpoint, and because of the lightly voiced and subtle tone of the piece, the novella has the flavour of young adult fiction and/or crossover readerships. (In saying this, however, the novella is not only of interest to a young adult audience. The adult perspectives of the parents in the story, as well as the social, political, racial and moral boundaries in the Australian-African context explored, also leads to a novella that might be appealing to an adult Australian audience, particularly to parents). Although the tone and approach of the piece came about subconsciously during the writing of the novella, that the story is accessible to a younger audience is not an insignificant matter. As suggested at the end of Chapter One of the exegesis (see p.56), it is with the younger generation that we might expect transformation of interracial relationships to occur; as one young writer from the short story anthology, *No Place Like Home: Australian Stories* (Dechian, et al., 2005), says: "It's up to the children of today to stop this" (Hann, 2005, p.8) – to stop the racism, to stop the discrimination, to stop this "silly colour believing" (Hann, 2005, p.8).

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