

**Pedagogic possibilities of diasporic texts in a contemporary  
literature classroom: a postcolonial analysis**

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## Abstract

Over recent decades, the demography of Australian classrooms has changed considerably. This is evident in the increased mobility, cultural diversity and transnational connectivity that students live and experience. However, the literature curriculum continues to maintain a focus on the English canon. It tends to ignore the diverse knowledges and literatures within the students' cultural repertoire. This project, therefore, seeks to respond to this anomaly by examining the ways in which a text produced by an Australian-Asian diasporic writer has the potential to contribute to the development in students of 'transnational literacy' (Spivak, 1992). It investigates how diasporic texts might help contemporary students to negotiate their identities and understand their 'worldliness' (Said, 2003) in relational, critical and reflexive ways.

Using a range of critical tools from recent postcolonial theory, this research is based on a pedagogic experiment. It involves the researcher teaching a postcolonial text to Year 11 students, observing student responses to the text, and interviewing them to generate data that is analysed through a constant movement between theory and data, privileging neither. This data suggests that, within the transnationalised and hybridised space of the contemporary Australian classroom, some students find difficulty negotiating the dominant norms of Australianness, and identify nation-centric narratives as key sources of feelings of confusion and exclusion. Yet, by the end of the course of study, after contesting these norms, the majority of these students reported changes in their epistemic constructions of themselves and of others. As they began to see themselves differently, they were becoming better prepared to imagine the Other who was pushing back at the self. Based on this insight, this thesis shows that the teaching of diaspora literature is a useful tool in steering students towards transnational literacy inasmuch as it highlights the ambiguities, ambivalences, and the hybridities that they experience and gives useful insights into how 'reading otherwise' is essential for its development.

In conclusion, this thesis proposes a new form of literary pedagogy that takes into account contemporary social changes and recognises that they necessitate a new ethical receptiveness, a transnational sensibility that is disposed towards cultural difference. Achieving such recognition emerges from a deliberate process of slow reading and imaginative training to focus on often overlooked detail, and importantly involves privileged subjects showing awareness of their complicity within transnational hierarchies of power.

## Declaration

This thesis comprises only my original work towards the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliography and appendices.

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## Note on Published Material

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

What kinds of times are these?<sup>1</sup>

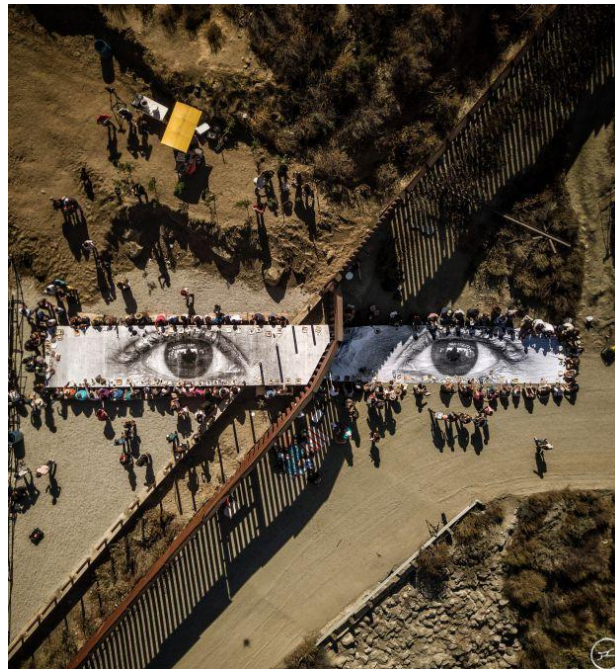


Figure 1: Gigantic picnic at the U.S.-Mexico border fence. Image posted to:

[www.jr-art.net/](http://www.jr-art.net/) by artist JR, October 11 2017

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<sup>1</sup> I have taken my chapter headings from Adrienne Rich's poetry, acknowledging my indebtedness to her transnational feminist views and her intense awareness of the politics of location with its attendant privilege and partiality. This title is taken from Rich (2002, p. 253).

In June 2015, just as I was beginning this project, Donald Trump, in his presidential announcement, June 16, 2015, made the following now-famous remarks:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you ... They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people (Time Staff, 2015).

His words, the precursor to his push for a border wall, help many of us to examine the question, 'what kinds of times are these', as they indicate the contradictory pull between transnational mobility on the one hand and nationalist backlash on the other. This is a tension now characteristic of current global politics, as demonstrated through Brexit, through widespread resistance to embracing refugees, and through the rise of neo-nationalist movements such as Le Pen's Front National in France and Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in Australia.

French photographer and street artist, J R, constructs his art right in the midst of these global tensions. Through it, he connects people across boundaries and engages them in practices that he hopes will have the potential to change perspectives. In the above image of the Mexican wall at Tecate, the eyes confront you as viewer with their intensity and their humanity. On the same day in October 2017 that the Trump administration announced a group of hard-line immigration proposals (Keith, 2017), J R erected a gigantic dining table which straddled the border and connected people in Mexico and the United States. Painted onto the tabletop was this enormous image of the eyes of a 'dreamer', (a young person who qualifies for assistance according to the U.S. Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act.

This image, also, has a great deal to tell us about our current historical conditions. With one eye on each side of the wall, it shows the divided self that can develop as a response to politically erected borders. It conveys the vitality and sentience of the victims of borders and walls, the ways they become part of the wall and the wall part of them. But they are

also looking and seeing. They have their own viewpoint. This image shows also that people on each side of the border are both divided and joined, both similar and different, all actively participating in the dynamic political practices of bordering. It draws attention to the ways that the processes of globalisation have changed the possibilities of aesthetic and political engagement. Each of J R's cross-border installations has a limited life span. Often they are illegal, always they are temporary. But the images go viral. They are filmed and archived. They spread across the world and enter many different political and social spaces, some local, others transnational. They testify to the ways in which technological advancement and globalisation have changed communicative possibilities, have created new political conditions, new power relations and new forms of resistance.

These emerging political and economic conditions, together with the ubiquity and speed of demographic, social and technological changes, generate both additional challenges and fresh possibilities for education around the world, but particularly in settler colonies (Youé, 2018) such as Australia, constituted by successive waves of migration. In Australia, as ever-increasing global mobilities change the nature of communities, schools and classrooms, they bring with them greater cultural and linguistic diversity. In the face of these changes, it has become necessary to interrogate curricula and pedagogies. This study considers how best to respond to the complex forces of global mobility and connectivity across the curriculum generally and from within a senior secondary literature classroom in particular. How might literature teachers approach the prospects of learning within a rapidly changing and diverse society? What kind of literature is it appropriate to teach in this rapidly changing context? How might the teaching of literature speak to the complex, dynamic and ambiguous identities of many of the students in a school, which is the site of both my teaching and my research?

In this chapter, I begin by describing how I, as a teacher, have experienced the changes associated with globalisation and cultural diversity over the past three decades. I then consider the drivers of these changes, how they have reconstituted the Australian classroom generally and my literature class in particular. I follow this with an account of how educational authorities in Australia are responding to recent demographic, social and cultural shifts. The final part of this chapter indicates how my recognition of these shifts has steered this thesis into an exploration of the ways in which the teaching of literature might be reconsidered and reimagined towards what Spivak (1992) refers to as ‘transnational literacy’ (p. 16).

### **Experiences of social transformations**

About five years ago, I became aware that while my students, many of whom came from a range of Asian backgrounds, were studious and attentive in their literature classes, the more dynamic conversations happened outside the class where they talked about their families, their own reading habits, their tensions and fears, often expressing the belief that the literature curriculum did not connect with their lives. Often they mentioned conflicts between home and school, the necessity of code-switching, the resentments, yet protectiveness, the anger yet respect, the love-hate relationships they had with their parents. Normal teenage concerns. But over time I realised that these students had more complex identity to negotiate than I or, I think, my own children, as an Anglo-Australian family. Many expressed a sense of powerlessness, caught between high expectations of achievement, strict sexual mores and a stringent work ethic on the one hand, and yet on the other hand messages from their teachers and fellow students that balance and confidence were more important and ‘as long you tried, you were doing fine’. Many talked of being bullied, in their primary schools or neighbourhoods, because of different foods they ate, different ways they talked and carried different racial markings.

During recess, and lunchtimes, I heard about parents of my students, from Iran, China or Vietnam, who had found their own childhoods interrupted by changes of government or social conditions, losses of freedom – people who wanted to forget a painful past. I was introduced to forms of Persian ghazals, the intricacies of Indian dancing and the Chinese story of Pu Songling who would give someone a bowl of porridge if they told him a story so he heard the stories of the hungry and the less educated. Over time, I realised that the classrooms I was currently teaching in had changed significantly from the ones I had taught in at the beginning of my teaching career in the 1970s. I began to ask, ‘what kinds of times are these?’ (Rich, 2002) and ‘what sort of literary pedagogies are appropriate for these times?’

The world I grew up in was culturally diverse but this fact remained unacknowledged under the dominant ethos of assimilation. Everyone was an Australian or a ‘new Australian’. Certainly, the new Australians were rarely from Asia or Africa. Yet the Anglo world of our cultural mythology was already changing. Our classrooms contained a smattering of Italians, Greeks, Maltese, Poles and Russians but we only ever looked at maps of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries especially those where English was the official language. Growing up as a white female in a white middle-class environment, I took for granted the norms of white Australian society, never realising how terms such as ‘foreigner’ or ‘ethnic’ were used to differentiate between Australians considered as ‘entitled’ and those considered to be the Others. As Hickling-Hudson (2005) suggests, such modes of expression reflect and are ‘constitutive of power relations dominated by British-derived cultural hegemony, still entrenched despite the growing diversity of the population, the increasing support for various levels of multiculturalism, and the articulation of multicultural aims by governments’ (Hickling-Hudson, 2005, p. 341). Being entrenched in this Anglophone ideology, I never identified myself as having a culture, but ‘unthinkingly

accepted the graces that came from [my] middle-class location where education was valued, academic ability rewarded, and English spoken fluently' (Hickling-Hudson, 2005, p. 345).

In more recent years, the writings of such postcolonial theorists as Fanon, Said and others began to permeate the thinking of some educators, challenging the cultural assumptions on which literature courses were based. As Rizvi noted, many teachers occupied, and perhaps continue to occupy, contradictory positions in relation to racism and were often complicit in such discriminatory practices as grading according to norms that rest on assimilationist assumptions (Rizvi, 2014, p. 67). My experience suggests that deep entrenchment within a particular tradition can render one blithely unaware of its social and political implications. I recognise now that, as both teacher and researcher, my own situatedness and subject position require scrutiny and ongoing reflexivity in order to do justice to the experiences and aspirations of my students.

The first and the most apparent change to note that has occurred over the years of my teaching is that of the greater diversity of the student population. My current classroom includes students with family histories in India, China, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia, Singapore and Australia, as well as a smattering of students from complex and mixed backgrounds. Thus, I represent a commonly experienced problem facing many students in these changing times, the demographic division between teachers and students (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2016). As Angus (2012) has commented, not being adequately reflected in the curriculum is one of the key barriers facing young students of colour as 'schooling tends to privilege the culture and experience of mainly white, middle-class students and their families who occupy the normalised centre ... and who, like their teachers, tend to take existing social arrangements for granted' (p. 231).

Ukpokodu (2016) argues that there is a lack of cultural diversity among teaching staff in many countries: 'In both the United States and South Africa, much has been written about

the demographic cultural divide between the teaching force and the student populations' (p. 119). She maintains that the demographic gap between the cultures of teachers and students means that as they come from different socio-cultural worlds, their different worldviews may create a teaching-learning disconnect, 'which negatively impacts on marginalized students' learning' (Ukpokodu, 2016, p. 119). Demographic diversity requires us to question our current educational arrangements and practices, but it may also present us with new pedagogic opportunities.

A second significant change I have noticed over my teaching career has been what is often referred to as an audit culture (Thompson & Cook, 2013) – an emphasis on and accountability and assessment of student achievement against prescribed curricular objectives, reflecting a view of education as competitive (Angus, 2015). Yet, rigid standardised curricula do not leave much room for serendipity or individual responsiveness to different learning needs within the student cohort. The growing focus on measurement has caused a deep sense of loss for me, as my lifelong passion has been literature teaching. It was a thrill, in the past, to see a student puzzle over *Hamlet* or *King Lear* week after week, until a wonderful insight, which had been developing unseen, emerged from the slow deliberative process. This evolved response, gently nurtured over the year of the literature class, gave both student and teacher enormous satisfaction. But in the emerging context, mired in continuous assessments, this slow processing is almost impossible. Rather than the more flexible curriculum arrangements, which might seem to be more appropriate in times of global flows, greater diversity and technological facilitation, the competitive ethos currently imposes severe assessment regimes on schools. This leads to many teachers reporting being overwhelmed by a 'national onslaught of high-stakes testing and 'teacher-proof' curricula' (Levine & Au, 2013, p. 73) which have 'compelled teachers to use bland textbooks and associated software rather than more varied and creative curricular materials' (Levine & Au, 2013, p. 78). Hursh and Henderson (2011) argue that 'the corporate and



governmental elite ... use high-stakes tests to ostensibly assess and hold accountable teachers and students' (Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 172).

What is increasingly clear is that the contemporary developments in education have thus presented me, and my fellow teachers I observe, with contradictions, tensions, dilemmas and challenges, and perhaps also some new possibilities. This research project does not rehearse these contradictions, tensions and challenges as such, but seeks to identify what new possibilities for the teaching of literature in secondary schools still exist within the rapidly changing conditions of school governance, on the one hand, and the facts of complex cultural diversity of students on the other. What pedagogical changes would best serve the ever-changing needs of students in this dynamic context? In order to address this question, it is necessary to describe the political and social dynamics that impinge on the daily experiences of teachers in the literature classroom in Australia, and provide an account of the policy context in which the possibilities of pedagogic interventions may be imagined.

### **Drivers of classroom change**

Arguably, the key drivers of changes in the ways classrooms are constituted in Australia are technological change, social mobility and demographic change, and the reimagining of the purposes and governance of education within a global context (Green, 2017; Lindsay, 2017; Moyle, 2010). Technology now cuts through spatial barriers and distances and the attendant 'time-space compression' (Harvey, 1989) and challenges binaries of local and global, national and international. We can sit in an Australian classroom and video-conference with students in Beijing as an exercise in cross-cultural mutual learning. We can use Google Earth to visit foreign cities and travel down their streets even while sitting in desks in our usual classrooms. Young people in particular have become digital natives and can now use the tools of social media to communicate with friends and family around the

world. These technological changes overlap with the other drivers and each has a significant part to play in the changing morphology of the Australian classroom.

As part of worldwide trends caused by the rise of multinational corporations, ease of communication and travel, armed conflict and economic crisis, millions of people worldwide have been on the move. This has caused significant changes in our classrooms. Within Australia, the number of migrants from Asia has greatly increased in the last two decades. China now represents 8.3 per cent of the overseas-born population with India close behind with 7.4 per cent (Simon-Davies, 2018). The proportion of people of Asian backgrounds in Australia has increased from barely 5 per cent in 2001 to over 17 per cent in 2017. In the 2016 census, six of the top ten countries of birth of Australian immigrants were Asian countries. Overall, the rate of population growth has increased rapidly in Australia since the mid-2000s with overseas migration being the main driver of this (Simon-Davies, 2018). By 2016–17, natural increase represented only 36 per cent of Australia's population growth with net overseas migration (the difference between incoming and outgoing migrants) at 64 per cent (Simon-Davies, 2018).

Many Australians feel that the increased migration from the various Asian nations presents a challenge for Australia, which is still predominantly of European political heritage, despite its proximity to Asia (Soong, 2018). The diversity and mobility of the cohort that now typically constitutes the classrooms in Australian schools thus challenges us to interrogate our educational policies and practices to ensure they do not rely on false assumptions of stability and cultural homogeneity. This is a concern in my own classroom where 80 per cent of the students have heritages located in an Asian country, but where the texts and pedagogies have been predominantly Anglo-centred, and some students complain understandably that they 'cannot see' themselves in the texts.

The reimagining of education within a global context is another noteworthy driver of change within the Australian classroom. Education, now construed as an industry, is seen as part of a global competition for educational status and the ability to sell education at a high price. Rizvi and Lingard explain that education now appears to take place ‘within a global field of comparison to give it a measure of its potential global economic competitiveness’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 18). This competitive focus has led to an emphasis on training, work-ready skills and competency-based learning objectives inspired largely by ‘OECD’s creation of the influential Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] which focuses upon transfer and application of knowledge, rather than content recitation’ (Greenlaw, 2015; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). It has influenced Australian classrooms through a raft of government reforms, which have mandated high-stakes testing, informational technology competencies and new forms of teacher registration and professional development as part of the knowledge economy.

### **Policy responses to the changes**

The Australian government has recently introduced a wide range of policy reforms such as the Australian Curriculum, standardised literacy and numeracy assessments (NAPLAN), professional standards for teachers and national reporting on schools through the My School website ([www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)). These policies will be considered in some detail in Chapter 2. For now, I will focus on Asia literacy as the most germane government initiative to this study and draw on it as an example of the policy responses of the government to changing social conditions.

As a key Australian Government initiative, the idea of Asia literacy first emerged in the late 1980s, but was more recently reaffirmed with the Australian Government’s white paper, *Australia in the Asian Century* (Australian Government, 2012). The idea of Asia literacy is

designed to come to terms with the changing demographic and geopolitical context of Australian education. As Rizvi (2017) shows, awareness of the strategic and economic importance of Asia to Australia had been recognised in organisations such as the Asian Studies Association of Australia and various government reports since the 1970s (Rizvi, 2017, p. 70). But the push to help young Australians to become Asia literate received a major boost by the inclusion of Asia literacy as a cross-curriculum priority in the newly formed Australian curriculum informed by the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training, and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2008). The goals for this curriculum priority are outlined on the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) website:

This priority will ensure that students learn about and recognise the diversity within and between the countries of the Asia region. Students will develop knowledge and understanding of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments, and the connections between the peoples of Asia, Australia and the rest of the world. Asia literacy provides students with the skills to communicate and engage with the peoples of Asia so they can effectively live, work and learn in the region (ACARA, 2018).

These goals set worthwhile directions for teachers, but how are they being implemented? How might they be achieved within the context of shifts taking place in the governance of Australian education, with values and assumptions that often steer schools into conflicting directions? Many teachers feel inadequate to engage with Asia literacy given their own education within a Eurocentred curriculum, and a tension is created inside educational institutions when these policies are situated in a neoliberal context (Halse, Cloonan, Dyer, Kostogriz, Toe & Weinmann, 2013). Not enough assistance is provided to professionally develop teachers to take up these policies and put them to work in everyday lessons. It should be noted also that change will not be sustained if teachers are not encouraged to experiment with new ideas, since even well-articulated policies that express ideals and possibilities are meaningless unless their implementation is supported, in the places and spaces where students are able to grow and learn and where teachers' professionalism is

nurtured. Asia literacy, as a policy, may have the potential to usher in practices that are constructive and ethically desirable, but only if there is adequate support for the implementation of reforms, where context-specific possibilities can be imagined, and where new approaches can be trialed and debated with the help of new ways of thinking about culturally responsive teaching within literature classrooms.

### **Investigating possibilities**

Inasmuch as policy measures have only partially come to terms with the increased mobility and dynamism of our times, this project seeks to investigate possible pedagogic responses more suited to the nature of the student population in the school where I teach. This school, Atwood High School,<sup>2</sup> the site of this research, is one of approximately 60 Australian public schools that admit students selectively based on a difficult academic entry test. Ho (2017) in her provocatively titled paper, ‘Angry Anglos and aspirational Asians...’, reports that ‘in the majority of selective schools in Sydney, students from language backgrounds other than English comprise at least 80 per cent of overall enrolments and the majority of these students are from Asian backgrounds’ (Ho, 2017, p. 3).

The domination of these spaces by Asian-Australian students has provoked intense media debate, analysed by Proctor and Sriprakash (2017) as rendering race and racism ‘hyper-visible’ (p. 2378) as Asian success is represented in the Sydney print media as problematic for the imagined white nation. Proctor and Sriprakash point out that this tension appears to result from a sense of the ‘threat such success makes to historical relations of white privilege’ (Proctor & Sriprakash, 2017, p. 2379). Selective schools within Australia could be described, therefore, as fraught political spaces, ones that have emerged from ‘Australia’s

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<sup>2</sup> I have given this pseudonym to the school that is the site of this research in order to protect student confidentiality.

neoliberal migration policy [which] has led to a dramatic growth in well-educated professionals from Asia arriving as skilled and business migrants over the last 20 years' (Ho, 2017, p. 1).

Atwood High School is thus in one sense an elite, privileged space and could be seen to be unrepresentative of the demographic diversity that occurs in other Australian schools.

However, while such selective schools are places of academic privilege, and have more highly concentrated populations of Asian-Australian students, they also manifest issues that apply to non-selective schools with rapidly changing cultural demographics, as well.

Even before I collected data for this project, many of the girls in my literature classroom could testify to experiences of being Othered, bullied and patronised in their primary schools and in their everyday dealings in the world. They feel 'different' when praised for their glowing skin or when asked where they come from really. In many cases, they feel their exclusion keenly, even if these girls are privileged in some other ways. They aspire to high university entrance scores and top remunerative professions. But they are subject to normative assumptions that devalue their academic efforts as 'Asian work ethic', as if this were some kind of essential quality. Given the rapid demographic changes affecting all Australian schools, their experiences can nonetheless usefully guide us towards a better understanding of some of the challenges of identity that students in other school groups may also experience.

Atwood High School is a single-sex school. Not surprisingly, one of the key identity issues that students at Atwood face relates to gender, which is ever-present in my analysis, as indicated symbolically through the Adrienne Rich quotations and assigning the name, 'Atwood' to the school. Issues of gender, therefore, cannot be overlooked, not least because, as Arnot notes (2009, p. 245):

globally women suffer some of the worst effects of exploitation, oppression and violence. It is even more significant that the global citizen, like the learner citizen back in the classroom, is a gendered citizen. The more we discuss global citizenship education, particularly from a gender perspective, the greater the need for young people not to receive a normative education, one which implies consensus.

Various writers (Fraser, 1989; Nandy & Banerjee, 2017; Pateman, 2016) have investigated the issues of education of the gendered citizen within the context of nation states. But what happens when we move these issues to globally interconnected spaces? In these spaces, issues of race and gender intersect. Both Spivak (2012) and Mohanty (2003) emphasise the significance of marking the category of racialised gender. They see this as necessary in the face of capitalism's practices of utilising the raced and sexed bodies of women in its search for profit globally. For Mohanty, the 'critique and resistance to global capitalism, and uncovering of the naturalisation of its masculinist and racist values, begin to build a transnational feminist practice' (Mohanty, 2003, p. 530).

It is important to note that the experiences that girls have in places such as schools are often located in contradictory spaces, as they find themselves caught between normative masculinist values and their interest in various popular feminist sentiments. Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Kofman (2005) argue that '[c]ollective places constructed by imaginings of belonging...are constructions that disguise the fissures, losses, absences and the borders within them' (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005, p. 528). The imagining that they could fit in into the dominant order, if only they conformed to normative expectations, is both inviting to girls but also difficult to realise. This shows the power of the discourses to naturalise 'socially produced, situational and contextual relations, converting them to taken-for-granted, absolute and fixed structures of social and personal life' (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005, p. 528). In schools such as Atwood, as the politics of belonging is comprised of political projects aimed at constructing belonging in tacit ways, the girls can be expected to be 'interpellated' (Althusser, 1984) by the discourse of 'Australianness' finding it difficult to dissociate

themselves from dominant, implicitly patriarchal values, some of which may not be in their best interests. Yuval-Davis (2010) argued that ‘collective identity narratives provide a collective sense of order and meaning’ (p. 267), which is unevenly distributed across race and gender.

The pedagogic question raised by this tension is how to render visible to the students the ways dominant discourses disempower them in the curriculum, within the classroom and in the world around them. How might the contested nature of curriculum be revealed to the students, with a pedagogy that addresses their tensions of race and gender in the Australian literature classroom? What kind of pedagogy might be adequate to this task? This fundamental question has framed my study. It is located at the juncture of three areas of inquiry: pedagogy, literature and literacy. In practice in a literature classroom, these are inextricably intertwined. Teaching literature can be done in many ways and traditional literary pedagogies in Australia have tended to focus on the English canon, have been taught using teacher-centred methods and have adopted predominantly humanist approaches that assume universal insights. These traditional classrooms have focused on literature without considering the implications for the out-of-school literacies of the students. My study takes a critical perspective on the traditional nation-centric approach to the teaching of literature. Rather, it is a study of transnationality and of a pedagogic approach to literature that looks at literature as a way of learning new literacies – literacies appropriate to spaces of cultural diversity and transnational connectivity. I am interested in exploring how uses of texts written by authors of Asian background in Australia may be pedagogically deployed in working towards what Spivak refers to as transnational literacy.

In approaching this exploration, it is important to consider the complex relationship between literacy and literature. In some senses, it could be said that literacy, in the literature classroom, is in service of literature. If I were using ‘literacy’ in the traditional sense of



decoding<sup>3</sup> then that is what I might mean. However, I am instead drawing on an understanding of literacy employed within the Australian Curriculum as comprehending texts through listening, reading and viewing; and composing texts through speaking, writing and creating (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2014). When I teach deep and close reading, the literacy serves the analysis and understanding of the text in quite sophisticated ways. For example, when I teach the literary device of counterfocalisation, I build the students' literacy knowledge to help them better interpret the text. Perceptive interpretations of the text involve engagement with its views and values, its context and its informing discourses. They involve cultural analysis and acknowledgement of the social basis of textual practices (Macken-Horarik, 2014). When my students sit for their literature examination, they are not going to be asked about literacy but they will demonstrate their literacy skills in the service of the literature studied. But as I am for the most part using literacy, in this study, in the sense of 'a sociocultural phenomenon ... centred in social and cultural practices' (Gee, 2015, p. 35), the emphasis is on new literacies emerging within the transnational space. The literature being studied is in service of literacies that are applicable to the globalised world of the students. Pratt's concept of the classroom as a contact zone is of relevance here as she speaks of an intercultural literacy course she taught to a diverse student body. 'Every single text we read stood in specific historical relationships to the students in the class, but the range and variety of historical relationships in play were enormous. Everybody had a stake in nearly everything we read, but the range and kind of stakes varied widely' (Pratt, 1991, p. 39).

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<sup>3</sup> Decoding within the field of literacy usually refers to acquiring meaning from written language: 'We have established that learning to read in an alphabetic writing system such as English requires the acquisition of the alphabetic principle – the insight that the visual symbols of the writing system (graphemes) represent the sounds of the language (phonemes)' (Castles et al., 2018). In a senior secondary literature classroom, we do not tend to engage in decoding which would imply a fixed outcome but rather practise literary analysis which allows for multiple possible interpretations.

Rather than a homogenous community, the classroom operates as a transnationalised space where many cultures and histories criss-cross and interplay with each other. Such a classroom demands different pedagogic practices. Luke (2004a), speaking of the subject English, makes some points that are particularly pertinent to this exploration of how one might teach a literature class in these changing times in Australia. He locates the subject English within the changing demographics of learning communities and observes that, in order to respond to these 'new material and discourse conditions' (p. 87), English teachers should be open to new epistemological stances and to reframing their underpinning theories and pedagogies. He asks, '[w]hat kinds of literate subjects does our pedagogy produce? Fitted to what kind of society?' (Luke, 1991, p. 131). He thus aligns himself with the view of literacy presented by Street (1994) who argues:

[e]very literacy is learnt in a specific context in a particular way and the modes of learning, the social relationships of student to teacher, are modes of socialisation and acculturation. The student is learning cultural models of identity and personhood, not just how to decode script or to write a particular hand (p. 122).

What are the implications of these insights for a pedagogy of transnationality in a contemporary literature class? How might a pedagogy be developed that takes account of the many literatures, the diverse literacies of the students and helps them to find a fit in an ever-changing globalised world? As I design a pedagogic intervention to explore these questions, I recognise, on consideration of my own practice and these literacy scholars' views that the pedagogy will be informed by both literary and literacy concerns. I shall use both terms, 'literary' and 'literacy', sometimes interchangeably, to indicate their deep interdependency on and co-implication with each other within this study. How these different elements – pedagogy, literacy and literature finally come together – it is too early to say. I know only that the object of study is a transnational pedagogy appropriate to a particular literature class in an Australian school. How the pedagogy will develop, I will explore using theoretical resources drawn from postcolonial theories as a framework of

analysis. Postcolonialism shows us that neither contemporary globalisation nor contemporary Australian education can be dissociated from their roots in European imperialism. According to Young (2003, p. 2), '[p]ostcolonialism claims the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being'. It offers analytical tools to help us detect power relations between races, cultures and knowledges. This conceptual framework will inform the remainder of this study and will be further theorised in Chapter 3.

### **The structure of the thesis**

In this first chapter, I have presented an overview of the research context and approach. I have contextualised this study within selected aspects of Australian policy discourse (in particular, Asia literacy) and my own formative context as a student and teacher of canonical literature within a normative white Australian ethos. I have briefly introduced my conceptual framework as postcolonial and I have addressed the ways students, classrooms and society have changed in recent times asking how we should respond. While educational authorities have sought to address these changes, the responses have been inadequate and leave us with questions as to what changes might be most appropriate.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the transnationalisation of Australian schools partly as a consequence of the global processes that have engulfed us all. I show that in order to explore how to respond to shifting social conditions, I need to understand the changing social morphology of the classroom in detail. I begin the chapter by considering globalisation as a set of processes that have become forceful in defining ways nations are related to each other, institutions are related to each other and diasporas are created. I explore transnationalism within the context of these global forces. Globalisation has been a major force that has transnationalised the spaces in which we live, work, and learn. Australian schools have therefore been transformed and have been affected by global

mobilities, technologies and by being subjected to neoliberal ideology. In the latter part of the chapter, I present a range of policy and pedagogic responses to new conditions of mobility and diversity and locate this study in relation to those responses.

In Chapter 3, I introduce a growing body of research investigating possibilities of transnational literacy, particular debates related to postcolonial theories and elaborate the theoretical framework used in this study. Through a range of literatures, I show that postcolonial theories offer a useful framework both for exposing the single national narrative underpinning many contemporary Australian literature courses and for recognising the new literacies that students bring as a result of contemporary transnational mobilities. I review current debates concerning the exclusionary effects of hegemonic literacy practices and the centrality of the West as an analytical focus. I map the field of transnational literacy showing that, while it can be seen as coextensive with postcolonial theories, affect is a concept that has largely been omitted from postcolonial accounts. I locate my own work within a deconstructive, affective transnational strand in literary pedagogy. I review particular discussions concerning diasporic texts and subjects in relation to nationalism and the notion of borders and conclude that there is a need in the literature for further research concerning the experiences of secondary literature students in transnational spaces.

In Chapter 4, I outline the story of my methodological journey and show how and why I had to create my own bundle of methodological tools in order to achieve my aims. I locate this as a piece of research that draws on postcolonial theories and I explicate pedagogic intervention as a research approach. I detail elements of action research as the data produced from the students was a product of a pedagogical conversation, and the pedagogy was adjusted on the basis of students' responses to the intervention. I draw on elements of case study/participant-observation to tap into their histories, experiences and

out-of-school literacies and to try to learn more about how they experienced their literature classes in the context of those histories. Elements of deconstruction (see Critchley, 2014) are also employed, recognising that voice is a problematic concept within a postcolonial frame. I then adopt an adapted version of a ‘thinking with theory’ approach (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) to analysing the data as a product of the methodology I have devised. I outline and justify this data analysis method of thinking with theory and show how it contributes to my study. I also highlight that, as this study addresses both teaching and researching involving complex conversations between students and their biographies, text, theory, the place and space of the classroom and myself as teacher-researcher, it would have been impossible not to step outside current methodological norms.

In Chapter 5, my first data analysis chapter, I consider the response of the students to the labels they felt had been inscribed on their bodies. To help me understand these, I draw on Ahmed’s (2004) concept of affective economies in relation to students’ orientations to the classroom and the wider society. I consider how the classroom can be oriented around certain bodies and whether some bodies might feel more ‘in place’ than others. Proctor and Sriprakash (2017) help me to engage with the data when they ask, ‘How is this out-of-placeness, this disorientation, racialised and legitimised? What is produced through the public anxieties about bodies-racialised-as-Asian entering selective public schooling in Australia?’ (Proctor & Sriprakash, 2017, p. 2380). They draw attention to the structures of colonialism that inhere ‘in our social institutions as race becomes attached to bodies’ (p. 2380) and to classrooms. Thinking with the help of Ahmed, I analyse the data as showing that many in the class were oriented to whiteness as ‘Australianness’ at the expense of other possible cultural identities offered by their biographies. The data also foregrounds the necessity within the pedagogy of detecting the students’ orientation to or away from the classroom space, discourses and practices and shows that contemporary students can often

find themselves interpellated by conflicting discourses that make their identity negotiations fraught and difficult.

In Chapter 6, I consider the effects of dominant discourses on student subjectivity. I explore how hegemonic norms become sources of subjectification for students and find the work of Bhabha helpful as I attempt to render them visible and appreciate their impact in the students' lives. The data suggest that, while mimicry fails to deliver the belonging it promises, the other side of mimicry, the return of the gaze is the site that promises possibilities of transformation for both students and the institutions to which they belong. Student responses also demonstrate that hybridity is a useful concept in their lives, not because it is new to students, but because it names and frames experiences they are living.

In Chapter 7, I analyse the data in relation to indications of sensibility change through learning new reading practices. I consider how learning to read texts and the world differently changes the epistemological performance of the self and opens possibilities for thinking literacy otherwise. I draw on Spivak's concepts of transnational literacy and the implied reader to help me understand the students' responses to the text and the unit of work. The data show evidence of epistemic change in some students and suggest that implied readership can be learnt through the slow reading of both the cultural positioning and the mechanics of construction of texts.

This then leads to the final chapter in which I return to the emergence of transnational spaces and suggest that while they present pedagogic challenges, they also offer possibilities for enhanced intercultural competence and ethical sensibility. Drawing on Spivak's concept of transnational literacy, and suggesting its compatibility with the findings that have emerged from the analysis of student responses, I suggest some possible ways in which the empirical and pedagogic expression of transnational literacy might operate in contemporary literature classrooms. I do not make the claim that this form of transnational literacy is in

any way definitive. Rather, each version of transnational literacy operating within its own affective economy and its own transnational space must necessarily be different. However, I do suggest that this instantiation of transnational literacy, informed by the practices and experiences of a group of Australian students, offers a new approach to teaching students how to read by postponing the need to construct objects of knowledge in order to promote an ethical, transnational sensibility.

In keeping with the postcolonial epistemology of this thesis, no claims are being presented as total or universal. The limitations of my own cultural and social positioning and my role as a white female teacher in an all-girls Australian academic school have coloured the analyses and the findings presented here. The analyses of the data in this research are offered as incomplete understandings based on a specific theoretical framework.

Nonetheless, I believe they point to some of the ways in which pedagogic possibilities of diasporic texts could be used to work towards the objectives of transnational literacy.

## Chapter 2

### TRANSNATIONALISATION OF AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

#### **Atlas of a difficult world<sup>4</sup>**

In the previous chapter, as I presented the context for this research, I showed that Australian policy-makers now recognise that recent changes in demography and pervasive transnational connectivities have transformed Australian schools. However, the policy responses that have been developed have been inadequate to the task of meeting emergent teacher and student needs as a number of recent scholars (Halse et al., 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Santoro, 2009) have pointed out. This may be because the nature of global transformations and their implications for education are not widely understood. In this chapter, I explore the ways globalisation has been a major force that has transformed the spaces in which we teach and learn. I show how Australian schools have been significantly affected by global mobilities, technologies and by being subjected to neoliberal ideology within the terms of which the hegemonic understanding of globalisation has been articulated. I begin this chapter by distinguishing between the notions of globalisation and transnationalism. I then present a range of policy responses to new conditions of mobility and diversity and argue that these do not adequately support teachers to either practically implement these policies or to combat the undermining potential of neoliberal practices.

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<sup>4</sup> Rich, 2002, p. 233



Finally, I explore a range of pedagogic responses to social transformations and locate this study in relation to those responses.

### **Transnationalisation of space**

Over the past thirty years, the forces of globalisation have transformed Australian schools, transnationalising them and more broadly reshaping the economic, political and social contexts in which education takes place. Driven significantly by advances in the fields of communications and technology, globalisation has facilitated the flow of money, people and ideas across national boundaries. Many theorists have commented on the stretched social relations that result as events and processes occurring in one part of the world have significant impact on other parts of the world (El-Ojeili & Hayden, 2006; Vertovec, 2009). As social relations expand, there is also increasing interpenetration of ever-widening economic and cultural practices. Entangled in a range of complicated ways, economic, political and cultural flows are transforming the politics of national identity, as nations struggle to make policy adjustments. ‘Sandwiched’, as Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1999) put it, ‘between increasingly powerful local, regional and global mechanisms of governance’ (p. 3) national governments are having to reconsider their roles and functions. Associations between states are changing along with global economic relations and peoples’ desires, aspirations and social identities.

What is now abundantly clear is that globalisation as a set of processes has become influential in how institutions, countries, markets relate to each other, how new diasporas are created, and how people struggle to make sense of their identity and modes of belonging. But even more than these, ideologically charged narratives, stories, norms and values are important in helping to reshape personal and collective identities (Steger, 2017). These discursive aspects lead Steger to make an analytical distinction between globalisation as ‘social processes of intensifying global interdependence that have been described by

various commentators in different, often contradictory ways' (Steger, 2003, p. 94) and globalism as 'an ideology that endows the concept of globalisation with neoliberal values and meanings' (p. 94). This thesis lies at the heart of this contrast, between the facts of global transformations and changes in our shifting orientation to them.

The ideas of globalisation and globalism have been interpreted in many and sometimes conflicting ways, including a grand narrative of dominance and resistance (Skonieczny, 2010). For example, globalisation is often viewed as inevitable, out of control and abstract. Its power effects can seem inescapable and the local (sometimes national) is viewed as victim or heroic resistor. Donald Trump's anti-globalism rhetoric positions him within this binary. Alternatively, global flows are conceived as liberating, able to empower and intertwine with the local to produce complex ever-evolving new identities. Held et al. (1999) maintain that globalisation can be thought of as 'the widening, intensifying, speeding up, and growing impact of world-wide interconnectedness' (p. 2). This view sees globalisation as involving new and multiple social networks and activities that cross geographical, social and cultural borders. These various views are united only in that they perceive the need for rethinking global structures.

As competing forces pull against one another, politics is being reconstituted in unforeseen ways. As Appadurai notes, 'globalisation is itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even localising process ... locality itself is a historical product and that the histories through which localities emerge are eventually subject to the dynamics of the global' (Appadurai, 1996, pp. 18–19). As nations negotiate changes brought by economic, communication and technological advances, migration and the plight of refugees are becoming the burning moral issues of our age. Global forces have affected spaces in which we think, live and work, requiring us to recognise that the nation-state is no longer the only determinant of personal or social identity.

While 'globalisation' refers in a general manner to the forces that are stretching social relations and increasing interpenetration of economic and social practices (El-Ojeili & Hayden, 2006, p. 14), 'transnationalism' refers to the specificities of ensuing cultural interconnectedness and mobility across national settings. It is characterised by the ways people who migrate can often express loyalty to the physicality of more than one place (Chan, 2005). In this way, the concept of transnationalism denotes processes that involve ties that reach beyond and across borders of sovereign states. It implies a rejection of methodological and normative nationalism' (Baubock, 2010, p. 310), that is, the tendency to assume the nation-state and its boundaries as a given in social analysis. Levitt and Schiller (2004) have challenged the nation-state container view of society (p. 1007), and have pointed to the emergence of transnational spaces, along with the processes of transnationalisation, which involve the crossing, even dissolving, of national borders. This has given rise to the need to investigate emerging networks linking transnational spaces, also to examine discourses, power differentials and changing forms of representation as subjects become constituted and connected in new ways (Grewal, 2005, p. 23). Transnationalism takes us away from the regimes of truth traditionally invoked by globalisation and opens up the possibility of new – concrete and grounded – ways of thinking about the changing social conditions. Ong (1999), seeing transnationality as 'the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space' (p. 4), also uses transnationalism to refer to the cultural specificities of global processes. Levitt (2011) suggests that:

A transnational perspective does not assume away the importance of the global and local, or the nation-state system form. Rather, it invites us to think about how these categories change when we don't assume that they are automatically linked to particular types of territory or space. It pushes us to confront how taken for granted categories such as citizenship and identity, change when they are constituted across space. (Levitt, 2011, p. 168).

The use of the term 'transnational' thus involves a recognition that the border-crossing of people, ideas, practices and capital alters the distinctions between nations, and invites a focus the ways in which nations are characterised are reshaped by various practices of cross-border flows. A transnational perspective thus decentres us from ourselves and makes connections with those who reside elsewhere, in diverse spaces. Vertovec (2009) argues that it reflects 'economic, social and political linkages between people, places and institutions crossing nation-state borders and spanning the world' (p. 1), giving rise to the formation of transnational spaces.

In recent years, the idea of space has been used widely to suggest that particular places do not simply represent a geometrical grid, but are characterised by their dynamic formation, socially created by groups of people to name their contingent locatedness, historically constituted and often politically contested. Accordingly, transnational spaces, it has been argued, (Collyer & King, 2015) are constitutive of social processes, defined by Featherstone as 'the diverse ongoing connections and networks that bind different parts of the world together and that are constituted through (and in fact constitute) particular sites and places' (cited in Collyer & King, 2015, p. 190). Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004) analyse transnational space as 'complex, multidimensional and multiply inhabited' and show that whereas traditionally, the national connotes place, territory, rootedness and belonging, 'transnationalism' suggests space, deterritorialisation, uprooting and rootlessness.

Transnational spaces then are parts of flows and circulations, 'constituted through the dialectical relations of the grounded and flighty; the settled and flowing; the sticky and the smooth' (Jackson, Crang & Dwyer, 2004, p. 8).

Transnational spaces arguably both create and reflect the formation of diasporic identities, forged out of the mobility of people across national boundaries and the ability to remain in touch with each other across these boundaries. Baumann explicates the concept of

diaspora as ‘expressing notions of hybridity, heterogeneity, identity, fragmentation and (re)construction, double consciousness, fractures of memory, ambivalence, roots and routes, discrepant cosmopolitanism, multi-locationality’ (Baumann, 2000, p. 324). In keeping with the complexity of Baumann’s description, Mishra (1996) writes of the ‘hyphenated subjectivities’ of peoples of diasporas explicating this term in relation to the ‘semantics of the hyphen’, analysing hyphenated subjects as those ‘outside the identity politics of nation whose corporealities fissure the logic of unproblematic identification’ (Mishra, 1996, p. 433). Mishra sees the struggle to inhabit the hyphen, the problematic situating of the self, as simultaneously belonging ‘here’ and ‘there’, as the unstable ground of an ever-negotiated identity. He thus sees diasporic space as a space of border, always contaminated, often by an agitation about home.

The home here is not a fixed point of reference, but involves social imagination. Drawing on the psychoanalytic tradition, Mishra portrays the fantasy structure of homeland as an ‘imaginary haven, as the sublime sign, an absence, to which diasporas return for refuge’ (Mishra, 1996, p. 442). Rushdie also depicts homeland as images seen through broken fragments of mirrors, informed by memories supplemented by imaginative truth, which is ‘simultaneously honourable but suspect’ (Rushdie, 1992, p. 10). These images open up possibilities, ‘engendered by rethinking identity in terms of fluidity, mobility, and hybridity’ (Rizvi, 2015, p. 271) that alter the ways in which identities are formed. Brah has used the concept of ‘diaspora space’ to draw attention to the fact that contemporary experiences of transnationality involve an intersection of borders where all subjects and identities become ‘juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed, or disavowed’ (Brah, 1996, p. 209). Brah claims that entanglement, intertwining and flux characterise such spaces: ‘In the diaspora space called “England” ... African-Caribbean, Irish, Asian, Jewish and other diasporas intersect among themselves as well as with the entity constructed as “Englishness”, thoroughly re-inscribing it in the process’ (Brah, 1996, p. 209).

While recognising that transnational spaces and diasporic spaces are not the same, that they are distinct, ‘particularly in their historical ontology’, they have come to be increasingly used as ‘overlapping, almost coterminous, concepts’ (Collyer & King, 2015, p. 189). Essentialist dangers attach to attempts to lock down these terms too tightly, Collyer and King maintain. They identify these risks of essentialising diasporic identities, of attaching exclusive criteria relating to dispersal, prior histories of international migration, particular group membership and ethno-national origin. In seeking to clarify these concepts, Faist questions whether ‘transnationalism’ offers more analytical purchase than ‘diaspora’ (Faist, 2010, p. 11). I am going to sidestep this question by using the Wittgenstein notion of ‘family resemblance’. Just as Wittgenstein explored the uses of the word ‘game’ in terms of its travel through ‘a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing’ (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 66), so, these terms, in their many uses across a range of disciplines and national and international applications, defy attempts to find an essential core of meaning. Accordingly, in the context of this study, both ‘transnationalism’ and ‘diaspora’ include, but not exclusively, the notions of rupture, intersectionality, cross-border relations and conceptual and social mobility. These notions are not summed up in but are in conformity with Faist’s concept of the ‘transboundary expansion of social spaces’ (quoted in Collyer & King, 2015, p. 190), which is broad enough to incorporate the intersections between the two concepts and for purposes of utility, also enable differentiation where it is not necessary to distinguish the two. Utilising this understanding of the concept of transnational space, in the next section, I discuss how recent changes in demography and pervasive transnational connectivities have transformed Australian schools and how increasingly students and teachers operate in spaces that are becoming transnationalised.

## **On Australian schools and students**

As I have flagged in Chapter 1, amongst many recent changes that are reconstituting Australian schools, one of the most prominent is the increased mobility of people, goods and ideas. Global mobility of people, money and ideas is reshaping our communities, leading to new identities and cultural formations. While there have long been global mobility and cross-border economic relations, (for example, The East India Company), and while people have always been mobile, the nature of global migration has recently changed. Motivations driving migration and migrant experiences are not what they used to be. Not only has the number of people migrated or wishing to migrate increased exponentially, so have their diverse forms. The figure of the migrant is now diverse and complex resulting from active skilled recruitment to forced displacement.

By the end of 2018, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency, 70.8 million refugees were forcibly displaced worldwide (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). At the same time, international tourism is a major industry, working internationally is prevalent, reverse migration is now common and moving to a new land does not mean severing ties with the homeland. With the commercialisation of educational services, the number of globally mobile students is rapidly rising and predicted by the OECD to be over eight million by 2025 (Siegmond & Rawdon, 2016). The imperative of globalisation thus shapes the experiences of many contemporary students who are no longer confined to national spaces. The 2016 census data showed that in the preceding decade, the number of Australian residents born overseas has continued to increase (28 per cent in 2016), in particular those born in India and China have both more than doubled in this time (ABS, 2016). Given the complexity of current cross-border movements and patterns of global interaction, Urry (2007) has invited us to theoretically assume mobility rather than stasis to

be the norm, so that in any analysis of mobility, movement and contingency are privileged over structure and order (Urry, 2007, p. 9).

Inevitably, global mobility of people has changed the demography of our schools and classes, the opportunities for students to study abroad, the daily cross-border contact that is technologically available and the pervasiveness of international media images. The hopes and desires of students are transnationalised in many often unheeded ways. Students expect now that they will travel to a range of different countries, either for tourism, study or work. They are exposed to ideas and values that have crossed borders and derive from many different cultural bases. Yet, while most of us are affected by these mobilities, these effects are uneven as mobilities occur in spaces that involve asymmetries of power (Held et al., 1999; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Both positive and negative effects result from increased mobility, as it is inherently political and can be a source of new social inequalities.

The effects of mobility and its unevenness can be seen in our communities and in our schools. They take the form of diversified groupings, cultural exchange, hybridisation of cultures, shifting notions of belonging and complex identity negotiations. Given these effects, it is important to view cultural diversity and exchange as a norm rather than an exception. New mobilities challenge us to consider how and to what extent our educational policies and practices rely on false assumptions of stability and cultural homogeneity (Casinader, 2014; Luke, 1997; Rizvi, 2011).

An important way that forces of globalisation have transformed Australian classrooms is through technological advances that have produced 'new sites of pedagogy marked by a distinctive confluence of new digital and media technologies, growing concentrations of corporate power, and unparalleled meaning-producing capacities' (Giroux, 2004, p. 498). The growth of information and communication technology has increased the student's capacity to access raw data at speed. It has opened up the classroom to outside worlds



through online research and interactive sites. The internet is also changing the way learners interact with each other by providing new forms of collaboration and knowledge construction. Online technologies support collaborative learning, and have the potential to build global understanding so that there is a shift from learning about content to learning about context (Lindsay, 2017). The corollary is a transformed learning space with student and educator facing challenges outside the range of traditional teaching and learning roles. Some students tell me they have formed a dependence on colourful imagery and animation. Teaching literature is a case in point, where students' reading can be enhanced with the use of visuals such as Internet material: interviews, travelogues, geographical excerpts and illustrations. It has become possible for students to initiate articles and items of class planning. In my own class, on one occasion, a tourist video of the city of Nuwara Eliya<sup>5</sup> was introduced ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8Cb6yfwJLs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8Cb6yfwJLs)) and the whole class was taken by the colour and liveliness of the people and the various angles of the setting. Visual aids to teaching have of course long been present in traditional classrooms, but there is now a difference in scale. There is a dependence on sophisticated technological presentation, an expectation to have the reading buttressed by visual incentives. The twenty-first century classroom is strongly mediated by technology and many students regard reading as simply laboured without visual accompaniment.

Technology has also allowed many students to have immediate access to friends and relatives around the world. Families can share daily occurrences and be transported into one another's homes. Social media allow for the creation of transnational spaces where cultural insights can be shared, exchanged and played out and where closeness can be maintained and further developed. However, it is important to realise that technology is

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<sup>5</sup> Nuwara Eliya is a city in the central highlands of Sri Lanka, which features in *The Hamilton Case*.

not always accessible to all, and rural students in Australia, for instance, are often disadvantaged in relation to both computer and internet access. Many theorists (including Cartelli, 2012; Mossberger, 2008) have discussed the digital divide and its attendant social justice implications. They include within this term those individuals or groups who do not have the hardware or are out of range of good internet services; those who have these but do not have the mastery of the skills necessary to use them effectively; and those whose economic circumstances preclude them from participating in the 'new informational economy' (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 153). Global flows and networks are highly uneven in their operations and effects. This unevenness applies both within individual nation-states and across the world. It both reflects and contributes to new patterns of social inequality in the world.

Global mobilities of people and ubiquitous impact of new technologies and social media are of course not the only source of changes taking place in Australian classrooms and schools. A further way of understanding how global forces have changed the Australian classroom is through an examination of the globally circulating and increasingly hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is expressed in the belief that free market economies are the best way to achieve human wellbeing and neoliberal thinking pervades economic, political and social life in the globalised world (Adhikary, 2012). Connell (2013) explains neoliberalism as 'the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market ... Advocates of neoliberalism have had astonishing success in creating markets for things whose commodification was once almost unimaginable: drinking water, body parts and social welfare among them' (Connell, 2013, p. 100). Education is now increasingly construed in economic terms, as though it were an industry, focusing on how to prepare the student as a useful human resource within the global economy. This assumes that all are motivated by economic self-interest and that education is concerned with the preparation of 'homo economicus' (Foucault, 2007) able to participate competitively in free

economic markets. In the global knowledge economy, the student is understood as human capital, an economic resource, while government investment in education is seen as beneficial for the nation's participation in global markets. Giroux (2004) describes this as the way in which 'neo-liberalism discourages teachers and students from becoming critical intellectuals by turning them into human databanks' (Giroux, 2004, p. 502).

Under neoliberalism, pedagogy 'constructs knowledge, values, and identities through a variety of educational sites and forms of pedagogical address that have largely become the handmaiden of corporate power, religious fundamentalism, and neo-conservative ideology' (Giroux, 2004, p. 497). This socio-economic agenda shifts education in a new direction. 'Under neoliberal rule, education is displaced by competitive training, competition for privilege, social conformity, fear and corruption, while protest and rational alternatives are marginalised' (Connell, 2013, p. 110). The neoliberal framing of education 'privileges the private sector over the public sector, and assumes that market arrangements will always produce better outcomes than government regulation' (Angus, 2012, p. 232). The Australian government's MySchool website<sup>6</sup> is an example of how neoliberal policy accentuates market arrangements, high-stakes testing regimes and strict accountability procedures, for it is created as an instrument that assumes parents as consumers of educational services. The Australian national competitive test (NAPLAN) displays its results on the MySchool website allowing them to be processed by the mass media into rank order so that schools are set up in competition with one another. Thus within a neoliberal regime, education becomes competitive training, teachers become dominated by assessment and are afraid to be creative lest they lose their jobs. Policy documents depict

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<sup>6</sup> The My School website is a site that was launched by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in January 2010. It is a site where the community, particularly parents, can locate information about every school in Australia. They can learn about the school's profile and its performance in relation to national testing procedures. It has been a source of much controversy in this country's media as some schools feel that it is used as a stick to control them rather than an innocuous source of information.

Australia's literacy and numeracy rankings *vis-a-vis* other countries as a problem and attribute poor rankings to individual student, teacher or school responsibility (Meeks, Kemp, & Stephenson, 2014). From a critical perspective, however, the problem can be represented differently, as located in inequalities arising from multiple causes including social structures of class, race and gender, systems that reinforce cycles of poverty and power relations that privilege some schools and families over others.

Co-opting literacy into a knowledge-economy discourse and shifting it away from curriculum and pedagogy to an emphasis on assessment, is particularly notable in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) first conducted in 2000. The literacy assessed in PISA tests is not so much knowledge as work-ready capabilities and skills and the contribution they might make to the economy (Grek, 2009; Rutkowski, 2007).

Australia's national government tends to adopt this discourse and currently evaluates educational success in terms of the contribution education is making to the economy.

Former Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, noted the dependence of national economic performance on the quality of a country's educational institutions. 'To win the economic race,' she observed, 'we must first win the education race' (as cited in Thomson, 2012).

Davies and Bansel (2007) identify concerns about the market economy and education in Australia: 'Economic productivity is seen to come not from government investment in education, but from transforming education into a product that can be bought and sold like anything else' (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254). They question how the market works on students to shape their desires as consuming individuals and ask how the calculated invisibility of neoliberalism works against the capacity to critique it. They conclude that neoliberalism both competes with other discourses and cannibalises them in such a way that it seems more innocent than it is (p. 258).

As Davies and Bansel discuss the discursive construction of desire in adverse terms, Rizvi (2008) too does not deny the pervasively negative impact of neoliberal views of education. However, he insists on the need to view the impact of the global mobility of people, ideas, capital, desires and sensibilities (Rizvi, 2008, p. 19) in a neutral fashion, capable of both positive and negative outcomes. As national borders become more porous, he argues, imaginative possibilities are opened up in education, as desires and aspirations change. These changing possibilities necessitate a rethinking of the role and purposes of education as students are affected by mobilities and the changing nature of the world they inhabit, not deterministically in the direction of a neoliberal view of education, but also its alternatives. Rizvi asks, 'if indeed these transformations affect everyone, albeit in ways that are highly differentiated and unequal, then the question arises as to how ... should we re-think the processes of learning about global inter-connectivity, about cultural formations that now occur in transnational spaces?' (Rizvi, 2008, p. 20). These considerations demand a new conversation about the possibilities and challenges of the transnationalisation of Australian schools and classrooms.

So, while neoliberalism implies a pedagogy that involves the discursive moulding of the student as a consuming individual, a focus on transnationalism opens up new pedagogic possibilities, based on assumptions of interconnectivities and new relationalities. As more people move from more places, new and increasingly complex social formations ensue. As Vertovec (2007) argues, these complexities require finer, more layered forms of analysis. He has coined the term 'super-diversity' to account for the 'multiple dimensions of differentiation' (p. 1028) characterising changing social conditions in Britain and the world, and explicated it in the following way:

the 1990s – early 2000s have seen more migrants from more places entailing more socio-cultural differences going through more migration channels leading to more, as well as more significantly stratified, legal categories (which themselves have acted to internally diversify various groups), and who maintain

more intensely an array of links with places of origin and diasporas elsewhere. (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1043).

Given this dynamism and complexity, Urry's invitation to assume mobility rather than stasis as the norm so that movement and contingency are privileged over structure and order makes good sense (Urry, 2007, p. 9). Ironically, though, it is possible to even construe globalisation in purely Western terms (Pieterse, 2012, p. 2), to replicate the problems of Eurocentrism, and to fail to recognise and embrace the possibilities offered by diversity. While a focus on mobilities challenges us to question how our educational policies and practices rely on false assumptions of stability and cultural homogeneity, the dominant curriculum used in most Australian classrooms consists of predominantly Eurocentred views (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Mackey-Smith, 2019; Yiannakis, 2014). Yet there is some evidence to suggest that Australian educational authorities have begun to interrogate the extent to which educational policies and practices remain trapped within a nationally bounded framework that fails to take heed of the cross-cultural flows that are transforming our classrooms. The following section considers some of the policy responses of the Australian governments to the changing demography of Australian schools, the super-diversity that now exists in Australian classroom, the transnational connectivities that have become a permanent feature of Australian communities and the ubiquitous presence of new technologies and social media that are transforming the ways in which Australian students can now access diverse sources of cultural knowledge.

### **A range of official responses**

Educational systems throughout the world have undergone significant changes as they try to understand and respond to the changing global economic, social and political conditions within which education is embedded. Within this context, 'new narratives about what counts as a 'good' policy are articulated and validated' (Junemann, Ball & Santori, 2012, p. 538) as nation-states and education departments attempt to interpret and negotiate the

impact that these changes might have for them. One narrative is that generated by global organisations such as OECD and the World Bank, which create new policy networks and a discursive context heavily inflected by neoliberal values. An example of this is the prevalence of normative phrases such as ‘quality teaching’ in Australian educational discourse that place emphasis on performance-related funding and accountability. Rizvi and Lingard illustrate how, in tying policy to funding, international organisations can put pressure on individual governments to conform to their neoliberalised expectations (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 10). Thus, a new form of governance is emerging which Ball sees as indicating ‘a new kind of policy space ... in and beyond the traditional sites and circulations of policymaking’ (Ball, 2012, p. 138). The conversations emerging within this space indicate the transformative effects of globalisation on the discursive terrain within which educational policies are developed and enacted. This terrain is increasingly informed by a range of neoliberal precepts that are changing the ways in which we think about both educational purposes and its governance (Adamson, Astrand & Darling-Hammond, 2016). This neoliberalising logic involves off-loading demands made on the state to other sectors, most predominantly the market (Hattam, 2018).

The discourses of national governments are now increasingly permeated by not only the expectations of international organisations, such as the OECD, and global corporations, such as Pearson, but also by global ideologies that lead them to promote a minimalist role for the state in education, with a greater reliance on market mechanisms. As local jurisdictions look to market solutions, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) analyse this as revealing a ‘shift from social democratic to neoliberal orientations in thinking about educational purposes and governance, resulting in policies of corporatisation, privatisation and commercialisation on the one hand, and on a greater demand for accountability on the

other' (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 3). Even policies such as Asia literacy<sup>7</sup> (which might at first glance seem to be grounded in cosmopolitan values) are immersed in neoliberal ideology as the government seeks to 'capitalise on the economic potential of the Asian Century' (Australian Government, 2012, p. 23). The Melbourne Declaration emphasises that Asia literacy, knowledge and understandings related to Asia, involve 'engaging and building strong relationships with Asia' (MCEETYA, 2008, p.4) and that these relationships are envisaged as personal, social, economic and political. Although Asia literacy is often viewed as instrumentalist (Rizvi, 2017, p. 80), theorists such as Halse (2015), Rizvi (2017) and Peterson (2018) argue that it offers opportunities for moral and social engagements that move beyond instrumentalism. Halse interprets this policy as literacy as social practice 'rooted in cultural knowledge' (Halse, 2015, p. 2) and Peterson (2018) echoes this and foregrounds the ways Asia literacy engages people in 'particular and varied relationships with others' (p. 38).

The neoliberal orientations underpinning the Asia literacy discourse produce some significant contradictions. The Australian government's policy documents on Asia literacy articulate intercultural concern for respectful interconnection while also foregrounding economic utility. As Connell (2013) puts it, 'the policy changes all move in the same direction – increasing the grip of market logic on schools, universities and technical education' (Connell, 2013, p. 110). Prime Minister Gillard wrote in the forward to a White Paper on the Asian century: 'Our nation has benefited from Asia's appetite for raw materials and energy. The challenge we must now address is how Australia can benefit from what Asia will need next' (Australian Government, 2012). Kostogriz (2015) describes

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<sup>7</sup> Much research has recently examined the effects of this educational policy discourse, with key findings being that it remains entrenched within neoliberal values which tend to "constrain the curriculum and narrow students' educational experiences", (Hodge, 2016; Peacock, Lingard & Sellar, 2015; Polesel, Rice, & Dulfer, 2014, p.640) and promote the application of market forces to education (Connell, 2013; Lambert et al., 2015; Reid & Watson, 2016).



a contradiction between this and Asia literacy's potential for socially just and culturally responsive education in schools. He locates this contradiction in the binary distinctions between literacy as a set of skills and knowledge about the Other that are implicit within the concept of Asia literacy (Kostogriz, 2015 p. 103). Teachers become caught between accountability for Asia-related skills of the future workforce and teaching to difference in multicultural classrooms, the politics of standard-based accountability and the ethics of professional practice. This sense of contradictions within Asia literacy policy is shared by Cairns (2017) who states:

coupling of the Asia priority with the intercultural capability, one of seven general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum, would suggest that the desired outcome is essentially one of intercultural enrichment and interconnection. However, when the rationales of various Asia literacy policies are examined, Asia as an educational policy concern has chiefly been framed by an instrumentalist rationale that has viewed the problem of Asia literacy as an economic and strategic one (Cairns, 2017, np).

Cairns, like Kostogriz, views the policy and curriculum discourse of Asia literacy as being caught in competing ideological frictions and Casinader (2016) takes these criticisms further in his analysis of the Australian Curriculum. While the Australian Curriculum states its purpose to be providing relevance to a twenty-first-century globalised society, Casinader argues that it remains entrenched in Euro-American conceptions. He suggests that it needs instead to reflect:

a sense of transnationalism, an inherent capacity that enables young people to acquire and develop a porous and empowered notion of global outlook, giving them the ability to interact with and respond to myriad facets of a globally interconnected society, whether economic, cultural, political, environmental, social or ethical' (Casinader, 2016, p. 328).

Thus, Casinader argues that in order to fulfil its stated purpose of preparing students for participation in a globalised society, the Australian Curriculum needs to show an awareness of the increasing de-territorialisation of culture, thinking and knowledge. He thus criticises the Australian Curriculum for conveying mixed messages and for embodying a narrow vision of the implications of transnationalism. However, Asia literacy, Kostogriz says, 'can

help us make a shift away from the restrictive and xenophobic inhospitality of education unified around the concept ‘white Australia’, to a society and education governed by the principles of cultural coexistence and intercultural awareness’ (Kostogriz, 2015, p. 113). He argues that the Asia literacy discourse has the potential to contribute to the development of ethical sensibilities in Australian students because of the values it affirms as it encourages engagement with diversity, connectedness, and globality (Robertson, 1992).

But while there is support for these values, it is less clear how effectively they translate to practice. As I suggested in Chapter 1, most Australian teachers are not trained in these capabilities and often feel inadequate to the task of engaging in intercultural work. In the area of literature, this is seen in the reluctance of teachers to teach other than canonical texts to their students as culturally different texts take them beyond their field of expertise and they do not feel supported to take risks (Davies & Buzzacott, 2018). Well-targeted professional learning is a necessary condition of implementing change (Voogt & Roblin, 2010). On the one hand, institutions have to comply with highly competitive market-based values, locally and globally, and on the other, they must enhance opportunities for increasing social awareness and embracing diversity (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010). Schools face escalating pressures to achieve better outcomes for more students, and they find it difficult to work within these expectations to address such issues as the diversity of their cohorts and the needs and complexities this entails (Angus, 2012)<sup>8</sup>.

Casinader asserts: ‘there has been very little literary evidence of engagement by Australian schools and teachers with transnationalism as a specific concept’ (Casinader, 2016, p. 329). As Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggest, if the ability to interact with people from widely

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<sup>8</sup> Angus, in this article, also shows some teachers and schools have successfully ‘resisted the regime of managerialism and accountability’ (Angus, 2012, p. 231).

different backgrounds constitutes a desirable educational goal, then the focus must be on learning ‘about the modalities of cultural interactions’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 176) and how these are produced. While the practicalities of how to implement these goals are unclear, the potential of these policy discourses is not yet being realised in everyday classrooms.

Another key national policy reform in Australia concerns the introduction of the National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). This constitutes a standardised assessment requirement for all Australian school students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9. It assumes that school improvement is achievable systemically via increased levels of inter-school competition that can be measured through ‘regimes of accountability, measurement and comparison’ (Savage 2017, p. 153). While the intended consequences of collecting and publishing these data are to improve student outcomes, extend teacher accountability and raise Australia’s international status as an education provider, Thompson (2013) lists some unintended consequences. These include ‘teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum focus, increasing student and teacher anxiety, promoting direct teaching methods, a decrease in student motivation and the creation of classroom environments that are less, not more, inclusive’ (Thompson, 2013, p. 64).

In Australia, there has been much national controversy about data-driven reform (Mills & Goos, 2017), though the parameters of this debate tend to remain restricted to national concerns. Williamson’s (2017) analysis, however, considers data-based education through global movements and flows of ideas, people and money and argues that these assemblages of data are part of a corporate school reform movement (Williamson, 2017, p. 91) that threatens to replace the individual school as central to processes of knowledge generation. He argues that data are inevitably value-laden, and always present a view from somewhere, ‘not from nowhere’ (p. 40).

While reforms such as NAPLAN and My School impose stringent expectations and pressures on teachers and students, there is little evidence that they have led to improvements in literacy and numeracy (Angelo, 2013; Thompson & Cook, 2013; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). For example, PISA data, 2018, indicates that the performance of Australian students in international assessments of mathematics, science and literacy skills are either stagnating or in decline (Schleicher, 2019). Kostogriz and Doecke (2013) consider the ethical implications of these reforms. While arguing that teachers struggle with the tensions between statewide mandates and a sense of responsibility towards their students, they challenge the view that being publicly accountable through mechanisms like the publication of standardised test results constitutes ethical practice. They instead interpret professional ethics as responsiveness to those around us, claiming that an ethic of care cannot be measured, and can offer resistance to the judgments made by standardised tests. In taking the debate into this ethical realm, they expose an area of inadequacy in the ways educational authorities have sought to address contemporary changes in social conditions.

The positioning of the Australian education system within a globalised marketplace is consistent with another significant change, the introduction of professional standards for teachers and principals. As part of a new national architecture for policy and inter-departmental communication, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was established in January 2010 by the Australian government to 'promote excellence so that teachers and school leaders have the maximum impact on student learning in all Australian schools (AITSL, 2019, np). AITSL is part of a suite of system-wide reforms that aim to raise the quality of the teaching workforce in Australian schools. Gannon (2012) states that the focus of the National Professional Standards for Teachers is on mapping 'quality teaching' onto a 'grid upon which teachers can plot themselves at various career points, so that their employing authorities can accredit and reward individual

teachers' (Gannon, 2012, p. 61). According to Gannon, the AITSL professional standards assume a linear progress of teachers through the profession. The goal of this policy change is to improve student achievement through raising teacher professionalism. The standards operate within 'economies of performance' (Gannon, 2012, p. 73) that circulate globally and that are associated with neoliberal managerialism and an audit culture. These standards have provided an accountability structure for teachers and have involved them in higher levels of professional development than had previously been the case. They have therefore provided teachers with both constraints and opportunities.

Another way in which Australian authorities have attempted to come to terms with the current times is through the Assessment and Teaching of 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills Project. At its launch in 2009, the, OECD's education director, Schleicher asserted that 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills (21CS) have been adopted in order to prepare people for the globalised technological workplaces of the future. He considers how knowledge is generated and applied, shifts in ways of doing business, of managing the workplace or linking producers and consumers, and becoming a different kind of student from those that characterised the 20th century (Schleicher, 2011, p. 42). In line with these expectations, Australia's National Assessment Program has been collecting data concerning students' information and communication technology literacy every three years since 2005. This new focus on information technology is emblematic of the changing emphases in Australian education. The expectation is that future generations will need information technology as a base literacy, one on which they will depend in their everyday lives, and that this has significant implications for schools and teachers as they encounter students in the classroom who will need the 21CS, as prescribed by the OECD.

Yet the discourse surrounding the 21CS raises questions about whether education's main aim is to produce work-ready students and whether the implied values of that workplace

need to be presumed in the processes at every stage of education. The 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills Project is 'sponsored by three of the world's major technology companies, Cisco, Intel and Microsoft, and includes the founder countries Australia, Finland, Portugal, Singapore and England, with the USA joining the project in 2010' (Griffin, Care & McGaw, 2012, p. 1). This international convergence of educational values around 21CS is clearly oriented to human capital formation (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), and overlooks the other potentially important goals of education. It is important to note moreover that international rhetoric surrounding 21CS that has grown largely from policymakers and experts drawn from differing social, political and economic traditions suggesting similar solutions to education reform (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 72). This location of Australian educational policy and practice within global trends indicates how the mobility of ideas, values and capital has led to changes in the ways Australian educators see themselves and their students. But it invites us to question whether the competitive, profit-oriented workplace values implicit in these changes, those significantly inspired by industry leaders, are the only or the desired ways to approach the future. This question is particularly pertinent in the literature classroom. For instance, to what extent does narrowly prescribed work-oriented continuous assessment assist in the development of better literary understanding or appreciation of literary texts by students who hail from a wide variety of different cultural and epistemic backgrounds?

A major criticism of the current orientation of Australian educational policy is that student identities are being circumscribed within this discourse of 21CS, which oversimplifies the difference between traditional teacher-centred approaches and twenty-first century learner-centred approaches (Greenlaw, 2015). 'While it is clear that teaching and learning processes are evolving because of the affordances that technology offers, the idea that traditional approaches to teaching are content-driven and that only the twenty-first century approach is process-oriented is too simplistic' (Greenlaw, 2015, p. 898). The adoption of these binaries signifies a failure to recognise the fluid and dynamic nature of times in which

mobilities of people, ideas, goods, service and values blur such distinctions. Greenlaw argues that students' future identities as moral agents, responsible citizens, and lifelong learners depend upon their teachers striking a wise balance between traditional and contemporary approaches to guiding their learning (Greenlaw 2015, p. 902). What is needed now is a newly imagined pedagogy that is neither traditional and teacher-centred nor dictated by the demands of the knowledge economy; one that offers a new way of attending to social change. What might such a pedagogy look like?

### **Towards pedagogic responses**

How have educators attempted to address the pedagogic challenges of growing scales of diversity and mobility? Valuable work has and is being done (Diallo & Maizonniaux, 2016; Luke, 2004b; Usher & Edwards, 1994) but more is needed within the Australian literary context where, in practice, canonical texts and pedagogies dominate practice as overworked, under-resourced teachers struggle to come to terms with ever-changing demands. As indicated in the earlier discussion of neoliberalism, a significant response within Australia has been the introduction of the new Australian Curriculum. The architects of this curriculum (first implemented in its initial stages in 2010 and endorsed by all Australian states in 2015) in pursuing the value of inclusiveness, have addressed the changing nature of globalised society. They have recognised the implications of movement and change and of interrogating the foundational concepts on which Australian educators have typically relied. But critics have analysed its limitations, among which is that its assumed 'liberal multiculturalism always confronts a certain strategic limitation, a horizon above which it cannot rise when it comes to the task of representing and identifying with "otherness"' (Rowe, 2011, p. 11). The Australian nation-state operates as a horizon. It purports to embrace cultural, racial, political, and sexual differences, but does so only as long they fit the hegemonic national imaginary.

Thus, we need to look beyond the Australian multiculturalist discourse of recent decades and interrogate how it has a 'domesticated diversity' (Hoffman, 1997, p. 379). By disavowing many dynamics of diversity, it may have imposed cultural stereotypes, essentialist patterns of thinking and responding and implicitly Othered students whose traditions are excluded from course contents. Various groups such as professional subject associations and text selection panels are working to recognise greater social diversity. They have encouraged the inclusion of different literatures in text lists and have shown a cultural acceptance of the importance of difference. However, inclusion, while necessary, is not sufficient for transnational literacy. What then would make it sufficient? What would transform curriculum and pedagogy towards a more comprehensive and fitting response to contemporary social conditions? It is not just inclusion that is the issue but *how pedagogy might do the work of inclusivity*, a more critical and less symbolic engagement with difference. While Asia literacy, for instance, shows that diversity is accepted rhetorically, it has not yet developed tools that help teachers develop more responsive pedagogies and practices that take account of the demographically and culturally changed classrooms they now encounter. How might we investigate the potential of that diversity and explore how we do the pedagogical work required in times such as these?

Kalantzis and Cope (1999), Bennett (2003), Allard and Santoro (2005) and Dei, Shahjahan, Bahador, and Asgharzadeh (2006) have all paved the way in this pedagogical endeavour, exploring the possibilities of developing more inclusive practices within contemporary classrooms. Bennett (2003) focusses on equity pedagogy, expansion from monoethnic to multicultural course contents, intercultural competence and teaching towards social justice (Bennett, 2003, p. 14). Her goals include understanding multiple historical perspectives, developing cultural consciousness, developing intercultural competence and combating racism, sexism and other prejudices (Bennett, 2003, p. 32).



Kalantzis and Cope (1999) identify three pedagogical models as emerging from the nexus between politics and education. They posit the 'traditional transmission pedagogy' (p. 253) as emerging from the initial assimilation approach. They see a subsequent 'progressivist pedagogy' as arising from the pluralist approach. Each of these they see to be founded on dubious analytical distinctions and a categorical basis that instates hegemonic constructs without question. They suggest, for instance, that the classification 'Anglo-Celtic' might be said to be meaningless in that it attempts to pull two warring factions into one grouping. They question the uses multiculturalism makes of the concepts of race and majority and, finally, they reject assimilationist or pluralist approaches, instead arguing for the need to move towards a more progressive critical approach, an emerging post-progressivist pedagogy that 'lives between the paradigms' (p. 262) and provides an 'explicit pedagogy for inclusion and access' (Kalantzis & Cope 1999, p. 253).

Dei et al. (2006) also explore transformative ways of responding concretely to difference. 'While diversity speaks to variety', they maintain, 'a politicized evocation of difference brings a critical edge in terms of seeing difference as a site and source of power and power relations' (Dei et al., 2006, p. 68). Their focus is significantly on embodiment: 'the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, sexual and gender identities of our students are important in relation to how these bodies engage in schooling' (Dei et al., 2006, p. 69). Dei (2005) finds a school to be inclusive 'to the extent that every student is able to identify and connect with her/his social environment, culture, population and history (Dei, 2005, p. 268). He emphasises that discussions of difference are central to a redefinition of inclusive schooling as inclusivity 'responds to and accounts for majority-minority relations and asymmetrical relations of power based on difference'. He thinks we should focus explicitly on difference as schooling can be 'exclusive' by not responding adequately to difference and diversity among the student population. Dei, James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery, and Zine (2000) also affirm this view when they state that if teaching and learning includes 'the bodies,

cultures, spaces, objects, positions, beliefs, sights, sounds, and smells within schools then, an inclusive curriculum, which is positioned through the cultures and experiences of all students, is one that has the broadest range of academic possibilities' (Dei et al., 2000, p. 175). Dei explicates the concept of inclusivity as:

an approach to schooling that centres the lived experiences of the students defined by the markers of difference: class, gender, ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural differences, and the asymmetrical relations of power that such differences evoke... This working definition of difference contrasts with dominant definitions that view inclusivity as simply teaching students with a range of abilities (Dei, 2005, p. 268).

DeLuca (2013) takes up this concept of inclusivity and the attendant critical theory perspective. He agrees with Dei et al. (2006) that in order for such an education to occur, hegemonic structures must be recognised as conditions that shape the production and expression of cultural forms. He sees the task of literacy as to recognise individual marginalised cultures within a larger framework of social human rights and within the pursuit of hegemonic deconstruction. Rizvi (2014) agrees and claims that it is important for teachers and communities not only to equip students with the general critical skills that might help them deconstruct representations of popular racism, but also to unmask those institutional practices that sustain racist ideologies, with a view to dismantling them. (Rizvi, 2014, p. 67–68).

Researchers Dabach and Fones (2016) demonstrate one way to do this in practice. In a compelling construction of an innovative and engaging approach to inclusivity, they relate the practices of a teacher in a Social Studies classroom in the United States who makes space for the diverse knowledge and experiences of his students. He does this by making explicit their countries of origin and by including their travels, emails and photos in his everyday curriculum. When one student left to visit his home country of Pakistan, this became an opportunity for the whole class to learn about Pakistan. Thus, the teacher was expanding the classroom space beyond a national frame of reference. Dabach and Fones

demonstrate how by inviting students' knowledges into the official classroom space, an inclusive act of recognition and affirmation, the classroom practices facilitate exchange of knowledge and information across borders. This exposes the impact of transnationalism on students' lives 'in a way that framed their belonging to two countries as not only part of their lives, but as an asset' (Dabach & Fones, 2016, p. 18). As lived experiences become validated as a source of knowledge, and when the process of how knowledge is constructed is interrogated, the strategic ruses by which hegemonic groups exclude others can be unmasked, rendering visible the trace of the Other as part of the classroom and cultural dialogue. Dabach and Fones show that, rather than relying on 'discourses of deficiency and difference', knowledge production can be approached porously and expansively, in official classroom space (Dabach & Fones, 2016, p. 20).

## **Conclusion**

While each of the pedagogic reforms suggested in the previous section are grounded in sound theoretical presupposition, they are articulated in a most generalised abstract manner. They assume the applicability of generalised principles across most contexts and cultural settings, as well as across all disciplines. They are also abstract, because they do not adequately consider how the hegemonic neoliberal practices that have now become institutionalised in Australia might undermine their potential. It is in this context that the research discussed in this thesis examines the potential of teaching a diasporic text in a literature classroom characterised by growing levels of cultural diversity of mobility, in an effort to realise the objectives of what Spivak refers to transnational literacy.

The broader questions that I examine in this thesis concern the ways in which it might be possible to work towards a pedagogy that is in line with Australia's changing social context. How might I seek to change the ways in which the teaching of literature in particular might play a role in the shifting cultural formations in Australian schools? As I have already

noted, in most Australian schools there is a 'growing disconnection between the texts selected to be on the ... curricula and the student population these texts are meant to educate' (Jogie, 2015, p. 291). When exploring the challenges presented within contemporary Australian classrooms, how are traditional assumptions about a world of 'mateship, world wars and white men' (Doecke, Davies, and Mead 2011, p. 1) interrogated using the cultural resources from the diverse, mobile and ever-changing cohorts of students that Australian schools are now encountering? As almost 50 per cent of the parents of Australian residents were born overseas, with most coming from Asia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017), it is arguably vital to interrupt racial and cultural divisions that persist in Australia, and work towards a transnational literacy. But what might such a literacy look like and how might it sit alongside the neoliberal priorities that have evidently become entrenched in Australian education.

The idea that secondary literature teachers need to consider the political and pedagogical implications of social change can no longer be left unacknowledged. We need to explore, therefore, pedagogic responses of literature teachers that take into account the new mobilities and the changed morphology of our classrooms. Sadly, however, the changes being introduced into educational policy are not the ones that will help students to better negotiate their complex, often hyphenated identities. What is needed are the changes that will accommodate the many knowledges and literatures that students bring into the literature classrooms. Even when policies such as Asia literacy have the potential to move in this direction, there is little scaffolding to assist teachers to implement them successfully. So, given that these responses may not be inadequate, how might literature teachers come to terms with the transnationalisation of their classrooms within a dynamic, difficult and ever-changing world, how should they respond to this pedagogic challenge? In the next chapter, I will investigate the literatures relating to the major concern of this thesis, the

theoretical and empirical possibilities of transnational literacy within an Australian secondary literature classroom.

## Chapter 3

### POSTCOLONIALISM AND PEDAGOGIC POSSIBILITIES

#### Diving into the wreck<sup>9</sup>

As Adrienne Rich ‘dives into the wreck’ and delves into the ‘book of myths in which our names do not appear’ (Rich, 2002, p. 103), she discerns the gaps – the names and stories that are missing from hegemonic narratives. She models for us a journey that is both theoretical and empirical, one that is neither disinterested, nor uncommitted, but where she is both immersed and critical, passionate and analytical. With this in mind, I begin this chapter by focusing on research relating to the main concern of this thesis: the theoretical and empirical possibilities of transnational literacy within an Australian secondary literature classroom. This review serves a dual purpose in that it identifies gaps in existing research literature on transnational literacy and informs the data analysis and knowledge claims made overall.

This chapter, then, examines a growing body of research investigating possibilities of transnational literacy, to which the current project potentially contributes. It begins with a discussion of contemporary literacy debates in Australia in which a tension between traditional canonical practices and the current needs of diverse cohorts is identified. It

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<sup>9</sup> Rich, 2002, p. 101

connects this tension to a broader, epistemological hierarchy implicit within the frameworks and structures of the subject of English. Following this, two dominant strands in postcolonial theory are identified and the resources which this conceptual frame contributes to the teaching of secondary school literature are considered. The next section examines literature concerning certain aspects of postcolonial affect that have a central significance for this study. The chapter then examines research investigating classroom pedagogy in relation to transnational literacy. In the concluding section, I outline the theoretical framework for this study in terms of my own positioning in the light of the perspectives presented, and open the way for the research questions that are ushered in by this consideration of the literature. Throughout this review, I argue that while there is much consensus concerning the need for new transnational pedagogies in globalising times, more work is required to determine how these pedagogies might operate in literature classrooms, especially given that such pedagogies are context-dependent and vary according to the changing nature of the cohort.

### **Literacy debates in Australia**

This research is situated both in the policy context for the study outlined in the previous chapter and at the juncture of two competing views of literacy in Australia. Kell and Kell (2013) analyse the so-called literacy wars in Australia as a battle between ‘cultural restorationist’ (p. 28) and ‘progressivist’ (p.29) approaches to knowledge and curriculum. Whereas cultural restorationists favour traditional didactic methods, based on endorsed and recognised knowledge (p. 28), progressivists favour a constructivist view of knowledge and a situated view of language. These wars are linked to the knowledge economy discourse (Griffin et al., 2017), as restorationists claim that national economic and competitive prestige depends on the teaching of ‘basics’. Failing standards are seen as the result of neglecting to teach phonics, classical texts and rote learning.

Cultural restorationists view literacy as a matter of imparting cultural traditions (typically, Anglo-centred traditions), sets of linguistic skills, or meeting the demands of high-stakes tests (Buckingham, Beaman & Wheldall, 2014; Donnelly, 2004, 2006, 2014; Meeks et al., 2014). While these are a requisite part of Australian literature courses, literacy can also be seen as a cultural and linguistic practice, entailing a recognition of how texts and discourses can engender narrative patterning that is internalised by students, clandestinely imposing views and values that are assumed as common sense (Street, 1984; See also Freebody, 2007; Green, 2002; Luke, 2017; Somerville, D'warte & Sawyer, 2016; Zhang & Guo, 2015). I shall begin by exploring the progressivist side of the debate, the view often referred to as 'new literary studies' (Gee, 2015; Street, 1984).

This debate has social and ethical implications, which Freebody foregrounds when he says, 'some current literacy and English education practices silently collude in the economic and cultural marginalisation of people and places' (Freebody, 2014, p. xvii). Accordingly, Luke and Carrington (2002) suggest that literacy conceived as both a social and curriculum practice can be employed as a 'technology for remediating globalisation' (Luke and Carrington, 2002, p. 243). Massey (2005) adds into this mix a concept that will be highly significant to this research, the concept of imagination: 'The imagination of globalisation in terms of unbounded free space, that powerful rhetoric of neoliberalism around 'free trade' ...is a discourse which is dominantly produced in the countries of the world's North...It is normative; and it has effects' (p. 83). To these researchers, literacy teaching is positioned, emerging from a context bearing a history. And, as a text always bears the traces of where it has come from, so, these writers imply, does the text of a tradition, a curriculum, a practice.

Chen (2010), speaking to an implied audience of readers from the many Asias, challenges the West as the primary referent (2010, p. 222). He focuses on multiplying the frames of reference rather than deferring to the hegemonic power of a West that sees knowledge as



flowing only one way into Asia but not from it. Chen argues against the 'reproduction of imperialist desire' (Chen, 2010, p. 41) which constructs China as an alternative power, thus locking in the binary opposition of China and the West. He demonstrates the cultural construction and framing that precedes and surrounds any cultural or linguistic practice, any analysis or pedagogy. In particular, his work raises questions about the cultural assumptions and frameworks in which current Australian conceptions of literacy and literature are embedded. He leads us to ask exactly what Asia literacy might mean, from whose point of view and how we might do justice to the possibilities it raises. Chen challenges both the unproblematic acceptance and the unproblematic rejection of Western assumptions. Thus, Chen invites readers to rise above contemporary circumstances influencing the production of knowledge and to try to 'deimperialise' their thinking and practice. For my research which draws on a postcolonial analysis of contemporary Australian literacy practices, his insights are highly significant as they broaden the frame and open a larger epistemological space.

However, other academics and Australian media representatives contest views such as this. While literacy has been subsumed into the culture wars discourse as part of the Australian government's 'war against terror', the claims of restorationists pay no heed to the ethical implications of the exclusions implicit in their totalising views of Western culture. In January 2014, the then Australian Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, announced the appointment of two known critics of the Australian curriculum, Kevin Donnelly and Ken Wiltshire, to review it. Peterson and Bentley (2016) analyse this decision as part of the contemporary debate on Australian values: 'the review included a key recommendation calling for a greater focus on Western civilisation and the Judeo-Christian basis of Australian values' (p. 240). The strengthening of these values was posited as a means of protecting against terrorism, in particular homegrown terrorism. Thus, schools were

implicated in the political project of ‘securitisation’ (Peterson & Bentley, 2016, p. 247). Donnelly claims that critical literacy destroys the pleasure of reading (Donnelly, 2006, p. 73), and ‘much of what should be valued, such as the moral and aesthetic qualities of classic literature, is lost’ (p. 67). By ‘classic literature’, he means predominantly English, certainly European literature. Donnelly represents the opposite side of the debate to Chen and Freebody. He rejects the notion that literacy is inevitably political, that texts are situated and positioned, and that students might benefit from recognising this positioning. In contrast to this, Chen’s work reminds us that research and educational institutions in Australia are located in the Asian region and awareness of this, and of its ethical and epistemological implications, is an important aspect of educational research.

### **Postcolonialism and the canon**

While recognising the historical debates regarding the definition of postcolonialism (Achebe, 2016; Chakrabarty, 1992; Gilroy, 1987; Loomba, 1998; Young, 1990 among others), I use the term to refer to critiques of colonising impulses and discourses, including those shaped more recently in globalising times. In this paradoxical era of hyperconnectivity and closing borders, of economic movement and restrictions of the mobility of people, postcolonial writers expose vested interests served by the ‘economic text of globalisation’ (Morton, 2003, p. 5). The transnational turn in postcolonial pedagogy has received considerable attention internationally and in Australia (Doherty & Singh, 2005; Gomaa, 2016; Grewal & Kaplan, 2006; Hamston, 2012; Lecourt, 2016; Mignolo, 2000; Pennycook, 2012, 2017). Studies vary on a range of dimensions, including the focus on local or global and national or international concerns, as well as on a specific literature, such as Anglophone, Chinese, or other. Within the constraints of this review, I consider only those approaches that offer possibilities for the contemporary Australian literature classroom.

I have found two main strands in the literature on postcolonialism regarding this chosen focus on secondary literary education. The first strand emphasises challenges to hegemonic privilege (Said, Spivak, Bhabha, Fanon, Mohanty). This literature tends to foreground both the imperative to render visible the historical and institutional structures from within which *we* speak and the need to challenge the presencing (Derrida) of totalising identity, that is, to challenge cultural and linguistic essentialism. It also affirms the necessity of challenging contemporary forms of global knowledge that are claimed as universal and the need to challenge binaries particularly those concerning centrality and marginality. The second conceptual strand revealed in the literature on postcolonialism and literature in the context of secondary literary education focuses on the concern for marginalised voices (Chakrabarty, 2000; Chatterjee, 2004; Spivak, 1988). This literature points out the silences, the unspoken implied Others undescribed in the narratives. It is also concerned to strengthen the visibility of local discourses and practices but is aware of the contradictions within this, recognising that there are many knowledges, many literatures.

Amongst postcolonial literary theorists, there is a shared concern to break the silence around the hegemonic strategic ruses that disempower and disenfranchise minority groups within the global community (Bhabha, 2004; Gandhi, 1998; Said, 2003; Spivak, 1999; Young, 1995). In the context of this research, canonical text selection, high-stakes testing and teacher-centred pedagogies perpetuate binary thinking, hierarchical assumptions and subtle and unsubtle modes of Othering. Andreotti and de Souza (2012) express their critique of hegemony in the following way:

despite claims of globality and inclusion, the lack of analyses of power relations and knowledge construction ... often results in educational practices that unintentionally reproduce ethnocentric, ahistorical, depoliticised, paternalistic, salvationist and triumphalist approaches that tend to deficit theorise, pathologise or trivialise difference (Andreotti & de Souza, 2012, p. 1).

Against these hegemonic impulses, Brydon (2011a) sees postcolonial theory and literature as capable of ‘democratising, deparochialising and even globalising the research imagination’ (Brydon, 2011a, p. 13). This aligns with Mohanty’s view that postcolonialism critiques the ‘interplay of micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes’ (Mohanty, 2003, p. 501). Young sees that ‘when Western people look at the non-Western world what they see is often more a mirror image of themselves and their own assumptions than the reality of ... how people outside the West actually feel and perceive themselves’ (Young, 2003, p. 2). He offers here a sense of the filtered view of any cultural construction.

Said uses poststructuralist theories of power to develop an understanding of the practices of reading that investigate colonial constructions of knowledge and the hegemony of the West. He sees colonial texts as supporting European powers and their imperialist projects, based on assumptions of superiority and entitlement. His seminal text, *Orientalism* (2003), analyses representations of the East based on observations that purported to be objective but were coloured by political interests and stereotypical attitudes. These depictions implicitly justified colonisation as saving the colonised from their supposed savagery by bringing the benefits of Western civilisation. Said’s (1993) focus on contrapuntal reading practices set in train the strand of postcolonialism that primarily informs the present study. It includes a focus on the worldliness (Said, 2003) of both the text and the critic, their ‘connections with many other aspects of the world – political, social, cultural’ (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 7).

Another significant aspect of this first strand of postcolonialism is the challenge to the presencing of a totalising identity. Derrida destabilises the presence/absence binary, challenging the metaphysical assumption that privileges presence and showing that the structures overlap (Derrida, 1978, p. 249). Taylor relates this to postcolonial theory and

‘constructing new, hybrid identifications that critically deconstruct the same discursive power mechanisms that marginalise them’ (Taylor 2006, p. 30). Taylor invites us to ‘challenge evolutionist ideologies of Eurocentric cultural and linguistic essentialism...’ (Taylor, 2006, p. 33). She rejects cultural heritage models of identity which position Anglophone culture as the founding host and thus Other non-Anglophone peoples, denying their ‘complex claims of affiliation’ (p. 32). This seesaw of presencing and Othering is evident in the ways knowledge is constructed in hegemonic societies. There is an assumption that knowledge is the preserve of the powerful. What is constructed as ignorance is lack of familiarity with particular cultural forms. Chatterjee (1986) views European knowledge production ‘as the moral and epistemic foundation for a supposedly universal framework of thought which perpetuates, in a real and not merely a metaphorical sense, a colonial domination’ (Chatterjee, 1986, p. 11). Thus, Chatterjee recognises the continuing role of postcolonialism amidst the exigencies of contemporary forms of global knowledge production.

Brydon (2010) sees postcolonial theory as important because of its recognition that ‘education uses literacy to construct illiteracy as its abject opposite’ (Brydon, 2010, p. 21). As certain forms of knowledge are constructed as valuable and other forms construed as ignorance, power reinforces itself without recognising the ignorance that attends the limitations of each form of knowledge. Postcolonialism then plays an important role in revealing that ignorance is not always a deficit. It was to challenge views such as this that Spivak called for the powerful to ‘unlearn their privilege as their loss’. It was to challenge this form of Othering that she underlined the importance of ‘transnational literacy’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 152). These ideas will be taken up in much more detail in Chapter 7.

This strand of postcolonialism then provides a set of reading practices within a framework that destabilises dominant discourses, challenges inherent epistemic and political

assumptions and puts forward a set of productive questions that can be used to interrogate the frames of reference that shape global ethnocentric hegemonies (Steffler, 2004; Sugars, 2004; Tikly, 2001). But this, I argue, only examines one part of the postcolonial story – that of challenges to hegemonic assumptions. While addressing these assumptions is important, it can have the unintended consequence of reinforcing the centrality of the West, of continuing the focus on dominant and colonial powers. This can inadvertently reinforce the idea that knowledges from other cultures, times and places are not honoured in the current context. This is the point that Chen makes (2010) when he invites his readers to stop seeing the West as the primary referent.

### **Recovering the marginalised voices**

Fanon, psychiatrist and one of the pioneers of postcolonial thinking, analysed colonialism as not only colonising the minds of the colonised but also destroying, distorting and disfiguring their communal past (Fanon, 1963). The reclaiming of pre-colonial history, Fanon claimed, gave the people hope for a future national culture and changed their sense of themselves. His project is thus tied explicitly to liberation from colonial subjugation, but it begins at the level of subjectivity achieved through '[r]e-assemblage of the body that is split apart' (Prabhu, 2006, p. 194). His account of being called a 'dirty nigger' and finding himself objectified by the white gaze leads him to experience a split in the self. He uses images of fragmentation to describe how he felt following this encounter (Fanon, 1986, p. 82) as his sense of hope is evaporated by the white gaze. What Fanon underscores here is that the subjectivity of the Martinican has a context and history that precedes the white intrusion and is damaged by it, a subjectivity so often ignored by colonial accounts. He influenced writers such as Achebe (Gikandi, 1991, p. 128) to foreground the voices of those native to the area and to give them a deep background. While much research has

been influenced by the school of thought introduced by Fanon, I discuss just one small study that draws on this knowledge to show how this thinking relates to my project.

Binebai (2015) shows something of the double movement between complicity and refusal that Fanon foregrounds. He engages in a postcolonial analysis of a selection of Nigerian plays to argue that the text can extend or deny the stage to the subaltern. The implications of each choice are politically powerful and can affect people such as those of the Niger Delta whose subjugation has confined them to the 'centre of darkness and silence' (Binebai, 2015, p. 211). The dramatic subjects of Binebai's (2015) analysis are marginalised and voiceless, thus echoing Fanon's experience of marginalisation based on race. Binebai argues that texts, when exercising responsibility to the oppressed, can remove them from their subaltern status. He draws on Spivak's (1988) seminal paper, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in which she claims that access to voices outside one's cultural representation is not possible, and cultural appropriation of the voices of others even under the guise of benevolence is a form of violence and silencing. Binebai demonstrates how space can be created on the dramatic stage so that the 'silenced centre' (p. 208) can be exposed and combatted. He uses metaphors of darkness and silence to render the subaltern as outside the parameters of European-based, institutionally established communities of discourse. He shows, however, that members of the Niger Delta community, writing from within the assumptions and experiences of their particular history, might find ways to allow the subaltern to speak. The strength of his paper is that he also shows that this attempt constitutes a struggle and the Nigerian creators of these texts might well be unable to transcend the assumptions and blind spots of their society's conventional beliefs. Binebai's work is of interest to this research as he models an engagement with text that relates postcolonial concepts to an ethical and social purpose, showing that textual engagements can have political effects in people's everyday lived realities. They can challenge existing

social relations, provoking different ways of treating the Other. He also demonstrates how difficult it is to detect and challenge cultural assumptions. He models the pedagogic possibilities of postcolonial textual analyses in terms of interrupting national pedagogies and normative assumptions.

Bhabha (2004) analyses the thinking of Fanon and takes up the idea of the split in the self that Fanon demonstrates in *Black Skins White Masks* (Fanon, 1986). Bhabha argues that the subjectivities of both coloniser and colonised are marked by ambivalence. Identity is always a site of struggle and of uncertainty where in between two opposites lies a space that both separates and sustains them. ‘The very structure of human subjectivity’, he says, involves ‘contradictions and ambivalences rather than unity’ (Bhabha, 2004, p. 29). The subjectivities of coloniser and colonised, while discursively constructed as a binary, are implicated in one another, are mutually constituted by fear and desire. Neither side of the binary represents a fixed point of stability or reference, neither is a presence unto itself. Each self is only a self in relation to its Other, its opposite. The coloniser desires a subservient mimic but fears the mimicry that too closely resembles himself, ‘a difference that is almost the same, but not quite’ (Bhabha, 2004, p. 127). The colonised desires the wholeness he imagines himself to have had prior to his colonisation (Fanon, 1986), but instead discovers the seeds of his subversion of colonial authority.

Chun (2001), in showing mimicry as significant in identity construction in the USA in the late 1990s, builds on this emancipatory counterhegemonic potential. She models a method for analysing everyday talk to show how and why mimicry could be employed for transnational literacy in the context of Australian education. While the social context differs, Chun shows how extrapolating on everyday speech patterns from diverse groups to express both opposition and conformity to dominant discourses can help forge a distinctive identity. Mimicry can at once express resistance and conciliation. Linguistic



patterns can be co-opted to new uses that work between the dominant norms and dissident feelings to create productive contradictions. As my study seeks tools for teaching the interplay of the global and the local in the literature classroom, I will next consider how such forms of analysis can be employed as part of this wider pedagogical inquiry.

The highly contested concept of the border takes us beyond a particular place or state and invites us to consider the interrelationality of the local and the global. In general usage, the term 'border' depends on the binary logics of inclusion/exclusion, in/out, us/them.

Borders can be constructed upon many grounds, gender, race, class, religion, nation; the possibilities are endless. They are not confined to state lines as national borders are porous, dynamic and historically contingent. Mignolo's notion of border thinking is useful here, helping us to see practices of inclusion and exclusion in a new way. Border thinking, Mignolo (2000) says, is 'a dichotomous locus of enunciation' (Mignolo, 2000, p. 85). He argues that this double consciousness involves breaking away from Eurocentrism as an epistemological perspective. Thinking within the Western logocentric frame is to think within coloniality as Eurocentric epistemology creates an outside from the inside. It sees in terms of binaries but those binaries are from a perspective of territoriality, from within a logocentric frame. Border thinking, on the other hand, is an epistemological project that begins with '*dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies*' (Mignolo, 2000, p. 85, italics in the original).

A valuable way to think about this is through the concept of everyday bordering (Wemyss, 2015). This concept draws attention to the normative assumptions implicit in the social and political space and highlights the value of naming those assumptions to students showing the potential divisions to which they might give rise. Whereas 'border' is generally used to fix space, the term 'bordering' opens up a more dynamic, shifting and contested social and spatial process (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss & Cassidy, 2017). This more fluid term does not

refer just to political or state territorial claims but also to the everyday discourses and practices across all levels of society that perform inclusion and exclusion. As Yuval-Davis puts it, '[b]orders acquire double meaning as state boundaries and as symbolic social and cultural lines of inclusion and difference, material and imagined, physical and cultural.' (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p. 14). Thus, it is important to look at everyday practices in order to understand how the 'reproduction of national identities occurs and how feelings of belonging are created and performed' (Paasi & Prokkola, 2008, p. 16).

The notion of everyday bordering, in moving from the noun 'border' to the verb, 'bordering', changes the emphasis from geographical or state borders to a focus on the subtler and symbolic ways in which borders are constructed. Kolossov and Scott have applied the notion of bordering to 'the everyday construction of borders, for example through political discourses and institutions, media representations, school textbooks, stereotypes and everyday forms of transnationalism' (Kolossov & Scott, 2013, p. 3).

Current political and media debates in Australia over national identity and border protection perform this bordering, which I speculate then trickles down into the classroom through labels and personal histories of inclusion and exclusion. Such everyday bordering uses invisible practices of exclusion to construct individuals or groups as Other. The *Other* in this sense is 'the excluded ... subject created by the discourse of power' (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998, p. 171). As 'borders are used to sort the people according to the degree of their belonging to certain ethnic, cultural, political, and social (class) groups' (Kolossov & Scott, 2013, p. 5), they can be read as determining 'who is in, who is out' (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p. 10).

Dillabough, McLeod and Oliver (2015) link the concept of border to everyday exclusions and model a way this concept might be employed as part of classroom pedagogy. They understand social exclusion not as a 'set of institutional events – expulsion from school, for

example ... but as a practice and a process that is always mobile and historically situated in relation to circulating narratives of borders and security' (Dillabough et al., 2015, p. 660). They draw on Rumford's (2013) analysis of how a national focus on policing of borders can permeate other layers of society and shape everyday meanings and practice (p. 663). An important element of Rumford's analysis is the calculated invisibility of borders, showing that everyday exclusions can be difficult to detect as they exclude people from 'normative citizenship' (Dillabough et al., p. 674). The thinking of these writers demonstrates that close interrogation of local norms and practices can be understood as breaking away from the epistemological assumptions of a Eurocentric perspective. It places the inquiry within a transnational space and draws attention to the dangers of failing to question everyday assumptions.

### **Developing cosmopolitan sensibilities**

The notion of the border and everyday exclusions brings us to writers such as Appiah (2006), Gunew (2012), McLeod (2012), Papastergiadis (2012), and the study of cosmopolitanism, which has recently had a renaissance as an area of research (Beck, 2004; Braidotti, Hanafin & Blaagaard, 2013; Hansen, 2014; Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; Werbner, 2006). Cosmopolitanism is a vast and nuanced area of study. I consider it here only insofar as it relates to ways everyday bordering might be understood to be implicit within contemporary Australian normative assumptions about race and how it might serve as a counter to such norms. Beck and Sznaider (2010) recommend a form of methodological cosmopolitanism which proceeds on a logic of 'both/and' (p. 394) rather than of either/or to open up new horizons in research. This builds on Beck's (2004) reflection that 'a denationalised social science can research into the global inequalities that are hidden by the traditional focus on national inequality and its legitimisation' (Beck, 2004, p. 131). Rumford (2014) makes the case that processes of bordering could be better understood through the

lens of cosmopolitanism. He sees borders as ‘cosmopolitan workshops’ where ‘cultural encounters of a cosmopolitan kind’ take place and where ‘entrepreneurial cosmopolitans advance new forms of sociality in the face of “global closure”’ (Rumford, 2014, p. 89). He explicates this by arguing that borderwork is done by ordinary people in their everyday lives. It is not the preserve of the state or of powerful institutions. It involves a multiperspectival and transnational connectivity between people and places within dynamic and ever-changing spaces.

While Rumford’s notion of cosmopolitanism emphasises its social possibilities, Papastergiadis (2012) argues that the current concept of cosmopolitanism is too limited. He asks how might aesthetic cosmopolitanism look and how might it contribute to a more ethical global imaginary. He uses philosophical and aesthetic analysis, globalisation theory and the postcolonial thinkers, Spivak and Bhabha, to investigate the paradoxical nature of border thinking, and to show that imagination needs to be trained to see the Other as also knowledge-producer. He finds that critical and aesthetic cosmopolitanism is exemplified in collaborative art projects, which demonstrate the benefits of an imaginative engagement with the Other as an alternative way of imagining our participation in the world. His relevance to my project is his use of Spivak and Bhabha to investigate the paradoxical nature of border thinking, and his modelling of analysis of texts that affirms the connection between the training of imagination and ethical participation that counters exclusions. In demonstrating how art keeps open the mystery of the stranger’s identity, Papastergiadis shows how we might approach literary pedagogy drawing on the idea of aesthetic cosmopolitanism and seeing imagination as learning to become the implied reader of others’ texts.

Keeping open the mystery of the stranger’s identity is also important to Gunew (2012) who works the concept of cosmopolitanism to show its limitations and contradictions. She is

interested in how cosmopolitanism excludes Eastern European voices despite claims to multiculturalism. She asks how recent fictions embody the contradictions of vernacular cosmopolitanism in ways that work pedagogically through estrangement. By 'vernacular cosmopolitanism', Gunew means both everyday cosmopolitanism and 'a cosmopolitanism from below: a subaltern and peripheral cosmopolitanism that makes claims for the recognition of the cosmopolitan nature ... that is associated with groups that have been marginalised' (Gunew, 2017, p. 7). Gunew links wider global economic movements to the increasing numbers of those who are dispossessed of homeland, work and protection and forced to seek these things beyond the confines of national frames. Within this broad context, she investigates possible roles for literature and literary education, considering how fictions work as pedagogy by making readers imagine themselves as stranger. She distinguishes between imagining the stranger, imagining oneself as stranger, and being interpellated as stranger. As she does this, she models a form of transnational literacy, (a concept to be explored in the next section), a way of interrogating texts for the everyday bordering, inclusions and exclusions they contain. Gunew's work speaks to the 'silences of each cultural closure' (Taylor, 2006, p. 33). As it reveals the centrality of the concept of the stranger for this research, it emphasises the ways we position ourselves within the cultural assumptions and practices of our time and place and make a home in them. To deliberately step outside these frames and to learn to become the implied readers of culturally different texts is a potential way to approach a pedagogy that takes account of this globalised era.

McLeod's historical study (2012) also draws on the concepts of stranger and exclusions to investigate the 'way progressive education in particular, despite its inclusive and tolerant face, also and inevitably, marginalised some students' (p. 340). She places education within the context of cosmopolitan ideals that espouse enlightenment virtues and envision a 'world-minded student rather than a nation-minded student' (p. 341) and yet, in practice,

have damaging implications for first nation students within Australia. She explains this in terms of the cosmopolitan 'alignment of worldliness with reason and clear mindedness' (p. 342) which, in my terms, locates cosmopolitanism within logocentric values and violates Mignolo's understanding of border thinking. A postcolonial reading of cosmopolitanism thus raises questions about the implicitly racialising and colonising dimensions of even the best-intentioned theories.

Postcolonialism, while it offers valuable resources to educators, has many critics. It has been charged with dealing in caricatures such as 'Enlightenment reason' (Krishnan, 2009, p. 265), cultural essentialism rather than universal essentialism (Banerjee, 2012, p. 76), implicitly embracing binaries and therefore identity politics or 'mirroring the very society they seek to oppose' (Graff 1979, p. 26) and unwittingly contributing to a global commodification of cultural difference (Shands, 2008, p. 8). Joseph (2015), in her analysis of the political implications of the translation of vernacular languages, argues that postcolonial scholars tend to disregard the specifics of history. Thus, while postcolonial analysis offers many possibilities, it is necessary to exercise caution so as not to fall into unwitting essentialisms or the temptation to attribute to postcoloniality a canonical status of its own.

### **Pedagogic importance of postcolonial concepts**

As Chun has demonstrated above, postcolonial concepts such as mimicry can be productive pedagogically. Terrill (2019) explores the pedagogic possibilities of mimicry in the teaching of writing. He proposes two potentially productive practices: moving from binary engagements in the use of models of writing in favour of a more 'pluralistic mode of exchange' (p. 176) and 'challenging the hierarchies that are implied when students are expected to model their work on texts that are considered superior' (p. 167). Students are encouraged through these practices to develop an inclusive sensibility with a suspicion of

‘calcified hierarchies’ (p. 176). These strategies might serve to avert ‘the cultural erasure which the mimicker must experience as a result of mimicry’ (Byer, 2019, p. 6).

Dutro (2019, p. 84) adds another dimension to this consideration of pedagogy by rendering visible the beguiling nature of literature/literacy classrooms and the need to have pedagogic strategies to both expose the risks and be aware of the dangers of doing so:

Literacy classrooms, as story-filled spaces, are risky places that require conscious efforts to make visible the differential role and consequences of challenges. ‘The hegemonic,’ as Berlant (2011) writes, ‘is, after all, not merely domination dressed more becomingly—it is a metastructure of consent’ (p. 185).

The attempt to recognise the metastructure of consent parallels the postcolonial strategy of learning to uncover the narrative patterning referred to earlier in this chapter. Stories are beguiling. They carry both hegemonic and resistant possibilities. Dutro’s argument, however, takes us in a new direction. She shows that affective literacies viscerally move us and have the potential to create small moments of ‘felt recognition’ (p. 84) exposing hegemonic dictates as not inviolable. They therefore contribute to a pedagogy informed by postcolonial sentiments. Just as emotions impel us towards other bodies, they simultaneously open possibilities of disentanglement from narrative entrapments. This sense of movement within a space, its dynamism, links to Bhabha’s postcolonial concept of hybridity<sup>10</sup> for it takes place in in-between spaces. It is played out, according to da Silva Iddings and Leander (2019, p. 125) ‘in the between spaces of language-to-language, in the between spaces of mother-to-child or person-to-person, in the between spaces of language-to-materiality, in the between spaces of language-to-place’. In the transnational space of an Australian literature classroom, such dynamism is border-crossing as national, cultural and language boundaries are ever-moving, ever-changing. This is very different from traditional

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<sup>10</sup> Jang & Kang (2019) have indicated the pedagogic value of Bhabha’s concept of hybridity in their study of North Korean refugee youths in South Korea. They show hybridity as inevitably part of a space, connecting the new and the familiar and challenging dichotomies.

Australian literature courses where '[t]ext-centric or discourse-centric perspectives on the production of subjectivity ignore movement and sensation' (da Silva Iddings & Leander, 2019, p. 140).

While affective pedagogies appeared to be an area which in most earlier enunciations of postcolonial theories was largely overlooked, in recent years, postcolonial theories have also begun to direct our attention to the importance of affect. In what follows, I argue that concept of postcolonial affect has much to offer to my study of the pedagogic possibilities of transnational literacy. Since the 'affective turn' (Clough & Halley, 2007), many writers such as Ahmed (2004c) and Tolia-Kelly (2016) have produced analyses that imply that considering the classroom as an affective economy would be beneficial from a postcolonial point of view.

Ahmed's (2004c) work on the affective economy – the flow of energy and emotion between bodies – helps us read everyday affect within the wider social and political context of the nation. Coming from the tradition of cultural politics, Ahmed regards both discursive and material conditions as important elements when investigating how affect and emotion work and the work they do. Ahmed's concepts are also helpful in opening up those aspects of literature/literacy teaching that are outside the rational, cognitive, analytical processes in which teachers have primarily been trained. Much of what happens in a literature classroom 'cannot be explained in rational frames' (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 2). As the concept of affective economies focuses on the energy of contact as things come together and what affect or emotions do in the moving intensities of those contacts, it has the potential to illuminate the embodied interactions and interrelations occurring within and beyond the transnational space of the literature classroom. In particular, Ahmed's framing of affect from the point of view of cultural politics can assist us to explore how affect or emotions align some bodies with particular communities and situate some outside



of community. Her analysis foregrounds the affect associated with everyday exclusions as a response to hegemonic norms that set borders, marginalising some and centralising others. Challenging such norms is fundamental to a postcolonial pedagogy.

As Ahmed locates affect in the circulation of signs and emotions, she emphasises the submerged histories that have contributed to produce the affect. In emphasising the hidden history of production of words and emotions, she offers the conceptual tools to investigate the work emotions do within the classroom, 'how they align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the intensity of their attachments' (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 119). She thus helps us to detect the affect that ensues from hegemonic privilege and the deleterious effects it can have on students it excludes.

Pedwell (2012, 2016) suggests further pedagogical practices that stem from Ahmed's work. She argues that attention to affective relations requires that we account for shifting cultural and socio-political connectivities that keep the 'qualities of any imagined context in flux' (Pedwell, 2016 p. 18). She reminds us of the dangers of privilege. Claims to know or represent the experiences of others through cross-cultural or transnational interactions may reinforce existing hierarchies, 'obscuring their complicity in the wider relations of power in which marginalisation, oppression and suffering occur' (Pedwell, 2012, p. 167). She shows the need to unlearn and reimagine, to develop a knowing that brings 'new sympathies, new affects as well as new cognitions and new forms of intersubjectivity' (p. 164). She quotes Spivak in this context:

Pushing at the boundaries of the concept of imagination may also open up ways to think about the possibilities of different kinds of affective journeys which hold the empathetic 'possibility of being somewhere that is not the Self' (Spivak, 1997, p. 2) to present literature as having possibilities for the development of transnational empathy (p. 176).

Like Spivak, Pedwell is committed to the hope that privileged subjects will experience a radical transformation in consciousness, which will lead them not only to respond to the

experience of the Other with greater understanding and compassion, but also to recognise their own complicity within transnational hierarchies of power.

Pedwell's project considers what it might mean to decolonise emotion and to ask how empathy expressed at the margins of normative postcolonial imaginaries might disrupt or refigure universalist emotional politics (Pedwell, 2016, p. 3). She explores what might be gained in departing from mainstream ideas of empathy premised on knowledge, accuracy and prediction towards a mode of affective translation involving attunement, negotiation, and invention. This involves her in investigating how liberal, neoliberal and neo-colonial visions and practices of empathy can be reinterpreted in the context of transnationality. For students in the current project who have often suffered in response to ethnocentric norms, reinterpreting empathy in this transnational context might open up new ways of helping them to feel they belong in Australian society. For those who have not felt excluded, it might lead them to reimagine their relationship with those who have. Pedwell imagines affective connectivities involving greater self-reflexivity leading to awareness of complicities in social forces that disempower others. She shows that critical approaches to theorising affect transnationally attend to the ways in which feelings travel. Espousing these views, she responds to the context described in the early chapters of this study. She takes account of the changing social conditions of a globalised world and ushers in new approaches to pedagogy that offer useful resources within a postcolonial frame and to a postcolonial analysis.

Anwaruddin (2016) also seeks to construct a critical affective approach to literacy that highlights how students' emotions help or hinder their learning (Anwaruddin, 2016, p. 386). Anwaruddin (2016, p. 390) asks 'what emotions do rather than what they are'. He supplements the rationalist activities of critical literacy, as they might not address the 'non-rational investments' (Janks, 2010, p. 211) that students bring to their reading. Anwaruddin

thus offers resources for the current project presenting a model of critical literacy from an affective viewpoint. While he uses a psychoanalytic literary approach, his theory of critical affective literacy could be usefully combined with a postcolonial approach. A critical affective literacy listens for the discursive practices that implicitly motivate the flow of emotions in the classroom, paying attention to the ways that teacher and student identities come to be constituted through classroom and school discourses and everyday practices.

Lenters and McDermott (2019), although they explore the influence of affect on critical literacy from a posthuman point of view, also have something to offer a postcolonial approach. They challenge the binary between theory and practice in their approach to literacy and demonstrate that teaching is relational and learning is an affective and embodied process. Drawing on Semetsky's (2013) concept of bodymind, they remind us that body and mind are inextricably linked and always working together (Semetsky, 2013). They remind us, also, to challenge other binaries that are assumed in conventional practice such as that between literacy and literature. 'Rather than thinking in binary terms such as focus on grammar or immersion in literature', they suggest we ask, 'what do these students need at this time?' (Lenters & McDermott, 2019, p. 11). From their perspective, affect refers to 'the preconscious, visceral responses of the bodymind during any type of encounter' (p. 6) which have a crucial influence on the relational literacy practices within the classroom. Lenters and McDermott assist literacy teachers to pay attention to these visceral aspects of the classroom relationships by presenting a sample set of questions to guide their practices:

How have my students and I been changed by our engagement with the text/author and the practices of critical literacy? In what ways have my students reflected on the words and background knowledge or cultural narratives that inform their understanding of the text? When, where and how are my students and I open to allowing new ideas to interfere with our preconceived notions on belief systems? How might we engage with texts and practices that foster new ways of being with the world? What worlds have opened up for my students and me as we critically engage with text(s)? How has engaging with texts set us on

trajectories of re-imagining and re-making our own worlds? (Lenters & McDermott, 2019, p. 8)

A recent spate of publications (Burnett & Merchant, 2018a; Burnett & Merchant, 2018b; Ehret, 2018; Leander & Ehret, 2019; Lenters & McDermott, 2019) is opening up both theoretical and practical considerations in this area of critical affective literacy. Perhaps the most compelling of these publications is the introduction to their recent book by Ehret and Leander (2019). They ask what difference it makes ‘for literacy education and literacy scholarship to feel the world, to take affective intensities seriously, to engage with the surplus and with the unspoken and powerfully unknown?’ (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 3). This question, so important for this project, leads me to ask what difference it might make to include selected aspects of affect theory and affective practice as an intrinsic part of my construction of transnational literacy. Ehret and Leander draw on the writing of Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015):

all our phrasing – race relations, racial chasms, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy – serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. ... You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics ... all land, with great violence, upon the body (p. 10).

Coates’ graphic account of the ways racism marks and violates the body underlines the importance of postcolonial affect and the need to explore this further. Ehret and Leander attest to the need to acknowledge such affects in the literature/literacy classroom. To ignore them would be to bury the lived reality of many of the students’ experiences under a rationalist cloud. They ask how affects ‘animate our bodies towards new relations and potentials, connections and disjunctures, thoughts and feelings’ (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 12)). ‘What’, they ask, ‘if lesson plans were written to express potentials of human relationships around literacy learning, rather than to delineate and align technologies of learning – e.g., objectives, assessments, timeframes, etc?’ (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 16). I found this introduction, not only helpful in the range of considerations it raises for how

one might attend to critical affective literacy, but also inspiring in the energy, the aliveness, the sense of the power of the emergent moment that it evokes. It showed that rethinking literacy pedagogy in relation to postcolonial affect might open possibilities for richer, more vital engagements within classroom relationships. It demonstrates the immense potential within a critical affective literacy classroom to make space for students to negotiate or resist metanarratives that work against their best interests.

### **Pedagogic uses of diasporic texts**

The critical scholarship discussed above has highlighted the power of hegemonic assumptions and the ways in which the Eurocentric colonial imaginary structures 'both student desire as well as the terms and limits of 'thinkability' (Britzman, 1998). With this in mind, I move to pedagogy and the classroom and consider what might be meant by the term 'transnational literacy'.

While Appadurai speaks of the postnational imagination needed in globalised times (Appadurai, 1996, p. 6), Spivak writes of the need to decolonise the imagination (Spivak, 2012, p. 77) and to learn to submit to culturally different texts. Transnational literacies attempt to combat hegemonic devices of silencing and to recognise the many knowledges that emerge from diverse cultures, times and places. Spivak introduced the term in several texts (1992, 1999, 2012) but without clearly defining it. She intends it as the sort of literacy that dominant cultures need to learn (Brydon, 2011b, np) and it includes the necessity for such readers to develop ethical reading practices. It emphasises the need for change within the self by unlearning one's privilege, taking the subaltern as a teacher and making connections between literary analysis and social engagement (Lee, 2011, p. 5). Spivak is concerned to combat hegemonic knowledge claims that deny their situatedness within a particular local area and make false claims to universality. The skill of differentiation between knowledge claims, between discourses and between texts is central to her project.

Spivak's concept of transnational literacy has three main aspects: it is interruptive, empathetic and innovative (Spivak, 2012). She claims that it is through transnational literacy that 'we can invent grounds for an interruptive praxis from within our hope in justice under capitalism' (p. 152). She also claims that transnational literacy 'allows us to sense that the other is not just a voice, but that others produce articulated texts, even as they, like us, are written in and by a text not of our ... making' (p. 152). Thus, it involves empathy, the ability to see the subjectivity of the Other and to avoid binaries and hierarchies. It is innovative, alerting the reader to the discourses that inscribe us, to the hegemonic views that might otherwise escape detection. It is an epistemological project that involves deconstructing Eurocentric knowledge, a perspective constructed within coloniality and at the same time taken as universal.

However, there are several meanings of the term current among educationists. Jimenez, Smith and Teague (2009) use the term 'transnational literacies to refer to the written language practices of people who are involved in activities that span national boundaries' (Jimenez, Smith & Teague, 2009, p. 17). They are sympathetic to other views, but prefer a functional understanding of 'transnational' premised on the country of origin: 'our emphasis here is on something quite different, namely the production of and interpretation of texts for functional purposes by people of transnational origin' (Jimenez et al., 2009, p. 17).

Others such as Lam (2009) and McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg and Salianni (2007) focus on transnational literacy as framed in online spaces. Lam highlights students' affiliations across host and home countries focusing on the 'impact of transnational relationships on native language maintenance, multilingual identities, and the development of a cross-societal frame of reference' (p. 305). McGinnis et al. (2007) focus more on the formation of 'particular identities, including transnational identities, through the hybrid textual practices

of online communication sites' (p. 283). They suggest that these technological sites are important spaces for youth to engage in transformative literacy practices and perform identity work, suggesting that transnational practices may both 'reconnect them to the land of their ancestors and establish social relationships that make them participants in more than one state' (p. 284). Both Lam and McGinnis et al. conclude that to prepare young people to be actors on a global stage, educators need to understand the complexities of their students' literacy practices. They affirm that schools should consider ways to bridge youth's digital worlds with their academic worlds; to provide space for all youth to share their concerns regarding local, national, and global issues; and to encourage and build on such transnational literacy practices. My study draws on their work to reimagine how literature might be taught to include the role transnationalism plays in the literacies and identities of our students.

Wargo and De Costa (2017) reveal how learners' lives are situated and informed by their social relations and locations. They find that academic literacies locate 'hybridised repertoires... that are shaped and constituted by the physical and social spaces that contemporary youth inhabit' (Wargo & De Costa, 2017, p. 102). Literacies are therefore deeply entrenched in the lives of people, their experiences and desires and as such are dynamic. This embeddedness in social interrelations and specific places needs to be recognised in transnational literary pedagogy, along with learners' situatedness amongst entrenched discourses.

In their version of transnational literacy, Tom, Suárez-Krabbe and Caballero Castro (2017) express the postcolonial concern with silenced voices. They develop a pedagogy of absence, conflict, and emergence (PACE), seeking to transcend Eurocentric knowledge construction and to think from and for places and experiences that are otherwise negated in mainstream Western education. They endeavour to break from Eurocentric knowledge

production and to create space for other epistemologies and ways of being. They show how white privilege constructs the white body as Presence, expected to be seen by others without seeing itself being seen. They note that this is the perspective, a form of epistemic racism, that is being taught in schools. It is a perspective that needs to be challenged within transnational literacy.

Christiansen (2017) focusses not on absences or silences but on what diasporic groups are already doing to construct transnational social spaces through digital media, especially on Facebook. She describes how members of a transnational social network of Mexican bilinguals living in Chicago manipulate their social media language to facilitate close connections across borders. She argues that through deterritorialised language discourse, members of this group recontextualise Facebook as a transnational social place that connects families, allowing for the continuation of cultural practices. Knowing how people use language on social media to construct transnational space shows us new ways to teach literacies. It models the importance of tapping into out-of-school literacies and the possibility of constructing the contemporary classroom as a transnational space that facilitates cross-border connections and understandings.

Sanchez and Kazun (2012) claimed some years ago that few educational researchers had used the lens of transnationalism (Sanchez & Kazun, 2012, p. 79). They suggested that through this view, an expanded imagination of life possibilities would be facilitated as a by-product of globalisation. (Sanchez & Kazun, 2012, p. 80). Although I have shown that more studies have since been conducted in this important field, there is a gap in the area of transnational literacy within an Australian secondary-school context. De Lissovoy (2011) suggests possible ways to bridge that gap by theorising transnational literacy as a necessary response to these globalised times. He argues that the pedagogical is a model for wider social change. He invokes Gough's concept of a 'transnational imaginary' in curriculum



(Gough, 2000, p. 334), to convey ‘an unravelling of the national identifications that anchor student and teacher subjectivities, and which are painstakingly constructed through the experience of schooling itself’ (De Lissovoy, 2011, p. 1125). To unravel national identifications is an important step towards the goal of unsettling the canonicity of texts and thus the implicitly bordering practices that flow from hegemonic assumptions.

The writers addressed so far have emphasised the importance of the local, the practical and the political aspects of transnational literacy. Rizvi (2011) places more emphasis on imagination as he argues that, ‘despite ubiquitous discourses of globalisation, our modes of thinking about cultural diversity and managing interethnic relations remain trapped within a national framework, in ways that are both misleading and inadequate’ (Rizvi, 2011, p. 180). This view has been borne out in the survey of literature noted above where, in many cases, country of origin appears to be central to the analysis. And there is a tension here as the local is an important pedagogical foundation. How to do justice to the immediate challenges of students’ locatedness (not necessarily the national) while also contextualising this within the global is an important question that transnational pedagogies need to address. But the point here is the range of our thinking, its limits and possibilities. Rizvi focuses on how imagination ‘contests the hegemonic social imaginaries of globalisation and is implicitly directed towards the goal of global relations that are more just, democratic and humane’ (Rizvi, 2009, p. 265). Spivak (2012, p. 10) also emphasises the need to ‘keep up the work of displacing belief onto the terrain of the imagination’. It is through the aesthetic that Spivak envisages the challenge to the dominance of globalisation that ‘takes place only in capital and data’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 1). Thus, both these theorists emphasise the nexus of the ethical and the imagination. Their analyses open up the possibility that the classroom study of literary texts, through the aesthetic, might offer new ways of seeing and knowing, a

new epistemology that could stand as a challenge to hegemonic certainties and invite a more ethical engagement with a diverse and rapidly changing world.

As we consider the forms and practices that might constitute transnational literacy in the secondary school classroom, it can be claimed that the inclusion of diasporic texts as cultural resources assists the process of renegotiation of identities (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019; Choudhury, 2019; Sevilla, 2019). But to what extent are diasporic texts an instrument for the development of transnational literacy? In recent years, much has been written about the evolving concept of diaspora – Safran (1991), Clifford (1994), Brah (1996), Cohen (1997), Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004), Friedman (2007), Cárdenas (2013), to name just a few. This literature is often definitional, explicating the term ‘diaspora’ with reference to long and particular histories or to its semantic origins. Other commentators debate whether to define it in relation to the nation-state, given that increased travel and migration and porous national borders have led to significant reconceptualisations of the term’s sense and reference (Friedman, 2007, p. 271). In contrast to migration logic, which is about being either *here* or *there*, embracing one thing while abandoning another, diaspora logic seems to be situated in a more transnational space and to be connected with both *here* and *there* through networks and interconnectivities.

One of the most significant theorists on diaspora for this research is Hall (1990), not so much because of his explications of the term ‘diaspora’ but because of his insight into its implications for identity. Hall conceptualises identity as ‘not an essence, but a positioning’ (1990, p. 226) within the discourses of history and culture. Hall invokes Derrida’s *différance* to convey the infinite sense of deferral of identity, of becoming, not being. Hall therefore theorises diaspora as juncture points where many cultural tributaries meet. But lest this image seem static, he insists on the dynamism of the image as a place of collisions, of

negotiations, of many continuous displacements (Hall, 1990, p. 234). Thus, both identity and diaspora are characterised in terms of movement, mobilities and change.

Mignolo argues that as literature as it is understood today 'has been ideologically shaped by the combination of national/global designs ... it is crucial, at this point, to rethink the articulations in the production and distribution of knowledge' (Mignolo in Delgado & Romero, 2000, pp. 13–14). Friedman (2004), on the other hand, sees diasporic writing as containing the 'locations of identity in motion, the palimpsests of the scattered self' (Friedman, 2004, p. 207). Diasporic texts often subvert generic conventions to foreground complex ever-moving identifications. Diasporic writers develop what Sullivan (2012) calls a 'poetics of difference' – a formal approach in which generic amalgamations and heterogeneous narrative structures emphasise ... difference' (Sullivan, 2012, p. iv). In articulating broader interstices of difference, they open space outside of normative social and cultural structures to forge radical new connections. Sullivan contends that these writers reframe identity around radical models of difference by developing and naming hybrid genres, and destabilising formal conventions of recognisable genres through multiplicities of voice thereby expanding the terrain on which subjectivity is conceived (Sullivan, 2012, p. iv). In this study, a postcolonial analysis of a diasporic text and students' responses to this text will examine its possibilities for expanding this terrain.

## **Conclusion**

One of the strongest strands to emerge from this examination of current literacy debates is the construct of transnational literacy and the ways in which it has been addressed in postcolonial, transnational and critical-affective literacy research. According to much of the literature, transnational literacy cannot be described apart from the context in which it is used, the discourses and assumptions of that context. Scholars such as Chen, Mignolo,

Andreotti and Spivak challenge us to expand the epistemological terrain, the space within which we think and construct our knowledge. In order to create a space for other voices to be heard, many key theorists in this field urge breaking out of the cocoon of nation-bounded, Eurocentric reference points and thinking beyond logocentric limits. A consistent emphasis in the literature is the need to recognise everyday bordering that occurs in persistent and hidden conventional ways and to combat these with vernacular cosmopolitanism, aesthetic cosmopolitanism or training of the imagination to see beyond the binaries, the hierarchies and false assumptions of universality or privilege. Finally, common to many of the approaches to conceptualising literacy are descriptions and examples that document the changing out-of-school literacies that offer models and directions for classroom practice.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this engagement with the extant literature, both theoretical and empirical, towards establishing what more might be required in the field of transnational literary education. First, it demonstrates that there is a need to change from colonially inflected traditional forms of literacy. The changing demographic of our classrooms means that persisting in Anglo-centred literature and practices implicitly Others much of the cohort and fails to promote an ethical sensibility through inclusive pedagogical processes. Second, postcolonial theorists such as Spivak and Andreotti suggest that it is imperative to teach students to read in such a way that they learn to discern the textual devices that clandestinely position them within values and discourses to which it may not be in their best interests to give assent. Third, changing practices in relation to out-of-school literacies and social media relations mean that students bring a wide repertoire of knowledges, literatures and behaviours that can be used within the classroom to open space outside of normative social and cultural structures to forge new connections and new learnings. These emerging practices, recent researchers demonstrate, can help to destabilise

formal pedagogic conventions and expand the terrain on which student subjectivity is conceived.

In this chapter, I have considered key approaches to both the thinking behind and the empirical construction of a postcolonial literary pedagogy within a contemporary literature classroom. I have examined approaches that are consistent with the emerging concept of a transnational space noting that literary theories and pedagogies that remain bounded within the space of the nation-state provide limited insights into the production of pedagogical practices at the level of transnationality. Emerging work that attends to the political and social discourses appropriate to globalising times and the contradictory workings of the colonised imagination, work that serves to subvert global/local binaries and knowledge regimes, opens up possibilities for further investigating the mobilities, relationalities and interconnectivities, that constitute the space in which contemporary students seek to understand themselves and their worlds. But there is a need for further work on how these might apply in practice within Australian secondary school classrooms. What has been largely omitted from postcolonial accounts is consideration of the material and the visceral and how they are part of the way students read. While many theorists considered here provide ways to respond to globalisation's challenges, more needs to be done to explore how to implement these recommendations in literature classroom settings. The potential contribution of my project is to contribute to this endeavour.

Thus, this thesis revolves around two closely linked questions: first, given the changing demography and increased social mobilities of our times, how might a pedagogy be constructed that is appropriate for current secondary school literature students in Australia?; and second, how, within this context, might literature teachers use diasporic texts to help students to understand their own circumstances and negotiate their identities,

and their differences in relational, critical and reflexive ways, suggestive of the Spivakian concept of transnational literacy?

By addressing these questions, this study attempts to understand how transnational literacy might be developed within a literature classroom and what forms it might take. It explores the potential of diasporic texts to take us beyond canonicity and to broaden the terrain upon which student subjectivity is conceived. It does this in the light of Brydon's statement that 'transnational literacy as a concept needs to be developed beyond Spivak's initial theorisings and requires much more attention' (Brydon, 2010, p. 21). With a focus on pedagogy in mind, it also takes up Sanchez and Kazun's (2012) invitation to create a space where students' transnational experiences 'are allowed to be aired, understood, and built upon in schools' (Sanchez & Kazun, 2012, p. 84). It attempts to both activate and further theorise transnational literacy in order to address social transformations within the Australian classroom brought about by globalisation. In the next chapter, I discuss the journey I undertook in order to arrive at the methodology and methods employed in this research in order to investigate these questions. At the centre of this approach is a pedagogic experiment that involved teaching of a diasporic text to a Year 11 Literature class, with data collected from observations of the students' engagement with this text and their reflections on the text's potential in helping them to examine their evolving understanding of issues of identity, culture and difference.

## Chapter 4

### A METHODOLOGICAL JOURNEY

**‘Hewn of the commonest living substance into portal, archway, frame’<sup>11</sup>**

The narrative in this chapter charts my methodological journey towards a literary pedagogy suited to my particular context of an all-girls senior secondary literature class in an Australian select-entry government school. It choreographs a set of circumstances through which I have striven to derive insights about the ways in which a group of students negotiate their identity, in a transnational setting, as they critically read a novel, *The Hamilton Case* (de Kretser, 2003), that in itself represents a transnational text. De Kretser, who was born in Sri Lanka and emigrated to Australia when she was 14, has become one of Australia’s leading novelists and *The Hamilton Case* is one of her earlier celebrated novels. It deals with complex issues such as colonial complicities, cross-cultural identities and mental colonisation.

The introduction of this text and the attendant border-crossing teaching strategies into an otherwise canonical literature course performed an interruption and constituted a pedagogical intervention. Given the diverse nature of my students’ backgrounds<sup>12</sup>, experiences and literacies, together with the transnational nature of the society in which we live, my research aim was to develop a pedagogy that would best serve my particular

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<sup>11</sup> Rich, 2002, p.131

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 1 for the background details of the research participants.

cohort, one that would do justice to the out-of-school literacies and literatures and knowledges to which their experiences have exposed them. It is this aim that underscores my research questions (as outlined in Chapter 3) with their focus on an appropriate pedagogy to help students to understand their own circumstances and negotiate their identities and their differences in relational, critical and reflexive ways.

To address the research questions, I thus sought insights from a literature review of postcolonialism (as relevant to the teaching of literature) and how it might steer me towards an understanding of the use of a diasporic text in forging transnational literacy. I collected three sets of data: written responses from the members of my year 11 literature class to a set of questions (Appendices 2 & 3) before and after the unit of work being undertaken; audio-recorded group discussions from the class divided into self-selected groups on two separate occasions over the unit of work and interviews with a purposive selection of students from this class (Appendix 4). These steps will be further explicated in the Data section of this chapter. I had, throughout the period of teaching the unit of work, kept a brief and informal set of teaching notes, and informally observed student interaction with regard to *The Hamilton Case*, so teacher participant observation was a further but less comprehensive data collection technique.

The unit of work in question concerned me as teacher-researcher teaching the diasporic novel, *The Hamilton Case*, to a group of 20 year 11 literature students in an Australian all-girls, selective entry secondary school. The length of the unit was 10 weeks with four 55 minutes lessons a week. It consisted, in the first week, of the introduction of some elements of postcolonial theory (suitable for year 11 students), in the second week, the introduction of the historical and geographical setting of Sri Lanka and then six weeks of slow, close reading, analysis and discussion of the novel. The final two weeks of the unit were spent teaching the skills for structuring and writing creative and analytical text



responses. As this research project has been a journey of struggle and discovery, a journey which has led to the construction of my own methodology, one which refuses to fit the models provided by conventional methodological textbooks, I have chosen to tell much of it as a narrative, a search, replete with false starts, blind alleys and only occasional aha moments. Here is my attempt to hew from everyday classroom interaction a ‘portal, archway, frame’.

## **A postcolonial perspective**

In this section, I outline my epistemological perspective and my reasoning for choosing a poststructuralist strand of postcolonial theory to underpin this study. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the cohort of the year prior to beginning this research had shown that they were struggling to deal with the ambivalence of the competing normative demands of different cultures. They were often caught within tensions between competing hegemonic discourses in the Australian public sphere and ‘ethnolinguistic minority societies that are sparked when globalisation destabilises monocultural institutional practices’ (Taylor, 2008, p. 89). While I did not know if future students would also report such tensions, I decided to draw on some postcolonial theories and language that might provide – for them and for me – ways of investigating, recognising and articulating aspects of their experience. Prior to beginning the teaching and data collection phase of my project, postcolonial theorists such as Spivak, Bhabha, Said, Hall and Andreotti had been epistemological influences on me, had started me questioning my white privilege, had positioned the canon for me as much narrower and exclusionary than I had hitherto recognised. They had inspired the developing language and theoretical stances I then took into the classroom.

Andreotti (2006) talks of how helpful she found the writings of Spivak in naming and gaining some control over her own experience and I hoped this approach might also help me to begin ‘decolonising [my] imagination’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 77) and my students’

imaginations to better develop their ability to negotiate ‘the pluralisation of life worlds’ (Flick, 2014, p. 12). Within the context of globalisation and the escalation of transnational experiences, this phrase is particularly relevant. The pluralised life-worlds of our students can be overlooked in the construction of our curricula. I designed my study in the hope that it might acknowledge the diverse and ever-changing social situations and relations of the participants’ lives, their rich identifiable local contexts (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014) and in the recognition that inquiries into other people’s lives are always an exercise in ethics (Agee, 2009, p. 440).

As I wished to investigate *how* my students experienced their literature classes and the possible changes and interventions made to them over the course of the study, and *how* these related to their out-of-school literacies, a qualitative approach underpinned by postcolonial theories seemed the most suitable. ‘In doing poststructuralist analysis there is an opportunity to be transformative, not only through the deconstruction of current ways of knowing, but also in the development of strategies for change’ (Triandafilidis, Ussher, Perz, & Huppatz, 2018, p. 3). I found Bhabha’s epistemological perspective was also helpful. In referring to the ‘liminality of the people – their double-inscription as pedagogical objects and performative subjects’ (Bhabha, 2004, p. 216), Bhabha shows that the ‘certainties’ of the culture are forever in flux because of the performative interventions of those who are both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the dominant viewpoint. This is perhaps even more the case now than in the early 1990s when Bhabha wrote *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (2004) as borders become more porous and mobility ever increasing.

Thus, for this exploration I have adopted a poststructuralist strand of postcolonial theory as a framework of analysis. This framework is based on an understanding of both poststructuralist and postcolonial theories as critiquing modern colonial discourse. It is

informed by an epistemology that subverts the oppositional dichotomies implicit in logocentric enlightenment thought (Derrida, 1976) and rejects the universalist ontology of the Western enlightenment. Thus, this project seeks to challenge a 'logocentric-essentialist epistemology' (Andreotti, 2006, p. 100) which promulgates its values as universal and normative.

At the heart of poststructuralism is its challenge to all intellectual forms of totalitarianism and its interrogation of discourse and ideology. Poststructuralist thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida regard all interpretation as potentially inflected by the cultural and personal presuppositions of the interpreter and present language as polysemic and plurivocal. They are concerned to unmask the shadow-side of discourse and demonstrate that knowledge of the world is inevitably mediated. In so doing they expose the often-repressed undercurrent of social inequality in cultural records and show that everyday language is not innocent or neutral. For Derrida, there is no transcendental signified and he rejects the 'logocentric' view that there is an order of truth that is absolute and which grounds our belief system. From a poststructuralist perspective, as researcher, I cannot eliminate my personal biases, so one of my objectives is to render my assumptions visible and to expose how they function politically. Within this poststructuralist perspective, I present my analysis as a partial viewpoint, one that is inevitably a product of my situation with its attendant biases, blindspots and cultural and personal ignorances. Thus, a central task is to track the hidden itinerary of assumptions, within the educational and philosophical discourses that permeate both my own and my students' texts and practices.

The other major focus of this research methodology is to interrupt canonical conventions of literature teaching in Australian secondary schools, in particular the secondary school at which I teach. Just as Spivak performed an interruption to the Western narrative with her essay, 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1988), so I selected *The Hamilton Case*, for its potential to

illustrate a similar role in interrupting the dominant cultural narrative (in this case British) It might show through both the failure of the British system to deliver justice to one of the novel's chief figures, Sam, and through the interweaving of complex other stories into the strand of the detective story, that linear single narratives exclude significant voices and experiences, that they omit too much. By introducing de Kretser's interruptive text into my classroom, I sought to continue this process of intervention and disruption of the dominant narrative. Hence, I turn to postcolonial theory and methodology for its history and tradition of contesting colonial processes.

Postcolonial theories thus offer literary educational discourse some critical tools in relation to methodology, particularly a suspicion of generalisations that essentialise or universalise. They assist in recognising that methodological nationalism<sup>13</sup> is 'in-built into the European ... self-representation' (Braidotti 2013 p.4). Postcolonial thinkers such as Said help us to discern Eurocentrism and pave the way for the literature classroom to become 'an adventure in difference and alternative cultural traditions' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 4). As postcolonialism today maintains an intense engagement with 'questions of alterity and identity, with community and globalism, with racism's now protean forms' (Roy, 2008, p. 357), it exposes ways in which current educational structures remain embedded in colonial, imperial, and now postcolonial projects.

Roy (2008) analyses the term 'Other' as a key concept in postcolonial theory (p. 321) and shows that the 'textual construction of the term 'Other' can be traced to the dualistic thought structures of Western epistemologies, where ideas were essentially formed around Hegelian binary oppositions (such as man/woman, positive/negative, white/black, and so on)' (Roy, 2008, p. 321). As these dichotomous structures depict non-European Others as

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<sup>13</sup> Methodological nationalism is discussed by Schneider (2019) as a bias based on the assumption that nations are the norm and form a naturalised and invisible background to scholarly research.

being incapable of achieving the status of subjects, one of the aims of postcolonial theory has been ‘to deconstruct the source of these Western epistemologies, and reconstruct new meanings in discourse and dialogue’ (Roy, 2008, p. 322). As exclusive focus on British canonical literature or literary practices implicitly constructs many students as the Other of the Anglo-tradition, this potentially denies those students recognisable subject-positions and renders them ‘subalterns’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 189) within the education system.

Postcolonial theories are therefore used both within this analysis and within the classroom that is the site of this project to interrogate canonicity and the colonial basis of its authority. Young (2003) analyses postcolonial theory as involving a ‘conceptual reorientation’ (p. 33) towards non-Western epistemologies and knowledges, thus affirming a ‘political practice morally committed to transforming the conditions of exploitation and poverty’ (Young, 2003, p. 33). A central feature of postcolonial scholarship is the deliberate decentring of the dominant culture so that the voices, perspectives, and experiences of people who typically have been ‘marginalised become a starting point in our knowledge construction’ (Kirkham & Anderson, 2002, p. 12). The focus of my analysis, then, is on how to detect and unpack the ‘apparatus of value-coding’ (Spivak, 1990, p. 228) as it is produced and replicated in Australian literature classrooms. It is partly motivated by a desire to interrogate the tradition of Western literary pedagogy in such a way as to address the third of my research questions which asks how, within the context of the transnational space of my classroom, might I help students to understand their own circumstances and negotiate their identities, and their differences, in relational, critical and reflexive ways? The goal is to provide tools for both myself and my students that might allow us to more clearly recognise the implicit norms of English colonialism, which still permeate Australian social and political life and underpin the education system we are *inside*. From a postcolonial standpoint, the tools offered by Derrida’s deconstruction of the Western humanist subject can be productively employed both in the classroom context and within this study to

search out the contradictions, both productive and unproductive, within literature courses that present the British canonical tradition as *the* knowledge and thus fail to recognise other knowledges.

These tools employed in combination with Bhabha's notions of hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry and the third space provide an opportunity to see the canon as only one amongst many literatures and emblematic of a hegemonic epistemology. Within this postcolonial perspective and this analysis, both the canon and its Other are seen in a different dialogic relationship, with new possibilities of multiple inter-realities and hybrid spaces being recognised. And to the extent that this process contests the canon's claims to universality, it opens up conditions of possibility for negotiations of identity in critical, relational and reflexive ways.

### **Pedagogic intervention as research**

Having set the epistemological stage, I now turn to the narrative of how I came to make a particular set of choices in relation to my research approach to this study. This narrative is located in a shifting terrain methodologically. It is a dynamic and emerging landscape as I am experimenting and coming up with my own methodological toolkit, creating my own particular approach that is suitable for responding to my own particular circumstances.

Although I began with conventional, *tried and true* approaches such as case study, I found that these did not adequately fit my purposes or situation and often created methodological dilemmas for me that I needed to work through with my own set of tools.

### **Initial decisions**

When I first began this project, building on Andreotti's (2014) and Brydon's (2012) analyses and explications of transnational literacy, I conceived of my literature class as a case study in which I was trying to understand how students were experiencing an experiment in transnational literacy. Through presenting de Kretser's novel, *The Hamilton*

*Case*, to students within a culturally diverse literature classroom, the study aimed to explore its pedagogical possibilities asking to what extent the teaching of such a text might be a useful means of developing transnational literacy and helping students engage issues surrounding national and cultural identity. I understood this to include, *inter alia*, redefining and positioning minorities' literacies as valid and relevant social and cultural practices (Taylor, 2008, p. 112) and learning to become the implied reader of culturally different texts.

Spivak, in considering the question of what makes a case a case, what are they cases of, answers by saying 'cases of subject-ing, cases of agent-ing, thus cases of identify-ing, cases of the staging of culture as the originary synthesis with the absolute other' (Spivak, 2012, p. 162). She thus demonstrates the slippery nature of case study methodology and the need to uncover the often ignored staging processes, the mechanics by which the hegemony of dominant ideologies operates within particular cases so that normative 'identities and values are both produced and legitimated' (Giroux, 2004, p. 494). The emphasis on the gerunds, the doings and becomings, works as a caution not to consider cases as static, fixed entities but rather as situations in process and flux. This is relevant to this case of transnational literacy-in-the-making as there have been many previous examples and forms of transnational literacy (Hornberger & Link, 2012; Zhang, 2019; Warriner, 2009; Lam, 2009). Each of these cases of transnational literacy is located in a specific time and place, is responsive to the changing global conditions and is in flux as the cohort grows and changes.

In my case, as the researcher immersed in the field, I wanted to draw out from the students their own feelings and thoughts about the literature, but I also wanted to hear about their histories and experiences and how these influenced their reading of the text. In order to do this, I began by adopting a qualitative bounded case study methodology as that seemed best

suited to my goal of hearing my students' responses, their ways of learning, their preferences and engagement levels and how these might develop within the affective economy – the way affects pass between bodies – of the class. There are many views regarding the boundaries of case studies and what a researcher is required to do to produce effective case studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018; Stake, 2005). My research, conceptualised in its early stages as a case of how particular students respond to the input within a literature class and the pedagogic possibilities of the Spivakian concept of transnational literacy, was to be bounded in a limited time frame, (a 10-week unit of work from July to September 2015), a small and specific place (a literature classroom in an all-girls school in Australia), a specific task (the study of a diasporic novel *The Hamilton Case* by Michelle de Kretser), a context (the transnational nature of the world around us, not merely the nationally bounded space that seemed to surround the canonical literature course), and a cohort of 20 literature students. Hyett, Kenny and Dickson-Swift (2014), in their review of case study methodology, distinguish between two approaches. The first, proposed by Stake and Merriam, is situated in a social constructivist paradigm while the second, proposed by Yin and Flyvbjerg, is developed from a post-positive viewpoint (Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift, 2014, p. 1).<sup>14</sup>

As I wished to develop a pedagogy that contests the feelings of having been Othered, which students had expressed to me, it is what the students feel about their lives, contexts and their learning that was my original focus. I wanted to frame the project in terms of a transnational space and do a project around transnational literacy and its potential and possibilities against a set of conditions I knew to exist in the school and in the lives of these students. But I also wanted them to reflect, not simply on the unitary subject they might

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<sup>14</sup> As case study has emerged as only one part of a complex methodology, I have not engaged in the detailed explanation of its possible manifestations that my story had originally included.



identify with, but on the subject in the state of formation, on mimicry and hybridity. Thus, the focus was on the elements of the case itself rather than on measurement or generalisability. This locates the case study elements of my project in the tradition followed by Stake and Merriam, rather than the post-positive tradition.

### **Methodological dilemmas**

In the early days of teaching the unit of work, I felt confirmed in my project. I thought the responses indicated the relevance and the value of the questions being asked and of the postcolonial approach. The language and concepts being introduced seemed to resonate well and the students applied them readily to their own experience. Being generally quick learners, they tended to take on new vocabulary and concepts with relative ease. This process was giving them ways to interpret concepts that were concerning them. However, it was also compromising the version of case study being undertaken. While initially, I had committed to using traditional case study methods of participant observation, group discussions and interviews, I began to see a potential problem as the students were being *taught* possible ways to respond, their answers were in part a product of a pedagogical conversation. Methodologically there was a tension to account for between an interventionist approach (me as teacher-researcher choosing a postcolonial text and methods of inquiry) and a more interpretative case study approach. If I had been trying to hold strenuously to a pure or orthodox version of qualitative case study, there was a risk of leading the witness, so to speak, and I needed to think about the possibilities available within my methodology and their implications.

Also, as I explored the possibilities of transnational literacy, as I read postcolonial thinkers such as Said, Bhabha and Spivak and philosophers such as Derrida, I realised that the assumptions that teachers can hear what students want is highly problematic. Spivak asks ‘can the subaltern speak’ interrogating whether in fact those with privilege can actually hear what those outside the ‘lines of social mobility’ say. She considers the structural and

ideological impediments to hearing in this context. She draws in part on Derrida who suggests that voice is always partial, ever-changing, constituted by the trace of the Other. Voice, I came to understand, is haunted by silences, absences, restraints, concealments and frivolities.

I was also, in these early stages of my project, blithely unaware of the deeply personal and confronting challenges that were soon to destabilise my position of white privilege. As I inhabited the dual roles of teacher and student-researcher, it was only gradually as a response to the interaction with my students that my whiteness became more visible to me, that the implications of privilege became unsettling. Chatterjee's words (2007), 'my physical self became the site where cultural negotiation, post-colonial conflicts, and pedagogical goals intersected' (p. 23), turned out to be true for me as well, but from a different perspective and it took some time for me to realise this. As I was learning this about myself, I was all the while observing my students' responses to this intervention and developing my pedagogy in the light of them. But my own standpoint coloured and limited the extent to which I could see and hear them. However, even as I recognised these constraints, in practical terms I needed to 'hear' my students in order to teach them, so I needed methodological strategies to help me deal with these seeming contradictions. How was I to reconcile the need to understand the students' experiences of subject-ing, agent-ing and identify-ing as it had occurred and was ongoingly occurring in their histories and the need to develop a pedagogy that was emergent and responsive? How was I to understand how the students' experiences and histories fed into the *case* of transnational literacy that was dynamically unfolding within the ever-expanding classroom walls? It was these questions and dilemmas that led me towards integrating selected elements of case study methodology and some aspects of critical action research approach. I needed a methodology that included the doing, the intervention, the practice of pedagogy as an

active evolving process in dialogue with the case study interviews and participant observation.

### **Creating a methodological toolbox**

‘Action research’, O’Toole and Beckett ((2013) say, ‘is about change and intervention’ (p. 63), and intervention is the first characteristic of action research that I will explore. The impetus for my research was investigating the effects of intervening in the conventional Euro-centred literary education that had been the tradition at Atwood High school where I was teaching. Thus I drew on Giroux (2004) for his account of an interventionist pedagogy that contests and interrupts the view that sees ‘education as primarily a financial investment and learning as a form of training for the workforce’ (Giroux, 2004, p. 494). Giroux (1992) advocates a border pedagogy forged within ‘postcolonial ruptures’ (p. 18), which represents ‘a space in which to retheorise, locate, and address the possibilities for a new politics ...that allow ... educators ...to transform the languages, social practices, and histories that are part of the colonial inheritance’ (Giroux, 1992, p. 22).

Giroux claims that education appears useful to those who hold power, as pedagogy ‘becomes a powerful force for creating the ideological and affective regimes central to reproducing neo-liberalism’ (Giroux, 2004, p. 494). He sees, in the public sphere, a powerful mix of ideological and institutional forces that conspire to produce competitive individuals at the expense of social welfare and gender, class or race considerations. Giroux understands educational institutions to be complicit in this process as ‘the power of the dominant order is not just economic, but also intellectual – lying in the realm of knowledge, information, beliefs, and ideas (Giroux, 2004, p. 497). A pedagogical intervention then, recognises and takes up the possibility of making power visible, in order ‘to challenge the ideological circuitry of hegemonic knowledge’ Giroux, 2004, p. 497). It undertakes an interruption to dominant ideologies through a language of both critique and possibility. Giroux analyses pedagogy as both a political and a moral practice. As a political

practice, it renders visible the relationship between power, knowledge, and ideology, while also recognising its complicities and responsibilities as intervening in how identities are constructed.

As a moral practice, pedagogy recognises there are consequences within the real world of politics and practice of the ways self-conceptions are influenced and performed within classrooms. Giroux asserts that the moral implications of pedagogy suggest that the responsibility of educators 'cannot be separated from the consequences of the knowledge we produce, the social relations we legitimate, and the ideologies and identities we offer up to students' (Giroux, 2004, p. 500). A pedagogical intervention then, viewed through a postcolonial lens, aims to connect the experiences of students to the wider situations, issues and discourses that provide the social and material contexts of their everyday lives.

Pedagogy, Giroux claims, thus becomes performative in that it addresses what it might mean to create modes of individual and social agency while focusing not merely on understanding but also on how to participate in the wider world; how, as Kemmis and Mutton put it, to work towards not only the good for each person but the good for all humankind (Kemmis & Mutton, 2012).

As students come to terms with ongoing relations of power, struggles and negotiations regarding identity and the nature of their participation in society, a postcolonial pedagogical intervention operates at a level of affect and ideological critique in the interests of developing an ethical sensibility. 'There is a need to rethink the syntax of learning and behaviour outside of the geography of rationality and reason' (Giroux, 1992, p. 26) and to acknowledge that hegemonic narratives are embraced as an affective investment. This separates this pedagogy from the view of education as training as it resists the economic rationale in favour of a view of pedagogy as developing sensibilities within a moral and political practice. Given the demands of the twenty-first century, this is not the time for

standardised curricula but rather flexible and responsive approaches where teachers research their own teaching to meet the new needs of changing cohorts. Instead of following set curricula, postcolonial pedagogical interventions help us to show greater sensitivity to difference and diversity and thus action research, a process involving change and intervention, offers the possibility of ways to better address changing social conditions.

Before I seek to justify the various choices made along the rest of my methodological journey, I wish to interrupt the linearity of this process by embedding my methodological choices within a ‘moment’ of classroom practice. As my aim was to develop a version of transnational literacy, I opted for a form of dialogic pedagogic practice outlined by Brydon (2004) which she terms ‘cross-talk’ (Brydon, 2004). ‘Cross-talk’ rests on the assumption that postcolonial pedagogy ‘should not be in the business of producing converts to a cause, however worthy, because all causes can be perverted’ (Brydon, 2004, p.77). Rather, it should ‘stage contradictory readings in such a way as to open further discussion rather than forcing the premature taking of sides’ (Brydon, 2004, p. 81). With a variety of conflicting readings of a single text unfolding, students may find it easier to entertain alternative possibilities to their own previously held convictions. This is Brydon’s adaptation of Spivak’s invitation to stage the text as a battle of epistemes (Spivak, 2012, p. 55). In working-through rather than smoothing over potentially productive contradictions, postcolonial pedagogy refuses to silence problems, refuses stereotypes, instead offers diverse and multiple possibilities in the ways knowledge is constructed. I describe in the following paragraph one of the early examples of the classroom activities involved in the unit of study being analysed, in order to locate both reader and my theoretical justification firmly within the messiness of everyday practice and within what emerges as the need for the postcolonial practice of cross-talk. As each of my methodological decisions occurred as a response to classroom events or dilemmas, it is only from this immersive perspective that it can be properly defended. Accordingly, for the remainder of this chapter, I will

intersperse narrative moments that gave rise to methodological dilemmas and subsequent decisions.

In the first week of the unit, we read the introduction to Young's *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003). This was an enjoyable class. The students responded to the article very strongly. They were affirmed in their own sense of being Othered, and angry that they had to 'look up to the institutions that ultimately invalidate who I am'. We had a long discussion about educational institutions and their enticements to students to study abroad. Comments were made such as 'education and life is better in Western countries and more valued worldwide', 'I am unknowingly succumbing to the Western world and its ideals', 'when I had the opportunity to come to Australia to study everyone was like 'why wouldn't you, it's Australia. Why would you stay in Mauritius' and 'growing up in another country for the majority of my short life I saw firsthand how the Western lens was valued in developing countries. Not only was international education prioritised but it showed a blatant racial hierarchy in regards to treatment of Caucasians and those with Western accents as better students'. These quotes are verbatim. I asked them to write their thoughts on the board.

We discussed white privilege and authority and I asked students where they dreamt of going to university if they could go anywhere. Every student preferenced Oxford and Cambridge first and then Ivy League universities in America – Harvard, Princeton and Yale. This is evidence of the affective 'pull' of celebrated universities worldwide. These universities are part of what might be called an affective economy (Ahmed, 2004c) of post-school choice. One student very tentatively asked 'is Tokyo University good?' She didn't declare a dream of going there like the other students, but recognised the Eurocentric pattern and tried to think outside of it. Even then, she couldn't be bold or actually declare it like the rest of the class, but was left with a question. After discussions of the 'pillaging of

the world by England’ and how that set them up with a self-affirming and ‘ridiculously rich advantage’, one student declared, ‘I know it’s self-hating, but what else can we do but buy into Western values. I want to be successful and that’s success’. I asked if, considering what they had said, they identified as Western. Some said yes, many were ambivalent, not sure where to identify. Some told stories of how when they tell people they’re from Australia, the response so often is; ‘No, where are you from really?’

I narrate this event within my methodology story in order to locate my methodological choices on the rough ground of practice – practice that occurs within a specific classroom space at a particular time and place; practice that is socially and politically located and narrated from a situated and ethno-specific perspective. I wish also to introduce the reader to the interplay of voices that constitute this study so that the unfolding of methodological decisions is embedded in the uncertainties, the to-ing and fro-ing of the conversation. It was here, that in observing their immersion in the dominant discourse, I recognised the salience of Brydon’s method of cross-talk. This narrative moment shows that my students are deeply immersed in the dominant neoliberal discourse of Australian education. While they also express tensions and some alienation in relation to it, their choices and desires are predominantly constructed within its value-coding. This particular tension, constructed as a consequence of the diasporic histories of their families and the normative values of Australian education is, in many ways, peculiar to this specific time and place, this exact group of high-achieving female students. While many students in Australia and worldwide may experience similar tensions, the pedagogic response needed to cater for this precise set of circumstances requires its own individual flavour and set of tools.

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, pp. 5–6), action research is ‘a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as

their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out.’ It allows participants to identify an issue and then alter practice to improve what is happening in the classroom setting and investigates a problem through a collaborative cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. This methodological approach certainly describes some aspects of my approach. While I did not engage in a formal process of discrete cycles in line with Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon’s (2014) process of iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting<sup>15</sup>, my practice involved all of those steps in a more everyday-usual-teaching-practice version of action research. After each lesson, or week of lessons, I considered the responses of the students, what I could detect of what they were thinking and feeling and adjusted the pedagogy accordingly. I will illustrate this with an example of working practice from the classroom.

In the third week of the unit under consideration, after two weeks of introducing both postcolonial theory and Sri Lankan history, we began to analyse the first part of *The Hamilton Case*. Quite a few students struggled over de Kretser’s phrase ‘ambiguous legacy’. They did not see the connection de Kretser was making between protagonist Sam’s family history and the wider Sri Lankan story with its ambiguous colonial legacy. In my teaching notes after the lesson, I made the following note:

The girls think of Sam’s education as very different from their own. They do not feel the need to critique any colonial residue in their current educational experience. They see Sri Lanka as different rather than see the English school system as leaving a colonial legacy shared by Australian schools. Need to think about how to deconstruct the power of the

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<sup>15</sup> I was restricted by the limits of the school year and considerations of participant burden. By the time I had adopted some aspects of critical action research, these were practical constraints on the way it could be developed. But the cycle of plan, lesson, observe, reflect and change where desirable seemed to work well in this context.



Western narrative within them so they see the subtext of the colonial narrative and of the canon. So that they are able to read it against the grain. Need new vocabularies!

In week five, as a result of this observation, I introduced some techniques of deconstruction such as detecting and unpacking assumptions, interrogating patterns of language/imagery and the world-view they imply; exposing bias, hierarchies, binaries; and considering whose voices are represented, whose ignored, silenced. I focused both on how the value-coding in Sam's world was manipulated by the colonial power and the way that British detective fiction with its assumption that rational clue-following would always result in *Truth* was being challenged by de Kretser. In deconstructing the literary genre, we considered the ways that hegemonic structures immerse us in a discourse and constrain our thinking. In this way, I changed the elements of the teaching in response to the reactions of the students (a practice that I think of as a usual and common teaching strategy). As I strove to improve my own pedagogical practice in line with observation and reflection, this also, as I understand it, constituted an everyday form of action research in the classroom. In this way, I introduced deconstructive methods and various postcolonial concepts as a response to observations of students' reactions and behaviours. Thus, by moving between practice and reflection, rethinking practice according to what I saw to be happening in the class, I was employing selected aspects of action research as relevant to my particular circumstances.

Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) outline seven types of action research. Of these, my practice seemed to fit between classroom action research which emphasises practice and teacher self-understandings, and critical participatory research, which 'expresses a commitment to bring together broad social analysis, the self-reflective collective self-study of practice, and transformational action to improve things' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 12). In this project the teaching is often and in many ways the research and the research is about

the *how* of the teaching and why and what *should* be. And both teaching and research are a blend of design and serendipity. They are about trying strategies out and hoping and sometimes finding that the design works beautifully and sometimes learning more because it doesn't. At the end of week four of the teaching, following some of the principles outlined by Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 85), I decided to review the previous weeks' lessons and asked the class for their dominant impressions. Kemmis et al. describe critical participatory action research as distinctive 'partly because it understands itself as a practice - changing practice' (p. 5). It is critical, with 'a collective intention to make our practices, our understandings of our practices, and the conditions under which we practise more rational and reasonable, more productive and sustainable, and more just and inclusive' (p. 85). It also invites us to think about theory not just as texts but as dynamic and changing, and as constituted in practices of theorising that orient us to the world in distinctive ways (p.2).

In order that practice might change practice, towards greater inclusiveness in my classroom, I wished to discover what might have surprised the students, made them angry, have given them enjoyment. Their responses included: 'this unit is more personal than I'm used to. So, therefore both more threatening and more engaging'. 'Very involving and involved discussions'. Quite a few still said they were finding it difficult to work out the plot of de Kretser's novel. One said, 'I need quite a lot of help just to know what's going on'. Some said they felt very angry at the colonisers, and even angrier when they realised that in some ways they felt like Sam, that they had been taught to be proud of being Western and acting Western and they had rejected their parents' and grandparents' culture in racist ways. And in relation to identity, several needed reassurance that they weren't being asked to reject their *Western self*. I tried to explain that this was not a rejection of Western values, or ways of life. It was an attempt to put those values in context and not see them as central or universal. I went back to postcolonial theories before the next lesson in order to respond to their statements. In order to change the pedagogical practice, I drew

on Hall's 'routes not roots' and Bhabha's concepts of the unhomely, the 'insider's outsideness' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 20) suggesting the complex interconnectedness of the multiplicity of identity as it is both discursively constructed and experienced. I spent half of one class explaining these concepts and comparing them to more normative, hegemonic accounts of identity, linking it to the characters in the text. Some seemed to find that useful. We had an interesting discussion about multiple aspects of self, thus exemplifying some aspects of the reflective praxis and revision of strategies involved in action research. In this way, practice led to reflection, which led to revised practice in an ongoing cycle towards an account of transnational literacy appropriate to this particular class.

Kemmis et al. (2014) argue that 'insiders have special advantages when it comes to doing research in their own sites and to investigating practices that hold their work and lives together in those sites' (p. 5). While acknowledging the ethical risks of being a teacher-researcher, such as causing stress or anxiety, taking students away from other valid educational opportunities, causing harm to their reputations or constraining their rights to self-expression (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 159), these theorists endorse the role as providing special opportunities to draw on particular practice traditions, shared languages and understandings. It is the case for most schools (Hargreaves, 1995; Prosser, 1995; Van Gasse, Vanhoof and Van Petegem, 2016) that they build up a culture with shared underpinning values and 'code words' to which only insiders can relate. It is often the case at Atwood High School, the school where I teach. While there are also separate student languages and teacher languages within the school (and many sub-categories under each), there is a case for thinking that between teacher and students a transnational space can be built that provides conditions of possibility for improved learning and greater mutual enjoyment in the process. Researching within such a space has advantages in that much can be taken for granted, such as, at, Atwood, the assumption that the majority of students are multilingual and have numerous transnational experiences. But that advantage has

limitations, for it may be that assumptions of shared understandings are not justified in some instances (some students are monolingual, some have never been out of Australia) or that words, ideas or values that might repay scrutiny pass undetected.

In this research, some elements of critical action research were used to assist in the creation of a transnational space and a collaborative endeavour to further the possibilities to address the research question concerning how, within this context, I might develop a version of transnational literacy along Spivakian lines. Through the students' input and the ever-revising pedagogical strategies, selected critical action research practices were combined with some aspects of case study methodology to move closer to a sense of what kinds of pedagogy might be appropriate within this classroom and transnational space.

### **Why *The Hamilton Case*?**

I now explain why I found *The Hamilton Case* by Michelle de Kretser (2003) to be the most suitable text for my research purposes. I chose this diasporic novel because it exemplified mental colonisation and the obliviousness of its protagonist to the 'structure of [his] own production' (Spivak & Harasyn, 2014, p. 21). I had read the novel some years before and some of what the students were saying seemed to tap into its themes. De Kretser constructs her principal protagonist, Sam, as a Ceylonese character who imitates and adheres to the values of logic, linearity and order as established through his Oxford education. He has internalised a colonial view, voice and intonation as indicated through his use of words such as *grove* and *glade* to describe the Ceylonese rainforest. This adoption of English words and cadences superimposes a British view on the landscape, denying its unique and inherent beauty. Sam's voice is a performance on multiple levels as he models himself on the rational clue-following example of British fictional detectives believing that truth and justice inevitably follow logic. His adherence to this belief leads to his social and professional downfall as his accusing a white Englishman of murder results in his forfeiting

social and professional elevation within the British colonial structures. Sam eventually dies, a sad and lonely hollow man, an Anglophile, anachronistically celebrating Empire Day even after the British have left the country. Sam's mother Maud is a character caught in a state of flux between the colonial world and an older precolonial organic world. Maud's transition to a hybrid stance is exemplified through her language, which moves from the exoticised clichés of sensationalised tourist brochures to the more exploratory reflective inner voice through which new revelations and insights are conveyed. In Maud, de Kretser creates a character who tests the boundaries of the narratives she mimics and disrupts the conventions of universal truth promulgated by the English canon. The embodiment of British ideals is broken, transmuted into a woman of fluidity who subsumes both worlds. In studying this text, I wanted my students to explore the gap between colonial rhetoric and reality. I did not know if or to what extent they might identify with the novel's characters but I thought engagement with them might prove productive.

### **Data from four sources**

Methodologically, this research includes the collection of documentary and audio-recorded evidence from my students and teacher participant observation. For convenience and immediacy of access, I chose to ask my Year 11 literature class to be my student participants for this research. Year 11 had the advantage of not being the final year of school so there was not the pressure of university entrance exams on the students. Of the 21 students, 20 accepted my invitation to participate and one declined for personal reasons.

### **First method of data generation**

Students in this literature class were asked to record their pre-study and post-study impressions of the text, *The Hamilton Case*, as part of a unit of work that all Year 11 literature classes (four altogether) were undertaking. Forming part of the regular study of a novel, these text responses were undertaken in class and each took no longer than 50

minutes (see Appendices 4 and 7 for a copy of the pre-class and post-class activity sheets). As I wished to see how they were responding to the pedagogical intervention, it was necessary to first find out how they had read the text prior to the unit of work. Individual writing was deemed the best method to explore this so that students were responding personally and without reference to the teacher, other students or other texts. The first pre-unit writing phase presented some evidence as to the concepts, vocabulary, identifications and emotions they experienced in their private ‘untutored’ experience with the text. This was then able to be qualitatively compared to their post-writing<sup>16</sup>. A comparison of the two appendices mentioned above shows that the questions, while similar, are slightly adapted to appropriately inquire into these two different stages of the learning.

### **Second method of data generation**

For the second data collection method, the class was divided into four self-selected groups on two occasions during the unit to respond to questions (see Appendices 5 & 6) about the novel and these group discussions were audio-recorded. The first of these recorded discussions took place in the seventh week of teaching the course. Because I invited the students to choose their own groups, there were different numbers in each. One group consisted of seven students, while the smallest had only three. The other two groups had five students each. Each group sat at a small table within the classroom. At the beginning of the lesson, I handed each group a digital voice recorder and checked that they knew how to use it. The first ten minutes of the lesson was spent setting up the groups, handing out the question sheets and recorders. The recordings then began and lasted for 45 minutes.

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<sup>16</sup> The risk associated with such a comparison is that discernible changes will be attributed to the intervention but potentially caused by other factors. This said, the interventionist approach under study was not of a positivist kind where cause and effect relations are of predominant interest. In this study, these pieces of student writing were triangulated with evidence from audio-recorded group discussions, everyday class discussions and semi-structured interviews. These provided a strong context within which to consider the pre and post writing.

While there were spaces between the groups, there were moments where the noise from one group interfered with the concentration of another, however, this interference seemed to be minimal and manageable. In Week 10, I once again audio-recorded the lesson using the same procedures with the same group formations.

The advantage of including group discussions as a data collection method was that the students were, to some extent, speaking just to each other and, although they were audio-recorded, seemed to forget at times that this was the case. The hope was that they would use different language and share additional stories, ideas and emotions that they might not have felt as disposed to share within a whole class discussion or an interview with their teacher. Of course, it could also be the case that some students found the group discussions inhibiting or stressful. The recordings indicated though that the students enjoyed their interactions and talked freely, some even ignoring some of the questions and substituting their own in productive ways.

### **Third method of data generation**

The third data collection method I used was 45-minute semi-structured interviews loosely following a set of questions (see Appendix 4) eliciting student responses (10 students altogether) to the pedagogic activities used to scaffold the study of *The Hamilton Case* and any shifts in their thinking and subjectivity that occurred over the course of the unit of work. The semi-structured format of the interviews was chosen for its flexibility and depth ‘providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses’ (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 88). In line with selected characteristics from Kvale’s (1996) investigation of qualitative research interviews, I attempted to foreground the nuanced and specific self-interpretations – the identity and subjectivity - of the participants, and to open up to their diverse conceptions and experiences. Kvale uses the term *focused* to refer to interviews that emphasise particular themes and are ‘neither strictly structured with standardised questions, nor entirely “non-directive”’ (Kvale, 1996,

p. 30). Thus, the interview questions were created with the research question in mind, focussing on the transnational spaces within which the participants located themselves and the implications of this for the ways they responded to the literary text. Given the teacher–student context of the interview relationship, I drew on Kvale’s (2006) cautions regarding the power asymmetries within dialogic and seemingly egalitarian interview relationships. ‘Domination and inequality can be masked through authentic and egalitarian dialogical conceptions of hierarchical and commercial social relationships’ (Kvale, 2006, p. 489). Kvale warns that teachers may overlook their power and that there is a need for vigilance in relation to hierarchical power structures despite appearances of freedom and mutuality (p. 491).

As in any study that relies primarily on participants’ voices, there is a risk of placing too much weight on voice as evidence (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). In the current study, the students may have desired to please the teacher or present themselves in a positive light. As researcher, therefore, I acknowledge the potential limitations attached to self-report. Sayings about experience may be susceptible to, *inter alia*, reference bias, social desirability bias (West, 2014; McDonald, 2008), or lapses of memory. In order to address these limitations, other possible bodies of evidence could be brought to bear. Post-school interviews with students towards determining the effects of the pedagogic intervention over time, for instance; or interviews with parents towards gathering a further set of data regarding any attitudinal or behavioural change on the part of the participants might serve as useful additional means of investigation. Given the size of the current project, however, there were difficulties attached to gathering such further evidence. The inferences about learning and change were drawn from the textual, discussion and interview data provided by participants and teacher participant observation of student engagement (as discussed immediately below) and the knowledge gained is indicative of shifts made rather than



conclusive. The nature of these shifts differed across members of the participant group and the findings are presented as partial and as an invitation to further research.

#### **Fourth method of data generation**

The fourth method of data collection was teacher participant observation. Throughout the unit, I observed student engagement and took brief informal notes as I observed the class in action, while at the same time participating as teacher. Generally, these notes were made at the end of the class or at the end of the week. It is normal teaching practice to both participate and to observe one's students to try to ascertain how much and what type of learning is taking place. As teacher-researcher, this participant-observer stance has several advantages. De Munck (1998) describes this as affording access to the 'backstage culture', beyond the normative conventional behaviours meant for public viewing (p. 43). This allows for the observation of and participation in unexpected and unscheduled events, reactions and interactions. Thus, as the teacher for the full 10 months of the school year, I have interactions with my students beyond the duration of the unit under consideration. But participant observation also has disadvantages. Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) express the concern that observation is 'always filtered through the researcher's interpretive frames' and that 'the most accurate observations are shaped by formative theoretical frameworks' (p.95). Breuer (2003) cautions about the subjective nature of participant observation and suggests finding ways to use it positively in knowledge construction (Breuer, 2003, section 3). He suggests acknowledging oneself as an 'embodied researcher, who bears social, historical, socialised, and biographical characteristics and who interacts with and intervenes in his or her research object' (section 3). Merriam (1998) echoes these concerns, also acknowledging the difficulty of recording details after the event. As I focused on the students' written and oral responses as the main sources of data, this data collection method was a less comprehensive one. However, it was one that helped

me to articulate how the pedagogy seemed to be progressing and where I needed to adapt it according to how the students were responding.

### **Issues of sampling and reliability**

As indicated above, from the responses, to both the audio-recordings and the documentary material, a purposive sub-sample of 10 students was asked to take part in 45-minute semi-structured interviews. According to Patton (1990) all sampling in qualitative research is purposive. He outlines 16 different sampling strategies for qualitative research and of these, I selected purposeful sampling which he explains as selecting ‘information-rich cases for in-depth study where size and specific cases depend on the study purpose’ (Patton, 1990, p. 182). In drawing data from the 20 students in the class, I tried to ensure identification of cases or individuals covering a range of positions and perspectives on the stimulus material and pedagogy. The original sample size of 20 students provided adequate data into which I could ‘drill down’ to find ‘thick’ and ‘rich’ data about the students’ experiences within the literature classroom. The smaller sample of 10 interviewees provided a range of student responses from those observed to have made shifts of identity (however small), to those who were observed not to have shifted. Given the culturally diverse character of the literature classroom, it was anticipated that students’ responses would vary considerably. The triangulation of three different types of qualitative data – individual written responses, group discussion transcripts and interview data - allowed me to understand the students’ experiences of the unit of work in a way that would not be possible through interview accounts or written responses alone.

However, many contemporary theorists problematise the assumptions that traditionally underlie triangulation. Lather (1986) demonstrated some decades ago through analysis of a range of qualitative research projects that triangulation of methods such as the combination of interviewing and participant observation combined with triangulation of different data sources and of different theories can build credibility for the qualitative researcher (p. 72).

She argued that rigorous ‘self-corrective’ (p. 65) mechanisms help the researcher to produce ‘social knowledge that is helpful in the struggle for a more equitable world’ (Lather, 1986, p. 67). More recently, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) have forwarded the view that researchers ‘eschew efforts to triangulate, verify, affirm, confirm and substantiate, for to do so is to seek ‘easy sense.’ (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p. 31). They reject easy sense as the result of following received methodologies and privileging experience as truth, assuming voice to be transparent. They prefer to challenge researchers to look for the ‘snags’ (p. 33), the filters or veils that censor the ignored or uncomfortable moments, the contradictory pieces of evidence that are inconvenient, that destabilise an otherwise coherent narrative. Lather (1993) is closer to this view. While still retaining the term *validity*, she recasts it: ‘[r]ather than jettisoning ‘validity’ as the term of choice, I retain the term in order to both circulate and break with the signs that code it. What I mean by the term, then, is all of the baggage that it carries plus, in a doubled-movement, what it means to rupture validity as a regime of truth’ (p. 674). Lather draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) concept of the rhizome to subvert traditional understandings of validity:

As a metaphor, rhizomes work against the constraints of authority, regularity, and commonsense, and open thought up to creative constructions...The ‘new’, however, is not so much about the fashionable as it is the creativity that arises out of social practices, creativity which marks the ability to transform, to break down present practices in favor of future ones (Lather, 1993, p. 680).

These theorists problematise the conventional positivist notion of validity, showing that the knowledges constructed from, or better with, qualitative data, arising from a specific coincidence of circumstances, people and events are contingent, often idiosyncratic and complex. However, these knowledges are still constructed to recognise the experiences and feelings of participants, ‘offering an embodied “feel” of the power of relational and affective dynamics’ (McLeod, 2017, p. 53) that operate in the unique context of the study. Giroux (2011) states that:

critical pedagogy is not about an *a priori* method that simply can be applied regardless of context. It is the outcome of particular struggles and is always related to the specificity of particular contexts, students, communities, available resources, the histories that students bring with them to the classroom, and the diverse experiences and identities they inhabit (Giroux, 2011, p.4).

For Giroux this means highlighting the performative nature of agency as an act of participating in shaping the world in which we live rather than teaching viewed as a set of strategies and skills to use in order to teach conventionally sanctioned disciplinary content. I have tried to show in this section that the version of critical transnational literary pedagogy that I am pursuing defies a concept such as *validity* in any positivist sense. While this is not a conventional way to consider validity in action research, I am bending conventional methodologies to my own purposes and to the requirements of my pedagogic situation in keeping with the Giroux's postcolonial reminder concerning the specificity of particular contexts. Lather's 'rhizomatic validity', because of its entanglements and lack of linearity, has more relevance to the embedded messiness of this type of pedagogic process.

### **Analysing the data**

Whereas humanist conceptions of subjectivity presuppose that every individual has a unique essence, the poststructuralist epistemological framework of this study proposes a subjectivity that is multiple and ever in process. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) offer an approach that attempts 'to decentre some of the traps in humanistic qualitative inquiry: for example: data, voice, narrative, and meaning-making' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. viii). This methodology involves 'thinking with theory' and working with unstable subjects and concepts-on-the-move (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p. 10). The data are 'not centred or stabilised but used as brief stopping points and continually transformed, and exceeded' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 265), as theory is used to 'turn the data into something different, and [data is used] to push theory to its limit' (p. 265). Flick (2018) also highlights the limitations attaching to the use of terms like data; 'researchers never find data *per se*, but

construct or interpret phenomena in specific ways so that they can be used (as data) in social research' (Flick, 2018, p. 2). He argues that theories are not simply discovered in phenomena but are constructed by the researchers (p. 3). From a poststructural and postcolonial perspective, no data generated for research purposes is neutral or value free. St. Pierre makes this point when she says that things or words 'become data only when theory acknowledges them as data' (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 621). Markham expresses a similar concern even more strongly:

For the qualitative researcher, data is a red herring of the brightest color. It directs our attention to objects, pieces of texts, and the outcomes of interactions rather than the interactions themselves, all the while distracting us from the point that this is not where meaning resides. Data, as an ideological concept, beguiles us to think that it is the reality, when in fact it is only a fragment or artifact, not even of the whole, but only of whatever we chose to focus on as we made decisions that led us to where we are situated (Markham, 2018, p. 10).

Since, as researchers, we are entangled with our participants and our data, the data we generate and interpret is located within a discursive, social and material context. It is deeply embedded in political and theoretical constructs, as are we and our participants.

Recognising this, Jackson and Mazzei open up multiple possibilities of analysis as they place the data in dialogue with a range of concepts, opening up investigation of the complexities of knowledge production. Thinking with theory was a useful heuristic for this research as it provided a framework to interpret and analyse the students' constructions of transnational literacy in their reading and responding, and understand the implications of viewing their responses through a series of postcolonial concepts.

Throughout the teaching of the unit of work, I was often surprised to find how prominent the word 'white' was in student's conversation. I had not predicted how large the concept of whiteness loomed for them and I realised that whiteness had been, if not invisible, considerably less visible to me, a blind spot in my dealings with the students and a product of white privilege. I came to understand that I was limited in my ability to analyse the data

by the ‘white noise’ that accompanied me on my research journey. I appropriate this term from the realm of physics to convey the interference that inhibits white hearing – that masks background noises and unwittingly imposes interpretations, assumptions and essentialisms. I use it in a parallel sense to the way I use male gaze or white gaze but here I use it to interrogate power relations between myself as white teacher and the voices of the students. To what extent does white noise mask or blur the voices I am trying to hear? Chadderton (2011) argues from a poststructuralist perspective that there is ‘a growing awareness that different researchers will generate different data from the same participants, due to the influence of factors such as race, gender, age and class’ and that a teacher-researcher ‘does not collect data as much as generate it through her own involvement’ (Chadderton, 2011, p. 6).

Reading Jackson and Mazzei generated many questions for me: In what ways do the voices of my participants exceed my ways of hearing, knowing and understanding? How are voices represented in my data discursively constructed, ideologically and socially mediated? How do I acknowledge that voices cannot be captured but are slippery, shifting, uncertain, unstable? Am I seeking only discernible voices, normative voices? How can I hear the voices that have been silenced? How might I become more alert to signs of epistemic colonisation implicit in texts and analyses?

In order to address these questions, I chose to think with both the data and different theoretical concepts towards detecting the slippages that occur when I asked students to speak in a voice that would be understandable to me. The purpose of the first loose qualitative content analysis of the data was to reveal key themes.<sup>17</sup> I decided to take Jackson

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<sup>17</sup> This initial step simply involved reading through the data first, as if it were a story. I made no markups at that stage. Then I read it several more times, locating recurring words and ideas and clustering these until these themes emerged.

and Mazzei's approach and bend it to my purposes by taking these themes as they emerged from the data and then investigating what theories might help me to analyse those themes fruitfully. This is an adaptation of Jackson and Mazzei's approach as they chose a set of poststructural theorists that they had found stimulating and provocative in their own work and then selected concepts from those theorists that would assist them to make certain methodological points. As I have no such purpose in mind, my selection of theoretical concepts emerges purely from the data. I begin with the data and the themes that arise, then investigate concepts that might offer useful ways to reflect on the data and themes. I then work between the data and the concepts that surface without privileging either. I observe how data and theory speak to each other, and how theory might be either helpful in relation to my analysis or needing moderation in the light of the emerging analysis. By running the data through different theoretical filters, foregrounding different values each time, I hoped to hear very different things. What was silenced or backgrounded within one analysis, might be prioritised in another. I hope that this method of analysis offsets some of the interference, such as the tendency to background voices that defy my assumptions, or to interpret students' words in convenient ways.

Through the various stages of analysis, identification of themes, thinking with different concepts that emerged in relation to these themes, I loosely follow a style of postcolonial discourse analysis that has its foundation in the thinking of Foucault and Said. This method of analysis is also underpinned by the understanding of discourse outlined by Usher and Edwards (1994) which foregrounds the ways a 'discourse authorises certain people to speak and correspondingly silences others, or at least makes their voices less authoritative. A discourse is therefore exclusionary' (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 90). The first phase of this approach is to become familiar with the data then identify and interpret the discourses within it (Willig, 2003). I then ask a series of questions such as: What and whose knowledges are ignored, unheard or dismissed? How does listening to and engaging with

such knowledges call into question dominant discourses? What kinds of knowledge have been deemed normal or inferior? What can and cannot be said? What is foregrounded and backgrounded? What is made problematic and what is not? What knowledges are ignored? For the first round of analysis, which is the closest to conventional qualitative analysis, I uploaded the data to the program NVivo 12 which allowed me to identify the themes. This was followed by employing the discourse analysis method and trying to ‘grasp the subjective experiences shaped by the subjects’ positions’ (Darroch & Giles, 2016, np). This critical discourse analytic approach explores the role of discourse in the constitution of subjectivity and the ways discourse is implicated in experience and makes available particular ways of being. This first phase of analysis involved identifying the broad discursive patterns that informed the students’ responses, to identify both the discursive realms that informed them and how they negotiated these. I began by doing interpretative work against the key constructs which emerged from the NVivo 12 word frequency query as significant in the participants’ discourse. I drew on this first phase of data analysis as background to the methodology of ‘thinking with theory’. It foregrounded the major themes, discourses and subject positions that I would think through with the aid of certain chosen analytical concepts from postcolonial thinkers. In subsequent rounds of analysis, I would take each of these concepts in turn and read them in conversation with the data to see how they helped me to understand the student responses.

### **Limitations and ethics**

Given that I as researcher was conducting the project and producing data from my own literature class, it might be perceived that there was a dependent relationship between the teacher and the students. However, no data collected was used for assessment purposes and as both researcher and classroom teacher, I ensured that the class was made aware that the information collected was for purposes of improving the quality of literature teaching



and enhancing opportunities to learn in the literature class. In this way, students' ability to give consent to participate was freed from pressure. As in all such research, the interaction between teacher-researcher and student is messy as both are complicit in the construction of the knowledge that emerges from the intervention. Knowledge is constructed relationally within the space. Not only was I teacher, but also participant. This situation however, pertains to all action research and while it does not lessen the value of its findings, it highlights the important need for self-reflexivity and ongoing scrutiny of the processes. As McLeod suggests, 'all research methods, including emancipatory ones ... shape the worlds they set out to investigate and do not simply provide the means for documenting them' (McLeod, 2016, p. 280).

Within the authoritative structure of school and teacher-researcher power, one limitation of this project was that the voices I was seeking exceeded my ways of hearing, knowing and understanding (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p. 45). I had to be cognisant of this throughout this work and adapt my original methodology to attempt to mitigate this risk. I began by underestimating my position of white privilege and its implications as an impediment to hearing. My own limitations of being monolingual and monocultural needed to be worked at throughout this project and beyond. The multilingual, multicultural experiences and knowledges of many of my students, aspects so often constructed as deficits in Australian public rhetoric, in fact operated as strengths and benefits. Indeed, they were the 'beating heart' of the project.

An ethical dilemma experienced in relation to this thesis, was the protection of participant confidentiality while exposing the richness of the data. As there are so few single-sex selective-entry schools in Australia, this was an important consideration throughout the research. I used pseudonyms for both the school and the students in the light of this.

## Conclusion

In research which has as a goal the contesting of canonicity, perhaps it is understandable that the canons of methodology have also to be opened up to a play of possibilities. I have had to create my own bundle of methodological tools in order to achieve my aims. To improve my pedagogical practices, I needed elements of action research as, at one level, the data produced from the students was a product of pedagogical conversation. By the time I interviewed them, their responses were produced as a result of that extended classroom conversation which created the conditions of possibility for the data. To listen intently to my students and their contexts, I needed elements of case study/participant-observation. But within a postcolonial frame, voice is deconstructed and problematised. Also, to respond to both the set literary text and the data within a postcolonial analysis I needed elements of deconstruction.

Dynamism is part of this methodology as the study I wanted to undertake did not enable reliance upon the various registers that are available in methodological textbooks. So I have put together a set of elements and assembled them according to the dynamics of the situation. This methodology, I recognise, displays elements of incompleteness, complexity, contingency and innovation. This narrative relates some moments of struggle, some of discovery, some of affirmation. It is not yet fully integrated, still in experimental stage, becoming. As a methodology therefore, it needs further research to expand its possibilities and iron out its newborn wrinkles.

## Chapter 5

### ROLE OF AFFECT IN TEXTUAL ENGAGEMENT

**‘That we are different, that we are alike’<sup>18</sup>**

*[W]hen I go to Sri Lanka, I’m from Australia, so where am I from? I know I’m born in Sri Lanka, so that makes me Sri Lankan, but at the same time, when I’m there I don’t ... they just make me feel so out of... not out of place, but like I’m from somewhere else, and like the ten years that I lived there kind of gets erased and it doesn’t count for anything ... It’s just a weird battle between how do you assimilate into someone else’s culture while maintaining your own heritage? (Anjali, Year 11 literature student).*

Anjali was born in Kandy and spent the first ten years of her life in Sri Lanka. Her mother’s side of the family has a Dutch background, but she is uncertain about her father’s ancestry. Her maternal grandmother’s forebears moved from Holland to Sri Lanka to work at a tea plantation and oversee the plantation workers, before settling in Kandy. Anjali’s grandmother still lives in Kandy in a traditional Sri Lankan house which Anjali loves and visits every year or two for a month each time. The floors inside the house are red oxide and the garden there is lush with jacaranda trees and coconut palms, as shown in the photos Anjali proudly showed me one day.

In the extract from her interview that opens this chapter, Anjali poignantly expresses, through images of erasure and battle, her sense of being beleaguered. As she speaks, the

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<sup>18</sup> Rich, 1980, p. 300.

sentences are broken – her world is split, as are her words. They enact her lost sense of place, pulling her between two worlds so that, whatever she tries to do, the intense affect – the emotions she feels that take the shape of the contact she has had with the world – remain to be addressed. Anjali’s problematical sense of cultural identity arises from the pain of being regarded as an outsider in the place of her birth. There is an intense feeling of hurt in ‘the ten years I lived there kind of gets erased and it doesn’t count for anything’. In being cut off from her history and her stories, Anjali feels her claim to being ‘Sri Lankan’ is undermined. Her sense of yearning for that ‘affective citizenship’<sup>19</sup> (Ayata, 2019; Brydon, 2007) is palpable. And in Australia, as the only non-Anglo student in her primary school year level, she has felt Othered as well. But this latter aspect is not conveyed with the same intensity, which suggests her attachment to Sri Lanka is stronger. As she reflects on her two contexts, in the light of our study of *The Hamilton Case*, Anjali’s language is seeded with binaries (us-them, Australian-Sri Lankan, home-other). Her language suggests that her concept of identity is entangled with notions of nation-state and is severely conflicted between two bounded nations. These binaries testify to the pervasiveness of nationalist and geopolitical discourses. Such discourses can include some bodies while others are disdained. They can turn some into strangers, objects of fear or hate.

Anjali’s story raises important concerns about how literature should be taught. Reading *The Hamilton Case*, a diasporic text, with themes such as mimicry and mental colonisation, has raised a range of issues, and the relationship of students to these issues, as Anjali’s case points out, involves affect. Anjali’s situation, therefore, raises the question of how she reads and how affect comes into it. The intensity of the affective charge in her words shows us

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<sup>19</sup> Brydon sees affective citizenship as “attentive to embodied political subjects and capable of challenging dominant imaginaries on a terrain that they have successfully claimed as their own: the emotional registers of the political” (Brydon, 2007, p. 997). Ayata analyses it in terms of practices of governance relating to people’s feelings toward those they identify as “alike” and those they identify as “different” (Ayata, 2019, p. 334). I am using it here as the feeling of fitting in, of the space being constructed in such a way as to include your body.

these questions cannot be ignored. So affect is much more important than we had previously assumed in canonical literature classrooms where the reading process was understood as predominantly cognitive<sup>20</sup> (Woolley, 2010). As Mulcahy argues, ‘A cognitivist bias continues to play out in education’ (Mulcahy, 2016, p. 220):

While cognitivist, constructivist and representationalist accounts take a variety of directions and follow a number of influences, they share the understanding that a traditional knowing subject lies at the heart of learning and that this subject is separable from its relations with the world (Mulcahy, 2016, p. 210).

This cognitive bias detracts from the recognition of affect in the literature classroom as enabling us to be ‘moved by literacy and using literacy to move’ (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 3). But as Anjali’s story suggests, the students’ engagement with *The Hamilton Case* often involves an intense and contradictory meld of feeling and thinking, identification with characters and analysis of them, immersion in the text and linking to their own experience. There is much more going on than the purely cognitive.

Each text orients students differently and ‘spaces are oriented around certain bodies [so that] some bodies will be more ‘in place’ than others’ (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 235). The text, *The Hamilton Case*, is affectively<sup>21</sup> relevant to many of their lives. The affective charge in the room, the flow of emotions and self-revelations, intensifies with the reading of *The Hamilton Case*. This diasporic text serves as a catalyst and demonstrates a strong relationship between the students’ reading and their identity negotiations. The remainder of this analysis concerns what happens affectively when they read this text. It shows how affect enters the process of reading and asks what is the affective economy (Ahmed, 2004c; Grossberg,

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<sup>20</sup> ‘When most children read narrative texts they actively utilise cognitive resources to comprehend by constructing appropriate mental models of story events’ (Woolley, 2010, p. 108).

<sup>21</sup> I am drawing on Ahmed’s (2004c) account of affect. Emotions take the shape of the contact we have with objects in the world. This leads to the ‘press of impression,’ as ‘not only do I have an impression of others, but they also leave me with an impression; they impress me and impress upon me.’ (Ahmed, 2004c, p.6). The contact with *The Hamilton Case* presses with greater intensity on the bodies of some, making a stronger impression.

1986) as it emerges in this particular classroom. I draw on the resources of Ahmed as I try to understand the nature and complexities of how affect operates in relation to my students.

I begin with an in-depth consideration of Anjali's story as I have found her responses to be dense with affect (Munk, Larsen, Jensen-Guenec, Bothe & Jakobsen, 2016). Here, my choice of which data to work intensively is made in relation to their affective 'pull' for as MacLure (2013, pp. 627–628) claims, 'at their most lively, examples have a kind of affective agency – a power to reach out and connect forcefully with the reader, to open up questions, and to summon more than can be said in so many words'. I then explore key moments in the data and find that the ways the students perform their identities and the ways discourses perform them are sometimes fraught with conflict. Against canonical practice, I have given the class an Asian-Australian diasporic text to read which I believe speaks better to the transnationality of their circumstances. While they read this text, it becomes clear that the reading is not only about how they analyse the text but crucially includes affect as an intrinsic part of reading. Ahmed's concept of affective economies (which I explicate in the next section) offers helpful ways to analyse what is going on in the classroom as I work with the data towards a pedagogy and an appropriate form of literacy.

### **'When you go into someone else's culture'**

During her interview, Anjali shows she recognises that being an 'Australian' is constituted by how she performs it. But rather than making choices about what she performs, it is as if an assimilationist discourse performs her (Butler, 1993). Through the repetitions of 'should' in the following excerpt, we are given access to the history of her adoption of this assimilationist discourse:

I guess it's... deciding at what point am I fully assimilated in here? But I know that if I fully assimilate ... it's like coming into the media a lot more now ... and everyone's saying that you should assimilate. And like I understand about the

assimilation thing, I get it, and I agree that you should... When you go into someone else's culture you should, especially with your living that you should, I don't know, integrate yourself into it. But I think that you should find things that you identify with their culture so that I think you can create like a sense of cultural belonging where it's not them and us. ... And maybe we should make the things that we, you know, have in common, like the pillars of our society rather than like pointing out differences, that we should just find things, yeah ... find things that we have in common and use them to our advantage.

All this, we might suspect, is an allegory of the affective power of discourse. The use of assimilationist rhetoric in this excerpt shows Anjali's interpellation by this norm. The sense of being an outsider is expressed through 'someone else's culture' and 'your own heritage'. The phrase 'pillars of our society', while changing the pronoun to 'our', nonetheless sounds like borrowed rhetoric, either from home or from school. There is a strong need to fit in, to belong, but without a sense of entitlement: and this discourse of the nation and its attendant feeling of outsider status soon performs itself as shame:

And now I think it's the same, but it was almost a feeling of like feeling ashamed, and now I'm not so much embarrassed of it ... So I think after doing this I'm not so ... I don't feel so ashamed or like embarrassed to admit that ... I don't know, that I identify with my own culture [laugh].

If shame is the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence (Ahmed, 2004c, p. 107) then Anjali has tried hard to adopt scripts of nationhood and assimilation. But she has identified with norms she perceives as repudiating her. Her shamed self has been acted upon by perceived cultural codes of citizenship and they lead her to identify with Sam, the protagonist of *The Hamilton Case*:

And that's why I identified with him so much because we both kind of just don't know where we fit in ... It's really hard ... I've always thought that when you assimilate into someone else's culture that you get maybe the same opportunities ... I see myself more as equal when I assimilate myself into this culture, and then ... I don't know, it's just like I allow myself to be entitled to the same opportunities in a way.

Thus the adoption of a different discourse, liberal multicultural rhetoric that posits assimilation as the strategy that will deliver access and opportunity, is the way Anjali breaks out of the difficulty that the binaries and norms of nationalist discourse have constructed

for her. She is aligning herself with an imagined community (Anderson, 2006), because of the emotions she feels.

Anjali's personal transnational experience has produced some negative emotions such as insecurity and shame. Her reading is inextricably bound up with her life experiences and the emotions mobilised through the reading of the text relate deeply to her own history and the emotions it generates. Sam's inability to fit into colonised Ceylonese society generates an affect that brings to the surface Anjali's own feelings of exclusion, which are embedded in historical, political and social norms. The novel as affective object both draws her to it and pushes her away. Sam is both like her and not. Her response demonstrates her sense of affective citizenship (her yearning to belong to Sri Lanka) in contrast with the standard version of citizenship ('born in Sri Lanka so that makes me Sri Lankan') which emerged in the extract which opens this chapter. A distributed sense of belonging and an emerging global consciousness might be said to be in play here. Affects do things and they move Anjali in complicated ways toward and away from both Sri Lanka and Australia because of her transnational history. Affects are 'about attachments or about what connects us to this or that' (Ahmed, 2004c, p. 11), involving movements toward or away from particular objects.

As I re-read the transcript of the interview with Anjali, I focused on the ways we become invested in social norms. In her interview, Anjali used the word 'assimilate' thirteen times. The repetition suggests this has a powerful resonance for her. She said it as though it was expected by others and she had adopted it as an expectation of herself, a norm to be followed. Drawing on Butler's work, Ahmed argues social norms are effects of repetition. The concealed power of repetition establishes certain norms as common sense. This seems to be the case in relation to assimilation discourse here. As Mulcahy (2016) expresses it, '[a]ffect is performative: these repeated phrases serve to bring into effect' (p. 218) the hope



of belonging for Anjali. Some figures<sup>22</sup> accumulate affective value because of their histories of association as emotions align individuals with particular communities and, as I have suggested, Anjali's adoption of assimilationist discourse offers her an avenue of escape. Looking at this through a postcolonial analytical lens reveals the collapse of 'a range of figures into a single figure of 'the non-Westerner'' (Munk et al., 2016, p. 9). Normative instances of orientalist patterns create affective borders for Anjali between Sri Lanka and Australia. The histories of production of these figures and the attendant emotions have already been shaped through colonial ideas and representations of the racialised, non-Western 'Other'. As Munk et al. (2016, p. 9) demonstrate, Ahmed's considerations about the fixation of certain bodies are in line with postcolonial perspectives on how the figure of the colonised is and has been portrayed.

Anjali's childhood in Sri Lanka gave her a positive view of colonialism. Because she expressed this often in class and as it went against the thrust of the text and the grain of the postcolonial approach I was using, I was interested to explore her views further and it was one of the reasons I selected her for interview. The benefits of colonial rule are clearly asserted when she says, 'In primary school we always got told that they helped us develop our railway roads, which I know we still use today, and we still have like steam-run like trains'. A tone of conviction is evident in her further affirmation, 'Yeah there is good. I don't think you can deny that... I wasn't really taught to think badly of colonial rule just because of that side of the family, but when I was at school we weren't really taught great things about it, but we knew ... they helped us to develop our society'. Implicit in her words and values, perhaps, are buried influences on her mother's side of the family of

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<sup>22</sup> 'Figures' here refers to figures of speech or tropes that have accumulated affective value within a particular community. Ahmed gives the example of the figure of the bogeyman, 'as a ghostlike figure in the present, who gives us nightmares about the future' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 123). I go on to refer to the figure of the 'non-Westerner'.

Dutch burghers. But we can also detect a negotiation between the normative values of her childhood and lessons from *The Hamilton Case* which suggested an alternative angle on colonialism, ‘they never told me anything bad about it’.

The use of pronouns in Anjali’s responses, in particular her use of the pronoun ‘I’, indicates she has been hailed by this colonialist discourse, identifying with its economic benefits. Of course, this could also be interpreted as performing a national rather than a colonial identity. Butler argues that as discourse functions constitutively creating subject-positions, the identities it activates are transient and unstable (Butler, 1993). Anjali’s early life and schooling in one country have interpellated her as a Sri Lankan subject. Her subsequent life and schooling have convinced her that in order to find acceptance, she needs to perform being assimilated into Australian society. Reading *The Hamilton Case* has shown her that being interpellated by nationalist norms may not be in her best interests and it has brought to the fore the affect of being caught-between, of ‘not fitting in’, to use her words.

This steers me towards aspects of Ahmed’s affective economies - performativity, orientation, stickiness and relationality – which are useful ways to understand what the students are feeling. Ahmed analyses affective economies as involving the circulations of words, the histories of production of those words, the concealed history behind the words and the performativity of the words in the current context. The concept of affective economies challenges the inside-outside model of emotions, which conceptualises emotions as individual and interior and as a possession of the subject. Instead, it locates affect in the flow, in the circulation of signs and emotions, and in so doing, emphasises strains of submerged histories. In highlighting the hidden history of production of words and emotions, it offers conceptual tools to investigate the work emotions do within the

classroom, how they align students with each other, with the teaching and with the wider community through the strength of their attachments.

Thinking about Anjali's responses in relation to being aligned emotionally with aspects of *The Hamilton Case*, suggests how norms have contributed to Anjali's subjectivity and to the ways she reads but it also leaves us with a question: how do these norms gain such a persistent and emotional hold? This is where Ahmed's notion of stickiness offers valuable resources.

### **'I guess I did act white': examples of orientation and stickiness**

I'm not sure why, but I sort of push away the idea of being Chinese in Australia, but then when I'm in China, I want to be included again ... I think it's just the environment. To me it's just somewhere I should be Australian and not Chinese ... So being brought up within that situation made me probably feel like acting [white] was a lot easier than like embracing my Chinese side ... Yeah. I guess I did act white, but that was because white was normal there (Sue).

For Sue, whose parents were both born and raised in Shanghai, and who came to Australia when she was six, the first line of response to typecasting seems to be to accommodate it, to meet the norms and to rehearse the role recognised as valued by the environment within which she finds herself. Sue, in these statements, seems to express a shifting and divided sense of self. As she responds here to a class discussion, she exemplifies the problems associated with being caught between stereotypes. Her image for her situation is very telling:

It's like the ugly duckling, yeah ... So he thought he was a duck, and so he wanted to be like a duck when he was around the ducks. But he wasn't and so he stood out, but he still tried to be like a duck, and he couldn't accept that he was a swan until someone else was like, 'hey look, it's okay, you're a swan, you're beautiful'.

Sue shows here how when typecasting happens enough, the stereotype created for you by others becomes fixed to your body. This image suggests that although she had oriented

herself away from being categorised as Chinese, the category of ugly duckling had stuck to her body.

Using powerful examples of racist incidents that Othered both Fanon and Audre Lord, Ahmed shows the dramatic initial impact on a body of a racist sign. Continued repetition of racist language ‘allows the sign to accumulate value’ (Ahmed, 2004c, p. 92) and stick to the body. That stickiness, the result of past histories of association, becomes a fixture of the way the body is perceived by both self and others. Given this analysis, I consider what clues there are in the students’ patterns of language for the sticking of figures together. How do emotions expressed by the students work as orientations towards objects and others? Within the classroom space, how does the circulation of affect between text, student, teacher and the wider school work? How are patterns of language being used by students to show how they have been constructed as bodies ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the nation? For instance, the students commonly speak of white students as distinct from Asian students. Do they think of the school as more inclusive of one of these groups rather than the other? How they see themselves in relation to the wider community arises in many interviews where the phrase ‘fit in’ is much repeated and seems to perform what some regard as their outsider status. How do these considerations help me to construct the classroom as a pedagogically productive space?

Kay’s response to Sam, the protagonist of *The Hamilton Case* shows us something of how she reads the text and of the work emotions do in this process:

Sam tends to see the world in black-or-white, English, or not. He has a difficult time expressing himself, saying one thing but then thinking, why do they always misunderstand me? It demonstrates his confusion with his identity. He views things non-English with disdain and constantly tries not to seem different from Westerners. I think de Kretser wrote him in this way to portray the effects of colonialism and the struggle of dual identities ... I partially understand Sam’s constant want to not appear as Other to the English. Despite being proud of my Vietnamese heritage, there are aspects I put down and may be embarrassed about. I have found it quite common for South East Asians to compare themselves to East Asians (such as Korean, Japanese) and hold them in higher

regard than their own nationality. I think this is ultimately because of Western ideals. Westerners tend to fetishise certain East Asian countries, and because of that, other South East Asians (mostly those who have immigrated to a Western country) feel inferior to them.

Like many of the students in the class, Kay both moves towards and away from Sam.

Ahmed argues that emotions are relational, involving relations of ‘towardness’ and ‘awayness’ from objects and here, Sam’s disdain for the non-English generates a response in Kay of recognising that she sometimes puts down aspects of her Vietnamese heritage.

She expresses in a muted way an affect of shame and inferiority. Naming this affect allows

her to begin thinking about why she feels it, where it came from. Her own negotiations

with her dual identity are an intrinsic part of her reading process and would not be

addressed by purely rational pedagogic processes that focus only on the text and analysis of

its literary devices. Our choice to study a Sri Lankan-Australian text in our literature

classroom perhaps means the classroom space is oriented around certain bodies rather than

others. Selecting a text that includes a different set of students from those whose bodies

and cultural history were foregrounded by studying Jane Austen’s *Emma* earlier in the year

makes visible the way the classroom space is oriented around certain bodies and how some

bodies are more ‘in place’ than others. Some students were not obviously reoriented

through this change, perhaps because, while the pedagogy focussed strongly on those with

hyphenated identities, it needed to be further developed to address the implications for

those not caught between cultural or national identities. Also, while the dialogue in the

class enacted the reality that we are all from diverse contexts and all suffer or thrive in

relation to each other, I needed to work out better ways to assist students to reorient by

developing an ethical sensibility that recognised that the exclusion of some is the

responsibility of all. Some, like Helen, say, ‘I can’t really identify with much of what’s

happening in the book personally because I’ve always lived in a place where I guess my

ethnicity is the majority'. Others, like Kay and Anjali, reacted either toward or away from this text in quite intense ways.

A body's approach to an object is never neutral. 'We may walk into a room and "feel the atmosphere"', but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival' (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 32). My classroom practice involves 20 variously marked bodies from many different backgrounds (see Appendix 1), sundry objects such as desks, chairs, whiteboards, digital devices and texts, and complex social interactions (for example, between groups such as Tamils and Sinhalese whose parents might not have spoken to each other). Involving as it does interrelations between bodies (both human and non-human), it includes acts of orientation between one body and another as objects and bodies are co-constituted in the midst of the experiential. As a result, there is continual movement, what Kidd calls 'an inherent uncertainty that forces shifts in orientation and direction' (Kidd, 2015, p. 161).

The angle of arrival for our literature students is largely derived from the cultural emphases and values given by family influence. Their families provide a background in which things happen in a certain way (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 248) and in which certain objects become familiar. These familiar objects may be all sorts of things both material and immaterial such as, values, capital, and aspirations. For many of my students, the authority of parents, the necessity of hard work and discipline and the importance of purity for girls are dominant values. Thus, to a certain extent, their orientations are 'already an inheritance' (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 248).

A commentator on the affect prompted by changing attitudes to Asians, Riz Ahmed<sup>23</sup> is a British actor, rapper, and activist of Pakistani descent. His grandparents migrated from

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<sup>23</sup> For the rest of this chapter, to avoid confusion between the two Ahmeds I will use Riz Ahmed's first and last names.

India to Pakistan during the 1947 partition of India and his parents moved to England from Karachi, Pakistan, during the 1970s. After graduating from Christ Church Oxford with a degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics, Riz Ahmed went on to study at London's Central School of Speech and Drama. As an activist, he is known for the political nature of his films and rap music. In a chapter on being labelled as a terrorist, Riz Ahmed (2016) states, '[T]he fluidity of my own personal identity on any given day was further compounded by the changing labels assigned to Asians in general' (Ahmed, 2016, p. 159). In the same way, the circulating affect for our students often involves what Burman (2010) describes as, 'transnational desires' (Burman, 2010, p. 10). Transnational desires are, she argues, produced through often resistant encounters with structures of power such as racialised class systems and national migration policies. 'They are also produced through encounters with the promises of global capitalism, which include the promise of social mobility and fulfilment through commodity consumption' (Burman, 2010, p. 10). We see in the students' responses evidence of the affective ways they desire to belong, and at the same time, implicit in these responses, are the complex workings of colonialism, neoliberalism, and other frames that structure normative life. Orientation is then, largely, a product of the history of production of the labels ascribed to your body.

A 'sticky' affect relates to an object's orientation, or its embeddedness in a given setting. As stickiness suggests, 'negative' affects are associated with an object that distances itself from the body, whereas a 'positive' object arouses a desire for a closer proximity—as if to touch it (Ahmed, 2010a, p.32). So, for Sara Ahmed, the concepts of stickiness and orientation are intertwined as attachments are formed on the basis of orientations towards or away from certain objects. Affect's sticky character maintains connections between bodies (both human and non-human) which in turn generate common orientations towards objects.

For thinking with stickiness, I adopt the three-stage conceptual framework provided by Riz Ahmed (Ahmed, 2016, p. 160) in order to investigate where the students are in relation to the labels they perceive to be sticking to them. Riz Ahmed employs the metaphor of a necklace and each of the three stages he describes involves a different relationship to the necklace. He introduces it in this way:

As a minority, no sooner do you learn to polish and cherish one chip on your shoulder than it's taken off you and swapped for another... You are intermittently handed a necklace of labels to hang around your neck, neither of your choosing nor making (Ahmed, 2016, p. 160).

Riz Ahmed has found in his personal experience that the labels in the necklace are changed by history. National and international events can make the necklace either looser or tighter. In particular, for him, the 'post 9/11 necklace tightens around your neck' (Ahmed, 2016, p. 162).

The three stages he presents are as follows:

- Stage One is the two-dimensional stereotype – the minicab driver/terrorist/corner shop owner. It tightens the Necklace.
- Stage Two is the subversive portrayal, taking place on 'ethnic' terrain but aiming to challenge existing stereotypes. It loosens the Necklace.
- Stage Three is the Promised Land, where you play a character whose story is not intrinsically linked to his race. There, I am not a terror suspect, nor a victim of forced marriage. There, my name might even be Dave. In this place, there is no Necklace (Ahmed, 2016, p.160).

In a partial identification with the character of Sam in *The Hamilton Case*, who yearned to belong to English society but was rejected because of the labels seen as attached to his body, many of the participants in the current study focused on 'fitting in'. Tia, for instance, reported in a classroom discussion:

Usually I feel like I fit in quite well, but then if I actually think about it and their (her parents') effect and their teachings on me, I think it does make a bit of a difference... I feel like it's very interesting too, like 'cause it's kind of like my roots too, like I might be born here, but at the same time, all my relatives are at China.



The pull towards two different traditions is being negotiated so intersecting orientations are operating. She reports tension in her past in relation to this duality:

when I was really young I didn't want to be seen as Chinese. So they would have a Chinese group in school, and I was like I'm not part of that group, I have my own group with like Western people and people who aren't Chinese, and I don't know, it was just embarrassing to like Chinese things like you know K-Pop and all that when I was young, but now ... I like it.

Tia, here, has not felt 'in place' as part of the Chinese community and has felt she needed to renounce this affiliation so as not to be out of place in her school community. There was a general murmur of agreement in the room when she said this and everyone started talking together suggesting this was a feeling many of the class shared. This is an example of how the affective economy of the classroom worked as a sort of affective community generated by Tia's disclosure. The feeling the students shared are reminiscent of Riz Ahmed's statement that 'you are a type whose face says things before your mouth opens; you are a signifier before you are a person; you are back at Stage One' (p. 163). Tia tries to resist having the Chinese label stuck to her as she interprets that label in a negative way and attempts to replace it with a Western label. She seems to have felt the community was oriented around other bodies and identifying with the Chinese group would have meant forfeiting belonging. Riz Ahmed observes that 'rehearsing a scene beds a role into you' (Ahmed, 2016, p. 166). Many of the students express this need to fit into the identities dictated by the stereotypes as Samantha indicates when she says in a group discussion:

I felt the need to be like one of those stereotypes you see in the films. I was a bit lost. Like, 'I really don't fit into any of them what is wrong with me?' and I was a bit confused I was like, 'I want to do this but I'm this person.' I guess this unit has just made me think a little bit more about it. It's like people actually don't fit into those stereotypes and all along I knew that but I wanted to have this sense like I wanted to belong to something.

The flow of feeling during these exchanges was intense and the extent of self-revelation was often surprising. Tia's rejection of her Chinese identity, which Riz Ahmed would label 'Stage One', was changing as she matured: 'but then as I grew older, and the more I

understood, the more I talked to my mum, I realised it's actually really useful, and I can like all that stuff without being judged'. This attitude was shifting back a bit now at a school where Chinese are not such a minority and in relation to the reading of *The Hamilton Case*. She noted during one discussion that Sam being not self-aware made her want to be more self-aware and to avoid rejecting important aspects of herself. There seems to be an emerging sense of hybridity, a re-orientation in relation to her reading of the text:

It's like who am I really? Am I more Chinese or am I Australian? And I feel like for us it's a bit confusing because our parents are from China, and I was born here, and before I used to really reject that culture because I thought it was kind of embarrassing to speak Chinese or whatever, but now it's like I can appreciate it, and it's kind of hard to toe the line between the two, but at the same time I feel like I can appreciate both.

This seems to reflect Riz Ahmed's comment that his own personal identity moved in relation to changing Asian stereotypes. While Tia has been trapped in *Stage One* for much of her school life, there seems to be a developing transnational sensibility, a sense of the in-between. If, through a postcolonial lens, we consider the labels inscribed on Tia's body as shaped by multiple histories, past histories of association between Chinese bodies and, for instance, the White Australia Policy<sup>24</sup>, we can critique normative instances of orientalist patterns which create borders between 'the West' and 'the Orient.' As we see the students embedded in the logics of binary thinking and struggling to break free from the tight necklaces that threaten to constrain them, we see the need for a pedagogy which offers language and concepts which cut across the borders of the nation, and is anchored across multiple locations socially, culturally and geographically.

Such a pedagogy, the data suggests, would need to challenge the single story of one cultural narrative. As Riz Ahmed puts it:

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<sup>24</sup> The White Australia policy was a series of acts passed by the newly formed Australian government in 1901 with the goal of maintaining a white, British national character in Australia. It was in place for seven decades and leaves many traces in Australian politics and society.

I tried not to ingest all the signs telling me I was a suspect. I tried not to buy into the ... Stage-One stereotype of who I was. But when you have always molded your identity to your environment and had your necklace picked out by others, it's not easy (Ahmed, 2016, p. 166).

Sara Ahmed maintains spaces are shaped by the bodies that tend to inhabit them. And yet, it is not always decided which bodies inhabit which spaces, even when spaces extend the form of some bodies and not others (Ahmed, 2010b, p.252). In Sue's case, she tried to smother the various routes by which she had constituted her identity by orienting herself to the single story of her Australian 'side' in the belief that the social space she inhabited was shaped to Australian bodies which were not marked as Chinese, while Chinese bodies were conceived as 'ugly ducklings'. Sara Ahmed explores how we are touched by 'what comes near' (Ahmed 2010a, p. 30) and for students whose starting point is a family orientation towards a culture that is not the mainstream culture of the school, affect is often connected to emotions and feelings associated with belonging and fear of exclusion. Kouri-Towe (2015, p. 30) comments that affect 'conceptualises subjectivity and belonging through the points of encounter', raising questions about what belonging means and how we achieve it. Sue's relocation to Atwood High School, her reflection on her previous experiences and her conception of her new community as shaped by a greater variety of bodies and possibilities, lead her to a reorientation:

So previously it was more like intense for me, like I really wanted to be Australian, and I was like I have to be really good at English to be Australian and I will, and I don't want to be Chinese, I don't want to learn Chinese. But then later I guess... well a lot of people were like 'no, look it's okay to be Chinese as well', and then I just started being more Chinese.

But this is a qualified change. The oppositional thinking implied in the word, 'side' (in her extract at the beginning of this section) persists here as binaries so prevalent in mainstream political discourse in Australia retain some of their hold on her: 'Yeah but my subjects are

more like my Australian side because I thought it was really important to choose at least one of every stream<sup>25</sup>.’

Another student whose parents emigrated from China, Amy, also talks about aligning herself with ‘Western’ bodies and values:

I don’t want to believe that, but I think just like some decisions I make do lean towards like white supremacy thing almost ... Yeah, and like I reckon before this year, I was always like I’m pretty Western, like I’m Western, I want to be Western and I am Western. And I don’t know, this year after studying this unit, I think that’s kind of like faded a little bit ... There’s a bit not of like self-realisation, like ‘oh my God I have been doing like narrative patterning and I have been shutting out my Chinese culture’.

The strong phrase, ‘white supremacy’, suggests Amy interprets the label attached to her Chinese side as signifying inferiority. Immediately after reflecting upon this inferiority, she shows the affective force of this through repetition of the claim of being ‘Western’.

Affective force is amplified through language. As Dawney (2011, p. 601, original emphasis) claims, ‘language can operate *as* affect: it has the power to impact materially on the body, to course through and between bodies’. It is suggestive of the affect Riz Ahmed refers to when he says, ‘In this situation, you’re all fighting to graduate out of a reductive purgatory and into some recognition of your unique personhood. In one way or another, you are all saying, ‘I’m not like the rest of them.’ (Ahmed, 2016, p. 163). Similarly, Amy’s repeated assertion of her Westernness represents her claim that she can be a success in her current society. Her reference to narrative patterning, a term from the novel set for study, *The Hamilton Case*, shows the power of a freeing vocabulary. While there are dangers in applying any given framework as it can lead to categorical or formulaic judgments, I find it helpful to consider her response in relation to Riz Ahmed’s stages. The recognitions afforded through the narrative patterning allow her the agency to resist the sticky labels and could be

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<sup>25</sup> In a context where most students chose the “Asian five” –Maths, Chemistry, Physics, Biology and English – this was a significant statement.

seen as a shift from typecast to subversive. *The Hamilton Case* has reminded Amy, through Sam's adoption of British culture, of her own childhood reading that had a similar effect to Sam's response to his upbringing:

When I was little, I used to read books by Enid Blyton, and she's very English and I used to be like oh, that's so cool, I want to be like English ... And do you know the St Claire series? ... Yeah, in one of the books he's talking about like the English sense of honour, and I was like, oh I want to have like the English sense of honour and all that sort of stuff.

If attachments and alignments are a result of the orientations we take to objects and others, then the angle of their arrival at school, given largely by the influence of the family background and culture, has predisposed these students to perceive themselves as not quite 'in place' (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 235). They therefore feel the need to work towards positioning themselves as one of the bodies around which the space seems to be shaped. Ahmed maintains the role of feelings in mediating the relation between individual and collective bodies is complicated as 'feelings rehearse associations that are already in place' (Ahmed, 2004b, p.39). Thus, the ways in which they respond to the proximity of others are shaped by histories that stick, 'at the same time as they generate the surfaces and boundaries that allow bodies to appear in the present' (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 39). The promise of 'fitting in' seems to these students to be predicated on behaviours and appearances imagined as 'Western'. It is located in the production of images of success and unanimity promoted by Western governments and media and by neoliberal slogans within a society that advertises itself as a multicultural success (Soutphommasane, 2016, np). Behind this promise is a process of concealment that hides inequality and dissonance. It also hides histories of production of figures of 'Western' and 'non-Western' and the ways such labels become attached to bodies. The promise of fitting-in 'plays a neo-liberal trick, placing responsibility on the individual' (Downes, 2012, p.232) to fit in and adapt to the previously existing social norms as though long histories of representations of racialised, non-Western Others had never occurred.

Katie lived in Sri Lanka until she was eight years old and seems very oriented towards a perhaps idealised past in Colombo:

I grew up in a small village ... My house was near the beach and it was always fun. ... And I always loved it ... I was mainly surrounded by my family because ... our land was divided into my dad's brothers and sisters ... I wish I grew up there more than here...It's more free I guess. When I was there, I didn't really know much about the world, and I was just free and just running around and playing. ... Now I'm here, I feel sort of caged, like I only have one cousin here, and she lives eighty kilometres away from me, so I hardly see her sometimes, and I just miss that closeness with my family.

Katie contrasts the sense of community she felt in Sri Lanka with her sense of isolation (played down) in Australian schools: 'Yeah, a bit left out, but it was good. Sometimes I felt included...Well there was a bit of bullying but other than that it was alright [laugh].' In relation to her Australian school experiences, Katie does not name the labels, in fact almost denies them through understatement ('a bit left out, but it was good'). Her disavowals suggest some repression and imply a hidden narrative of negative affect which is conveyed in the sadness of her tone and her eyes when she mentions the bullying. By contrast, in relation to Sri Lanka, she talks about fun and freedom. This is juxtaposed with her current experience: 'Here I feel caged.' We are left to deduce the exact nature of the labels but it is clear she feels Othered and restricted. At Atwood High School, she states that she feels more connected to other students of Sri Lankan background: 'and I feel that I can talk to them about back there ... because they all had the same sort of experience as me...Most of them grew up there as well, and we sort of connect over that as well.' She feels that compared to her Sri Lankan cousins, she is 'more free thinking and a bit crazy' while they are 'more focused and calm I guess.' Katie explains this difference as, 'Since I moved here, I'm obviously exposed to a lot of ideologies ... [laugh]. So I don't think I would be me ... if I wasn't influenced by that'. She responds to the novel in terms of her childhood memories: 'I remember the trees and the forest and the mountains, yeah. ... Yeah, so it was easy to imagine because I've seen it in real life'.

We can detect the affect of yearning, the need for coherence and consistency, the simplicity of her childhood worldview. We can hear a strong orientation towards Sri Lanka and away from Australian society, which she perceives as having offered competing ideologies and confusion. In Australia she has had a freedom she describes as ‘though I had that open mind to not feel restricted, I felt like it overpowered me sometimes where I wish I had control of it, but I didn’t [*laugh*]’. Within Riz Ahmed’s framework, Katie has not embraced the second stage of the subversive but seems to be located on ‘ethnic terrain’ (Ahmed, 2016, p. 160) but without the confidence to challenge stereotypes. There is ambivalence in Katie’s use of the binary ‘caged’ and ‘free’ that supports this way of hearing her.

The concept of orientation is emerging as very important for this thesis as it reminds us that subjectivity has a context and a history and that the way people read is, to a significant extent, a product of that history. Just as Fanon inspired writers to foreground local voices and give them deep background, so Sara Ahmed’s concept of orientation can remind teachers that the way students are oriented to texts, concepts or knowledges is a product of their previous encounters with those texts, concepts and so on. But what is left out of most postcolonial accounts is the way the discourses and their repercussions circulate emotions that have material and visceral effects that impel them either towards or away from other bodies. Student orientation, in my experience, has been largely ignored in traditional literature classes. Thinking about affective economy from a postcolonial point of view suggests how important orientation is as part of responding to the world and, in the classroom, to the texts and each other. For students such as Katie, the process of responding to characters and texts might be thought to be more material (corporeal) than mental (cerebral) which is how conventional literary responses tend to be made. Moreover, how students feel about how their bodies are perceived in relation to national, gender or race norms becomes pertinent when studying postcolonial diasporic texts. Student

orientation to the text influences how they feel about studying it and, hence, their ability to interpret it.

Anne's first experience at Atwood High School felt disorienting, as though she was somehow an outsider, somehow not 'in place':

The first thing that happened to me when I walked into school... oh this is shocking.... [laugh] ... this girl was like to me, 'oh you're white', like that's actually first thing that was said to me when I walked in, and I was like 'what the hell?' [laugh] because I don't know ... I don't think that I've really racially bullied anyone ever.

Whether as a consequence of this, or because it was more characteristic of her, Anne gravitates towards 'white girls': 'I thought I was just going to stick really to like white girls. I thought oh if I see some white girls'. This alignment in terms of body markings seems to be accepted as common sense, despite her shock at being 'racially bullied' which, given the data, is a strong claim. Her shock might be understood as her surprise, given her position as a white student, part of a racial minority in a school where the majority of students were from the many Asias. With reference to the set novel, also, Anne responds in terms of racial binaries, making the implicit assumption that if one is not white, one is not British. When speaking of the protagonist, Sam, in *The Hamilton Case* she remarks, 'his skin colour is like [laugh] and you would be able to tell that he's not British, well strictly British or whatever... white skinned.' The qualification suggests embarrassment at the racial assumptions. But, her repetition of the word 'white' 17 times during her interview and her discussion of friends defined by their body markings suggests a pervasive undercurrent in her thinking. 'I had a really good friend, like a white girlfriend called Lindsay, but she left, and I think she was really... she was probably the most similar to me ... So... it's actually just weird for me'. While Anne affirms her group of Chinese friends, the concealed power of repetition has established certain norms as common sense. Certain figures such as



Lindsay have accumulated affective value because of their histories of association that have aligned her with particular communities.

But when Anne talks about her boyfriend, a change is registered. She introduces him with some embarrassment: 'Well I guess it's because like in Australia we've been colonised... like Aboriginals have been destroyed basically, and oh my boyfriend, he's Aboriginal [laugh] which is weird'. A few sentences later, she added:

He gets really offended over certain things that I wouldn't really think he'd get offended by, like he says ... I was with him and someone asked him like, 'so how much Aboriginal are you?' And he said, 'I'm Aboriginal ... like what do you mean?' Like there are certain things that ... but like it's all like ... it's not like ... even the whole concept of race is kind of stupid because I probably have more biologically to do with someone who's not even of the same race necessarily ... So race is kind of stupid.

Her face flushed as she said this and it seemed she was feeling her boyfriend's anger. When questioned about this, she agreed it was so. In responding to and empathising with her boyfriend's experience, Anne challenged the binaries and the constructs that had been implicit in her language until this moment. Her orientation to her boyfriend undercut some of her assumptions. But Anne did not transfer her learning to her relationships with her classmates. With them, she maintained an assumption of white normativity, even, perhaps, an expectation of dominance, as evidenced by her statement when asked had she been changed by being part of such a diverse school population. She replied, '[laugh] It's kind of ... I think that my friends ... more of my friends are trying to meet me rather than I'm trying to meet them'. This indicates that while she entertained a new way of seeing race in relation to her boyfriend, it did not lead her to construct herself differently as an object of knowledge. It leads me to reflect that the understanding of diverse cultures is centrally important to cultivate in students who identify as part of the mainstream. Unlearning privilege goes hand in hand with challenging disprivilege and is about relating as much as knowing. While no significant shift in Anne's personal identity seems to be evidenced in

her interview responses, nevertheless, the intensity of the affect demonstrated in relation to her boyfriend suggested the power of affect as an impetus to learning. Perhaps such a focus on the power of affect might open a way for the pedagogy to begin bringing Anne towards unlearning her cultural privilege as a step towards achieving transnational literacy.

### **Attending to embodied affect**

So far I have focused on words and discourses rather than affect expressed through the body. But Anne's flushed face leads me to think more about how affect is manifested in more material ways. To help with this, I employ Gilligan & Eddy's (2017) listening guide in which 'others are approached not as subjects for assessment but as experts on their own experience' (p. 77). This guide specifies three successive 'listening,' each guiding a different path through the narrative. The first listening surveys the landscape of the interview and notes the plot of the story being told. It charts repetitions, images and emotional hotspots. The account I have already given of Anjali's life story with its images and repetitions is a response to this first listening. The second listening, the writers call listening for the I-poem and this concentrates on how the speaker expresses her own actions and beings. By separating out each I-phrase (subject and verb) from the story, the speaker's movements, tonal changes, regressions, and contradictions can be exposed. From Anjali's I-poem, two phrases jumped out as conveying the most intense affect: 'I'm never going to be Australian; I'm not born here'. But an interesting aspect of Anjali's interview emerged as I logged her I-poem. Some of her most revealing comments are expressed in the second person 'it's a bit nauseating when you're asking yourself where you belong and you don't know' and 'up to what part are you just a victim, and then at what point... like at what moment do you become ... do you allow yourself to be the victim?' At these moments of intense feeling, Anjali spoke slowly, looked vulnerable, in one or two moments sounded close to tears. Perhaps using 'you' rather than 'I' is an attempt to push back the feeling and contain it.

When she asks, 'how do you assimilate into someone else's culture while maintaining your own heritage', the second person voice perhaps serves to fend off the difficulty, the lack of answers. But with the sentence 'in certain situations that you're in that really make you feel like you're neither here or there, but you're just kind of in the middle', it seems more as though she is looking at herself from the outside. There is operating here what we might call an affect/discourse (Wetherell, 2013, p. 361) as a result of the norms Anjali feels are imposing on her. As the next point she makes is that 'everyone's saying that you should assimilate', this intuition seems to be supported.

The third listening Gilligan and Eddy call 'Listening for Contrapuntal Voices'. This step involves listening for different voices and their interplay. Two voices that sound distinct in Anjali's voice are the vulnerable, melancholy voice and the intense, battling voice. In the following quote, Anjali expresses the difficulty of being caught between two cultures, two homelands: 'the cost for me is a lack of cultural identity. So I have to let some of it maybe go. It's a *weird* (strongly emphasised) thing that ...I don't think people give it enough credit ... It's really hard'. The emphasis on 'really hard' was followed by a pause conveying intense feeling. This vulnerable voice, seemed present throughout the interview but was often submerged within a faster-paced reasoning or rationalising voice that tried to find solutions to her problem: 'when you go into someone else's culture, especially when you're living there, you should try to, I don't know, integrate yourself into it'. There is a sense of battling in this faster, intense voice, a sense that there has to be a way through the pain of not fitting in. When she says, 'when you're the only person of your background in a group of people, you kind of... you kind of close off that side of you that's different because you don't want to stand out, and you want to like blend into the group', she shows she has adopted a strategy for survival. This third listening step 'not only picks up on what is being said, and being said differently at different times, but it is also sensitive to what is not being said or what may be silenced' (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017, p. 79). And perhaps what is silenced

in Anjali's attempts to reason her way through her situation is the deep sadness her body and her eyes convey even while her voice works towards reasonable answers.

### **Choosing to read differently**

On one occasion, late in the unit, I divided the class into groups, and gave them a set of questions (see Appendix 6) on the theme of identity in relation to the text. One group decided to totally ignore my questions. They chose to each tell their identity story and share their experiences. They worked in between the formal requirements of the class and their own needs and desires, in between the text and their own lives. While established literary reading practice valorises the idea that literary responses can be constructed by rationality alone, the students' relationship to the text includes the 'push-and-pull of feelings that live in bodies (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 1). In this particular class, I had set questions, expecting them to read in the traditional literary-critical, analytical way but this group disrupted my strategy. Because of the affect involved, they resisted my process. They ignored the traditions of reading because they wanted the opportunity to read differently. They chose to co-construct their learning processes and do it together in their own ways, and in moving away from canonical processes, interesting things emerged.

Much of what is happening in thinking the data relationally occurred in between the students' stories and viewpoints. It occurred in apparently random asides, in interruptions to the trajectory of the lesson or conversation, in the evolving relationships within the classroom. The so-called relational turn (Selg, 2016) challenges the Cartesian conception of individual, autonomous subjects and instead affirms the primacy of relationships in how subjects are constituted. This underlying relational ontology underpins Ahmed's concept of affective economies that relies on an account of individuals as woven into contexts and of knowledge as produced in relation to others. Reading the data with this concept in mind leads us to think of literacy as involving an affective encounter. Knowledge is constructed,

on this view, as a mutual endeavour and students are not receivers but co-producers of meaning. Thinking with relationality invites us to see the flow within the classroom between people, objects, ideas and values as emerging and evolving. In the following excerpt, affect is generated between cultures, between the text and personal histories, between past stories and present experiences:

- Anna: I feel really bad that we've missed out on the Indian, for me, the Indian side of our culture because there's a lot to it. I feel like going into the Western culture I was kind of suppressed -
- Georgia: Lost.
- Anna: I lost a lot of elements of Indian culture but the Western people might see it as very
- Katie: Integration kind of.
- Carol: Moving forward or whatever.
- Chala: Moving forward.
- Anna: That's not my point. I was saying Western people might see Indian culture as different and not very enhanced as them but the thing is there's a lot of elements to Indian culture which they aren't exposed to. There's something quite special and precious about the culture and we don't know anything about that.
- Chala: That's kind of sad.
- Anna: It's quite sad seeing that we've kind of lost our roots.
- Chala: I didn't actually realise this until this book.
- Anna: Yes and as I'm growing up I realise ... how I've got a great appreciation for my culture and my ethnicity and what my parents were born into ... and how they lived. But then now that I've been put through the Western education I have lost a lot of that so I'm hoping that as I grow older I try to get back some of that.
- Chala: Yes same.

From this extract, we can identify an emerging transnational sensibility that appears to cohere around the interactions between members of the group. Within this, the sharing of their histories as inspired by the text could be interpreted as an example of literacy practice. This practice could be seen as shaped socially and culturally, building in part from the students' memories of where they had lived previously and their experiences of negotiating their hybridised identities. The strongest affect here seems to be the regret for lost possibilities, lost aspects of their histories and identities. Approaching literacy as an

affective encounter focuses the ‘fluidity, affect, and emergence’ (Burnett & Merchant, 2018b) generated by the students, the text and the classroom setting as they come into relation. This discussion might be viewed as an affective flow mobilised by reading the text. Anna, in her post-course writing (as described in Chapter 4) shows the ways the text has created questions for her about why she thinks and feels as she does:

Being of Indian background, I’ve known that my ancestry was affected by colonisation and the general aftermath. But this book has made me think of the present, especially since I’m not as connected to my heritage as my parents would have been; I start to wonder whether my character, that I’ve built up over the years, may have been a product of colonisation of the mind. I realise that we process our thoughts according to what we ingest through reading, so does that mean I’m completely Westernised as I’ve been fed through the Australian high school education? Do I also have characteristics of Sam which I’m oblivious to having never been schooled in the country of my birth? Then it led me to question the foundations of these thoughts. Would I have never had this conflict prior to reading this book?

Emotions are shaped through our contact with others and the impressions that contact leaves upon us (Ahmed, 2004c, p. 6). The novel, in leaving these impressions on Anna, leads her to experience emotions of conflict, of doubt and uncertainty. An impression involves emotions, thoughts and bodily sensations (Ahmed, 2004c, p. 6). Anna’s reading of the text takes place within the affective economy of the wider Australian education system, her parents and their heritage, the text as an object she both moves towards and yet away from. There is a hint of anger at the end of her words as if she resents feeling unsettled and disturbed. This is a different affect from the one mobilised by the group discussion. There, the affect is pain of loss followed by hope for transformation in the future. In the group discussion, there is a sense of a convergence of orientations to the space. The feeling of being together also seems to be a significant part of what is emerging. Of course, there are risks in claiming clarity about the affect here. This sequence of interactions is cut off from the flow of classroom life, from the social and political lives outside the classroom, and the narratives the students share carry traces of different times and places. These play out in what happens, and flow into the present moment and the current setting:

Katie: To me I don't really know where I am. I don't know if I'm a Sri Lankan or Australian. I'm just on the fence. Sometimes I feel like I'm Sri Lankan sometimes leaning towards Australia but I don't know it's confusing ...

Anna: Because we're all first generation.

Katie: Yes.

Anna: I bet our kids, kids' kids they'll be like, 'We're totally Australian what are you talking about?'

Carol: 'Australian mate'.

Anna: So we're just like the middle grey zone.

Carol: And our parents are - if your parents were born overseas they're all that traditional.

Anna: They identify ... with that ethnicity.

Carol: It's just us, our generation.

Anna: It's our first generation we're like, 'Where do we belong?'

Chala: No I feel like they identify themselves according to their origin but the thing is when they move to a place they don't adapt well to that place. They just say, 'We're just living here' but our culture is really the place that we came from.

The parents who migrated and remain, as the students see it, embedded in the cultures of their homelands, cannot offer guidance through this caught-between feeling that the students are expressing. They rely on each other to process their current situations and make sense of them relationally. They seem to feel as though they are forging new ground and they express the attendant confusion and uncertainty, the affect that results from not knowing how your body fits into a given space.

"Thinking relationally prompts us to keep interrogating what is going on and to seek out other stories of what is folded into the flow of activity" (Burnett & Merchant, 2018b, p. 7). Here the parents' stories are folded into the students' accounts and we can detect parental anxiety that students might be excluded and that a high level of English literacy might serve to fend off this threat:

Carol: when I came here my parents got upset that I wouldn't interact with the rest of the kids, the rest of the white kids. They were like, 'You have to you're going to be working here when you get older so you have to learn the language' and stuff like that. They wouldn't let me speak Malayalam at home they were just like, 'You can only speak English'. I

couldn't speak Malayalam so I've been speaking English at home for the past how many years and now I can't get my tongue around a word of Malayalam.

Anna: Same. I can't speak Konkani and my parents have been trying to get me to speak it and I can't.

Carol: Exactly and it's so upsetting. I tell them every day; 'Look what you made me do' – I'm so upset right now.

Chala: But the thing is it's a balance. When you try and go towards the English you are sacrificing your other language. For example, in your case you wanted to become more English and your parents were looking towards your brighter future in the English sense but you have to sacrifice your Malayalam.

Carol: Are you saying you can never have an equal balance of both cultures?

Georgia: So there's no binary you can either be this or that there's no shade of grey in between?

The parents' desires are in play now with the students' sense of loss and the students battle to find a way to reconcile these competing demands and desires. In every action they take, something is sacrificed, something else gained. They find solace in the shared affect – 'same', 'exactly and it's so upsetting' – as they talk their way to some sort of understanding, some way to make sense of it all. The memories they have of other places, other life-worlds contribute strongly to the affective flow within the group:

Chala: You know how people stereotype - not stereotype like when they think of India they think they don't want to go there it's sort of third world and they don't see why I would like to go there but I love going there. Whenever we go there it's like ...

Anna: I sometimes wish that I could live like my parents grew up.

Chala: Yes...

Carol: so it was a massive house. My dad and both my parents have many cousins so they all lived in the house with the cousins and they grew up with their cousins -

Anna: That's like me.

Carol: they've played with their cousins outside in the garden things like that and that was my childhood at the very start -

Anna: Same.

Chala: Same.

Carol: when I lived in India for those couple of years. Then when I moved to Mauritius I lost that. Completely lost contact with my cousins and came here to Australia. Nothing, like literally the last time I talked to a family member was probably five months ago.



Chala: That's bizarre.  
 Anna: The thing is I'm like that too. I grew up in the middle there were five houses like my house, my uncles, my other uncles, my other aunties so all my cousins were around us and I grew up with them. I didn't feel like they were cousins they were more like my brothers and sisters.  
 Carol: Yes or my best friends.  
 Anna: Yes we were all so tight and I was just like me and then I came here and I lost so much of my childhood.  
 Georgia: Connection.  
 Anna: Yes connection.

In these literacy encounters, 'multiple potentialities exist and meanings may be felt or sensed as well as cognitively realised' (Burnett & Merchant, 2018b, p. 8). This excerpt leads us to focus more on the new collaborations and understandings the students are forging as they share their search for meaning. These emerge in the midst of the in-betweenness, as they share and hence put their own experiences into the flow of affect in the room.

Different intensities are generated through this conversation and dynamic, unpredictable affects and meanings arise. You can almost feel the relief generated by the sharing and mutual understanding. The repetitions of 'yes', 'same' and 'connection' underline this emerging affect. The affect of grief at the loss of a valued way of life is expressed through detailed examples and is gradually moved aside by the sense of relationship, the building of connection within the group. This processing of experiences and negotiation of identity is literacy at work in this classroom. While the text seems to have faded into the background, it provides the occasion for this sharing and reflection.

Sara Ahmed affirms that how a space is occupied is political. Who claims the space? Dominates it? Who is included? Left out? What bodies 'fit' here? What don't? How as teacher can I ensure a space where all the bodies of my students are included? In this excerpt, the students show the importance of the relationality of their group process to their sense of how their bodies fit and their construction of knowledge in this space:

Anna: I hate the question where do you come from.  
 Georgia: So do I.

Anna: I'm like, 'What do you mean by where do you come from? Where I was born or where I've lived most of my childhood or where I was -'

Carol: I culturally feel like I'm Indian.

Anna: Yes, '- or where I've done most of my primary education because then that would be Mauritius ...'Where were you born? India. ... Where I've learned English and stuff? That's the Gold Coast. Where I live currently? That's Atwood so what do you want me to tell you? What do you mean where am I from? That doesn't make sense'.

Chala: I've got a question for you guys. When you're surrounded by only white people - that's racist but -

Georgia: No that's me in primary school.

Chala: The thing is at Atwood High School, you've got to say I'm surrounded by a lot of Indians and Sri Lankans and also Asians, Australians. A lot of people from our origin but what our family ancestry is so it's not like we're surrounded by Western people but when you go -

Georgia: I've forgotten to type.

Chala: They're all first generation - most of them are first generation as well.

Anna: Most of us are first or second generation we're not -

Georgia: We can all relate to each other. I love this.

Chala: Yes.

Anna: We're not fifth generation Australian so when you're surrounded by fifth generation Australians do you feel Australian? That's the question.

Chala: I don't feel Australian.

The affect is so strong here that Georgia has forgotten her role as scribe and has neglected to write. She exclaims, 'I love this', showing the dominant affect for her is about the relationship itself. In forging a shared understanding, they are creating a space where their bodies do feel as though they fit; where at least some of the labels attached to their bodies are becoming ones that they are mutually negotiating. The text then, although in the background of this discussion (it has been, however, the focus of class discussion and analysis for over four weeks) serves as a catalyst for the students to express, share and process emotions that have been mobilised by current Australian norms but do not usually form part of conventional literary pedagogy in canonical literary classrooms. The 'non-rational investments that readers bring with them to texts and tasks' (Janks, 2010, p. 211) constitute an important part of how they read. These investments are demonstrated powerfully here in the students' decision to bracket off the text from their discussion and

share the transnational histories and experiences that they are still oriented towards even while negotiating their lives in Australia. This affective flow would not have happened if it had not been for the diasporic text that expanded the classroom walls to include transnational spaces. The text, *The Hamilton Case*, introduced into the affective economy of the classroom, issues such as rejection of one's cultural tradition, mimicry of a colonial culture and hierarchies of power. These issues are central to the students' discussion, to their reading of texts and to the work emotion does in aligning them to their traditions and to each other through the intensity of their attachments. But, while from my point of view as teacher, the major pedagogic disruptive element was originally the introduction of an Asian-Australian diasporic text, what emerged in the class as disruptive was actually what I didn't consider disrupting. What I was finding was, in ways I did not expect, the story of *The Hamilton Case* was taking these students to an analysis of lives; this is not what the analysis of literary devices and methods of characterisation literacy pedagogy at this level usually involves. The students are taking the pedagogy in new directions. Thus, a new understanding of transnational literacy is emerging.

### **Circulation of affect**

One of the interesting aspects of the language used by the students is that the word 'white' is used twelve times just in these short extracts. The use of the word, 'white' by the participants in this study exposes whiteness as a pervasive social and cultural construction. Whiteness is starkly visible in their responses, whether they identify with it or not. It is a label to contend with, to be oriented either towards or away from with some intensity. It is a very sticky label and results in the surfacing of bodies in ways that pull some people into alignment. Some strive to be included in the category called whiteness, others resist it. Many move back and forward between these alignments in the ever-messy business of attempting to understand their situations and their subject-positions. For Anne, her

whiteness, normally allowing her to be 'in place' in the wider society, within the space of the school, is not an unchallenged norm. Many other participants, having experienced Othering by virtue of their body markings, experience 'whiteness' as a norm that involves particular behaviours and privileges and something to aspire to. They 'fit in' by performing whiteness and striving to be recognised within the constraints of normativity. Thus, they attempt to hide behaviours they see as being viewed as non-white. They are orienting themselves either towards or away from 'whiteness' depending on how they see it as helping them 'fit in'.

What the analysis above indicates is that thinking with Sara Ahmed (2004a) helps us see how national borders such as the Sri Lankan and Australian borders transmit affect as they create divisions and hierarchies between different groups. These borders can emerge within classrooms in the ways students adopt nationalist norms and embody the affective power of these discourses. They can create sticky labels which limit the extent to which students feel they are 'in place' within the space. In reading a diasporic text, the orientations and the sticky labels attached to bodies can be interrogated via the characters and transnational settings and can become part of the circulation of ideas, texts, emotions, people and objects that constitutes the dynamic interaction of the classroom. In looking at this affective economy through a postcolonial lens, we see 'the affective afterlives of colonialism, slavery and racism continue to shape contemporary subjectivities in ways that are not easy to penetrate' (Pedwell, 2016, p. 35). The affect transmitted by 'white supremacy' (Amy) and 'someone else's country' (Anjali) are inevitably a part of their reading of the text. A pedagogy that denies, negates or ignores this fails to harness the power implicit in the affective construction of identities, in the forces circulating between people and between people and text.

Attending to both the orientations of the students and to the labels attaching to their bodies as a result of dominant norms and discourses is to recognise significant aspects of the way students read. The affect that arises from students' orientation to the text, the stickiness of the labels that have been attached to their bodies, leads students to subvert usual classroom reading practices and opens the way for a type of transnational literacy to emerge. But while, the students themselves open up pedagogical possibilities, and while I have established that affect is an important part of reading practices, what does this mean for how I should teach literature? What is missing from this analysis so far is the range of strategies students adopt in order to deal with the affects attaching to their reading. While the students' accounts show the centrality of affect, there are limits to the extent to which I can understand their affective intensities and how to pedagogically respond to these. Bhabha offers a strategic component that can help us to deal more productively with the affect associated with norms of whiteness and with other affects emerging from students' reading.

## Chapter 6

### AMBIVALENCE, MIMICRY AND HYBRIDITY IN PEDAGOGIC ENCOUNTERS

**‘All new learning looks at first like chaos’<sup>26</sup>**

*I just kind of felt I internalised it all, and I just thought if I fake it, I’ll just like end up becoming it, and then I’ll forget all that. (Anjali, Year 11).*

Anjali reflects here on her attempt to use mimicry as a strategy to help her in ‘becoming’ what she understands as Australian. She wants to ‘become it’ to stop the turmoil of feeling excluded. She demonstrates the difficulty many students have with negotiating their identities in a transnational space. In the previous chapter, I established that affect is significantly involved in student reading practices although not normally taken as seriously, in traditional literature teaching, as it ought to be. Given its importance in these student accounts, then, how do they read in relation to affect? I need vocabulary, concepts and strategies to help me to understand, more productively, what is going on for them. Thinking in conversation with Ahmed has opened up the ways students’ orientation either towards or away from whiteness is often a product of the history of production of the labels ascribed to their bodies. Many participants, having experienced Othering by virtue of

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<sup>26</sup> Rich, 2011, p. 77.

their body markings, encounter whiteness as a norm that involves particular behaviours and privileges and something to aspire to. They fit in by performing whiteness and striving to be recognised within the constraints of normativity. Thus, they attempt to hide behaviours they see as being viewed as non-white.

Thinking with Ahmed in relation to the data, therefore, leads to a focus on how the classroom or school space is oriented around some bodies rather than others. It suggests that pedagogy and curriculum are dynamic and interactive and influence how some bodies might be more in place than others. This can depend on students' previous experience, their socio-economic context, their current relationships with each other and with me as teacher, and their closeness or distance from the normative expectations of the school and classroom. This leads to a consideration of what reading strategies they adopt given this complex context. Thus, I turn to Bhabha, drawing on some of his concepts to help me theorise the ways my students read *The Hamilton Case* and how they come to terms with affect. I then consider the implications these responses have for literary pedagogy, acknowledging the complicated conversation this pedagogy and its analysis involve.

Classroom interaction is constituted by a complex interplay between the biographies of the students as partially revealed through their responses to each other, the text and the pedagogy; the ideas of Bhabha as mediated to them through me; my own positioning and responses as white teacher and the diasporic text set for study, *The Hamilton Case* (De Kretser, 2003).

As indicated in Chapter 1, my original planning for the unit was based on the conversations I had had with students from the previous year who reported being caught between different cultural expectations and feeling the strain of code-switching between home and school. Without having the terminology to theorise what they had lived, they told me stories of bullying they had experienced, or incomprehension and false representations to

which they were subjected. They responded with what I understood to be attempts at mimicry and camouflage to hide their sense of difference. Given this context, I realised that a literary pedagogy could teach students vocabulary and concepts that might help them to express the feelings and experiences they were living and to gain some greater agency in relation to these everyday experiences. Vocabulary can be freeing and, as Sreya expresses it in her interview:

there are many times that I've felt a surge of emotion on a bad day ... and I've felt sad, but I didn't realise why I felt bad ... and I blame myself because I thought I was ungrateful, or like how could I just complain about a tiny little thing? But then reading the book I realised there was more to it than just that one event, and it could be just everything combined, and how that impacts on what I feel.

While Sreya's response suggests something of the freeing nature of being able to recognise, name and locate one's feelings, Shanthi shows the effect of expanding her vocabulary in another way:

I think because we talked about hybridity and things like that in class, and I realised that it's totally normal to have that sense of varying ability in your identity, and that's what makes a human a human is that they have different layers upon layers.

Without the necessary language, they could not frame their emotions in a way which gave them agency or entitlement, but with the words to say what they felt or lived, they moved towards greater self-acceptance. They hint at some of the possibilities this pedagogy might release.

Not wanting to assume that the cohort that included my participants would feel the same as those who had talked to me the previous year, I opened the unit with class discussion focused on general points such as where they went to primary school, what it had been like for them and what moments stood out. Many of the points the students raised suggested hybridity, mimicry or ambivalence but they could not name them as such and hence often



could not get control of these aspects of their lives. Amy, in her post-unit writing, indicates this:

During one of our first lessons on *The Hamilton Case*, I remember our class discussing what it felt like being on the outside of a culture and I remember sitting silently in class thinking *I do not relate to this at all*. Even though both my parents migrated from China quite late during their lives, my sister and I were raised in a very Westernised way, due to my father's hatred for Chinese politics and consequently many aspects of Chinese culture and my mother's more progressive views, and this had been something I'd always been really proud of – not so much anymore. Then I was lucky enough to attend quite open and multicultural primary and secondary schools, so I never truly felt 'outed' by the people I was surrounded with. But as soon as we started actually studying *The Hamilton Case* I realised that in many ways I had been doing what Sam was doing, hopefully to a much lesser degree, and that I too had been brainwashed.

Amy's acceptance of 'Western' views as superior and her consequent rejection of her Chinese heritage has been unthinkingly assumed and has had implications for her ways of reading herself, her society and her texts. However, her current reading of *The Hamilton Case* is challenging her orientation away from Chineseness, suggesting that acquiring the language to name and understand her experiences helps give her a sense of greater agency. The students need words to give them ways to enunciate what they are living. As I heard them expressing their identity negotiations and struggles, I decided to organise the pedagogy based on some selected postcolonial concepts such as mimicry, essentialism and hybridity as these words encapsulated much of what they were saying from their own biographies. I began working with a selection of Bhabha's concepts to find ways to help them articulate their intuitions and their lived experiences so that their sense of belonging and identity might be enhanced. In the remainder of the chapter, I consider examples of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity from the students' spoken and written accounts. I indicate how Bhabha's analysis opens up productive possibilities within these responses. I then show how the return gaze (Bhabha, 2004) of my students unsettles my own authority as teacher and researcher and in turn leads to wider possibilities of transformation within Atwood High School.

### **‘I have to assimilate to fit into where I am now’**

The subject formation of the students – the way they understand themselves and their relationships, the ways they read – is bound up with an epistemological model of Anglo-Australian whiteness as normative (Hage, 1998). This is indicated when Shanthi says, ‘there is this national identity, this Western identity. For example in Australia we have a national Western identity or in *The Hamilton Case* they have a national British identity because of the colonisation that happened’. In a group discussion within the literature class, the students express both their compliance and their resistance to claims to national stereotypes:

- Jessie: I think the whole concept of a national identity can be so alienating for some people. Because you have to put yourself in a box and just be like, ‘Who are you? I’m this one thing and I’m just going to commit to it even though I’ve lived in all these places and I have all these cultural experiences’. My parents are a different culture -
- Shanthi: I have to assimilate to fit into where I am now.

While Jessie questions the concept of national identity in this extract, many of the students began the course with a strong sense of the fixed and hegemonic nature of national identities. These students both perpetuated and resisted the myths they were subjected to and found them to be both a catalyst for change and a source of anxiety. This ambivalence is taken up by Bhabha as he shows how rigid distinctions between the coloniser and colonised have always been impossible to maintain and that each is constituted by its Other. He helps me investigate the repressed colonial origins in both literature and my classroom, realising that cultural meanings are open to transformation and negotiation. Bhabha provides a conceptual vocabulary for the reading of the texts of colonialism, including education. The pedagogic question he opens up is how to enable students to see these possibilities of transformation by demonstrating the vulnerability and fragility of hegemonic discourses.

As I seek to address this question, I cannot ignore the ongoing processes of history, the social and political moment in which the students are enmeshed. In the contemporary moment, despite the increased mobility of people, money and ideas, the perceived threat of uncontrollable immigration has resulted in examples of racist and nationalistic backlash. Within this context, Jansen (2018) talks of the revived ‘myth of a quintessentially white, monocultural, and homogeneous ‘British culture’” (Jansen, 2018, p. 1). This myth is accepted as normative by many of the students in my study and it has real and material consequences for them as they engage in the processes of subjectivity formation. As they try to work out who they are in relation to Australia, to school, to themselves and each other, the study of the set text and its characters become intertwined with the ways they attempt to make sense of themselves and others. It is this dialogic process of searching and exploring that constitutes their literacy journey.

In this chapter, I explore how thinking with both the student data and Bhabha’s concepts of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity can help us to see how nationalist representations are unstable, fragile and unable to deliver the unity they promise. Anjali, who we learned in the previous chapter was born in Sri Lanka and moved to Australia when she was ten years old, is an instantiation of the tension between competing nationalist discourses. She embodies this as she explores what it means to belong in Australia:

Yeah so everyone’s Anglo ... So it was me and like 300 other Anglo people, and we got on really well, and I never felt like I was out of place, but I guess it’s...deciding at what point am I fully assimilated in here? But I know that if I fully assimilate, I’m never going to be Australian, like I’m not born here, it’s not ... you know it doesn’t conform to like society’s standards of where you belong.

Bhabha’s work is particularly useful in helping me to unpack struggles such as this. Bhabha shows us that both culture and subjectivity are complex and fluid and that rather than striving towards an illusory wholeness or unified identity, it is more productive to embrace the contradictory logic of the border, rethinking hegemonic concepts. As many of the

student-participants in this inquiry report difficulty in negotiating norms of Australianness, exposing the insubstantiality of such constructs offers the possibility of interruption and resistance. Bhabha's method of colonial discourse analysis and its implications for teaching I find to be productive for pedagogical purposes within my specific context, particularly as one of the most surprising findings I encounter is the prevalence of the word *white* in the students' discourse. Bhabha contests the normativity of the white position asserting that it is an authoritarian strategy rather than a fundamental identity (Bhabha, 1998, p. 21). He argues that exposing the construction of that authority is the best way to unsettle the operations of white privilege. Thus, I emphasise the ways in which colonial discourse can be exposed as flawed and contradictory in order to challenge its hegemonic power in the minds of my students. I seek to provide them with a set of Bhabha's tools that might have possibilities of transforming their ways of feeling entrapped within normative discourses of Australianness.

### **Nationalist representations in pedagogic encounters**

Anjali: but then I'm Sri Lankan and when I'm in Sri Lanka they're all like, oh you're from Australia. And they don't identify with me as having lived there for that long, and when I'm there, when I'm talking to my cousins, they refer to me as like *you* and them as like *us*. So it's *us* and *them* all over again, which kind of happens here as well, so I don't know.

Anjali, at sixteen, cannot read herself within essentialist national categories, either the ones into which she is expected to assimilate or the ones she feels her inheritance has given her. She struggles in between these ascriptions striving to perform them. But in trying to perform Australianness, the contradictions become too much. She is caught in the 'dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 13). She could camouflage who she feels she *is*, but she cannot emulate the taken-for-granted performances of the dominant culture, and something escapes. The power of the national category is interesting here as she identifies as Buddhist, middle class, female,

migrant, Sri Lankan, but she is being pushed to define her dominant identification through a national category. Gradually she begins to realise that she can either perform it or refuse it, perhaps even both perform and refuse it, and while not able to articulate her experience in those terms, she exemplifies aspects of mimicry but is also deeply aware of its ambivalence:

Well I'm living in someone else's country, and I need to assimilate or I'm going to stand out for the wrong reasons. So I didn't want to do that, so I was...you know I was trying to mesh myself [laugh] into like Anglo society.

She demonstrates that mimicry is a useful concept with which to understand her situation as she is trying hard to be like *them* but finding it is a slippery thing that escapes her. It is as if she says, with echoes of Bhabha, 'I want to be white but I can't be quite' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 131). She has accepted the importance of the normativity of Australianness. But she also shows that no matter how much mimicry she performs, it always eludes her grasp. While she does not use the term *mimicry*, her ambivalence, her seeking of the 'self-presence' (Derrida, 1993, p. 226) of a totalising self, shows her struggling with the myth of presence offered by hegemonic normativities.

Anjali's experience illustrates that mimicry within the contemporary literature classroom is a very different concept from what Bhabha might have envisaged in the different time and place from which he wrote. The elements of ambivalence and camouflage are evident but the coloniser is not as explicitly manifested as in Bhabha's conception. As students read de Kretser's *mimic text*, they come to see how she interrogates colonial assumptions of rational power and exposes the mechanisms of the production of knowledge implicit in British detective fiction. They understand that much of what defines Sam is what he cannot see about himself and the hidden powers that have colonised him. Katie's view is changing in part through her identification with Sam:

De Kretser purposely created Sam blind and naive to his true surroundings because where Sam is unable to identify such situations the readers are able to

see the proper and dangerous consequences of a colonised mind. Considering this novel actually made me realise and understand the way and how certain people or in this case colonisation can manipulate an individual's mind. Also, personally I have connected to this book as I can relate to the feeling of struggling to identify myself certainly of where home truly is.

We hear in her voice the emergence of her new learning, her emerging subjectivities complicated as they are. We also sense a history of struggle, of the difficulty of locating herself in the world. Anjali also expresses this sense of grappling between competing identifications:

I was lacking some form of, like there was a void between where I felt like I belonged, but then after doing *The Hamilton Case* and doing Lit, I really found that I could identify the problem more ... I think what changed is that I know that who I am isn't really defined by where I'm from, but at the same time, it's something that's just been so ingrained that I have to just keep telling myself that because I think it will take a while to get rid of, but then ... I don't know, there's certain things that happen in certain situations that you're in that really make you feel like you're neither here or there, but you're just kind of in the middle.

Anjali, struggling here between emerging awareness and the pull of ingrained patterns of thought, understands that whatever new knowledge she constructs will take time, be tentative and will continue changing. She knows that originary myths are losing their hold on her but seems to still feel vulnerable to them, as though she feels there could be situations where nation-centric norms might still have the power to make her feel Othered. The one claim she makes confidently is that she can now identify the problem. This underlines the pedagogic value of providing students with vocabulary and tools to articulate their experience so that they can gain a sense of control over it. Bhabha invites us to focus on the processes produced in the articulation of cultural differences and to see that it is possible to embrace different cultural identities at once without contradiction. He sees the politics of identity as a constant process of negotiation (2004, pp. 274–275) and thus cultural identity cannot be essentialised. Thinking with Bhabha's concept of ambivalence helps me to see how the binaries, the normative categories in which the students sometimes feel entrapped might be challenged. Cainkar argues that the hegemonic powers

that constructed ‘imaginaries of national identity intended to supersede all other identities’, created ‘socially constructed distinctions between insiders and outsiders’ (Cainkar, 2013, p. 128). She demonstrates that while necessary, broad categorisations are problematic, and we need to avoid the paradox of ‘erasure through inclusion’ (p. 129).

As I respond to the students’ stories, this phrase serves as a reminder to address the range of specificities, to recognise the transgressive voices, the ones that refuse to be tamed to my emerging argument or insight. Tess, for instance, said in her interview that she was not changed by the unit of work and thought ‘Australian education’ was appropriate in Australia:

If you want to know ... you can do it in your own time, if you have an interest in that, but it just makes sense for I guess in Australia here to have like ... because it is a Western country, like to say it has like Western topics.

While Tess accepts nationalistic norms, I see my pedagogic task as offering students tools to combat feelings of imprisonment in nation-centric norms, and thus helping to free them to read in more transnational ways. Strategies to break down and problematise categorisations constitute useful knowledge for students, even those who do not feel entrapped by hegemonic dictates. Perhaps emphasising the ethical implications more might have engaged students like Tess and others who did not feel changed by the pedagogy. Because of the intense affect of living between cultures, those who do so are more likely to experience change than those who have always lived in the dominant culture. In the interests of enabling all students to develop transnational literacy, a future pedagogical challenge is to lead students from the dominant culture to become the implied readers of Asian and/or diasporic texts.

Strategies of resistance seem to help Anjali to push back against the assimilative effects of her environment and reject the notion that she needs to synthesise her identity to fit what she understands to be normative expectations. Anjali gains some knowledge through

partially identifying with Sam, but she can also distance herself from him and detect something of the construction of his values. This interplay of identification and dis-identification seems to allow for the development of great self-reflexivity and an understanding of the workings of colonialism and its effects of mental colonisation:

So Sam is ... the microcosm of colonialism because he really embodies that. He embodies trying to impose something on someone else like colonialism tried to impose it on the Ceylonese society, and Sam tries to impose his values onto Harry ... and Harry resists that, but Sam's still like pushing that onto him ... I think it's about like the imposition of values in all aspects of the story.

The strategic ruses by which power is manipulated, the narrative patterning inscribed on the characters are rendered visible through the concept of mimicry as demonstrated by Sam in the text. As students come to see how Sam is constructed as a victim of colonialism, they recognise his entrapment in discursive constructions that narrow his vision and what he perceives to be his options and they become more alert to the mechanisms of knowledge construction within their own situations. Tia shows something of this awareness when she writes:

He [Sam] is unconfident about himself and fears that the British will realise he is *not one of them*. He looks down on his own culture and his own people and loses the people around him. He isn't confused about his culture or identity, but to me, he's chasing after something that he can't have and someone he can't be. I think de Kretser presents Sam this way to put a reality to colonisation and human behaviour. Everything will affect who we become, our relationships and our own values and identity. Colonisation is not just a simple event as we may hear about, but it affects the lives of people and the country itself. That there isn't just straight up acceptance of the values enforced but it will cause many minds to be confused and question who they really are.

In vicariously negotiating identity with Sam, Tia acknowledges the process of mental colonisation. The students find it much easier to recognise this process in the novel than they do in their own lives.

The partial identification with characters, while also observing their entrapments, offers an interruptive possibility, the chance to scrutinise the discursive production of subjectivities, the emergent cultural identifications that are being articulated. The study of the novel



supports this challenge to nation-centric assumptions implicit within contemporary educational structures. As the characters question the narrative patterning imposed by colonial powers, the students move with them to challenge views that have been naturalised as common sense:

- Kay: When Europe is in the middle of a map it like skewers everything else out of perception ...
- Kay: And makes all the other countries insignificant and in the corners. Why would you put Europe in the middle?
- Anjali: In the middle. I don't know.
- Kay: It's like putting America in the middle. It splits Asia in half, doesn't it?
- Anjali: Yeah.
- Kay: What should be in the middle?
- Sue: Asia.
- Anjali: I think because Shiva used to think of the world in terms of Europe because that's maybe what his aspirations were. But now ... after having seen it maybe he's regretting

The image of the map is used here by the group to help them articulate their own sense of locatedness in the world. It helps them to challenge established hierarchies and to imagine other possibilities. The postcolonial connotation of *split* refers to the spatial as well as psychological split. Physically it exposes the messiness between categories like West and non-West, which are no longer exclusive categories. The students are thinking beyond national borders and in terms of how countries are situated in relation to each other. They challenge Eurocentric assumptions both in texts and in their own thinking. Anjali, recognising the character Shiva's shift in view, begins to imagine what it means for him. Her identification with such characters allows her to articulate some of the changes she feels. Over the course of the unit of study, Anjali indicates that a shift in her self-conception has occurred:

But when you're the only person of your background in a group of people ...you kind of close that side of you that's different because you don't want to stand out, and you want to like blend into the group. So I think that's what I was doing as well. So I think after doing this [unit of study] ... I don't feel so ashamed or embarrassed to admit that ... I don't know, that I identify with my own culture [laugh].

The student responses suggest that they find it easier to detect nation-centric assumptions within characters in a text and to see the foundations and implications of such beliefs. It is difficult and involves much toing and froing to recognise and combat such assumptions in their own thinking. The practice of interrupting normative Australianness in a pedagogic context is a slow and tentative dialogic process, one in which each student moves at her own pace and many encounter self-resistance along the way, as we have seen with Anjali and will see with the example of Amy later in this chapter. Anjali's phrase, 'my own culture', represents *culture* as a noun and, while Bhabha offers us tools to see it as a verb, making this a pedagogic reality is a complex task. But for Anjali, the opportunity to reflect on her sense of her place within Australian society and to see that national representations are unstable and unable to deliver coherence is one that enables her to articulate how torn she feels and how complex her identifications are.

### **'In order to fit in'**

Even though many of the students fail to detect the normative assumptions in their own thinking, most are unable to take for granted the cultural narratives by which they are encouraged to define themselves and others. Their experiences often represent a challenge to normative ideas of ethnicity and nationhood. Sreya shows this seemingly contradictory position in her interview when she says:

When I first came to Australia ... I still identified as just Indian because that's who I associated more with or could relate to more, but now I don't really know. I'm just a mixture of everything. I don't consider myself to be completely Australian because there are certain things that those that have just grown up in Australia or in the suburbs or something their entire life, they've had that identity with them, but I can't relate to that aspect ... and Atwood's a really multicultural place anyway ... so in that aspect I feel like I am. It's really confusing.

Here Sreya associates being 'completely Australian' with a linear sense of history which is grounded in living in Australia 'their entire life'. It is this sense of the 'historical identity of culture as a homogenising unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in

the national tradition of the People' (Bhabha, 2006, p. 157) that Bhabha challenges. But Sreya's diverse experiences have also made her question the possibility of one totalising national identity as least in relation to India:

Because even in India there are many states, and they're not like the sort of states that we have in Australia where pretty much everything is kind of standard. So I came from the mid-western part, so near Mumbai, and .... that sort of area is different to the north for example where music and dance is a large part of it, and also they have ... they live life to the fullest kind of thing. But where I came from, people were really just rational and logical and they got educated, went to school, and they got a job, and they married and settled down, and that kind of life.

It is interesting, her different attitudes to India and Australia, the former complex and varied, the latter, 'everything is kind of standard'. The first person pronoun is linked to Australia here, although, at other moments in her interview, India is named as 'home'. Sreya seems to navigate between different senses of national identity and feels uneasy in relation to them, unable to find for herself a comfortable or clear locus of enunciation. Observations concerning the students' ambivalence about their own ethnic and cultural identities have driven this project from the outset and expressions of confusion and tension are common in class discussion. As the students explore the ambiguous legacy of the characters in *The Hamilton Case*, they gradually find ways to name these feelings and to ventilate them more productively.

In the second recorded group discussion<sup>27</sup>, Chala laments the loss of her Indian culture and the ways it is construed through Western eyes: 'I feel like I'm totally Westernised and I feel really bad now that I think about it I don't know much about India at all.' Whereas many of the students had begun the course by seeing themselves against what they perceived as the fixed origins of Australianness, Chala and her group contest the binary of ours and theirs

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<sup>27</sup> Other parts of this same discussion were analysed in Chapter 5 in conversation with Ahmed. Looking at it alongside Bhabha gives rise to different insights.

and the unequal power relations between Western and Indian. Without knowing it, they exemplify Bhabha's challenge to 'essentialist categorisations' and his emphasis on 'the multiple and intersubjective nature of each locus of enunciation' (Andreotti., Ahenakew, & Cooper, 2012, p. 222). As discussed in Chapter 3, Bhabha draws on poststructuralist analysis to open up the colonial sign or subject as *différance*. Through this split sign, he demonstrates the contingency and indeterminacy of discourse, analysing signification as an event that happens on the 'boundary of differences' (Xie, 1996, p.159). As there is no whole subject in his poststructuralist account, the focus is on the liminal space where signs of self and other intersect and constitute one another.

Situated within an intercultural site of enunciation, the students in Chala's group discussion recognise the limitations of a Western construction of India, and knowing that there is an alternative way of seeing, are able to contest its claims to epistemological universality. As Anna says, 'I also feel my family thinks that me and my sister we're not open to our culture as well. I feel like they think that because we've been exposed to the Western culture we look down upon our culture now as well'. As the students dispute the claim that they might look down on their Indian culture, their own biographies teach them that Western civilisation is not unique, nor just Western, and its claims to superiority are not able to be upheld in the face of evidence that their own family histories have such strength and richness. They are engaged in a dynamic where, within the small world of the classroom, the margin modifies the centre. Sharing their understanding expands, perhaps challenges, the views of students who have no access to their experience and it also broadens my own views of both Indian society and how the students feel. They are anxious to reclaim aspects of their identity that have been repressed within their Australian education, which tends to rely on Eurocentric and colonialist vantage points to construe the world and how one should behave in it. As they become aware of their geopolitical situatedness, the students develop the possibility of changing not only the substance but

also the conditions of the epistemological conversation and begin to reframe their locus of enunciation.

But some students feel entrapped in the discourses that they see to be excluding them and find it difficult to identify their locus of enunciation. In her interview, Shanthi reflects on her position in relation to the character Sam as a response to the cultural narratives impinging on the sense of self:

Well he was mimicking what an Englishman was, and when you're mimicking, it's not the real thing. You're mimicking something so it's almost but not quite. And so the obsessive way that he tries to mimic an English person, it's just... he does it in a way that's not English. I mean a normal Englishman wouldn't behave like that. And that's what stood him out because he'd got rid of what he felt on the inside, like all his actual needs, his personal narrative to be something that he wasn't... to be this English figure. Like ... and that created this massive contrast I think of discordancy between like his innate needs, and he made a compromise between what he was and what he wanted, like what he ... like the British constraints and things like that. The idealised figure of an Englishman, and I think that was, like for me, like it was basically a story of who I was because I'd grown up in such a way that I'd... you know I'd moved from one culture to the next culture that were so drastically different that in order to fit in, I had to ... I had to let go of ... well I lost touch with myself, and that came out like in my characteristics.

Shanthi invokes here a humanist account of Sam and his 'innate needs' and an essentialist notion of a 'normal Englishman' showing her immersion in these dominant discourses. But she is coming to see that the 'idealised figure of an Englishman' is a construction imposed on Sam (and on herself), both enveloping and excluding him and that his mimicking of the imposed narratives is splitting his sense of self. Her understanding of mimicry as 'almost but not quite' shows she recognises it as a strategy that will fail to deliver the sense of fitting in she is seeking. Thinking with Bhabha allows me to read her response in terms of subject-positions that emerge amidst a contradictory and ambivalent space between discursive framings. This is so, according to Bhabha, because 'the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity ... even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised, and read anew' (Bhabha, 2006, p. 157). The pedagogic challenge

presented by Shanthi's reflection is how to help her to embrace the (seeming) contradictions and to see them as potentially productive, to show her that subjectivity is always an in-between state, a becoming. How might I challenge the essentialist thinking that leads her to read Sam's experience and then her own in terms of a binary between 'innate needs' and social pressures? It is the recognition that identity is relational, that any self is constituted by what it's not, that underpins Bhabha's concept of the third space of enunciation. While Shanthi sees her history in terms of individual struggle and difficulty and construes it as a deficit, for Bhabha, culture is always and inevitably hybrid and in flux. While Shanthi seeks a sense of self, Bhabha articulates, through the concept of the third space of enunciation, the impossibility of unified identity. He predicates this on the recognition that identity is never whole, never total but rather is constituted within a play of agentic forces. The pedagogic challenges presented by Shanthi's interview I cannot claim to have resolved during the teaching of that unit. While Bhabha gives me a way of naming and analysing these challenges, it is Spivak who helps me most with the pedagogic strategies, as I will indicate in the next chapter. In the meantime, my own major learning occurs in relation to my subject-position as a white teacher in a classroom mainly composed of students from South East Asian diasporic backgrounds.

### **My locus of enunciation as white teacher**

'For Bhabha as for Fanon, there is no fact of blackness, and there is no 'fact' of whiteness, not if those facts or identities are imagined as permanent. At the moment you hope to have fixed yourself, you find yourself slipping away yet again' (Huddart, 2006, p. 30). For most of my teaching life, 'whiteness' was transparent (an unmarked category), and was not an issue for discussion. But as this study progressed, I came to see whiteness as 'a strategy of authority' (Huddart, 2006, p. 33). The literature classroom in Australia and other former

British colonies has been underpinned by its colonial legacy. Coloma (2016)<sup>28</sup> argues that education ‘serves as empire’s most pervasive tool of governance and change, and remains as an enduring legacy in postcolonial nation-states’. Rudolph (2011) argues that the Australian education system, ‘having grown from colonial values remains grounded in Anglo-centric aspirations and intentions or ... a value system based on ‘whiteness’ (Rudolph, 2011, p. 17). So, as a white teacher of literature attempting to move from the canonical literary site of enunciation, when thinking with Bhabha, I find my own sense of identity problematised and my situation fraught with personal and institutional tension. I have struggled to deal with this ambivalence and to identify myself within my new understandings of this context. Over the years of my thesis, I have found this to be the greatest source of difficulty and perhaps the greatest opportunity for learning.

Many students who enter the colonially-inflected space of my literature classroom which privileges a white perspective (Rudolph, 2011) find they have to exercise a double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1994). In response, I need to ask myself how I might, as teacher, construct an intercultural site of enunciation. Who is imagined as the source of the literary? Who, as its audience? In class discussions, students often mentioned their primary school days where norms of whiteness felt like law. They said things like ‘we had slippers at the front door – that was not very white in my primary school days’ and ‘most people were white and being brought up within that situation made me probably feel like acting white was a lot easier than like embracing my Asian side’ and ‘I guess I did act white, but that was because white was normal there’. It was only as I listened to these conversations that it dawned on me how big a concept whiteness was for many of them. Until then, I had been guilty of the assumption that my whiteness would not intervene in the teacher-student

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<sup>28</sup> This statement was made as part of a seminar presentation at the University of Melbourne, January 11 2016, entitled ‘Imperial Fixations and the Question of the Human’.

relationship. I was jolted by the significance of this concept for the students, as I had not expected it, or to have to reconsider my whole relationship to whiteness and its implications for my role as teacher.

Sreya in her interview shows how materially whiteness asserts itself as normative when she goes to buy make-up:

I identify with [Sam] because he does a lot of things unaware, like he doesn't know why he's doing them, and so for example when I turn on the TV and I see advertisements for things, I look at it and I'm interested and I think 'oh, that's cool' ... it takes you a second to realise that wait, I'm not like the person that they advertise. ... So you're just looking at something and you're looking at a tone or some kind of make-up, and you're like 'oh my God that's great'. And then you look at it and they don't have the skin tone in your range available, and it sort of hurts for a second because you think, oh, all this time I thought I was the same as everyone else here, and then ... and you look at your own skin and you're like, 'no, I'm not, I'm different'.

As I am accustomed to think of my students as strong young women who are academically proficient, with their many languages, broad range of experiences and great professional possibilities, I am disconcerted by these revelations. I have been blind to much of what is happening to them, to the realities of the politics of ethnicity surrounding me. I am slowly coming to see the deeply racialised nature of power and privilege. I identify with Haggis' words when she says, '[i]t seems to me that as I speak, I both reveal and disguise my complicity in a continuing colonising moment in the production of knowledge...how do I break my complicity in the colonising moves of knowledge production in terms of my own intellectual praxis?' (Haggis, 2004, p. 48). Haggis argues that perceiving whiteness as identity slides past the issue of white race privilege (2004, p. 51) and suggests that Frankenberg's 'layered definition of whiteness as discourse, structure and location' (p. 51) is more appropriate.

It is with relief that I find that Bhabha provides some language and concepts to help me navigate this new territory. The concept of mimicry analyses the locus of enunciation as inevitably split because, in part, of the return of the gaze of the colonised (Bhabha, 2004).



When the gaze is returned, it unsettles the authority of the coloniser. This is what was happening in my classroom. As the students used the word 'white' often and in ways I had not expected, I realised that they were looking back and using the tools of analysis perceptively to evaluate their position in relation to what Amy called the 'very white' education they saw themselves to be receiving. This unsettling of my sense of myself as teacher is emblematic of the challenge being posed to the school as a whole by a cohort whose diverse experiences challenge the assumed universality of truth and knowledge that underpin the curriculum. A new space is being opened up, a borderland space between the traditional canonical knowledge conventionally taught within Australian schools and the wider possibilities and knowledges introduced by the students. The 'Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 55), offers possibilities of resisting restrictive notions of identity and of finding strategies to help my students do the same.

I wonder as I prepare my lessons, how might 'the disruptive temporality of enunciation' displace the narrative of the Western nation in a space where whiteness has such normative power and where I am seen to, and actually do, embody that power? It is a strange feeling for me engaging the students with a text in which whiteness and colonial power are exposed as both so beguiling and so destructive, recognising that I am both complicit and resistant at once. I do not mention these feelings to the students. Not being sure how they perceived me in relation to these questions and not wanting to make it about me or whiteness itself rather than them and their identity negotiations. I still do not know whether it would have been more helpful in the construction of their knowledge if I had, as '[i]t is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 55). Considering the transformative possibilities offered by the power of the return

of the gaze, perhaps I should have offered my feelings in recognition of the relational nature of the educational process we were engaging in together.

Yazdiha (2010) helps me to see that the freedom to move between identities is powerful in defying the claims of essentialised racial identity. Furthermore, the bounded labels of race do not account for the 'historical and geographic narratives that lie behind each body and inform their identity' (Yazdiha, 2010, p. 33). In studying a novel where the protagonist could so easily have moved between identities but locks himself into, or is entrapped by, mental colonisation, so that he mimics Englishness, the losses associated with restricting subject-positions are becoming clear to the students. Imagining other possibilities for Sam means imagining new ways of being for themselves. Shanthi in her interview shows that, to a large extent, she sees the student cohort in racialised terms but is glad of the opportunity to discuss these issues in relation to a set text:

my best friend is white, Samantha, and she's ... a lot of the time she gets this label, oh she's such a typical white girl ... I mean you do Sri Lankan dancing and all sorts of things, but I don't call you cultural, but the thing is, at my old school I did, and they'd say oh you're so FOB you know, like fresh off the boat. Yeah, it's like you're recently a migrant and you don't know how to behave like how normal people here ... and in our year level ... oh we have the white group, oh you know, she's part of the White group, or she's part of the Asian Jap group, or like oh yeah the Curries, have you seen the Curries today? I mean that's the thing [laugh] ... and that happens. Yeah and usually we don't talk about this in class. We don't talk about the issues we have with our identities and you know how we form to live in this Western culture. We don't talk about that, and having to do this in class, not solely focusing on you know ... because if we'd study Charlotte Bronte, or ... *Pride and Prejudice*.

These identity issues loom large in Shanthi's mind. She wants opportunities to process the 'issues we have with our identities and ... how we form to live in this Western culture'. She is troubling the racial categories but still seems to feel their power, resisting the stereotyping but still feeling immersed in it. Her need constitutes a teachable moment. I need to work to open up an intercultural site of enunciation through a process of dialogue, creative dissent and conversation. Bhabha shows us that it is necessary to explore the ways

in which ‘Western culture’ or any other culture is not one thing, and never has been one thing. He emphasises the temporal dimension that breaks open fixed stereotypes and allows us to contest and construct identities in an unending process. He affirms that as we move through time, the relationalities of which we form a part move and change and fixed categories become impossible to maintain in the face of the processes that constitute them. In my classroom, an opportunity for epistemological pluralism is required and a recognition of the contingency and indeterminacy of discourse. The text is a starting point and the diverse experiences of the students are a rich resource. As Andreotti, Ahenakew and Cooper ask, ‘[w]hose myths, stories or metaphors inform our thinking? What do they say about our locus of enunciation? What other metaphors or myths could provide new possibilities for new constructions or transformation of selves and communities?’ (Andreotti et al., 2012, p. 235). These are my questions, questions now complicated by my emerging awareness of my own positioning as embodying the norm of whiteness. The students see this norm as a form of cultural capital in Bourdieu’s sense, bestowing social privilege, respectability and entitlement. Shanthi shows in her interview and her group discussions, how she sees acquiring this capital as dependent on conformity to social norms. These norms militate against the students embracing the third space of enunciation and the pedagogic task is, while recognising my own complicity, to try to challenge that normative power.

### **‘As any old Edwardian will attest’**

We saw in the previous sections that both Anjali and Shanthi relate strongly to the character of Sam through the concept of mimicry. They see him using it as a strategy in order to fit into colonised society, to be seen as ‘one of them’ (de Kretser, p. 344). They relate to his need to do that as they have often felt similar needs. In the group discussion of which Anjali is a part, the students explore the nature and implications of Sam’s mimicry:

Sue: He's pretty much mimicking.  
 Anjali: He's a school boy. Yeah. And he's pretty much just being – his attitudes are being tolerated by the school so no one is telling him that he's wrong  
 Kay: I think the school upholds those values anyway  
 Kay: 'Two woolly haired brothers from East Africa'  
 Sue: And then there's like actually that's kind of actually not tolerated either. And then also 'all school boys everywhere' – sees other physical attributes that deviate from the norm. So like what is the norm? Like obviously if you're picking on other cultures here what does he perceive to be the norm?  
 Tia: British...  
 Kay: Yeah, but then there's 'as any old Edwardian will attest the prevalent tone of the school was one of comradeship, unmarred by racial or religious strife' (said in mock-English voice).  
 Anjali: I think page 31 and 32 are just full of irony because ... he contradicts himself all the time. ...  
 Sue: 'Two woolly haired brothers from East Africa'.  
 Anjali: Superior. Yeah...  
 Kay: But then like he says it and then he goes on to disprove that with the rest of his opinions.

As the students discuss Sam's contradictions and his racism, they see it as constructed from beyond himself. 'The school upholds those values', Kay says and Anjali comments that no one is telling Sam he's wrong. Kay's selection of Sam intoning a very English phrase, 'the prevalent tone of the school was one of comradeship, unmarred by racial or religious strife' indicates that she hears the perfect cadences, the exact imitation for which Sam is renowned. His perfect mimicry of tone and language shows his immersion in the discourse of the colonisers. It indicates his uncritical acceptance of its values. It helps to explain why he believes the rhetoric that proclaims the absence of racism when the rest of the quoted discourse is overtly racist ('two woolly-haired brothers from East Africa' and 'I believe the savage races do not distinguish between fact and fable as rigorously as we do') and when racist hierarchies permeate the structure of colonialism and all its institutions. It is this false belief in the claims of colonial discourse that forfeits Sam his promotion and professional

preferment. In class discussions, this was made much of and Georgia, in her post-writing, notes this as causing her anger:

Sam's implementation of lawful justice meant he was unable to further his career by much after his condemnation of Hamilton (British man) personally angered me...Sam's cross-cultural confusion is made more obvious by the narrative objective voice which seeks to have a more objective distance from Sam, allowing a bigger picture of the story. Sam's voice shows his confusion, his endeavours to mimic, particularly in pages such as when Sam is annoyed by Claudia's incorrect idiom usage and prides himself on being so perfect that his speech passed unnoticed. Throughout Sam's life he feels isolated from his family and acquaintances unable to form close relationships ... De Kretser has created a pitiable character to explore the idea of who is 'good' or 'bad' in the story known as life. Though the British and other European colonisers can be seen as the 'bad people' of the novel, the readers are forced to question how and in relation to who? Sam? It blurs the line between characters we should or should not support since the protagonist is such a despicable character himself. This mimics the ways colonies have worked. After reaping the harvests of the nation's goods, they leave and not long after the country often collapses politically (civil wars, etc.) yet the colonisers, in the eyes of many even to the colonial subject, are a celebrated part of the nation's history.

Georgia sees that even perfect mimicry would not ensure belonging. Sam has internalised the colonial discourse to such an extent that he seems 'despicable' to her. She captures in her paragraph the contradictions and ambivalences that constitute mimicry but not in the way Bhabha analyses them. While Bhabha, drawing on psychoanalytic theory, analyses mimicry as resistance or potential resistance and as a strategy exposing the flimsiness of colonial power (Sam's perfect mimicry could have been taken as an example of this), Georgia's analysis focuses on it as a strategy of co-optation of the nation to the hegemony of British imperialism. She is critical of the colonial power and sees it as morally reprehensible rather than as vulnerable. It is the impact of its power she notes, the ways it creates victims, not the ways in which its discourse might be exposed as self-contradictory, based on essentialism, binary thinking and false assumptions of fixity.

Georgia is a sophisticated student of literature adept at reading according to the critical literacy training she has received in the previous year or two of her schooling. But in her first response to *The Hamilton Case*, prior to the lessons on it, she fails to take into account

the centrality of colonialism to de Kretser's text. In the pre-unit writing data, she produces a perceptive feminist reading in which the characters with whom she sympathises are all female:

I sympathise with most of the females in the novel: Leela, Claudia, Maud and Thornton. Somehow they are entrapped in this patriarchal society that values beauty and shuns them when they grow old. Claudia more than anyone else in the novel, is treated as an object, especially by Sam, who seems to have this overfond, even incestuous, affection for his sister. This is shown through the rough handling of his sister. Sam 'grasped her by the shoulders and swivelled her around.' The violence of this action demonstrates his disregard for Claudia's feelings and is only interested in placating his own.

This is a valid reading, one which registers the suffering and disempowerment experienced by the women characters in the novel but Georgia's response fails to recognise the dominant emphasis, insisted upon by de Kretser's novel, on the effects of colonisation. It is as if colonial attitudes have been absorbed into social structures to such an extent that they have been rendered invisible and go undetected. Billig talks of immersion in a discourse 'which is so familiar that it seems hardly noticeable' (Billig, 1995, p.12). While the novel foregrounds the influence of a colonial power imposing itself on another culture, it is not until the end of the course that Georgia shows awareness of this major focus within *The Hamilton Case* and it has a powerful effect on her:

Reading through the book, even though Sam was portrayed in a particularly condemning way, I still felt incredibly sorry for him, which really begins to show through in the second part/volume of the novel, where there is a switch to the narrative voice which offers a more objective (albeit still focused on Sam) view of the narrative. Though Sam is an extreme manifestation of the colonised mind, after I stopped resisting his flippant degradations of his own culture, I realised part of my condemnation of Sam was through a recognition of self as also embodying some of those values. This was possibly the most difficult part about the book for me, the realisation that the character, created to both loathe and sympathise with, mirrors my own views in some ways.

The pedagogy has opened up the possibility of a postcolonial reading for Georgia which she has applied both to the text and to her understanding of herself. She relates to Sam's disparagement of his own culture in the interests of being esteemed within the colonial culture. This identification with Sam involves a painful realisation for her and constitutes

evidence of change in her own subject-position. This occurs partly as a result of the growing visibility within the classroom of colonial discourse and ideology. Thinking with the text helps the students to destabilise claims to the authority of the colonial narrative, with its assertions of universality and its racist underpinnings. Theorists such as Fanon and Bhabha, Huddart tells us, see that ‘although fixed identities may seem to offer stability and certainty, in fact they merely produce an idealisation with which we can never be identical, and so in fact they introduce alienation into our sense of self’ (Huddart, 2006, p.20).

Bhabha’s use of Derrida’s concept of iterability shows us the instability of language and concepts when transposed to new contexts as every iteration operates differently. Often the students see identities as whole and fixed and power structures as secure, unassailable and beyond their power to breach. It is, as Billig (1995, p. 12) suggests, as if ‘nationalism has seeped into the corners of our consciousness and is present in the very words we use for analysis’. Bhabha’s account leads me to see that one way to challenge the power of the hegemonic discourses in my students’ minds is to emphasise the relationality and fluidity of colonial relations and identities. The ability to challenge essentialisms is an important first step and one that the groups seem to take on board:

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| Anna:   | I think this chapter’s quite ironic because they all assume that like they are being very ... Yeah they think they’re not racist and embracing each other’s’ cultures but if you look at Sam’s words, yeah they used to make fun of the Chinese.                              |
| Chala   | And this quote: I believe the savage races do not distinguish between fact and fable as rigorously as we do’ so it’s like ...   |
| Anna    | No ... sorry. He thinks he’s not being racist but he really clearly is.   |
| Georgia | And Irony .. through that gap between what he says that is racist and his belief, being unable to see his own racism.   |
| Katie   | The essentialism is reflected in this section because he does stereotype all of the groups of people like he says ‘Most of my schoolfellows came from Sinhalese or Burgher families’ so like he’s classifying people by their race not as schoolmates, like personality wise. |
| Chala   | But then he sees himself as like Western.   |

The irony in de Kretser's writing allows this group to see Sam's blindness to his own and the discourse's inconsistencies and contradictions. They are able to detect the essentialisms in the characters' thinking. They are also able to see that Sam's identification of himself within the stereotypes of Western discourse blind him to its implications. Thinking with Bhabha changes the way stereotypes can be construed: '[t]he stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations.' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 107). The static nature of Sam's assumptions of superiority, his essentialisms and his belief in the promises of colonial rhetoric gradually become clear to the students and allow them to distance themselves from those beliefs and to see the dangers of essentialist thinking. As many of their later interview responses show, this leads to the challenging of many of their own stereotypical concepts and essentialist assumptions. While they take on this learning regarding essentialisms and stereotypes, one thing that seems clear to them through reading the character of Sam is that no matter how good a mimic you are, there are no guarantees that it will help you fit in.

### **Mimicry within students' accounts**

Just as important as the students' emerging awareness that mimicry does not promise belonging, is the perception that it could embroil the colonised in a conceptual maze that entraps them. Katie, in her post-writing writes:

Sam is so caught up in a web in which he believes he is very much English and it prevents him to see certain experiences as they truly are and not something he creates in order to excuse other people's actions towards him. For example, his piano teacher's reaction when he touched a photograph was extremely harsh, but Sam however found an excuse to cover for those comments.



Katie responds to how de Kretser undermines Sam's assumptions of superiority. She recognises that once drawn into the self-enclosed mindset of colonial discourse, that its predictions become self-fulfilling to him. What seems like a coherent and solid identity and ideology in fact imprison and isolate him, leave him feeling lost and hollow. Bhabha argues that '[m]imicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 126). The coloniser has no absolute pre-existent identity that Sam can mimic. Neither does he himself have an originary personal identity which he is betraying by adopting an English voice and imperialist concepts. But to the character of Sam, these things were not apparent and the students distance themselves from him as they see how enmeshed he is in discursive constraints that avail him little:

There was also the idea of racial injustice, even more so when Sam rejects his Ceylonese identity, which I feel may even be worse than the British being degrading towards the Ceylonese, since it is almost as though Sam is rejecting part of himself to pursue the ventriloquist ideal, an idea that seems fickle and silly to me. For example: p. 268 'In Sinhalese [Sam] always used the lowest form of address, because anyone who deserved respect spoke English.'

In this response, Georgia shows her awareness of the political constructions of Sam's situation. He believes the rhetoric of British justice ('without fear or favour') and acts accordingly but the rhetoric is false and misleads him. Sam is following what he thinks is an honourable profession without realising that if you were not of the dominant culture it would undermine its own values. Thus, he is bound up in knots, rejecting the Other who constitutes himself. Maud's voice has also been discursively constructed and in her response to Maud, Georgia again shows insight into the political situation of the colonised:

Maud is another example of a colonised mind. Her exotic descriptions of Lokugama make her appear as a tourist visiting Ceylon for the first time, demonstrating her indoctrinated perfect mimicry, her rejection of a different identity (which de Kretser utterly condemns).

Georgia has become alert to the mimicry and narrative patterning of colonial language and the ways it colonises the mind. As she pays attention to what is lost and rejected in this way of observing and describing the world she comes to think about her own situation

differently, concluding that 'Sam's plight warns me against the dangers of possible cultural (or any form of) identity rejection'. The combination of the concepts of 'mimicry' (Bhabha) and 'narrative patterning' (de Kretser) proves to be powerful in rendering visible the hidden mechanisms of knowledge construction within both the Ceylonese and the current education context. Georgia's insight into the dangers of essentialist accounts of self and others gives her a tool to negotiate her own experience. When she realises what narrative patterns have impinged on her constructions of her experiences, she is able to analyse the effects of these patterns and feel less confined by essentialisms. Whereas, for the character of Sam, his entrapment within a discourse which fixes his identity, splits his sense of self and condemns him to an ongoing cycle of appeasement and rejection.

### **'A suit and sarong ... together at the same time'**

In their group discussion, Jessie, Samantha and Shanthi come to see hybridity as a way through the impasse of entrapment in a never-ending cycle of identity negotiations. They come to this slowly after attempting to articulate the effect of colonisation on the mind and self-concept of the colonised:

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|----------|---|
| Shanthi: | It's just trying to highlight the fact that even underneath all this there is some sort of self-identity but it's been covered so much. It's trying to be renounced to give into this, this blanket, like the British views and values that covers over the underlying individual narratives of everyone and that's trying to fit into the grander narrative of what is the British.  |
| Samantha | Yeah, there's that one quote .... 'a cockeyed Portuguese projection, continents rolled up and jammed into corners. Europa at the centre dragging the world out of true'. Just that one quote makes it so obvious like again the Eurocentric eurocentredness of Europa dragging the world out of true, like making it theirs, getting everyone else to do their bidding. Also, the idea of truth like what is truth?                       |
| Jessie   | And it's so skewed by Eurocentredness and everything. ... so many things influencing it and how everyone sees things. And how can you be objective when the Western way of thinking is so prevalent. ... Like what is truth. Cos he like wants the law, like justice and everything and then... Just with the law, like he's saying, like he believes so strongly in the European, the British law and it's founded on truth and justice. |

Samantha                      It's so superficial, so skewed, it's so racist.

Shanthi begins in this extract with the image of colonisation as a blanket, as if it were smothering the colonised and stymying 'some sense of self-identity'. Throughout the unit, Shanthi maintains her sense of an 'inner' self, a humanist and essentialist concept to which she seems committed. She employs the concept of the 'underlying individual narrative' here in relation to the 'grander British narrative' and seems to invoke both humanist and poststructuralist discourses as she tries to respond to how colonised subject positions are constructed in the world of the novel. Samantha and Jessie move the discussion to the impact of Eurocentric discourse and examine the idea of truth. Jessie links Sam's entrapment within colonial discourse to her own experience: 'we're so blinded', recognising the impact of discursive limitations. This group seem to have a clear sense of the way discourse serves as an underlying structure, disciplining thought and behaviour. They recognise that what seems true within one discourse might be construed differently within another. They resist the racist underpinnings of Eurocentric discourse and see both the power – 'getting everyone else to do their bidding' – and the limitations – 'it's so superficial, so skewed, so racist' of the assumptions in which Sam is trapped. They then move on to consider how this might be thought otherwise:

Sreya                      Also here it says: 'Sambol spooned onto a Limoges plate' ...The plate is like a really European and a Western kind of thing. It's a French plate with lots of design and it's the opposite of the sambol which is a tradition

Shanthi                    It's like a China plate.

Chorus                    It's like hybridity

Shanthi                    Eating the curry on a really British...

Sreya                      It's like the same thing as Jaya when he wears a suit and sarong... together at the same time.

Shanthi                    Like when in primary school like our parents would pack a nice curry to take to school in the lunch box and then all our friends would run away because it smelt funny

Sreya                      Really? Oh my friends loved it! They lined up for it.

- Shanthi            They would run away from me because it smelt so bad apparently. And I talked to one of my friends and they had the same experience. And like you'd go home and cry to your parents and they would stuff the Curry in a jaffle sandwich. Like every single curry family had a jaffle presser just so they could put their curry into sandwiches.
- Sreya             I had so many friends that just like stopped eating traditional food because of this and they just ate sandwiches and their parents complained to my parents and my parents would be like why she takes curry to school every day. And we would have like this trade-in thing. I would swap the sandwiches for the curry...It really depends on the friendship group as well.
- Shanthi            So the sambol spooned onto the Limoges plate. 'Each hygienic Canadian dawn finds me a little further advanced in invention and imitation.' Again, it's like I think he's trying to discover, like he's talking about that mimicry but at the same time you can't fully mimic something to the point that you are that thing...Mimicry leads to a sense of hybridity like a hybrid place that exists between like what you are trying to copy and what you are yourself. Even if I'm trying to copy what Jessie is, like it will go into a weird hybrid form like a Jessie/Shanthi because you can't fully renounce yourself to become someone else.

Shanthi moves in this discussion from de Kretser's image of the sambol spooned onto a Limoges plate to the curried jaffles her parents gave her to take for school lunch. The comfortable use of images suggests that the students have embraced the idea of hybridity and see it as a useful way of articulating their diasporic experiences. Colonial discourse divides the world into self and Other, east and West, superior and inferior. Bhabha's emphasis on hybridity contests the idea of pure and discrete cultures and suggests that, as nothing stands still and within different contexts signs have different meanings, an ongoing process of 'hybridisation' (Huddart, 2006, p. 4) is always taking place. Being caught between cultures and cuisines has proved troublesome for many of the students and finding creative ways to reconcile differences had become a necessary strategy in their lives. They embrace Bhabha's concept of hybridity not because it appeals to them as a new concept but because it names experiences they have so often lived. It gives them an opportunity to articulate those experiences and to share them.

## **‘I have been shutting out my Chinese culture’**

Amy has used the tools of transnational literacy to enable her to articulate her own shift from accepting her father’s rejection of many aspects of Chinese culture to embracing both her Westernised identity and her Chinese heritage. She draws on the postcolonial vocabulary of hybridity, mimicry and essentialism in various parts of her interview. In her post-class writing, she expresses her impressions of the unit of study and the shift she experiences in her thinking:

this had been something I'd always been really proud of – not so much anymore...But as soon as we started actually studying *The Hamilton Case* I realised that in many ways I had been doing what Sam was doing, hopefully to a much lesser degree, and that I too had been brainwashed. Now when I think back to all the times I rejected an aspect of Chinese culture or made snide comments about the *Asianness* of things, I feel so bad and I'm angry at myself for... well, for one, being so goddamn uneducated and closed-minded, and for another, being racist to my own culture.

We catch Amy here in ‘the now of recognition’ (Bhabha, 2008, np). Her response indicates that through both the relational nature of the classroom space and the characters in the novel, essentialist attitudes and subtle forms of racism (as in the rejection of one’s own culture in favour of the dominant normativity), are made visible and the implications opened up. The pedagogy, which includes an introduction to postcolonial theory, a brief history of Sri Lanka to background the novel and the Ceylonese characters and selected postcolonial vocabulary, is conducted mainly in terms of class discussion focusing on excerpts from the novel. These discussions usually move outside the text to draw on students’ personal experiences. The sharing means that students learn from each other and I, as teacher, learn from all of them. The classroom space becomes transnational as we talk, as experiences from places far outside Australian national boundaries are invoked and the novel itself constructs many of us as the implied readers of a culturally different text (Spivak, 2012).

Amy's interview responses show that she is aware, in her own life, of being defensive when people apply essentialist racist assumptions to her:

Whenever people are saying where are you from, I always get really annoyed, I'm like I'm Australian, like what do you mean?... Yeah, and like I reckon before this year, I was always like I'm pretty Western, like I'm Western, I want to be Western and I am Western, and I don't know, this year after studying this unit, I think that's kind of like faded a little bit.

It is interesting to consider what Amy means by 'Western' here. She seems to focus particularly on the United States, which in her mind has played the most significant role in constructing images that dominate thinking in her family and in Australia. The images of Asia constructed for Western consumption have strongly influenced her views and she continues to draw on stereotypical portrayals of Asian people and culture. The word 'Western' in wider class discussion tended to include both European and North American nations and all nations that were white, or had inherited European culture. It could have been seen to depend on Orientalist structures of knowledge in which oppositional distinctions prevailed and was often used as an oppositional term within the binary East/West.

While Amy originally sets up a clear binary between Australianness and Chineseness, she troubles the binary as she talks. The repetition of 'Western' can, on one reading, sound like emphasis. On another, it can indicate holding the concept up to scrutiny. Her tone, a mixture of musing and conviction, suggests that as she tosses the concepts around in her mind, in playing with them, she comes to question the essentialisms on which they are founded:

In some ways my mother is... her views are much more like considered a lot more Western than my father's, which is weird again because now that I think about it, it's so weird. Yeah, because my father's always like oh yeah, Western, Western, Western, but some of his views are like, yeah I feel like it's just all talk in some aspects... Okay, so like with dating, in China it's like you kind of need to go to university before you can start dating...but my mum's always like why don't you have a boyfriend and all that sort of stuff, and my dad's like, you can't have a boyfriend!! [laugh] Like what!

Amy is becoming more aware of the contradictions in her experience. Her father both rejects and adopts Chinese attitudes and values. There are no unmitigated judgments here. As she applies her new awareness to herself, she draws on the concept of narrative patterning and realises that 'there's a bit not of like self-realisation, like oh my God I have been doing like narrative patterning and I have been shutting out my Chinese culture'. Amy is applying the vocabulary from the novel to her own experience. The essentialisms with which she began are becoming unsettled and her emerging insights are changing her ways of viewing her parents. She expresses a significant change in her attitudes but it is not without discomfort. Her final comment in her post-class writing indicates this and shows the difficulty of embracing the 'productive epistemic fracture' of the hybrid subject (Spivak, 2012, p. 50): 'this unit of work, which I find fascinating, appalling, confrontational, intrusive, eye-opening, repulsive and a whole lot of other adjectives that I can't be bothered searching up or thinking of'.

## **Conclusion**

The type of literacy these responses unveil is constituted by a shared struggle as students attempt to figure out who they are in relation to Australia, the school and each other. That unravelling, deciphering, attempting to comprehend themselves and their relationships is the form that literacy takes within this space. The processes, the purposes and outcomes of reading *The Hamilton Case* give rise to an instance of transnational literacy as they extend their reading strategies and draw on their own funds of knowledge. The ways they read *The Hamilton Case* in relation to where they have been, what they have experienced and with whom, intertwine with the novel's characters who become figures to think with. As they think with these figures, there is a certain objectification involved which offsets the affective intensity or grip of rethinking and possibly undoing their cultural identity. The literary pedagogy provides for both closeness and distancing. Thinking with concepts and

terms such as mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity offers a potentially productive way for the students to name and navigate the affect they express in relation to their reading. It also helps them to embrace the contradictory logic of the border by revealing the fragility and instability of hegemonic concepts in an interruptive transnational pedagogy. By being exposed to the futility of achieving belonging through trying to camouflage themselves as white, many of the students re-examine the complexities of their own experience and discover they have unnecessarily rejected aspects of their cultures and heritages that they now wish to rediscover. This is complicated for them and not without difficulty and the negotiation is ongoing. The other side of mimicry, the return of the gaze, is the site that promises possibilities of transformation for both students and the institutions to which they belong. In looking back, the students show me I am white and complicit in all that whiteness means. If I had grasped that teachable moment by showing them that their return gaze had power to change me, and in turn the school, the pedagogy might have assisted them in acquiring a sense of empowerment that would have been new knowledge for them. As it is, they offer me new learning that I would hope can be passed on to future classes. The pedagogic experiment also reveals the students have gained some empowerment as they now make choices in their thinking that were previously unavailable to them. In the next chapter, I explore the extent to which these analyses of students' practices of reading may point towards Spivak's notions of transnational literacy.



## Chapter 7

### LEARNING TO READ OTHERWISE

#### Imagination will carry us beyond this place<sup>29</sup>

*Sam denies people their complexity. He thinks of them as one thing, you know, they're Ceylonese or they're Tamil or things like that, whereas he doesn't see the full... I just think the character of Sam is used to show the importance of imagining everyone complexly in life, and yeah and not imposing a narrative patterning in your, you know, your story (Jessie).*

In the previous two chapters, I considered concepts and methods of analysis from Ahmed (affective economy) and Bhabha (mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence) that offer tools and resources towards an account of transnational literacy. Thinking with the data in conversation with Ahmed, I focused on 'the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds and the drama of contingency', and explored how we are touched by 'what comes near' (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 30). For students whose starting point is a family orientation towards a culture that is not the mainstream culture of the school, Ahmed helps us see how affect is often connected to emotions associated with belonging and fear of exclusion. Affect, then, needs to be recognised as an inevitable part of literacy (Lenters, 2016) as it has significant implications for how the students read both set texts and the texts of self and other. While it is important to recognise this affect in attempts to

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<sup>29</sup> Rich, 1980, p. 273.

understand the challenges students face in negotiating the transnational space, it is not the full story. The question remains: how to help students to read themselves, their circumstances and their texts more effectively, given this affect?

To help address this question, in Chapter 6, I put the data into conversation with Bhabha's notions of mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence. I showed how thinking with Bhabha offers strategic approaches that help students read more constructively, taking into account the intense affects that their reading includes. For transnational literacy this means showing that hegemonic systems in place in the contemporary world of the students are not omnipotent or unassailable and that some of the strategies they adopt to find a sense of belonging are not in their best interests. While Ahmed and Bhabha provide compelling ways in which an understanding of the transnational space might be approached, they do not provide the implications of this understanding for considering issues of literary pedagogy. To do this, I turn to the work of Spivak. I focus on one of the central planks of her thinking: that learning to become the implied reader of culturally different texts trains the readerly imagination 'to receive the literary and thus go beyond the self-identity of nationalism toward the complex textuality of the international' (Spivak, 2012, p. 281). How does this thinking, we might wonder, contribute to a new understanding of the idea of transnational literacy, one that responds to the stories of the students in my classroom? How might it offer slow reading strategies that expand the terrain on which the students' subjectivities are conceived and on which they can recognise the agency of those whose experiences are different?

### **'The need for imaginative training**

Reading Shanthi's post-unit writing shows me how strongly discourses of nationalism have imposed on her thinking and feeling:

I identified with Sam more than any character I have come across in my life. It really gave me a lot of answers as to why I experience so much conflict between myself and my interactions with other people. I do believe a lot of migrant or cross-culture kids feel the issue of having to give up our natural fluid identity to fit in with a confined societal conduct, to fit in. This pressure changed me a lot and who I perceived myself to be, though at times I still find myself searching for a solid identity. I am more aware of the fact that no such thing exists.

Shanthi shows the power of the normative categories that attempt to contain her when she says 'having to give up'. The words, 'to fit in with a confined societal conduct', signal categories laden with nationalist norms. These norms seem to offer her a coherent subjectivity but, at the same time, pressure her to give up what she saw as her 'natural fluid identity'. This phrase suggests a hybridised subjectivity, but one in tension with a 'solid identity', presumably dictated by hegemonic norms. Here, Shanthi is riding the tension produced by methodological nationalism.

This kind of tension makes imaginative training necessary because narratives of nation can be internalised as truth by those immersed within their discourses (Spivak, 2012). This narrative patterning can be detected in much of my students' data where fixed subject-positions translate into national identities that become enshrined in patriotic assumptions. Many students have felt entrapped by assigned subject-positions. As teacher, my challenge is how to expose the imaginary nature of the construct of 'nation' and the invisible mechanics of the staging of nationhood in order to open up the 'unacknowledged system of representations that allows you a self-representation you believe is true' (Spivak, 2012, p. 168). In the literature classroom, this suggests the need for engaging with literature as an opportunity to train the imagination to see that national, gender or class master narratives engender stereotypes that mask the subjectivity of the Other. My pedagogical task is to show how students might resist such categorisation of themselves and others. While they live between national spaces, many students are caught within national discourses. Spivak helps us see that the literary imagination can impact on discourses of nationalism and

unsettle them. For Anjali, for example, the experience of the protagonist in the text seems to help prepare her imagination to begin questioning assigned subject positions:

I think Sam... Sam wants to identify with the English people, but he also ... instinctively knows that it's maybe not his place, and for me as well, it's like this battle to find your place and you don't know where you fit in.

In the teeth of this 'battle to find your place', Anjali aligns herself with Sam. Spivak helps us analyse this by contesting the mechanics of the staging of these assigned subject-positions, through what she calls 'imaginative detranscendentalisation' (Spivak, 2012, p. 276). She underlines the need to demythologise such figures as nation: "The task of the literary imagination is the persistent detranscendentalisation of such figures. ...keep it framed in the imaginary, rather than see it as the ineffable cultural 'reality'" (Spivak, 2012, p. 289). Concepts such as nation seem like facts of existence to Anjali and, for many of the students in my literature classroom, these transcendental assumptions are experienced as hurdles to overcome. They both cause pain and seem unassailable. Thus, imaginative detranscendentalisation – the questioning of assumptions about *a priori* conditions of knowledge – has to be taught. These extracts from Penny's interview indicate this:

So I am not Australian. I'm from Indonesia, I was born there but my background is Chinese. So on both sides of my family everyone can speak Chinese ... I don't know if I am actually Australian because....Like I guess I've lived here so long that I identify with parts of the culture, but there's always aspects of Indonesian culture that I kind of keep in mind like ... In Indonesia they're very like respectful and kind of conservative, and then here it's very like out there [*laugh*] ... when I'm here, when I speak Indonesian they're like 'oh you sound so Indonesian', but then I go to Indonesia and they're like, 'oh you sound so Australian' [*laugh*].

The task of transnational literacy within this context is to keep 'nation' framed in the imaginary, viewed as a ruse, a deceptive category (Spivak, 2012, p. 289), rather than fact. Spivak suggests that the literary imagination can impact on such embedded concepts by

placing ‘a question mark upon the declarative’ (Spivak, 2014, ‘Introduction’, para 5<sup>30</sup>). For example, many assume normative Australianness to be white and English-speaking. But inviting them, as Anjali did within one class discussion, to turn this declarative into the interrogatory, ‘what do Australians look like today?’ introduces the ‘complexity of interpellations’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 275) involved in nationalist ascriptions.

While imaginative detranscendentalising might go some way towards constituting a form of transnational literacy, there is more to be done. As Jessie begins to challenge methodological nationalism, she learns to acknowledge systems of representation through responding to the text:

After reading *The Hamilton Case*, I have come to the realisation that colonialism, especially epistemological colonialism, comes at the detriment of the culture and minds of the native people of the land being colonised. These detriments include the exploitation of the traditional owner and inhabitants of the land, and the development of the belief that they are somehow inferior or subordinate to their colonial masters.

This is just the first step of her changing self-representation. Culler, when he claims that literature makes ‘Otherness palpable’ (Culler, 1987, p. 187), suggests another important direction for this imaginative training. As literature begins to assist the students to detranscendentalise accepted constructs contributing to an interruptive praxis, this encounter with difference perhaps helps to subvert universalistic assumptions by presenting alternatives. By expanding the imagination beyond the limits enclosed by the metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984) pertaining within their particular political or cultural space, they then begin to move towards imagining the other who does not resemble the self. But this is complicated for many of them who are being ‘interpellated as stranger’ in the place one calls home’ (Gunew, 2017, p. 14). My complicated task as literature teacher is to help

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<sup>30</sup> For in-text references from Kindle books I use the convention suggested in the APA Citation Guide of quoting an overarching heading plus a paragraph number within that section.

them use literature to imagine themselves as stranger (that is, to decentre, to challenge assumptions about centre and margins) while their experience, many feel, Others them in everyday life.

### **Re-imagining self and Other**

In their interviews, several of the students commented on how useful they found the short unit on transnational poetry with which we preceded the study of *The Hamilton Case*. Helen, raised and schooled in Australia in conventional classrooms studying predominantly Anglo-canonical texts, said in her interview that she found it a struggle to read texts from other cultures but she also found it interesting and worthwhile. In striving to read 'Directions to my imaginary childhood', a poem by Manila-born Nick Carbo (2008), many students in the class found themselves without a context, both geographically and culturally, as the narrator of the poem led them through a series of unfamiliar streets past cultural images outside the canonical English frame. In reading such texts, students discovered how much context matters in deciphering the text of another. And even when they googled all the references and mapped the journey of the poem's narrator through the streets of Manila, becoming the implied reader, they discovered, required something more. It meant training oneself not to naively relate to the text, in order to identify with it, but rather, to be alert to its 'body-language', its textures, tones and movements, its pauses and hesitations and to learn to follow its cues and clues till they approximated the reader Carbo might have envisaged, the one who might have shared his 'hypotheses about persons, places and times' (Spivak, 2012, p. 37). The students found it challenging to 'imagine the Other who does not resemble the self' (Spivak, 2012, p. 324). But they found it useful, this reimagining of self and Other that occurs as a reader strives to become the type of reader implied by the text. Jessie was particularly enthusiastic about this aspect of the course:

And then in contrast is these beautiful poems, and there's one ... I think my favourite was the one that's set in the Philippines with all the different cultures,

and talking about how confused he is and he's listing all these streets, and I was like 'oh it's so good'. And so yeah, I think like reading through that it was daunting because I don't know how much depth to go into and I'd never done this task before in relation to myself and culture and everything like that, but it was also amazing and eye-opening, and many people in the class I think felt the same way. And I remember I was writing up one of the analyses of one, and a student from another literature class came over and she said, 'oh I've read this', and she is a student who... she's white and she's Australian and she's never... I think she's travelled but she's lived in Australia her whole life, and she even said, 'I can relate to this so much'.

While they usually read texts only within their own cultural self-representation, in reading historically and culturally distanced fiction, they strove to begin shaping their minds until they engaged with the different system of cultural representation informing the text. This reading experience involved imagining themselves within the landscape of the text, so that, within its social rules and assumptions, the desires of the reader, the sense the reader has of herself, could slowly and subtly be changed. They were finding that they, as readers, could be swayed, caught up in the experience of the text in an almost surreptitious way. If learning to become the implied reader means learning to 'identify implicitly with the value system figured forth by literature' (Spivak, 2012, p.38), then these responses suggest that becoming open to the experience of the Other, and re-imagining that Other through vicarious familiarity is an important step along the way.

For me, this part of the course was particularly intriguing as, in studying these poems, my canonical power, my teacher privilege, was undermined. I had no more access to these texts than students did, sometimes much less, given what I was learning was the deficit of my monocultural, monolingual background. I found it quite exciting to explore the unknown texts together without a compass, often learning a great deal from the students. Some students, however, were perturbed during this time. They felt they were 'doing all the work', that I was not 'looking after them'. This was interesting as in some cases the poems were chosen by students and selected as a valued cultural text in their particular tradition. For much of the rest of the course I was feeling guilty because of my white privilege,

strangely out of place in mediating diasporic texts to a predominantly diasporic cohort. I kept asking myself, ‘by what authority?’ Worried already by my complicity in systems of oppression because of my specific situation as white teacher-researcher venturing somewhat blindly into the realm of South Asian diasporic literature and experience, I became uneasy when my deliberate pedagogical decision was construed as neglect. Even though this was expressed by only two students, I could not tell whether the feeling was more general. I asked around, talking to individual students at different times to see whether this section of the course was educationally valuable to them. They said it was and it felt convincing although teacher authority has to be taken into account. My own subjectivity was being challenged, my identity as teacher and as reader was changing as I realised how many other knowledges, knowledges beyond my ken, the students brought with them. I asked myself to what extent was I the implied reader of *The Hamilton Case*. How would I need to reimagine myself in order to teach this course well? Amongst the many uncertainties, one thing seemed clear, ‘[i]f the ‘I’ of the participant is always becoming in the process of telling, so too the ‘I’ of the researcher is always becoming in the process of researching, listening, and writing’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 266).

### **Slow reading as imaginative and ethical training**

In a group discussion concerning *The Hamilton Case*, (de Kretser, 2003, pp. 182–184. See Appendix 5), having previously considered some postcolonial theory, the students then responded to three selected extracts from the novel. I was interested, as I read these responses, to discover how classroom teaching in the attempt to encourage suspension in another’s text, might play out as a training for the ethical impulse.

Jessie	The last two sentences, ‘dropping a fistful of pink newborn mice into four inches of water. There were places where everything was new and clean, where no one struggled’. And so just like the irony of that, he’s trying to make it all clean but at the expense of these lives, like he’s trying to...
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Shanthi	Also the fact that he's Sinhalese and how like he was a fisherman, like they don't advocate killing and they're taking lives...so the fact that he's a fisherman and he's also now resorting to killing mice big time and so this really is highlighting the fact how he is really caught between the religion and the work.
Sreya	He's a Buddhist. 'To Buddhists the work was abhorrent since it necessitated taking life' ...so they were against that but then...
Jessie	in the end it's like oh yeah, it seems it's just like an everyday chore. It's like just drop it in.

In this extract from a much longer classroom discussion, this group begins to recognise the contradictions within the character of Sirisena – a minor character in the novel, the bungalow-keeper – usually overlooked in analyses of this text. Contradictions become evident in his ambivalence toward his wife, his work situation and his relationship to his employers. The text conjures these ambiguities in the image of the drowning mice, as Sirisena attempts to clean up the environment pending the arrival of 'the nonamahatheya'<sup>31</sup>. The students recognise that he is caught between 'the religion and the work' and between cultural practices – Sinhalese and Tamil – as suggested by his nausea at his wife's cooking. As he violates his Buddhist beliefs by taking life, he is, he thinks, cementing his place within the household as the devoted keeper of the house, the dutiful servant.

Rather than just seeking to analyse Sirisena as an object of knowledge, an example for use in an exam, there is an attempt by the students to suspend themselves in the slow moment of the text and to learn the backstory and context for this lesser character, the competing impulses within the character, his class situation, his ethnic interrelationships. Spivak shows us that it is only with the help of the training of the imagination that we can change our epistemological performance, that is, how we construct objects for knowing (Spivak, 2014, 'Introduction', para 7). And the imagination is trained through painstaking attention to the

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<sup>31</sup> This refers to Maud as the elder mistress of the house, the master's mother.

rhetoric and the literary devices of a text until they reveal how and why the textual ruses are constructing us as the implied readers of that particular text.

These responses suggest that literature as it figures forth ways of being not previously experienced by the reader, opens up new possibilities for encountering the Other. This view has been advanced by Spivak (2002), and later by Choo (2013) and it owes a philosophical debt to the ethics of Levinas (1969) who contests Western philosophy's traditional definition of the Other as an object of consciousness for the Western subject. This reductive definition, according to Levinas, has effectively undermined the singular alterity of the Other. He argues instead that the challenge the alterity of the Other poses to the self in the face-to-face encounter between the self and the Other opens the question of ethics. I wanted to see if and how thinking with this idea might help me to read the data transcripts. 'For Levinas, ethics is, first and foremost, born on the concrete level of person to person contact' as the moral 'ought' for Levinas has 'already occurred before reason comes on the scene' (Beavers, 1990, p. 1). Spivak points toward this notion in her much-repeated phrase 'before will' where she suggests an ethical imperative that precedes cognition and does not depend on rational choice. Andreotti (2014) sees this as implying 'a different (non-Cartesian) relationship between being and thinking, and a decentering of reasoning and agency' (p. 382).

Of most interest for this chapter is Levinas' attention to sensibility which, in his view, precedes thought as the ethical moment is found in 'response and responding' (Biesta, 2003, p. 64), whereby the disturbance of being by sensibility disposes us towards the demand of the Other. We are subjects only as primordially exposed to the Other as indicated by Levinas in his quoting of Isaiah's 'before they call, I will answer' to signify the infinite Otherness at the centre of subjectivity (Levinas, 1991, p. 150). The proximity of the Other demands a response and operates as a weight that comes from the outside because

the other pushes back at the self. While responsibility to the Other is pre-ontological or other-than-ontological, what we can learn from Levinas for the literature classroom is the importance of a truly dialogic process, towards the development of a 'Levinasian responsible and 'response-able' subject' (Biesta, 2003, p. 67), keeping open the possibility for students to ethically respond. As Biesta suggests, this might lead towards 'a pedagogy that is no longer primarily informed by knowledge, but by something which we may want to refer to as 'justice.' (Biesta, 2003, p. 67). Levinas' ethics underpin Spivak's claim that in the literature classroom what you are taught is how to suspend yourself in another's text, in other words, training for the ethical impulse. In order for the ethical to interrupt the epistemological, the ability to surrender the self to the demand of the other is a necessary first step.

During the discussion on *Sirisena*, Jessie imaginatively enters the text to try to understand the ambivalence of the colonised subject-position:

So it's like you have an inherent desire to colonise and if you are not being colonised you go and colonise because it's just like, does that make sense? ... Because it's like a need to belong to one of two groups, the coloniser or the colonised ... And that's sad because it's like the effects of colonisation again. It's like what they've taught them, it's like you go and colonise because you are colonised. And they just want a sense of belonging.

Jessie plays with the binary, 'colonise/colonised', troubling it, questioning its overlappings and collusions and struggling to allow them to surface. The movement between pronouns is interesting, as 'you' becomes 'they', suggesting that thinking into this engenders both a distancing and a recognition. Here Jessie taps into one of the novel's central concerns. Sam, the protagonist, is portrayed by de Kretser as both perpetrator and victim, both oppressor and oppressed. Scholars such as Bhabha (2004) and Mignolo (2003) insist that awareness of one's moment and locus of enunciation is a necessary condition for reading and analysing the texts of self and Other. Spivak, also, models acknowledgement of one's situatedness, asking of her reading of Tagore's 1895 poem, 'Didi', 'how was I historically constructed as

its implied reader so that I was able to read it with pleasure within my cultural self-representation?’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 39). To respond to this, Spivak introduces the concept of alienated consent, which she distinguishes from the hegemonic notion of willing suspension of belief. Alienation can ensue when we teach students to read and enjoy culturally different texts. Students both immerse themselves in the world of the story and recognise their own situatedness as located elsewhere. As the text works in covert ways, while they relate to a protagonist from long ago or far away, they *become* that person for a time. They imaginatively enter that character’s experience – perhaps only momentarily, perhaps only to some extent – and it is this degree of immersion that gives them pleasure in the text. But as we must keep dislodging belief in order to read imaginatively, we expand our boundaries of recognition. Hartwiger (2010) relates this point back to Levinas: ‘Levinas’ characterisation of teaching is useful in that it shows that knowledge emerges from a location beyond ourselves, through encounters, and brings us what we do not and cannot contain – difference’ (Hartwiger, 2010, p.86). Reading in this way opens students to that which is beyond the self and encourages them to expand their horizons. As the text is working at both discursive and figurative levels, the response can be embodied (hope, fear, amusement), imaginative and critical in different combinations at different stages of the reading. It is perhaps the affective level that plays into the potential for ethical transformation as we make the imaginative leap to enter another’s text. For the ethical implications here do not involve generalisations of ethical principles but what you are becoming as an ethical being, the sensibility that develops through the imaginative training. As Braidotti (2011) claims, ‘[t]he ethical good is that which acts as empowering modes of becoming, whereas morality is the implementation of established protocols and sets of rules’ (Braidotti, 2011, p. 300). When Jessie uses the words ‘sad’ and ‘they just want a sense of belonging’, she expresses a sensibility that is open to different even puzzling experiences and diverse ways of responding.

Following Jessie's comments about colonisation, Shanthi takes up the invitation to expand on this, linking the discussion to Sirisena's wife, Padma:

it's not like whereas Sirisina he's being the coloniser, almost a bit like Sam he's unaware of the effects that the colonisation has had on him. He's not aware of any inner struggle. But I think that sort of the conflict between moving and giving up her baby all because of the fact that she has to assimilate in this country – and I'll stop talking about colonisation for a sec – but just like the general hardship that she's had, marrying a poor guy, having to cook, giving away her child and then completely relocating away, again. That's like an identity crisis in itself, where like herself is just being lost in amongst so many other things that it's partially, it's due to colonisation like ultimately, though if we just look at like the things that have affected her in her life like obviously she'll turn sullen.

Here Shanthi recognises the gendered nature of colonialism as represented in the novel.

Consistent with other research, my participant responses also suggest that for female students, gender tends to overshadow other forms of social difference (Levine-Rasky, as quoted in Taylor, 2013). In the pre-course writing, 14/20 expressed sympathy and identification with female characters. 3/20 expressed sympathy for the protagonist, Sam. In this example, Shanthi moves quickly from Sirisena to Sam and back to Padma. Sirisena, she claims, is unaware of his wife's struggle. De Kretser used a third-person narrator in this section of the novel and free indirect discourse<sup>32</sup> to move between Sirisena's and Padma's points of view. Spivak (2012) reminds us that attention to details of the rhetorical conduct of the text renders visible the clandestine ways in which the implied reader is drawn into patterns of cultural value. Padma's emotions are emphasised by graphic bodily imagery and placement at the end of the paragraph: '[I]n her dreams a flay-eyed baby mewled. She lay on her mat with aching nipples'. Shanthi does not refer explicitly to these signposts but her response suggests she has, by this stage of the novel, been trained by its rhetorical signals to read the impact of reproductive heteronormativity on female characters such as Padma.

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<sup>32</sup> Free indirect discourse is third-person narration that slips in and out of characters' consciousness.

Having to give up her baby, cook, move away, live amidst Sinhalese rather than familiar Tamil customs are all aspects that invite Shanthi's sympathy for her. But Shanthi also sees that Padma's experience is contextualised within the wider colonial frame. Partly through Sirisena's blindness to it, her situation is presented as dependent on what males can or cannot see and part of what they are blind to is the effect of colonisation on them. Thus, female characters are inscribed within hegemonic structures of colonialism as much through the blindnesses of their husbands as through the wider political frames. Colonialism is gender active, masculinist in orientation.

While these are minor characters and therefore outside the compass of a sustained engagement, students notice personal histories that impact on the characters' present situations. Within the context of postcolonial ethics, this is a significant recognition. Achebe (2016) criticises Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (2010) for including only unnamed African characters, providing no sense of the social context in which they lived and no sense of the long history that had preceded the historical moment of the text. Anglocentric canonical texts have all too often failed to acknowledge that their protagonists are interacting with others who are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement (Bhabha, 2004, p. 172). The students in this discussion respond to how religious and ethnic identifications play into the relationship between these characters. They sympathise with the contradictory nature of Sirisena's position and with the impact of patriarchal and colonial hegemonic structures on Padma. Implicit in these reflections is an understanding of how characters in lowlier social roles and social classes have backstories and contexts that deserve recognition. Is this suspending themselves in the text? Yes and no. They are slowing down, taking in the details, entering a different system of representation. At the same time, they have been in a class studying a postcolonial reading of a text and are ideologically positioned through the teaching and the set questions to look at the text in this way. As many asked me at the beginning of the lesson who Sirisena was, they had not

originally paid attention to subsidiary characters. But there is some indication here of a developing recognition that even though Sirisena did not belong to the social role/class they might customarily read about, the class separation allows for a feeling of ‘identity-in-difference which seems a much more flexible instrument of epistemic transformation’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 41).

Thus, while these are small steps, the time and attention to the precise details of the text, the imagining of how the characters are feeling and the location of that within their wider histories, help the students to be better attuned to fine tonal changes: ‘obviously she’ll turn sullen’ and ‘they just want a sense of belonging’. There is an element of care in these comments. A space is being created for the eruption of the ethical (in this case, the caring for the suffering of the culturally different Other) to interrupt the epistemological, the undertaking to construct the Other as an object of knowledge.

### **The ethical as interruption to the epistemological**

But what does it mean to interrupt the epistemological? Could it be as simple as lingering in the text, reading it slowly with painstaking attention to details as the students did with the Sirisena passage? Spivak (2002) gives some indication of what it might mean to postpone the epistemological. She tells the story of a class-inflected encounter she had with two students in which their silence could variously be interpreted as class-based deference, pain, resentment or withholding. ‘Training in literary reading’, Spivak says, ‘can prepare one to work at these silences’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 330). She works closely with the students to teach them to read but they find it difficult. The only glimmer of hope is in a flicker of a smile from one of the students which while minimal suggests the possibility of a changing performance of self and other. Ethics is presented here as a matter of relation rather than a matter of knowledge. As Braidotti affirms, ‘the ethical ideal’ is to increase one’s ability to enter into modes of relation with multiple others (Braidotti, 2009, p. 530). Rather than

constructing the Other as an object of knowledge, leaving space for the students' responses, trying to hear how they experience the encounter allows for, but does not guarantee, the interruption of the ethical. The girl's flicker of a smile might indicate the possibility of opening up class interrelationships, a glimmer of hope. Spivak does not overclaim for this – in fact, she insists on the singularity and unverifiability of such encounters – but shows that learning and teaching reading can be effortful without much effect. While she claims that the one-to-one encounter with the Other has the potential to usher in the ethical, her point in the paper lies elsewhere. By itself, this encounter amounts to little within an economically and politically uneven world. Although the literary mode of instruction activates the subject, 'in order to be secured it must enter the political calculus of the public sphere' (Spivak, 2012, p. 333). She moves to Marx affirming that philosophy must displace itself into the everyday struggle. Thus, she has argued that both steps are necessary. There is a need first to train the imagination to postpone the epistemological and only then to follow this by engaging in the day-to-day struggle.

Within my study, situated within the exam-driven senior years of schooling, the emphasis is solely on the first step, which hopefully will predispose students toward the second. The argument I am making – suggested through thinking both with Spivak and with the responses of my students – emphasises the role of the imagination in contributing to a sensibility that will prepare students for ethical engagement with such sociopolitical realities. The focus here is on sensibility rather than ethical principles or the rational evaluations and actions ensuing from conventional ethical theories and approaches. My understanding is that fiction is well suited to this encouragement of the disposition towards the ethical as it draws the reader to identify implicitly with the value system figured forth by the text. These considerations helped me when thinking about how to read data excerpts from a literature group's discussion concerning the protagonist of *The Hamilton Case*, Sam.



Kay: He uses racist language.

Anjali: Yeah. And rather than anything else it's kind of ironic how he's like 'we're more Edwardian...'

Anne: So first comes school and then comes our nationality. But then he has like...

Sue: And it's like, 'yes, we never bothered with the Kaffirs' jaw breaking name but dubbed them the Kalus for their glossy black skin', so that's like racist again.

Kay: Yeah. This is really contradictory because – 'these distinctions passed almost unnoticed' – Like those people's names like how they're distinctly other cultures and stuff, but then he goes on to say we called them Ching Chongs and that other guy... But to be honest it's not entirely his fault because it's kind of tolerated at his school anyway so it's not like it's wrong because no one has told him it's wrong ...

Anjali: I said like it's not entirely his fault because –

Tia: He's been conditioned.

Sue: He's pretty much mimicking.

Anjali: He's a schoolboy. Yeah. And he's pretty much just being – his attitudes are being tolerated by the school so no one is telling him that he's wrong...

Kay: I think the school upholds those values anyway.

As we think of the goal of the literature classroom as orienting the mind of the student toward the patterns of cultural value affirmed by the text, we see the subliminal ways in which *The Hamilton Case* is doing just that in the passage discussed by the students. On first reading, many had responded with aversion to Sam and here they begin with a judgment – 'He uses racist language' – categorising, trying to construct him as a recognisable manageable character, as an object of their knowledge. Anjali notes the irony, indicating that Sam locates himself within a colonial discourse, accepting its rhetoric blindly. The irony consists in Sam telling the reader this without knowing it himself; and this within a chapter ironically named 'Sons of Empire'. Anne and Kay take up this point considering the subject-positions constructed for Sam by school rhetoric and norms and seeing how Sam is caught within the rhetoric not noticing its contradictions. They begin to see his morality as prescribed by the school and from inside the rhetoric it seems to have a logic. So the students emphasise that Sam is caught within the wider narratives. These initial

softenings of attitude towards the protagonist are developed further thirty minutes later in the discussion:

- Kay: I really just like Sam...I don't know sometimes I feel sorry for him. Yeah. You feel sorry for him because he's the victim really.
- Anjali: But he's the victim, but he also victimises other people which is what's like not okay, which is why they're like him, but he didn't have the best childhood.
- May: Yeah. I think I feel sorry for him because it's like he doesn't know what he's doing.
- Kay: Yeah. But then he becomes one of the adults ... that teaches the other people the wrong things.
- Anjali: So how long can you be the victim for when you start victimising other people?

Here we see that literature buys reader assent in often-concealed ways. Closer attention to the details of how the text constructs the character of Sam leads to a different, however partial, assent to his character. The students begin to uncover the ways Sam is written by the grand narratives of his time: empire, capitalism, Christianity, patriarchy. Many, on first reading, see him only as a perpetrator of cruelty and injustice to women. By the final piece of writing for the course, 17/20 are sympathetic to him and 8/20 say they identify with him and feel as though he shows them something of themselves. At this early stage of the unit, they commence a closer engagement with specific passages, trying to uncover the text's clues and how it gains reader assent, often in covert ways. The text takes them towards a more sympathetic response to Sam but also an ambivalent one. Colonisation of the mind does not tend to beget likeable characters but to understand the victimhood is the difficult and necessary challenge of the novel. The device of irony opens the way to learning that it is what Sam doesn't know about himself that most characterises him. While some in the discussion keep repeating the racist phrases Sam used, showing the powerful affect of those words, others recognise that behind the gap in his knowing lie glimpses of a history of manipulation, discursive entrapment, pain and deprivation. In negotiating the complexity of the victim/perpetrator complicity, they are moving towards awareness of the

ambivalence involved in colonial mimicry. The ethical interrupts the epistemological as the reader gives assent to the rhetorical devices of the text, to its images, changes of narrative voice, its subtle ironies, the range and complexity of its characterisations. As the students spend time with the passages, unpacking them slowly, they gradually bring to light the mechanics of the production of Sam's mimicry, his subject-position as a not-quite-British subject. Leaving space for the contradictions, the complicities within binaries, and the different cultural knowledges ushers in a gradual transformation of original views. The eloquently expressed judgment, the glib phrase that aptly sums the character up is often the temptation of the secondary literature student wanting success in exams. But patiently putting this aside to allow for the slow reading necessary for the text to reveal the mechanics of the staging of its situations can dispose the reader to adopt a more open approach to the Other. The pedagogical goal (perhaps hope) here is that this disposition might form the basis of the ethical sensibility that understands radical alterity as the necessarily human responsibility.

### **Beginning to approximate the implied reader**

The differences between students' pre-course and post-course written responses give some indication of what is involved in learning to approximate the implied reader of the text.

Penny moves from 'definitely' not liking Sam in her pre-unit writing 'because he is rude, selfish, jealous and arrogant and only thinks about himself' to a more ambivalent post-unit response:

I kind of feel sorry for Sam. After all he did grow up in a colonised environment. Always striving and vying for the attention of his parents. His experience at school definitely set up the basis for his thinking, but in the end he could have realised more about what he was learning. It is partly Sam's fault that he views himself as superior to the Ceylonese, but I cannot fully blame him for sympathising with the colonisers who basically allowed him to have his education and experience at Oxford. His family history also plays a major role in his thinking, and the environment he lived in certainly confused him. Growing up in such an environment kind of encouraged Sam to be confused about his

identity. He hates to be seen less superior to the British but yet he views himself superior to the Tamils.

Penny has followed the text's moves in that she takes into account the 'colonised environment' and the feeling of inferiority that has been inculcated in Sam by his rejection by the British. But she is struggling here between her early dismissal of Sam and her emerging sympathy. Like several other students in the class, she wants to blame him for what he cannot see. Somehow, he seems culpable for the fact that he cannot detect and therefore cannot negotiate with the epistemically violent structures that have produced him. The words, 'cannot fully blame' and 'partly Sam's fault', indicate that while the text has moved her beyond total dismissiveness of him, it has not significantly transformed her construction of him as an object of her knowledge. Her journey to becoming the implied reader of this text has, however, taken her to a more complex view, to a divided assent and, importantly, to an emerging sense of the complicities within the binary coloniser/colonised.

Becoming an implied reader of this text, suspending oneself in its figurations, involves moving away from the alienation as a result of Sam's mimicking British voice of Part One to identifying the force of his narrative patterning, how he was being written by the grand narratives of his age. The novel makes these moves through, among other literary techniques, changing narrative positions, subverting the underlying assumptions of British detective fiction and its universalising view of truth and gradually filling in the gaps in Sam's personal history. To follow and give assent to all of these moves takes time and the development of skills to analyse how the effects are produced. Students do this slowly and at different rates. As they learn to do so, they adopt strategies of attentiveness that have the possibility of opening them to subtler, more complex and therefore more open responses to the characters they read.

Some, like Jessie, a self-described ‘Third Culture Kid’, who lived for many years in America and then China, move towards implied readership by beginning to critique their own attitudes, as this example from Jessie’s interview suggests:

At the start ... I related to Neddy’s, and I was like yeah he goes to a school ... it’s a British school, that’s just like me, but I didn’t go deep into Sam, I just thought, you know he is how he is. ...I didn’t begin to think about the narrative patterning or any of the complexities which may have made Sam the way he is... And then... I just started to realise the complexities and the way that his childhood and his upbringing have shaped who he is into the future ... I started to analyse ... his use of language and the use of the British lexicon, which ... in my average essay I probably would be like yeah he uses this sentence type which shows he’s educated or something you know something really stupid. But, then I just started to really think about this, and think about it in a way that was not just, oh yeah, this is my subject and I just have to do my homework for it. But, thinking about it in a way that’s like – this is real life, and how am I shaped by my upbringing, and how is everyone else shaped by that as well? And what’s going to be my outcome if I continue with some elitist mindset that I’d been taught when I was growing up? And so yeah. I think my reading had definitely changed, and that was through not only re-reading it over and over again, but having that dialogue in class where everyone picked up on yeah he’s racist, or you know he’s making these comments, and then we went back and looked... oh well you know he had the Burgher as a teacher, and she made these comments about his hands being too black and he couldn’t touch the picture of her and things like that, and how that changed at the beginning who he is. Yeah and I think with each reading it became so much more complex, and that’s something that’s usually the opposite for me. and what I’ve realised now is studying any novel in literature is that people are more than one thing ... let’s think about what made them that way, and also their complete complexities and imagining people as whole and full rather than yes, one simple thing yeah

Jessie’s taking on board de Kretser’s technique of showing the imposition of narrative patterning through its material manifestations in the characters’ lives and, only in the final section, rendering explicit the narrative patterns themselves, has become part of her everyday response to the world. She demonstrated this in class discussions, but also in her applications of this concept to her analyses of social situations, as will be shown later. Here, however, she articulates her developing insight into the glib nature of responses she had hitherto given and her awareness of the multilayered response she now recognises as doing more justice to complexity. For her, as with Anna, backstory is significant in her changing attitude. Placing a character within their history and learning enough of that history to

begin to understand the nature of its impact is emerging as a key aspect of this pedagogy and this incarnation of transnational literacy.

Implied readership manifests as a messy and complex business. It involves a changing combination of textual literacy (that is, the ability to see how the text constructs its meanings, how to follow its clues and figurations), a certain quality of attention and availability, and the experiences brought by the reader to the text. The structures and form of the text are certainly significant. To paraphrase Eagleton, we don't read a bus ticket for plot (Eagleton, 2008, p. 9). Thinking with Spivak foregrounds how the conventions of the text guide us to meaning and that learning to read is in large part knowing how these conventions work within particular reading settings. But learning to read also involves developing a certain sensitivity to tone and nuance, the ability to listen and absorb new elements of a situation. Teaching this necessitates teaching the precise meanings of words and how these denotations are supplemented by their connotations, often carried by texture of language and the range of possibilities engendered within the given context. The students in my class worked hard at developing two new vocabularies, that of postcolonial theory and that needed to discern the different world of the text, a world removed from their daily lives both geographically and temporally.

It is this disposition to respectfully enter new worlds that offers the possibility of the ethical interruption. In this tentative entry into new situations, into the lives of different others, lies the possibility of epistemic transformation, of having this new and different world challenge entrenched assumptions. Jessie was introduced fictionally to the impact of narrative patterning on Sam, on how his taking up of one elitist story cut him off from his family, his schoolmates and his fellow Ceylonese. Paradoxically, it left him also cut off from the British. Jessie's own experiences as temporary resident in a range of countries helped her to enter the world of de Kretser's text and to be open to its figurations. She was more

prepared for this than some others in the class, many of whom felt torn between the norms of their Australian education and their acceptance of its often colonially inflected values. Many took some time to negotiate the internalised sense that ‘Western meant better’ as some articulated it. But Jessie’s responses indicate something of the ethical possibilities of this pedagogy, moving towards, what we consider in the next section, a destabilisation of assumptions of centrality and periphery in prevailing discourses and structures.

### **‘there’s a bunch of people who, you know, can’t relate to this’**

As one of the course goals was to open the way for other knowledges through undoing imported distinctions between centre and periphery, I decided that we would look at literature as the ‘staged battleground of epistemes’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 55). Staging the literature classroom as an interplay of these various knowledges unsettles the power of canonicity and opens up the ideological and ethical landscape. Spivak quotes Gramsci in support of this proposition, claiming that the recognition of a ‘hegemonic apparatus, insofar as it creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 9). Part of what my emerging version of transnational literacy was attempting to do was to render visible the hegemonic structures of power operating both in the world of the text and in the lives of the students so that they become aware of the contingent nature of the constraints imposed by their norms. Foucault (1970) in *The Order of Things*, employs the concept of ‘episteme’ as a body of ideas that shape what counts as knowledge at a particular epoch of history. It includes a range of cultural and political elements that underpin the prevailing discourses and are foundational to the assumptions of that time and place. Thus, an episteme is a particular way of seeing the world, a set of discourses and practices that inform the ways of knowing in a particular place and time in history (Parvini, 2017, p. 21). What, then, might it mean to teach literature as the clash of epistemes? It seemed to me, as I planned and taught the course, to have three main

components: the inclusion of a range of culturally different texts, contesting of universalising assumptions of the Western episteme and the presentation of other knowledges as centred within the unit and in dialogue and complicity with the canon.

I made these pedagogic decisions on the basis of the assumption that knowledge is constructed within a discourse and contingent upon that discourse, and therefore knowledge produced within a colonial episteme continues to be contingent on the remnant assumptions of coloniality. The assumption of supremacy handed down through British colonial history has been famously deconstructed by postcolonial thinkers in relation to texts such as *Jane Eyre* and *Mansfield Park*. But unless these assumptions are deconstructed, they operate as orthodoxy within the classroom and beyond. A diasporic text has the potential to open up a different mode of engagement with the world and thereby challenge this orthodoxy.

But if students study only canonical texts, implicit colonial assumptions are presented as central and universally significant. In the unit immediately preceding the study of *The Hamilton Case*, the literature class studied Jane Austen's *Emma*, famously described by Leavis in *The Great Tradition* as having a 'formal perfection' that can only be appreciated in terms of its author's 'moral preoccupations' (Leavis, 1966, p.17). Along with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and some feminist poetry from Plath and Dickinson, these texts, which constitute the main part of our literature course, tend to establish in the students' minds a sense of a cultural centre, one not characteristically presented as an imported or unstable centre.

Although the majority of the students in the school have, among their out-of-school literacies, rich literary traditions and knowledges that are often from the many Asias, many accept the norms of Australian literary education and do not question the choice of material. As noted earlier, Anjali said in her interview, 'I think I chose literature to study Jane Austen because I feel like that's what I expected it to be'. But in adopting this



assumption of centrality, they (both students and course designers) unwittingly consign other knowledges to the periphery. Even as the students came to recognise that this is what Sam was doing in the novel, they rarely identified it in themselves. Jessie, however, was an exception and after the unit of work, she commented on this centre/periphery distinction in her interview:

I've read *Emma* before, and I've seen the film before. It's great, but then I spoke to a friend of mine ...in the class, and she said, this is the most boring thing, I cannot relate to one aspect of *Emma*... and then I started to realise oh wait, there's more than me in the world. There's more than me at Atwood, and there's a bunch of people who you know can't relate to this. And it's just that awkward situation where you're like, well the majority of Atwood is of a non-Western ...descent. Why are we reading these Western novels?

While Jessie invokes the Western/Asian binary here and seems to imply that she, as a white Australian, is the implied reader and inheritor of this centralised tradition, she also acknowledges that the distinction between centre and periphery is imported and questions its appropriateness in the transnationalised space of her current classroom. Her comment suggests that, to some extent, the inclusion of a diasporic text to interrupt the canonical trajectory of the course has opened up assumptions of centredness to scrutiny.

For many of the student-participants in this research, reading *The Hamilton Case* led them to read the Western episteme subversively, disrupting its assumptions of superiority. Consider this from Helen's post-class writing:

The most striking aspect of colonisation is the presumption of superiority it entails. The lack of regard for other ways of living is frightening, in the sense that one people can think itself better than another simply because their way of thinking dictates that their ideas are more advanced. The creation of the Mudaliyar class supposedly to bridge the gap of understanding between the two societies, highlights the difference in the way the British saw themselves and their colonial subjects. However, it also created an identity crisis for people like Sam, who is unable to classify himself because he thinks himself superior to 'uneducated' Ceylonese, yet will always be considered inferior by those British in ethnicity. It is astounding that not only did the British see their society as better, but also that they were superior in some essential way, so even when someone of another ethnicity was raised with British values and education, they would still be unequal.

Words such as ‘striking’, ‘frightening’, ‘crisis’ and ‘astounding’ convey Helen’s sense of outrage at the double-bind of the colonial subject, the lose-lose nature of Sam’s predicament. This outrage has emerged from the slow transformation of Sam as an object of knowledge over the course of the unit. His transition in the minds of the majority from simple perpetrator to complex perpetrator-victim has been intertwined with a developing awareness of how his subject-position was being staged, the mechanics of its production. His interpellation (Althusser, 1984) as a colonial subject was one to which he gave his assent, but assent did not guarantee him what he had hoped it would, a fixed and stable identity as a British subject rather than his current split subjectivity. ‘Caught in the baleful and paralysing glare of the stereotype’ (Gunew, 2017, p. 58), Sam’s character exposes for the students the implications of the hierarchical assumptions of the colonial episteme.

The movement away from binary thinking towards awareness of mutual implication is slow and difficult. As the unit continued, students began to question the authority and the necessity of hegemonic values beyond the text. After discussing the details of Sam’s schooling and its effect on him, Shanthi and her group began to look at the contradictions and ambivalence of the coloniser’s values:

- Shanthi: The school expects English standards and things like that and you learn...he’s been learning his national identity... I find that Neddy’s is like a micro-organism representative of the whole of Sri Lanka... – elite white values.... Eurocentric values whilst completely undermining the individual cultures that exist. Then the elite people ...making fun of woolly haired people and not even recognising the fact that we are undermining their –
- Jessie: Yes, and it’s such irony because Western culture claims to preach individualism and yet everyone I feel sometimes is the same within these Neddy schools they’re preaching the same values. They’re not saying, ‘Go explore yourself, look at your past and your traditional cultures’ or anything you’re just basically going British, British, British.
- Shanthi: the white people’s burden. They think that this is good, they think white is superior...We’re coming and helping them so in that case it’s in the form of help.

Samantha: It's kind of this tricky situation though because I feel like, not in all instances, but in a lot of instances the Western powers they actually feel like they're honestly helping. They actually think that they're doing a good thing ... It's really tricky when you don't know how to get around it because the other country could be like, 'No we don't want your help' which could work but then everywhere is just if there's none of that crossover then everyone's just growing in their own countries. Maybe that is a better way to do it, I don't know, but when you try and think of a solution to the problem it's just—

As the students consider opposing points of view and the dilemma of dealing with good intentions which perhaps sometimes produce benefits but often produce what they refer to elsewhere as 'poison', they see the colonising educational strategy of training a population to 'adopt elite white values' while 'making fun of woolly haired people'. They place the 'white man's burden' in the context of the undermining of individual cultures. But they worry about nation-bounded isolation if 'everyone's just growing in their own countries'. The main point to note pedagogically is that they remain in the questions and trouble them without trying to provide answers. As the unit progresses, the easy normative responses often fail to satisfy and the questions highlight dilemmas that challenge their usual epistemic assumptions.

So, in attempting to teach literature as the clash of epistemes, some small but detectable outcomes emerge. Through the inclusion of a range of culturally different texts, canonical assumptions about Western superiority, and what constitutes a literature text, are destabilised. Through the contesting of universalising assumptions of the Western episteme, the students begin to look in a different way at the good intentions of colonisers and as a result of these small changes, other knowledges are affirmed as important. These nascent, epistemic changes are used here not to claim success for this pedagogy but to indicate its possibilities. It is possible, these data indicate, that thinking with Spivak can help to change the ways objects of knowledge are constructed in the literature classroom and hence to unsettle hegemonic assumptions about centre and margins.

## **The repositioning of centre and periphery**

Once the binary of centre and periphery has been upset, negotiations concerning one's place in a dynamic and unstable world are also changed. As the students become aware of the concept of narrative patterning and analyse it in relation to the characters in the novel, many begin to see that they also are being written by institutional scripts that produce the subject-positions available to them. Rather than see these subject-positions in terms of binaries, the introduction to the complicities between colonised and coloniser invites the students to tease out further complicities in their own experience. Chala reflects on her identity in her post-unit writing in relation to the question: Has considering these characters changed anything about the way you think of yourself?

Yes, it did. I was born in India. But I moved to Australia when I was three so the first language I picked up properly was English. I never went to school in India, nor was I subject to many cultural aspects that I can remember. The result? A person who cannot speak my parents' language (Konkani) and does not know the reasons behind traditions, or even much of the country. When I go there I don't feel like I quite belong but I'm not really Australian either. This disjointed sense of identity and my indifference towards Indian culture did not bother me before reading this book...but now it does. Why am I placing English culture before Indian? In my lack of interest about learning about India and all the richness that constitutes the culture I am indirectly behaving in a way that suggests English culture is better, isn't that considered eurocentrism, the same thing Sam is accused of? Why is a logical way of thinking better than religious or 'superstitious' beliefs? I am just now realising the extent of how much I am a product of the narrative in which I'm immersed, even the language ... Even my writing is filled with clichés from English fiction just as Maud's was ... By describing Lokugama in those clichés she was appealing to Sri Lanka's 'exoticness', but this, of course, was from a white perspective.

Chala wants to embrace both strands in her upbringing and no longer invests English culture with greater importance. Her sense of identity now includes the notion that your desires and goals can be constructed from the narratives and discourses within which you are immersed. She registers that English fiction has supplied her with formative scripts, as it did for Sam. She feels the gap in her knowledge and the sadness that not being able to speak Konkani separates her in some ways from her parents. Now that existing

assumptions about South East Asia have been troubled, the Konkani language has greater significance and has moved in her thinking away from the periphery where it had formerly been. While it might sound patronising when she contrasts logical thinking with superstitions, the language she uses there came from the text and class discussions about how de Kretser used minor characters to challenge the assumption that one's own beliefs constitute knowledge and those of others are merely superstition. Chala's epistemological performance of self, the way she constructs herself as an object of her own knowledge, is undergoing a change and different possibilities of engagement with the world are opening up for her. Not all of the students experienced such a change. But most registered some alteration in their awareness of the shaping and forming authority of the structures and discourses around them. Even changing the type of text set for study makes way for this incipient move.

### **Connecting literary, social and ethical engagements**

Choo (2017) argues that training for the ethical might productively occur by incorporating into the literature curriculum philosophical texts that offer an introduction to cosmopolitan ethical criticism. She grounds this view in a comprehensive history of cosmopolitan theory (Choo, 2013) and envisages in the present day a form of vernacular cosmopolitanism that 'counters any universalising of values' (Choo, 2017, p. 342). Choo recognises both the implicit and explicit ethical implications of literary texts and wishes to engage with these by establishing a pedagogical nexus between the literary and the philosophical in order to invite students to connect 'literary reading to real-world issues of global violence and injustice' (Choo, 2017, p. 353). While this position has much merit, it is not the position being proposed in this chapter, which emphasises instead what I take to be a different learning path, the postponement of the epistemological for the slow literary training of the imagination to allow for the emergence of an ethical sensibility. While Choo distinguishes

between aesthetic criticism which 'is fixated on questions of literariness and remains immersed in the fictional lifeworld of the text, thereby disconnecting the text from socio-political realities' (Choo, 2017, p. 340) and more politically active cosmopolitan ethical criticism, Spivak argues that texts such as *Beloved* and *Foe* gesture beyond themselves to real political and social engagements (Spivak, 2012). Those who learn to read in the Spivak sense will experience an epistemic transformation that prepares them to perceive both their own and others' subjectivities differently and hence prepare them to act against injustice in the world.

While epistemic changes are difficult to detect, within the unit changes occurred in the ways many students constructed Sam as a product of his backstory and the colonial ruses and strategies that had constituted him. Several also reported changes in their epistemic performance of self – how they negotiated their own identities. Sreya says, both in group discussions and in her interview, that she experienced a change in how she sees herself and her family. Her response suggests that she is able to better recognise and accept views that differ from her own:

The TV shows I watched or the books I read, I saw these characters doing things, and I wanted to be a part of it and experience those things as well. But because my parents' values and what they believed in, and because how they want to raise me are different, I couldn't do all of those things, and that made me feel like I was missing out on something, or like everyone was moving on, but I had to stay in the same place. And that's pretty much that's the biggest change that I notice, and it's made me more accepting or understanding of what's going through my parents' minds as well, and how they are alright.

Sreya's feeling that she was different in that her parents had different expectations and rules than the mainstream was a view often expressed by other students. Sreya articulated her changing view as emerging from her engagement with the text:

After this unit, I realised because my parents have different values and they have different beliefs because they've seen different things. They've seen whatever that has made them not make me go somewhere or do something and I have to accept that and I learn to accept what they might be feeling and I have to learn to incorporate with my views and how my friends are ... It just made me realise

that it's fine to be different. It's fine to have multiple identities and personalities and different values in different places and I think it's cool.

De Kretser's inclusion of a wide range of characters from different races, religions and classes, as well as class discussions about the implications of this, invited the students to extend their imaginations to different ways of being and to distance themselves from nation-centric norms. Sreya now imagines her parents' backstory and how it might have situated them in a different position from her own. From their position, perhaps different rules and customs apply. She is more ready now to accept this. This is not a large transformation. Often such a change might not be detected in a classroom. But it does suggest a changing sensibility, a way of construing others as products of histories that are different from one's own. This suggests that text responses do not remain solely within the world of the text but can manifest in the students' active social engagements.

Jessie takes this point further when she tells of an incident of relating her learning to the world outside the classroom and the text while watching television programs with her parents:

That stuff meant a lot to me, and I think many students as well. We realised it's what have I read that's made me project that view of the world, and even with the Paris attacks that have recently occurred, I started to think, oh well, why did this happen? Syria. And so I tried to watch a documentary about Syria, and I looked it up... and the first thing I looked up was ...Syria in five minutes, and then I thought... no, I'm going to take what I've learnt – Syria is much more complicated to describe in five minutes. And so I did watch this five-minute clip and it was – these are the good guys, these are the bad guys, and then I watched this other documentary with my family, and it was the situation is so much more complicated than good versus bad, which is what I've been taught through this narrative patterning in my life. And so yeah, just celebrating that... well not celebrating, but realising that what I've read and the narrative that I've been exposed to and the conversations that I've had have a massive impact on who I am right now, and that like humans need to be exposed to so much more than that...

Rendering visible the concept of narrative patterning has been a significant aspect of this pedagogy and it has captured the imaginations of many of the students. Jessie showed here that it was helping her to acknowledge her own situatedness and the limits of her discursive

constructs. This has engendered a desire to go beyond these limits and to explore other ways of construing political situations. Spivak's oft-quoted phrase, 'uncoercive rearrangement of desires', is relevant here as new desires are developing as a result of Jessie's literary engagement. Her imagination, 'which is the inbuilt capacity to other ourselves' (Spivak, 2012, p. 111), has taken her beyond her previous epistemic performances of self and other<sup>33</sup>.

What thinking with Spivak's implied reader in relation to this data suggests about transnational literacy is that learning to read in the sense required for transnational literacy is not easy. It is a slow and uncertain process with no guarantees. But through suspending oneself in and following the cues of the text till entry has been gained into its world, through imagining otherness palpably, through detranscendentalisation of 'nation' as a construct, and through observing the ways the text gestures beyond itself, it is possible that desires will be changed. These new desires constitute the basis of a developing sensibility that is disposed towards the Other who is ushered in by the interruption of the ethical as it postpones the epistemological.

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<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that student 'take-up' of the pedagogy was not 100 per cent. Some students did not register shifts in sensibility. I have not emphasised these in this analysis, not because I am trying to hide them, but because my thesis is about the possibilities of transnational literacy. I am not assessing or claiming the success of the pedagogy but rather exploring what possibilities it generates.



## Chapter 8

### PEDAGOGIC POSSIBILITIES

#### On the porch of history<sup>34</sup>

Literature, I have always maintained, is a subject to love. It immerses us in the beauty of words, the excitement of ideas and the expansion of worlds. It gives us ‘vivid compelling evidence of differences’ (Culler, 1987, p. 187), of different ways of living, thinking, believing and feeling. But most of all, it is a place where sensibilities are developed. Literature in the past was used to colonise subjects – enculturation through the aesthetic. As it immersed students in the grammars of hegemonic discourses, it developed sentimentalities and manners, from a particular cultural perspective. When I read Austen as a girl, I felt as though I needed to behave ‘better’, to have a fine sensibility, to have exemplary manners. I did not realise I was at the time being initiated into a particular form of life, both cognitively and behaviourally. Canonical literatures were designed to help colonised people mimic the coloniser. In this way, as Spivak tells us, literature is an ‘excellent vehicle of ideological transformation’ (2012, p. 39) because it catches the reader into its value system in often undetectable ways. But what sorts of sensibilities are we currently developing through the teaching of literature and are they appropriate for our times?

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<sup>34</sup> Rich, 2002, p. 228.

Adrienne Rich claims that poetry ‘never stood a chance/of standing outside history’ (Rich, 2002, p. 197) and this is true for other text forms, including those used in educational settings. If, however, we are concerned to ‘recognise’ (Fraser, 1997) the plurality, the diversity, the complex identity negotiations that so many of our students are engaged in, then the literature classroom is a space potentially well suited to meet these emerging opportunities and challenges. As students inhabit new transnational spaces of connection and share experiences of widely different cultures and localities, they bring an exciting multiplicity of knowledges, diverse stories and traditions through the classroom door. As one focus of literature is to attend to cultural texts and traditions, it offers an already existing range of tools that have the potential to be expanded to respond to this array of stories. Therefore, in the contemporary historical moment, amidst widespread demographic transformation and the emergence of various instruments of global, transnational interconnectivity, the literature classroom is an important site since it provides new pedagogic opportunities to meet the challenges of the changing social circumstances. But, to do so, many of its traditional methods and practices need to be adapted to respond adequately to fast-changing contemporary social conditions.

This study, therefore, has addressed the possibilities for shifting current thinking in relation to literary pedagogy within transnational spaces. A key assumption taken into the study has been that contemporary classrooms have increasingly become transnational spaces, ‘characterized by multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation-states’ (Rizvi, 2010, p. 158), and therefore they demand new thinking about what is included in the teaching of literature and how this teaching is approached. How might the multiply diverse cultural resources that now exist in classrooms in most secondary schools in Australia, along with the resources from recent postcolonial theory, be utilised to make the teaching of literature more culturally inclusive? The challenges that this study has set itself are thus both theoretical and pedagogic.

Throughout this thesis, I have asked what might constitute the enabling conditions for a literary pedagogy within these newly emerging classrooms. To explore such pedagogic possibilities, I have sought to examine how the use of diasporic texts, those based on experiences of transnationality, along with a carefully selected set of theoretical resources that acknowledges and counters colonial power relations, can interrupt hegemonic discourses and challenge implicitly hierarchical social and political assumptions inherent in the teaching of canonical literatures. Significantly, in this thesis, I have argued that the literature pedagogy for our times should be designed not merely to render visible the hegemonic structures that serve to Other racial minorities, but also to gesture towards alternative modes of being in the world.

### **Emerging transnational spaces and the literature classroom**

Forces of globalisation connect countries in a range of new ways, creating multiple affiliations and new patterns of interrelations. In the ‘turbulence of migration’ (Papastergiadis, 2000), the contemporary migrant, for example, does not typically abandon former national connections but also acquires additional ones. Within the transnational spaces generated by widespread mobility, internationally diasporic families relate differently from their counterparts a generation ago. Current students may bring stories from diverse places and cultures through social media including Skype, Facebook and Instagram. They also often bring a range of different epistemic and religious traditions. With 49 per cent of Australians born or having at least one parent born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017), Australian contemporary classrooms are places of inherent cultural diversity.

However, while these emerging transnational spaces pulsate with intertwining diverse stories from ‘moving and mattering lives’ (Ehret & Leander, 2019, p. 10), they come with challenges. Universalising assumptions are no longer appropriate in these emerging spaces,

especially as people today tend to maintain ties with the past alongside the present. Assimilatory policies no longer do justice to the pluralising of identities many contemporary students are living and negotiating. This gives rise to pedagogic questions such as: how do contemporary Australian schools help them to live in these spaces; to negotiate their identities, to reconcile competing cultural demands and values within evolving social conditions. These challenges and questions are increasingly acknowledged by curriculum experts, educational theorists and Australian government policy through initiatives such as *Asia Literacy* and *Intercultural Understanding* which are now built into the Australian Curriculum (Rizvi, 2017, p. 68). Texts set for study are no longer confined to the English canon, which constructs knowledge within a narrow colonial range, but include texts of the diaspora and the dispossessed, alongside the canonical, often provocatively so. However, teachers remain uninstructed on matters of practical functioning with regard to pedagogical and political aspects of literacy. The representation of diversity through the occasional token minority author, and 'making such writers visible only by viewing them as representative of their cultural groups, does virtually nothing to dispel the 'marginality' attributed to those authors' (Kamboureli, 1996, p. 3). But what might the teacher do instead?

For teachers, constructing a pedagogical response means using classroom practices that provide adequate space and time for students to work through the 'difficult knowledge' with which their social conditions present them (Radford, 2004, p. 504). Part of the challenge is to create a space where the students can do the work of learning so they can absorb what they have learnt into a changing sense of becoming. But as the classroom borders expand, teachers can find they are facing this task without direction. There has been, for example, little advice provided regarding the practical implementation of Asia literacy within the classroom. And what has been offered is often ignored by teachers who feel their students are better served by the system's traditional texts. Thus, we can find only

a partial response in policy initiatives regarding how we might adjust to the new pedagogic challenges presented by these changing times. This study represents an intervention in response to these challenges, through an experiment involving the teaching of a diasporic novel.

## **The pedagogic experiment**

For more than a decade, the field of transnational education has wrestled with two separate, but related issues: how to deparochialise knowledge from its Eurocentric biases (Andreotti, 2011); and to rethink the close relationship between epistemological justice and social justice (Brydon, 2011a). Within the context of these debates, many writers have asked ‘what works’ with diverse student cohorts and commented on the limited data documenting this (Halse & Cairns, 2018; Mukherjee, 2004; Sanchez & Kasun, 2012). Failing to answer these questions has resulted in inconsistent and often ineffective pedagogic provision for the complexity and diversity within transnational spaces. What results is a situation in which some students’ knowledges are unrecognised and many feel out of place in contemporary classrooms. Indeed, my own experience as a teacher of literature suggests that students are not usually given the opportunity or the tools to discuss issues such as identity, their histories, how they struggle to fit into a different culture or how they relate within a culturally diverse classroom.

Rather, this thesis rests on the premise that there has been, in the typical Australian literature classroom in secondary schools, an air of comfortable conformity to the conventions of English literary traditions. It has been and is, as a result of history and surrounding social and political structures, a colonially inflected space, repeating and entrenching, for the most part, traditional English texts and methods of analysis. Traditionally, secondary school literature classrooms in Australia introduced pupils to literary traditions, taught them the names of literary devices and encouraged them to

develop analytical skills. Classrooms such as this have for generations admirably served the cohorts and purposes of their times.

However, in the current context they also need to consider the political and pedagogical possibilities of social change. Gone are the days when cohorts of students in Australia were monocultural and were raised on A. A. Milne, C. S. Lewis and J. M. Barrie. Courses that continue to teach predominantly the texts of dead white males to diverse cohorts run the risk of implicitly or explicitly Othering many students and knowledges. Literature that centres British or European knowledge and treats other literature as irrelevant or marginal asserts a hierarchy and devalues many students' out-of-school literacies. Texts that establish 'ethno-national' (Pihl, 2016) norms and suggest that there is only one shared heritage, one common language and a common ethnic ancestry among the students fail to acknowledge what is really going on in many current Australian schools. Such texts impose hegemonic dictates on students and can produce alienation and anxiety in them.

But the contemporary literature classroom as a transnational space needs to do much more work than transmitting a literary tradition. In teaching students to discern the tone of a poem, to listen for its deeper impulses, the important work of educating their transnational sensibilities begins. Spivak says that literature is a flexible instrument of epistemic transformation as through images, rhythms, pace, mood, diction and texture of language, it can buy your assent in 'an almost clandestine way' (Spivak, 2012, p. 38). If, as Spivak suggests, the goal of the literature teacher is to shape the minds of the students to become the implied readers of often culturally different texts (Spivak, 2012), then it must operate in the realm of imagination including the imagining of the self, the other and the world. In response to the varied experiences of characters, all students should be invited to reimagine themselves and others, opening themselves to other worlds and how those worlds are constructed.

When we take into account the ‘stickiness’ of some labels in many students’ everyday lives, it implies the need to rethink the potential for new practices and affective relations in the classroom (Zembylas, 2014, p. 154). As Lightman (2018), in her Bourdieuan analysis notes, conflict is caused by the ‘shaping of student norms and behaviours to align with the dominant system of capital, [rather] than the cultural or other capital afforded by students’ transnational ties’ (Lightman, 2018, p. 144). This suggests that foregrounding the stories of ‘marginalised individuals that contest dominant narratives through lived experiences’ (Coloma, 2004, p. 1) might offset the practice of unintentional Othering which is rife with inequities that have been difficult to eliminate.

These considerations led me to construct a pedagogic experiment, aiming to identify possible strategies to nurture an ethical literary sensibility with a commitment to including a diverse range of students. To a degree, the experiment draws on Biesta’s concept of a ‘pedagogy of interruption’ (Biesta, 2010) as it challenges the hegemonic norms of Australianness to build more inclusive classrooms. It seeks to interrupt the Anglo literary canon and its conventional methodologies to experiment with new pedagogical strategies that accommodate the demographic changes, the variety of knowledges and experiences, both positive and negative, of students whose lives cross borders. It emphasises the literary imagination as an important tool in this work, highlighting the usefulness of deconstruction in order to show how ‘power works through our habitual processes of making emotional, ontological and epistemic homes within hegemonic ideologies’ (Taylor, 2013, p. 59). Thus it suggests how interruption to that operation of power might open up a space of epistemological disorientation on the way to new understandings.

The recognition of the classroom as a transnational space challenges the risk within typical literature classrooms unwittingly Othering many of the contemporary cohort. ‘Space is never ontologically given (but is) discursively mapped and corporeally practiced’ (Clifford,

1997, p. 54). Unfortunately, many students feel as if they ‘do not fit in’ because educational authorities assume the cultural homogeneity of the space and the cohort. A conventionally configured classroom is unable to recognise the complex and contradictory positions that students currently hold. Hickling-Hudson (2005) notes that an ‘ethnic’ within Australian parlance is regarded as the ‘Other’ ‘who is different from the Anglo norm in colour, race, and/or language. The culture of Anglo groups ... is taken for granted as the invisible norm against which ‘Others’ with their exotic cultures are understood’ (Hickling-Hudson, 2005, p. 350).

Such insights are central to the pedagogic experiment and have emerged from discussions with my literature students who often stay after class to discuss their struggles within this invisible norm. The project thus responded to tensions that I, as a senior literature teacher, repeatedly noted in their everyday experiences. In response to the set texts, students often became aware that the views and values of their parents differed from those of the school, the wider society or even themselves. I began to realise the students did not have the language or concepts to negotiate these tensions. They reported identity confusion, feelings of exclusion, being caught-between in ways that were spontaneous and unsystematic.

In order to better understand my students’ sentiments on the way to forming a pedagogical response, I realised that systematically collected data was needed to conceive a literature classroom as a transnational space. In addressing this question, I was attracted to transnational literacy, a term used by Spivak but not deeply theorised. I decided to explore the use and value of diasporic texts within my classroom in an attempt to give practical substance to Spivak’s idea of transnational literacy. What might diasporic texts offer that conventional canonical texts might not? How might they help my students to understand their own circumstances and negotiate their identities and their differences in relational, critical and reflexive ways?



To address these issues, traditional approaches to educational research were insufficient in developing a better understanding of how widespread social changes and global mobilities precipitate experiences of dislocation in the lives and identities of many of the students. This is so because they often rest on static notions of identity and on tightly bordered conceptions of the spaces in which identities are negotiated. These assumptions had already been unsettled in my mind through prior conversations with my students about identity, dislocation and belonging. I decided to bring these conversations explicitly and formally into the literature classroom around the reading of a novel, *The Hamilton Case*, by a Sri Lankan-Australian author, Michelle de Kretser. Through this collective reading and discussion, I hoped to not only understand the ways in which students constructed their life-worlds but also consider the pedagogic possibilities of diasporic texts in a literature classroom, towards transnational literacy. It is in this way that my study is both theoretical and pedagogic.

### **Feeling like a stranger**

As the student stories beget more stories – aunts who want them to use products to whiten their skin; beliefs in their communities that white looks better so that they begin to look at their own bodies through a ‘colourist’ lens – the data suggest the pervasiveness of colonial legacies and orientalist tendencies and open up the relevance of thinking with Ahmed (2004c) as she offers the tools and resources to think about these tensions more methodically. These pervasive orientalist tendencies are detected by Salter (2018), who, in her analysis of the Asia literacy discourse within the Australian Curriculum, finds a dominant economic rationale, promoting ‘the difference between the familiar and the strange’ (Salter, 2018, p.90).

Ethno-nationalist norms emerge as pervasive in the students’ thinking and their identities are being negotiated significantly in relation to those norms as labels of ‘Australian’, or ‘not

Australian' are seen to stick. Thus, close reading of the student data draws attention to Ahmed's affective metaphors of stickiness and orientation. Ahmed connects the ways affect flows within a space to the structural relations of power, demonstrating that how any particular object impresses upon a body may depend on 'histories that remain alive insofar as they have already left their impressions' (Ahmed, 2004c, p. 8). For many of the students in this study, ethno-nationalist norms have inscribed on their bodies the feeling that they do not belong in some classrooms and reading the data in the light of this highlights the relevance of stickiness and orientation. These concepts of Ahmed's help to challenge the individual isolation that students can experience when negotiating these norms. They do this by putting the focus on the nationalist script itself and the ways it contributes to world-making through repetition and stickiness. This intervenes in the students' tendency to feel personal failure in the face of norms they feel obliged to but unable to meet. Affect is defined within the larger structural arrangements considered to shape individuals and some students in this study report feeling less pressured by hegemonic norms once they have spent time analysing the ethno-nationalist discursive context. Others have struggled throughout the course with the feeling that they are 'caught-between'.

Ahmed tells us that affective economies 'work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between ... the individual and the collective' (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 119). In a time when ethno-nationalism is on the rise and terrorism discourse constructs some bodies as not fitting into Australian society, many of the students feel that they are not included in what is publicly understood as 'Australian'. They feel, like Riz Ahmed, that their identities are shaped by the changing labels assigned to Asians in general (Ahmed, 2016, p. 159). These labels construct stereotypes which create affect because they include or exclude certain bodies from particular spaces. In casual public encounters, students report having to account for their origins or defend their status as Australians. They resent being pushed to claim one national identity when they have lived in many countries, have many national

affiliations. Canonical texts too, which implicitly teach them their Otherness and make them strangers by centring protagonists who look and sound ‘nothing like me’, exacerbate, for some, the affect of being interpellated as a stranger.

Thus, racialised relations between bodies become perpetuated, as stereotypes and the emotions that attend them become stuck to certain bodies and circulated throughout the community. Allouche (2015) offers an example of this when she shows how the Western media, ‘through selected and repetitive imagery, constructs the Arab man as highly emotive ... highly militarised ... incapable of making his point in a civil way’ (Allouche, 2015, p. 122). She shows also, how, seen through a postcolonial frame, the discourse of the ‘Angry Arab Man’ is ‘saturated with Eurocentric assumptions’ (Allouche, 2015, p. 123). White privilege and racial stereotypes are ‘enacted through particular affective relations and embodied practices that fixate ‘us’ and ‘them’ into exclusive subject categories’ (Zembylas 2014, p. 150). Affects, Zembylas stresses, are ‘at once embodied, affective, and socially produced’ (Zembylas, 2014, p. 153) and I would add, are expressed in one’s orientation to a space. These orientations can be redirected through pedagogic interventions and Zembylas urges teachers to create ‘spaces that highlight the entanglements between the psychic and the social [which] may enhance the potential for anti-racist politics and practice in education’ (Zembylas, 2014, p. 154).

My students’ histories are located in multiple diverse countries and cultures, they come from a range of social classes, and the data suggest that the ways they respond to being interpellated by nationalist discourses strongly influence their identity negotiations. Their accounts locate their responses in the texts – public media and rhetoric and fictional and cultural texts – which encapsulate them in narrative patterns, phrases and labels that stick to their bodies and cause emotions of shame and self-rejection in some, uncritical self-acceptance in others. They identify this in the characters in the set text, and see it as a

reflection of the affect that circulates in their own worlds. In this sense, the affective economy of the classroom is in many ways a product of the wider affective economy within which it is situated.

One strong feature of the data is the affect that results from the ignorance many students have encountered in relation to their countries of origin. Stereotypes concerning primitive housing, lack of hygiene, and lack of amenities are expressed by other students and even other students' parents. Assumptions of superiority are communicated clearly resulting in the affect of shame and later indignation, testifying to the 'important emotional layers that migration inherently entails' (Alinejad & Olivieri, 2019). Pedwell (2014) opens up possibilities for how to respond to this when she explores what a transnational affective analysis might offer to the consideration of diasporic identity formation within a classroom. Pedwell demonstrates that to foreground the circulation of emotion within a space and the ways in which different students are oriented to the space, it is not sufficient to understand the emotion. Rather, she argues, it is better to acknowledge the long and invisible histories that feed into the space and recognise that 'cultural and geopolitical contexts are fragmented, relational and in flux' (Pedwell, 2014, p. 149). Thus, grappling 'with the felt qualities of transnational encounters and relations, accepting that there will always be a trace, a remainder' acknowledges the visceral reactions that such histories and assumptions engender.

The education system and wider social interactions can reinforce this sense of Othering unless deliberate interventions in the calculated invisibility of borders, that make everyday exclusions difficult to detect, are implemented. Such everyday borders exclude people from 'normative citizenship' (Dillabough et al., 2015, p. 674) and cause them to feel shame and even self-disgust. The concept of 'orientation' in Ahmed's sense, invites us to consider exactly how the classroom might be oriented around certain bodies and whether some

bodies might feel more 'in place' than others. As Anjali repeats the word 'assimilate', as Amy invokes the concept of 'White supremacy' and Sue talks of her 'Australian side', it becomes evident how much it matters to these students to orient themselves towards Australian national norms. The taken-for-granted authority and normativity of the white position in their minds (and in the minds of 'Anglo' students such as Anne and Jessie) presents a pedagogic opportunity to critique this norm and expose it as a structure of power rather than a fixed essential identity (Bhabha, 1998).

In pedagogic contexts, then, the development of transnational sensibilities draws on deep affective not just intellectual resources. As many of the class are oriented to whiteness or what they understand as 'Australianness' at the expense of the other possible cultural identities offered by their biographies, the text set for study becomes pedagogically useful as a way of showing the possible losses of claiming a fixed identity position at the expense of others. The protagonist of the set text, Sam, models the narrowness of adopting a British identity that leads him to reject Sri Lankan culture and people. In doing this, he rejects much of potential value to himself and destroys his close family relationships. He becomes a bitter and lonely old man who perpetrates injustice to his wife, son and mother because of his fixed views. Many of the students identify with him in the rejecting of their cultural backgrounds and, while repudiating many of his actions, are able to recognise and take distance from some of their former behaviours. Thus the text and classroom process help to reorient them in potentially productive ways. This pedagogical focus is consistent with a critical transnational perspective such as that articulated by Pedwell, which emphasises positive relations, negotiating between 'the imperative to contextualise and the need to account for emergent and shifting cultural, sociopolitical and economic connectivities which keep the co-ordinates and qualities of any imagined context, group or site in flux' (Pedwell, 2016, p. 28).

This focus on orientation contests the notion of discrete cultural traditions in favour of a relational understanding which changes the literary pedagogic focus from one that is colonially inflected into a critical-affective-transnational approach which is potentially transformative. It emerges from thinking with the data, together with Ahmed's affective economy, as a necessary but not sufficient condition of the transnational literacy being developed here. For once all the players – the text, the students, the classroom architecture and furniture, the surrounding school environment, even the wider social and political environment and me as teacher-researcher – are put together, the flow of emotions, ideas, and energies produces changes in orientation. As this begins to happen, it creates teachable moments that need to be seized. When Tia, for instance, announces in a class discussion that when she was young she didn't want to be seen as Chinese, seeing it as embarrassing to like Chinese things like K-Pop, there is a general murmur of agreement in the room. Tia's feeling generates widespread response and constructs a space within which others feel able to share their previous orientations.

Thus the classroom provides a sort of affective citizenship for students struggling together to understand their identities and their citizenship within Australian society. The flow of feeling in the room engenders the emergence of a more inclusive atmosphere, one consistent with (but not the same as) the values of Kalantzis' and Cope's third pedagogical model, an 'explicit pedagogy for inclusion and access' (Kalantzis & Cope, 1999, p. 253) and Dei et al.'s concept of inclusivity as an approach to schooling that centres the lived experiences of the students defined by 'the markers of difference' (Dei et al., 2006, p. 289). What I am adding to these theorists' work is the story of an intervention which describes one way this might work in practice in a specific literature classroom under specific contemporary Australian conditions.

The social conditions, particularly in relation to Australian attitudes to immigration, have created a set of circumstances which impose pressure on my students to ‘fit into’ Australian society and to deny other cultural and historical investments. Indelicato (2018), speaking of international students in Australia, suggests that representations of them are framed within an affective economy that is shaped by Australia’s ‘settler colonial anxiety of territorial and racial vulnerability’ (Indelicato, 2018, p. 25). She analyses the stereotypes applied to these students and exposes the simplistic nature of the binaries that fail to do justice to the complexities of their experiences. Stein (2019), in her review of Indelicato’s book, focuses on the ways Indelicato has attempted to ‘denaturalise those popular frames of reference through which international students’ experiences and emotions are most commonly narrated as truth’ (Stein, 2019, p. 104). Unpacking these normative Australian discourses and the pressures they impose helps to render visible the mechanisms by which they have become so pervasive.

Thinking the students’ accounts from the perspective of affective economies opens up three significant possibilities. First, it foregrounds the necessity within the pedagogy of detecting the students’ orientation to or away from the classroom space, discourses and practices. This is not a consideration usually articulated in Australian literary pedagogies, as orientation has not been a factor that is generally taken into account when teaching senior secondary literature classes. Second, it shows the value of constructing the classroom as a transnational space, allowing room for the different knowledges, literatures and cross-border awarenesses implicit in the students’ experience, and understanding learning as occurring collectively, moving with the affective flows of the space. Third, it shows that contemporary students can often find themselves interpellated by conflicting discourses that make their identity negotiations fraught and difficult. Allowing them space to name, share and process these conflicts helps them to see that they do not need to choose one or the other. Naujoks (2010) argues that it is of ‘utmost importance to introduce contingency

in the identity framework' recognising that identities are multiple, not fixed and change over time. The processes of globalisation have ushered in a more complex reorganisation of affect, rather than its disappearance, and pedagogic practices need to adjust to reflect that.

Close interrogation of local norms and practices reveals something of this complexity and can be understood as breaking away from the epistemological assumptions of a

Eurocentric perspective which the students have adopted by way of their education and socialisation within Australian society (Dillabough et al., 2015). How literature can help is to foreground these categories of orientation and stickiness, to make explicit the labels to create space for them to be processed and to enable feelings about them to be shared.

Through the circulation and flow of emotions, the transnational space of the classroom can perform an interruption to the discourses that have created subject-positions for the students. It can help them recognise that what is making them read their bodies as out of place does not have to be accepted, that the plausibility and subtlety of colonial rhetoric disguised now as 'border protection' and the assimilationist rhetoric seen as offering inclusion have not been working in their interests. The classroom as a transnational affective economy can be a site of strong affective enactments which might open up new ways in which bodies can relate to other bodies and in which all students can renegotiate their concepts and feelings concerning their own bodies. Such renegotiation is one way in which sensibilities emerge and change in relation to affective economy.

### **Mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity**

Ahmed, however, does not give us all the tools required to create a full picture of how transnational literacy might operate to help students to combat the power of normative discourses and to develop ethical transnational sensibilities. For this, we need to not only understand the cultural politics of affect but also acquire the tools to name and analyse it.



Understanding how the affective economy works is necessary to expose how stereotypes seek to fix the meaning of the Other, how emotions do things such as build distance between bodies or how they can work as affective economies by not residing in a particular object or sign but sliding between bodies. But while the concept of affective economy is compelling, particularly in relation to the various orientations of the students, more might be done to show how to challenge the norms being inscribed on their bodies. For the discursive hold of normative expectations seems impenetrable at first and is gradually interrupted and loosened with reference to Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry, which allow students to name and gain some power over what they are living. Bhabha offers the pedagogy the tools to articulate this process and to feel more empowered in relation to normative discourses that construct them as strangers.

Anjali's assertions that 'I'm living in someone else's country' and that 'I know that if I fully assimilate, I'm never going to be Australian' demonstrate the power and force of normative Australian discourses in the students' lives and Bhabha offers the resources to contest this power. In showing the fragility and instability, the contradictions and complicities of dominant discourses, Bhabha provides the means to unsettle the hold they have on the students. He offers them resources to help push back against the assimilative effects of their environment and reject the notion that they need to fully synthesise their identities to fit that of a prototypical Australian student. Whereas thinking with Ahmed's affective economies exposes the ways dominant discourses became inscribed on students' bodies, thinking with Bhabha offers a useful way to understand how their impact might be contested. Both elements are essential components of the pedagogy. Bhabha's method of colonial discourse analysis offers a vocabulary that my students find to be freeing as it offers them both means and opportunity to express, share and process their experiences of exclusion and displacement. It gives them the opportunity to test their own survival

strategies (for example, mimicry, acting white) and to feel supported when faced with the fallibility of these strategies.

But Bhabha offers more than a lexis to this project. He helps me as both teacher and researcher to understand the ways the students attempt to use mimicry as a means to belonging. He does this, first, through the ways he theorises the nation. Bhabha shows nationalist representations to be 'highly unstable and fragile constructions which can never produce the unity they seek to achieve' (Bhattacharya, 2011, p. 46). He speaks of the 'double narrative movement' of nationalist discourse and argues that it is split by ambivalence. On the one hand, it is a pedagogic discourse claiming a fixed national origin and a linear history. On the other hand, it is also performative and must be endlessly repeated. There is a split between the cumulative linear temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, iterative nature of the performative. Bhattacharya argues that what emerges, in 'the interface between these different identities is a new hybrid identity, which remains perpetually in motion and is open to further change and reinscription' (Bhattacharya, 2011, p. 47). 'The idea of subjectivity as stable, single and pure', Bhattacharya claims, 'is forever demolished' (2011, p. 47). Thus, through analysing nationalist discourses as highly ambivalent, Bhabha destabilises their power and challenges the subject-positions nationalist discourses construct. When Anjali says, 'I need to assimilate or I'm going to stand out for the wrong reasons', and Shanthi says, 'in our year level ... we have the white group, oh you know, she's part of the White group, or she's part of the Asian Jap group, or like oh yeah the Curries, have you seen the Curries today', they show immersion in a discourse 'which is so familiar that it seems hardly noticeable' (Billig, 1995, p. 12), one that needs challenging in order to free them to move beyond constraining subject-positions.

But while deliberately destabilising the power of dominant discourses through analysing their ambivalence is emerging as productive for practice, Peimanfard and Amjad (2018)

challenge Bhabha's notions of mimicry and are critical of the threats mimicry poses to the colonised. They posit that it can be seen as an oppressive strategy, especially when adopted by colonised characters who make futile attempts to imbibe the imposed images of white culture (Peimanfard & Amjad, 2018, p. 115). Mimicry, they argue, presents the danger of internalising the norms of the dominant culture, and can result in colonisation of the mind. Therefore, the ambivalent experience of the colonised, when engaged in mimicry, is a trap, for the mimic voice is inevitably split. Bhabha argues that the coloniser, through the process of mimicry, confronts 'his alienated image; not self and Other but the Otherness of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 63). But Bhabha does not show the extent to which the colonised is damaged or how and when mimicry ceases to be destabilising to the coloniser. In Bhabha's theory, Peimanfard and Amjad argue, 'the colonised can only operate under the constraints of mimicry ... for the colonised to deploy some sort of resistance against the coloniser; he has to mimic, emulate, and be subject to a constant ambivalent feeling toward him/herself' (Peimanfard & Amjad, 2018, p. 116).

Close reading of the student data, to some extent, supports Peimanfard and Amjad's view. Many of my students have been acting white, performing mimicry for much of their school lives, but it has only reinforced the power of the nationalist discourse in their minds. It has not, for many of them, brought a sense of belonging. They have been caught up in the dominant discourse, embroiled in its assumptions and often feel powerless to escape its value judgments. Mimicry provides them in some cases with a temporary hiding place, an attempted invisibility so they do not stand out. But it also shows the potential to damage them and to make them feel inadequate in relation to mainstream culture. It often appeases their parents who want them to fit into Anglo society, but many still feel caught between their parents' customs and values and the values of the school. So mimicry does not prove to be a strategy that offers them the sense of inclusion they are seeking. They see this

clearly when they analyse the perfect mimicry of Sam, the novel's protagonist and realise that his perfect English cadences trap him within colonial discourse but avail him little in terms of his professional or social life or his personal identity. From the point of view of students such as Anjali, Amy and Sreya, the power of the normative Australian nationalist discourse is undiminished and needs to be resisted in other ways.

But while the limitations of mimicry are a strong feature of the data, there is one important way in which Bhabha's analysis of this concept speaks powerfully to this thesis. The other side of mimicry, the 'displacing gaze of its disciplinary double' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 123), the return of the gaze reveals itself as having important possibilities. As I read the student data, I find that a commonly used word is 'white'. Some describe their education as white. They show me as teacher-researcher that my whiteness is highly visible. While I am researching their experiences of the literature classroom, they are, through their return gaze, teaching me much about my positioning within this space. Just as, through their encounters with the white students in the class, they are constructing new understandings relationally. The return of the gaze is potentially powerful and an important resource within my developing pedagogy.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity offers another valuable tool for helping students negotiate their identities. Various educational theorists have drawn on Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the third space to interrogate 'what counts as literate or knowledgeable practice in school, the different disciplines, and the everyday world' (Moje et al., 2004, p. 43; Ryan & Barton, 2013). Ryan and Barton discuss the forging of a third space in which to teach literacy, 'a space to resist, subvert and re-imagine everyday realities' or 'wriggle room to negotiate government agendas' (Ryan & Barton, 2013, p.3) while still teaching the required skills and content. Moje et al. (2004) understand third space as a hybrid space where they might guide students across the boundaries of privileged content through their

everyday funds of knowledge. They also see it as a space to 'challenge, destabilize, and expand literacy practices that are typically valued in school' (Moje et al., 2004, p. 44). They ground their discussion in hybridity theory which they claim 'posits that people in any given community draw on multiple resources or funds to make sense of the world and ... of oral and written texts' (Moje et al., 2004, p. 42).

Bhabha's concept of hybridity as cultural multiplicity and continuous cultural change across history adds to this the sense that many histories play into an historic moment, not just colonial history. Borders are porous and shift so that the cultural diversity of the people within each border is ever in flux. Bhabha's analysis of culture affirms it as moving and changing according to the varying diversities and hybrid mixes within it. As this project seeks a literary pedagogy appropriate to building a bridge between knowledges and voices that are currently being marginalised in Australian school settings and those that are required for success in traditional school learning, the liminal spaces and the hybridities within Bhabha's cultural conception offer possibilities of resistance, reimagining and renegotiation of identities beyond normative constraints.

Offering a potent example of this resistance, Bhattacharya's proposal that the family space offers its members an identity that is more immediate and intimate than any the nation can provide (Bhattacharya, 2011, p. 47) adds a most productive possibility to Bhabha's analysis. Building on this idea provides a means of conceptualising how Bhabha's concepts of ambivalence and hybridity work as analytical tools in this project. Bhattacharya argues that while nationalist discourse 'requires essence, origin, unity and coherence, the familial space continuously disrupts this unity by bringing in a jarring note, a difference from within' (Bhattacharya, 2011, p. 47). Bhabha refers to domestic spaces as 'sites for history's most intricate invasions' (Bhabha, 2004, p. 9) as everyday interactions, stories and random events are often in tension with national, pedagogical 'truths'. Countless forms of hybridity emerge

as a result of this tension. Particularly for those who inhabit border lives located in the margins of nations, these tensions can lead to profound ambivalence. As they encounter difference and identity, past and present, inclusion and exclusion, they inhabit spaces where ‘opposites commingle’ (Bhattacharya, 2011, p. 56).

Standing at the border, a student from, say, the Asian diaspora thus becomes a hybrid subject always in motion and ever-changing. Thus, the out-of-school knowledges the students bring indicate the way a classroom might provide support for students’ identity negotiations. These knowledges gained often within the intimacy and vibrancy of family life have a visceral lived component embroiled in relationship and everyday experience. They feed into the students’ identities in powerful ways and can provide for a politics of affect that can be harnessed by the literature teacher. To omit them from classroom processes and procedures is to discount the complex hybridity of the spaces the students inhabit and the complex identity negotiations in which they are engaged. Thus, thinking with Bhabha leads us to the faultlines, the liminal spaces where identities are performed and contested.

Thinking with Bhabha’s concepts of mimicry, hybridity and ambivalence opens up three significant possibilities. First, it shows the value of contesting the illusory power of nationalist discourses and revealing that they are unable to deliver the unity they promise. Second, it foregrounds the importance of rendering visible strategies of mimicry, exposing the dangers of the attendant entrapment in colonial discourse and the futility of many practices of mimicry in terms of achieving social inclusion. While it does this, it also reminds us that the colonised look back and this return of the gaze provides potentially empowering opportunities. Third, it reveals the productive possibilities within hybrid spaces of differing normativities that interrupt each other and move and change producing new knowledges which are embroiled in everyday experiences. In contesting the normativity of the white position, asserting that it is an authoritarian strategy rather than a

fundamental identity, Bhabha models how exposing the construction of that authority is the best way to unsettle the ways that whiteness ‘naturalises the claim to social power and epistemological privilege’ (Bhabha, 1998, p. 21). He helps to make visible the epistemological limits of the political and social context in which we are working and opens possibilities of thinking more fluidly. Thinking with Bhabha thus affirms the need for a pedagogy that recognises subject-positions that emerge amidst a contradictory and ambivalent space between discursive framings.

### **The implied reader**

However, for the development of an ethical transnational literacy, still more is required. The normative dimension needs the resources of Spivak. Her major contribution to the pedagogy being developed in this thesis is her modelling of how literature can be framed as an educational practice that instantiates an ethical imperative conceived as a responsibility ‘to’ the Other (as answerability or accountability) and not ‘for’ the Other. (Spivak, 2012). And one of the key insights that emerge when thinking the data with Spivak is that when the epistemological is deliberately postponed to promote the ethical, many students respond with greater openness and care to characters of difference. Many of the students in the class learn to become the implied readers of culturally different texts even when those culturally different texts involve aspects of themselves. Parts these students have previously renounced in their own histories or subjectivities, are readmitted and often embraced. This openness to themselves enables greater openness to the other in the text, in their families or in the wider society. The responses of both Jessie and Sreya as indicated in their changing responses to their families and to current events indicate this shift in their ethical sensibility. But it is the ‘how’ of teaching this that matters most as I consider the role that transnational literacy might play in this classroom.

In a social context where popular media so often has preponderant influence, inviting quick, sharp interactions and short attention spans, there is a risk that the benefits that follow from slowing down the pace and investigating the details and backstories of characters and situations will be lost. So, against the ‘depthless, commodified, instantly legible world of advanced capitalism, with its unscrupulous way with signs, computerised communication and glossy packaging of ‘experience’” (Eagleton, 2006, p. 17), Spivak encourages us to immerse ourselves in the text and learn to read in a new and more rigorous way. The tasks involved in this method of reading for transnational literacy are various and complex and necessarily require a slow process. The empirical material indicates that in taking the time to consider how the contrivances of the text position them, in closely investigating the textual conventions and strategies that contribute to meaning, in lingering long enough to interconnect the different parts of the text and the characters’ lives within it, students are learning to become different sorts of readers. They are developing (at different rates and in different ways) the ability to see how the texts operate, thus enabling them to extrapolate from written texts to the texts of themselves, their worlds, their lives. They are learning to enter different worlds and value systems and to see that different meanings could and are being made in those worlds. They are also beginning to see that simple judgements on characters fail to acknowledge their complicities, their co-implication in forms of oppression.

This long, slow build-up of a literary sensibility, what Spivak calls ‘imaginative training for epistemological performance’ (Spivak, 2014, ‘Introduction’, para 7) aims to produce a disposition to suspend self-interest in the text of the Other and to read humbly as the text ‘wants to be read’ (Spivak, 2014, ‘Reclaiming Philosophy in Postcoloniality’, para 2). It prepares students for the ethical reflex, Spivak argues, by making them enter the movements of the other text and suspend their desire to read it in habitual or preordained ways (Spivak 2014). Thus part of learning to read in Spivak’s sense is to hold back on



Eurocentric assumptions and avoid being seduced by the authority of ‘concept-metaphors’ (Spivak, 2004, p. 545) such as origin and national identity. Students do this by deliberately following the cues of the text and paying attention to the rhetorical devices of its language until learning to make the reading moves it dictates.

But what does it mean in practice to read in this sense? Although this can be done in many and varied ways, and will differ according to the nature of the text, Spivak models this deep and close reading in relation to a number of novels. With reference to Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, she outlines the strategies of focalisation and counter-focalisation (Spivak, 2012, pp. 323–4). While the protagonist carries the dominant perspective of the text, the reader’s attention is paradoxically drawn to the marginalised female’s perspective. This counter-focalised character, while ostensibly having no, or little, voice, is, through the silences in the text, made present. Such textual strategies show that the dominant viewpoint within a text is not representative of the text as a whole. The texture of the language, the patterns of imagery, the rhythms of speech, once recognised by the reader, can lead to the voiceless characters being rendered visible. Another set of reading strategies is employed in Spivak’s analysis of the text *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid, as she analyses the techniques of intertextuality and parataxis to expose the disconnectedness of the protagonist Lucy within a postcolonial context. Intertextuality intertwines the poet Wordsworth’s Lucy poems with the current Lucy as emblematic of an alienating British education. The paratactic speech patterns show, rather than tell, the sense of disconnect felt by the protagonist throughout the text. Spivak emphasises that it is the texture of the writing, the ‘how’ of the text that is its deep meaning rather than the narrative content which may not reveal the depths of the character’s psyche. Thus, she shows that the words themselves may indeed be at odds with the deeper impulses motivating a text. And it is through becoming attuned to these more profound resonances that the reader ‘learn[s] to learn’ (Spivak, 2008, p. 43) how to read this particular

text. Each has its own voice, its own strategies. Each is embedded within particular ideologies, within particular historical moments.

This form of reading is difficult and slow but it must be undertaken, Spivak insists, 'because only the habit of literary reading will train our unconditional ethical reflexes towards the text of the other' (Spivak, 2014, 'Rereading Spivak', para 6). In response to reading *The Hamilton Case*, my students, to varying degrees, begin to develop the habit of literary reading by following the rhetorical signals, set up by de Kretser, that are teaching them how to read her text. They begin to see that the way de Kretser presents the jungle resists exoticisation by Western readers and exposes the tendency of the characters to wish to tame and colonise the wilderness to their own ends. They show in many ways that the text is inviting them to inhabit an unfamiliar episteme, one which draws them to a subtle kind of cultural and epistemic transformation. The data generated from their discussions, writings and interviews support the insights expressed by Zimbler (2011) when he says that what strikes him as most significant about Spivak's method of reading is that it begins and ends by putting in question the reading subject, its position and constitution, its trajectory and aims. For Zimbler, what Spivak has affirmed is that 'learning sometimes requires a change in one's own position, one's own constitution' (Zimbler, 2011, p. 20).

Jessie shows this change when she moves through the stages of her response to Sam from a glib summing up to an acknowledgement of his cultural construction as a subject-in-history (Brydon, 2004). Through this learning, she moves to interrogating her own cultural position: 'what's going to be my outcome if I continue with some elitist mindset that I'd been taught when I was growing up?' Here Jessie shows a strong connection between the way she is learning to read the text and her epistemological performance of self. Both what she looks for when she reads and her own sense of positioning in the world are changing. Ranasinha (2013) takes this point further when she asks how 'diasporic novels problematise

the nature of readership ... to what extent are the differing responses to diasporic, intercultural texts explicable in terms of differing 'horizons of expectations' of diverse, multi-levelled readerships?'(p. 27). Spivak, Ranasinha tells us, 'contests the idea of the homogenous Western implied reader of postcolonial texts, by drawing attention to the diversity of both Western readerships and non-Western ones' (Ranasinha, 2013, p. 27). Different texts require different lexical sets, associations, idioms and cultural experiences and knowledges. But the texts themselves can train the reader in how to acquire these knowledges if slow, painstaking reading is practised. Learning to become the implied reader of culturally different texts prepares students for the recognition of agency in others, that 'others produce articulated texts, even as they, like us, are written in and by a text not of our own making' (Spivak, 1992, p. 16). The epistemic changes in students such as Jessie, Chala and Sreya support this view that implied readership can be learnt through the slow reading of both the cultural positioning and the mechanics of construction of texts.

Thinking with Spivak's 'implied reader' opens up challenging possibilities. It suggests focusing on how objects of knowledge are constructed and how they might be constructed differently. It suggests that helping the students to take account of their cultural self-representation assists them to recognise its limitations, investments and complicities. It suggests developing reading practices that are precisely judged, take time and require great attention to detail, often detail hidden deep in the structure of a text. It also suggests that learning to suspend oneself within a culturally different text can open ethical possibilities as becoming the implied reader of such a written text opens the way to learn to read and be open to cultural differences, silences, power imbalances and inequalities in the worlds beyond the classroom.

Transnational literacy practices such as acknowledging other knowledges, literatures, out-of-school literacies and/or funds of knowledge; recognising the everyday concepts learned

during students' participation in common daily experiences in their families and communities (Dabach & Fones, 2016; Jimenez, Smith & Teague, 2009); the sharing and processing of histories and the reclaiming through conversation of lost stories constitute an intervention and perform an interruption to canonical literary practices. Within this intervention, conventional centres and boundaries and therefore the epistemological performance of self (Spivak, 2014) are challenged. As Anjali shows in many of her responses, such a pedagogy can cause disconcertment. It can be uncomfortable. But as the students want to be able to explore what they are living, some discomfort is unavoidable (Andreotti, 2009).

### **Towards transnational literacy**

The pedagogy is composed of two main movements and transnational literacy takes different forms in each stage. The first stage involves learning to read the background narrative of the literary canon to understand who might or might not be the implied reader of conventional canonical texts. This involves reading against the grain of the canon to make visible the effects of canonical literature in terms of inclusions and exclusions. The second stage involves giving students the vocabulary to talk about their own histories and experiences which become a constitutive component in the educational process. These interconnecting stories with their many knowledges, cultures, locations and histories flow together and apart, moving and changing in a dynamic pedagogical conversation, which becomes how literacy works in this space. This resists the conventional literary pedagogical practice of ignoring identity dilemmas and running the risk of trespassing silently on rights or sensitivities. Through this interruptive method, some resistance is offered to the assimilatory process to which these students almost universally subscribe. Rather, emphasis is placed on the need to face contingency in order to confront a complex world. Such a pedagogy is not self-affirming. It involves looking at difficulty and paradox and it is

necessary to table early in the process that this experiment involves trying to learn differently.

As the pedagogy involves questioning our relationship with knowledge, strategies are needed to encourage students to be more flexible in navigating tensions. For this, they need the vocabularies that Bhabha's resources offer. When they can articulate what is bothering them, they become more relaxed. The fluidity offered by the transnational affective space offers them freedoms denied by the canonical classroom with its hierarchies and structures of truth. By refusing to impose a mono-epistemic frame on the pedagogy, it becomes possible to deconstruct the confounding power of the Western narrative through the Spivakian method of slow reading. This allows students to gradually detect that there is a subtext to the canon and this subtext might go against their best interests. This in turn leads them to consider how these things might be thought otherwise. The study of postcolonial theories includes as a basic tool the notion that discourse creates a self and an Other and that the discourse of self and Other is affectively charged and has significant impact on how people feel about themselves and their worth. As they consider how worth is constructed in our texts, who is empowered to do things and who is not supposed to, they begin to deconstruct assumptions of superiority and privilege.

But another means is needed to direct their minds to discern how discourses get to normalise ways of seeing, knowing and being. Once the students are able to identify the Othering, they are in a better position to identify the kind of knowledge that leads to that Othering implicit in that kind of reproduction. The Spivakian reading method helps them to recognise the kind of mechanisms that lead to the Othering and from there to what kind of knowing supports that Othering and how this knowing is presented as unlimited and universally valuable; how historically this has been the case and how the canon abets this. As this knowing is presented as unlimited and universal, there is much that is being left

aside, not paid attention. Take, for instance, the assumption that canonical English literature largely embodies a humanist endeavour involving universal values and uniform human experience. British detective fiction is built on this assumption and de Kretser challenges this through Sam's inability to become successful on the basis of logic and merit. The pedagogy is not designed to overcome or replace such canonical knowledge but is rather about learning to hold paradoxes, to think otherwise. The goal is to ignite the possibility of interrupting how we conventionally understand texts and selves and to begin to read for expanded thought, to implement a literary pedagogy to create an interface between the Western canon and other stories that we need to attend to but cannot approach in the same way. Spivak's method of reading helps us to be attentive to stories and characters that have to be read differently. Potentially, this in turn leads to reading the self differently.

Thus, transnational literacy as it emerges from this project promotes the development of a transnational sensibility through contesting methodological nationalism, raising awareness of who does the value-coding, how its mechanisms work, and learning to read in the Spivakian sense of suspending oneself in the text of another. The literary pedagogy employed shows the potential to be productive as it provides for both closeness and distancing as personal disconcertment is held against the distantiated experience of the characters. These Spivakian features of the pedagogy are supplemented by constructing the classroom as a transnational affective space in which none of the students' bodies are 'out of place' and which has the potential to transform places of exclusion (nation bounded spaces) to spaces of possibility and flows across boundaries (Lagman, 2018). The classroom is therefore conceived as a place of becoming, where both teacher and learners engage in the practice of transnational literacy while always becoming otherwise.

## **Pedagogic possibilities**

I am bringing these three elements together – how affect operates in the relationship between text and reader, how to name and contest the discursive structures and colonial histories that have constructed what students are experiencing, and how to develop the tools required to learn how to become the implied reader of culturally different texts. The ethico-political practices such as slow reading (learning to suspend oneself in the text of the Other), challenging assumptions about hierarchies, centres and boundaries, fostering the imagination and developing openness and care towards the Other develop from students' interrogation of norms and the sticky labels attaching to their bodies because of these norms. These practices together could be said to manifest something of Biesta's notion of respons-ability. Barad (2012) has famously addressed respons-ability within a feminist new materialist frame. Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) have also taken up this perspective to analyse an interdisciplinary course in South Africa, analysing the elements of respons-able pedagogies as 'attentiveness, curiosity, responsibility, and being rendered capable' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 66). In the light of their work, and thinking with Spivak, Bhabha and Ahmed, I have attempted to create my own particular transnational affective respons-able pedagogy.

The first practice to be elaborated in my account of this transnational affective respons-able pedagogy is slow reading. By this I mean reading in the Spivakian sense of suspending oneself in the text of the Other and learning to become its implied reader. This involves developing 'critical intimacy' (Spivak, 2014, 'Introduction', para 26) with the text rather than critical distance. It includes such activities as investigating the backstories of characters, analysing how the text is constructed and how its devices construct us as its readers. It includes paying close attention to particular words and phrases and the assumptions and histories within them. It emphasises the need to remain open to cultural

difference, to unfamiliar customs, values and ways of construing the world through developing sensitivity to tone and texture in the language. Through these and other strategies of suspending oneself in the text, possibilities are opened for both understanding how texts and discourses position readers and for cultivating an ethical sensibility that is respectful of the Other.

The second practice that constitutes this pedagogy is the contesting of discursive power and assumptions. An important step in helping students to develop understanding of their own circumstances in this literature classroom is the acknowledgement of their ambivalence regarding normative constraints and their own subjectivities. De Kretser's concept of narrative patterning is a significant factor here. As they come to see how their desires have been discursively constructed and how narrative patterns have been stealthily introduced through popular and canonical texts, it is possible to show the students their own power of resistance. As I have indicated, the power of vocabulary is significant in this. By exposing hegemonic discourses as unstable and fragile, the opportunity is created for the students to think otherwise and to detect through the characters the dangers of adhering to discursive values that are not in their interests. This in turn provides an opportunity to interrupt the subjectivities forming within hegemonic discourses that are the norm within the class. In expanding the boundaries of 'Australianness' as a concept and at the same time, contesting the centrality and relevance of Australianness to identity formation, the unit invites the students to think otherwise about who they are becoming and how they are negotiating their relationships and senses of self.

The third element, the encouragement of the potential for ethico-political subject formation through transnational literacy, depends on the accomplishment of the previous elements. For learning to read slowly in the sense meant here and loosening the power of discursive frames change the students' epistemological performance. Once they begin to



see themselves differently, they are becoming someone different as an ethical being as the sensibility develops through imaginative immersion in the text. They are becoming better prepared to imagine the Other who is pushing back at the self.

The fourth pedagogical practice offered to help students better understand themselves and their worlds is the nourishing of the literary imagination. Spivak calls upon the readerly imagination to 'go beyond the self-identity of nationalism towards the complex textuality of the international' (Spivak, 2012, p. 281). By this she means the imperative to nourish the imagination by detranscendentalising hegemonic concepts such as nation, by immersing oneself in the world, history, community and desires of characters in texts, by deliberately thinking outside the borders of nations, of conventional thought, of canonical texts, of normative practices. She reminds us that we have an ethical imperative to imagine the Other responsibly and we do that in a literature classroom by transforming the way objects of knowledge are constructed and expanding the range of subjectivities to which students are given access. In my course, literary education involves training the imagination for epistemological performance, through the undertaking to construct the Other (for example minor characters in the text) as an object of knowledge. It includes challenging assigned subject positions and imagining the Other who does not resemble the self. It also involves recognising nationalism as a product of the collective imagination and therefore being able to visualise possibilities that extend beyond its limits.

My research suggests that the deliberate construction of a pluri-epistemic space which is constituted by the affective flows and constant movement of ideas and energies to some extent generates its own relational dynamic pedagogic practice. Its fluidity and flexibility can go part of the way to countering the dissonance experienced by students who are being interpellated by conflicting discourses. Framing the study through a postcolonial perspective draws our attention to this dissonance and the ways imperial histories have

been implicit in the power relations and inclusions and exclusions within Eurocentric canons and chronologies that define for the students the 'value and meaning accorded to who they can claim to be and what they can claim to know' (Taylor, 2006, p. 108). Against these restraints, in this classroom, the transnational conversational flow between text and lives, between one culture and another, moving across borders both acknowledged and unacknowledged, opens up possibilities that the students take up by embracing formerly rejected aspects of their histories and subjectivities. Chala indicates this when she reinstates Konkani as important in her life. Shreya's acceptance of the different histories and positionings of her parents is another example and Amy's recognition that her parents' positions are complex and contradictory rather than straightforward are learnings emerging from this pedagogical conversation. They indicate the relational nature of the ways in which these students are negotiating their identities. These findings add to work such as that by Dabach and Fones (2016) which draws on a classroom in the United States foregrounding the importance of recognising the funds of knowledge of immigrant youth. These writers highlight the need for a greater focus on transnational approaches as means to chip away at dominant hierarchies and I tried to address that focus throughout this study.

As the insights from my three data chapters strongly suggest, a transnational pedagogy seeks to engage students' out-of-school literacies and to decentre hegemonic discourses. The data also suggest that constructing the classroom as a transnational space greatly enhances the opportunities for the development of an ethical transnational sensibility. The possibility emerges, in the examples reported here, of helping to enable openness to the Other through engagement with culturally different texts. The pluri-epistemic nature of the space is designed to engender feelings of inclusion and equality and encourage the kind of openness that enhances ethical receptivity. This openness is grounded in a recognition of the interconnectedness of experiences as different but interrelated. Once students have the

language to articulate their feelings, the classroom space affords them the opportunity to attempt to comprehend themselves and their relationships by sharing their feelings and experiences and comparing them to characters in the set text. This is the form that literacy takes within that space and it is built on an interpersonal understanding of alterity. The concept of ‘relationality’ is also evident in the scholarly literature defining transnational literacy (for example Andreotti, 2016; Brydon, 2004; Guerra, 1998; Lagman, 2018; Miller, 2007) describing both the space and the self as partial, open, and constantly under construction. In this interactive space, the processes, the purposes and outcomes of reading *The Hamilton Case* give rise to an instance of transnational literacy as the students extend their reading strategies and draw on their own and others’ funds of knowledge into order to make better sense of their situations, themselves and others.

## **Conclusion and where to now**

At the conclusion of Chapter 3, after considering both the social and epistemic contexts, I posed my first research question: given the changing demography and increased social mobilities of our times, how might an appropriate pedagogy be constructed for current secondary school literature students in Australia? While there is no definitive response to this question, I wanted to explore possibilities of the Spivakian concept of transnational literacy. I was also interested in assisting students to negotiate their identities in relational, critical and reflexive ways. This thesis offers one possible response to Spivak’s call to develop transnational literacy seeking to deconstruct the hegemonic frame of Western epistemology that marginalises many students whose identities are negotiated across borders. Kostogriz and Tsolidis (2008) have also articulated the need, within an Australian context, to investigate the possibilities of rethinking literacy within transnational spaces. Warriner (2009) and de Lissovoy (2011) have analysed the concept in the United States and Brydon (2004) and Andreotti (2016) in Canada. Thus, my thesis is part of a larger

transnational and postcolonial project that seeks to find new and appropriate literacies within dynamic globalisation.

The analysis and interpretation of the data generated within this research project provide several insights in relation to the construction of transnational literacy in pedagogic discourses in Australia. First, canonical texts and practices when viewed through a postcolonial lens implicitly Other many in the diverse cohorts in contemporary Australian classrooms. As Pike (2003) states, '[c]anonicity is inextricably bound up with notions of power' (Pike, 2003, p. 356) and Australian government rhetoric in recent years recognises this, declaiming the importance of literary heritage. Many literary academics have commented on canonicity and power in relation to the classroom (Davies, 2012; Gould, 2014; Kriewaldt, Davies, Rice, Rickards, & Acquaro, 2017; Shah, 2013). Transnational literacy pedagogy challenges risks of potential Othering through decentring canonical texts and practices.

The data also shows the persistent power of discursive constructions within the students' lives and the difficulty of resisting them. Chadderton (2018) argues in a British context that the notion of a good British citizen functions as a constituting norm. My research supports this view in relation to Australian citizens as the students express desires to identify themselves in relation to a national category. These categories, however, both restrict and, in often subtle ways, exclude them. Norms that the students find to be constraining have, however, been contested amongst Australian academics. Mansouri and Jenkins (2010) and Carey and McLisky (2009) interrogate the normative constructions of whiteness in Australia and challenge the view that whiteness is a stable or monolithic concept. Forrest and Dunn (2006) explore the extent of Anglo-privilege in Australia and the threat experienced by the privileged when migrants from diverse nations disrupt the status quo. These investigations

foreshadow some of my findings that when thinking with Bhabha the return of the gaze has the potential to change teacher, school and dominant norms.

This thesis also advances possible ways to implement policy areas such as Asia literacy in Australian schools. It contests the official narrative of Asia literacy as Asia ‘out there’ which emphasises economic benefit. What I propose instead is that Asia literacy, if it is going to have any real meaning that is productive, has to take into account the complicated experiences, affects and the transnational lives of increasing numbers of contemporary students. Buchanan (2017) argues that cultural grammars<sup>35</sup> can prove inadequate to bridge cultural gaps and this has consequences for the ways the Australian curriculum, in particular, the Intercultural Understanding capability is undertaken. If teachers and students, as they try to relate to other cultures, are equipped only with cultural grammars that ‘appear arbitrary, inconsistent, and anarchic’ (Buchanan, 2017, p. 22), then the possibilities for the Australian government’s project of Asia literacy to be successful are limited

A pedagogy is needed that recognises the complexity of reading texts of self and Other in these mobile and dynamic social conditions and is cognisant of the limitations of dominant epistemologies. I believe that, in a secondary literature classroom, learning to read slowly in Spivak’s sense of reading for epistemological performance as I have described it in this study would be one way to move towards intercultural capability. As Ommundsen (2007) and Dudek and Ommundsen (2007) suggest, cultural citizenship widened to include membership of transnational communities requires a new and complex cultural repertoire.

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<sup>35</sup> Buchanan draws on Holliday (2013) for the notion of cultural grammars meaning the ways in which underlying social structures condition how we perceive the world. But whereas Holliday insists that the cultural is always intercultural, Buchanan suggests that personal cultural trajectories can be limiting. I draw on Buchanan here to underline the difficulty in achieving intercultural capability without due training.

The insights from this study support Ommundsen's view and present a challenge to the assumption that student orientations to the classroom space can be ignored.

Transnational literacy offers a valuable intervention in the broad domain of literary pedagogy by focusing specifically on whether and how the study of literature within a transnational space might contribute to the development of students' ethico-political responses. What distinguishes transnational literacy is its emphasis on the multiple possibilities offered by expanding the terrain on which subjectivity is conceived. Moving beyond national bounds creates pedagogical opportunities for enriching response-ability towards individuals who have been defined as Other by local norms and enlarging the epistemological frames of those who have not. Students are helped to question essentialist categories and binaries and given opportunities to recognise the relational nature of their participation in the affective economy of the space of the classroom and by extrapolation, the wider transnational spaces beyond.

It is, however, difficult to generalise from the findings of this study as they stem from the experiences of a small number of participants. Given the nature of this cohort – single sex and members of a select entry school – its applicability to other fields in secondary education may be subject to doubt. A range of writers have investigated the education of the gendered citizen (Arnot, 2009; Naseem, 2006; Paechter, 1998; Paechter, 2003); and Ho (2017) and Proctor and Sriprakash (2017) have analysed the social and political challenges currently facing Asian students in select entry schools in Australia. However, the challenges of diversity are relevant to all students and to all teachers. As literature teachers, we need to recognise how political and social constructions of identities structure educational relations (Mayo, 2010) and to cater for difference in our pedagogies, not least because all students need to learn to explore the cultural politics of difference. They need to appreciate how normative education masks its exclusions.

As I have shown, in relation to the development of a transnational sensibility, the challenge is different depending on each person's orientation. However, as they learn to become the implied reader of culturally different texts, all students in the class are attempting to relate to each other in border-crossing ways. The development of a transnational ethical sensibility is a subtle, complex and slow process and each student, if she shifts in her attitudes and self-concept, does so in her own manner and time. Potentially, the pedagogy creates possibilities for all students to shift, and it is these possibilities that are my focus. Ethics, as I have argued, are a matter of relation rather than knowledge. Each cohort, each incarnation of transnational literacy, must necessarily be different as the flow of ideas and feelings in each transnational space will generate different affective economies. This thesis represents only one experiment and other novels, other groups, other affective economies would likely produce different understandings. However, the issues raised by these students – being interpellated as stranger, feeling that nationalist norms and stereotypical labels are inscribed on their bodies – could also be seen to be issues experienced in a wide range of diverse contexts and therefore to have wider applicability amidst rapidly changing global conditions.

One important aspect of transnational literacy is that the teacher is changed along with the students (Brydon, 2004). A significant insight suggested by the data was that the return of the student gaze offers possibilities of transformation for students, teachers and the institutions to which they belong. The prevalence of the words 'white' and 'whiteness' as a theme in the data made whiteness much more visible to me. Bhabha (1998) describes whiteness as naturalising the claim to social power and epistemological privilege. It became obvious that while I and many of the teachers with whom I worked assumed the privilege of whiteness without critiquing it, to the students, it was highly evident and contained potentially harmful structures of power. One of the participants in Vickery's (2017) study proclaimed that 'You need to understand ... It looks different to us' (p. 327) and the

language in my students' responses indicated that their return gaze had implicit (yet insistent) questions for educators. Vickery (2017, p. 339) concludes her study with the consideration that those 'in positions of power oftentimes fail to consider how the White supremacist structure prevents certain bodies from being recognised'. Schools in Australia typically have a preponderance of white teachers and this can reinforce the sense of the normativity of the white position.

While Bhabha (1998) asserts that whiteness is an authoritarian strategy rather than a fundamental identity, the data indicated that many of the students struggled to see it this way. A number of their responses revealed how they felt these structures Othered them and inscribed on their bodies feelings of shame, rejection and inferiority. Responses also revealed how 'white' they saw the school and their education to be. This presented a challenge to the teachers to change. In responding to this challenge, the school introduced a transnational education priority into its strategic plan and teachers from a range of disciplines began to share transnational strategies to offset the Eurocentred curriculum. Nevertheless, these changes could be seen as a token offering to appease teacher consciences. And this could be case. But these innovations also had the potential to show to the students the power of the return of the gaze to transform the space. It is this prospect that excites me. Rather than just show the permeability and fragility of hegemonic structures in order to challenge their dominance, we might show students their own possibilities of transformative action, and therefore the corollary of institutional reform. It is this possibility that might help steer us towards recognising the potential for a new transnational literacy practice.



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## Appendix 1: Research participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Country of birth</b>	<b>Age when migrated to Australia</b>	<b>Where attended preschool/primary school</b>	<b>Country/ies of parents' birth, upbringing</b>
Amy	Australia	-	Australia	China/China
Anjali	Sri Lanka	8	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka/Sri Lanka
Anna	India	12	Mauritius	India/India
Anne	Australia	-	Australia	Australia/Australia
Carol	India	9	Mauritius	India/India
Chala	India	3	Australia	India/India
Georgia	Australia	-	Australia	Hong Kong/Hong Kong
Grace	Australia	3	Australia	Germany/Cyprus
Helen	Australia	-	Australia	Australia/Australia
Jessie	Australia	-	USA, China	Australia/Australia
Katie	Sri Lanka	8	Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka/Sri Lanka
Kay	Vietnam	7	Vietnam	Vietnam/Vietnam
May	India	4	Australia	India/India
Penny	Indonesia	4	Indonesia	China/China
Samantha	Australia	-	Australia	Australia/Australia
Shanthi	Sri Lanka	9	New Zealand	Sri Lanka/Sri Lanka
Sreya	India	7	India, Fiji	India/India
Sue	China	6	China	China/China
Tess	Australia	-	Australia	Myanmar/Myanmar
Tia	China	5	Australia	China/China

## Appendix 2: Pre-class activity

### Year 11 Literature

#### *The Hamilton Case*

*Write responses to the following questions. Time allotment: 50 minutes.*

1. What is *The Hamilton Case* about?
2. With whom did you sympathise as you read it?
3. In what ways did the British presence advantage/disadvantage the Ceylonese?
4. What excited your most intense feelings across the course of the novel?
5. Did you find a particular character intriguing? Why?
6. What does Sam's voice reveal about him? Why do you think de Kretser created him in this way?
7. What do you suppose was Michelle de Kretser's motivation to write this novel?
8. Any other comments?

### Appendix 3: Post-class activity

## Year 11 Literature

### *The Hamilton Case*

*Write responses to the questions or prompts below as a retrospective account of the learning that has taken place. Time allotment: 50 minutes.*

1. What did de Kretser have in mind when she constructed then wrote this novel?
2. In your reading of “The Hamilton Case”, you will no doubt have discovered your own empathetic leanings in relation to a character or characters. Record your observations.
3. Michelle de Kretser tells us colonisation is not straightforward. What advantages and disadvantages arose from her novel?
4. What particular injustices inflamed you personally?
5. Select a character [other than Sam] as a means to show how the British seeped into an individual consciousness.
6. How does the voice of Sam betray his cross-cultural confusion? What does Sam’s voice reveal about him? Why do you think de Kretser created him in this way?
7. Any other thoughts or impressions?

## Appendix 4: Student interview protocol

1. Please tell me a little about yourself and your background.
2. Did you enjoy reading this novel? Did you enjoy studying this novel?
3. We have considered different concepts of identity over the course of the unit. What concepts of identity did de Kretser particularly promote in *The Hamilton Case*?
4. Thinking about yourself as a member of a cultural group, e.g. a cultural minority, a member of the dominant culture, how would you describe what membership of that group means for you?
5. How closely or not do you identify with the sorts of views held by Sam in the novel?
6. Who speaks in a non-Euro-centric voice in *The Hamilton Case*? Why might de Kretser have included this voice?
7. Did you sense any shift in your reading of the key characters over the course of studying *The Hamilton Case*? How did this occur? What particular instances can you think of to account for that shift?
8. Did you notice any shifts over the course of the unit in the way you think about identity?
9. Does the study of this text have any implications for or offer any insights into, the education you are receiving at Atwood?

## Appendix 5: Audio-recorded class discussion 1

### Year 11 Literature

#### *The Hamilton Case*

*(Having considered postcolonial theory in terms of Euro-centredness, essentialism, mimicry and hybridity, audiotape a class discussion to apply these notions to the three selected extracts as follows:*

*[i] p. 31 “most of my schoolfellows...” to p. 32 “...he’s gone now, forever”,*

*[ii] p. 182 “A boyhood devilry...” to p. 184 “...where no one struggled” and,*

*[iii] p. 366 “These days...” to p. 367 “...break the fall”.*

*In groups of 4 or 5 discuss and write notes arising from the following questions. Time allotment: 50 minutes.*

- 1. Can you find examples of euro-centredness, essentialism, mimicry, hybridity in these passages?)*
- 2. How does the literary text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression?*
- 3. What person(s) or group(s) does the work identify as "other"? How is such a person(s)/group(s) described and treated?*
- 4. How does a literary text in the Western canon reinforce or undermine colonialist ideology through its representation of colonialization and/or its silence about colonized peoples?*

## Appendix 6: Audio-recorded class discussion 2

### Year 11 Literature

#### *The Hamilton Case*

*Audiotape a class discussion once again where questions of personal and cultural identity are applied to the novel.*

*In groups of 4 or 5 discuss and write notes arising from the following questions or prompts. Time allotment: 50 minutes.*

- 1. The novel addresses some tensions in relation to national identity. Provide some examples of this. Which positions appeal to you and why?*
- 2. What do these conflicts suggest about the value of the concept of national identity?*
- 3. Does national identity necessarily imply a concept of the 'other'?*
- 4. The colonial presence has been defined as both medicine and poison. Clearly define two examples of each.*
- 5. Is identity something constantly evolving or possibly something that is evident in recurring patterns?*
- 6. How do cultural differences operate to shape perceptions of the self and other? ie, the ways in which race, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, and customs combine to form individual identity.*