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Australia between White Australia and Multiculturalism: a World Literature Perspective

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ABSTRACT

World literature has a double edge. On the one hand, it is a matter of turning the eyes of a local literature and culture toward the world at large; on the other hand, it catches the literatures of other cultures and continents with the local radar. In this article, I will turn the radar toward Australia in an attempt to see the literatures of that continent in a world literature perspective. Australia is both an old colony and a modern nation state which, at the same time, embraces a whole continent, scarcely populated on most of its territory, densely populated in its urban areas, with indigenous first nation peoples with the longest unbroken history on Earth and with an increasing influx of migrants. The complexity of modernity and prehistorical reality, of postcolonial conditions and realities of migration makes Australia a complex continent. This complexity has been understood under various headings in the about one hundred years since 1901 of independent Australia, and these differences have influenced questions of individual and collective identity and belonging, questions which have been crucial for Australian literature. Among the writers will be Patrick White (Australian native), Mudrooroo (Aboriginal origin), Richard Flanagan (Australian native – from Tasmania) and Christof Tsiolkas (Greek origin).

中文摘要

本文认为世界文学是一把双刃剑，一则它让当地文学文化的目光投向世界，再则它又利用当地雷达般的敏锐性探测捕捉其他文化与大陆的文学。在本文中，作者将“雷达”投向澳大利亚文学，在世界文学视角下来审视该区域文学。澳大利亚既是古老的殖民地，又是一个现代化国家，并且其国土覆盖整个大陆地区。虽然其大部分领地人烟稀少，但是城市却人口密集。在这儿最早建立国家的原住民拥有世界上最悠久的、不间断的历史。现在，来自不同地区的移民不断涌入这个国度。现代性与史前现实、后殖民形势与移民现实的复杂性让澳大利亚成为一个杂糅的大陆。这一复杂性自1901年澳大利亚独立以来，被赋予不同的名称与阐释，而其中的差异影响着个人与集体的身份和归属问题。这些问题在澳大利亚文学中至关重要。涉及这些问题的作家包括澳大利亚联邦本土人帕特里克·怀特、原住民马都鲁、来自塔斯马尼亚州的联邦本土人理查德·弗拉纳根以及希腊籍克里斯托夫·齐奥尔卡斯等。本文对此进行了专论。

KEYWORDS

Space; migration; aboriginal culture; white Australia; multiculturalism

关键词

关键词：空间 移民 原住民文化 白澳 多元文化主义

[...]

When Sydney and the Bush meet now
 There is no common ground.
 Les Murray 1982

1. Simple and complex, large and small¹

Australia is a continent of its own and a nation of its own with one national language. Even if we also take neighboring New Zealand into account as part of the continent together with a number of smaller isles in the Southern Pacific, this will not change the picture very much. However, in spite of the laid-back life style often attributed to the Australians, a comparative view will turn the apparent simplicity into a more complex situation for people living there and their self-understanding. The largest province of China, Sichuan, comprises a territory of 485,000 km² with a population of about 81M people or, in other words, close to four times the numbers of Australia's c. 22M inhabitant, spread thinly over 7.7M km², six times the space of Sichuan. Compared to China as a whole, the difference becomes even more staggering. The size of Australia is only slightly smaller than China's 9.3M km², but with 1.3B people China's population amounts to 600 times the number of Australians. For an Australian to understand him- or herself, it is clear that a challenging relationship to the vast space with few people becomes a crucial issue, not diminished by the fact that the white majority has a European, mainly British, pedigree and cultural orientation, yet located as far away as possible from these regions.

If we also add a quick historical survey, the fact that the continent cum country moved from colonial to independent status in 1901 added to the complexity, spatial and otherwise. Although a British colony from the eighteenth century adopted as such after skirmishes with competing European colonial powers like France and the Netherlands, it was a low ranking colony from the backwaters of the empire, not occupied for extracting resources but as a place where to deport convicts and to cleanse the land for indigenous people, both aims carried out with great zealously until 1901. Then, the rough country became a nation within the commonwealth with the enormous task of building a national identity through governance, education, culture and social development on all levels. From being a non-place on the outer periphery of a global empire, Australia became the only place for its inhabitants.

Apart from the enormous space with almost no people, still partly unknown to white people in 1901, now two new important cultural issues topped the new national agenda and have done so ever since, in spite of economic, political, economic and social changes: the relation to the indigenous people, the aborigines, and to immigration, both of which redefined the relationship to space, ideally seen as the place of all Australians. However, while the spatial outstretch of the country could house infinitely more people, also before the country would come even close to the size of the Chinese population, the question of how many and whom should live there never left the cultural and political agenda in Australia, where it continues to point to fundamental issues with regard to Australian identity. Thus, space and place as divisive issues became the point of gravity for Australian literature from its early beginnings in the age-old aboriginal dream stories via post-colonial culture to present day's literature in a

globalized context. One may say that the combination of three persistent themes, though in a permanent process of changing both form and direction, has been the driver of literary creativity in Australia: space and place, aboriginal culture and immigration.

1) As far as *space and place* are concerned, the paradoxical situation is that Australia was a British colony as far removed from Britain as possible, in an absolutely non-European environment – in terms of climate: the driest continent on Earth, and in terms of geography: between Antarktis, Asia and Latin America; in an extreme way, it was simultaneously British, rather than European and non-British. In a transnational perspective, Australians are helplessly living “down under,” caught by the British colonial perspective, but after 1901 attempting to turn “down under” to “down here.” To this are added, on the domestic scene, two radically opposed but co-existing approaches to space without any possibility of a mutual understanding. For the white colonizers, the outback was empty and deserted, not owned by anybody until it was taken by somebody, a non-livable place. For the aboriginals, however, it was a space full of life and history with not a single spot being empty, but charged with ancestral spiritual power everywhere as it was, and not owned but protected and taken care of by the indigenous peoples. They not only survived but also lived there for thousands of years and transformed the land into numerous stories, told and retold over and over again in the oral traditions of about 300 languages.

The understanding of the outback in relation to the entire country continues to be an open question which is crucial for any discussion about Australian identity. The importance of it has not been diminished by the distribution of people across the continent. The big urban centers in Melbourne and Sydney are now the home of more than one third of the population. With a few other big cities like Perth to the west, Adelaide to the South and Brisbane to the east as the home places of more millions of urbanites, to which can be added other urban settlements, the huge Northern Territory and larger parts of the outback belonging to other provinces are left with less than 500,000 inhabitants, yet together comprising more than the combined area of France and Spain. The country is like a bag too big for the potatoes it is meant to contain; all of them are at the bottom, while the top is flapping empty in the wind. Australia is a place of an extremely bi-polarized spatial composition with an equally diversity of culture between international urbanism of the many and remote local life and culture of the few; yet, and paradoxically so, the outback constitutes an essential ideological point of orientation for Australian identity formation.

2) With Australian independence the relation to the *aborigines* raised new and difficult problems: from a colonized and sharply reduced part of the population, there had to be made decisions about their status as citizens of the new nation. And if they were citizens like the white population, then with which status with regard to a place to live according to their tradition and culture? Right to vote for the new parliament and become elected? Education? Self-determination over territories taken over by the colonizers? – such questions, and others as well, not only concerned the aboriginal peoples and the respect for their culture, but also challenged the white majority itself and its self-understanding as the caretaker of a nation founded on European democratic principles which seemed hard to apply in the new national context. The treatment of the aborigines is a mirror for the identity and the values of the white majority, and the

reflection in the mirror was not always nice to look at. The division between the two groups has never been bridged and continues to be an integral part of the discussion of Australian identity and values.

3) *Immigration* was a topic of decisive importance for the new nation in 1901 and it still is. There was a need for having more people move to the continent, simply to secure an independent development of industry, commerce and building of infrastructure. But who should be allowed access? The policy that was adopted followed criteria of ethnic identity, identical with the dominant composition of the white majority: newcomers had to be of Anglo-Celtic breed. Therefore, immigration became immediately identical with national identity formation in terms of ethnicity more than economic and social development. The policy was baptized “White Australia.” This principle functioned as the ideological underpinning of the emergent nation, giving prominence to the descendants from the Anglo-Celtic colonial center on the other side of the globe. Hence, it imposed an ethnic hierarchy on all the ethnicities then existing in Australia with proto-Britishness on top of the ladder and the aborigines at the bottom, a vertical order which fostered the rich pejorative Australian ethnic slang for ethnic groups, at times with a touch of humor (wogs, dagos, lebs, abos, etc.)

After WW2, this ideology gradually lost its firm grip on immigration politics, but remained the ideological backbone of the national identity. Since the 1970s, it has been officially challenged by the new politics of “Multicultural Australia,” open to immigration from other parts of Europe as well as from the neighboring countries in the Pacific. As in most other countries influenced by the global flows of migration, the Australian society clearly has moved and still moves toward a multicultural reality in demographic terms; however, the ongoing conflict between the values derived from the notion of White Australia and those generated by the multicultural reality continues to define the ideological climate. Yet, immigrants from regions outside the Anglo-Celtic sphere, from Asia in particular, are now gradually being socially and economically integrated, while the migrant flows of refugees are still met with sharp resistance. However, with regard to identity formation and ideological recognition, they are situated in a void both outside their own ethnic group and outside the white Australian mainstream. A similar discrepancy is known in various forms in all societies having migration as an important social component, and it has become the center of gravity of literatures of migration charging them with a general cultural significance beyond any local setting of the texts, Australia, or elsewhere.²

The texts I have chosen to exemplify main trends in Australian literature not only embrace the three main topics – space and place, aboriginal culture and immigration – but they also buy into an even broader theme hovering over the whole spectrum of topics, that of *memory* as a troubled connection to the past.³ This is not only a difficult relation in itself, which at times amount to a painful recall of the past; first of all, it is a cumbersome work of reworking of the past with the aim of turning it into an important part of life in the present in view of a viable future. Each text deals with the three basic topics from the perspective of one of them and with memory as their point of gravity. Moreover, the more a unified sense of place dissolves as we approach contemporary society, the more important and also difficult becomes the role of memory of places no longer existing or now rapidly changing in the present social or natural environment.

Patrick White’s novel *Voss* (1957) was an international breakthrough for Australian literature and later earned him the Nobel Prize. The protagonist, Johann Ulrich Voss,

sets out from nineteenth-century Sydney to explore the unknown interior of the continent, unknown to the whites that is; but, as it turns out, not to the aborigines and that in ways beyond what the whites can grasp. For the aborigines, it is familiar homeland, loaded with memories and traditions. If this novel has the conflicts of space and place as its main topic, the next novel, the aboriginal writer Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991), opens the imaginary world of aboriginal dream stories in a historical setting of early nineteenth century British colonization in an Australian space which then both alienates whites and blacks.⁴ To this I add the non-aboriginal perspective of Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines* (1987), the travelog on the particular role of aboriginal storytelling and singing for the mapping of the Australian outback. Finally, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1997) by Richard Flanagan and *The Slap* (2008) by Christ of Tsiolkas, deal with immigrant experiences of identity as a prism of the broken identity formation in Australian culture. Flanagan's novel takes us into the mind and memory of traumatized refugees from Slovenia, and Tsiolkas (2008) describes a group of people of mixed ethnic origin around a family drama in a Greek family in Melbourne where the disparity of their memories defies the attempt to create a sense of shared identities.

2. Space: wilderness of space, wilderness of culture

Patrick White's *Voss* is set in Sydney and the eastern Australia in the 1840s when Australia was still the rugged continent with adventurers, convicts, large areas unknown to the white settlers, some extensive agriculture and an emerging urban bourgeois culture in Sydney, yet everything on the backdrop of European, particularly British habits and norms. We meet a social and cultural structure in the making and still without any stable recognized boundaries between culture and nature. In a sense, all are foreigners or are making the others foreign in a continuous process involving everyone – white British urban and rural settlers, emancipated convicts, aborigines and the German scientific explorer, Johann Ulrich Voss with his small group of explorers. The novel is built on the travels, writings and diaries of the nineteenth-century German scientific explorer with a taste for adventure, Ludwig Leichhardt (Jurgensen, 1988; Petersson, 1988). Voss' project is built on a grand and idealistic vision of exploring the life and landscapes of the central Australia, not yet known to mankind, at least the European part of it. Idealistic or not, the colonial constraints are obvious: Voss has to be financed by rich farmers and merchants and promise them to find exploitable land that can pay back their investment.

On every page, the voyagers stumble over the impenetrability nature, from the larger features of the desert under the scorching sun to sites soaked in water, all of which is directly translated into bodily degradation: "The cores of his extinct boils were protesting at the prospect of re-entering the desert. His gums were bleeding under the pressure of emotion" (White, 1994, p. 336). The characters always find themselves faced with the power of wilderness where the values that unites them and the learned cultural practices for cooperation and mutual assistance are lost. All of them are separated by an unbridgeable distance, between themselves and to the environment, struggling on their own between the habits derived from places they are familiar with and the extreme demands imposed on them by the unknown space of the outback. What unites them all

is their body. In the body, all the manifestations of the nature-culture divide are concentrated and integrated as an inescapable part of everyone's most intimate and immediate experience across cultural and social divides (cf. Durix, 1979).

What is played out on a large scale as a spatial contrast between known and unknown space, is also an experience within the safe spaces of the wealthy Sydney households, there just manifested as an immediate bodily uneasiness. Voss meets in the garden with the young orphaned Laura, who lives with the rich Bonners who finance Voss' expedition. Their bodies gradually discover their love, but they are unable to recognize it and verbalize it, let alone to realize it before they have separated for good: "Drifting in that nihilistic darkness with agreeable resignation, the young woman bumped against some hard body and immediately recovered her own." (ib.: 85). The bodily abruptness is too strong. On every page, we find seemingly insignificant metaphorical expressions like "he has been rubbed up again," "listening with his skin" "squeeze the meaning out," "burst into a life he did not know, but sensed," "she hugged her joy" (ib.: 138, 170, 203, 252, 396). Some metaphors are brief and complex: To Voss' embarrassment an aboriginal woman is "naked as the night" (ib.: 167). She stands out in her bodily presence, but in continuity with the natural setting which to the whites is as indistinct as the wilderness.

Almost all the characters are aware of this basic bodily nature of their existence and its consequences. Some feel abhorred, others comforted and others again just accept it as a neutral fact of life. The overwhelming impact of nature appears in the novel as a change of bodily behavior. The birth of an illegitimate child by the servant Rose changes Laura's bodily behavior. The extreme conditions during the expedition turns the stiff and detached Voss into a compassionate and caring human, shown when he relieves the sick Frank le Mesurier of the effects of his diarrhea. Via the body, the spatial difference between known and unknown space enters the basic individual and collective identity formation of everyone wherever they are.

Communication is best performed without words, remarks Voss at a certain point, himself handicapped by his German. This is the general logic of encounters. Words come late and are deficient, the tacit presuppositions abound, and when put into words they don't get across. It is like the love letters written between Laura and Voss: They are not all received, and when they are read the geographical distance prevents the lovers from ever being united. Everybody returns helplessly "into their bodies" (ib.: 90). Words create misunderstandings and distance between people, not mutual understanding; bodies mark the isolation of the characters, not their closeness. But silence and distance prove also not to be a solution.

On the margins of the group of white voyagers, but necessary for the subsistence, are the aborigines and the ex-convict Judd. They are all looked upon from the outside, sealed off from white introspection, the narrator's included. They follow patterns of movement as enigmatic to the others as the landscape around them. But also the white characters into whom the narrator looks omnisciently are never disclosed entirely. All are enigmas to each other, fighting primarily against the natural dispositions of their bodies to avoid a profoundly shared cultural space.

Voss is a novel about the distance separating people from nature and other people, locked up in their individually defined bodily enclosures, an isolation reinforced by the spatial reality they are placed in. This distance is an embodied translation of the vast

empty space into everybody's identity formation. Eventually, the characters crack open, but in situations where no one can really use the opening to make a change. When Voss for a short time helps with the harvest in a mission, he tears off his clothes, works hard and bursts out: "I begin to receive proof of existence. I can feel the shape of the earth", or when with Laura in the garden: They have to stabilize their bodily pose "the better to grip the reeling earth" (ib.: 49, 89). But the moment is only an experience in passing.

The embodiment of the spatial distances is also represented in the novel's mixed use of several genres, understood as discursive forms that secure a collective communication. Most obviously, there are two genres involved (cf. Platz, 1984). First, we have the Victorian novel of manners from Jane Austen to Thomas Hardy. This is the genre we meet in the beginning when the unsociable Voss visits the Bonners. That the novel imitates the most important novelistic genre of the period of its action is evident to the reader after half a page. The narrated time is constructed on its own terms by way of a contemporary genre, which also points to the displaced Britishness of the upper social tier of Sydney. As often in this genre, there is a separation between external and internal nature: the garden and the remote wilderness on the one hand, and the bodily passions on the other. In the garden, external and internal nature can meet. This exchange of nature is represented in the manner of the genre: Plants, trees, and animals evoke the passions, which are oppressed, and the natural surroundings of the garden then metaphorically show the hidden sexuality.

The other genre is the fictional or non-fictional travel writing, from Charles Darwin's diaries to Captain Marryat: the preparation of the tour, the happy beginning, the obstacles, the stubbornness of the leader, the dissolution of the group leading to a sort of mutiny plus the obligatory attack from natives in spite of the good intentions of the white people. Maybe the finding of something adds a happy ending: resources, knowledge, or hidden treasures. This genre covers the domain outside the domestic world of the novel of manners. The two genres complement each other and cover the whole field of natural and cultural experience, analogous to how the urban Bonner complements the adventurous Voss by financing his expedition. These two genres use the devices proper to their genres in terms of plot, character and narrator and offer a shared aesthetic experience of the historical setting.

Yet, *Voss* is more than a double pastiche. There are also two modern genres involved: the psychological novel of the modern individual in the manner of realism, naturalism and early modernism. Certain features, common for this and the two older genres, are highlighted more than in the older ones, such as sexuality and the bodily sensitivity in general. The narrator changes his discursive mode during the text. The eloquent and ironic characterization of the characters in Sydney rendered in the Victorian mode is supplemented by the psychological reflections on the feelings and reactions of the characters which rather bear the stamp of Émile Zola, Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg and William Faulkner.

The strong emphasis on the individual body experience makes yet another modern genre relevant: the behaviorist novel located somewhere between the young James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway and Alain Robbe-Grillet. Characters who do not belong to the world of British nineteenth century or of European individual psychology of a little later date do not fit in. They are here represented by the aborigines and the ex-convict Judd and his taciturn, hardworking family. They speak in one-liners, if at all. No one

can really figure out what is going on inside them, not even the narrator. They are just people to be observed through actions. And those actions show that they are at home in the outback. Judd is more in control of survival under pressure than the other whites. The aborigines come and go as they please, also in an out of complete darkness at night, and can see paths invisible to the white, who are defenseless without any sense of orientation and left to the mercy of their aboriginal guides and to their own bodily degradation on the tough existential conditions of the outback.

In this way, Voss enacts a complex dialog between two pairs of genres. One pair is contemporary with the narrated time, the other with the production of the novel in the 1950s. Each of them covers a complete universe but on the historical terms of their origin: the domestic world and the global colonial world of the nineteenth century in the older genres; the inner and the outer world of modern individuals in the two modern genres. The two universes are partly incompatible, and each of them is constituted by an opposition of conflicting aspects of the particular built-up of the Australian space. However, because of the pervasive role of body experience, the separate worlds of the genres interact through the concrete encounters of the individual characters.

On the one hand, the mixture of genres translates the separate worlds of the characters into the text: characters appear to live in separate worlds but still in touch, at least externally, with each other without a shared identity or mutual understanding. On the other hand, the collective nature of genres works to the effect that the isolated individual worlds are also transgressed. Included in a genre, they belong after all to a universe of shared meaning and can be shaped in recognizable forms, showing the problem of the relation between spatial conflicts and individual and collective identity. Each walks into the divided Australian space guided by their own memories, unknown and also impenetrable to the others. On the one side, the whites with no memories of what the outback really is, which would enable them to turn a blank slate into a differentiated and recognizable landscape, mapped out by the experience they bring along. On the other side, the aborigines who has full knowledge of the layout of space carried by collective memory to which not even the narrator has a clue.

3. Aborigines: in and out of the aboriginal world

In Mudrooroo's *Masters of the Ghost Dreaming*, we get the chance to look both at space in an aboriginal perspective and into the way that this landscape embraces both an imaginary and a material dimension, which together and inseparably so, form their identity which is out of reach for the white people they live with. The novel is set on a small island near Tasmania in the early nineteenth-century colonial period. Here, the almost extinct tribes from Tasmania are brought by more or less well-intending British colonizers to be "civilized", meaning Christianized, dressed in European clothes to hide their nakedness and taught basic skill to enable them to serve the whites. To them also comes a former convict, Wadawaka, a black slave from the Caribbean region, born on a slave ship during the transfer from Africa. After staging a rebellion, he is deported as a convict to Australia. The white people are the pathetic couple, Mada and Fada and their hopeless son Sonny; they have taken the job to govern the island after various misgivings in London, partly of their own making. Fada, a former bricklayer too full of

himself, stages himself as the noble missionary sacrificing himself for the savages; Mada, his wife, a former barmaid, hates every minute of their lives down under just as much as she hates her husband, only wanting to return to London. He finds some suppressed comfort in his rum keg and by fantasizing about having sex with his native housemaid, Ludjee, the wife of the old aboriginal shaman, Jangamuttuk. Mada dopes herself with laudanum, an opium solution much used in the period. Different of origin and ethnicity, yet the black convict, the aborigines and the whites are all united by being exiled, a term the narrator uses for all of them (Mudrooroo, 1993, p. 1, 6, 85), or, in other words, away from the space and place of their memories which that could have been a basis for their identity.

Eventually, Mada and Fada set sail to go back to London, although we know that all the memories they have of the imperial city are of poverty, prostitution, cheating, stealing and hard manual work. She dies on the way, we are told, and Fada catches a new wife with a certain position. In contrast to Voss, they are just chance adventurers without any compass in life, apart from egotism and no understanding of other people's life, white or black. Wadawaka, on the other hand, appears to have been initiated to the aboriginal tribe after his arrival, which, however, is not much of a support for anyone anymore. Its numbers are going down rapidly, due to sickness, malnutrition and the separation from their native land. None of them can go back to any place: Wadawaka is born on a ship, and the Tasmanian homeland is forever closed to the natives.

Nevertheless, Ludjee's and Jangamuttuk's inherited and gendered sense of place offers them a way to relate to their new place, also on the island they have been deported to. Combined, his shamanistic skills and her capacity to relate to the ancestral spirits, their songs and their stories from the time of their first ancestors, the so-called Dreamtime, open the space up for them in a familiar way. Their imaginative encounters with the spirits are embedded in both ritual practices and secret ways of finding natural resources. At the end, they set out on a schooner, stolen from Sonny who is left desperately alone on the island after his parents' departure, and with the rest of the doomed indigenous group they head for a new island of their own, dreaming of the reestablishment a truly aboriginal community the reality of which seems highly precarious.

That the two groups, whites and blacks, are totally foreign to each other and to the place, not only appears in their social interaction, but also by the fact they call each other "ghosts". The ill and poor blacks appear to the whites as death on feet, while the whites are ghosts in the profound sense of aboriginal beliefs. They are beings in a human body with no relation to the ancestral spirits and thus to the land where they have settled, and therefore with no life at all – ghosts. The fundamental goal in life for Ludjee and Jangamuttuk is to stay alive by keeping that relation intact, not for themselves alone but for the steadily shrinking exiled community of their tribe. In the homeland, this would have been an important and self-evident everyday task, based on the immediate recall of where the ancestors are present in the landscape and its flora and fauna. On the island, however, their attempt to fight against their exiled status and still remain in contact with the spirits is much more precarious and requires extraordinary efforts. Nevertheless, Jangamuttuk tries to educate two young boys to embody the memories of the existentially essential knowledge of the tradition and its practices.

There are three ways of performing the past memory of an essential relationship to the place to evoke the immanent ancestral presence and its meaning. When these practices unfold in the novel we look at the environment, including the white “ghost” people, through the eyes of the aborigines. When the narrative concerns Mada, Fada, or other non-natives, then they carry the point of view and reveal a distance to native lives as wide as Voss’ to his aboriginal guides on his expedition to central Australia. The split in focalization reveals how the two types of point of view and the two parallel version of reality that runs in tandem through the novel are mutually exclusive, as are the different cultures that underpin them. At times the two narrative lines intersect although never to merge; we jump from one register to the other by way of shifting focalization, like the shift between genres in *Voss*. The narrative is like woven of two strings of different material and caliber: tying them together in a durable knot will always be in vain. There are three different aboriginal traditional practices at play attempting to embrace the place.

1) The first fundamental practices are the *shamanistic ceremonies* carried out and lead by Jangamuttuk to the sound of clapsticks, didgeridoos and chanting. The novel opens with a ritual performance where he reaches out to his dreamtime companion, the dangerous and powerful totemic spirit Goanna, a “stone axe-headed” spirit with a hiss like a snake. It both challenges him and supports him and also holds him responsible for his attempt to keep up the ancestral relations. At a certain point during his visions, flying with Goanna, Jangamuttuk enters a room where something in the shape of a human being meets him:

A slab of wood attempted to bar his way, but he passed through [...] ... The urgency of the didgeridoos danced him free. He changed from a spider back to the shaman, then into his Goanna familiar, then back again as he found himself out of danger. A ghost female lay on the platform on the softest of skins. She was fair to behold. Stark white and luminescent was her skin beneath which, pulsing blue with health, Jangamuttuk could see the richness of her blood. [...] She slept the sleep of a being seemingly content in body and spirit, but Jangamuttuk with his insight knew that this was an illusion. A wave of ill-feeling from her nightmare shivered her form and before his eyes the fair illusion of her face twisted with a hunger which might never be satisfied. Her longing extruded from her to fix his attention on a small table within reach of her groping hand. On it stood a golden flask. The source of good health. Before the hand could clasp it, Jangamuttuk snatched it up [...] From behind came a loud shout of rage, followed by a scream of despair. (ib.: 15–16)

During this brief episode the shaman imagines a flight through space from the outer world through a narrow passage into another world, all the while he transforms himself, still hearing the sounds from the ceremony he has set up. A beautiful fairy-like female emerges and, in his transposed state, he can see right through her and read her calm disguising an uneasy longing and also spot a flask with what looks like a potion with magic powers. Now, all this is seen through the trance of Jangamuttuk, only broken at the end when a more neutral narrative voice relates the reaction of the awakening Mada. However, when he leaves this state and comes back to the ceremonial site, it is much simpler. Actually, the female is Mada who observes somebody, accompanied by the sound of native instruments and singing she fears and hates, standing next to her bed and stealing her laudanum which then later is administered to the native participants in the ceremony. Mada screams in a rage. When questioned by Fada later,

Jangamuttuk sullenly avoids the interrogation. The whole point here is that the space of the natives has a relation of continuity established within the material world between that world and the spiritual world which is inaccessible for whites. For them, the flask has been stolen, no more no less; for the natives, the flask is a reward given by the spirits as a sign of the power produced by their maintenance of tradition.

2) *Everyday practices* from home are another way to ensure the seamless connection to the other world. In this case, it means going shellfishing. This is Ludjee's task. Fada invites her to take a swim, simply in order to indulge in her nakedness, pretending to be only interested in making a sketch of the scenery. She knows that white settlers have already harvested everything edible in the sea close to the coast. But entering the water, she is also entering the female element, her true element. Land is male, Jangamuttuk teaches his young novices who, unseen by Fada, are overlooking the scene. Swimming, diving and enjoying the alacrity of her naked body, brings Ludjee close to her spiritual companion, the big Manta Ray that leads her to where she can find shellfish in an imaginary series of movements in and above water:

She waited. The old ways began flowing through her. A connection was made and a line established. [...] She knew [Jangamuttuk] would expect shellfish from her. [...] The female power surged within her; ancestors were connected in an unbroken line. The grid of the Female Dreaming flowed with energy. She dove into the water in a quick flowing motion which took her under and under. Fada frowned in annoyance, but she was beyond his control. She was free in her tradition. [...] Men and ghosts needed boast and ships; but all she needed was the strength of her body and her connection to Dreaming. Her arms were fins; her legs tail; her lungs gills. [...] Her Dreaming companion, Manta Ray, gently nudged her with her back. They had missed each other. Now they were together again. Now they were together again and she settled onto the back of her companion, grabbing hold of the edges of her wings to cling on as Manta Ray charged off. (ib.: 59–60)

Again we witness a process of transformation from the human body to another shape through a combination of imagination and concrete praxis, yet without losing the sense of the material world and its limits, related to Fada, the beach, the ships and the concrete search for shell fish. The transcendental world is not really transcendental, but a material immanence. Again, with Fada's discontent the narrative register of the whites is inserted with a different focalization in the long representation of Ludjee's transformation.

3) The third and final way of recreating what Ludjee experiences as an "unbroken line" to the ancestors, is *mapping the landscape* through singing and storytelling. This is extremely difficult away from home, because only there does one know the right songs to be sung. Nevertheless, Jangamuttuk tries to induce the right knowledge in his two pupils, while he himself now and then feels some kind of relation to the ancestors when mapping the space, even in exile. He chooses a place with an ancestral echo hidden from the white gaze for his private dwelling:

One place which still retained traces of power was high on the hill overlooking the bay where the ghosts had deposited them, and where Fada had ordered them to stay. Stone tools and chips were cemented into the stone floor of the deep rock shelter and impressed in the back wall, and now part of the surface of the stone were painted imprints of ancient hands. Jangamuttuk felt the power of his ancestors residing there. He chanted softly of the nascent power, feeling it stir, but it had been so long ago that it might no longer quicken.

[...] Long ago, a huge round boulder, a ball of wind giants, had been tossed down to cover the top of the mouth of the cleft. It hung over the very edge and appeared ready to complete its journey down to the coastal plain. Jangamuttuk knew that only the power of the ancestors held it there. He sang softly of their action. In the Dreamtime, they had set up a camp for him, then entered the cleft to leave their essence there. (ib.: 22)

He becomes one with the place, sensing its structure and direction by singing the spirits who belong there. It gives him an identity in the same way as he provides the place with its true ancestral identity. Place, song and moves are united as an identity formation in the performance of the memory of the tradition, in this case, however, only in fragments, removed as he is from his real place somewhere in Tasmania. Here, as in the other cases, all practices are about space and identity, shaped as a passage through a narrow gate or the breaking of a surface like water into Ludjee's temporary sweeping flight in a free and open space elevated above the world of the white ghosts, only opened after a strenuous actualization of the memories of the tradition.

By telling or chanting the space, otherwise sealed off from the grasp of humans, becomes accessible. Translated into the terminology of modern sociology, this embodied performance of humanity and place in a mutual interaction could be labeled "mediated social action" (Wertsch, 1998, 2002), although "mediated social interaction" may be a more apt term. In social theory, this notion is often used to indicate that no social interaction, however, spontaneous it may appear, happens without the use of various cultural media, discourse in particular, but also objects, institutions and behavior, in this case the chanting and moving body being the medium. The point is that embodied performative actions creates a material relationship as part of a mutual identity formation between people, or as in the case of the aboriginal practices, between humans and anthropomorphic units like a landscape conceived as a living organism upheld by active ancestral spirits. Both humans and the landscape will die if not kept alive by the embodied performative re-enactment of the tradition as encapsulated in the collective memory of stories and practices. It is of no use just to record the song and the movements and replay them in order to save them from oblivion. Embodied performance is indispensable for the mutual process to take place (Munn, 1973; Sutton, 1998).

In his *Songlines*, the global British traveler Bruce Chatwin tries to open the box of secrets related to this embodied performative practice of mapping a space through songs, as a way to literally find and maintain its otherwise invisible pathways for concrete walking through the landscape. The land is mapped physically and symbolically through the performative acts of singing and dancing. The indigenous peoples recreate permanently the dream tracks or dreamlines as well as the land itself and its peoples by anchoring them in the eternal continuity of the place, this continuity being the effect of the interaction between humans and land through the performances. Like in Mudrooroo's novel, it is a practice now exercised in a kind of exile, also for aborigines living on their old land, simply because the changes of the landscape since the beginning of colonization and the lack of continuous practice within the individual place bound tribes and languages pushes them out into oblivion (Bradley, 2010).

Step by step, Chatwin recognizes that he will never understand the full meaning of the performative practice. Apart from native forgetfulness, his limited insight stems from his white European outlook and from the taboo of some songs that have to be hidden from the knowledge of outsiders. He ends up with snippets of information only

(cf. Texier-Vandamme, 2003; Brown, 1991; Williams, 2003). When Bruce conceptualizes this experiential void, he tries to come to terms with it on the grounds of a performance entirely of his own making. Although in the following remark he has a skeptical engineer in mind, it goes for himself as well: “It was something else to convince him that a featureless stretch of gravel was the musical equivalent of Beethoven’s Opus 111.” (Chatwin, 2005, p. 14). This observation is both a sign of confusion and an anticipation of a workable solution when he has to give up understanding the aboriginal dreamworld from within. Instead, with his book, he sets out to understand the performative nature of the singing and dancing of the songlines by performing it on his own conditions and to create in writing his own Beethoven Opus 111. By mapping the landscape by singing, the aborigines shape their place bound identity, while he, placeless and nomadic as he is, in the performative process of writing, shapes his own identity in analogy with aboriginal practice. They have their individual totemic icon, which is the heart of their individual and collective identity to be confirmed in repeated dancing and singing; he has his creative work to reiterate, now as *The Songlines*, with his creative self as an equivalent icon. Analogy or not, while the aborigines recreate their collective memory unbroken through generations, Chatwin creates a new identity out of a memorial void every time he engages in writing before he travels on to the next place he has never encountered before.

4. Immigration: from issues of immigration to problems of migration

Like emigration, immigration not only indicates a flow of people, but also a fixed point of view on the movement: emigration adapts the view of those departing from a particular place; immigration of those arriving to a new place. However, both terms assume that those places are identifiable as delimited locations, maybe at present in social turmoil, but nevertheless of a certain spatial stability. In contrast, migration indicates the perspective of the flow itself and operates with the potential volatility of places at both ends. More importantly, it deals with the equally decisive transformative effects of migration on dwellers at either end of the movement as well as on the moving people (Walkowitz, 2006). As for Mudrooroo’s exiled characters, place is always something lost and memories become crucial for recreating imaginatively a sense of place and identity in a new location. My last two novels mark this shift from the key Australian term of immigration to that of migration as the actual reality of contemporary multicultural Australia.

My first example is Richard Flanagan’s *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (1997). It is set in Tasmania with two Slovenian war refugees, aka *reffoes*, Sonja and her father Bojan, striving hard to go beyond the traumatic memories related to WW2 in the Balkans, yet without knowing how to handle their memorial baggage. The past is not unknown or unknowable as such, but inaccessible. The gap between past and present, Slovenia and Tasmania is turned into an inner conflict between the wish to access the painful experiences and a fear of opening the gates to their past misery.

For several reasons, they have no or only a troubled verbal access to their past. First, because Sonja knows only a few words in Slovenian, and Bojan’s English is rather rudimentary. They never communicate on the same level. Second, because the traumatic core is placed on the margins of or outside reflexive language whether English or

Slovenian. Hence, the memorial process will have to unfold in another medium, which happens to be the body. With or without a shared language, they are at least present as bodies in the same space.

Father and daughter are not locked up in the same traumatic past. Bojan is traumatized by the atrocities of the Nazis in Slovenia during the war toward his wiped-out family and his raped wife, Maria. Sonja is haunted by the incomprehensible day in 1954 here in Tasmania when her mother simply walked away from her, then aged three or four, and never returned, only leaving a few things behind and the sound of a Slovenian lullaby consisting of words unknown to Sonja, but remembered as sound patterns. In a painfully slow pace, it eventually turns out toward the end that the two events nevertheless are related: Maria, haunted by her being raped by the Nazis and seeing her father being shot, finally walks away to commit suicide in the Tasmanian winter of 1954. This connection cannot be established without a shared language between them which father and daughter do not possess. But gradually and painfully the body becomes a medium that paves the way for a communication between them that makes them somehow feel at home in Australia.

As readers we have a double task – first tracing the mystery at the heart of Sonja’s trauma and the unspeakable horror of Bojan’s, then combining them, experiencing the same painful search for the truth as the characters. As readers, we have to proceed along two paths: On the one hand, we follow the composition of the novel. From chapter to chapter, we shift like the characters between the disconnected past and present, in the beginning between 1954 and the mid-60s. But as the present is still moving forward, while the chain of narrated events advances, the temporal position of the threshold between past and present also moves ahead. The present begins as 1960s but ends as the 1990s, while the 1960s is now being absorbed by the past. The present consists of ever-changing temporal nodes. In the 1990s, Sonja returns from Sydney to Hobart to have an abortion. Yet, she decides to keep the baby and stay on, reunited with Bojan. None of them knows exactly why she returns. Nevertheless, as in the zen-buddhist riddle of the title, they try to “shape a mystery into something knowable” (Flanagan, 1998, p. 319). The past moves slowly forward from 1954 to the 1990s, but at the same time is also extends backward to WW2, while the characters hesitantly dig out their past. In other words, while reading, the readers are faced with the same conundrum of the past as the characters – guessing, reconstructing and connecting in order to make the scattered fragments co-exist in the changing here-and-now where father and daughter are both present.

Being deprived of words to grasp the past, both we and the characters have to read the embodied representation of memories in the characters’ behavior. They cannot recall the past in words, only perform it in actions. In Sonja’s case she is, on the one hand, totally detached emotionally from her body and indulge in a mechanic and high speed sex life, and, on the other hand, she is repeatedly singing the incomprehensible sounds of the Slovenian lullaby in a re-enactment of a past but undefinable happiness:

What did the words mean? They were without meaning. They were nonsense words like ‘Humpty Dumpty’ Yet they meant everything. She knew they meant everything. She knew the meant love, but why? (ib.: 211)

The beginning of the novel and the end, related to us by the narrator, are identical in form, but different in meaning – maybe this is the sound of one hand clapping:

All this you will come to understand but can never know, and all of it took place long, long ago in a world that has since perished into peat, in a forgotten winter on an island of which few have ever heard. It began in that time before snow, completely and irrevocably, covers footprints. As black clouds shroud the star and moonlit heavens, as an unshadowable darkness comes upon the whispering land.

At that precise moment around which time was to cusp, Maria Buloh's burgundy-coloured shoes reached the third and lowest snow-powdered step outside their wooden hut. It was then as she turned her face away from the hut, that Maria Buloh knew she had already gone too far and that she could no longer return. (ib.: 1)

The last sentences of the novel are identical, but now it is about Sonja with her baby on a meadow in Tasmania:

... for how could she ever tell her daughter of what only those who lived it can ever know?

[For] all of it took place long, long ago in a world that has since perished into peat, in a forgotten winter on an island of which few have ever heard. It began in that time before snow, completely and irrevocably, covers footprints. As black clouds shroud the star and moonlit heavens, an unshadowable darkness comes upon the whispering land.

At that precise moment around which time was to cusp. (ib.: 425)

The last sentence takes on two different meanings: In the beginning of the novel, it forebodes the opening of a disaster; at the end, it marks the closure of the time of difference; now past and present coalesce. The first occurrence is the narrator's reference to Maria, the last is the narrator's reference to Sonja, but neither of them are part of the verbal dimension, only of the bodily performance of the past that gives them a presence, Maria turned toward the past by walking away from her daughter while Sonja, in a reverse movement, looks toward the future with her daughter.

With Bojan it is different. He is not facing a void in the past like Sonja, but an unbearable violence. When he is with the other *reffoes*, they just share the same silenced horror without communication:

Bojan's friendships now, such as they were, were with strangers who without being told know the horror of each other's stories, who demanded no explanations, and gave no justification for their own bad behaviour. They never told these stories [...] There were horrors Bojan kept within him without even a story to enclose them, that he kept shapeless in the hope of dissolving them. (ib.: 109)

Bad behavior is actually one part of his life: violence, drinking and self-destruction. Sonja is taken away from him at a certain point to live in foster care because of his violence. And later he hits her senselessly in a desperate and radically inversed love for her, knowing she has been with boys, a father's remembrance of his duty to protect his child without being able to exercise it:

Sonja pleaded him now in Slovenian, chattering like a caged, maddened bird: '*Ni, Artie, ni, ni, ni, ni ...*' But no language meant much to Bojan now. He hit her again and again." (ib.: 272)

The other part of his life is formed by his practical skills. Working with his hands, brings him at ease with himself and the world like singing and dancing do for Mudrooroo's native characters: He is a good cook with Slovenian recipes, an excellent cabinet maker and deft with a sewing machine. His competent hands, the semi-automatically remembered routines they obey and the products that come out of it replace the distortion of memory by words and violence, but also lock him up in the past as in short-lived illusionary bubbles of happiness, not talked about but performed in identical repetitions. At a certain point, Bojan has unexpectedly sown a dress for the adolescent Sonja:

Those hands, so confident at making. She listened to the rolling sound of the old black Singer at work, speeding up and slowing down in thrumming bursts, as though it were on a journey and them all travelling with it. [...]

He held her lightly and together they danced around the sewing machine to an old country song playing on the radio. [...] Sonja felt happy. She felt a certain grace. A lightness, an understanding that there was this fundamental goodness in life that could be danced and that one could be part of it dancing. (ib.: 203)

The ambiguity in the embodiment of memory – here of Bojan's old skills – lies in the fact that both of them, through their body, perform a past which cannot be channeled into words in the migrant life, but they also, and at the same time, avoid reworking the past; it is simultaneously a real present and an illusionary and repeated past.

Therefore, the dance and similar peacefully shared moments are not permanent escapes from the vicious circle of violence, but only a temporary breaking away from it. The same holds for the circular closure of the beginning and the end of the novel. Does it mark a new beginning for Sonja or a repetition of Maria's life. The process of reaching beyond the temporary but gradually expanded moments of joined bodily mediation of memory is still open but only accessible through dancing, sowing, cooking or cabinet making. They have succeeded in communicating the events of the past to each other as isolated moments of a shared past, *their* shared past. Like Jangamuttuk they exemplify the workings of "mediated social action". Also for Bojan and Sonja embodied memory is a social action in the sense that by being embodied, memory leaves the individual sphere of consciousness and inner life and becomes a way in which an embodied subject locates itself in a social context, among other and for others. Across cultural dividing lines, the Dreamtime songlines of the aboriginals and the embodied works of memory of the migrants belong to the same category of actions.

The role of memory in Christos Tsiolkas' internationally bestselling Australian novel *The Slap* (2008) expands this perspective, emphasizing the negotiation of already stored memories contained and turned into mediated social interaction within a larger multi-cultural community in Melbourne. The social and ideological center is a family of Greek immigrants, surrounded by partners, spouses and friends of the family, including Aboriginals, European, White Australians, people from the Pacific, Christians and Muslims who, together, represent the postcolonial and now globalized hybridity of Australia but also, ironically, push the characters of pure Anglo-Celtic descent into the wings of the social scene. Yet, they represent an Australian majority having a hard time accepting the arrival of people with other ethnic and geographical backgrounds. The characters in *The Slap* have all moved, or their parents have, from different places to

Melbourne, a huge intersection of the roads of migration. Different family values, celebrated or contested, set the agenda for all interactions. Individually, the characters find themselves in a transitional phase in their lives – the 40 years old: young(ish) or middle-aged? The teenagers: adolescent or adult? The older generation, Hector's parents: Greek, Australian or just dying? The well-established Aboriginal colleague now with his wife converted to Islam: Australian or un-Australian? The gradually self-conscious gay teenager: a real *bloke* or a sissy?

On such cultural and social conditions, the characters are forced to activate, construct or live with hidden and broken personal memories from their diverse backgrounds while trying to re-contextualize themselves and redefine their identity in a multicultural context with a rapidly decreasing collective foothold. There is no physical, social or ideological space where they can locate the particular memories from their mixed personal history and come to terms with them. They become free floating memorial fragments, more and more incomprehensible for those who remember and inaccessible for other people from their multicultural environment.

Eight of the characters act as the protagonist of one chapter each, beginning with Hector, of Greek descent, now turning 40. During his birthday party in the first chapter, a sudden event transfixes everybody's memorial volatility as a piercing and biting actuality. Hugo, the three year old son of the overprotecting Rosie, threatens the other kids with a baseball bat. Rosie is the white underdog childhood friend of Ashia, Hector's half-Asian wife. With her hot-tempered drinking artist husband, Gary, Rosie has moved to Melbourne from West Australia. Hugo swings the bat dangerously close to the son of Harry, Hector's Greek cousin and a successful car dealer, and receives an instant slap from Harry. Everybody reacts passionately to the smack, but in different and contradictory ways. It forces the whole party to reflect on what it takes to have a collective set of norms and values to fashion a shared understanding of a social event beyond the daily routine which eventually involves their whole identity as well. The slap comes to redefine their mutual relationships on all levels.

Through the punch is also revealed another dimension of memories at work in migrant environments beside the more or less troubled personal memories. In continuation of the term "mediated social interaction," I will call it *collective embodied tradition* which they constantly and spontaneously reenact as a memory without paying attention to its memorial foundation which, nevertheless, becomes visible when it materializes in social interaction as the embodiment of culturally transmitted values, attitudes, talk and actions. If the personal memories are mainly hidden and hardly verbalized, the embodied tradition is the memorial yet subconscious glue of the community and its identity formations as it was in the aboriginal tradition in Mudrooroo's novel.

The embodied tradition is a practice defined as a bodily mediated social action (I still prefer "interaction") with a history: "the habitualized ways in which people reproduce relationships among social actors, resources and settings. [...] mediated actions become practices by being linked with actions in real time, and [...] come to define not only 'what social actors are doing' but also 'who they are'" (Norris & Jones, 2005, p. 98). A family gathering is such a collective embodied tradition, where a group reenacts a stable social order which is reasserted by their almost stereotyped way of talking and behaving. Hector's party is such an event. Family and friends meet to celebrate and

consolidate the unity and conviviality of their social circle. By their actions, they confirm how such party has been carried out as long as their memories go back and reaffirm their identity.

The slap reveals the family to be a fake, powerless and disharmonious unit. The embodied tradition can only handle repetition, not rupture. When they all have to cope with the slap and prevent it from releasing a social eruption that sends friends and family away from each other in all directions, they do it in so diverse ways that an eruption is exactly what happens, making eight of them separate protagonists in each their own chapter. Here, their personal memories and unstable position within the entire group shape their own interpretation of the event. A discomforting doubt seeps into their minds: Is it possible at all to share personal memories and a collective memory practiced as an embodied tradition beyond individualized fragments?

This doubt is confirmed by *The Slap*. Here, memories *are* not common by their content, but may *become* a shared resource through the communication within a community that establishes the relevant content as well as the limits of the shared universe of memory. This communication could be termed *negotiation* (cf. Nuttall & Coetzee, 1998), a notion that has been important in memory studies from Maurice Halbwachs' collective memory to Michael Rothenberg's multidirectional memory (Halbwachs, 1925; Rothberg, 2009). However, as the non-verbal embodied tradition in this case constitutes the basic memory, negotiation has a hard time to reach a common ground beyond the individual and partly antagonistic personal memories.

The novel's overarching structure of enunciation emphasizes this predicament. It is defined by the eight chapters with a different protagonist who also appears in other chapters. All key characters are seen in turn both from within and without while developing their different view on the same events, on themselves and on the other characters, each of them adding something which is unknown to the others. Using free indirect discourse, Tsiolkas does not turn them into first person narrators, but works on a shifting boundary between inner and outer space which, therefore, is subject to constant reinterpretation.

Therefore, what we see and hear and how it is put into perspective remains an unsettled matter of dialog and negotiation, also for the reader. Each character adopts a different position to the slap as the central event. To establish a shared memory of it would require an ongoing negotiation between the characters, both of the slap itself and, more importantly, of their personal and collective background and identity which each of them invest in their approach to the bash. However, the novel shows the impossibility of negotiating a new shared perspective through dialog, no different from the situation in all the previous novels in this article. Negotiation is not a delimited act as a court case, but a recurring daily challenge they have a hard time to stand up to. They live in more or less disconnected and individualized bubbles, simply because constructions of memory only come to play a role in their identity formation when communicated and accepted by others, not with reference to a shared past. This dialog is precisely what they are unable to perform.

In *The Slap* the family unites individual and collective identities and is the store house of memories as embodied tradition. In that position, it generates the norms that define which personal memories are important and can be made public and which ones must remain hidden, like domestic violence, homosexuality or an affair. It serves as the

point of reference in the negotiations of memory between the characters. However, the family does not appear as an unquestioned unit, but as a cross-cultural reality in many forms: from the Greek extended family via the modern nuclear family to other forms of cohabitation like bohemian partnerships and gay couples. Hence, for all characters a family, or other types of partnership, it is actually less a unity than a collection of broken experiences: The Greek family had to emigrate; for some, the family means a traumatized childhood; for others, it is a dream, attractive and frightening at the same time, and ex-marital affairs fly under the radar of shared memories; divorce is a reality as is domestic violence behind closed doors. Thus, the family is itself a matter of differentiation and negotiation or, as for Hector's Greek parents, a fading ideal from a lost world with no alternatives. It is never a perfect match of individual and collective memory with a form that is recognizable and accepted by everybody and translatable into a unified embodied tradition.

In *The Slap*, the contested role of the family on the collective level corresponds to the ambiguous role of the body on the individual level. Both body and family have a collective and individual dimension. The family is a collective unit charging the ideal individual behavior with the clear goal of reproducing the family structure and maintaining the embodied tradition. The body, on the other hand, is marked by collectively recognizable features of gender and ethnicity, often categorized in stereotypes; yet, it is also the site of individual explorations of sexuality and cross-ethnic relationships in order to mark a self-defined individual identity beyond the contested standards of the family. Most of the relationships in the novel are the result of such experiments, not a repeat of the Greek paternalistic family or the white Australian marriage.

The painful awareness of the tacit friction between body and family has now flared up when ignited by the slap. In a flash of a second, it challenges everybody's understanding of both body identity and family norms. For some of the characters, the boxed ear is a violent transgression bordering on a crime against humanity and actually prohibited by Australian law. For some, it appears even as an unforgivable act of child abuse; for others, it is an unfortunate mishap that can be reconciled by regret and forgiveness; for others again, it is just a trivial affair between kids and adults when kids act outrageously. For Rosie, the mother, it is an unforgivable wrongdoing. She presses charges against Harry, but loses the case after the attempts to stage reconciliation before they meet in court have failed. Harry is pressed by Hector to ask forgiveness from Rosie. When they meet, Rosie is as unforgiving as Harry is insincere in his remorse. There is no shared space where to find a common ground and the judicial platform only brings people further apart.

The re-contextualization of the slap from a family affair to the legal framework of retaliation only makes matters worse. No one is willing to take the risk of renegotiating with others the balance between what should be remembered and what should be forgotten and take a new look at themselves and their deeply buried painful memories and their traditional values, all of which legitimize the fixed boundary between open and hidden personal memories and lock the painful memories forever up in the safety box of the past. Although all chapters open the possibility of establishing an alternative re-contextualization of the slap to a framework of mutual reconciliation, nobody is seriously trying to do so. Everybody is stubbornly waiting for others to forgive.

Tsiolkas has little confidence that people can transcend their individual confinement of personal memories and embodied traditions (cf. Pavlides, 2013). Their capacity to reconsider their memories in order to re-contextualize transgressive actions in contexts of productive negotiation is limited. Their positions are carved in stone. In *The Slap*, Tsiolkas seems to insist on the inevitability of the individualization of life in a world of globalized flows of migration and also the narrow limits of the human capacity to re-contextualize the personal memories and embodied traditions into a space of mutual negotiation of the cultural baggage and the identities which the migrants are traveling with and the locals are holding on to.

5. Conclusion: from the Australian outback to the world of globalization

In 1856, the German-British immigrant Frederick Sinnett published a small booklet *The Fiction Fields of Australia*. Only 19 years old, he had left Europe in 1849 to work down under as an engineer, but soon he changed his focus: to build itself the continent needed culture as badly as material infrastructure, and he became a cultural journalist until his early death from tuberculosis. He was in no doubt that literature is a necessary and indispensable part of the process and not only to be introduced after elementary material protection of a rudimentary life has been established. It is always there already, as he learned from the aborigines:

MAN can no more do without works of fiction than he can do without clothing, and, indeed, not so well; for, where climate is propitious, and manners simple, people often manage to loiter down the road of life without any of the “lendings” Lear cast away from him; yet, nevertheless, with nothing between the blue heaven and their polished skin, they will gather in a circle round some dusky orator or vocalist, as his imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, to the entertainment and elevation of his hearers. To amend our first proposition, then, works of fiction being more necessary, and universally disseminated, than clothing, they still resemble clothing in this, that they take different shapes and fashions in different ages. (Sinnett, 1966, p. 21)

If Australia did not yet have a Shakespeare, it still needed literature to reflect the experience of people living there, foster their imagination and lift their attention beyond the immediate daily life with the courage to look ahead to “things unknown”. If we call this process identity formation, then it is fair to say that Australian literature, in the “different shapes and fashions,” it has taken since then has been preoccupied with precisely this question (Dixon & Rooney, 2013). And it has done so, not only by propagating the official identity claims of a new and still young nation, but also by taking up the challenge of the contradictions and conflicts related to its particular spatial layout, its indigenous peoples and its migrating ethnicities, releasing or bringing their own, often incompatible yet co-existing memories to the continent. Thereby, Australian literature is no longer a literature from a corner of the world, remote corner for most people, but a literature in and about this globalized world at large.

Notes

1. Part of the article builds on (Larsen, 2017).

2. See (Carter, 2006; Hage, 2000; Hodge & O'Carroll, 2007; Jayasuriya, Walker, & Gothard, 2003; Jupp, 2007 and also Lindqvist 2007).
3. Recent development in memory studies opens the field to issues of globalization, transnationalism and migration with the shared fundamental condition that place bound memories are being contested and have to be reconstructed to be instrumental for identity formation, a condition the applies to dwellers and movers who co-exist in the same place. See works like (Agnew, 2005; Aydemir & Rotas, 2008; Cesari & Rigney, 2014; Gutman, Brown, & Sodaro, 2010; Levy & Sznajder, 2002; Philips & Reyes, 2011). A special dimension has to do with memory, human rights and reconciliation, see (Levy & Sznajder, 2010; Soyinka, 1999).
4. Mudrooroo was born Colin Thomas Johnson, but called himself Mudrooroo (= paperbark) Narogin or Nyoongah, the former after his birth place, the latter after his people. However, in 1997, his claimed aboriginal ancestry was brought into doubt.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

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