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Abstract

This essay, through a theorized analysis of Australian popular song lyrics, investigates a range of understandings of “home”, including the exclusions *and* the sacred connotations that inform the term. Against accusations of mere sentimentality or nostalgia regarding a desire for “home” as familiar and comforting, and in response to Levinas’ related arguments that a desire for home is at the root of splitting “humanity into natives and strangers”, this essay argues that it is necessary for post-colonial Australia to embrace “homelessness” at the heart of any understanding of “home”.

Biographical Note

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“It’s a Hungry Home”: Post-colonial Displacements, Popular Music and the Sacred.

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One's implementation in a landscape, one's attachment to Place, without which the universe would become insignificant and would scarcely exist, is the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers. (Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. 1990. 232.)

“Great Southern Land”

Great Southern Land, Great Southern Land

you walk alone like a primitive man

and they make it work with sticks and bones

see their hungry eyes, it's a hungry home...(Iva Davies. *Primitive Man*. 1982)

Metaphors of emptiness, distance and desert proliferate in discourses about colonial and post-colonial Australia. However, alongside this deeply entrenched trope, and seemingly conversely, the nation has been steeped in fantasies of being overrun or invaded, and experiences of desperate migration and refuge-seeking. The discourses that have burgeoned around these two recurring tropes inform opposing but linked narratives in the ongoing national preoccupation with what “home” might signify. What post-colonial scholar Roland Boer describes as “The thirst, indeed the rage – for a land, a home, an ethnic unity and national or at least group identity” (Boer 91) has driven many to perpetrate atrocities on those excluded from the group. In an essay entitled “Home is always Elsewhere”, Boer examines the ways in which the myths and metaphors of home and its counterpoint, exodus, have informed so many diverse migratory movements: the Dutch in South Africa as Israelites in the desert; the Puritans of America on the way to God's promised land; liberation theology's use of the Exodus myth; the immigrant waves in Australia. In these versions of the myth, he argues, home and expulsion from home depend on each other. Boer invokes what he calls the demonic aspect of the myth, aligning the oppressive uses of the biblical book of Exodus with “the severity of monotheism, and its demands for one people, one God, one land” (93). In this he is in agreement with Emmanuel Levinas who saw the ambivalent nature of “home” as both necessity, and perpetrator of murderous exclusions. This essay asks the following questions:

How can home, so often invoked as sacred, as crucible of meaning and identity, be imagined – let alone lived – in the contemporary diasporic world, and in the context of this doubleness and splitting to which Levinas points? Further, in the light of the splitting, and the ambivalence which congeals around “home”, are there be any sacred understandings still possible in the contemporary manias over home/homeland/nation? What kind of sacredness might this be?

So, what is the genealogy of “home” in relation to two seemingly contradictory paradigms of the contemporary sacred?: first, the sacred as place, belonging, rootedness, identity, relation to land, kinship; and secondly, the sacred as migrant and peripatetic, as seeking, journeying, homeless, offering glimpses but never attaining. In examining these two paradigms of sacredness, we can see that the first is an object, an entity or phenomenon; the second is adjectival, and adjectival of a process; so in fact we are dealing with two different epistemologies: being and becoming. The essay’s argument is that it is crucial, in the context of continued global unrest over nationhood and homeland, and the consequent violent displacements of human communities, to continue seeking ways of negotiating between the apparent contradictions of these two paradigms, exemplified in part by the spirit of Wilfred Owen’s “dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” on the one hand, and that embodied in the Judeo-Christian theology of prophets in the desert, of Jesus as nomadic man-god, unacknowledged prophet in his own country, having “no place to lay his head”.

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The argument of this essay focuses on the myths of home and homelessness that have received currency in Australian popular music about and by indigenous Australians. In Australian rock group *Ice House*’s iconic 1982 anthem, “Great Southern Land”, the poetry of Iva Davies is deeply ambivalent about the place of indigenous Australians and white settlers in what is figured as a “faraway” land.

“Great Southern Land”

(Icehouse. *Primitive Man*.1982)

Standing at the limit of an endless ocean
stranded like a runaway, lost at sea
city on a rainy day down in the harbour
watching as the grey clouds shadow the bay
looking everywhere 'cause I had to find you
this is not the way that I remember it here
anyone will tell you its a prisoner island
hidden in the summer for a million years

Great Southern Land, burned you black
so you look into the land and it will tell you a story
story 'bout a journey ended long ago
if you listen to the motion of the wind in the mountains
maybe you can hear them talking like I do
". . .they're gonna betray, they're gonna forget you
are you gonna let them take you over this way .. ."

Great Southern Land, Great Southern Land
you walk alone like a primitive man
and they make it work with sticks and bones
see their hungry eyes, it's a hungry home
I hear the sound of the stranger's voices
I see their hungry eyes, their hungry eyes
Great Southern Land, Great Southern Land
they burned you black, black against the ground

Great Southern Land, in the sleeping sun
you walk alone with the ghost of time
they burned you black, black against the ground
and they make it work with rocks and sand
I hear the sound of the strangers' voices
I see their hungry eyes, their hungry eyes
Great Southern Land, Great Southern Land
you walk alone, like a primitive man
you walk alone with the ghost of time
and they burned you black
yeah, they burned you black
Great Southern Land

In the lines describing the first white inhabitants, convicts “standing at the limit of an endless ocean”, “standing” is half-rhymed with “stranded”, in a land where memory is ripped or leached from you. It is a “prisoner island” where you’re “betrayed and forgotten.” If you listen to this land, the song tells us, its message is at the very least ambivalent: like the strangers who watch you with hungry eyes, you too will become primitive, blackened, devoured by the ghost of time. And the story the land will tell you is that a journey - the archetypal journey of migration and settlement – “ended long ago”, presumably a reference to the ancient occupation of the land by indigenous Australians. “Great Southern Land”, written at the beginning of an important decade in Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, and the politics of land rights, has been considered a pro-Aboriginal song, appearing on play lists repetitively right to the present. However, its ambivalence towards the land and its inhabitants, and its blurring of indigenous and non-indigenous positions, are worth probing.

With its contemporary hymn- or anthem-like rhythm, its chanted chorus, and indigenous background music/sound, it has the movement and the speaking perspective of a walking nomad, but not an indigenous nomad. The speaker of the song’s narrative is a white intruder

almost overwhelmed in an alien place. However, the unnamed strangers who watch you from the land are described as being able to “make it work” with sticks and bones, with rocks and sand. The lyrics express ambivalence towards this place, or towards being in this place as an intruder, and the song does not resolve in any simple way. This is because the music beckons, celebrates, declares and repeats the reality of this huge, strange, mythic place: “Great Southern Land”. When the song appeared in 1982, a torrid decade of political unrest in Australia, culminating in the 1988 Australian Bicentenary celebrations - or mourning – was just beginning. In the song, written and performed by a white band, perspectives of indigenous and non-indigenous are arguably highly ambiguous. The narrator is not indigenous, but “like a primitive man”, an outsider viewing as other those who “make it work ...see their hungry eyes, it’s a hungry home”.

In the same year, the Australian musician Shane Howard and his less commercial, though hugely popular band, *Goanna*, recorded the song “Solid Rock”, an up-tempo, driving rock song with a deeply serious theme. Lyrically a much more overtly political song, “Solid Rock” registers the ravages of colonialism:

“Solid Rock” (Goanna. *Spirit of Place*. 1982)

Out here nothin' changes, not in a hurry anyway

You feel the endlessness with the comin' of the light o' day

We're talkin' about a chosen place

You wouldn't sell it in a marketplace, well

Well just a minute now

Standing on solid rock

Standing on sacred ground

Living o-on borrowed soil

And the winds of change are blowin' down the line

Right down the line

Round about the dawn o' time, When dreamin' all began

A crowd o' people came

Well they were looking for their promised land

Were running from the heart of darkness

Searching for the heart o' light

Well it was their paradise

But they were standin' on - solid rock

Standing o-on sacred grou-ound

Living o-on borrowed soil

And the winds of change were blowing cold that night...Oh

They were standin' on the shore one day, Saw the white sails in the sun

Wasn't long before they felt the sting, white man, white law, white gun

Don't tell me that it's justified, 'cause somewhere, someone lied

Yeah well someone lied, someone lied, genocide

Well someone lied, oh, ahh

And now you're standing on - solid rock

Standing o-on a sacred grou-ound

Living o-on borrowed soil

And the winds of change are blowin' down the li-ine

Solid rock, Standing on sacred ground

Living o-on borrowed soil

And the winds of change are blowing down the line

Solid rock, Standing o-on sacred grou-ound

Living on borrowed time

And the winds of change are blowing down the line

Oh-oh-oh no, NO-O

Against this theme of uprooting and desecration, the song utopically posits a place of authenticity, a land where nothing changes; it is an endless, chosen place, not able to be sold in the marketplace, a promised land, a heart of light, their paradise, solid rock, sacred ground. While at the level of the lyrics and the narrative the song goes on to undermine the solidity of all these claims of unchanging promise, as the reality of change, cultural commodification and invasion are narrated, it is at the level of the music that the joy of being in place, standing on solid rock, is celebrated and reiterated. But again the fact that this was a white band narrating indigenous locatedness arguably sets up some ambivalence. By the end of 1982 “Solid Rock” was number one on Australian popular music charts and the album *Spirit of Place* had sold 300,000 copies (a large number for the Australian population of 18 million). “Solid Rock’s” non-Indigenous author and singer described in these words the song’s reception when the band went on tour:

Every town we played, they’d be a group of aboriginal people who would actually come to check out these white fellows, what do those white fellows know about cultures or aboriginality? But we learned very fast, and we learned every night. It meant sitting up till 2, 3 in the morning, talking to groups of aboriginal people in every town we went into. And we were hearing firsthand the stories of how they grew up, the life they had to lead. The oppression and the racism that they lived with every day. And every night when you’re hearing direct stories from aboriginal people, once you know, you then can’t un-know.

(*Solid Rock* – *The Music of Goanna* website)

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In his 1998 essay “Geographies of the Sacred and Post-colonial Literatures”, in the volume of post-colonial essays entitled *Spirit of Place: Source of the Sacred*, Canadian Jamie Scott writes from a non-indigenous awareness of “the precariousness of our own sacred contexts,

the historical accident of our own sacred locations...in a heightened awareness of the relativity of all locatedness, human or divine.” (Scott in Griffith and Tulip 70). It is a sense of the sacred, he writes, that honours “critical practices of dislodgement, without which...narratives become fortified places, abiding cities.” (61). This “relativity of all locatedness” applies most obviously to the second of the descriptions of contemporary sacredness outlined above: the sacred as migrant and peripatetic, as seeking, journeying, homeless, offering glimpses but never attaining.

The argument of this present essay is that sacredness – experienced emotionally, politically, psychologically, spiritually, morally, physically – so often operates in Australia, and in many white settler, colonised countries, with a sharp and simultaneous double sense of home and homelessness; of the importance of acknowledging “the relativity of all locatedness”, even when, or perhaps especially when, we claim to be most at home. Of course the relative weight and the nature of such split experiences of “home” falls differently for indigenous and non-indigenous in these colonial contexts. For example, in the music, almost against the lyrics, of “Great Southern Land”, and in the rhythmic drive of “Solid Rock”, the dialectic between these two paradigms can be seen at work: desire for home and a sense of the impossibility of home, as mutually implicated ideas; and relatedly, home as built by inclusion, while also necessitating exclusion, to remember Levinas. Is this oscillation between home and homelessness – experienced differently by colonisers and colonised - able to be seen as dialectical, or are we dealing here simply with contradictory and necessarily antagonistic motions? Can the human desire for home, belonging, land, place – so powerfully voiced by Indigenous and diasporic peoples, and differently by colonisers – hold at its heart, in reasoned, social human practices, its opposite, a significant acknowledgement of homelessness, rootlessness, journeying, and the exclusions, expulsions, barriers caused by defending home? What can this dialectical epistemology of home promise to achieve? And what distinctions need to be maintained in regard to colonisers and colonised when thinking about this doubleness?

Homelessness at the heart of “home” is the central idea of rock band Midnight Oil’s famous anthem, “Beds are Burning”, from the 1986 album *Diesel and Dust*. The song was performed most famously at the 2000 Olympics closing ceremony. Midnight Oil’s iconic front man, Peter Garrett – tall and shaven-headed, his trademark gangly figure taken over in his contorted, gyrating dance style - is now the Federal Labour



Opposition’s spokesperson for the environment. The 2000 Olympics performance of “Beds are Burning”, the group dressed in track suits with “Sorry” scrawled across various parts of their bodies, was beamed around the world. The song’s lyrics were known, mantra-style, by many of the crowd, who sang and danced throughout the performance:

“Beds are Burning”

(Midnight Oil. *Diesel and Dust*. 1986)

Out where the river broke

The bloodwood and the desert oak

Holden wrecks and boiling diesels

Steam in forty five degrees

The time has come

To say fair's fair
To pay the rent
To pay our share
The time has come
A fact's a fact
It belongs to them
Let's give it back

How can we dance when our earth is turning
How do we sleep while our beds are burning
How can we dance when our earth is turning
How do we sleep while our beds are burning

The time has come to say fair's fair
to pay the rent, now to pay our share

Four wheels scare the cockatoos
From Kintore East to Yuendumu
The western desert lives and breathes
In forty five degrees

The time has come
To say fair's fair
To pay the rent
To pay our share
The time has come
A fact's a fact
It belongs to them
Let's give it back

How can we dance when our earth is turning

How do we sleep while our beds are burning

How can we dance when our earth is turning

How do we sleep while our beds are burning

The lyrics work powerfully, with their simple, idealistic logic: it's theirs, give it back. The music and lyrics are anthemic, repeated, and call out to the crowd to join in. Behind this emotionally simple logic, and the repeated rhetorical questions – How can we..how do we - stands the utterly complicated historical and legal conundrum of land rights in Australia, and the already grievous loss of languages and traditional forms of life. The powerful central image of burning beds is compounded by the poem's depiction of Australia as unhomey for all but the indigenous inhabitants, a land of wild heat, floods, wrecked and derelict vehicles. In other words, a land impenetrable – or almost - to modernity. But it is also a home to those who belong, who have adapted: “The western desert lives and breathes/In forty five degrees.”

The Western Desert, encompassing the Gibson and Great Sandy deserts, is still the traditional country of groups of Pintupi, Warlpiri and Martu Aboriginals. Pushed out of their traditional forms of living in the 1960s by the Menzies government's assimilationist policies, these groups have since been “settled” in mixed Aboriginal communities such as Papunya, Hermannsburg and Haasts Bluff in The Northern Territory, between the 1960s and the 1980s. The Western Desert, or Papunya Tula Art movement, now internationally famous for the so-called “dot paintings”, originated in this country 240 kilometres west of Alice Springs. The 2002 Philip Noyce film *Rabbit Proof Fence*, based on the novel/memoir *Molly's Daughter* by Doris Pilkington Garimara, is also set through this country. Most white settler Australians have not visited these parts of Australia, but communities such as Kintore East and Yuendumu have a mythic resonance for many. Four-wheel drive vehicles obviously also penetrate out there.

In June 2004, left-wing, radical political commentator Margot Kingston wrote a typically larrikin and subversive article entitled “Howard’s Memory of burning beds” for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, recalling the Oils’ Olympic event. With no love lost between herself and the Australian Prime Minister John Howard, and with no pretence of journalistic objectivity, Kingston quotes web diarist Mark Hayes:

Remember back in August 2000, when the Olympics were on after hundreds of thousands of Australians showed their support for Aboriginal Reconciliation though the famous bridge walks and seas of hands? The Prime Minister had, and has, refused to apologise and say 'Sorry' to the Aboriginal people.

At the closing ceremony of the Games - that huge stadium party and concert broadcast live around the world to an audience of over one billion people - Midnight Oil, dressed in black track suits with the word 'Sorry' stencilled on them, ripped into 'Beds are Burning' before an ecstatic crowd.

Yothu Yindi followed up with 'Treaty'.

The crowd at Olympic Stadium went berserk in screaming support, knowing exactly what was being done to shame the Government over Reconciliation.

Sitting in the audience with nowhere to run or hide, and no 'I am advised' to scuttle behind, Prime Minister Howard had no choice but to squirm and receive the huge, public, 'F... You' delivered loudly, proudly, and strongly by the Oils and Yothu Yindi. He never forgets any slight delivered upon him, and exacts revenge whenever and wherever possible. This was a massive public rebuke at his meanness. And he won't ever forget it.

That's why his favourite Oils song is 'Beds are Burning', and he won't sleep while his bed is burning for revenge against Labor for publicly embracing Peter Garrett, who delivered that most public of attacks on John Howard at what should have been one of his triumphant moments.

This indeed was an odd moment in Australian Indigenous/White Settler relations. The Prime Minister, not known for his popular culture involvement, responded to the leading question “What is your favourite Midnight Oil song” in the context of the Olympics, causing much ironic amusement. The very idea of white Australia being in debt to its Aboriginal inhabitants, or of rental due, is anathema to most conservative Australians, and certainly to the present Federal government.

Another Midnight Oil song, “Maralinga”, written by Garrett and Oil’s guitarist Jim Monginie, appears on the 1982 album *10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1*. It is a spoken song, in the voice of an Aboriginal person witnessing the horrors of British nuclear testing at Maralinga, on the Nullabor Plain of Western Australia. Much has been written about the tests, and their ongoing legacy, conducted in 1956 (Operation Buffalo) and 1957 (Operation Antler), on land which was considered sacred to the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara peoples. The opening lines of the song come from a displaced voice remembering home: “I come from a land of wide open spaces/Where the world turns around us and we just follow suit.” The transformation of a whole way of life is sudden and apocalyptic:

In the wind

The ashes fly

The poison crown

The charcoal ground

And if you can't see the smile in me, that's where I wanna be...

There's only God

There's only Christ

Think I'll lie down for just a while...

The land turns from an environment lived in for centuries, to “charcoal ground”. The reference to “The poison crown” of course invokes the newly acquired “Crown Land”, and

British power; as do the references to God and Christ, as the new British overlords. Again, home is made horrifically unhomey, in the name of gods and powers unheard of by those who were dispossessed:

And the grass became granite
And the sky a black sheet
Our bed was a graveyard
We couldn't feel our blistered feet...

But what is most uncanny and moving about the lyrics of “Maralinga” is that the speaker, who watches the awful sublimity of the nuclear tests, and their effects on the land, wants to be there, in country:

All around
An eerie sound
Their dreams a cloud
Their world in shrouds
In the wind
The ashes fly
Not much time
But time to try
And if you can't see the smile in me, that's cos I wanna be
I want to be here at the end. I have to be here at the end.

The mesmeric phantasm of nuclear explosion – “Their dreams a cloud/ Their world in shrouds/in the wind” – draws the speaker into the apocalypse, to be there even “at the end”. The sorrow of the speaker is caused because this is a traditional custodian of place speaking. He marks the awful transformation, unable to smile. The awful gap between European dreams of land use for modern, experimental purposes, and the urgent, need of the custodian to be

once again in country opens up at this point. He will, if ever he makes it back, be in country at the same time as that country has been transformed into utter unhomeliness.

*

For indigenous Australians, homelessness – loss of languages, loss of traditional country, loss of memory and community - has been thrust upon them, and continues to be so. The dialectic between home and homelessness, voiced in the lyrics of “Maralinga”, has its own trajectory for Indigenous Australians, emerging out of deeply traditional relationship to the land, to ancestors, and to dreamings. But this dialectic is different for White Australians. In 2007, the long hard processes of coming to understand homelessness as something which they have perpetrated - upon the land and upon its first inhabitants - are now reaching maturity. Since the June 3, 1992 Mabo High Court decision for the Meriam People, and the first white settler awakenings to the nonsense that was the doctrine of terra nullius, multiple land claims have been proceeding, with varying results, across the country. However, life expectancy, infant mortality, education levels, incarceration and suicide rates are still much worse than for white Australians, and the health conditions and employment prospects of many Indigenous individuals and communities are still at disgraceful, internationally queried levels of poverty. So, what is the particular dynamic that needs to be acknowledged and worked through for white Australians, now? Is it possible for white Australia, looking into the distorted mirror of Australia’s history, to see both the ongoing Aboriginal dispossession and to see its own face reflected, but differently, transformatively? The argument of this essay is that to do so, and to continue the processes of renewal and justice, it is necessary for non-Indigenous Australians to learn to think and practice “home” and “dislodgement” together. The songs of the early 1980s were already alive to such a need. Such a double understanding acknowledged at a national level would be truly post-colonial.

A richly poetic exemplar of such thinking can be found, as early as 1966, in the poetry of post-colonial poet Judith Wright. Her poem, “The Document”, is the work of a privileged daughter of pastoral landowners who had settled in the fertile New England area of New South Wales. Wright, whose life’s work across the 1950s to the 1980s would lead her to

personally devastating realisations about her own role in the dispossession of Indigenous Australia, wrote “A Document”, a paean of love to the country she knew and had grown up in. But it is a poem that also represents the dawning awareness that home must, from that time on, always carry the double freight of love and displacement:

“A Document”

‘Sign there.’ I signed, but still uneasily.
I sold the coachwood forest in my name.
Both had been given me; but all the same
remember that I signed uneasily.

Ceratopetalum, Scented Satinwood:

a tree attaining seventy feet in height.
Those pale-red calyces like sunset light
burned in my mind. a flesh-pink pliant wood

used in coachbuilding. Difficult of access
(those slopes were steep). But it was World War Two.
Their wood went into bomber-planes. They grew
hundreds of years to meet those hurried axes.

Under our socio-legal dispensation
both name and woodland had been given me.

I was much younger then than any tree
matured for timber. But to help the nation

I signed the document. The stand was pure
(eight hundred trees perhaps). Uneasily
(the bark smells sweetly when you wound the tree)

I set upon this land my signature.

Here we are given the intimate details of the land, and the speaker's love of it: the coachwood forest, "*Ceratopetalum*, Scented Satinwood", "they grew/hundreds of years", "the stand was pure", "the bark smells sweetly when you wound the tree". Latin abuts with sensuous new-world knowledge and descriptors, as a retrospective but active, poetic meaning-making takes place. Home is both the loved intimacy of forests and childhood memories, and it is the place given her "Under our socio-legal dispensation"; it is part of the nation.

Some readers might identify guilt and regret here, in the realization of what was done, but the poem encompasses something much more dynamic than mere guilt. There is self-forgiveness – "I signed uneasily", "I was much younger" – together with a broader social understanding of profound injustice and destruction, performed under the authority of the conquerors: "I set upon this land my signature". The uneasy conjoining of deeply private guilt and sorrow, together with public responsibility, has the effect of a shock. Ownership and rights are placed beside a wounding loss, as the pure stand of eight hundred trees turns into bomber planes for the war, for the nation. The personal and the individual are registered as having public, national import; and the manacles of history are seen to tie down even the person of good will.

However, what opens the poem up to moving beyond the merely personal and nostalgic thoughts of a white settler Australian, is the forthright and passionate disposition towards justice being registered by the individual voice. Wright traces her own love of land, but also the need to re-read and re-understand such love, in the light of present realities. It is a moment, this poem, which births an awareness of what British theologian Rowan Williams describes as time and understanding belonging together, and of the power of language to constantly remake. Williams, in the course of an essay on language and sacred belief from the volume *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion* writes:

What is thinkable is so precisely because thinking is not content with the abstraction of mutual exclusivities, but struggles to conceive a structured wholeness nuanced enough to contain what appeared to be contradictories. Once again: time and understanding belong together; language constantly remakes itself in the fact of what is not yet understood, criticizes itself unceasingly...we can indeed abstract to the trace of a perpetual shadow...but this shadow *can only* “appear” in the historical process of making (communicable, communal) sense, in the “following” of discourse.

(Williams, in Berry 76.)

Williams is here speaking into the dialectic of being and becoming in an original way. While his desire for “wholeness nuanced enough to contain what appeared to be contradictories” might be dismissed by some as naively utopian, his theorised and pragmatic understanding of the operations of language is gripping and persuasive: language as always capable of both abstraction and communicability, of approaching the mysterious, the “not yet understood”, the place of the shadow; but it also carries a desire to make the future, to communicate, to commune. Williams sees language as richly philosophical in its impossible reaching out towards something contradictory and beyond reach; but also as the humble tool of particular times and understandings, particular communities and places when moments of reconciliation, healing, home might be urgently needed and achievable. What can Williams’ delineation of this dual capacity and practice of language do to assist thought and practice of “home” in Australia?

Like Williams, Australian critic Jennifer Rutherford is interested in intervening in monolithic understandings of home and nation, but she approaches these questions in different ways. Instead of focussing on the possibilities of language, she seeks to disrupt unified mythologies that paper thinly over deeper, psychic struggles for home. In her cultural and literary analysis of Australia, *The Gauche Intrude*, she focuses on “the way that fantasies of the good provide a camouflage for aggression at both a national and local level: an aggression directed both to an external and an internal Other.” (10). For Rutherford, following novelist Patrick White’s

infamous 1950s description of Australia as “the Great Australian Emptiness”, she argues that the good, homey, egalitarian nation of Australia needs to recognise the spiritual dimension of its emptiness, an emptiness which is

...an aggression towards the Other that has been endemic in white Australian history; the fantasy of the good neighbour and the good nation that has sustained this aggression; and a certain experience of emptiness, of a symbolic fragility or inequality to the task of representing this nothingness, that fantasy has never been able to occlude. (12).

This is written by Rutherford well before the Tampa “incident”, when a boat carrying refugees (“illegal immigrants”, “queue jumpers”) was intercepted off the coast of Western Australia; and it is written well before official responses to the death of all 353 refugees on another boat, the SIEV X, close to Australian shores. *The Gauche Intruder* is alive to the power of national myths, and of the rhetorical and political mechanisms actively constructing such myths. Rutherford places in linguistic, literary and psychoanalytic terms what happens when we buy our own rhetoric, when home becomes the monolithic, protected, expulsive refusal of others, even as it dresses itself up in the very terms of protection of the nation, home, kith and kin; in other words, when home is mandated as this “splitting of humanity into natives and strangers,” (Levinas 232), rather than the double, dialectic sense, for post-colonial citizens, of homelessness within all understandings of home.

In this context, the lyrics of the fifth and final song addressed in this essay, “Treaty”, from the 1991 album *Tribal Voice* by Aboriginal (Yolnu) Band Yothu Yindi are significant. “Yothu Yindi” means in Gumatj, the Yolnu tribal language, “child and mother”. The song’s lyrics can be read as a particular instance of thinking home and displacement dialectically, first painfully and realistically for Indigenous Australians, but also in calling white Australia to respond. “Treaty” is politically, emotionally, musically and poetically alive to love of home, and the fact that the dream of home will continually be erased. The song is utopian in the richest

understanding of that word, dealing with a full and powerful sense of the particularity of place – “country” that has been lived in for 40,000 years. Yet the song also comprehends the deeply precarious, unabiding nature of home, and the fact that no-one – Indigenous and non-indigenous alike – *owns* the land. The song declares that “words are easy, words are cheap”, but it also simultaneously *uses* words – English and Gumatj - and music, to dream up home and its loss. The very necessity for a treaty points to this double understanding of home and its precariousness:

“Treaty”

(Yothu Yindi, *Tribal Voice*. 1991)

Well I heard it on the radio
And I saw it on the television
Back in 1988
All those talking politicians
Words are easy, words are cheap
Much cheaper than our priceless land
But promises can disappear
Just like writing in the sand

Treaty Yeh Treaty Now

Treaty Yeh Treaty Now

Nhima Djatpangarri nhima walangwalang -

Nhe Djatpayatpa nhima gaya nhe-

Matjini.... Yakarray - nhe Djat'pa nhe walang - Gumurrtjararrk Gutjuk -

This land was never given up

This land was never bought and sold

The planting of the Union Jack

Never changed our law at all

Now two rivers run their course

Separated for so long

I'm dreaming of a brighter day

When the waters will be one

Treaty Yeh Treaty Now Treaty Yeh Treaty Now

Treaty Yeh Treaty Now Treaty Yeh Treaty Now

Nhima djatpa nhe walang

gumurtjararrk yawirriny Nhe gaya nhe matjini

Gaya nhe matjini Gaya gaya nhe gaya nhe

Matjini walangwalang Nhema djatpa nhe walang - Nhe gumurtjarark nhe ya-

Promises - Disappear - Priceless land - Destiny -

Well I heard it on the Radio - And I saw it on the Television

But promises can be broken

Just like writing in the sand

Treaty Yeh

Treaty Now

At the literal level this can be seen as a hardnosed, political cry – we know you colonisers lie, so give us a treaty. The song jams utopian, emotional “truth” up against political pragmatism: “This land was never given up/This land was never bought and sold / The planting of the Union Jack /Never changed our law at all”, and is thus, in its self-conscious fictionalising, both a poignant overreaching, and an exhilarating challenge to make such claims true. There is a double understanding of language here: an acknowledgement that history is written in

language, and language can have at its heart an emptiness and duplicity. But there is also the grasping of a more processual, local, temporary and communicable use of language, analogous to Jamie Scott and Rowan Williams' understandings of the sacred, a figuring of home and dislodgement in continual, dialectical, questioning negotiation with each other.

This essay has argued that it is in particular contexts, and ceaselessly, dialectically, with a double, awareness of homelessness within home, that post-colonial Australian understandings of home need to be forged. The cry for a treaty can be read as pragmatic, coming from a merely political understanding of the need for legal certitude, but that is not the overwhelming effect of this song by Yothu Yindi. From somewhere at the heart of its mix of indigenous and white musical technologies, its use of Gumatj and English, its oscillation between fragile utopian desire and a hardnosed call for legal structures, a sacred impulse has been felt and shared by many who hear the song (all Australians, arguably). The song embodies an impulse, a pulse, finding ways to express deep desire for home, as well as a transforming realisation that such desires need to acknowledge – vulnerably, hauntedly, dialectically - the “relativity of all locatedness”.

Do such claims to relativity finally neutralise any political, practical claims to home and country by indigenous and post-colonial in Australia; or worse, do they belong to a stagnant, nostalgic insistence on return to an unattainable past? On the contrary, this essay has been arguing that it is Indigenous Australians, and those artists and audiences who respond to them, who are most acutely aware of this claim to home which persists amongst all the different kinds of homelessness in post-colonial Australia. Across a multitude of pragmatic and metaphoric levels, for colonised and colonisers, holding together the human need for home with an understanding of the constant reality of human dislocatedness is a riven, necessary and unending process. Openness to such processes for making “home” is urgently needed in the political languages of negotiation, in poetic and musical expressions, and in personal and public discourses of home in Australia. Such openness can be described as a sacred quality, in

an understanding of the contemporary post-colonial sacred as migrant and peripatetic, a continuing journey in search of home.

(6,061 words)

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