

Discursive Belonging

Surviving Narrative in Migrant Oral History

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—INTRODUCTION

In Australia in the late 1970s, multiculturalism was put on the policy agenda for the first time. The Ethnic Affairs Council was established in 1977, and one year later the first official national multicultural policies were implemented by the Fraser Government. By 1979 the new Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs included objectives such as ‘raising awareness of cultural diversity and promoting social cohesion, understanding and tolerance’.¹ These changes meant that by the early 1980s ‘aliens’ were instead to be referred to as ‘non-citizens’ in the Migration Act and the push to favour British immigrants over non-Anglo immigrants was slowly being wound down. This shift happened in the wake of seismic moves in the governance of migrants in previous decades: the new Labor Party program to ‘Populate or Perish’ in the late 1940s expanded the influx of British nationals to include European victims of war; the legal end to the White Australia Policy in 1973, with the Whitlam government’s anti-discrimination amendments, disallowed application rejections based on racial background alone; and the arrival of refugees from Vietnam, Lebanon, Cyprus and Chile in the mid to late 1970s—not to mention

growth in Asian migration—meant that from the postwar 1950s Australia had become significantly racially diverse. In the backdrop to these shifts sat the nation's own heated postcolonial politics: Indigenous Australians were not recognised on the national census until 1967.

In this article I explore two cultural narratives that reflect the discursive management of European migrants in Australia in the 1950s and early 1980s. By discursive management, I mean the rhetorical attempts to contain, assimilate or recollect European migrant subjectivity through such textual enactments as advertorial brochures, educational pamphlets and personal interviews. Within this approach rests an understanding of the performativity of these historical textual traces: they create—through words, images and material signifiers—the field within which the truth-effects of a highly nationalistic memory practice were to be staged. It is important to note that the 1950s and early 1980s encompass two distinct moments in the governance of migrants in twentieth-century Australia. In the first, New Australians (British and European nationals) were lured to the country as part of an extensive campaign to boost the post-World War II economy. In the second, the eventual shift in multicultural policy welcomed the narratives of these New Australians to the festivals, cultural institutions and funding categories of the new national imaginary.

While the New Australians of the 1950s were required to assimilate, the burgeoning multiculturalism of the 1980s encouraged the preservation, and even visibility, of ethnic practices, customs and codes. I am a first-generation Australian on my mother's side; she fled Hungary as a child with her parents (my grandparents) following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. My Hungarian mother and grandparents—with their 'odd' ways, 'strange' language and 'different' foods—experienced the unwieldiness of being New Australians in late 1950s Sydney. (One example: my mother recalls the sting of shame when her father—my grandfather—insisted on taking his own dark rye bread into restaurants). They also, much later—when my mother had become a mother herself—experienced the 'multi-cultures' of the 1980s, the time of my own childhood. My interest in the cultural stagings of migrant identity hence stem from this very personally vexatious location: the privately forgotten as it sits against the publicly, institutionally recollected.

In the form of public recollection, the State Library of New South Wales holds the Oral History Project, a collection funded by the Ethnic Affairs Commission (EAC) of New South Wales in 1981. Originally titled *Thirty Years After*, the aim of the Oral History Project was to collect testimonials from migrants who arrived in Australia after 1951—the turning point in the nation’s immigration pattern, replacing ‘large numbers of refugees’ with ‘voluntary migrants’.² Interviews were conducted with over thirty-five migrants, from countries as diverse as Poland, Hungary, the former Yugoslavia, Spain, Cyprus and Holland. The histories demonstrate viewpoints from a range of socioeconomic and familial backgrounds and attest to the wide variety of intercultural experiences that can characterise migrant experience as a whole. An article in the *Australian* in 1981 notes the significance of the Oral History Project: it ‘represents Australia’s first permanent, professional oral history collection’.³ For my purposes, it is important for whom it frames within its novel cultural function.

Here, I first conduct a close reading of promotional materials developed to educate New Australians into Australian cultural life. These 1950s’ documents are interesting for how they perform a semiotics of cultural difference based in the personal and behavioural signifiers of race—particularly around the categories of British and ‘non-British’ migrant hierarchies that they stipulate. Second, I focus on one sole entry in the Oral History Project from Hungarian migrant Eugene Masszauer, whose collection includes a wealth of artefacts and whose story is in some ways comparable with my maternal family’s background. Masszauer’s presence disappears and reappears between his yellowing letters, signatures and meal tickets. As a sociohistorical performance analysis, I read Masszauer’s migrant experience through the documents that have now found second life in this collection.

My third approach both counters and supplements the first two. Masszauer is one ghost in this journey; my grandparents are two others. I use the performative in my writing as an attempt to stage one further—hypothetical—entry into this oral history collection. I travel to Budapest, conduct family interviews and unpack forgotten histories in order to perform the construction best described as my memory of my grandparents’ memory. In doing so, my register slips between the imagined voice of my grandparents, my voice, and my voice of their voices. What does this writing strategy enable? It is appropriative and wrestles with the

languages, imaginings and tropes that frame migrant discourse in Australia. It invokes a derivative poetics of the fractured migrant voice and stereotypical images of loss as a way of interrogating the collective's hold on the nature of personal story.

Through these intertwining methodologies, I attempt discursive recuperation by re-staging the culturally normative textual codings that can frame migrants in Australia. I argue that if this archive produces migrant identity as a narrative of survival grounded in loss, it also produces itself as an institutional saviour, by framing itself as the means by which migrants can demonstrate the acquisition of speech. The phrase 'discursive belonging' explains the conditional performativities to which migrants in these time periods needed to adhere; their need to attain not only a legal, but a symbolic, register of inclusion.

—SHE ARRIVED

What was the weather? A blue day a sepia sun that spiked the insides with liquid sickness a grey revulsion that peaked over mountains, churning. Nothing could be seen the weather was not there was no weather inside of her nothing could be perceived there was numbness and a husband and a red-headed child waiting to get off the ship.

Is this how she saw the world? (Ne beszély helyettem.) And there was no language. And she was embarrassed already. Did she think that years later her grandchild would be writing it all down? There was a ship, an ocean, a long journey, a port, a rickety jetty with wood and paint peeling off. The sun was blinding, splintered on the crowns of heads so that everything happened in washout, was faded before it began. That was the weather. It sat there. Burning through her cheeks while rivulets of acid made their way to the back of her throat and were swallowed back down again.

A trip to the city. Putting the gloves on. A moment not anticipated on the flotsam jetty, still flushed with all that was left behind. And years later, asking the granddaughter to buy the bus ticket, to ask the bus driver because she was the one who could speak. (Èn csak Magyarul beszélek.)

Held within the Oral History Project is a selection of promotional brochures that expand the collection's focus on purely oral history to incorporate artefacts of 1950s propaganda. These pamphlets were developed for the nation's Populate or Perish immigration policy, designed to recruit new European migrants to boost Australia's economy following the near invasion of the Japanese in 1942 while at the same time offering salvation from war-torn Europe. Their titles vary: *Know Australia; Your Introduction to Australia: Hints and Help on Knowing Your New Homeland; For New Australians; Australia in Brief; Australia's Bold Adventure; Facts That Concern You About the New Settlers League of NSW; Social Sciences of The Commonwealth* and *Reunion in Australia*.⁴ Together, they demonstrate the beginnings of what has become a foundational narrative in Australia's politics of ethnicity: the task of the 'non-British' migrant to belong to Australia, and to survive the traumas of their past through becoming culturally and ethnically invisible.



Figure 1: *Reunion in Australia*, pamphlet cover c.1950

Source: Eugene Masszauer papers, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

One pamphlet, titled *Reunion in Australia* (fig. 1), is a bilingual German and English picture book that narrates with certainty the joys that Australia as a nation can promise to 'former displaced persons'.⁵ It outlines the premise of its narrative:

This is the story of a young European girl who found her greatest happiness in Australia. It is a happy ending story. We shall not tell you the first part of the story. That part was clouded by war and unhappiness. We shall tell you only about the happy ending which occurred in Australia.⁶

The pamphlet conveys Australia in simple sentences and large photographic illustrations. In its 'happy ending story' a young woman leaves her homeland and arrives in Australia to be greeted by her mother, already a new migrant. 'Mother', she exclaims, 'Mutter'. The story is of trauma to survival: 'the first part of the story ... clouded by war and unhappiness' produces the success of a 'happy ending' figured in the prospect of life in a 'new and free land'.⁷

The narrative signals further markers of successful integration by both promoting Australia's support for migrants and by pre-empting the behavioural, emotional, and fiscal activities New Australians were to undertake. The two New Australians travel to the Bathurst training centre in regional New South Wales, 'a pleasant inland town, where European newcomers are welcomed and accommodated'. They eat 'three big meals a day' ('the food was wonderful'), 'chat confidently with the Commonwealth Employment Service officer' to get a job, and learn English. There is free clothing, and food can be bought at the canteen. They sightsee, go fashion shopping and 'become impressed by the tall, clean buildings and the sunny parks'. Finally, they visit the War Memorial in Canberra to 'honour Australians who died so that their country, born in freedom and developed with a love of liberty, should be able to offer sanctuary and hope to the victims of aggression'.⁸

Reunion in Australia derives from a period of anti-Asian sentiment in Australia's migration history that was formally established by the White Australia Policy, operative in varying forms from 1901 until its abolition in 1973. Officially titled the Immigration Restriction Act, the White Australia Policy aimed for ethnic homogeneity by only admitting British or Northern European nationals into the country. In the late nineteenth century, influxes of Chinese migrants to the gold fields and South Pacific Islanders indentured to cane plantations had created a

sentiment of anti-Asian 'yellow peril'. Following this, subsidised migration was used in the attempt to attract large cohorts of British citizens well into the 1940s. Notorious for its administration of a fifty-word dictation test (which required applicants to write in a language with which they were not familiar), the White Australia Policy connected ideologies of colour to a rhetoric of national protection, where 'keep[ing] this country white' was equated with 'not allow[ing] its peoples to be faced with the problems that ... are practically insoluble in many parts of the world'.⁹

The 1950s' context that produced *Reunion in Australia* marked a new migration policy again, in that it encouraged a broader range of European citizens from the east and south. In this, the pamphlet is poised between a slackening of the terms of racial discrimination and a continually racist administration for those the country would still not admit. Another pamphlet, *Australia's Bold Adventure*, offers a statement on these politics of ethnicity by the Catholic Bishops of Australia. While expressing awareness of the difficulty for migrants to assimilate, it also offers a strong vision of the desired ethnic balance. First, 'Imperialistic Communism, which has a strong and ruthless grip on millions in Asia' is envisaged as the primary threat to Australian freedom. Second to the threat of Asians, the 'unmarried non-British migrant' is responsible for 'a rapid growth in the sordid trade of prostitution'. Third, the document favours 'an equitable balance in our population growth by the promotion of a larger influx of Britons, Irish and Scots, upon whose cultures and traditions the Australian Commonwealth developed in this portion of the globe'.¹⁰

While this brochure is written both for New Australians and Australians more generally, and clearly delineates its political position on migration, other brochures demonstrate the attempt to enculturate New Australians into these already set ethnic hierarchies. In *Your Introduction to Australia*, migrants were advised to adapt their behaviour in a step towards cultural invisibility, so that 'when fellow Australians stop being especially polite to you because it is obvious you are a newcomer ... you will know you have been accepted as one of the community'.¹¹ The guide persists in some detail:

Perhaps the most important thing is to learn to speak the language of Australians. Australians are not used to hearing foreign languages. They are inclined to stare at persons whose speech is different. Also try to avoid

using your hands when speaking because if you do this you will be conspicuous. There are many other things you will notice ... For instance Australian men never wear hair nets. They regard men who do as effeminate.¹²

What is interesting about this text is its preservation of the social status quo through pre-emptive management of bodily practice. The New Australians, it seems, were supposed to disappear themselves, to avoid being conspicuous, to not speak, and certainly to not demonstrate controversial masculinities. In its focus on gesture, it emphasises a deeply ingrained cultural hesitation around the kinds of ethnic otherness that become threatening through a perceived heightened access to the corporeal. This is made particularly clear in the attempt to curtail the use of expressive hand gestures when speaking, a measure (however unconscious) to restrict the New Australian from taking up too much space.

The rhetoric is here drawn towards physicality, but as resources these brochures also function interestingly as historical imprints of a highly Anglophile country committed to preserving a version of national identity that is separated from the corporeal, and by implication, separating different public 'bodies' from each other. *Your Introduction to Australia* bolsters this project with an initial homage to freedom: 'Freedom was not in your countries—it was in your hearts. But now you are in Australia, a land of freedom.'¹³ It then justifies its logic of assimilation through the promise of access to freedom via the development of appropriate cultural behaviours. 'When you go to a good place for dinner', it explains, 'it is wise to be neatly dressed and wearing a coat and necktie, if you are a man, or a neat dress if you are a woman'.¹⁴ It also conflates cultural identifiers of ethnicity and masculinity, warning: Australians are helpful, but do 'admire a person who can stand on his own feet'.¹⁵

As these documents demonstrate, the terms of belonging for the new migrant to Australia circa 1950 were the promise of a bountiful land acquired at the expense of obtaining some clearly delineated normative cultural codes. Cultural anxieties about race, clearly evident in the White Australia Policy, demonstrated a similar logic to the practices of assimilation enacted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who were at this time being forcibly removed from their families. Connections between the internal management of the Indigenous population—in

these documents referred to as ‘the most primitive peoples in existence ... with a complex social organization, but possess[ing] ... no knowledge of metals or agriculture’¹⁶—and the external ‘outreach’ to select international ethnicities repeats the hierarchies of whiteness implicit in Australia’s colonial administration within the country’s migration policy. The codification of discursive belonging established by these pamphlets offers a vexed attempt to negotiate the ethnic minority identity within the myriad categories of citizenship that comprise the nation’s history.

Great Aunt Sari tells her story in strong Hungarian accent:

Bryoni and Sari sit at a card table to eat re-heated cottage cheese pasta and little pastry dumplings filled with walnuts.

I was born in 1922 ... in a little village called Örihodos. That’s belonged once for Hungary, once for Yugoslavia, and I was born when it belonged to Yugoslavia. But two years later we had to move away from there, because my father was a big Hungarian and he couldn’t stand the Yugoslavs.

So we moved back to Hungary to Szentgotthardt where my grandparents had a very beautiful big house, the biggest actually in the town, but we lost in 1928 because that [unclear] the depression everybody was [unclear] and my father too ... But in 1928 they had to sell the house and we went in the smallest flat in the little village. [Unclear] we had six children, I was the youngest. And we was four girls and two boys.

First a boy, and then your grandmother. And then Auntie Rosie who was living in Israel, and Olga who is still living in Israel, and a, a brother called Alexander and me. Unfortunately during the war we lost our two brothers in the Russian Front because they was slaves, they took them as slave labour and there were left four girls and my mother and father.

... auntie Sari ran ...

In 1956, my Jewish Hungarian grandparents and eight-year-old mother, Bondi, Ilus and Kati Bodo travelled on a boat to Australia fleeing the Hungarian Revolution. They fled, I have been told, because they feared—like many Jews who survived the Nazi regime against great odds—that the revolution signalled the demise of the communist state and a return to fascist rule. My grandparents arrived in Sydney in January 1957 and never returned to Budapest. Their first rented home was on Hopewell Street in the slums of Paddington, now one of Sydney's most hip and gentrified areas. I have been there—night-clad, tripping drunk and stupid along the road—quietly noting the shadow of my mother's childhood eyes that peek out from the bottom row of flats to the left.

My grandparents were part of the vintage that Egon Kunz classifies as the 'fifty-sixers'—the Russian occupation of 1945 had led to eventual revolt against socialist power and Hungary experienced 'a clamping down on the issue of passports, and a gradual sealing down of Hungary's western borders, with the creation of treeless strips of land and overlooking observation towers, completed in the first few months of 1949'.¹⁷ This period is classified by Kunz as one of many migrant 'vintages' that emerged post-World War II, 'each distinct in character, according to the background and expressed political beliefs' of the time.¹⁸ For Kunz, an immigrant's departure date signifies their political position, with factions being heightened because of the flux with which the country's major parties shifted from pro- to anti-fascist governments.¹⁹ Due to this rapid oscillation, when masses of Hungarians left in the years preceding the communist shift they 'brought with them the heritage of their previous political affiliations and categories of Jewish survivors, pro-German right-wingers, conservatives and socialists' who had supported the country's fascist-resistant line.²⁰

As 'fifty-sixers', my grandparents' journey to Australia was part of what John Berger has described as the quintessential experience of the twentieth century,²¹ and earlier in this essay I evoked my grandmother's nausea to express that experience in an image of volatility. She was sick on the boat for a straight six weeks, the echoes of ocean still in her long after she was on firm land. Writers on migrant experience collectively evoke this kind of poetics around the body, typifying what Sneja Gunew has described of migration's finite quandary: 'one neither leaves nor

arrives'.²² Anne-Marie Fortier writes of an inherent 'here and there[ness]'²³ that engenders the migrant condition, and Salman Rushdie locates the central motif of this schism as being 'haunted' by an urge 'to look back', framing migrant identity around homelands waiting across seas, the seductions of what inevitably become invisible cities and fictitious origins.²⁴

As these writers suggest, the migrant's physical distance from their homeland opens up a discursive space in which a kind of fracture in subjectivity stabilises the institutionalised collection of their personal memories. In this regard, the very fact of migration leads to a field of discursive migrantness, which is constituted both by artefacts such as the brochures analysed above, and by how those brochures preempt the performative, performable tropes of migranhood for New Australians. In this respect, the language evoked in my opening passage is intended to suggest how the physical realities of migration (leaving, distance) come to generate the institutional discourses that then frame it (languages of memory, loss and longing). My grandmother's 'liquid sickness' both inscribes the 'split' in her identity at the same time as it tries to replay the tropes of 'haunting' and 'memory' that frame migranhood through a national rhetoric of cultural difference. As I evoke her arrival through such tropes of loss, I also counter this evocation with a remonstrance that differently haunts the page, my grandmother's voice in Hungarian: 'Is this how she saw the world? (*Ne beszély helyettem*)'—or—'Don't speak on my behalf'.

In relation to the ideas offered by Gunew, Fortier and Rushdie, I want to suggest that documents such as *Reunion in Australia* occasion rhetorical performances of migrant identity that position it in, and of, the past. In doing so, *Reunion in Australia* offers two histories of the narration of migrant experience in Australia. The first is seen in the images and ideological sentiments that are encoded in its story. The second is seen in the ensuing performance of survival that the booklet as a material artefact demonstrates. In this capacity, the booklet functions as a trace of the past, generating meanings around migrant identity through how—and what—it signifies as a textual, affective remnant. In this next section, I want to suggest that *Reunion in Australia* sets up the discursive conditions through which the European migrant in the Oral History Project can speak, and likewise recollects through its materiality the normativising success of its (and the migrant's) narrative plight. The tension between archival structure and speech here generates a code of discursive

belonging that ultimately stages culturally normative memories of migrant identity in Australia.

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... Sari keeps talking:

We was living in Budapest quite quietly, you know. But I was sixteen years old and I'd never felt any hardship because I thought the life must be beautiful, everything is open for me, you know, when you are sixteen. But it wasn't happened to be so because in 1944 the Germans occupied Hungary.

At first they took the Jews from the country and so we lost all our relatives. My mother has a few sisters and brothers and my father had a few sisters in the country where we was living before. Everybody was disappeared and the young one was in hard labour, the young boys. The girls were left behind [unclear]. But in June, the Germans occupied Hungary ... they bothered only the rich ones, the poor ones they left it as it was.

By August, they took all the Jews from the country, and they start to take it from around Budapest. Not in the city but you know, the surrounding little cities. So it was harder and harder.

... *auntie Sari* ran ...

—MASSZAUER'S BOX IN THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The *Reunion in Australia* brochures are contained in a box of memorabilia donated to the State Library of New South Wales by Eugene Masszauer, Hungarian migrant to Australia in 1950. Masszauer's personal collection, consisting of handwritten letters, tickets and transcribed interviews, is part of the Oral History Project's aim to document shifts in migration patterns that occurred in the early 1950s. Placed in the personal collections of the archive rather than in generic historical files, these brochures interestingly position the effects of 1950s immigration policy within the effects of late 1970s multicultural policy, where the personal becomes the primary framework for the researcher. Following the dismantling of the White Australia Policy in 1973, Australia began to institute policies promoting migrant diversity

over assimilation. In 1977 the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council recommended a public policy of multiculturalism, and in 1978 these policies were implemented at a federal level. The premise of the collection was hence for migrants to 'g[i]ve details of their lives before their immigration to Australia ... [and of] their adjustment to a new lifestyle' after thirty years of cultural integration.²⁵

While the Oral History Project sought to recognise difference by focusing on the historical experience of assimilation, it also privileged certain discursive emphases in its approach—particularly in the correlation drawn between migrants as speakers of oral history, and this collection's position as the nation's first permanent oral history archive. For Sneja Gunew, multicultural projects that are liberal in intention can also essentialise the minority group they attempt to assist. While multiculturalism may control diversity to offer 'more democratic participation by minority groups', it may also, she explains, become a platform which 'perpetuate[s] dominant interests in the guise of extending political and cultural suffrage'.²⁶ Multiculturalism, even when earnest of purpose, forges hierarchies of difference most often witnessed in tropes of 'good soccer, bad English and bad hygiene'.²⁷ For Gunew, these tropes are deeply problematic. They 'legitimise' ethnicity in a discourse of 'experience',²⁸ marking power relations between normative and non-normative identity formulations by 'ventriloquism'—the performative iterations of 'the foreign name; the "un-Australian" history; the first-person narrator'—'symptomatic of subjects not yet "assimilated" ... or "naturalised"'.²⁹

It is this difference between signalling an abstract historical event (as do the rhetorical devices within the brochures), and signalling a personal story (as does the brochure as a material artefact of experience) that reveals how migrant identity becomes co-produced by discourses of memory. *Reunion in Australia* is a product of Masszauer's experience. I touch the document that his hands once touched. A delayed somatic handshake? I absorb a trace of his personal affect and leave mine registered on paper. I am overcome with what David Lowenthal has called memory's 'chance reactivation of forgotten sensations'.³⁰ 'Pungent' and 'persuasive'—my imagination travels to the sensations of Masszauer. Holding the brochure—what were his hands? Receiving a meal ticket—what was the day? Lowenthal writes that in affective memory 'such recall seems visceral' and I re-quote him quoting Proust: 'our arms and legs are full of torpid memories'.³¹ What becomes of the torpid

memories in my arms as they encounter the imagined arms of Masszauer? In Masszauer's archive, affect emerges in the authenticity I draw of him—the place of the archive, the place of his pen, the situatedness of my body in that space.

The remnants in Masszauer's archive contain all kinds of documents that ventriloquize his cultural otherness as an experience of landing in another place: ship newsletters, naturalisation papers, hole-punched meal cards. Ventriloquy occurs in how the narrative of survival told by the pamphlet pre-empts the act of survival performed by these items as memory objects. In this, the artefactual materiality becomes an awkward metonym for migrant identity: the paper is not accidentally yellowed and old. The preservation of these items suggests that his journey was fraught with struggle but also framed with anticipation for how his new life could be read. The difference between people leaving during his time or in later periods was in their ability to prepare for departure, as opposed to circumstances which required fleeing from authority in the darkness of night, under fear of death. I imagine my own grandparents travelling as Masszauer did and know that, as 'fifty-sixers', they did not have time to savour meal ration cards for some fifty years hence. How does his narrative—one from trauma to survival—produce the terms by which that life should return itself to the archive, a life within a box?

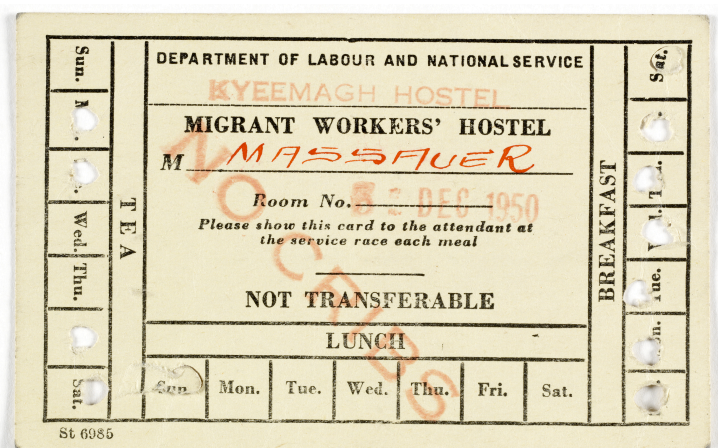


Figure 2: Masszauer's meal ticket, 5 December 1950

Source: Eugene Masszauer papers held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

—THE EXIT (OR, HOW BRYONI IMAGINES THE NIGHT OF ESCAPE)

a sort of goodbye, hidden
an anonymous street corner
Korut and Kiraly Utca (now she apologises for the names, there is no
translation)
a goodbye again
a failed goodbye
a hello then goodbye
a going, but not
a strike on the rail
a failed departure
a hope for the stay (miracles don't happen in everyday life)
a going a going a going a gone
and a long, long walk
in the dead of night
with the fear of machine guns
prodding at the back of our necks
the 3kilo mud stuck to the shoes
and the boy at the front
a hero of a long forgotten past
leading his people out on horseback
1000 years after he lead them in
triumphant/lost
I don't care / we didn't care if we were found then and there and
put to death
under the lamp in the sky
the biggest light for our quiet escape
the mud swallowing our feet with every step
the boy up ahead, his chest
open waiting
myself, no breath,

In a diary of one family's escape from Hungary, the writer traces her expedition from Hungary to Australia. The writer's most poignant impulse is in the necessity for her young family to survive:

a sentryhouse must be here in the nearby with guards and machine guns and I almost froze from fear for [my son]—he is a living target on the horse! From that moment on I repeated like an idiot 'please take [my son] off the horse' and that I pleaded non-stop, whispering, although I know I wanted to scream, but I didn't have any voice. Nobody heard me. I thought I will go crazy as I couldn't take my eyes off him, my son, my little son as he was riding in front of us, towards the border...³²

Later translated and with new asides to this translation, the diary is a process of temporalised self-reflection, positioning its story against the past and future selves that circulate the events it describes. The diary is testament to the struggle undergone and output of the struggle itself, and hence retrospectively enacts the act of survival achieved, and anticipates the future that is the present of my reading.

Survival registers as a key trope within the many entries held in the Oral History Project. The neatness of the curled handwriting in Masszauer's English class ledger, for one thing, reveals in imprint the force with which languages of survival needed to be learned. Concerted phrases spell out the conventions of such learning, but also spell alongside this the necessity to learn these conventions, to learn not only writing, but what the writing could do in new social terrain:

He has lived in this camp *since* 1949.
He has lived in this camp *for* a long time.
He has lived in this camp *for* the last two years.
I haven't eaten any meat *since* I was a boy.

Where *have you been*?
Whereever *have you been*?
Where on *earth have you been*?
Where the *dickens have you been*?
Where the *devil have you been*?
Where the HELL...?³³

Dear Mr Masszauer,

Thankyou for your last letter and for the details of your experience as an engineer. ... I enquired at the Public Service Board about you ... I do not know why they have not a job suitable for you at present but the probable reason is your imperfect English ... I think that you will understand that it is difficult to give responsible positions to persons who do not know the language very well.³⁴

The curious scribbles around the edges of Masszauer's workbook suggest furtive moments in which his precision did drift to other places, perhaps to Tapolca or the lake of his colour-pencil sketch, a rice-paper thin diagram included among faded certificates as a sign of something else, a red herring or a wayward daydream.

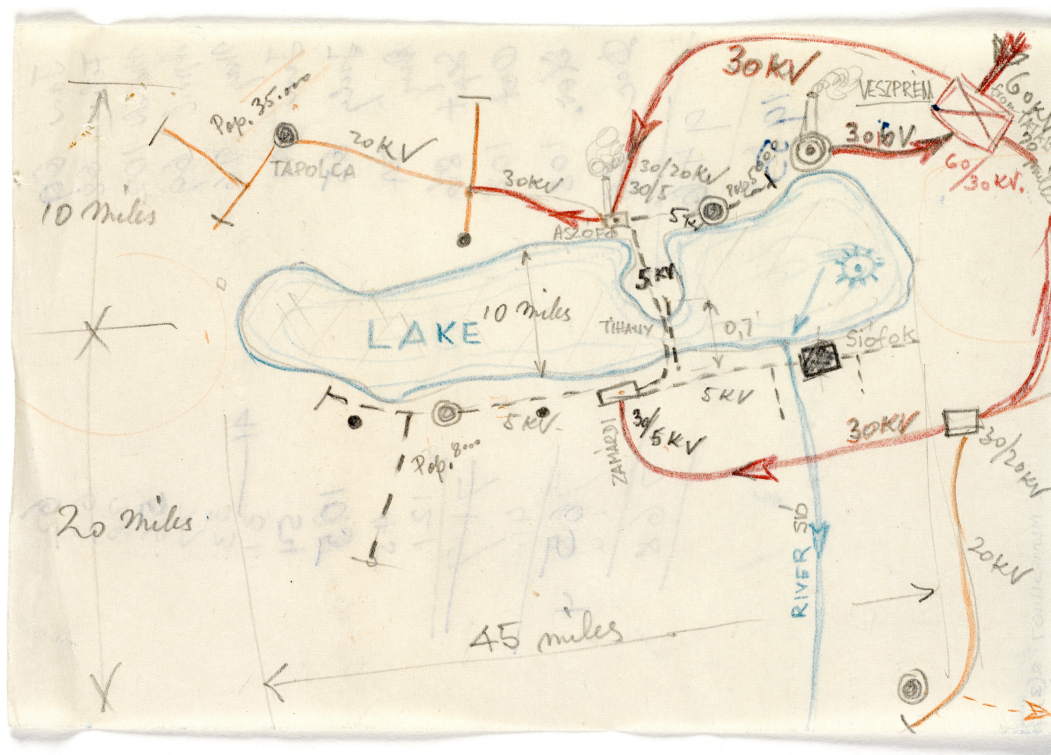


Figure 4: Hand-drawn map of Tapolca, Hungary [undated]

Source: Eugene Masszauer papers held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

For Susan Stewart, the kind of writing that enters the diary can map the 'time that cannot count'.³⁵ The time that cannot count marks the survival of the story as and while it is being written. Signatures also map this force of presence: to 'sign your name ... is to leave a track like any other track of the body'. The bodily track of the signature not only articulates a coincidence between nomenclature and penmanship, but performs how 'writing obeys the speed of the body, the speed of the hand'.³⁶ Handwriting makes the absent body spatial. Perhaps this is why I continuously catch myself imagining the hands that write Masszauer's hand. Handwriting tracks the body in space, it makes something formerly lived into a pencilled gesture. In Masszauer's box, the learning of English is performed as an authenticated gesture marked through scribbles, crossing outs and ellipses pencilled onto a page. I see English in progression, and the implied bodily imprints that accompany this gesture. The fact that the box provides not just any writing, but a writing lesson is important. I see Masszauer enacting what his narrative towards survival most importantly prescribes.

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... auntie Sari continues, this time with my mother:

So, on Saturday morning I was still at my, my fiancé's place and they knocked on my door at eleven o'clock and six Hungarian [unclear] you know the Hungarian SS was standing on the door, because somebody dobbed us in that the Jewish are living in the house.

[Guess who it was?] I don't want to mention who it was because it was a shame, it was a terrible thing. [It was the Christian sister-in-law, no?] Yes, yes it was my brother-in-law's wife, estranged wife, who was a Christian woman and her father was a big-shot in the SS movement.

[Was she an estranged wife then?] They got married in 1914, but you know they was living separately and then my brother-in-law fell in love with a nice Jewish girl. He wanted a divorce, but she was in love with him and she didn't let him go and then the German occupation came. You know they lived together because they needed her for a cover up.

... *auntie Sari was scared ...*

Jacque Derrida's critique of the archive argues that information is given cultural importance through an essentially arbitrary process of structuring. The archive, he argues, 'codetermine[s]' meaning before it arrives.³⁷ Bodo. Masszauer. Trezise. Inflected, loaded names that signify ethnicity no matter how hard one tries to normalise their resonance against a Wilson or a Hardy or a Smith. A Bodo is a dodo: just one youthful refrain amidst many thrown around in a 1960s Paddington schoolyard. The glaring prospect of being invisible because of being extremely visible. (Trezise is actually Cornish, I repeatedly emphasise in conversation, hearing myself replace what is often read as Eastern European with a distinctly Anglo gene pool.) Harder to disguise are my dark eyebrows—Jewish or Spanish? A difficult ambiguity for some. (*Arra nem emlékszem.*)

While for Derrida, there is a somewhat totalising argument around the foundational performativity operative in all archival structures, I would suggest that the foundational propensity of the archive is particularly acute in contexts of migrant or ethnic identity such as those enclosed by the Oral History Project. For Derrida, *arkhe* derives from both notions of commencement and commandment: the archive, in essence, discursively legalises certain cultural narratives of origin. For migrants, such narratives are especially tautological: they 'begin' their cultural identity in a new land as ... 'beginners'. Through the performativity of an archive that is institutionally given to create beginnings, and an identity that is discursively understood to experience beginnings, belonging to a nationalistic discursive code becomes problematic. In the Oral History Project, the migrant lands in a story of origins that positions Australia as the end of the line and the site for new beginnings.

The performativity of such narratives of origin established by the Oral History Project can be explained by what Sneja Gunew calls a game over 'who owns modernity' in multicultural Australia.³⁸ This is demonstrated in how the structures for identity and speech witnessed in the archive—although created by multicultural policies and agendas—can also be understood to percolate from the nation's postcolonial context. Gunew refers to Stuart Hall's definition of postcoloniality as that which structures both coloniser and colonised in relations of power framed through 'claims to ... European civilisation'.³⁹ What is interesting for the purposes of this discussion is how colonisation—as that which Melissa Lovell notes as being

both a historical (or ideological) narrative force, and a structural (or institutional) means of contemporary governance⁴⁰—inevitably re-positions the European-as-modernity equation in multicultural Australia. In this, colonisation can be understood to serve as a historical, ideological and institutional force for structuring the practice of multiculturalism within Australia, wherein a ‘chain of signification around difference’ occurs, allowing, as Gunew explains:

the Anglo-Celtic descendents of the settler colonizers to construct their Ethnicity as European modernity and civilisation against the differences of not only the indigenous peoples and those in the surrounding Asia-Pacific, but as well, and paradoxically, those ‘multicultural others’ many of whom ... came precisely from what is traditionally cited as continental Europe.⁴¹

The multicultural and postcolonial are not separate fields for accommodating difference, but are integrated cultural processes that co-produce relations of power. On one hand, as Lovell makes clear, while the ‘settler colonial narrative of Australian destiny celebrates the British heritage of its majority population’ it is also ‘expansive enough to incorporate many non-British migrants into its conception of national identity’.⁴² In this, ‘non-British’ migrants experience access to forms of national belonging from which Indigenous Australians are still excluded, or indeed, even participate by default in their continuing exclusion (the migrant Oral History Project being the first oral history archive of its kind is here a case in point). Lovell here observes that while the intent of multicultural politics is to ‘challenge the centrality of whiteness and Britishness as the defining aspects of Australian political identity’, it may thereby also ‘privilege the settler culture’ and ‘not fulfil the full potential of multicultural theory’ in practice.⁴³

On the other hand, it is evident that the very entry of the multicultural on the scene of the settler colonial state is itself what enforces a vexatious reshuffle of relations of power based on signifiers of difference. The postcolonial structuration of this racial scale has even had an impact on the positioning (or cultural reception) of contemporary minority literatures. Marian Boreland explains that debates between Aboriginal and Islander literatures and multicultural literatures often result in a practice of “‘out-othering” the other’, whereby ‘writers fight it out for the position of the most victimized ... and therefore the most authoritative and authentic “other”’.⁴⁴

At stake is clearly what Gunew identifies as the reframing of the signification of European modernity and civilisation to further the ideological purposes of a settler colonial situation when it is thrust into managing the affective realms of multicultural life. In this reading, modernity becomes aligned with civilisation and hence belonging: it constructs the terms for true Australianness, and decides the framework by which all other sorts of ethnicity can interact. The 'non-British' migrant to Australia is thereby 'part of a grouping of subaltern subjects who remain in need of enlightenment and civilization'.⁴⁵ At the same time, the very entry of the 'non-British' migrant forces a re-evaluation of how the scale of difference (both ethnic and indigenous) in relation to the European-as-civilisation is discursively managed. In postcolonial discourse, Anglo and European origins are often synonymous. In multicultural discourse, the European is produced as the civilisable other in Anglo-Celtic eyes.

In the Oral History Project migrants are represented by a discursive structure that frames the experiential as primary to the signification of their identity. While entry to an archive itself suggests an ethnic group's access to symbolic modernity, social anthropologists such as Elizabeth Tonkin warn that the generic 'conditions' of 'Oracy ... [must] include the circumstances of orality'—that is, 'one cannot detach the oral representation of pastness from the relationship of teller and audience in which it was occasioned'.⁴⁶ In this respect, the very discursive positioning of the spoken word derives from a historical process in which:

the oral domain became narrowed until its most noticeable European forms did indeed appear 'literary' ones. History not only became a literate domain, as law did, it was identified with literacy—the preliterate world was called prehistory—and for archaeologists.⁴⁷

The storytelling involved in any act of oral history would by extraction exemplify a viewable form of orality for literate readers. The power relations hence present in the use of oral history for European migrants play out the coincidence of a multicultural agenda that has derived from colonialist White Australia, where being European is ambivalently strung between the polarities of civilised and subaltern histories. Memory is not only a practice of expression but a semiotic in itself that frames how the migrant citizen is institutionally performed. Bodo. Masszauer. Trezise.

... Auntie Sari survives:

And we was standing there, I was never forget, I was washing up the lunch dishes or the morning dishes and you know the whole flat was smaller than a house, you know only two rooms and a kitchen and a bathroom, and a big, big [unclear].

So, what was that. So, everybody had paper only me. I didn't have any paper so the [unclear] was, it was such a turmoil, my sister-in-law pushed me out the door and I run.

... and auntie Sari ran, ran, ran for her life.

With these tensions in mind, a correlation occurs between the utopian move intended by the Oral History Project and the 'guise' of cultural suffrage perpetuated by dominant paradigms that want to represent cultural others. This guise might also be seen in the insistence of tropes of survival that the archive establishes. While migrant identity is characterised as being neither 'here nor there', Holocaust theorist Raul Hilberg further positions the survivor within a dialogic of 'before' and 'after', where after comes to be correlative of successful migrant identity as a practice—the starting of a 'new life'.⁴⁸ While attesting to survival in narrative appears to celebrate the final assumption of what Franscesco Loriggio calls the 'White Man's Burden',⁴⁹ Loriggio also points out, in relation to Italian migration to Canada, the imperialism by which survival can signify difference between ethnic and Anglo identities. In order to be seen as a surviving migrant, one must also have had something to survive. White men, obviously, don't need to survive. White men rather need ethnic men to have always survived, or to still be surviving. At the same time, the remnants in Masszauer's box clearly indicate a kind of provisional access to a form of symbolic modernity (through samples of writing, text, letters, and so on) from which other minority parties (namely Indigenous parties) were excluded.

Masszauer's handwriting lesson registers this desire for symbolic belonging in the way that it performs the act of writing as a transition between survivor and migrant identities. The temporalities given in his learnt phrases are significant for

how they reveal Masszauer contriving the constructs for a life narrative that happens in chronological sequence: 'He has lived in this camp since 1949 / He has lived in this camp for a long time. / He has lived in this camp for the last two years. / I haven't eaten any meat since I was a boy.' We witness Masszauer assuming a presence (the presence of the body as it writes itself spatially) that will always circulate inscriptions of before and after—derivations of earlier and later selves. We see him within the very time that, for Stewart, 'cannot count'. Moreover, we witness this as a gesture of not only learning language, but of learning narrative, and specifically the kind of life narrative that will later return the migrant-survivor back to the terms of the archive. We also witness the assumption of narrative as a presumption of the archive in teaching the migrant-survivor to read themselves. The writing lesson presumes, above all, that until the survivor is a survivor, there is no narrative to be told.

According to developmental psychologists, the getting of narrative is essential to a successful social self, which occurs through stages of physical, social, cognitive, representational, narrative and cultural 'levels of understanding'.⁵⁰ It is the child's narrative demonstration of autobiographical memory—what Katherine Nelson terms 'stor[ies] of me'—that reveals self-formulation in relation to 'explicit and implicit social and cultural norms'.⁵¹ The production of survivor narrative makes clear that there is a complicated paradox in how narratives become both the sign of survival and the means through which to survive. It is, however, in the normativising capacity of narrative that the 'me-ing' of the migrant becomes relevant. As revealed through Masszauer's writing lesson, the migrant's story is not only told through narrative, but through a narrative that privileges the very getting of narrative as central to its discursive agenda. Migrants must 'me' themselves through a narrative that presents the assumption or getting of narrative as an ultimately civilising gesture.

Survival opens up a secondary discursive framework for migrant belonging. While the migrant is neither 'here nor there', the survivor-becoming-migrant is both neither here nor there, and neither before nor after. Characterised as both geographically and temporally split, the survivor-becoming-migrant occupies a subject position that is both nowhere and not then nor now. It is the placement of the writing ledger within the archive and its performance of the very time that

'cannot count' that reveals how the archive both creates and restores the necessity for the migrant-survivor to attain narrative. It is the authenticated temporality of the handwriting that lands it in this way. The writing lesson sits within the gap of geographic (read: culturally different) and temporal (read: evolutionary) dislocation. It constructs the discursive condition whereby the migrant-survivor is to repeatedly attempt access to modernity through an impossible politics of discursive belonging.

In the pretence of giving the migrant writer the very time that 'cannot count', the archive performs itself as a discursive saviour to a plight that it has in effect generated. Surviving narrative is hence offered as a strategic manoeuvre to counter the strategic subject positionings this collection produces for its speakers. Surviving narrative becomes a complex challenge for migrant speakers of narratives of survival to both access narrative, and to survive the frameworks that position them within it.

—AFTERWORDS

They arrived, the three Bodos, Bondi, Ilus, Kati. Kati would insist on changing her surname as soon as she was married, and Bryoni thought it was funny that her grandfather was named like a beach. They arrived and even though the picture books showed balloons and crowds, the ground felt like air.

And in Hopewell street. The story about Aunt Sari who moved in and roasted the pet duck owned by the tenants before. Jaj Istenem!

[cue: large hand gestures]

And the cooked liver in the fridge. pungent. The strange ways these people bring with them.

And what they eat.

And what they do.

And what smells from their skins.

And what was her walk, nowadays. With stockings and sandals and the hair washed out as she sewed other people's clothing. Hair like straw and veiny legs but somehow still very soft hands.

*Where the Dickens have I been?
Where the devil have I been? Where
the hell have I been? Sometimes, in
this place, I don't notice a minute for
one whole hour.*

The final memory is of my grandfather, old, without words.

*g –
go from this girl
go
you silly—silly—silly—
(enraged)
the smell of that place
g
god
go
get gone go
is it God?
(the whiskers on the lips)
We left the room. (Hogy merhetsz).*

—

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—NOTES

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- ³ Di Coutis, 'Culture Shock in a Land Where Men Don't Use Hair-Nets', *Australian*, 21 October 1981, p. 14.
- ⁴ Australian Information Bureau, *Know Australia*, 1944; Australian News and Information Bureau, *Your Introduction to Australia: Hints and Help on Knowing Your New Homeland*, 1948; Commonwealth Office of Education for the Department of Immigration, *For New Australians*, 1950; Australian Department of Information, *Australia in Brief*, 1952; Catholic Bishops of Australia, *Australia's Bold Adventure*, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1957; M.S. Watts, *Facts That Concern You About the New Settlers League of NSW*, Witton Press, Sydney, undated; Australian Department of Social Sciences, *Social Sciences of The Commonwealth*, undated; Australian News and Information Bureau, *Reunion in Australia*, undated. All items are held in the Ethnic Affairs Commission Oral History Project in the Eugene Masszauer collection, State Library of NSW, Sydney, Australia.
- ⁵ *Reunion in Australia*, p. 3.
- ⁶ *Reunion in Australia*, p. 1.
- ⁷ *Reunion in Australia*, p. 4.
- ⁸ *Reunion in Australia*, pp. 6, 7, 13, 18.
- ⁹ This is an extract from an address given in 1929 by Australian Prime Minister Stanley Bruce, as cited in James and Margarita Bowen, *The Great Barrier Reef: History, Science, Heritage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 301.
- ¹⁰ *Australia's Bold Adventure*, pp. 6–8.
- ¹¹ *Your Introduction to Australia*, p. 8.
- ¹² *Your Introduction to Australia*, p. 8.
- ¹³ *Your Introduction to Australia*, p. 4.
- ¹⁴ *Your Introduction to Australia*, p. 7.
- ¹⁵ *Your Introduction to Australia*, p. 8.
- ¹⁶ *Australia in Brief*, p. 7.
- ¹⁷ Egon Kunz, *Hungarians in Australia*, MA Honours thesis, University of Sydney, 1967, p. 288.
- ¹⁸ Egon Kunz, *The Hungarians in Australia*, Australasian Educa Press, Victoria, 1985, p. 72.
- ¹⁹ Kunz, *The Hungarians in Australia*, p. 75.
- ²⁰ Kunz, *The Hungarians in Australia*, p. 76.
- ²¹ John Berger quoted in Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2000, p. 66.

- ²² Sneja Gunew, *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. vii.
- ²³ Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity*, Berg, Oxford, 2000, p. 158.
- ²⁴ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991*. Penguin, London, 1992, p. 10.
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- ²⁶ Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, p. 37.
- ²⁷ Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, p. 37.
- ²⁸ Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, p. 53.
- ²⁹ Gunew, *Framing Marginality*, pp. 74, 71.
- ³⁰ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 208.
- ³¹ Lowenthal, p. 203.
- ³² Anonymous, 'Diary of a Family's Escape', *Ethnic Affairs Commission Oral History Project*, State Library of NSW, undated, p. 9.
- ³³ Excerpts from Eugene Masszauer's English notebook, March 1950, *Ethnic Affairs Commission Oral History Project*.
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- ³⁶ Stewart, p. 14.
- ³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996, p. 18.
- ³⁸ Sneja Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, Routledge, London, 2004, p. 50.
- ³⁹ Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, p. 10.
- ⁴⁰ Melissa Lovell, 'Settler Colonialism, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Postcolonial Identity', *Australasian Political Science Association Conference*, Monash University 24–26 September, 2007, p. 2, <<http://arts.monash.edu.au/psi/news-and-events/apsa/refereed-papers/au-nz-politics/lovell.pdf>>.
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- ⁴³ Lovell, p. 10.
- ⁴⁴ Marian Boreland, 'Either/Or: Multiculturalism and Biculturalism', *Span* 36, 1993, n.p.
- ⁴⁵ Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, p. 34.
- ⁴⁶ Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*, University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 3, 2.

⁴⁷ Tonkin, p. 16.

⁴⁸ Raul Hilberg, "I Was Not There", in Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust*, Holmes and Meier, New York, 1988, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Francesco Loriggio quoted in Gunew, *Haunted Nations*, p. 48.

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⁵¹ Nelson, p. 19.