

THE REPRESENTATION OF MIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIAN DETECTIVE FICTION

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the nexus between crime and migration in the Australian crime novel phenomenon focusing principally on the authors Peter Temple, Shane Maloney, Philip McLaren and Peter Corris. Fiction, which both helps to reflect and to construct our world, provides us with a vision and a version of contemporary Australia. The questions which arise from these novels are: What does it mean to be Australian? Immigrant? Foreigner? What links are there between crime novel and place? Does crime fiction hold up a mirror to society? What role do ethnic groups play in organised crime? Is organised crime involved in the exploitation of immigrants and in illegal immigration? How is the Aboriginal community represented and what role does it play in Australian crime fiction? Reference works which shine a light on true crime in Australia and its links to migration and immigrants include *Blood Brothers* by Bertil Lintner, *Gangland Australia* by James Moton and Suzanna Lobez, *Leadbelly* by John Silvester and Andrew Rule and *Gangland Crimes that Shocked Australia* by Ian Ferguson.

KEY WORDS: Human rights; literary representation; reconstructed lives; adaptation/assimilation; crime; colonisation/decolonisation.

As a one-time penal colony inhabited largely by immigrants, or the descendants of immigrants, it is inevitable that Australian writing as a whole should be especially concerned with the phenomenon of migration and crime; indeed, crime fiction authors such as Peter Temple are themselves immigrants: he was born in South Africa in 1946 and moved to Australia in 1980. As Lucy Sussex wrote in *The Age*, in August 2007, in celebration of Temple's Duncan Lawrie dagger award:

[c]rime content has existed in Australian fiction since its beginnings, precisely because of the nation's origins as a penal colony. John Lang (1816-1864), the first Australian-born author, vividly depicted Sydney and its crime. He had inside knowledge as a lawyer, and like many colonists, had a convict in the family tree. (Sussex 2007)

This essay is concerned with migration and crime as described in the novels of Peter Corris, John Dale, Shane Maloney, Philip McLaren and Peter Temple and perhaps not surprisingly the novelists reveal common interests with regard to their subject matter. For historical reasons people of European origin play an important part, though they are almost always stereotyped by nationality, which includes their propensity, or lack of it, for crime, and the type of crime they commit. For reasons of geographical proximity Asians are also well represented and again, their relationship with crime seems to be based on

certain national stereotypes, particularly with regard to organised crime such as that practised by the Triads of Hong Kong. For similar historical and geographical reasons, or perhaps for the lack of them, the Americas play a very small role in these novels, and Africa even less so. New Zealand, meanwhile, is invariably, if infrequently, represented as a quiet, crimeless backwater. Migration is not, however, confined to the international sphere. Since the first days of European colonisation, the Aboriginal population has been forced into frequent and painful migration as a result of the annexation of its lands by farmers, the destruction of its resources and sacred sites by mining companies (often multinationals or with international backing), and the racist policies of the British and Australian governments. Philip McLaren, as an Aboriginal, deals with these issues, though he is not alone in his concerns.

According to a 2009 VicHealth survey “37 per cent of respondents felt Australia was weakened by people of different ethnic origins ‘sticking to their old ways’” and “thirty-six per cent of respondents said some groups did not fit within Australian society, with Muslim, Middle Eastern and Asian people cited most commonly” (Howie 2010). This type of response is particularly common with regard to the Chinese whose migration to Australia has long provoked hostility from the authorities and the already established immigrant population of mainly European origin. Attracted by the goldmines, Chinese began migrating to Australia in the mid-nineteenth century but following the arrival of several thousand in 1888 legislation controlling the ethnic origin of immigrants led, over the next fifty years, to a decline in their numbers by over half until “99.3 percent of Australia’s 7.5 million population were of European descent” (Grewcock 2006: 87). This policy did not end until “Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s ALP government ended the ‘White Australia’ policy in 1973 by introducing new legislation that abolished all racial quotas” (Lintner 2002: 318). As a consequence the Australian-Chinese population trebled between 1971 and 1986 (Lintner 2002: 318). In the wake of the Stern Hu affair in March 2010, Australians’ attitudes towards the Chinese bubbled to the surface and were widely debated on television, radio and in the newspapers. According to Marilyn Lake, writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, perceptions of the Chinese have changed over the years:

No longer accused of augmenting the ranks of cheap labour, they are now attacked for their apparent wealth and blamed for the difficulties experienced by young white Australians in buying their own homes, in realising the Australian dream. (Lake 2010)

Certainly the Chinese, or people of Chinese origin, are a common sight in Australia, especially in Sydney where they run newsagent’s, restaurants and a large part of the Sydney fish market, among other interests.

It is precisely Chinese wealth which most frequently concerns Australian crime writers. For some this is merely part of the common Australian practice of racial stereotyping, and is not necessarily related to criminality. Shane Maloney,

a Melbourne based comic crime novelist, makes frequent reference to rich, usually Japanese,¹ Asian tourists, but in *The Big Ask* he complains about the large number of “Taiwanese tourists bustling about in polyester leisurewear” (Maloney 2003: 233). Clearly it is not just their numbers, nor the fact that they are sufficiently affluent to take expensive holidays, which concerns Maloney, but their less than stylish dress. Meanwhile, in *Deep Water* by Peter Corris an Asian man is described as “middle-aged, groomed, in a thousand-dollar suit, looked as if he might own a sizeable chunk of King Street. He spoke in a low voice on his mobile the whole time, switching easily from an Asian language to English and French” (Corris 2009: 78-9). For prize-winning author Peter Temple, however, it is Chinese, or more precisely, Hong Kong money, used for criminal purposes, which preoccupies him most as the following dialogue from *Black Tide* demonstrates:

‘Started with these South Africans,’ Dave said. ‘Two of them. Business migrants. Know what that is?’

‘They have to bring in a certain amount of money.’

‘Invest it, create jobs, that was the idea,’ he said. ‘These blokes, they’re cousins, they’ve got the money all right. But the money doesn’t come from South Africa. It comes from Hong Kong. The cousins go into the travel business. Not how they made their money in the old country, they’re making a fresh start. Buy a little travel agency in Carlton. Then one in Camberwell. It goes on. All over Melbourne. But also Sydney, Brisbane, Perth. Darwin. All over. About thirty of them. They borrow money from Hong Kong to finance the deals.’ (Temple 1999: 306)

The travel agencies, it emerges, provide an international front for money laundering. Meanwhile, in *An Iron Rose*, it is “property investment advisors for Hong Kong syndicates” (Temple 1998: 261) who are engaged in criminal activity.

In John Dale’s 1995 novel, *Dark Angel*, Asian gangsters have virtually taken over all criminal activity in Sydney: “Major Hong Kong money,” we are told,

has started moving into Australia ... The Triads are preparing for their departure from the colony. Vancouver and Sydney are their two preferred destinations because the RICO

¹ The Japanese invariably make an appearance as tourists, usually affluent, rather than as criminals in Australian crime novels. In Peter Temple’s *Bad Debts* a restaurant is “full of Japanese tourists exclaiming at their handbag-sized steaks,” (1996: 224) while elsewhere “[a] black Mercedes pulled up outside and two Japanese men in soaked golf outfits got out of the back. They stood close together in the drizzle, cap peaks almost touching, watching the driver unload two massive golf bags and wheelchair-size chrome golf buggies from the boot” (1996: 140). Their wealth and numbers are a cause for concern. “‘There’s a hundred million fucking Japs out there,’ complains Angelo Agnelli in Shane Maloney’s *Stiff*, jabbing “a forefinger vigorously in the general direction of Africa. ‘And every one of them is trying to figure out another way to screw the rest of us’” (1994: 71).

Statute has made it hard for them to get into the U.S. ... We are talking billions of dollars. (Dale 1995: 165)

The money is basically invested in drug trafficking: "...what are Triads best known for – drugs and extortion, right?" (117), asks one of the characters in the novel, and the collaboration of Sydney politicians proves essential:

'The Australian people want growth. We can't afford to jeopardise investment.'

Jack said, 'What investment?'

'Billions of dollars, Jack.' The Senator lifted his thick-soled shoe up onto the rail underneath.

'You're talking about Triad money, that it?'

The Senator didn't blink. 'I'm talking about a relationship that shall benefit our nation greatly. Mr Chiu is a remarkable businessman.'

'But this is drug money,' Jack said.

The Senator smiled faintly. 'Many of the great commercial institutions of Hong Kong were founded on opium – Dent and Co, Hutchinson, Jardine and Matheson – the British upper classes made vast fortunes from the opium trade. But no, this is more than just drugs.' He pushed himself off the edge of the desk and advanced towards Jack slowly.

'Crime, Jack. Crime is one of the most profitable industries in Australia and growing rapidly. In the US the proceeds from crime are greater than those of the aerospace and entertainment industries combined. Now we either fight crime and waste a great deal of our precious resources like the Americans, or we manage it like our neighbours. We control crime from within and we take a percentage.' (Dale 1995: 210-211)

It would seem that such fictional portrayals of Chinese crime in Australia have some basis in reality. Morton and Lobez, in *Gangland Australia*, report that "By the 1980s law enforcement agencies accepted that ethnic Chinese were the major organisers of heroin imports into Australia" (2007: 304). While, according to Bertil Lintner, in 1998 police seized in a single operation

14 kilograms of pure, white heroin. The cache was worth 400 million Australian dollars (\$256 million at the time) and represented 20 million hits – or more than one for every person in Australia. It was the country's biggest heroin seizure ever. (2002: 306)

Lintner goes on to describe the relation between the criminal gangs and Australian politicians:

For, despite its western-style image, Australia has one striking similarity to its Asian neighbours: it had also long boasted a pragmatic collaboration between business, politics, law enforcement and the underworld, which has allowed crime of every description to flourish. (2002: 307)

Also: "compared with most other western-style countries, Australia has a remarkably high degree of corruption cases, involving politicians at both

national and state levels" (Lintner 2002: 317). He also confirms the assertion made in *Dark Angel* that Vancouver and Sydney are the main destinations for drugs trafficked by the Chinese Triads, claiming that "Australia has become the most lucrative destination for Burmese heroin [the source of Triad heroin] in the Asia-Pacific, rivalled only by Canada's west coast" (Lintner 2002: 308). Lintner goes on to describe how, in a 2001 speech

New South Wales state police commissioner Peter Ryan warned that more than 40 gangs – mostly Chinese, Vietnamese and Lebanese – were battling for control of Sydney's heroin, extortion and prostitution markets. His comments were immediately condemned as 'discriminatory' by ethnic leaders. (Lintner 2002: 308)

The Vietnamese gangs referred to by Peter Ryan in 2001 had begun to make their mark in the 1990s, so much so that, according to Morton and Lobez, it is "the Vietnamese who have had the highest profile in the rise of ethnic minority crime in Australia" (2007: 314). They began by working alongside the Chinese drug gangs: "Chinese syndicates remain the main importers, while other ethnic gangs, mostly the Vietnamese, sell the drugs locally" (Lintner 2002: 332). However, Morton and Lobez argue that "[t]he Vietnamese networks were able to sidestep the Chinese bulk importers who had initially used them as distributors..." (2007: 315). In John Dale's *Dark Angel*, a Vietnamese called Pham describes a similar journey:

'When I arrive Australia first job I get in Chinatown. Work casino over restaurant.' He jerked his head towards Dixon St. 'Learn Cantonese, little bit Mandarin. My boss he Sun Sai Gei. When I go Long Bay they tell me not to worry. Pay policeman, big one. Fix everythin. When I get out I meet good woman. Get marry. No more white powder job. My wife – she pregnant now'. (1995: 99-100)

Despite his assurances that he is now going straight Pham offers to provide Jack Buturov, the novel's protagonist, with protection in repayment for his previous collusion in a slot machine scam: "Now I help you back. Got many fren' in Cabramatta.' ... 'Very cheap fren. Good fighter. You unnerstan?'" (1995: 100).

Cabramatta, one of the western suburbs of Sydney, and "once the home of Italians, Irish and Yugoslavs" (Morton and Lobez 2007: 314) was, by the 1990s, dominated by Vietnamese street gangs. According to Ian Burnley, in *The Impact of Immigration on Australia: A Demographic Approach*,

[g]angs within the Vietnamese community also sought protection money from small business proprietors, but most activities were against their own community members. In an 18 month period in 1988-89 there were 15 murders in Cabramatta, half of which were within the Vietnamese community. (2001: 248)

Within a few years their influence had extended as far south as Melbourne. In Shane Maloney's 2000 novel *The Big Ask*, about union corruption and control of the city's major markets, "some kind of turf war was happening

between Vietnamese newcomers and some of the longer established market interests" (2000: 152) while in Peter Temple's *An Iron Rose* it is once again heroin with which the Vietnamese are associated:

Plugged a bloke into Springvale [an eastern suburb of Melbourne], suburb of smack. Smackvale. Three years in the making. Had to import this cop from Vietnam. Any day now they'll announce he's delivered half the Vietcong and a fucking mountain of smack. Scully's going to be the hero of the day. Course, most of the stuff'll be back on the street by dark. Catch the upward move in price. (1998: 110-11)

Not, it should be emphasised, that the Vietnamese are engaged exclusively in criminal activity. Ian Burnley points out that "the National Prison Censuses in 1986 and 1996 indicated that convicted prisoner rates per 1000 of population among the Vietnamese-born were a third less than among the Australian-born" (2001: 249). And Morton and Lobeiz insist that most of the "post-1974 immigrants were hardworking people seeking a better life for their children" (2007: 314) though perhaps such industry is also not without its dangers. In *Dead Point* Peter Temple describes the problems faced by Lester, the owner of a Vietnamese takeaway in Melbourne:

For an immoderate fee, in cash, a woman lawyer in Richmond had done the paperwork needed to bring his aged mother into the country. Then a man came around and told Lester that it would cost \$150 a week, also in cash, to keep his mother from being sent back. The money would be passed on to a corrupt official in Canberra. (2007: 14-15)

Jack Irish, the lawyer cum private detective hero of many of Peter Temple's novels, successfully puts a stop to the blackmail and obliges the Richmond lawyer to repay \$23,400, but heroically refuses to accept more than his usual fee of \$120. Lester offers a far more substantial payment: "Temptation had run its scarlet fingernails down my scrotum" (2007: 16) confesses Irish, but resists, providing a vivid counterpoint to his fellow lawyer's corruption, though he does accept a free takeaway: "Virtue may be its own reward, but there are other possible spin-offs" (2007: 17).

As the above-mentioned references to Hong Kong money demonstrate, criminal finance is international and the use by criminals of tax havens for hiding or laundering their money is a common theme. In *Something Fishy* by Shane Maloney, the villains make use of a company incorporated in the Cook Islands to conceal "a loan to a company registered in Panama, a Chesworth Investments. The entire exercise was doubtless a means of concealing the transaction from the scrutiny of corporate regulators and the tax man" (2002: 142). Such activities are common in Peter Temple's novels. In *Bad Debts*, an Irish company operating through three shell companies based in Jersey is owned by yet another company based in the Cayman Islands. The "Cayman-registered company had a shareholding in a company that wanted to set up a bank in the New Groningen Islands" (Temple 1996: 275) which, it transpires is owned by Australian shareholders. In *Black Tide*, meanwhile, money is laundered in

“[p]rivate companies overseas, about a dozen of them. Companies owned by other companies. Registered in one place, owners registered somewhere else – Cook Islands, Cayman Islands, Luxembourg, British Virgin Islands. Andorra” (Temple 1999: 104). The criminals in *Black Tide* are particularly concerned with that part of money laundering known as ‘placement’ or “the physical disposal of bulk cash resulting from criminal activity” (Lintner 2002: 339). According to Lintner, there are three stages involved in laundering money, beginning with ‘placement’ and followed by ‘layering’, or “the piling of layers of complex financial transactions” (2002: 339), and finishing with ‘integration’, or the investment of criminally obtained finance in the legitimate economy. The most dangerous of these, for the criminal, is the first: placement. The “least risky method,” says Lintner,

is what the police call ‘smurfing’, or hiring a large number of people to visit banks with cash, where they wire or purchase small drafts to just below A\$10,000, the minimum amount the banks are required to report to the law enforcement authorities (2002: 339).

In *Black Tide* the ‘smurfing’ is done by tourists who are offered an enticing currency exchange by crooked travel agencies set up by the launderers:

these customers all pass through Hong Kong or Manila or Bangkok, usually on the way home, and they cash most of their travellers’ cheques there, take out most of the money in their credit card accounts. Then it’s gone. Average expenditure’s around ten grand ... That’s the domestic side of the business. The foreign side is even better. Say you’re a young Italian, German, whatever, you’re coming to Australia. Backpacker. You’re German, you go to the travel agency your friend knows about, you give them, say, 5,000 Deutschmarks ... You get to Sydney, Melbourne, somewhere they tell you to go, you meet someone ... gives you an envelope full of dollars, cash, thirty per cent over the exchange rate. Maybe more. Cheapest holiday you’ll ever have. (Temple 1999: 308-309)

Once placed, the money then disappears into the complex layers of international finance: all “these deposits would then be sent to bank accounts in Hong Kong, Singapore or Bangkok, and then wired back to Sydney as a sold deposit which would be declared as income from a legitimate business in East Asia” (Lintner 2002: 339-340).

Tax havens and Asian criminals are, however, relatively anonymous, unlike the celebrated criminals of European descent who have led to the publication of lurid ‘true crime’ series such as *Gangland Crimes that Shocked Australia* by Ian Ferguson and *Leadbelly: inside Australia’s underworld wars* by reporters John Silvester and Andrew Rule. The latter led to the hugely popular television series *Underbelly* which, together with the original books, dealt with Melbourne crime families. Although the Australian media and public imagination is fired by the criminal activities of figures such as Abe Saffron in Sydney, or Mario Candello (Ferguson 2009: 52) in Melbourne, despite their ethnic origins, they are Australian-born and therefore may not be considered migrants. Indeed, the distinction is made in a conversation between

Commissioner Garry O'Barry and Inspector Stephen Villani in Peter Temple's *Truth* with regard to a gangster named Ivan Ribaric:

'Now is that Australian of Croatian descent or citizen of Croatia?'

'The first.'

'I've found there's a bit of sensitivity around this kind of thing.'

'It's a family with a wog name. Like me.'

'What about me?' Barry said. 'Is an Irishman a wog?'

'Mick is a kind of early wog as I understand it.' (2010: 66)

Thus, tempting though it might be to associate the likes of Melbourne gangsters Mick Gatto (Ferguson 2009: 52) or Alphonse Gangitano (Ferguson 2009: 113) with Sicilian or New York crime families, there is no evidence for this: they are homegrown. Nor, indeed, do they appear to be of much interest to crime writers. Both Peter Temple and Shane Maloney set their novels largely in Melbourne, yet the local crime families with their Italian surnames receive barely a mention (with the possible exception of the notorious comment made by a policeman in Peter Temple's *The Broken Shore* about the Melbourne gangs' regular habit of shooting each other: "So I've got a number of people committed to the utterly pointless shit of trying to find out which particular cunt killed some other cunt for whose death we should be grateful" (2005: 59)). Similarly, although Peter Corris, John Dale and Philip McLaren set much of their work in Sydney, the major crime families based in Kings Cross, while often referred to, are rarely central to their novels.

Criminal immigrants from Eastern Europe, however, make more frequent appearances, especially in the novels of Peter Temple. "No, mate, I'm just a fucken Serb" (2007: 179) says gangster Milan Filipovic, in *Dead Point*, who then goes on to confirm all of the readers preconceived prejudices about hard men from the Balkans:

'Nobody likes Serbs, right? Be fine if I was a Kosovar. Right? Remember that lot?'

I nodded.

'Everybody bleeding about fucken Kosovars. Mate, they not even Christians. Christian country this, right? Those people are fucken Arabs. Not from Europe. You see the women? Hide their fucken faces. Got no pity, either. Kill children. Right, mate?'

I didn't say anything. What was there to say to six hundred years of breeding? (2007: 179-180)

The main criminal activities conducted by Eastern Europeans in Peter Temple's novels are prostitution and pornography, together with a propensity for extreme violence. In *Shooting Star* we are told that

[T]he Russian Mafia wants to take over the world porn industry. They can supply women by the planeload. Ukrainians, Chechens, Tartars. All colours, shapes and sizes. They'll do anything, all the things the girls in the West won't do. And you can forget about your fucking safe sex. Anything goes. (Temple 1999: 193)

Violence and violation are inherent to pornography and prostitution, and so the Russian Mafia's fearsome reputation is hardly inconsistent: "'Young girls,' said Martie. 'With these massive blokes, never seen anything like it. Dicks, fists, dogs, anything. Violent'" (Temple 1999: 199). In the same novel, the consequences of crossing the Russians are graphically described, even when their victims consider themselves safely at home in Australia:

'The bloke lives in an apartment block, just a small block for millionaires, on the harbour. North shore. The Russians ring up. They tell him, watch your boat. He can see his sixty-foot motor yacht from the balcony. Before his eyes it explodes, they find the yacht fittings a kilometre away, the blast takes out three other boats.'

He laughed again. 'But there's more. The explosion's still ringing in his ears, the alarms in the underground car park go off. The place has had about half a tanker of petrol poured into it and now a few million bucks worth of cars are burning. A miracle the whole building wasn't blown into the harbour.'

'What'd he do?'

'Sent them the money. In the Swiss bank inside an hour.' (Temple 1999: 196)

Bertil Lintner is sceptical, referring to the

colourful, but perhaps overrated, bunch of international mobsters: the Russian *Mafiya* ... their activities seem to be confined to petty smuggling, credit card fraud, prostitution and acting as couriers for more powerful drug syndicates. (2002: 336)

In *Truth* the focus is less on the criminals but the victim, a young Romanian woman called Marica whose twin sister has been murdered. Their story finally emerges in an interview with detectives Dove and Villani:

He took Marica through her story, from the time in Tandarei when her uncle brought the man to see her and her twin sister and told them they could go to Australia and be trained as hairdressers and beauticians, the Australian girls did not want to do the work, they were also ugly and had big hands and could not do delicate things. His reward would be a small percentage of their earnings when they were qualified, that was only fair. (Temple 2009: 391)

Dove and Villani treat Marica with great tact and diplomacy but in reality it is likely that she would have received a far less sympathetic response from the police:

the immigration department routinely removed people found working illegally in the sex industry, regardless of whether those people were consenting to their working arrangements and notwithstanding any formal commitments the government had to protect further violations of the victims' human rights ... A victim willing to assist the police might then be granted a criminal justice stay visa that includes the right to work

for the duration of the criminal justice process. When that visa expires, a witness protection (trafficking) visa may be issued, allowing for temporary or permanent residence. (Grewcock 2006: 186)

In fact, in the story, once she has identified the murderers of her sister no more is heard of Marica, nor who was responsible for the (presumably) illegal trafficking and subsequent prostitution of young Romanian women: Peter Temple does not reveal what becomes of her once the interview is over.

Perhaps the greatest influence of European immigrants has been on the Aboriginal peoples of Australia and this is also reflected in crime and detective fiction, particularly in the novels of Philip McLaren, a descendent of the Kamilaroi people of New South Wales. In *Scream Blue Murder*, Koori detective Gary Leslie, standing on Circular Quay in Sydney “wondered what the harbour had been like before 1788 and imagined what life had been like for his ancestors on coastal Australia before the British landed here” (1995: 111) before reflecting on the fact that a “whole race of people, the Eora, who met Cook here on his historic journey, had been made extinct by the British” (1995: 113). The damage inflicted on the Aboriginal people and their land was immediate: “[o]ne year after British settlement the major source of water for the township, the Tank Stream, had become too polluted to drink” (1995: 113). In his first novel, *Sweet Water: Stolen Land*, McLaren describes the attitude of nineteenth century settlers towards the Aboriginal people. A wealthy Nonconformist immigrant, George Fife Angas

advanced the princely sum of eight thousand pounds to entice persecuted Prussian Lutherans into establishing missions to “enable Aborigines to come to where they might worship God and at the same time bind them to the missions as tenant farmers for a mandatory thirty years”. As well as destroying large segments of Aboriginal culture forever, Angas had put in place his perfectly legal method of solving the rising costs of labour: the enslavement of Australia’s Aboriginal people. Yet slavery was something he had publicly opposed forty years earlier in England. Obviously, when it came to his private business dealings a different set of principles applied.

Filled with righteousness and armed with faith, the Lutherans ventured to outback Australia to convert the Aboriginal people – to tell them, with absolute conviction, that forty thousand years of Aboriginal Dreaming was wrong. They passed on the word of the Lord and set about redeeming the heathen Australians through education, Christian principles and ethics, and tenant farming. (1993: 6)

With arrogance and hypocrisy the Lutherans attempt to impose their own religion on a people whose culture and beliefs outdate by thousands of years that of the newcomers. The missionaries’ piety is, in any case, irredeemably suspect given that the Aborigines are induced to reside on the missions as a cheap and docile source of labour. The settlers’ growing desire for land and property ultimately leads to the Myall Creek Massacre, an historical event which McLaren includes in the novel as part of his denunciation of outrages committed against the Aboriginal people.

In *Lightning Mine* McLaren deals with the issue of mining on Aboriginal sacred lands. It begins with a description of an enormous property owned by an English aristocrat:

Said to be the largest property held by one person in the world – 21 000 square kilometres in one lot – the Ludley cattle ranch was the size of Wales.

The seventh Lord of Ludley employed 73 local tribesmen until industrial laws required he pay them the same wages as his white workers. In addition he had to give them compatible working conditions and lodgings to his white workers. Previously he had paid his Aboriginal workers a quarter of the European men's wage and the blacks lived in a camp 100 metres from the main house. Subsequently he fired all the blacks except for eight; four of those were women who worked in his home, and in the bunk house, as 'domestics'.

The Australian media lapped up the imagery: the oppressed traditional owners of the land against the imperialistic aristocracy of Great Britain. It placed the Australian public one step away from the fray, it was excellent theatre, great sport, and they eagerly spectated while the courts refereed. (McLaren 1999: 10-11)

When the multinational company Global Mining moves in, headed by its CEO Sir Peter Gables (born on "Adolph Hitler's fifty-fourth birthday. His mother was not enchanted with her part in the painful event. Not surprisingly he was her only child" McLaren 1999: 212), the local people, inspired by the example of their ancestors, put up a strong resistance. Once again, the representatives of Christianity are less than helpful:

Tholly hated the patronising attitude of the church man, they had been waging a power struggle for more than four years now since Eric first arrived. But he had to tread carefully, the local people liked the influence the church had on their children. Tholly had to be more ... accommodating. The Church of England had built its first chapel here 100 years ago; some of the locals were fourth generation Christians.

Aaron stood and shook the minister's hand and Lee nodded in his direction.

'Here to learn about the magic, are we?'

'No, not really,' Aaron answered, his face said yes and he was a little embarrassed. 'I'd heard about the Wandjina battles that took place...'

'Said to have taken place. We're talking about passed down stories of a rudimentary people, Mr Shoemaker.' (McLaren 1999: 208-209)

The minister dismisses the local people's history as "passed down stories of a rudimentary people" and therefore of no consequence. It is perhaps for this reason that McLaren frequently makes reference to the amount of time Europeans have been in Australia. The Church of England "built its first chapel here 100 years ago", while in *Scream Black Murder* a farming family is described as being "third generation graziers" (1995: 140). Such attention to time is in obvious contrast to the many thousands of years that the Aborigines themselves have been there. Furthermore, as has already been mentioned, the European

colonists set about transforming the land in ways that its original inhabitants never did:

Aboriginal people claim they've always occupied this land and never migrated here, as some academics theorise. They reverse the logic of the popular concept: if people could walk south over the so-called land bridge which joined Australia to Asia, then surely they could also have walked north. After all, the most ancient evidence of human habitation has been found on this continent.

During the sixty thousand years of known human occupation of Australia prior to the first British settlement in 1788, any changes in the appearance of the land were caused by climate. About fifty thousand years ago, when the most recent ice age was rapidly coming to an end, ice sheets covered the entire southern part of the island-continent (for the second time in one hundred thousand years) were melting and Aboriginal people moved slowly south to reclaim their lands. (McLaren 1995: 113-114)

Not only does McLaren suggest that Aborigines have been in Australia since the dawn of humanity, but that they made no changes, they caused no damage. Mining is, therefore, among the greatest of violations that can be committed against the land, with its destructive extraction of minerals, heaps of waste, transport and living infrastructures and contamination of soil and water.

Perhaps this violation of the land by Europeans – both the landowner and company chief executive are English – is the greatest of crimes committed by any immigrants. The Chinese and Vietnamese drug dealers, the Russian and Serbian peddlers of pornography and prostitution are merely adapting themselves to a home-grown criminal culture and are, in any case, statistically less criminal than people born in Australia. As John Lack and Jacqueline Templeton point out in *Bold Experiment: A Documentary History of Australian Immigration since 1945*, "If Greeks and Turks, Serbs and Croats, Arabs and Jews live in peace in Australia, it is not because they brought tolerance with them" (1995: 251), and the same may largely be said of their criminal enterprises. Australia's traditional forbearance towards crime and criminality may be traced to its penal origins but it may also be attributed to mistakenly associating the 'battler' and his distrust of hierarchies and social classes with a lack of respect for the authority of the law.

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