City Space and Urban Identity
A Post-9/11 Consciousness in Australian Fiction 2005 to 2011

By
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Declaration of Originality

I affirm that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and I certify and warrant to the best of my knowledge that all sources of reference have been duly and fully acknowledged.

Lydia Saleh Rofail
Abstract

This thesis undertakes a detailed examination of a close corpus of five Australian literary novels published between 2005 and 2011, to assess the political, social, and cultural implications of 9/11 upon an urban Australian identity. My analysis of the literary city will reveal how this identity is trapped between layers of trauma which include haunting historical atrocities and inward nationalism, as well as the contrasting outward pull of global aspirations. *Dead Europe* by Christos Tsiolkas (2005), *The Unknown Terrorist* by Richard Flanagan (2006), *Underground* by Andrew McGahan (2006), *Breath* by Tim Winton (2008), and *Five Bells* by Gail Jones (2011) are uniquely varied narratives written in the shadow of 9/11. These novels reconfigure fictional notions of Australian urbanism in order to deal with fears and threats posed by 9/11 and the fallout that followed, where global interests fed into national concerns and discourses within Australia and resonated down to local levels.

Adopting an Australia perspective, this thesis contextualises subsequent traumatic and apocalyptic trajectories in relation to urbanism and Australian identity in a post-9/11 world. As a cultural and political artefact based on literary analysis, this study captures a particular moment in time within the decade after 9/11, in order to contextualise political, social, and cultural implications upon a multi-layered Australian identity as reflected in the selected examples. To articulate this complexity, I forge an approach and methodology from the foundational framework of trauma theory, which brings together a constellation of traumas that resonate in collective or individual memory or are projected onto the Australian urban landscape. They include global terrorism and the legacy of settler colonial violence in Australia, as well as other mass-mediated catastrophes of the twenty-first century, which fed into a worldwide post-9/11 mood of anxiety that resonated on national and local levels within Australia. Although separate from each other, these traumas operate in a multidimensional matrix which I extend in the second part of this thesis to incorporate apocalyptic landscapes.
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Dedication

To my mother Madeleine Saleh. Until we meet again, and you remember...

To my niece Isabella Marie Matthews who is still too young to truly understand how much she means to me.
Introduction

Global, National, and Local Trauma

As the twin towers of the World Trade Centre collapsed, the world looked on in real time. For America and her allies, it was to become a predominant image of urban destruction with unforeseen permutations of trauma and cultural damage that resonated decades after. At 8.46 am on 11 September 2001, a hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 ploughed into the North Tower of the World Trade Centre in New York City. Seventeen minutes later, United Airlines Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower. Two other American Airlines planes were also hijacked: one crashed into the Pentagon and the other into fields in Pennsylvania en route to crash into the White House. The 9/11\(^1\) terrorist attacks were comprised of this series of coordinated airline collisions into key symbolic buildings of the United States establishment. The Islamist terrorist group Al-Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden, claimed responsibility. The spectacle of the imploding World Trade Centre towers was to become emblematic of 9/11. Syndicated media reports and online news stories captured every catastrophic moment:

As firefighters and police rushed to help those inside the burning buildings, both towers imploded on themselves and collapsed in rapid succession, killing between 2,000 and 3,000 people who were unable to get out in time ... in addition to those who already had been instantly vaporized from the impact of the planes or had jumped off the building to avoid incineration.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) For the rest of this thesis, I will use this popularised form of the date to refer to the events of 11 September 2001.

The death toll from 9/11 was nearly 3000 people, with approximately 6000 physical injuries. The immediate short-term aftermath of the attacks cost at least 10 billion American dollars in property damage and approximately 3 trillion American dollars in total costs. For the first time in the modern history of commercial aviation, all flights over America were grounded to prevent further attacks. The military was put on high alert, and then president George W. Bush (2001-2009) and other government personnel were shuttled to heavily secured locations. Commentators remarked that, “In a matter of moments, the United States had become a gravely disorientated country tottering on the brink of chaos.” Theorists from the American Psychological Association observed that “nothing like this had happened before on home soil, in the United States.” Reflecting on the catastrophe, American academics have claimed that the repercussions will continue to reverberate well into the future. It felt as if 9/11 changed everything and now America and her allies had to face what seemed “an interminable string of terrorist attacks, that killed dozens of people at a time despite a wholesale upgrading of security measures worldwide.” Although there had been a previous attempt to destroy the World Trade Centre in 1993 by a group of Middle Eastern Islamist terrorists, as well as several foiled plots to bomb US airports, 9/11 was thought to be different. Up until the fall of the twin towers, “Americans still felt safe at home and believed that no one could penetrate … [their] … defenses and perpetrate the type of large-scale terrorism … experienced on 9/11.” The American media did not fail to point out repeatedly that “America came under attack” and that “the homeland was no longer secure … no longer home.” In light of these statements, the question arises as to whether 9/11 was a truly transformative moment of urban catastrophe around the world and whether the world had changed significantly after 9/11. Although it undoubtedly changed the lives of those directly affected by it, those in the American military, and American foreign policy, the question

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4 Pyszczynski, et al., In the Wake of 9/11, 4.
5 Galea, “Fifteen Years Later.”
6 Pyszczynski, et al., In the Wake of 9/11, 4.
remains: was 9/11 the singular defining moment of global catastrophe that many claim it was?

History suggests there is a continuity and repetition in urban catastrophe rather than extraordinary, isolated world-altering events. Incidents of urban destruction at the hands of humans as well as natural disasters, have included the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the destruction of Pompeii, the sack of Rome, and the fall of Constantinople, among many. For the generations born after World Wars I and II, and the Vietnam War, the live images of the crumbling towers in New York may not have marked their vision of urban cataclysm because they would have been aware of the destruction of Dresden during World War II, on the 13th and 15th of February 1945, when the Allied forces destroyed the German city. For them, Dresden would have been a symbol of the terror bombing campaign against Germany and the first strategic bombing of its type undertaken in order to destroy a city. Further urban destruction was seen during the atomic bombings that destroyed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki six months later, on the 6th and 9th of August 1945, respectively.

Writing in 2011, Richard Gray in *After the Fall*, attests to the repetitive nature of history, because the story after 9/11 is not new in terms of what happens to America contrary to its depiction in literature and film. For Gray the impact of “the fall” itself follows a familiar pattern of innocence lost after a traumatic and disorientating experience; paradise shattered, followed by a long descent into darkness. This is not new for America but rather a repetition of the past:

This is an old story, at least as old as the American nation. And, at this moment, in the national narrative, it has been fired into renewed life by the events of September 11, 2001 and after — the acts of terror

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10 Gray, *After the Fall*, 1.
11 Gray, *After the Fall*, 3.
that left nearly 3000 dead by the end of that day and the acts of both
terror and the “war on terror” that have accounted for hundreds of
thousands more deaths.\textsuperscript{12}

Gray’s observation reminds us not only of history’s cyclical nature, but also the repeated
cycles of trauma that continue in the decades after 9/11, where catastrophe, wars, and
reflective counter-wars, are waged.

\textbf{Australia after 9/11 and the Mediatisation of Trauma}

Western media presented the events of 11 September 2001 as a global phenomenon to
elicit affective responses that presupposed generalised suffering and catastrophe, vicariously
shared and experienced.\textsuperscript{13} In relation to trauma, 9/11 foregrounds the problem with
globalisation theories and what constitutes the “global,” as well as the role media and
technology play. For Gray, one of the factors that shaped perceptions of 9/11 was the media,
as the collapse of the towers took place in front of “a global public” that were eyewitness
(through television screens) to the event as it was actually happening.\textsuperscript{14} The fall of the
towers became a “global media event” and, in the words of Jürgen Habermas, the whole
world population was “a benumbed witness.”\textsuperscript{15} While the immediacy of the event of 9/11
was particular to the technologically-connected twenty-first century, the use of the media as
an instrument to promulgate specific American traumas as global trauma is highly
problematic. Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy borrow the term “world memory” from
Gilles Deleuze to “echo the globalizing tendency of media reports emanating from the
cultural and economic centres.”\textsuperscript{16} In other words, the perspective of American media after

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Gray, \textit{After the Fall}, 3-4. Gray notes that the number of deaths as a result of the American-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is disputed, but there may have been over 600 thousand in the Iraq War alone.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Gray, \textit{After the Fall}, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Jürgen Habermas, “A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas,” in \textit{Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida}, Giovanna Borradori, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 28; quoted in Gray, \textit{After the Fall}, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Bennett, in Bennett and Kennedy, “Introduction,” 5.
\end{itemize}
9/11, was (and still is) problematically presented as universal. For American allies, empathy with the United States, was “grounded on an emotional response, on prior affinity or shared cultural values” as well as “idiopathic identification.” But this empathy towards a select victim was also problematic because it only served to reaffirm cultural hierarchies, in the context of what is presented as a global tragedy. In the edited collection of essays, *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, Bennett argues for a more nuanced approached to 9/11 and the world and asks, “If indeed, ‘the world changed’ on September 11, how can representations enable us to understand the impact of change at the global, local and inter-personal levels—and the way in which these levels relate.” In order to answer this question, Bennett argues for a need to develop “critical analysis of differential and inter-cultural relations” in order to “situate trauma within a global political framework.” That is to say, rather than affirming grandiose and all-encompassing concepts such as “national trauma” and “global tragedy,” Bennett suggests exploring a wide variety of experience, which includes the relation of the local to the global, as well as embodied experience in relation to collective memory.

These mediated local and international notions of catastrophe and apocalypse fed into an anxious mood worldwide, and resonated in Australia, where identification with America is strong. Images of the collapsing towers were projected into Australian living rooms, offices, and public spaces around the country via syndicated newscasts and became a repeated spectacle. For many Australians it was hard not to be pulled into what writer and scholar Deems D. Morrione calls, the “gravitational pull” of the twin towers, resulting in an Americanisation of vocabulary such as “Homeland security,” which presumed that American interests were those of the wider world. Australians witnessed a barrage of media images of the planes hitting Tower Two, which were interspersed with the subsequent chaos that

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18 Bennett, “Tenebrae after September 11,” 186.
engulfed New York City. The scenes of people jumping from skyscrapers on the cusp of collapse were both traumatic and haunting. The destruction caused by the towers as they fell, crushing nearby buildings and blanketing the city with ash, became apocalyptic signifiers in Australia as well as America.

Australian news cycles echoed American fears of a new dangerous epoch, where “our way of life” here in the “modernised West,” as opposed to the “backwards East,”\(^{22}\) appeared under threat. This reductive dichotomy, perpetrated particularly by the media, insisted that a vast chasm exists between a mythical, far away “East” and a hegemonic “West” and has become unbridgeable after 9/11. New York (which, for Australia, encapsulated international capitalist aspirations), a thriving, invulnerable mega-city, an economic and cultural powerhouse in what was thought to be the most powerful country in the world, was struck in its heart.

Adopting an Australian perspective to 9/11 and the aftermath, this thesis is an examination and contextualisation of traumatic and apocalyptic trajectories in relation to urbanism and identity from the years 2005 to 2011. By undertaking a detailed analysis of a close corpus of five Australian literary novels, I will reveal how American interests after 9/11 feed into the national concerns and discourses within Australia, resonating down to the local levels. As a socio-political artefact based on literary analysis, the aim of the thesis is to capture a moment in time in an attempt to understand political, social, and cultural implications of 9/11 upon an urban multi-layered Australian identity, and reveal how this complex identity operates within the wider world. My analyses will also reveal and interrogate the interplay of the global, the national, and the city after 9/11 in relation to trauma. I will reveal how Australian identity is complicated, haunted, and conflicted, trapped in a circuit of historical atrocities and conflicted by inward nationalism, which contrasts with the outward pull of global aspirations. I posit that concepts of the global and globalisation are problematic, layered, and complicated. I argue that the global, or a global psyche, should not be taken for granted in relation to 9/11, nor should the global automatically be conflated with American concerns. In the twenty-first century, in particular, Australia has been bombarded with mediated images of collective trauma, such as of the wars on terror, unrest in the Middle

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\(^{22}\) Cilano, “Introduction,” 17.
East, and the rise of extreme militant Islamism in the form of Islamic State/Daesh. This has resulted in a pervasive international anxiety, with fear of terrorism and the tragedy of asylum seekers displaced by these wars, that has affected Australia, as well as Europe and America. Through my exploration of urban space in relation to personal, national, and transnational stories of trauma, I reveal how individual and collective traumas can preclude intercultural understanding. I also explore the cultural expression of trauma and pervading apocalyptic fears, as a means of reading and understanding experience.

The Problem of the Global

It has been argued that modernity is rapidly expanding around the world, which is undergoing increased urbanisation at an unprecedented rate. According to United Nations data, 55% of the world’s population resides in urban areas, with this figure expected to increase to 60% by 2050. Consequently, the twentieth century saw the rise of what is called the megalopolis, a “supercity stretching across several urban areas.” Concepts of the international city evolved with the late twentieth century impulse towards ideas of globalisation. In the 1990s, during the high point of globalisation theory, the “global city,” a phrase popularized by Saskia Sassen in 1991, was thought to be interchangeable with the transnational city and defined as a metropolis that was a primary contributor to a global economic network. Robert Dixon explores how late 1990s globalisation theories saw the concept of “nation as a redundant form of territoriality that was being replaced by new

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tropes of circulation and borderless flows.”27 Arjun Appadurai’s utopian model of “global flows” in Modernity at Large (1998) offers an alternative to the boundaries of nation states in concepts of cultural flows or cultural exchanges, which include migration, culture and electronic media.28 Neil Brenner in New State Spaces concedes that globalisation is a controversial term around which debates have circled since the 1970s. Some of these debates include questions about how the “geographies of social, political and economic life are being transformed under contemporary conditions.”29 Other debates acknowledge that globalisation often reifies constructions of “The West” and acknowledge that it is not a single all-encompassing force, but rather a “spatial extension of social interdependencies of a worldwide scale.”30

Although globalisation itself is a complex field, I claim that theories espoused in the 1990s are misleading, reductive and totalising, and fall prey to the economic and cultural influences and interests of America. Now outdated notions of the global presuppose that “all the world is America” and that there is an equal international playing field.31 More nuanced discussions move away from such totalising, nationalistic, or territorialised conceptualisations. In New State Spaces, Brenner rethinks the global as a social-spatial restructuring that transcends older “nationalized arrangements.”32 This approach restructures the global in terms of scale by seeking to understand “how geographies of state space” are being transformed at various geographical scales and under contemporary geo-economic conditions.33 Brenner outlines globalisation as an intrinsically geographical concept:

32 Brenner, New State Spaces, 27.
33 Brenner New State Spaces, 30.
... the recognition that social relations are becoming increasingly interconnected on a global scale necessarily problematizes the spatial parameters of those relations, and therefore, the geographical context in which they occur... space cannot be conceived as a static, pregiven platform of social relations, but must be recognized as one of their constitutive, historically produced dimensions.34

This reconfiguration of the global moves away from Cartesian notions of “space as thing,” and explores space as a complex and dynamic process.35 Utilising Edward Soja’s idea of the “socio-spatial dialect”36 and Henri Lefebvre’s concept of production of space, Brenner acknowledges that space is not a singular process, but an interrelated one, a multi-faceted process with varying political and economic contexts.37 Space therefore is not static, but rather, dialectical and conflicted. Global restructuring thus becomes not only spatial, but also temporal, operating in unfolding multiple geographical scales, or “national states, regions, cities, localities and neighbourhoods.”38 Thus for Brenner, under the contemporary geographical and economic condition, national states do not operate in terms of territorialisation for social relations of capitalism, but rather as “scalar geographies.”39 This idea of globalisation is not about one scale dominating or being more important than another, but about the changes and relationships between the scales.40 Thus in relation to reading Australian literature, my thesis moves away from ideas of nationalist reading practices, festishisations of globalised space and definitive constructs of nationalism. Rather, I undertake what Dixon posits as a scale-sensitive analysis to reading literature, which incorporates a multiscale interplay, which reads at global, national, regional, and local individual scales.

34 Brenner, New State Spaces, 28.
35 Brenner, New State Spaces, 32.
38 Brenner, New State Spaces, 35-36.
39 Brenner, New State Spaces, 37.
40 Brenner, New State Spaces, 45.
To move from outmoded ideas of the global to spatial explorations of scale is to resist what Jean Baudrillard calls the “violence of the global,” where the proliferation of dominant ideologies and values masquerades under the guise of universalism. Writing in 2002, Baudrillard identifies globalisation in terms of “technologies, the market, tourism and information.” He critiques the global in a mediatised age as an unchecked expansion of one “all-powerful global techno-structure which has been left alone to dominate.” Baudrillard is critical of the instantaneous, frequent way that ideologies are transmitted to us in the virtual space of the screen and online networks. He critiques the “virtual space of the global” as “dimensionless space-time,” with little depth and no room for difference or references to the natural world (such as the body) and the past. Baudrillard views this instantaneous ability to spread ideologies as horrific and the consequences of this globalisation are homogenisation, discrimination, and exclusion. Baudrillard further critiques the concept of American dominance and the global through his evocative anthropomorphic image of the crumbling buildings. Formerly a symbol of arrogant power and American hegemony, “their nerves of steel cracked. They collapsed vertically, drained of their strength, with the whole world looking on in astonishment.” Thus, charged with the symbolic burden of the moment, Baudrillard suggests the towers committed suicide, in essence, imploding in on themselves, demonstrating the fragility of the global.

**Conceptual Framework: Approach and Methodology**

The pivotal and iconic image of the twin towers falling at the beginning of this thesis brings together integral theoretical elements of my argument in relation to the exploration of trauma and scales of space. The plane hitting the twin towers is watched from Australian shores, in a nation already haunted by its own network of various traumas. These traumas resonate through all levels, from the global, to the national, to the local and the personal. In addition to the mediatisation of trauma around 9/11 and its aftermath, the city thus exists as

a site for trauma and apocalyptic projections. My analysis of the literary city will reveal how Australia is trapped within limitless cycles of trauma, including mediated images of 9/11 and the so-called wars on terror. These traumas include those brought to Australia via migration and those inherent in Australia’s violent history. *Dead Europe* (2005) by Christos Tsiolkas, *The Unknown Terrorist* (2006) by Richard Flanagan, *Underground* (2006) by Andrew McGahan, *Breath* (2008) by Tim Winton, and *Five Bells* (2011) by Gail Jones, are varied narratives written in the shadow of 9/11. These novels reconfigure fictional notions of Australian urbanism in order to deal with fears and threats posed by 9/11 and the resulting fallout, where international interests fed into national concerns and discourses within Australia and resonated through to local levels. Adopting an Australian perspective, this thesis contextualises subsequent traumatic and apocalyptic trajectories in relation to urbanism and Australian identity. The traumatic city is a space that is an integral part of this complex subjectivity. I utilise Brenner’s concept of scalar explorations of space and Lefebvre’s concept of space as not static, but rather one that is a dynamic social construction and which in turn affects spatial perceptions.47 This dynamic urban space impacts and shapes contemporary Australian subjectivity within multiple contexts that incorporate transnational interests such as the relationship with America and the world, historical national anxieties about settler atrocities, and local and/or individual stories of trauma. In my readings of *Breath* and *Five Bells*, specifically, I posit that the city is a locus for networks of trauma and explore its transmission along the different scales, from transnational, to national, to local and personal. In all five novels, however, I argue that Australian identity is haunted by a constellation of traumas which manifests in differing ways.

To articulate the complexity of this Australian identity after 9/11, I forge a theoretical model based on the framework of trauma. As a foundational concept, I rely on Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory*, in particular his model of the multidimensional matrix, where various traumas operate in concert. Rothberg posits a new framework for understanding collective memory, which he calls “multidirectional memory,” incorporating varying

historical memories that are productive, intercultural, and dynamic. This form of memory moves beyond what Rothberg calls “competitive memory,” because it does not assume one master signifier or totalising history of trauma, but rather is cumulative, and incorporates dynamic and diverse elements of various histories. The mode of multidirectional memory is paramount here because it does not espouse an exclusive version of cultural identity but acknowledges how the act of remembrance itself “cuts across and binds together diverse, spatial, temporal, and cultural sites.” As a case study, Rothberg examines Holocaust studies in conjunction with postcolonial studies. This model of trauma is comparative and interdisciplinary and allows seemingly incompatible historical atrocities to be studied alongside each other. Rothberg reveals how discussions of the Holocaust can in turn enable other articulations of historical horrors and victimisations.

The multidimensional matrix is an imperative theory to my study of trauma, which incorporates vastly different traumas, such as the legacy of settler-colonial violence against the Indigenous peoples, the fear of terrorism, and displacement of asylum seekers, and the twenty-first century mediated catastrophes as a result of 9/11. Furthermore, the diverse, differential, and intercultural relations of the multidimensional matrix fulfil Bennett’s impetus for a diverse, inter-cultural way to situate trauma within an international framework. It also fulfils Brenner’s impetus for a scalar approach to the global restructuring of space. I propose that there is not one master signifier of trauma, but rather an infinite mosaic or cascade of scales of different types of traumas that nest in a complicated matrix. These sites of trauma are not finite nodes, nor starting places or end points, but rather sites that reflexively refer to earlier traumas. Reading their movement along smaller and larger sites is an attempt to make logical order of the endless circuits of trauma. For example, 9/11 as a site of trauma is imbricated temporally and spatially in a long history of suffering related to historical colonialism, as well as American imperialism in the Middle East during the Gulf Wars and earlier. By using the language of multidirectional

51 Bennett, quoted in Bennett and Kennedy, “Introduction,” 5.
scales or circuits of exchange, I posit that identities, traumas, locations, and events are not discreet entities but rather a part of these exchanges. Seen in this way, 9/11 is not a singularly unique or iconic global event, but part of an endless multidirectional network of trauma which incorporates global, national, and local elements.

Thus, the matrix of trauma does not reify the West or America as global because it is transcultural, trans-historical, and multigeographical, incorporating global, national, and local experiences and narratives. I claim that although geographically isolated from many world conflicts and wars, Australia is a nation scarred by its own circuits of historical, imported, and mediated traumas, as well as external traumas that hover outside its shores. Racial violence against the Indigenous inhabitants and brutalities of British colonisation resonate into the problematic present that sees ongoing injustices committed against asylum seekers as part of the Australian government’s hardline political stance since 9/11. Additionally, people immigrating to Australia may bring with them international traumatic histories. These internal traumas resonate and blend with others that also seem to be outside of Australian history, becoming entangled and subsumed into a complicated contemporary urban Australian identity. This network of trauma provides one reason why Australian literary landscapes in the post-9/11 era feature such haunted, dislocated characters, that are recurring motifs in so many contemporary Australian narratives. The Australian cities analysed in the five novels are haunted and conflicted by this network of traumas.

In terms of secondary theoretical frameworks, this thesis is split into two main sections, investigating trauma and apocalypse as primary consequences of 9/11 upon the fictional landscapes. Although they appear chronologically within each of the two sections, in the overall thesis, the five primary novels are deliberately not examined chronologically. Rather, they are examined thematically with the overarching framework being trauma theory and apocalyptic writing emerging as a theoretical extension of this. I first examine trauma in Breath and Five Bells respectively because, thematically speaking, it is the overarching consequence of 9/11 in relation to the city. This foundational framework of trauma is then followed with notions of apocalypse that variously manifest in Dead Europe in Gothic tropes of monstrosity, and in The Unknown Terrorist and Underground, where I read through the framework of monster theory. Furthermore, as the environments in these latter texts
degrade as they logically progress from notions of trauma into newer areas of anthropogenic critique that are compatible with apocalyptic theories and terrorism studies. Anthropogenic studies incorporate environmental change which is caused or influenced as a result of human activity. Moreover, in terms of temporality, these two thematic concepts follow on from each other logically, with trauma being primarily focused on the past and possibly the present-future, and notions of apocalypse stretching into an unforeseeable and nebulous future.

My approach in undertaking these textual analyses is therefore varied and multidisciplinary, as I outline in detail below. While I base my foundation on trauma theory, I draw from elements of literary theory, cultural theory, and psychology, as well as phenomenology and sociology. Additionally, I utilise political and historical writings in exploring urban spaces in relation to Australia’s place in a rapidly technologising world. I reveal how the five texts navigate through this matrix of trauma and Australian identity after 9/11 through their timely and varying depictions of the city. Winton’s *Breath*, Jones’ *Five Bells*, Tsiolkas’ *Dead Europe*, Flanagan’s *The Unknown Terrorist*, and McGahan’s *Underground* constitute a cluster of novels written within a decade after 9/11, that reconfigure notions of urbanity in their fictionalised Australian landscapes to deal with the fears and threats it engendered. I do not categorise all my texts as urban or specifically 9/11 novels but explore their nuanced and differing responses. For instance, while Winton’s *Breath* is not an urban novel per se, my examination offers an original reading of the primacy of the city as a vital and traumatic aspect of Australian identity. I explore how the mediated image of the urban catastrophe of 9/11 in the opening scene of the novel, although subtle, sets the mood for trauma and anxiety that follows in flashback sequences. While *Five Bells* does possess a decidedly urban sensibility in its exploration of Sydney, the reader may question links to 9/11. My approach to these novels is not reductive – they are so much more than strictly urban or 9/11 narratives, or even trauma novels. Rather, I argue that *Breath* and *Five Bells* (as well as the other three novels studied), are different literary responses to 9/11, which evince an interplay of traumas that inform Australian identity. They present cityscapes resounding with webs of trauma, including the emphasis on repeated, mediated images of suffering from 9/11 and the wars on terror which, I argue, haunt the novels. I have deliberately focused on a small corpus of novels in order to allow for deep and detailed textual analysis.
rather than a wider survey. They are pertinent to my study as they reveal complicated aspects of contemporary urban Australian identity, which is historically haunted and problematically seeking to define itself in a complex and seemingly polarised post-9/11 world.

In each of the novels, conceptions of the city are central to my explorations of this complicated Australian subjectivity which resonates within a matrix of trauma, haunting urban centres that still struggle with inherent historical damage and anxieties. The generic term city refers to an urban demographic, economic, and above all political and jurisdictional unit, usually bigger than a town. Although it is often a locus for commerce, culture, and population as well as identity, the city is more than a tangible built environment. Is it also a social product, a site for social engagement, social movement, and mass capitalist consumption. In other words, cities are not just material, but also imaginary responses to built urban spaces; they can provide creative stimulation and paradoxically stifle inspiration, consolidating it in “collective imagination as tradition and authority.”

An Age of Terror(ism)?

Outwardly, particularly in the years depicted in the five studied texts, the post-9/11 period appeared to be difficult. There were numerous perceived global threats from Al Qaeda and so-called Islamic State/ Daesh among other extremist groups, as well as the continuation of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Smaller-scale attacks in Western urban centres gave rise to the so-called wars on terror, which in turn heralded a period of mass displacement and cultural anxieties around Islam in the West. As a result, mass migrations, cultural transitions, changing demographics and economic upheaval, coupled with increased Muslim immigration to the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom, inflamed local disenfranchised populations, leading to nationalistic tendencies or, in the extreme case, ideologies espousing virulent white nationalism. These phenomena date back to the Gulf War in the Middle East in the early 1990s.

53 Gregory, et al., Dictionary of Human Geography, 86.  
Upon closer inspection, however, the assumption that 9/11 ushered in a chaotic new era of global terrorism is a contentious one, as one could argue that terrorism, as a transcultural or religiously motivated violence, has always existed in some form. Was 9/11 a specific marker of a new age of terror, the inception of a more volatile and threatening world? If this is not the case, what was so unique about 9/11? The broad meaning of terrorism is the unlawful use of violence and/or intimidation of a group of people, particularly civilians, for political ends resulting from conflicting ideologies. Questions as to whether the world has changed after 9/11 are explored in Meagan Smith and Sean Zeigler’s analysis, “Terrorism before and after 9/11,” in which the authors examine data on global terrorist attacks from 1989 to 2014. In doing so, they come to the nuanced conclusion that overall the “post-9/11 era is a significantly less terror prone period than the years before it.” However, Smith and Zeigler identify the opposite trend for countries with higher Muslim populations, which experienced fewer domestic and international incidents prior to 2001, and an increase after 9/11. What has particularly defined the decade after 9/11 was the perception that life in the West was irrevocably altered. In the immediate aftermath, politicians decisively declared this an era of “transnational terrorism ... [and] ... extreme threat to international security.” The view was that 9/11 had “fundamentally changed the world,” while commentators presented it as “‘World War IV’ – a perpetual state of conflict between militant Islam and the West.”

The sobering reality that 9/11 brought to American consciousness was the realisation that radicalisation and polarisation were not just something seen on the news happening to other people in a faraway country, but a potential existential threat that military superiority could not prepare for or prevent. As a result, the decade following 9/11 saw a growing fear of terrorism, animated by media obsessively concentrated on international urban centres. In *Continental Drift*, Emily Apter discusses the idea of paranoid subjectivity in relation to the virtual world. While I am not examining virtual reality on its own, it pertains to the digital

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56 Smith and Zeigler, “Terrorism Before and After 9/11.”

environment which makes up a large proportion of the mass media. In subsequent writings, however, Apter extends this notion of paranoid subjectivity to encompass transnational ideas of “oneworldedness,” on which I focus here. Sharply critical of globalisation theories that reify the West, she claims that, “Paranoia has returned with a vengeance as the order du jour in the aftermath of 9/11.” 58 In articulating this argument, Apter lists a series of American novels by writers such as Don DeLillo, Philip Roth, and Thomas Pynchon, that “enshrine paranoia as a trope of national allegory.” 59 Apter goes on to articulate this concept in Against World Literature where she critiques earlier theories of globalisation because of their profoundly uneven impacts occurring at local levels after 9/11. Critiquing Appadurai’s notion of globalisation as “cultural flows”, Apter presupposed a contrasting theory of “Oneworldedness” as symptomatic of this paranoid globalism, whereby the territorial sovereignty of America and American interests (masked as global) are interchangeable with economic neo-imperialist projections of the world. 60 Paranoid globalism reifies the West, as American allies and Western countries within this system adopt a view of “[the] planetary and transnationalism … [that] … envisages the planet as an extension of paranoid subjectivity vulnerable to persecutory fantasy, catastrophism, monomania.” 61 The results of this paranoid subjectivity include increased border security and surveillance, cultural and political instability, and pervasive fear inflamed by a hyperbolic media. This culture of mediated terror fixates on potential terror threats and the rise of reactionary terrorist groups such as Daesh.

Although countless terrorist attacks usually perpetrated by or affiliated with radical Islamist ideologies and/or Islamic State /Daesh and/or al-Qaeda, have been carried out in heavily peopled urban centres in Western nations, the reality is that since 9/11 particularly between 2012 and 2017, “three-quarters of all terrorism fatalities … transpired in six countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen – all places beset with civil strife.” 62

61 Apter, Against World Literature, 71.
Notably, Iraq and Afghanistan also suffered the trauma of American strikes, which no doubt exacerbated the civil unrest. The notion of an age of terrorism as depicted in Western political discourse is ultimately discriminatory, inaccurate, divisive, and media-driven, speaking of a threat to “our way of life,” which is always equated with liberty. Hence retaliating against the threat of terrorism does not only entail defending borders but also striking against Syria and Iraq, which are viewed to be incubators and hubs for Islamist terrorist cells. What is missing in the mainstream mediated discourse on terrorism, however, are the causes of terrorism and the reasons terrorists actually fight, as well as nuanced discussion of the entrenched disadvantage of many Muslim populations (for example, in France) dating back to colonisation and extending to entrenched contemporary disadvantage, discrimination, segregation, and institutional racism. Fear of terrorism in Western societies is too often framed by Western media and presented in a reductive narrative of archetypal good (the West) versus evil (the terrorist or Other) but fail to take into account the rise of white nationalist, separatist ideologies.

International notions of catastrophe and apocalypse after 9/11 fed into an anxious mood worldwide, which resonated nationally in Australia. Although geographically far from America and Europe, Australia has not been immune to global paranoid terrorism hysteria. Richard Carr makes the point that “Australia, half a world away from the fallen Towers, vigorously took up the war on terror.” Carr explains how, after 9/11, “The terrorist was no longer a news broadcast; he might be the bloke next door.” This cultural paranoia and fear of terrorism was inflamed by the Howard government rhetoric in two separate incidents. In August 2001, weeks before 9/11, a Norwegian freighter carrying more than 500 refugees (primarily Hazara fleeing the Taliban in Afghanistan) was refused entry to Australian waters by the Howard government, which sent troops to board the ship. Howard then quickly

63 Muslims are socially ostracised and systemically discriminated against in France — essentially treated as an underclass society. Estimates suggest French Muslims are twice as likely to live below the poverty line, three times as likely to be unemployed, and make up more than 70 per cent of the nation’s prison population. These are prime conditions for religious radicalisation to occur.
65 Carr, “A World of ... Risk, Passion, Intensity, and Tragedy,” 63.
introduced the Border Protection Bill and the “Pacific Solution” policy of offshore detention. The refugees were eventually imprisoned in concentration camps on Nauru. The Australian government then used the events of 9/11 a couple of weeks later, as justification for its actions, and was largely supported by the Australian public. This came to be known as “The Tampa Affair.”66 The second incident took place less than a month after 9/11, in October 2001, when a boat full of refugees was intercepted off the coast of Christmas Island (which the Border Protection Bill had excised from Australia). After the boat sank, the then Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock falsely claimed refugees threatened to throw children overboard and were threatening to self-harm if they were not rescued. Other politicians, including Howard, repeated the allegation, asserting that the refugees had sabotaged their vessel. This came to be known as “The Children Overboard Affair.”67 Consequently, in the lead up to the 2001 election, the Howard government continued to demonise refugees: “The election campaign had just begun and the ‘news’ of these callous asylum seekers putting their children at risk caused an immediate media frenzy.”68 Later after a Senate inquiry, this claim was proven to be false and the government was shown to have misled the people about children being thrown overboard. The reality was that an overloaded fishing vessel with 223 people on board, including 56 children, was barely afloat and limping back to Indonesia. The “Tampa Affair” and “The Children Overboard Affair” led the Howard government to exploit post-9/11 fears of invasion to enact border controls to hinder so-called unauthorised arrivals by boat to Australia.69 Howard’s Pacific Solution (2001-2007) mandated that asylum seekers not be allowed to land on mainland Australia but transported to detention centres on island nations in the Pacific. The government’s perceived tough stance on border control resonated with the Australian electorate, feeding into the terrorism anxiety of the times, and the Liberal-National Coalition was re-elected with an increased majority.

67 See Marr and Wilkinson, Dark Victory.
69 See Marr and Wilkinson, Dark Victory.
Against this historical backdrop of the events around and after 9/11, the Australia depicted in the five studied novels, exhibits to varying degrees national allegories of paranoia coupled with a tense and oppressive mood. Heightened by reports of global, financial, and political catastrophe and the threat of climate change, *Dead Europe*, *The Unknown Terrorist*, and *Underground* are examples of paranoid fictions, with an attendant conspiratorial mode of thinking. This manifests in a pervasive sense of doom and decay. *Breath* and *Five Bells* are also cognisant of the anxious, traumatised sensibility after 9/11, and this urban trauma lies beneath various other traumas, haunting the multi-layered, multicultural urban topography, and feeding into a complicated Australian identity.

**Literature in the Aftermath**

The first decade of the twenty-first century produced what many scholars and cultural commentators have dubbed Post September 11 Fiction, an emerging (though perhaps finite genre), that explores and addresses the events and consequences arising from 9/11. The definition of 9/11 fiction incorporates transnational fiction that captures not only the events of that day, but also the wars on terror, the mass displacement of peoples, and militant Islamist terrorism, as well as the vilification of Islam and Muslim peoples. This genre also includes inflamed cultural anxieties and mediated fears of terrorism, encompassing increasing protectionism and isolationism in the West, as well as the rise of reactionary white nationalisms. In America, the output of 9/11 fiction has been varied and has had “at best uneven critical reception,” because the genre often flouts certain literary conventions, placing political ideology before plot and character development. Jay McInerney’s *The Good Life* (2006) for example, is a before-and-after view of a couple forced to re-examine their relationship following the events of 9/11. Other American novels such as Don

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DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), and John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006), among others, also dare to confront and unravel “a bigger crisis than many novels can contain or capture: ... a situation where truth is both bigger and stranger than fiction.” Many American narratives refer back to what Gray calls “the myth of the fall.” Novels considered as putting ideology first include Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and British writer Chris Cleave’s *Incendiary* (2005). Hollywood’s response after 9/11 included films such as Oliver’s Stone’s *World Trade Centre* (2006), about the rescue mission in New York based on actual events, and Paul Greengrass’s *United 93* (2006), which explores an uprising from passengers on the eponymous hijacked flight. Films dealing with the so-called wars on terror include Stephen Gaghan’s *Syriana* (2005), Gavin Hood’s *Rendition* (2007), Robert Redford’s *Lions for Lambs* (2007), and Michael Winterbottom’s *A Mighty Heart* (2007), among others. Many reviewers of 9/11 fiction and film make a case for a necessary political impetus, with content that localises and personalises individual suffering within “the Big Picture of national and international politics.”

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the high reviewer expectations for work that illuminates and elucidates a changed world and offers a trajectory forward. One the other hand, the “novelists perhaps may have raced into production before they had fully digested and objectified their experiences of and responses to this transformative moment.”

Rob Nixon poses the vital problem in *Slow Violence*, as to how fiction or indeed any form of representation can adequately deal with extreme catastrophic events. In “an age where the media venerate the spectacular,” Nixon asks, how we can assess “disasters that are attritional or indifferent” to the “sensations-driven technologies of our world.” While Nixon is specifically referring to gradual environmental catastrophe, the question is applicable here. How can fiction possibly reveal the long-term, residual effects of 9/11 in this media-saturated age? To answer this query, I defend the enormity and validity of writing fiction and critical analyses post-9/11 and make the case that compellingly complex narratives are indeed those which make 9/11 one element or the backdrop rather than the focal point of the story. These fictions, such as the corpus of five texts here, do not pretend to unravel, digest, or understand the implications of 9/11. Rather, they reveal life after 9/11 in Australia and the relationship of the transnational and national consequences by means of focalised individual stories. These localised stories are where the strengths of the narratives lie. Apprehending 9/11 and the terrorism debate from Australia, Tino Dallmann’s *Telling Terror in Contemporary Australian Fiction* is a foundational theoretical contribution in this study. Dallmann argues that “the geographical position and the country’s cultural traditions provide Australian writers with a unique perspective on the terrorism debate.” For Dallmann, fictional approaches to 9/11 “tend to focus on strategies of how events are manipulated in order to achieve greater effect in the public psyche.” That it is to say, the anti-terror legislation under John Howard was, according to John Frow, accompanied by “magical re-description of the real,” where the digital and print medias foregrounded the scandals involving the Tampa Affair and the Children Overboard Affair, which “equated

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asylum seekers with potential terrorists.” 

Similarly, debates about military actions against Islamic State/Daesh, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria illustrate how “truth becomes a battlefield for the antagonists and their ideologies.”

Although Dallmann explores *The Unknown Terrorist and Underground*, my study diverges from his, as I group all of my five novels not as terrorism texts, but rather in the wider context of narratives that respond in some way to 9/11. Whereas Dallmann explores the discursive qualities of terror and “terrorism as a form of both political and psychological violence,” I am not interested in the mechanics of terror per se, but rather in analysing this very political and psychological violence in relation to 9/11 as a whole. In other words, rather than focus my study on terrorism, I explore terrorism hysteria as only one by-product of 9/11 within the larger discourses of trauma and apocalyptic fears. Dallmann explores a number of Australian novels, including close studies of *The Unknown Terrorist* and *Underground*, and analyses terrorism as a literary theme. Alternatively, I explore a group of five texts that exemplify more nuanced effects of 9/11, with terrorism being one element in a configuration of trauma. Dallmann on the other hand incorporates counter-terrorist politics in Australian fiction as a vehicle for new insights into how it relates to the world after 9/11. However, I do build upon Dallmann’s interrogation of Australian identity, particularly colonial anxieties, but with a focus on the city and urban depictions as a locus for this anxiety that I explore through the framework of trauma theory and apocalypse theory.

There were comparatively few post-9/11 novels as a percentage of all Australian fiction published in the decade following 9/11, although this is changing in recent years. For Nicholas Birns, 9/11 and the immediate aftermath “shattered the global consensus that had emerged through the 1990s,” especially in what James Bennett calls “The Anglosphere,” which connects Anglophone countries via the internet “in an intellectual union of the

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92 Jeff Lewis quoted in Dallmann, *Telling Terror*, 10.
English-speaking peoples.” Birns claims that “the common experience of terrorism and its convulsive aftermath seemed to unite Australia and the USA,” which the political right utilised for militaristic purposes, even though “9/11 and the war on Iraq ended up diminishing this sense of Anglophone utopia that had been a feature of the previous decade.” For Birns, Australian novels “now had a definite place in world literature,” citing the publication of Claire Messud’s *The Emperor’s Children* (2006) and Kirsten Tranter’s *The Legacy* (2010), both of which “capture a sense that Australia was at the outer edge of the world and yet very much a part of it.” Despite the fear of terrorism and the problematic and divisive political discourse in Australia, the reality of life after 9/11 runs counter to the pervasive anxious mythology. Australia has been geographically sequestered from the global turmoil in the wake of 9/11 because, as Jen Webb claims:

What has happened to us (mostly) has happened outside the borders of this country: Australians caught up in the Bali or London bombings, Australian ‘terrorists’ captured in the American net, Australians trapped in the Twin Towers, Australians in the war zones.

However, we do live within the context of a global world, and therefore our narratives are based on local contexts and informed by international circumstances. This is why many Australian novelists in particular have chosen to examine the post-9/11 world from diverse perspectives, notably that of the downtrodden other who has suffered or been vilified. I locate my corpus of texts written in the decade following 9/11, within the international and national field of post-9/11 fiction. Firstly, I have selected these five because they are an eclectic group of novels and not all are obvious 9/11 narratives. Secondly, the five novels demonstrate trauma as multi-faceted, trans-temporal, and multigeographical, and allow me to adapt Rothberg’s model of the multidimensional matrix to their narratives. In other words, these novels demonstrate the way in which different kinds of trauma such as settler anxiety, terrorism, fear of the Muslim Other, and the media’s repetitive use of 9/11 imagery and the war on terror operate in concert as part of an urban Australian subjectivity.

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Furthermore, the novels also explore the way Australia operates in the wider world after 9/11, affording me a critique of totalising notions of globalisation, preferring a scale-sensitive approach to space that incorporates global, national, and local contexts.

While the *Unknown Terrorist* and *Underground* have often been examined critically in tandem because of their obvious links to 9/11 and terrorism, they have rarely been grouped with *Dead Europe* as a trio of post-9/11 apocalyptic texts. Read as three separate but simultaneous responses to a compelling post-9/11 cultural meta-narrative, these novels form an ironic, if heavy-handed, prescient political warning to Australia. The urban iterations in the apocalyptic novels are dystopic and nightmarish, as they move into the fantastical but vitally symbolic terrain or into the nightmarish world depicted in *Dead Europe*. For Dallmann, this is symptomatic of what he groups as “Australian terrorism novels.” These novels “illustrate concern about the colonial past of the country which also resonates in the increasing occurrence of anti-Muslim racism after 2001.” The tendency to dissolve threats as fiction, “highlights the Australian attitude to interrogate and ironise hegemonic discourse,”

that is the discourse espoused by the government and the media. This is particularly evident in *Dead Europe*, *The Unknown Terrorist*, and *Underground*, with the latter two novels possessing a definitive ironic flavour, as well as iterations of what I read as monsters that are manifestations of haunting colonial guilt coupled with contemporary nationalism. *Breath* and *Five Bells* are more subtle and nuanced in their approach, but they are narratives with definitive references to 9/11 that reflect the complexities and challenges of this period. By exploring *Breath* and *Five Bells* from the original perspective of Australia since 9/11 and reading through the theoretical lens of the multidirectional matrix of trauma, my aim is to open them up to new readings, particularly in relation to the city and Australian identity. I argue that these two novels are about so much more than 9/11, urbanty, and trauma, and the aim here is not to be reductive but rather to explore their narratives in original and compelling contexts, revealing their richness, nuance, and complexity. My study is therefore more than an examination of an obvious amalgam of 9/11 texts. Rather, I employ an original method of interpretation to open up the contextual debate of what may constitute post-9/11 literature. My study foregrounds a methodology of interpretation, which utilises a

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wide-angle theoretical lens incorporating how lives play out in the post-9/11 world. The characters in Breath and Five Bells work through traumatic events focalised through personal stories backgrounded with the overarching and resonating transnational trauma of 9/11. Dead Europe, The Unknown Terrorist, and Underground are more overtly political. They present frightening hypothetical, yet sometimes plausible, scenarios and ask ethical questions in the shadow of 9/11. Therefore, in the face of this conflicted identity and current social, cultural, and economic upheaval, I locate my corpus of five texts within the rubric of Australian trauma fiction, with 9/11 being only one catalyst for troubled times. Other catalysts include transnational mediated images of trauma, harsh asylum seeker policies, national legacies of settler violence, and localised individual traumas. In examining the five novels together, I hope to reveal a new reading that is multidisciplinary, encompassing literary theory, cultural studies, and terrorism studies, and anthropological, sociological, and political critique. Furthermore, in utilising Rothberg’s idea of the multidimensional matrix, I envisage trauma as a constellation of traumatic vectors, one of which is the events of 11 September 2001, that haunt, inform, and circumscribe Australia, problematising its place in the world.

Trauma

I posit that Breath and Five Bells are post-9/11 trauma novels. They depict the city as a traumatic topography, a space where history and identity problematically reside. Such conceptions of the city are historically rooted in the interdisciplinary fields of narrative theory, cultural theory, and psychology. Additionally, in explorations of urbanism, trauma theory lends itself readily as a framework because, as Rothberg attests, it “links events of extreme violence … [and] … structures of subjective and collective experience, with discursive and aesthetic forms.” At the heart of trauma theory is “an attempt to trace the inexhaustible shapes both of human suffering and our responses to that suffering.” Historically, major theorists of modernity such as Karl Marx, Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, and Siegfried Kracauer, through to more contemporary theorists such as Marshall

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Berman, saw the rise of the city as having traumatic implications. Berman defined modernity as a shared and “vital experience ... of space and time, of the self and others, of life’s possibilities and perils.”\(^\text{102}\) Additionally, modernity is a complicated experience that causes disunity, which Berman describes as “a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.”\(^\text{103}\) To be modern, as Marx states, is to encounter suffering in a universe of flux, and to be conflicted as part of a world where “all that is solid melts into air.”\(^\text{104}\)

Roger Luckhurst’s *The Trauma Question* is an influential synoptic account of trauma and the history of its study and treatment. He builds on the clinical definition of trauma and applies it to narrative. For Luckhurst, the city and the trauma of modernity are inextricably linked, as he “tracks the multidisciplinary origin of trauma in the nineteenth century through industrialisation and bureaucratisation.”\(^\text{105}\) Luckhurst posits the notion of “post-traumatic subjectivity,” which includes “the transmissibility of trauma” as part of many aspects of cultural life in advanced capitalist societies.\(^\text{106}\) In other words, trauma and nervous conditions are an integral part of the capitalist metropolis which constitutes modernity.\(^\text{107}\)

Experiences of urban trauma may be cultural, collective, or individual and may evince a particular set of symptoms. Luckhurst clarifies how trauma may be incurred by individuals who experience severe stressor events such as wars, natural disasters, or accidents. For these individuals, the result can often manifest in identifiable somatic and psycho-somatic disturbances. My theories in relation to trauma and narrative are based on the traditions of trauma theory formulated by Luckhurst among others, including the foundational work of Cathy Carruth, who in turn utilised Sigmund Freud’s clinical work on trauma. Caruth’s edited volume, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* is an interdisciplinary compendium of writings


\(^{103}\) Berman, *All that is Solid*, 15.

\(^{104}\) Karl Marx, quoted in Berman, *All that is Solid*, 15.


\(^{106}\) Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 15.

\(^{107}\) Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 20.
from specialists in various critical, practical, and theoretical disciplines. Caruth’s exploration of trauma includes child abuse, historical atrocities, and the ways in which such traumas may be interpreted and discussed. For Caruth, “psychic trauma involves intense personal suffering, but it also involves the recognition of realities that most of us have not begun to face.” Whether individual or collective, trauma highlights cultural anxieties about remembering. Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy refer to Andreas Huyssen’s argument on Western cultural anxieties regarding memory and remembering:

[T]he Holocaust ... stands as a master signifier of “cultural memory” the ultimate cipher of an unspeakable trauma that must never be forgotten yet can never be completely spoken.

Such notions of paradoxical and unspeakable cultural memories or painful collective memory-scapes feature often in Breath and Five Bells in recollections as well as mass-mediated depictions of impending global catastrophe — what Bennett and Kennedy articulate as the twentieth century Eurocentric and Western fascination with trauma and the cultural production of trauma as a mode of cultural memory, or public memorialisation. Rothberg’s model of the matrix of traumas demonstrates how different traumas can be linked. In other words, images of 9/11, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan haunt the topographies in the two novels as part of the matrix of trauma. These topographies resonate with colonial anxieties which precipitate a contraction into insularity and inwardness, away from these perceived catastrophes.

My explorations of traumatic topographies borrow from foundational ideas of trauma theory and make the case against events such as 9/11 as master signifiers of cultural memories, interrogating the myth of global territoriality. Although sometimes taking place primarily outside the complexities and anxieties that haunt contemporary Australia,

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109 Caruth, Trauma, vii.
traumatic stressor events seep into the collective contemporary urban consciousness through a bombardment of mediated images and are duly reflected in my novels. Added to this matrix of trauma are individual experiences of transnational trauma, as well as a brutal foundational Australian history which haunts and circumscribes the present. Lorenzo Veracini’s *Settler Colonialism,* among other writings in the field of Settler Colonial Studies, provides a theoretic framework for this foundational historical violence in Australia. For Veracini, settler societies develop a combination of multiple resistance strategies that tie in to elements of trauma theory. Some are manifestations of collective historical pain and include “direct anticolonial attack, sabotage, self-mutilation, insubordination, evasion, non-compliance, ostensible collaboration … [and] … mimicry.” In other words, the urban symbols of a globalised world sit on unceded territories. *Breath and Five Bells* manifest these various layers of trauma which contribute to the shaping of a complicated and conflicted contemporary Australian identity.

If conceptions of modernity are inextricably linked with trauma, what happens culturally to urban Western consciousness after what Luckhurst terms an “iconic trauma event” such as 9/11, a cataclysm of international proportions? In terms of literature after the fact, many believe that 9/11 was “a fissure in the history of the world that … dates books in a particular way – it is immediately clear whether a book is set before or after 2001.” *Breath and Five Bells* illustrate the literary aesthetics of trauma in the way they capture repetition, memory, and guilt, as well as their explorations of conflicted and haunted individual and collective Australian identity. Luckhurst states that “trauma fictions are seen to develop from the context of specific identity politics” and evince identifiable aesthetic markers, particularly in relation to time and memory, manifesting in the temporal structures via intrusions of the past upon the present in the form of painful memories. These intrusions may also include strange fixations and addictions, patterns of repetition, anxiety, psychological damage,

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114 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question,* 1.
115 “R.B.”, “After the Unthinkable.”
116 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question,* 87.
and/or threat of bodily harm. Trauma narratives do more than explore individuals impaired by trauma or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); in some way they are also an “important site for configuring (and therefore reconfiguring) traumatic impacts for wider culture.” As key examples of trauma novels Luckhurst cites, among others, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), which explores the after-effects of slavery in America, and the aforementioned *Falling Man* by De Lillo, which is a post-9/11 trauma narrative.

*Breath* and *Five Bells* feature alienation coupled with mobile cultures of trauma that reside both within and outside an intricate 9/11 Australian identity, I selected these novels due to their portrayal of both globalised and localised trauma. *Breath* and *Five Bells* are explorations of urban alienation and trauma, as well as individual and cultural memory. The Australian identities in these novels are forged by, or are formed despite, individual and/or collective traumatic histories. Both novels incorporate these smaller sites of trauma and transnational concerns. While the narrative of *Five Bells* unfolds in the streets of Sydney and possesses a decidedly urban sensibility, Winton locates *Breath* in a small Western Australian coastal town and explores how the transnational values of one generation can taint and infect another generation in a place already struggling with its own circuits of trauma. In *Breath*, the underlying historical trauma is conflated with endless cycles of traumatic incursion/s by the transnational city upon the Australian landscape. In *Five Bells*, transnational traumas reside in the readable script of the literary city and are triggered by walking. In both cases, however, trauma is mobile, moving through time and/or space. When coming from outside the city, trauma moves spatially from elsewhere to Australia. When transmitted historically, trauma moves through time and generations to impact the contemporary psyche.

Although *Breath* and *Five Bells* incorporate ideas of trauma, urbanism, and complicated identity, I will examine how they possess a post-9/11 consciousness in their depictions of human suffering, the foundation of which is urban trauma, but which incorporates and gestures to a constellation of historical and contemporary suffering. In addition to direct

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117 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 87.

references to 9/11, the landscapes in the novels, with their attendant mourning, fear, and anxiety, are haunted by traumatism, which Jacques Derrida defines as, “the wound ... [which] ... remains open by our terror before the future and not only the past.”\(^{119}\) This leads to a prevailing unsettled feeling based on “the precursory signs of what threatens to happen.”\(^{120}\) This anticipatory fear, coupled with a sense of grief in the shadow of 9/11, haunts and informs the two narratives, set in 2008 and 2011 respectively. They operate in a problematic world of globalised and mediated trauma, which is instantaneously transmitted, simultaneously felt, and endlessly ongoing.

The trauma novel is an “emerging genre,” in the process of \textit{becoming}, the full extent of which is yet to be seen.\(^{121}\) In other words, even decades later, the working through of 9/11 trauma is still stretching out endlessly into an unforeseeable transnational landscape, but also spiralling inward to local and personal trauma. Jenny Edkins claims that 9/11 was the moment when “trauma time collided with the time of the state, the time of capitalism, the time of routine,” resulting in a “curious unknown time, a time with no end in sight.”\(^{122}\) This propulsion of trauma time into the modern urban consciousness is reflected in the five studied novels, in a pervading and haunting sense of circuits of endless suffering. This suffering exists in the mediated repetition of atrocities, the return of painful memories, and the constant intrusion of the past upon the urban present.

The multidimensional web of trauma that haunts the Australian landscape manifests somatically in the bodies, as well as in the characters’ damaged psyches and fragmented identities. In order to examine this complex configuration, I claim that trauma is a chronotope, a contemporaneous amalgam of time and space that moves in multi-scalar shifts through the city. Although constructions of the city differ in each novel, an exploration of the transmission of trauma is the primary focus here, as these transmissions follow similar

\(^{120}\) Derrida, “Autoimmunity,” 96.
\(^{121}\) Anne Whitehead, in Luckhurst, \textit{The Trauma Question}, 87.
\(^{122}\) Jenny Edkins, \textit{Trauma and the Memory of Politics} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 233.
scalar patterns in each novel. Thus, I read trauma as a chronotope, that starts at the local level before moving outwards. Originally the idea of the chronotope was formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin and refers to the “ability to enact cultural memory in its spatiotemporal (chronotopic) fullness.” The chronotope can be used as a template for tracing trauma, commencing at the local rather than the transnational scale. In Homi K. Bhabha’s reading of Bakhtin, he misconstrues Bakhtin’s reading of Goethe as global rather than regional. For Bakhtin, following Goethe’s lead however, the chronotope was already a regional concept. John Pizer goes back to Bakhtin’s reading of Goethe to correct Bhabha asserting that the chronotope was already a regional concept for both Bakhtin and Goethe. Pizer explains that this sustaining cultural memory begins at the local level, and only at this “subnational domain” is it possible to articulate the global or to become in a sense, “world literature.”

This exploration of the temporality and spatiality of trauma allows for the logical extension of scales of trauma, the ways in which trauma may be transmitted microcosmically and macrocosmically, through diverse spatial and temporal epochs. The matrix of trauma reveals the inter-connectedness of space, time, and the body in Breath and Five Bells. I argue that trauma is transmitted along scalar movements, from localised traumatic sites of the body, to the dysfunctional home, to the corrupted town, to the larger traumatic scales of the city, to the country, the national psyche, and the world, and then back again to individualised sites. Robert Dixon poses the question as to how different scales may be related and whether the small scales of the body or the local region for example, are less important than the national or the world. I take the approach that these sites are not hierarchical, but rather, “structured ... as mosaics of equal but overlapping scales.” Thus these scales of trauma are intricately interwoven, cascading networks that are trans-generational and trans-cultural, inter-cultural

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124 Pizer, The Idea of World Literature, 35.
and transnational, and link to the wider concerns of this thesis with urban subjectivity and Australian identity in contemporary post-9/11 Australian fiction.

The fragmented Australian identities in the *Breath and Five Bells* emerge in relation to memory, and the role that memory plays in the construction of identity. As Luckhurst argues trauma fragments both memory and identity with the subject often experiencing traumatic dissociation, as well as recovered memory, to explore and assemble post-traumatic subjectivity.¹²⁶ This disruption of self is epitomised further in the assertion that traumatic experience produces a “‘temporal gap’ and a dissolution of the self.”¹²⁷ In an interview, Gail Jones affirms these notions of disrupted selves and temporal gaps, claiming that “we carry a past within us ... it interrupts and intercepts our selves in the present tense. The omnipresence of the past recollected through memory is very compelling.”¹²⁸ This notion is reflected in the characters’ splintered identities, as well as the fragmented chronology of the trauma narrative, as *Breath* and *Five Bells* move from present to past to present again, in order to make sense of individual and collective historical traumas.

Furthermore, this fragmentation is symptomatic of the mediated globally connected societies of late capitalism with their attendant feelings of rising uncertainty, fluidity, and ambivalence. These societies are a chaotic continuation of modernity, where “traditional patterns are replaced by self-chosen ones.”¹²⁹ The fluid and hyper-technologised social relations and realities of late modernity encroach upon the individual producing multiple selves and identities.¹³⁰ Additionally, trauma fragments and disorients consciousness and identity. Thus, memory is an imperative feature of the trauma novel because it shapes the way the traumatised subject views themselves, the traumatic event, and the world around them. As memory is malleable and not susceptible to the rational and temporal laws of time.

¹²⁶ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 1.
and space, it haunts the present, conflating it with the past, resulting in narratives that are not necessarily linear and reflect the belated ways trauma affects the subject.

Among the research questions arising from my close reading of these trauma novels in the chapters that follow, I will question whether an inclusive, resilient urban Australian identity is possible. Admittedly, this identity at times remains problematic, as it grapples with various layers of inherent and imported traumas, while navigating the ongoing effects of contemporary trauma. Australia is not immune from the effects of 9/11, which haunt the global and national landscape decades later, with border restrictions and perceived threats of terrorism in an era of global displacement. I reflect on the landscape of the post-9/11 cities, evoked in *Breath* and *Five Bells*, to theories of urbanism, where agency may be forged and read in the discursive literary spaces traversed by the disenfranchised characters. I concede however, that these notions of resilience which refer to the capacity to recover despite incurred trauma, may be not possible for Indigenous peoples, who still face ongoing atrocities as part of a history of settler violence in Australia. In addition to these global and national concerns is the ongoing threat of environmental catastrophe, which I will not explore in the first section but will examine in the second part of this thesis.

**Apocalypse**

For many in the West, the destruction of the twin towers on 11 September 2001, was a contemporary apocalyptic spectre, because underlying uncertainty and ambivalence was suddenly made clear. Confronting “the unacceptable, the catastrophic,” Americans experienced a collective rather than individual existential shock.\(^\text{131}\) In *The Sense of An Ending*, Frank Kermode argues that the function of apocalyptic and disordered views of our contemporary world in crisis is to make sense of apparent chaos by giving it intelligible order. Apocalyptic fiction, therefore, satisfies preoccupations with eschatology, linear temporality, and the impending spectre of death symbolically represented by notions of “The End.”\(^\text{132}\) Kermode makes a case for apocalyptic fictive narratives as a way of

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ameliorating and working through these fears because they embody the entropic order of things: “So we begin with Apocalypse, which ends, transforms, and is concordant.”

*Dead Europe, The Unknown Terrorist,* and *Underground* reflect this pervading apocalyptic mood in the years following 9/11. These novels are pertinent not only because they were published soon after 9/11, but also because they are discursive attempts to deal with the aftermath of urban catastrophe. With this in mind, I base my study on trauma theory and extend it into writings on apocalypse and anthropogenic studies, as well as monster theory. I read the degraded urban topographies in these narratives in two ways: first, as prescient evocations of troubled transnational political and cultural times that stretch into the years far beyond the settings of the novels and the decades after 9/11; second, as habitats for returning spectres and monstrous entities, which I construe as symptomatic, historical evocations of deep-seated settler anxieties. *The Unknown Terrorist* and *Underground* have often been grouped together in theoretical and critical discussions due to their direct link with 9/11, and their representations of perceived and actual terrorists. When read together with *Dead Europe* as vital 9/11 fictions, these books offer varying stories of trauma – destruction, forced immigration, exile, dislocation, racism, and poverty as a result of 9/11 and the wars on terror. Additionally, the three novels are coloured with catastrophe and dystopia. Like our world, their world after 9/11 has irrevocably changed but is bleakly, and perhaps hyperbolically, hurtling towards global entropy.

*Dead Europe, The Unknown Terrorist,* and *Underground* are examples of apocalyptic fiction, in which trauma coupled with cultural paranoia, manifest as apocalyptic urban landscapes, which in turn divulge a troubled contemporary Australian identity. This identity is anxious about its foundational history as well as its future in a troubled post-9/11 world. I read these texts historically and also within the political and social context that unfolded in the six years after 9/11. These three novels differ from *Breath* and *Five Bells* because they lend themselves to anthropogenic explorations as well as depictions of monstrosity. Additionally, my interest in these three novels lies in how trauma located within the psyches of urban

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inhabitants transforms into hysteria and cultural paranoia inflamed by the media, which is then projected onto urban Australian landscapes.

Apocalyptic cities are hurtling towards their own destruction and are aesthetic manifestations of our collective fears, as well as dead, dying, dystopic, chaotic, and dysfunctional wastelands. As direct literary responses to 9/11, Dead Europe, The Unknown Terrorist, and Underground are unique in the way they descend into nightmarish urban fantasies, which are aesthetic elucidations of unspeakable collective fear. This fear is multi-layered and consists of a constellation of traumas that includes foundational guilt over a violent colonial past, as well as the xenophobic fear of the Other and of invaded national borders. This is further conflated with the fear of terrorism, inflamed by a nationalistic paranoid media. Originating as a biblical concept, apocalypse (from the ancient Greek apokálypsis), means to disclose knowledge (literally, uncovering or lifting a veil to reveal).\textsuperscript{134}

The primary definition of the English term, dating back to 1175, is derived from the final book of the New Testament, The Book of Revelation, in which the author (traditionally held to be the Apostle John, also known as John the Evangelist) prophesied the ultimate victory of good over evil at the end of times.\textsuperscript{135} For Slavoj Žižek in Living in the End Times\textsuperscript{136} and Evan Calder Williams in Combined and Uneven Apocalypse,\textsuperscript{137} apocalyptic imagery of decay and ruin are symptomatic of the collapse of late capitalism, with its overconsumption and degradations. The apocalyptic world of the Bible however, is described with metaphysical, metaphorical, and mythological language to excite the imagination with fantastic wonders and extreme horrors.\textsuperscript{138} Utilising similarly jarring tropes of “crisis and catastrophe” in contemporary situations, “apocalyptic texts aim ... to clarify the patterns and conflicts at stake in present experience ... [rather] ... than to speculate about details of the future.”\textsuperscript{139}

Unlike the biblical contexts of apocalypse and eschatology, where God’s cosmic justice


\textsuperscript{136} Slavoj Žižek, Living in the End Times (London and New York: Verso, 2010).

\textsuperscript{137} Evan Calder Williams, Combined and Uneven Apocalypse (Winchester, UK and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2011).

\textsuperscript{138} Cook, Apocalyptic Literature, 20.

\textsuperscript{139} Cook, Apocalyptic Literature, 20.
ultimately prevails, contemporary apocalyptic events and the fiction that transpires tend to be inherently bleak, traumatic, and endlessly nihilistic. *Dead Europe* is a foray into repeated configurations of urban nightmares and monstrosity, and in both *The Unknown Terrorist* and *Underground* the surrounding cities descend into chaos as the protagonists are eventually murdered.

Various iterations of monstrosity inhabit the apocalyptic cities in the three novels embodying xenophobic fears and settler anxieties as they demonise ethnic, cultural, and/or religious difference. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s *Monster Theory* provides a cogent structural framework, which I employ to explicate the characterisation of the monstrous Other in an urban post-9/11 context. While monster theory has been widely linked to collective cultural and economic anxieties, it is imperative to this study of Australian cities and twenty-first century notions of catastrophism derived from fear of terrorism and xenophobia as well as the threat of climate disturbance. In the depictions of the city as a hostile, apocalyptic locale, I utilise Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence*, a pertinent anthropogenic study which reveals how the hungry machine of capitalist consumption displaces, devours, and ultimately destroys the poor, the marginalised, and the already dispossessed. This gradual annihilation of the environment with the attendant decay, toxic build-up, and ravaged habitats is reflected in the apocalyptic urban centres of the three studied novels. Thus, my examination offers an original reading because it explores the Australian city in relation to Australian identity, and combines anthropogenic and apocalyptic theories, with terrorism studies, monster theory, and political discourse.

The three novels evoke overriding notions of catastrophism with their apocalyptic cityscapes and monstrous entities. To ascertain what can be deduced from these portentous post-9/11 terrains, it is necessary to explore the symbolism of these monsters. How are the cultural or religious Others, or those regarded as terrorists, entrapped within these landscapes, transformed into literary monsters – embodiments of Australian urban and cultural anxieties? To answer this, I rely on Veracini and others in the field of Settler Colonial Studies.

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to re-iterate my historical claim that Australian identity is haunted by a web of traumas. I move beyond the realm of historical trauma into theories of terrorism and monstrosity, specifically xenophobic nationalism, protectionism, and cultural paranoia. I argue that the monstrous iterations are Gothic in nature – an amalgam of repressed historical anxieties coupled with terrorism hysteria that return to haunt the landscape. This results in literary cities populated with monstrous invocations which become more hyperbolic and more menacing as the narratives unfold.

Research Questions

In examining the dual aspects of trauma and apocalypse in post-9/11 Australian fiction in five novels from 2005 to 2011, my inquiry poses key research questions that will be explored and clarified in this thesis. How does trauma manifest in damaged individuals and collective psyches in the post-9/11 epoch, and what role does the city play? How is trauma transmitted and how does it move around the Australian landscape, the global landscape, as well as the landscape of the body? What does the movement of trauma clarify about relations between the global and the national in light of 1990s globalisation theory, world literature, and recent critiques of such reified concepts? What does the scalar movement of trauma within a multidirectional matrix reveal about Australian identity in relation to the world after 9/11? Is there a curative measure, a case for the working through and/or the amelioration of trauma here? Would that case apply equally to settler and Indigenous-Australian groups? Building on these ideas of trauma and traumatised psyches, I aim to explore how 9/11 trauma transforms into hysteria and cultural paranoia, manifesting in apocalyptic literary depictions of cities inhabited by monstrous entities. Who or what are these monstrous entities? What are they emblematic of? What do these iterations of monstrosity say about Australian history and post-9/11 Australian identity in relation to the transnational? How might Australia articulate a unique and inclusive urban cultural identity in a troubled post-9/11 world? How do these Australian case studies contribute to more general debates and critiques in the larger fields of globalisation theory, and notions of national and world literatures?
Thesis Structure and Chapter Divisions

This thesis is comprised of two main parts which explore the two elements of post-9/11 urban topographies: trauma and apocalypse respectively. Part A, “Traumatic Topographies: The Post-9/11 City and the Damaged Psyche,” contains two chapters on *Breath* and *Five Bells* that explore how the cityscape is a fundamental, yet traumatic component of an unsettled post-9/11 Australian identity. I read these cityscapes and explore the way in which they elicit relational, re-occurring traumas, including intrinsically internal or historic traumas, and the external mediated and/or globally transferred traumas. I utilise the overarching framework of trauma theory, in particular Rothberg’s multidimensional matrix of trauma, as well as writings on 9/11 in relation to literature in Australia and the wider world. I trace the imprints and circuits of trauma around the Australian landscape to reveal how and why urban trauma in *Breath* and *Five Bells* shapes an already traumatised subjectivity.

Chapter 1, “The Malignant City in *Breath* by Tim Winton,” demonstrates how the endless mediated traumas of 9/11 and other transnational traumas imported from American and Asian sites are repeatedly traced upon the Western Australian urban, suburban, and coastal landscapes. Manifesting as the narrator’s Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, these compounded layers of trauma contribute to an overriding and pervasive mood of defeat and futility, enacted in the protagonist’s childhood and repeated in adulthood. *Breath* explores the effects of trauma on a young man in his formative years, and the way in which this trauma shapes and circumscribes his life. Pike suffers at the hands of a transnational couple who in turn bring their own set of historical traumas. I establish that trauma in the novel is spatial and temporal, moving in circuits around the literary landscapes. Subsequently, I employ Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope as a spatio-temporal unit, in order to examine scalar transmissions of trauma along small, localised sites such as the body, and larger sites such as the coastal town and beyond. This chronotopic exploration of the movement of trauma is historical and cultural as well as temporal and exemplifies problematic elements of Australian identity after 9/11. As the narrative unfolds, the chronotopic movement of trauma across the literary terrain moves around cycles of transnational scales, which are inter-cultural incursions, as well as vast aquatic topographies that gesture towards the transnational world and retract back into localised configurations.
Chapter 2, “The Conflicted City in *Five Bells* by Gail Jones,” emulates the structure of the previous chapter, but explores a novel set primarily on the streets of Sydney. In contrast to *Breath*, the transmission of trauma which resides in the fictional fabric of the city is re-evoked as the characters walk across Sydney in a day. Jones’ Sydney is a city of physical beauty as well as grief and loss. As the narrative progresses, the protagonists remember their complicated histories as they navigate the city with its own painful foundational history. I present the literary city here as a palimpsest, a readable script upon which various cycles of traumas are layered and re-experienced through the act of walking. These circuits of traumatic history evince a paradoxical Australian identity, with foundational colonial traumas as well as imported transnational traumas from the migrant characters. Coupled with the overriding ubiquity of 9/11 and the wars on terror, these various traumas are projected onto a complex and eclectic, multicultural cityscape. As with *Breath*, time is spatialised here in order to explore trauma as a chronotope and reveal inter-cultural and inter-generational cycles of trauma that are historical and/or transmitted from transnational cities. James De Mello, the son of Italian immigrants, is eventually consumed by the life-long effects of transgenerational trauma while, Pei Xing’s body is a chronotope of atrocities incurred from the Chinese Revolution. Despite this, Pei Xing and the other female characters in the novel find empowering hope and resilience in Sydney. The transnational scales of trauma in *Five Bells* incorporate a move from the smaller chronotopic landmarks emblematic of Australian identity – the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge – to the vast transnational seascape of Sydney Harbour and back to individual sites of the body. I argue that Sydney in the novel is a locus for a matrix of trauma and haunted by historical atrocities committed against Indigenous inhabitants. The resultant Australian subjectivity is conflicted and paradoxical – moving outwards, towards the world but simultaneously withdrawing into parochialism and pathological insularity.

The second half of my thesis, Part B, “The Apocalyptic Metropolis After 9/11,” consists of three separate chapters, on *Dead Europe*, *The Unknown Terrorist*, and *Underground*, respectively. It builds upon earlier ideas of trauma in post-9/11 Australian fiction, extending them theoretically to explore notions of apocalypse. Published four years after 9/11, *Dead Europe* features cities that encapsulate post-9/11 unrest. Isaac, the son of Greek immigrants
to Australia, returns to Greece to explore his ancestral history. As he leaves Athens and travels to other European cities, he finds himself infected by the malignant post-9/11 world, as well as by European history. Isaac takes on monstrous attributes as he becomes infected by the fallen, apocalyptic cities. Europe is depicted as dead or dying, while Melbourne seems to offer Isaac a chance at recovery. *Dead Europe* is a novel that explores Australia’s relationship to Europe and its troublesome history. I argue here that these apocalyptic depictions of cityscapes are literary responses to the volatility of 2005 and 2006, as well as the haunting spectres of repeated historical traumas. This was a time when the so-called wars on terror were in full effect and the threat of terrorism, as depicted by the media, was pervasive, a time of mass displacements and global anxiety. Added to this was unrest and upheaval in the Middle East as well as cultural, economic, and environmental challenges in Australia. The three novels reflect the multidimensional matrix of trauma in nightmarish apocalyptic cities, peopled with tormented and tormenting individuals. Within the psyches of these inhabitants, trauma transforms into hysteria and cultural paranoia. I consider the ways in which fictive urban Australian landscapes are apocalyptic and trapped within networks of trauma and explore why they are inhabited and haunted by monstrous iterations which, I argue, are embodiments of collective post-9/11 fears conflated with historical settler anxieties.

Chapter 3 “A Hellish Necropolis: *Dead Europe* by Christos Tsiolkas,” widens the scale of the geographical lens to explore the apocalyptic European city in relation to the Australian city. The Gothic depictions of ruined and decayed European urban spaces are adapted to the post-9/11 political climate and can be read as a pertinent and prescient commentary upon the problems and fixations of Australian subjectivity in relation to Europe, 9/11, and its own history. *Dead Europe* reflects on the bombing of the twin towers and reveals the after-effects of the war on terror in depictions of dislocation and migration of (primarily) Muslim populations. Evoked in dystopic depictions is the foundational and collective iconic trauma event that has haunted Europe – the Jewish Holocaust during World War II. In doing so, Tsiolkas offers a cautionary tale, written to Australia, about haunting historical spectres and the repetition of injustices. The Europe that the protagonist Isaac traverses is hellish and his devolution into a vampiric monster signals excess, consumption, and decay in a globalised and haunted Europe after 9/11.
In Chapter 4 “Apocalypse Now: The Unknown Terrorist by Richard Flanagan,” I return to an exploration of Sydney caught in the matrix of traumas after 9/11. The city is depicted as a bleak, ruinous, and dangerously oppressive place that destroys disenfranchised and vulnerable outliers. The narrative employs speculative fiction tropes to critique post-9/11 paranoia around terrorism and the Islamic Other. Kings Cross stripper the Doll is wrongfully depicted as a terrorist, and the narrative follows her dangerous and clandestine travels through an increasingly menacing and apocalyptic terrain. I read this novel as a contemporary allegory of post-9/11 Australian identity. Set in 2006, the novel depicts a world of perceived economic and global catastrophe, where the shadow of 9/11 is palpable, and the supposed threat of terrorism is as omnipresent as the danger of global climate change. Flanagan’s Sydney is beset with paranoia and hurtling towards apocalypse, inflamed by media-provoked anxieties. As the narrative advances, the apocalyptic imagery becomes increasingly nightmarish for the protagonist. The cityscape evinces haunting reminders of Australia’s xenophobic and violent past and problematic present. The media representation of Doll as a terrorist moves towards constructions of the monstrous, as she is pronounced a national threat. This chapter follows Doll in her clandestine journey across Sydney and explores the cultural fears and anxieties she embodies. Notions of monstrosity appear in the novel in relation to deviance, terror, and the alien and Islamic Other. Monsters appear in culturally tumultuous times, and I argue that Doll is an iteration of the modern-day creatures that haunt the post-9/11 city, while also representing Australia’s horrific history of colonial atrocities.

Chapter 5, “Dead City, Fortress City: Underground by Andrew McGahan,” explores the fifth and final novel in my corpus. It adopts the style of speculative fiction in its exploration of identity, truth, freedom, and conspiracy in the face of oppressive government. Published six years after 9/11 but set in an imagined dystopic future more than a decade later, this novel features cities in the grip of terrorism panic. As a result of the collapse of the twin towers and after Canberra is destroyed in an apparent terrorist attack, an oppressive ultra-right-wing nationalist government beholden to America, has taken control of Australia. The novel follows Leo James, the brother of the fictional Prime Minister, who is repeatedly kidnapped and smuggled around the country. The cities in the novel are imbued with apocalyptic dread
and environmental threat as McGahan reveals an Australia haunted not only by 9/11 but by its own historical and ongoing injustices. Like Flanagan, McGahan examines a volatile contemporary urban Australian identity, which has itself become an outpost of a nationalistic and imperialistic America. This society is contending with cultural and political hysteria, as well its own history of trauma and oppression. As the narrative moves across the Australian landscape, McGahan’s imagined future is apocalyptic, dystopic, and circumscribed by heavy government surveillance. Large sections of multicultural societies, particularly Muslims, are racially and religiously profiled, and sequestered in ethnic ghettos within Sydney and Melbourne. Like Flanagan, McGahan adopts a worst-case scenario approach to his depiction of post-9/11 Australia, where urban societies are caught in cycles of fear, trauma, and division. McGahan’s landscapes resonate with impending and ongoing catastrophe in the depiction of dead cities and evocations of the monstrous. I read this novel as a prescient political warning of what can happen if post-9/11 cultural anxieties and hyperbolic xenophobia are inflamed to maximum effect.

My Afterword answers the questions posed by my explorations of trauma and apocalypse in relation to urbanism and 9/11. To conclude, I discuss how the trauma of 9/11 resonates nearly two decades later in divisive politics and polarised societies, as well as the rise of white nationalist terrorism. I interrogate the possibility of resilience after trauma in the post-9/11 world and what this means for Australian identity in an international context. In relation to apocalypse, I explain how the current epoch of populism, insularity, and nativist governments has led to an era of post-truth politics and diametrically opposed partisan views, where there can be no centre. Looking to cultural theories and theories of urbanism, I explore whether a more inclusive urban Australian identity after 9/11 is possible.
Part A

Traumatic Topographies: The Post-9/11 City and the Damaged Psyche
Chapter 1
The Malignant City: *Breath* by Tim Winton

Tim Winton’s *Breath* (2008) is a complex and evocative narrative about trauma, youth, identity, and surfing, set amidst the beauty of the coastal Western Australian landscape. Read in relation to Australian identity, this novel offers a vivid exploration of the pervasive and intrusive traumatic force of the transnational city in post-9/11 Australia. This chapter is a multi-directional reading of *Breath* that incorporates temporality, spatiality, and scale. My reason for spatialising time in such a way and injecting the temporal into the narrated landscapes in *Breath* is for the sake of offering a new reading of the movements of Australian urban trauma. Adopting an Australian perspective in relation to 9/11, I explore how Australian identity is comprised of an intricate and dynamic network of traumas, including urban trauma, which are incorporated into, and projected onto, a problematic Australian landscape. These traumas operate in what Michael Rothberg describes as a multidimensional matrix, in which various traumas circulate in concert, rather than independently or competitively.\(^1\) Rothberg’s approach to trauma and memory is multidirectional, multicultural, and cumulative, bringing together diverse historical elements of memory which in turn may offer new articulations of historical atrocities and suffering. This inclusive approach replaces outmoded, historically hierarchical, totalising ideas of “competitive memory,” or memory as “a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources” where one event, such as the Holocaust, stands out as a singular or uniquely devastating moment. Rothberg’s model allows for the seemingly incompatible legacies of slavery or colonialism, for example, to be studied alongside the Nazi genocide, enabling wider discussion of historical trauma.\(^2\) I apply Rothberg’s approach to *Breath* to reveal how collective memories work in tandem with scalar explorations of trauma, which in turn, are diverse spatially, temporally, and culturally. I argue that collective memory resides alongside the individual

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memory in a matrix of trauma. These layers of trauma operate as constellations which include historical and haunting legacies of settler colonial violence, and transnational traumas brought in via migration, as well as collective, mass-mediated traumas such as 9/11. Borrowing from Robert Dixon’s formulations of scale in relation to national literatures and the world, I argue that these traumas are not hierarchical, but rather, mosaics of “equal but overlapping scales.” Dixon’s model builds upon Neil Brenner’s earlier concept of “unfolding, multiple geographical scales” that are interrelated, multifaceted and multigographical spaces. Brenner’s theorisation of space as dynamic and conflicted restructures outmoded totalising, hierarchical ideas of the global which favoured American hegemony. Brenner argues that space, or what was formerly thought of as “the global,” comprises scales such as “national states, regions, cities, localities” and so on.

Adopting this scalar approach in relation to spatiality, I begin my study at the smaller, local sites in *Breath*, tracing the constellations of trauma in the matrix. Initially, these traumas are projected outward in their movements from the Australian landscape of the novel to the transnational city and the large-scale site of the world. Although the cycles of trauma are infinite, in a novel, as John Hegglund explains, apprehension of the scalar movements of trauma usually begins and ends with the local. Examining the literary geography of modern fiction, Hegglund claims that novels are like maps, and that to pull back from the “the local, particular and immediate” in an attempt at an overview results in “disorienting or self-conscious ways” of shifting the narrative into a new, disjunctive context. In other words, the imagination is necessarily geographic and Hegglund views it in terms of “scales of space” that embark from and terminate at the particular. Hegglund’s theories of space are especially useful here, because they marry the small-scale details of narrative aesthetics with the macro-scale view of world geography. Thus, my explorations of local culture,

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identity, and space, also seek to reveal the overarching transnational superstructures that potentially criss-cross the planet. I posit that infinite circuits of trauma haunt the novel from local sites to larger sites in unifying transnational structures.

Against the backdrop of the mediated global trauma of 9/11, the landscapes in *Breath* are beset with their own constellations of historical traumas as well as imported collective and individual traumas. Utilising Rothberg’s model, I argue that Winton’s narrative incorporates the cyclical ways in which inter-cultural and inter-generational trauma, encroach upon and impact parochial Australian lives. What I call “the American city” here is not a simple descriptive term, but a generalised theoretical concept that refers to complex circuits of historical trauma. Although geographically distant, this transnational American city exerts a far-reaching influence upon Australia, resonating on local and individual registers. This American city is not the originator of trauma, but rather, a locus for cycles of trauma at moments in time within the novel, which resonates with its own circuits of historical and contemporary trauma. As a case in point, at the commencement of the novel, is the fleeting image of the twin towers repeatedly collapsing on a computer screensaver, which foreshadows the way in which international cycles of trauma will impact the Australian landscape later in the narrative. New York itself is haunted by historical traumas that are causally linked to 9/11. These atrocities date back at least to the Gulf War in the Middle East in the early 1990s. These circuits of trauma disrupt and circumscribe inherently conflicted Australian identities.

Although the majority of the narrative takes place primarily in a country town, this town is constantly overshadowed by the influence of the American city. Winton explores life in the town of Sawyer, a small, exhausted working-class logging village built around a sawmill, near the larger regional centre of Angelus. Angelus is based on Albany, the actual town where Winton spent his teenage years, located approximately 418 kilometres southeast of Perth. It is a recurring landscape which also features in Winton’s earlier works, including *Shallows* (1984) and *The Turning* (2005).8 The narrative is focalised from the perspective of Bruce Pike

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(Pikelet), a middle-aged paramedic existing on the social margins, deeply shaped and scarred by events of his childhood in the 1970s. Moving from the opening urban setting of Perth, Western Australia, the long development of the narrative occurs in flashback, with the first half of the story exploring the small-scale site of the local, Pike’s boyhood with his friend and nemesis, Ivan Loon (Loonie), filled with sublimity in the surf. A few years later, they meet Billy Sanderson (Sando), a thirty-six-year-old professional surfer, originally an Australian from Melbourne who has spent much of his adult life abroad, who mentors the younger boys. As an adult, Pike is a broken man, hiding latent unresolved trauma. Alienated and dissatisfied, this lost, laconic man in the narrative present is a jarring contrast with the vibrant Pikelet of the seemingly endless summers of his youth. The second half of the narrative reveals the events that have led to Pike’s emotional breakdown and unhappy adulthood. It explores the transmission and circular movement of this trauma for Pike and the various transnational traumas that occur in the novel. As Pike’s friendship with Loon and Sando dissolves, he becomes tainted by a sexual relationship with Sando’s twenty-five-year-old American wife Eva when he is only fifteen. Eva, a champion skier now maimed with a permanent limp, is bitter and unhappy. She leads Pike into the dangerous terrain of erotic asphyxiation in order to reach new sexual heights and to escape the boredom of her lonely life.

_Breath_ is not only a book about the corruption of innocence by risk, sublimity, extremity, and trauma, but also about the dislocation of identity. As part of a network of trauma, the individual and collective layers of suffering in the novel can be read as a metaphor for the disrupted Australian identity, an identity already grappling with inherent and imported traumas. The disrupted self, or ruptured identity, outlined by Roger Luckhurst in _The Trauma Question_, as part of the wider tradition of trauma theory is pertinent in relation to the intercultural trauma and sexual and emotional damage that occurs to Pike. The urban incursions from Los Angeles, San Francisco, the west coast of America, and Southeast Asia, impact the Western Australian coastal town. Structurally, this is pre-empted by the incursion of New York City upon Perth in the seemingly endless and repeated images of the collapsing towers.

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9 For the purpose of differentiating the flashbacks in _Breath_ from the novel’s present, I will refer to the adult protagonist as Pike and the young adolescent protagonist in flashback as Pikelet, the nickname used by his friends.
Breath exemplifies the effect of the traumatised American city upon Australian identity, the international scale upon the national, the regional, and the local. This occurs in the novel via the disruption of collective trauma of 9/11 and is mirrored in the later incursion of the urban hippie counter-culture prevalent in The Summer of Love (1967), which incorporated elements from American culture and Southeast Asian culture, as a protest against the Vietnam War. This mirrors the corruption of Australian identity and Southeast Asian cultures by urban (West Coast) American values. People in this West Coast American culture “made love and drank hard and dropped acid.”¹⁰ It was a time of idealism, and self-discovery. As the novel unfolds however, elements of the American city are depicted as perilous and predatory. This is juxtaposed with the seemingly unsullied innocence of Western Australian country town life, which is ultimately infected by this transnational culture of urban trauma, as well as the frontier of Southeast Asia. Pikelet’s figurative and literal seductions at the hands of Sando with surfing in increasingly dangerous conditions, and Eva engaging in increasingly dangerous sex, leave him psychologically wounded and irreparably damaged.

Repetition, Memory, and Trauma

Breath is a trauma novel which imaginatively elucidates and aestheticises suffering. Richard Gray and Roger Luckhurst posit that the trauma novel is a literary concept based on clinical definitions. In After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11, Gray refers to Jenny Edkins’ explication of “trauma time”¹¹ as a period marked by the endless repetition of painful memories with no foreseeable end.¹² Breath is a narrative about dismantled subjectivity that is engulfed and irrevocably damaged by trauma, resulting in the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Pike exhibits. Luckhurst links trauma with the city causally and incorporates a notion of deep-seated repression in the manifestation of PTSD and how it has come to


¹¹ Jenny Edkins, Trauma and the Memory of Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 233.

“pervade the understanding of subjectivity and experience in the advanced industrial world.” He builds on Cathy Caruth’s definition of PTSD as a pathology:

which consists, rather solely in the structure of experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it.

Luckhurst extrapolates from Caruth’s clinical definition of trauma’s temporality to posit a literary conception of temporality in the trauma novel. Thus, in Breath, the concept of belatedness is revealed in the way temporality as well as topography frame the narrative movement of trauma. In the unfolding development of Pike’s tormented memories, there is a nostalgic sense of looking back to where his unconscious traumatic experience is latently embedded. This brings to mind Caruth’s iteration of trauma as a timeless photographic negative which is located somewhere in the brain and which persistently reprints itself onto consciousness. The repetitive notion of the imprint of time is reflected in an intrusive past, which haunts Pike’s present in terms of recurring painful dreams and memories. His splintered psyche is mirrored in the chronology of the narrative, where the present is interrupted with comprehensive flashbacks to Pikelet’s adolescence when the trauma occurred.

This painful nostalgia is tainted with the regret of a lifetime of pain. At the beginning of the novel, jaded and weary, Pike attends the scene of a young man’s death by accidental hanging. The bereaved mother has tidied up the scene and cleaned the body, but Pike senses what has happened: “Let’s just say I’ve seen a few things in my time. Honestly, I couldn’t begin to tell you,” he explains (4). Later, when his colleague Jodie asks how he can possibly know it was not intentional, Pike refuses to give a straight answer: “Maybe another

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14 Cathy Caruth, Trauma: Explorations in Memory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4.
15 Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 17.
time,” he replies (8). Immediately after that, he dreams he is drowning. The notion of belatedness here gestures to the embedded trauma Pike is experiencing as he reflects on a lifetime of psychological torment. When Pike realises his fears, there is unresolved trauma in the conflated and disturbing memories of Eva, which are marred by the indelible images of erotic asphyxiation:

I hated it … I hated the evil, crinkly sound of the bag and the smeary film of her breath inside it. I came to hate all masks and hoods and drawn faces without features and in retrospect I see that I probably hated Eva as well. (232-233)

Teenaged Pikelet’s lingering loathing hints at the source of enacted sexual trauma and its belated effects on the adult Pike. He has substance abuse issues and an inability to sleep, to look after himself, or to have healthy social interactions with people. Pike is unable to connect with his family, grieve for his father’s death, finish his education, or partake in a healthy, functional sexual relationship. Withdrawn and tormented, he fails to connect with his wife Grace (who later divorces him), or with his daughters.

Returning to the novel’s localised site of individual trauma in the first scene, the body of Aaron, the hanged young man in Perth, is an ominous foreshadowing of the later general, collective, transnational scales of trauma. The hanging body is a transnational symbol of trauma, evoking historical and contemporary atrocities. It alludes to state-sanctioned punishment, as well as lynchings. Billie Holliday’s haunting “Strange Fruit” (1939) was a protest song that utilised the image of the African-American black body hanging from the poplar trees after Ku Klux Klan lynchings in the American south. The narrative therefore commences with two complex parallel images: one individual, though a transnational symbol – the hanging body – and the other the fall of the twin towers, a transnational node in a larger circuit of trauma. Aaron’s death and his mother June’s shock are juxtaposed with this collective transnational trauma of recurring images of the imploding buildings in New

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York on a screensaver in a suburban house. Similar to Caruth’s photographic negative that repeatedly reprints itself onto consciousness, the “screensaver cycle of the twin towers endlessly falling” (5) signals the endless incursions of transnational urban trauma into the suburban Australian space of the living room in a “tree-lined boulevard” (1). These concurrent images of trauma are not binaries of personal and global that imprint upon one another, but rather, are complexly interactive and dynamic scales. They mirror the intricate network of emotional, sexual, and psychological trauma that Pike has experienced at the hands of the equally complicated and traumatised Eva.

The fall of the twin towers as an international image of urban devastation seeped into Australian consciousness with the ubiquitous nature of the media, the Internet, and the repeated, unlimited twenty-four-hour news broadcasts. The repetitive screensaver evokes these mediated reports of the actual event in “real time,” but operates with the belated, recurring trait of trauma time, where “every moment could be replayed, slowed down, speeded up, put in freeze frame …[and] … placed under obsessive, compulsive scrutiny.”17 For Gray, the traumatic moment became iconic through this media replication and obsession. The “sight of the World Trade Centre towers imploding on themselves in quick succession” was followed by “relentless replays of the planes crashing into the towers, the people jumping from the burning buildings, and the looks of horror on the faces of the rubble-coated survivors.”18 Some have argued that these mediated repetitions conjured other traumas, as well as evoking the sheer vulnerability of imminent mortality in a way that only a few other events could (aside from genocidal holocaust and extreme natural disasters).19 What is more pertinent, however, is the way in which the technological visual repetitions of traumatic events “enfold the memory of the social into the affect of the personal.”20 The pervasive mood in the face of such repeated images is a sense of trauma on

17 Gray, After the Fall, 7.
19 Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg, In the Wake of 9/11, 94.
a transnational scale that is then projected onto the city and incorporated into the individual trauma of the hanged boy.

Although Pike surmises that the boy’s death is accidental, it is first thought to be suicide by his mother June, and Pike’s colleague Jodie. This idea of suicide in relation to the twin towers is highly symbolic in terms of scale and the global. In “Requiem for the Twin Towers,” Jean Baudrillard confirms the fragility of the totalising concept of the global during 9/11. He claims that the crumbling skyscrapers were a “major symbolic event” with their implosion being “an act of suicide in response to the suicide of the suicide planes.” Thus weighed down by the global significance of the moment, the World Trade Centre tumbled, attesting to their collapse as global signifiers. The question of globalisation arises in relation to how media representations can allow for understanding at global, local and interpersonal levels – and the way in which these levels interact. The answer lies in scalar images of trauma. Taking Baudrillard’s anthropomorphic image of buildings committing suicide, alongside Aaron’s accidental hanging in the novel, and conceding that trauma is actually an endless cycle, one can seek to make order by tracing the patterns of suffering. The symbolic internalisation of (repetitive) collective global trauma is an example of the way trauma may be traced from the small-scale individual and localised sites before moving to larger scales, in this case the city-region scale of Perth, and then returning again to the small site of the individual Pike. Returning to the methodology of Luckhurst, adapted to Breath, the foreshadowing of the global incursion upon individualised trauma is thus concurrent with the inter-cultural trauma inflicted upon the Western Australian coastal town and the corruption of identity, as well as repetition of Pike’s traumatic symptoms, such as recurring nightmares of asphyxiation. This scalar movement has historical, political, and cultural repercussions for Australian subjectivity after 9/11.

When read through the theoretical lens of trauma theory, Pike’s symptoms correlate to PTSD. Synthesizing the work of Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth, Luckhurst cites seemingly paradoxical sets of cluster symptoms which I have taken and adapted to the novel here. The

first cluster symptom relates again to the idea of belatedness and manifests when traumatic experience is re-lived and re-experienced in haunting and persistent flashbacks or re-occurring dreams that mimic the original trauma and intrude on the present. The second symptom is strangely the opposite of the first, in that it involves an “avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma,” such as an aversion of feelings or thoughts associated with the trauma, as well as, an emotional numbing or amnesia in regard to the traumatic event. The third set of symptoms is increased arousal or hyper vigilance or a loss of controlled response. Pike suspects Aaron’s death may have been the result of erotic asphyxiation because he recognises the signs and the paraphernalia. The room “smells of pot and urine,” the mother has obviously dressed him, and there are “ligature marks on his neck and older bruises around them” (3). While Jodie is palpably upset by this scene of the young man’s demise, Pike is numb and perfunctory (exhibiting the second set of cluster symptoms), just “going through the motions” (3). Later, in the ambulance, Pike nonchalantly tells Jodie, “Yeah, it’s tough. But that was no suicide” (7).

Pike as an individual, exhibits symptoms of PTSD throughout the novel. He is plagued by flashbacks and repeated nightmares about suffocation that mimic his sexual and psychological trauma. He is manic and unlikeable, “alert and tingly with dread” (2) and thriving on the anxiety of his job as an ambulance paramedic. Friendless at work, his young female co-worker Jodie deems him “arrogant, aloof, sexist, bad communicator, gung-ho” (6). Pike’s hypervigilance throughout his adult life makes him emotionally desensitised, manifest in his reticence to express himself to colleagues, family members, and potential partners. Pike rationalises this to himself: “Nobody wants to be creepy. I was careful, always backing off. And somehow, somewhere along the track, I went numb” (251). He maintains this hypervigilant fear and reticence around his daughters, failing to truly express himself or to communicate the source of his pain. He looks back with regret, remarking that “They’re adults now yet I’m still vigilant, careful not to startle, because there’s been so much damage, too much shame” (265).

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22 Luckhurst, The Trauma Question, 1.
When Pike has a nightmare toward the end of the first chapter (after Aaron’s death and the image of 9/11), the reader is given a glimpse into his fractured psyche as well as the possible root of his problematic personality. As Luckhurst states, “trauma disrupts memory and therefore identity in peculiar ways.”

In the dream, he is disassociated, split into two identities as both victim and potential saviour. The aesthetics of the trauma novel bridge the clinical and the literary, particularly with regards to how trauma fragments memory, as Caruth and Luckhurst note. Pike sees himself deep in the ocean in the final stages of asphyxiation by drowning, careening “too long through the pounding submarine mist. End over end in my caul of bubbles until the turbulence is gone” (8). Pike views his lifeless self, “hanging limp in a faint green light while all the heat ebbs from my chest and the life begins to leave out of me” (8). Suddenly there is hope, “a white flash from above. Someone at the surface, swimming down. Someone to pull me up, drag me clear, blow air into me hot as blood” (8), but the realisation that this someone is himself is jarring, frustrating, and disappointing. He realises that it is his “own face peering through the gloom, hesitating an arm’s length away, as if uncertain of how to proceed” (8). The rescuer-self attempts to communicate with Pike’s drowning-self, but to no avail. The unspeakable or the unexplainable in the dream attests to the way in which traumatised individuals are unable to express their suffering because they “carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess.”

Repetition and verbal impotence are significant results of trauma which, for Jacques Derrida, speaking in relation to 9/11, signifies verbal impotence in the face of horror, whereby writers and observers are reduced to repeated incantations and mere repetitions of facts. Likewise, Pike’s nightmare is an elucidation of psychological pain, the element of inexpressibility corresponding with Elaine Scarry’s work on the body and physical pain, which actively destroys or unmakes language, reducing the victims to non-verbal articulations in the form of cries and moans. The dream attests to more than just existential crisis or fear of death by drowning. With trauma operating on the localised site of his body, Pike attempts to

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23 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 1.
24 Caruth, *Trauma*, 5.
speak, yet his dream-self is unable to understand what is uttered because the horror of his psychological trauma is so impossible to articulate.

Following this nightmare, Pike awakes on his sofa in a dishevelled flat. The anxious, suffocating mood of the dream, the lack of resolution, and the drowning imagery, all gesture not only to unresolved sexual trauma regarding asphyxia, coupled with his fear of drowning in the surf, but also to Pike’s disassociation. Not only is he unable to communicate with his deeper psyche, he is unable to save or heal himself. Pike’s nightmare is what Luckhurst would call psycho-somatic disturbance in which trauma is re-experienced and relived. Winton provides the source of Pike’s trauma through long narrative recollections, through which the reader comes to understand what has deeply scarred and informed Pike’s splintered identity. He is plagued by similar recurring nightmares throughout the novel. In another dream, as a young man, he witnesses his own demise:

I only remember the dream.
I was deep ... plummeting, a projectile. When it comes rushing at me, black as death, the reef is shot full of holes and I slam into one, headlong.
Next, I see myself, from outside my flailing, panicked body.
Headfirst. Wedged in the rock. While my lungs turn to sponge and the ocean inside me flickers with cruel light.
Drowning.
Drowning.
Fighting it.
But Drowning. (149)

Again, the narrative returns to the localised, small-scale site of individual trauma. This belated re-experience or flashback of trauma manifests in the dream as asphyxia and concludes with the finality of death by drowning. Pike’s recurring nightmares, particularly the first one, in conjunction with Aaron’s hanging death and the repetitive image of plummeting skyscrapers on 9/11, follow a pattern, a circuit to and from the local and the global, with the city as a traumatic setting, imbuing the novel with a tragic sense of dread. It
is only later, as the narrative develops, that we understand the significance of Pike’s dream, with its images of choking and drowning, and how his nightmares manifest the residual effects of life-long trauma Pike suffers as a result of his interactions with both Eva and Sando during his teenage years.

**Trauma as Chronotope and the Spatialisation of Time**

As the transnational incursion from the city to the country town in *Breath* is both spatial and temporal in nature, Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope is useful in order to explore transmissions of trauma and the relationship of trauma to the city and beyond. The chronotope is often a contested site and includes struggles over power, as well as the production of distinctive time-spaces.²⁷ The chronotope attests to the belief that time and space are inseparable, and their unity allows the simultaneous reading of historical and geographical settings to offer an interpretation for the trauma and alienation of the characters. In *Breath*, the movement and transmission of trauma around the literary space of the novel is through these chronotopes. Bakhtin formulated the chronotope in the 1920s and used it in order “to designate the spatio-temporal categories embedded within a text or other cultural artefact.”²⁸ Literally translated as time-space, a chronotope lies at the nexus between history and geography. Influenced by the revolutionising physics of Albert Einstein, among others, the chronotope was adopted by literary, historical, and cultural studies. Space in this case is more than technical constructions or fixed locations of places, events, and people located on the Earth’s surface and represented in maps. Rather the use of space here incorporates the complex interplay of power, knowledge, and geography. Many writers have argued that the nineteenth century was the “epoch of time,” and the twentieth century the “epoch of space,” and that movement from modern to postmodern has seen a shift of emphasis from time to space.²⁹ For the purposes of this argument, the chronotope is utilised in relation to trauma because it encapsulates the integration of time and a mutable concept

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of space, where “space is not fixed or frozen ground on which events take place or processes leave their marks.”

The unique feature of the trauma novel is the way it utilises and subverts time in the form of memory. Temporality, therefore, is paramount to trauma novels such as Breath and is foregrounded in its episodic nature and disrupted chronologies. Added to these aspects are vivid depictions of place in relation to identity. As well as time, the chronotope instils the impetus to utilise notions of place and landscape, all of which are imperative to the narrative. John Pizer elucidates these aspects of Bakhtin’s chronotope as a “dialectical interaction ... between temporal plenitude and concrete localised spatiality.” For Bakhtin, space is conflated with identity, as he argued that time and space are inseparable narrative entities that form a united whole because “time ... thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.” It is this intersection between time and space that Bakhtin characterises as the chronotope, and it is at this juncture, I argue, that trauma resides. Borrowing from Bakhtin’s impulse to conflate space with identity, I read the city as a spatio-temporal locus for identity, albeit one that is already traumatised and conflicted.

This construction of the chronotope also necessitates transnational contextualisation as part of the network of trauma, which is imperative to Breath, not only because some central characters are from abroad and many concerns in the novel are transnational, but more significantly because the novel is an exploration of the circular movements of trauma, foreshadowed in the opening scene of the book and mirrored throughout. The localised trauma of the hanged young man in Perth moves outwards toward the larger global images of 9/11 and back again to the local site of individual anguish represented by Pike’s nightmare. On another level, however, this transnational context and movement of trauma is vital because of what it says about Australian identity and how it is impacted by its

movement towards and away from the larger, often traumatic influence of urban American values. The chronotope coupled with the multidimensional matrix of trauma are useful tropes to chart these traumas in terms of spatial and temporal conflations. This allows for the exploration of individualised as well as collective traumas as part of the matrix, or as Pizer claims, “the ability to enact cultural memory in its spatiotemporal (chronotopic) fullness at the local, regional level.”

As part of a multifaceted network of trauma, the childhood home and country town of Pikelet’s adolescence are chronotopes, specified conflations of time and place as well as sites for the inception and transmission of trauma. These chronotopes are small-scale, localised sites of trauma signifying an insular Australian identity of the late 1960s and 1970s, caught between its established history with Britain and other global leanings towards America and Asia. The hippie youth culture that Eva and Sando espouse comes to Australia by way of America as part of the protest movement against the Vietnam War. Surfing culture is also imbricated in transnational circuits, originating in pre-colonial Hawaii and other Pacific islands, adopted by American West Coast culture, and then transmitted to the youth culture in Australia. Living in a weatherboard house in Sawyer, Pikelet is an outsider because his older parents were English migrants that he felt “were definitely of a different order to the parents of other kids … their singularity marked me out somehow” (14). Pikelet dwells on the lonely social fringes in his small town, alienated from his parents: “I was a lone child and solitary by nature. Somewhere along the way I became aware that my parents were old people with codgers’ interests” (13). This idea of the generational divide aligns the United Kingdom with the past, and America with a more youthful, vibrant culture. Pike’s parents are set in their British ways, which they bought with them from the Old World. Although not quite “grandparent age,” Pikelet concedes that he was embarrassed by their old-fashioned interests: his parents “pottered about with their vegetables and poultry” (13-14). They smoked their own fish, mended and embroidered. “Of an evening they listened to the radio, or the wireless, as they called it” (14). Instead of a shared love of football or cricket, which were the primary interests of his town, Pikelet grew up with tales of “the Blitz and … all night bombing raids” (11). His father was a “greengrocer’s boy from a village in Kent,” (13).
reticent teetotaller who did not partake in Sawyer’s robust masculine drinking culture, but instead enjoyed a quiet life with his wife in the domestic sphere. Perhaps the starkest marker of his parents’ Englishness for Pikelet, who himself had an overriding, longing for the sea, is that his parents had an aversion to water and could not swim, which embarrassed him (13).

Living with his antiquated British parents, prior to the transnational, urban incursion by Sando and Eva, Pikelet is a lonely boy, with a disaffected and alienated life. This small, quiet, nondescript sawmill town is buffered from the outside world by ocean and forest. Winton depicts the inhabitants of Sawyer as inward looking, regimented and isolated, fearing the sea and ambivalent or uninterested in the forest. Pikelet reflects on the predictable, small, well-travelled spatial trajectories of the townsfolk: “In Sawyer you kept to the mill, the town, the river” (12). Pikelet befriends Loonie, a troubled young man, and another compulsive outsider. Loonie was fearless, “greedy about risk.” (38) Bored in the prosaic country town, Loonie seeks subversive thrills and “any game would do as long as it was dangerous” (38). In an effort to escape this isolation, as well as the predictable banality of small-town life, and emboldened by Loonie’s indifference to authority, Pike begins to defy his father’s wishes by swimming in dangerous waters with his friend. The two teenagers begin to compete in order to test their endurance and bravery. They dare themselves to hold their breath underwater for as long as they can as well as to flirt with danger in the surf.

Pikelet and Loonie’s lives change when they meet Sando. Like the boys, Sando is also dislocated, a damaged man. Pikelet notes that he was “quite unlike other men we knew ... He was often aloof, and he could be fickle. At times there was a palpable restraint in his manner, a sense that he could say a good deal more than he did” (71-72). Despite his sporadic interest in the boys, Sando becomes a mentor and father figure to Pikelet and Loonie, leading them towards extreme forms of recklessness in the ocean, in an attempt to shirk the ordinariness of their lives in “tiny and static and insignificant” Sawyer (44). Lacking in parental affection and attention, and indifferent to and detached from his own father, a subdued and predictable man, Pikelet is instantly drawn to Sando, who brings with him to working-class Sawyer and Angelus the embodied glamour, untrammelled possibilities, and mysteries of the outside world. To Pike, Sando’s body was a transnational symbol, a
chronotope that represented the larger-scale global aspirations of Australia in the late 1960s and 1970s:

All my attention was on Sando ... I loved being around that huge, bearded, coiled-up presence. His body was a map of where he’d been. He had great bumps on his knees and feet from old-school surfing, his forearms were pulpy with reef-scars and years of sun had bleached his hair and beard. He was, for us, a delicious enigma. He never quite did what we might expect him to do and there wasn’t a man in Sawyer or Angelus in his league. (72-73)

Sando exemplifies the circular transmission of trauma because he is born in Melbourne, travels abroad, then returns to Angelus. His presence in the novel gestures toward transnational impulses, which seem aspirational to the naïve Loonie and Pike, but which devolve into secretive, odious, and ultimately destructive influences on the boys. Although never stated explicitly, it is implied that Sando augments his personal fortune via illegal international importation of drugs. Certainly, he offers the under-aged teens alcohol, as well as illicit drugs such as hashish. Sando is menacingly ambivalent and at times dismissive toward the impressionable youths. He is manipulative and enjoys pitting Pikelet and Loonie against each other, fostering an animosity and rivalry that destroys their friendship halfway through the narrative. Sando also encourages a taste for an extreme form of surfing in the adolescents, as their thirst for risk increases, an addiction to adrenalin and physical endurance in the face of overriding peril.

Having met his American wife in Hawaii, Sando and Eva spent their early years together travelling between sea and snowfields, San Francisco, the surf in Hawaii, and the snow in New Hampshire (216-217). Eva is originally from Salt Lake City, and likely from a wealthy family in Mormon-dominated Utah. Mormonism is significant here as a unique transnational signifier, “an avatar of a discernibly American hybrid of Christianity and Nationalist
mythology.” 

Like Sando, Eva has a taste for dangerous thrills. She had been an extreme skier and had “lived at the radical margin of her own sport” (209) until an accident crushes her knee and impairs her, leaving her with a permanent limp coupled with perpetual pain and psychological trauma. To ameliorate Eva’s frustrations and to begin a new life, Sando brings her as far away from the snow as possible, to remote, coastal Western Australia, where they live comfortably on her trust fund money. As a result, the town of Angelus is figured as a place of comparative sophistication, what Nicholas Birns calls, “the ‘global’ pole of the novel’s binaries, opposed to the more local and secure Sawyer.”

Perhaps the most confronting and poignant transmission of individual trauma, which echoes throughout the novel, is the psychological trauma Pikelet incurs as a result of his encounters with Eva. As a woman in her mid-twenties, she not only seduces fifteen-year-old Pikelet but terrorises him with her taste for erotic asphyxia. As a wounded adult reflecting back on the inception of this trauma, Pike claims:

> For a long and ruinous period of my later life I raged against Eva Sanderson, even as I grieved for her. In the spirit of the times I held her morally accountable for all my grown-up troubles. (208-209)

The grown-up troubles Pike refers to are myriad, hindering him psychologically and physically, and incapacitating him socially. Eva is also traumatised and in addition to the physical trauma of her damaged body, she brings with her cycles of unspoken psychological trauma. The reader, however, is never privy to Eva’s psychological processes, a criticism levelled at Winton’s allegedly flat rendering of female characters. She arrives in Angelus a defeated woman, living in constant pain after various failed knee surgeries. She self-

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medicates with a cocktail of prescription painkillers, alcohol, and hashish. Winton hints at the source of her trauma and her penchant for erotic asphyxiation when she reminisces about her glory days as a professional skier:

Being airborne. Sky and snow the same colour. Her skis a defiant cross against the milky blur.

When she spoke about those ghostly, quiet moments she wasn’t bitter or wistful, but the awe in her voice unnerved me.

I miss being afraid, she said. That’s the honest truth. (220)

Focalised only through Pikelet’s perspective, Eva is often depicted in disquieting terms. Pike depicts her as a menacing, predatory, yet tormented subject with “the pills, the limp, those bleak moods” (155). He also refers to her as “Sando’s prickly wife” (137) and later as “thwarted” (156). It is trauma and alienation which bring Eva and Pikelet together.

Additionally, Southeast Asia figures prominently in the narrative as a source of both personal and transnational trauma. Without telling Pikelet, who is later devastated, Sando takes Loonie with him to Indonesia on what is ostensibly a surfing trip, but more likely undertaken for drug-related business activities. This happens after an idyllic summer when Pikelet had Sando all to himself, as Loonie was working and Eva was in the United States for another knee surgery. When Eva returns, she is furious, and a sense of betrayal propels Eva and Pikelet together: “Well here we are Pikelet. We’re both abandoned,” she says (160).

Additionally, however, Southeast Asia is also the unseen site of colonial, transnational trauma for both Australia and the United States, as both nations are involved in regional wars and implicated in the aftermath. Vietnam intrudes into Australian small-town life, even after the American war there is over:

We could have been staying back at school as army cadets, learning to fire mortars and machine-guns, to lay booby traps and to kill strangers in hand-to-hand combat ... in preparation for a manhood that could barely credit the end of the war in Vietnam. Sando
appealed to one set of boyish fantasies and the state exploited others. (106)

When Sando and Loonie take another trip to Southeast Asia, Eva finally seduces Pikelet. As their sexual relationship develops, he becomes more obsessed with her, his sexual inexperience leaving him susceptible to precarious suggestions as she seeks to add more danger to the already transgressive relationship, and coerces him into sexual asphyxia, which she calls “a game we can play” (221). As she pulls the sexual paraphernalia out of the cupboard, the strap with a collar and a pink cellophane bag (222), Pikelet talks about “a falling sensation to the pit of my guts” (222). This falling sensation calls to mind the opening scene of collective urban trauma, with the iconic imagery of the collapsing towers on endless repetition as well as the recurring images of drowning in Pike’s nightmares. It compounds the mood of futility and the multiplicity of trauma in the novel. Pike’s anxiety and revulsion are palpable in this, as well as later sexual scenes, which are depicted with aggression and a gritty brutality, lacking tenderness, and with Pikelet often elucidating his disgust, fear, and helplessness during and after the act. A particular low point in the narrative and in the sexual relationship is the confronting moment when the game goes too far, and Eva loses consciousness. Pikelet apprehends the grotesque image, a traumatic chronotope – the lifeless figure of Eva that re-appears in painful memories and dreams later – passed out before him during sexual intercourse:

The bag came away with a hank of Eva’s hair. She was white-eyed and drenched. Her neck rippled with tiny tremors and I began to shout … Eva! Breathe! (226)

It is what Pike contemplates after this moment in hindsight that hints at the deep psychological impact of this relationship and the transmission of trauma from Eva’s damaged body and psyche to his, that infuses the latter part of the narrative and haunts Pike into adulthood:

I was fifteen years old and afraid. Sex was, once more, a confounding mystery. I didn’t understand love or even physiology. I was so far out
of my depth it frightens me now to recall it ... I didn’t understand how perilous Eva’s predicament was. (226-227)

What Pike expresses above is painful latent memories akin to Caruth’s clinical notion that builds upon Freud’s idea of painful repressed memories. In *Breath*, these memories are chronotopic images of Eva, and are too painful, incomprehensible or unassimilated for Pike to integrate, signalling the return of a haunting belated past. Pike’s fear demonstrates a painful realisation of formerly unrealised trauma, buried in painful memories. This childhood trauma and the realisation of the gravity of Eva’s predicament with suffocation, has haunted, tormented, and numbed Pike in his adult life. This transmission of trauma from Pikelet to Eva is underscored by the fact that erotic asphyxia itself, like surfing, is a complicated transnational phenomenon that originated in Japan, with ancient rope bondage as part of erotic play, and is often misconstrued as an urban American phenomenon.37 Birns explains erotic asphyxiation received its first major Western coverage in *The New York Times* in 1984 (which was dubbed “The Year of the Yuppy”) due to multiple deaths of wealthy suburban teenagers. Although this occurred in the 1980s, Birns makes the case that the inception of this ethos of erotic breath play, coupled with “the search for extreme erotic ecstasy,” was in fact “a further extension of the ethics of 1960s-70s sexual liberation, the same sense of erotic openness that made Eva’s affair with Pike more fashionable” than in other decades.38

Once again, we witness the intricate circuits of transnational trauma, exemplified here in a sexual practice derived from Japanese custom, mediated through urban American culture, and applied in small-town Australia.

Pikelet’s trauma is compounded further when Eva becomes pregnant. Although not stated directly, Pikelet is the likely father. By the time Eva gives birth, Pikelet’s own father is on his

37 The exact origins of this practice are unknown, see Nawashi Murakawa, *Kinbaku: The Art of Rope Bondage* (Cambridge: Kahboom Books, 2013)] but it came to prominence in Japan in the 1950s. The term *shibari* literally means to tie decoratively, and is not necessarily erotic (for example, it can be applied to tying flowers together into a bouquet) while the more formal term is *kinbaku* (“tight binding”), and is only applied to a sensual, sexual, and aesthetic type of bondage. See Master “K”, *The Beauty of Kinbaku: Or everything you ever wanted to know about Japanese erotic bondage when you suddenly realized you didn’t speak Japanese*, 2nd edition (USA: King Cat Ink, 2014).
deathbed in a hospital in Angelus after a freak sawmill accident where “half is face was mashed ... and he’d suffered a major skull fracture” (247). By the time Pikelet’s father has died, “Eva and the child were long gone,” presumably to the United States (247). Mr. Pike’s mutilated face is a chronotope that invokes Eva’s mask-like, lifeless visage and repeats Pikelet’s trauma and loss, hitting him “with a force that felt targeted and personal” (248). Unable to find true closeness with his mother, whom he had forsaken for Sando and Eva, Pike realises their bond is “a polite, undeclared failure ... [with] ... tenderness but no intimacy” (249). He muses that this perfunctory relationship is “a rehearsal for marriage” (249), alluding to his failed marriage with Grace. Pikelet spends the remainder of his young adulthood afraid of intimacy, a traumatised and haunted man. After his father dies, he has another bleak realisation which links to the idea of hypervigilance as a symptom of PTSD:

Death was everywhere – waiting, welling, undiminished. It would always be coming for me and for mine and I told myself I could no longer afford the thrill of courting it. (248)

This idea of being haunted by death is a sign of repressed trauma, relating to Freud’s and Caruth’s notions of trauma as repressed memory, whereby a belated return may evoke intense and personal suffering. This inter-generational and inter-cultural transmission of trauma, from Sando and Eva to Pikelet, accounts for the laconic, alienated, and broken adult, plagued by PTSD in the opening pages of the narrative, caught within layers of differing traumas. Winton characterises Pike’s life as thwarted, and Pike himself makes his own admission of being dysfunctional. He is estranged from his wife and daughters and spends a large portion of his adulthood avoiding physical intimacy through celibacy and eschewing psychological intimacy through a solitary existence. As a result, he recoils “into a watchful rectitude, anxious to please, risking nothing” (252). As a traumatised subject fleeing the painful memories of his past, Pike contracts inwards, attempting to bury his trauma in substance abuse and an itinerant lifestyle in caravans, cheap housing, and decrepit living quarters. At twenty years of age, he admits to having dropped out of university after having a “kind of breakdown ... only a few weeks from finishing my degree” (249). As an older man, he spends time in a “ward” (255) as a “voluntary patient” (256), which suggests long-term psychological struggles carried over from his adolescence with Loonie, Sando, and Eva.
The formulation of trauma as a chronotope within the larger multidimensional network of trauma in *Breath* explores the repetition of spatio-temporal aspects of suffering or circuits of infection as trauma moves around the literary landscape. Time and space are conflated in each chronotope of trauma, such as the young hanged man in Perth, Pike’s home, Sando’s home, Sando’s body, and Eva’s damaged body, and the large-scale sites of the falling towers in New York and back to the individualised suffering. During the 2006 Winter Olympics in Italy, Pike is in an airport where a skier’s accident is replayed on the large screens “time and again” (260). Like the repetitive screensaver of the opening pages, there is “something ghoulishly excitable” (260) in the recapitulation, “as if she might be forced to spend eternity doing nothing else but skitter ... downhill” (261). This repetition is echoed in “the miserable repeated franchises of the terminal” (261). Although images of the tumbling skier clearly evoke Eva’s accident and subsequent physical and psychological trauma, they also trigger painful memories of Pike’s childhood and recall the way his mind has replayed his own personal trauma. These chronotopes exemplify how moments in time and place comprise elements of Australian identity in *Breath*, a naïve burgeoning identity still grappling with its own layered historical trauma from British colonisation and cultural neo-colonisation and painful, collective memories, especially from Southeast Asia, the Pacific, and America.

At the same time, the damage inflicted on Pikelet by his relationship with Sando mirrors the sexual damage that he incurs from Eva. Pikelet and Loonie enter a dysfunctional relationship with Sando which is inappropriate, and which entails a strong homoerotic undercurrent. Sando exerted a cult-like influence on the young men and Pikelet himself reflects that: “So there we were, this unlikely trio. A select and peculiar club, a tiny circle of friends, a cult, no less” (124). Several descriptions of hero-worship borders on homoeroticism and cultic devotion. When Sando aims to forge a relationship with Pike, it is presented in provocative language of seduction. In forging a relationship with Pikelet, Sando insinuates, “We’ll go somewhere ... discreet” (82). When Pikelet asks if Sando means secret, Sando responds with “Yeah. I think you’re ready.” (82). This exchange is redolent of initiation, which could be religious and/or sexual. This relationship, unhealthy and inappropriate nevertheless leaves Pikelet devastated when Sando withdraws his attentions.
Transnational Scales of Trauma

Trauma as a chronotope operates within the matrix as circuits with no originating point of infection, but consisting of overlapping scalar trajectories, such as the dysfunctional home, the town, the individual body and psyche, to the nation, and outwardly towards the transnational world, before moving inwards to the localised sites again. While scale has no definitive or single definition, one elucidation incorporates cartographic scale and refers to the “mathematical relationship between the map and the Earth, usually denoted as a representative fraction.”\textsuperscript{39} For the purposes of this study however, scale is a methodological unit of measurement, which moves from micro (Body) to macro (Globe)\textsuperscript{40} and back again, modelled at the inception of the novel in the lifeless image of the dead Perth boy (Body/Individual) to the larger scale transnational trauma of 9/11 (Globe/Collective) and back to Pike’s nightmare (Body/Individual). Neil Smith maintains the importance of scale in his discussion on spatialised politics and invokes Fredric Jameson to assert the primacy of space and spatial logic in culture. For Smith, “a model of political culture appropriate to our own situation will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organising concern.”\textsuperscript{41} Smith criticises the reticence to view “geographical scale as socially-constructed.”\textsuperscript{42} Rather, he posits the construction of geographical scale as the primary means through which spatial differentiation happens, because the understanding of scale might provide insight into a “plausible language of spatial difference.” Borrowing this concept from Smith, I explore the construction of scale as a “social process” which is “produced in and through social activity which in turn produces and is produced by geographical structures of social interaction.” If Smith surmises that “the production of geographical scale is the site of potentially intense political struggle,”\textsuperscript{43} then I posit that it is this struggle that is of a primary concern in relation to urban trauma and Australian identity in the novel.

\textsuperscript{39} Gregory, et al., Dictionary of Human Geography, 664.
\textsuperscript{40} Gregory, et al., Dictionary of Human Geography, 664.
\textsuperscript{42} Smith, “Contours of a Spatialised Poetics,” 61.
\textsuperscript{43} Smith, “Contours of a Spatialised Poetics,” 62.
Founded on trauma, Australian identity is caught in the constellation of painful colonialisms and neo-colonialisms, as well as international impulses of the present-future. For example, the small-scale chronotopes that Eva and Sando bring with them to Angelus – their house, their van, Sando’s surfboards – are not only sites for the Pikelet’s trauma, but elements which mark specific moments in Australian history. For example, Sando and Eva’s apparent leisurely lifestyle, as well as their aesthetic sensibilities, epitomise the late 1960s American West Coast urban hippie subculture. The couple’s presence is incongruous with featureless Sawyer, “a town of millers and loggers and dairy farmers, with one butcher and a rep from the rural bank beside the BP” (28). It is a place where “men did solid, practical things, mostly with their hands” (28). In comparison, Sando brings colour and excitement to the young boys’ lives, teaching them to surf, to dance on the waves, to be men engaging in “something beautiful. Something pointless and elegant” (28). For the boys Sando’s surfboards are aspirational, transnational symbols – expensive works of art, some from the 1960s embellished with psychedelic patterns, and new ones from all over the world, “Sydney, San Francisco and Maui … from Peru … [and] … Mauritius” (71). The boys refer to Sando and Eva’s place as a “hippy house” (67), unlike any Pike has seen, “high off the ground on log-poles, surrounded by spacious verandahs where hammocks and mobiles and shell-chains hung twisting in the breeze,” like an “elevated safari tent” (46). Even Sando’s vehicle is unique and epitomises West Coast American subculture of the time, a cut down Volkswagen Kombi featuring psychedelic artwork. This counter-cultural zeitgeist of the 1970s was not a unique Australian identity forming at the time, but rather an irruption of neo-colonial American cultural influences, in turn influenced by the war that was taking place in Vietnam. The sixties were a time of great cultural upheaval, particularly in the United States. By the beginning of the seventies, the joy and liberation of the Hippie Revolution had soured with aimlessness, drug addiction, and the collective trauma and horrors of the prolonged war in Vietnam. The underside of the counter-cultural dream, what many say ended with the peaceful Summer of Love in 1967, was the brutality of the Manson murders of Sharon Tate and friends in 1969, which brought to American and international consciousness the dark

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side of the hippie dream, the realisation that the murders were committed by members of a cult-like commune in the California desert. Likewise for Pikelet, the counter-cultural danger and freedom in the surf, the movement outwards towards America and Southeast Asia, is fleeting, and acts as a prequel to the sadomasochistic sex and the resulting psychological trauma that follows, as well as the irreparable emotional damage caused by Sando.

**Ocean as a Chronotope**

Winton’s evocative depictions of surfing, bomboras, and the deep oceanic sublime are vast and masterly seascapes, leading examples of chronotopes in *Breath*, that serve various functions in relation to trauma. Surfing is a rite of passage for Pikelet and Loonie, marking the transition from the innocence of boyhood to the discovery of manhood. Surfing also offers Pikelet temporary respite from the various layers of trauma he encounters, as his body and mind move into a sublime state of being, momentarily cleansed of trauma in these baptismal waters. Bill Ashcroft explains the essential function of water in Winton’s fiction:

> Water is everywhere in his writing, as people sail on it, dive into it, live on the edge of it. Clearly the sea and the river are vital aspects of the writer’s own experience. But water is more than an omnipresent feature of his writing and life, the oceanscape of his stories. It is something that “let’s you through” … because it is a passage to a different state of being, sometimes in dream, sometimes in physical extremity, but it always offers itself as the medium of transformation. When it lets you through – whether to escape to a different life, as a rite of passage to adulthood, to see the world in a new way or to discover holiness of the earth or the wonder of the world, whether it

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is the baptismal water of redemption or an opening to a world of silence – and it is all these things – you become different.46

There are moments when, wrapped in the watery wonderment of nature, Pikelet is as far away from the constellations of trauma, as time does not exist in the frozen timelessness of water. While he is surfing, the movement of trauma for Pikelet is away from the traumatic space of the urban and sublimated in the impersonal transnational waters, moving away from parochial Australian identity, the land-bound existence in Sawyer, out towards the world. Conversely at other times, water is also clearly a site for trauma. Mr Pike fears the sea after he witnesses Snowy Muir’s drowning death. Additionally, Loonie’s faked drowning in the river traumatises Pikelet and other onlookers. Pikelet’s experiences of numerous near drownings in the ocean as he surfs more dangerous waters and his repeated nightmares that feature images of his drowning and/or suffocation are also remembered memories of trauma.

As a signifier of Australianness, and encompassing both sublime and traumatic moments, the aquatic seascape represents one problematic dialectic at the heart of this conflicted identity, the threshold between the scales of the global and the parochial. It evokes the myth of the beach-loving, “coast-hugging habits” of Australians since early settlement.47 As an island bound by sea the impulse for Australia is to either look inward towards land as home or outward towards the global seas. There is a counter argument that positions Australians as citizens of the world with a heritage as oceanic voyagers. An example of this literary tradition is the famous preface to Christina Stead’s For Love Alone in 1944, titled “Sea People,” which claims that because Australia is “the island continent … [which] … lies in the water hemisphere,” this compels Australians to look outward: “There is nothing in the interior; so people look toward the water, and above to the fixed stars and constellations.”48 More contemporary works of Australian fiction, such as Michelle de Kretser’s Questions of Travel

explore this concept in various iterations of the traveller, including as tourist, refugee, and emigrant. Likewise, Elizabeth McMahon claims that Australia’s status as an island continent has definitely occupied the Australian literary imagination, but that it is a paradoxical geographical space in relation to regional and global interconnections. In other words, Australia possesses a shifting boundary, at times perceiving itself as an island, at others a continent, and still other times still as part of Australasia. Although the ocean figures heavily in Australia’s view of itself with many Australians settled in in coastal cities, the obsession with the sea and living very close to the water with an ocean view is not a reality for most Australians. Despite his love of the surf, even Winton himself concedes that he did not live at the “Water’s Edge,” but rather, “Like most Australians I have spent much of my life in the suburbs ... A quarter acre, a terracotta roof ... a Hills Hoist in the back yard and picket fence between us and the neighbours.” As a newly married young man, Winton “dabbled with the older, more substantial world of the inner city.” At the same time, to stand at the water’s edge facing out over the vastness of the Indian Ocean is to apprehend the world at the scale of the global beyond. These images of the waves as vectors of flow and energy bring to mind Arjun Appadurai’s 1996 utopian theory of globalisation which offers an alternative to the nation state, primarily in terms of the “cultural flows” of migration and electronic information. Writing in 1992, Meaghan Morris argues for Australia’s imbrication in such cultural flows by claiming that the space of Australia is one of “mixed components”, with the interior space being a “sieve” rather than “a sealed-in-consistency.” For Morris, Australia is both an enclosure, but an exterior, “a way of going outside.” This idea of cultural flows as part of the oceanic space figures in the novel as a place of contradictions, which gestures outward toward the world, but also foregrounds Australia’s self-enclosed status as an island. In her book on Tim Winton, Mind the Country, Salhia Ben-Messahel claims that the Western Australian coastline in Winton’s fiction is “a physical barrier between two or several worlds”, emphasising the limits or frontiers

52 Winton, Land’s Edge, 4.
separating outer from inner space as related to Australia, particularly Western Australia’s insular and marginal nature.\textsuperscript{54} This ocean boundary also links the characters’ inner life to Western Australia’s geographic configurations, as it divides space between coastal and inland, populated and deserted, urban and rural centres.\textsuperscript{55} Additionally, the Indian Ocean is a metaphoric threshold between this scale of the global and the national. These “primarily aquatic”\textsuperscript{56} fictional topographies are not entirely sublime and utopian, however, but also evoke painfully parochial and inward-looking aspects of Australian history. Brigid Rooney states that because “Australian beaches and shorelines have been primal scenes of invasion and colonisation; they have been repeatedly deployed in popular nationalism as sites of re-enactment of settler claims to possession.”\textsuperscript{57} This inward impulse conflicts with Australia’s desire to also be international. Suvendrini Perera calls this conundrum, “\textit{terra Australis infirma},” where Australia’s shifting coastlines and watery foundations are sites for “an unattainable desire for insularity.”\textsuperscript{58} On the other hand, Perera claims that Australia as an island in the West holds a complicated position in its participation in the war on terror, which conflicts with its configuration of the territorial national as “the island-continent.”\textsuperscript{59} As the island continent, it espouses insularity, but its geopolitical position as a participant in the war on terror after 9/11, it extends its interests outwards to the world.

Regardless, the endless ocean, the longing for the thrill of surfing, and the obsession with the waves occupy a large portion of the narrative. This is rare for a long work of Australian fiction, so much so that Nathanael O’Reilly claims, “\textit{Breath} might be the first great surfing novel, albeit one with a dark undertow.”\textsuperscript{60} Winton has spoken of his love for this landscape and Western Australian coastal life, particularly the sea, over and above his life in the

\textsuperscript{54} Salhia Ben-Messahel, \textit{Mind the Country: Tim Winton’s Fiction} (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), 124.
\textsuperscript{55} Ben-Messahel, \textit{Mind the Country}, 124.
\textsuperscript{57} Rooney, “From the Sublime to the Uncanny,” 246.
\textsuperscript{58} Suvendrini Perera, \textit{Australia and the Insular Imagination: Beaches, Borders, Boats, and Bodies} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.
\textsuperscript{59} Perera, \textit{Australia and the Insular Imagination}, 1.
\textsuperscript{60} Nathanael O’Reilly, “Testing the Limits of Endurance,” \textit{Antipodes} 22.2 (December 2008): 169-170.
suburbs and inner city. In his non-fiction work *Land’s Edge: A Coastal Memoir* (1998), he explains the primacy of the Western Australian beach in his youth and the agency that surfing offered him: “I lived the coastal life harder and with more passion. As a kid I recognised that life, embraced it and made it my own ... At the beach I wasn’t just passive.” Winton’s revelatory passion for surfing and the sea is mirrored in the narrative and offers moments of sublime emotional respite. Paradoxically, for Pike however, his frequent struggles in dangerous waters and near drownings mirror what Eva experiences each time they indulge in erotic asphyxiation. Pike often wonders “whether the life-changing high jinks... [we] ... got up to in the years of my adolescence were anything more than a rebellion against the monotony of drawing breath” (50). This in essence is a paradoxical kind of death wish driven by a desire for excitement in an otherwise boring life. Although Pike’s introduction to the surf is in the relatively gentle waters of the local river, it signals the inception of something new for him. On one level, he engages with ephemeral camaraderie and friendly rivalry with Loonie, “kicking down time and again to the opaque depths of the Sawyer River to hold our breaths so long that our heads were full of stars” (17). On the other hand, this holding of breath foreshadows the trauma of erotic asphyxia as well as Pike’s own near drownings. These moments in the small-scale chronotope of the river, are imbued with possibility for Pike in the early days of his friendship with Loonie, and before they meet with the destructive force of Sando’s influence. Pike reflects on this hopeful innocence when he recalls, “That was the first of many such days ... It was the beginning of something” (17). At the same time, this can also be read as ominous as later on, Pike reflects: “I got the creeping sense that I’d begun something I didn’t quite know how to finish” (144).

Before they meet Sando, the nostalgic dreaminess of those youthful sun-cooked days in the river lead Pikelet and Loonie to seek out larger-scale bodies of water and to surf in more dangerous waters. Pikelet’s rebellion against his father’s wishes “began with a lie,” no longer the “compliant, respectful child” (24). Bolstered by his “friend’s indifference to authority” and feeling that “being denied access to the ocean was intolerable,” (24) he and Loonie ride their bikes partway behind a truck to the coast without his father’s knowledge. Lying about their destination, they cross a metaphoric and spatial threshold into more expansive,

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dangerous territory, “the hard white beach and the overpowering roar of surf” (26) at The Point. The boys seek adventure “with a sort of desperation, hungry for the exhilaration of fear, the vitality of excess and extremity.”62 This marks the inception of Pikelet’s obsession with surfing, “having caught the bug that first morning at the Point” (29):

There was never any doubt about the primary thrill of surfing, the huge body-rush we got flying down the line with the wind in our ears. We didn’t know what endorphins were, but we quickly understood how narcotic the feeling was, and how addictive it became; from day one I was stoned from just watching. (29)

These vivid reflections hint at dark underlying personality traits, such as transgression and addiction, which manifest in the adult Pike. At first the act of surfing offers Pikelet a sublime respite from the alienation, signalling Pikelet’s initiation, a defining moment of self-discovery and belonging; or in Makenzie Wark’s (2011) words, the moment “that tries to achieve the total realization of a specific possibility … [which] ... exhausts itself in the act of pursing its own goal to the very end.”63 There in the waves as he learns to surf, watched from afar by Sando, and egged on by thrill-seeking Loonie, Pikelet finds in this moment the (transient) goal of ameliorating the loneliness and sense of displacement that were inherent in his childhood:

I will always remember my first wave that morning ... The way the swell rose beneath me like a body drawing in air. How the wave drew me forward and I sprang to my feet, skating with the wind of momentum in my ears. I leant across the wall of upstanding water and the board came with me as though it was part of my body and mind. The blur of spray. The billion shards of light. I remember the solitary watching figure on the beach and the flash of Loonie’s smile.

as I flew by; I was intoxicated. And though I’ve lived to be an old man
with my own share of happiness for all the mess I made, I still judge
every joyous moment, every victory and revelation against those few
seconds of living. (40)

This revelatory and sublime moment of ecstatic discovery by Pikelet suggests how identity is
anchored in a sense of place and belonging in the ocean. These sublime instances however are fleeting. Pikelet forever tries to recreate “those few seconds of living,” he experienced in the surf in every in future risky or dangerous situation. Reflecting this paradox of sublimity and trauma, these large transnational vectors, the oceanic currents are chronotopic signifiers of complicated elements of national and global, with local and personal impact. For Pike, these transnational waves provide momentary sublimation of his personal trauma in the impersonal forces of the water. At other times, they are themselves sources of trauma and pain.

Ironically, this identity established in extreme surfing took hold in America and Australia as part of counter-culture but is a particularly transnational phenomenon. Thought to have originated with ancient Hawaiian or Pacific tribes who shaped surf boards out of trees, it was observed by British explorers in Tahiti in 1767.\textsuperscript{64} Surfing was later introduced to America in the late 1800s and became popular in Australia via national exposure in the summer of 1914-1915, when Hawaiian professional surfer, Duke Kahanamoku, surfed several Sydney beaches, the most famous of which was Freshwater Beach in January 1915.\textsuperscript{65} Ben-Messahel argues that Winton is suggesting that “surfing is the social manifestation of the mood of the times, a zeitgeist” that captures the adrenaline rush as well as solitary challenges of the environment, “rejecting authority and denying their inner alienation.”\textsuperscript{66} Although currently regarded as a quintessentially Australian sport, surfing is a transnational practice, both symbolic and a result of multiple transnational influences. Pikelet and Loonie “are depicted

as individuals searching for extremes to compensate for a disaffected youth.”

Loonie’s family does not offer stability or care. While Pikelet’s parents care for him, they are unable to show affection and understanding. In turn, he is unable to relate to their antiquated Britishness, feeling suffocated by the ordinariness of their lives. The act of surfing thus becomes a panacea for this loneliness and mundanity, a sublime act where the “ecological spectrum participates in the search for an Australian identity” and provides a way of exploring deeper psychological elements of belonging. I concur with Ben-Messahel in her assertion that Sando is also disaffected, “the eternal adult drifter with childish impulses who is unable to be a partner or father, but who is clearly a master in the art of seducing under-aged boys and scarred women.” As the three men are ambivalent to their surrounding society, surfing thus becomes a means of claiming a unique masculine identity, a non-domestic form of belonging, with the water as territory.

The oceanic presence is a large-scale chronotope, a threshold between the national and transnational, and it is thorough the act of surfing that global, national, and individual forces of trauma are realised in a kind of psychogeography of the sea. Usually applied to the city, the term psychogeography is borrowed from Guy Debord and refers to the geographical environment’s influence on the emotions and behaviour of the individual. In the novel, the oceanic space straddles this nexus of psychology and geography, an elemental force that compels and commands the protagonists. Depictions of the ocean move from these small, local sites to larger scales as Sando and the boys search for more challenging thrills in increasingly dangerous waters. After conquering Old Smoky, Sando and his two proteges move outward to larger more treacherous oceanic topographies, in particular the Nautilus, a bombora located three miles offshore. Devoid of the beauty evoked in earlier sublime

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70 Rooney, “From the Sublime to the Uncanny,” 252.
depictions, the Nautilus “takes on the qualities of a devouring monster, a thing of extreme otherness.” Pikelet apprehends the Nautilus with dread:

It came in at an angle, just a hard ridge of swell but within a few seconds ... it became so engorged as to triple in volume. And there at its feet lay the great hump of rock that gave the place its name...
It was a sight I had never imagined, the most dangerous wave I’d ever seen. (175-176)

The spiral configuration of the Nautilus evokes the larger cycles of trauma in Pikelet’s life. Firstly, in the “logic of repetition played on in the narrative’s succession of even bigger and more dangerous waves to be conquered,” and also in the repeated traumas transmitted to him by Sando and Eva. After the failed attempt to surf this vast oceanic seascape, Pikelet becomes disenchanted and isolated as the chronotopic movement outwards ultimately returns to the site of individual trauma. This resonating feeling of emptiness leaves him “gutted” with a “lingering sense of failure” that nothing could erase (180). This pain is repeated and re-evoked when Loonie and Sando, eventually, surf in Southwest Asia, a place replete with its own cycles of suffering as a site of colonial and neo-colonial trauma as well as the cause of individualized psychic trauma for Pikelet and Eva, who are left behind and feel abandoned and betrayed. Pikelet is left alienated and empty, and excluded from the triad. The oceanic currents here act as transnational vectors, and chronotopic signifiers of complicated national and outwardly global elements, yet also impacting locally and personally as demonstrated in the trauma incurred by Pike.

A Complicated Australian Identity after 9/11

In Breath, Australian identity is therefore complicated, a network of traumas including the paradoxical, outward pull of global ambitions with the myopic inward movements into nationalism and regional traditions. Within this are complex layers of national identity in relation to Indigenous Australians as well as Asia. According to Ben-Messahel the novel

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71 Rooney, “From the Sublime to the Uncanny,” 252.
72 Rooney, “From the Sublime to the Uncanny,” 254.
“encapsulates Winton’s major concerns: adolescence and manhood, place and the environment, life in Western Australia, identity, culture and politics.” Ben-Messahel contends that over the past decade or so “Winton has clearly shown concern for Australian culture in a global environment, arguing that Australians had, in fact, moved on from colonisation and gotten rid of the cultural cringe.” She cites the way in which Breath examines such claims of the past from the uniquely Australian perspective of the adult Bruce Pike, “who, as an older man and paramedic, is confronted by the challenges of the 21st century from the perspective of his own memory and past.” I concur with Ben-Messahel and add that the novel is also about Australian identity struggling within an intricate matrix of trauma, attempting to negotiate a place between the layers of past and continuing colonial traumas, as well as transnational, American-dominated culture of the present and future in a post-9/11 world. I also argue that Breath is a cautionary tale about the destructive cultural influences upon Australian identity represented in the scalar movements of trauma within the matrix that always end at the local level. Eva and Sando’s presence in Sawyer and the surrounding Western Australian landscape symbolises the way American values suffuse a bourgeoning Australian identity, still struggling to free itself from British colonisation and its ongoing traumas, as well as transnational traumas of the present. Twelve-year-old Pikelet at the commencement of the narrative, who lives in rural Sawyer on the margins of Angelus, inhabits Winton’s fictional territory, which I read as a chronotope, a liminal space in more ways than one, both familiar and unfamiliar, temporally existing between the past and the present, and spatially caught between giant karri forests and the endless oceans. For Ben-Messahel, this space is uncanny because it evokes ambivalent colonial structures about the local, suggesting the experience

of being simultaneously in place and out of place. This liminality, this place between spaces, is also evident in Pikelet’s status as a dislocated youth in his town. As he contemplates the wharf from the opposite side of the harbour, Pikelet notes:

It was like seeing the familiar world at a twofold remove, from another time as much as another direction, for it felt that I was in an outpost of a different era. It wasn’t only the colonial buildings that gave me such a sense, but also the land they were built on. Each headstone and every gnarled grasstree spoke of a past forever present, ever-pressed, and for the first time in my life I began to feel, plain as gravity, not only was life short, but there had been so much of it. (146)

Pikelet’s perspective here revolves around of the feeling of dislocation, of being lost in layers of traumatic history – a sense of colonial history, and a pre-colonial history, which included the lost traditions and heritage of the Indigenous peoples. Lorenzo Veracini claims that this is because “settler projects are inevitably premised on the traumatic, that is violent, replacement and or/displacement of indigenous Others.” Questions of legitimacy and belonging to the land, in settler societies, lead to a repression of (foundational) trauma that may emerge latently in a sense of disorientation or of not belonging. Although settler societies may attempt to disavow this collective foundational trauma, it haunts the landscape of the settler society, infecting its inhabitants with an underlying malaise, and a sense of exile. In Island Home: A Landscape Memoir (2015), Winton attests to the “looming spirit of desolation” that persisted into the twentieth century as “a response to the darker legacies of settlement as an expression of geographical isolation.” These feelings evoked in the landscape of Angelus require resolution of deep trauma that Pikelet is never able to access. As an adult, all Pike can manage is to appropriate Indigenous culture with some

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78 Veracini, Settler Colonialism, 77.
79 Winton, Island Home, 141.
therapeutic blowing on his didgeridoo to relieve himself of spiritual and existential puzzlement (263). The circular breathing method of the didgeridoo mirrors not only the repetition of his suffering, but also the cyclical way the past and present flow on from each other in the novel.

A manifestation of trauma’s movement from small-scale/local to large-scale/transnational in the narrative occurs when Pike’s mother sends him a newspaper item reporting Eva’s death by asphyxiation. Having failed to resolve her addiction to the dangerous erotic act, Eva is discovered “hanging naked from the back of a bathroom door in Portland, Oregon ... with a belt around her neck” (253). Later, Pike learns that Loonie dies in Mexico near the United States border, “shot in a bar in Rosarita, not far from Tijuana. Some kind of drug deal gone bad” (257). The nature of Loonie’s death leads Pike to question whether his apprenticeship to Sando may have been more than surfing, but might have entailed drug trips, particularly to Thailand, and whether “Sando’s family money had been augmented by his darker business interests” (257).

*Breath* invites readers to reassess Australia’s relationships globally and internally and to concede that some of these relationships have been problematic. For example, Hou Fei makes the case for Vietnam as a commentary on Australia and its place in the world. This relationship has been historically complex however as “The narration concerning Australia and its involvement in the Vietnam War, Americanisation and banal small-town lives do connect with each other historically and in relation to the probing of the characters’ fates.” Sando’s relationship to Loonie and Pikelet as “guru/hegemon to disciple/follower mirrors Australia’s relationship to America during the Vietnam War.” Even though he is Australian-born with links to Hawaii and Southeast Asia, Sando adopts “a recognisably American lifestyle.” Sando stands for “American values – physical, competitive prowess; entrepreneurship; individualism – that have so enchanted Australians.” Sando is at first so beguiling to the boys who become his disciples and he their guru. At first, the novel adopts a localised small-town perspective as it examines Sando’s appeal for Pikelet and Loonie. The

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80 Fei, “Extreme Games,” 284.
81 Fei, “Extreme Games,” 287.
82 Fei, “Extreme Games,” 286.
boys happen upon an article featuring Sando in an American surfing magazine, and realise that “for a time, and in places that were legendary to the likes of us ... [he] ... had briefly been somebody” (78). As a result, their adulation “enlarged; it had metastasized” (80). Winton’s pejorative use of “metastasized” here lends a pathological quality to the young men’ growing obsession with Sando that has catastrophic results for them. The boys respond to Sando, thus turning from the small-scale sites of Sawyer out towards the wider world. This admiration leads Sando to exert almost complete influence over the boys, urging them to surf dangerous waters, and in Loonie’s case, on to nefarious drug-related activities. The boys’ submissive relationship with Sando reflects Australia’s subservience to America as their ally in the Vietnam War. Sando and Loonie travel together internationally, to surf bigger waves which echoes Australian acquiescence in sending troops to Vietnam as a gesture of solidarity with America. Fei notes the doomed fate of those Australians who fought in the Vietnam War: “For many, this meeting was met with disappointment and despair, including along the way drug dependency.” Pike evokes the trauma of Vietnam veterans at the start of the novel when talking to Jodie, and qualifying that while he seems troubled that: “I’m not a Vietnam vet ... I’m not old enough” (6). Like the failed war and its attendant personal and transnational traumas, Sando and Loonie’s overseas trip also eventually engenders danger, particularly when readers come to understand that Loonie’s eventual subsequent death at a young age, was violent and drug-related.

Pikelet and Loonie represent Australian youth and their relationship to America during the 1960s and 1970s at the time of the Vietnam War, a relationship that ultimately ends with tragedy and disenchantment. This neo-colonialism moves in cycles from America to Australia, as well as Australia to Asia. This relationship and the ongoing relationship that Australia maintains with America after 9/11 are part of what Emily Apter calls “Oneworldedness,” in which America and American interests claim territorial sovereignty over Australia with “neo-imperialist projects of the world” which mask themselves as “the

83 Fei, “Extreme Games,” 288.
84 Fei, “Extreme Games,” 286-287.
global.”\textsuperscript{85} Apter critiques Appadurai’s theory globalisation as cultural exchanges of cultural flow in her formulation of oneworldedness, which conflates sovereignty and global space with American interests. Winton does not replicate the oneworldedness without resistance and sharp critique. Although Pikelet is at first drawn into the transnational glamour of Sando’s business empire, he ultimately loses faith, suspecting that his activities “may not be that above-board.”\textsuperscript{86} Although Pikelet becomes disillusioned with Sando, and in adulthood recognises Sando’s unwarranted mentor status, at the end it is only Sando who survives and prospers, still a kind of silver-tongued guru, “a motivational speaker of some note,” who has the appearance of “a man arrived” (253). In a pointed critique of American neo-imperialism in relation to Australia, Sando is revealed to be predatory, materialistic, and unethical because what matters most for him is “money, which strongly echoes the new religion of America, capital.”\textsuperscript{87}

**Conclusion**

Whilst *Breath* is set in a small sawmill town surrounded by bush and beach, what I have called the American city is one aspect that forges and damages Pike’s identity. It is the city (of Perth) that he returns to in his adult years to work as a paramedic. As a reading of Australian identity, the novel, with its alienated protagonist, signifies how national identity is shaped and influenced, and ultimately impaired by the city. The globalised American image of the urban catastrophe of 9/11 at the beginning of the novel sets the multiple incursions of repeated traumas from small-scale sites to transnational sites and then returning again to individualised sites of suffering. The 9/11 disaster imbricated in earlier traumas generates permutations which are felt throughout the novel in the way it erupts into the Australian landscape. This notion of disruption is borrowed from Luckhurst and adapted to Australian subjectivity at large, as well as American subjectivity. *Breath* elucidates the problematic way in which America, already troubled by its own circuits of transnational trauma, (from


\textsuperscript{86} Fei, “Extreme Games,” 286.

\textsuperscript{87} Fei, “Extreme Games,” 293.
Vietnam to the Middle East and more) circumscribes and shapes contemporary Australian society, which in turn grappling with its own traumas as part of a multidimensional matrix.

In tracing the scales of trauma in Breath along scalar sites, this chapter has explored political and cultural struggles for a unique sense of Australian identity, caught between painful British foundational trauma and the ongoing complexities and trauma of the globalised world, in particular America with its attendant mediated images of suffering, such as 9/11, as well as Southeast Asia. The relationship of Australia to America in regard to the Vietnam War is paralleled later in the unilateral military and unequivocal ideological support for America after 9/11. This was evident particularly in the misguided attacks against Iraq and Afghanistan as part of the subsequent war on terror, in which 9/11 was politicised as a causal factor. Thus 9/11 “functions monolithically, disallowing any diversion from its fear-based, militaristically-backed signifying power.” 88 To move into the sphere of a transnational identity for Australia is to uphold unquestioning allegiance to America as a superpower and cultural influence evinced in its support of the Vietnam War and the wars on terror. In Breath, Tim Winton illustrates the complicated and negative ways in which international traumas impact individual identity. I read in these affected and troubled young lives a critique of American hegemony in the world as well as the mediated, intractable, totalising formulation of 9/11 and its attendant effects and responses.

88 Cara Cilano, ed., From Solidarity to Schisms: 9/11 and After in Fiction and Film from Outside the US (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 15.
Chapter 2
The Conflicted City: *Five Bells* by Gail Jones

*Five Bells* by Gail Jones (2011) is an exploration of grief, loss, and trauma, and their effects on Australian identity in the post-9/11 world. Resonating with a network of traumas a decade after 9/11, Sydney, where the novel is set, is a traumatic topography, imbued with a sense of urban fragility in relation to the repeated threats of violence, terrorism, and war. As with Tim Winton’s *Breath* (2008), the overall mood is one of unease and disquiet. Violence hovers over the city and is emphasised in repeated conflations of Sydney with international incidents of urban atrocity. As a framework for analysing diverse types of trauma in *Five Bells*, I again turn to Michael Rothberg’s multidimensional matrix as a model that helps to understand how diverse spatial, historical or cultural articulations of trauma, which may be collective or individual, operate in concert as they move across the city, which is embedded with its own circuits of traumas. I use “the city” in this chapter, as a short-hand term for the locus of traumas, distinct from just a literal place. Incorporated into the city are painful memories which signify an overlapping and sometimes nested series of memory communities of different sizes and significance. This intricate mosaic model of trauma also applies to scales of space in the city, where trauma can be traced from smaller to larger sites. Rothberg’s idea of multidirectional memory adapted to *Five Bells*, allows different memories of trauma to coexist in such a way that there is not one master signifier, but rather cumulative, scalar multicultural interactions of traumatic experience that move through the matrix. These traumas inform post-9/11 Australian identity, which I argue is haunted by a network of atrocities, including the ravages of settler and colonial violence against Indigenous Australians, as well as traumas brought into Australia with migration and travel. This mosaic interacts with mediatised traumas as a result of 9/11 and the wars on terror, which themselves embody their own matrix of traumas. A scalar approach presupposes space as a series of what Neil Brenner would call dynamic multigeographical regions of interconnected and relative sites that may include local, regional, or global scales.
among others. Synthesising Brenner’s concept of interconnected sites or scales with Rothberg’s matrix of trauma allows for a study of traumas that incorporates scalar circuits of infection in which there is no originating or final node, but cycles of infection as the traumas interact with other atrocities and move endlessly through the matrix. Rothberg’s model posits a competitive memory of trauma, and by tracing the movements of trauma across the city, starting and ending at local sites, I reveal how diverse webs of trauma in *Five Bells* inform, circumscribe, and complicate Australian identity in the world after 9/11.

Sydney’s urbanity and eclecticism are a defining feature in relation to current, diverse Australianness in *Five Bells*. As Robert Dixon explains, the novel’s characters “seem designed to illustrate the cosmopolitan, multi-cultural nature of contemporary Australian society.”

Jones follows four characters and one anonymous girl (presumably the “fifth bell”), who arrive at the spectacular yet haunted setting of Circular Quay, looking over Sydney Harbour and the iconic Opera House. As they travel through the city, they struggle to make meaning from traumas emanating from their pasts and the present. The novel was inspired by the beauty of Sydney Harbour and Kenneth Slessor’s elegy “Five Bells” (1939), dedicated to his friend Joe Lynch, who drowned in 1927 when he leapt from a ferry into its dark waters.

Lynch’s demise is mirrored in the fate of James de Mello, who faces doom where the other characters find hope. James’s plight exemplifies how suffering is embedded in the city and re-experienced as he walks through it. The mythology of Joe Lynch is one originating trauma story of Sydney, imbuing Circular Quay with a spectral image, “an elemental spirit of the harbour,” which the tormented James views as “black … pure metaphysical black, and covered in a net of broken light.”

Although residing in Sydney, the characters are from

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5 Gail Jones, *Five Bells* (North Sydney: Vintage Books, 2011), 204. All subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text.
elsewhere, and their lives unfurl as the narrative folds in and out of their respective painful memories and pasts into the collective present of Australia in the post-9/11 world, where televised wars in the Middle East mingle with memories of transnational catastrophes in urban centres. Ellie, a girl from a small Western Australian town, has come to Sydney to pursue a PhD in literature and is irrepressibly optimistic. She carries with her a perennial longing for her schoolboy lover James, to be reclaimed and “returned ... the body remembered above others” (211). The son of Italian immigrants, James is a schoolteacher, also from Western Australia, who is traumatised by the drowning of a young pupil in his charge during a school excursion to the sea, coupled with a lifetime of suffering inherited from his Italian mother, which illustrates transmissions of trauma in the migrant experience. There is also Pei Xing, a sixty-five-year-old immigrant from Shanghai, who is a survivor of the brutalities of China’s Cultural Revolution in the 1960s that annihilated her parents and most of her friends and saw her own imprisonment and torture. Pei Xing also struggles to make a life in her new country, living modestly in an outer Sydney suburb. Catherine Healey, a traveller on a working holiday, originally from Dublin, carries the legacy of family loss after her beloved brother Brendan, who was involved in revolutionary activity in Ireland, is killed in a suspicious car bombing. The fifth character in the narrative is an unnamed schoolgirl whose apparent abduction links them all together as their images are randomly captured on grainy CCTV footage and broadcast on the nightly news. Other mediated images of international traumas intrude into the localised spaces at various points in the novel. Against this heterogeneous backdrop is 9/11, referenced repeatedly in the media with dramatic and traumatic imagery, and alluded to in the conflicted relationship Australia has with the wider world. These evocations of urban catastrophe foreground the fragility of the city, where the potential for violence is ever-present. In contrast depictions in the minds of the characters, Sydney as a conceptual matrix of trauma represents the contradictions at the heart of Australian identity. The city itself is conflicted and problematic, a spatial and temporal conflation of painful cultural memories and warring identities. This fractured identity fluctuates between outward aspirational movements, whereby Australia seeks a place on the world stage, while simultaneously espousing parochial tendencies derived from British colonisation. Additional contractions inwards in the face of transnational traumas such as 9/11 complicate this identity further.
Gail Jones has a profound awareness of trauma and has repeatedly asserted how her own life and the public life of Australia have been shaped by loss and grief. She is regarded as one of the “most prominent and sensitive contemporary Australian fiction writers.” In her rich and complex body of work, her exploration of grief is at once empirical, theoretical, and aesthetic. Jones does not shy away from exploring issues of trauma, displacement, and psychological turmoil on individual and historic levels, and in national and transnational contexts. Her novel *Sixty-Lights* (2004) is about love, death, and loss as well as a preoccupation with photography. *Dreams of Speaking* (2006) commences with an astronaut as a symbol of grief and explores displacement, loneliness, memory, and the need for belonging. *Sorry* (2008) is an exploration of Indigenous-White relationships, the Stolen Generations, and the isolation of farm life, as well as life in Australia after the trauma of the Second World War. *A Guide to Berlin* (2015), may be read as a companion piece to *Five Bells*, as it explores urban conceptions of space, history and painful memories from the perspective of six international travellers, who traverse the city of Berlin by foot and by rail. Like *Five Bells*, this subsequent novel is also a study of memory, adversity, and the way traumas shape the present urban experience. Most recently, *The Death of Noah Glass* (2018), as the eponymous title suggests, is about death and the navigation of grief, as well as art and the construction of identity.

Jones’ deep knowledge of trauma theory and the mechanism through which trauma and loss operate is also apparent in her academic essays. “Sorry in the Sky” (2004) explores unsympathetic unsettlement in relation to mourning and the Stolen Generations. “A

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Dreaming, a Sauntering” (2006) discusses mourning and the belated ability of language to encapsulate trauma. Jones claims that her academic knowledge has informed her thinking about trauma, although she is often critical of theory and philosophy for their inability to explore the complexities of affect, which is perhaps the domain of art, including literature. She is fascinated by the idea of “things coming after ... [trauma] ... surviving, after-life, after-image.” She maintains that survival is part of modernity itself, not just trauma or loss. Jones explores stories of marginality, oppression, or overlooked suffering. She ascribes to Fredric Jameson’s idea that “history is what hurts”, claiming that “if there is no suffering, there is no history.” Thus, history is imperative to her work as a broader context for trauma. Regarding history, Jones is committed to “the idea that to write after something, after an event or after a period of time is in part to find a way to represent suffering.” Like Tim Winton in Breath, Jones links memory inextricably with place in her exploration of the psychological after effects of trauma and identity. Five Bells, like Breath, explores suffering, which is reactive, longstanding, and ultimately traps the characters within their pasts.

Jones borrows from the modernist style of another exploration of trauma in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway, as Five Bells is primarily an urban trauma novel, which takes its shape and story from the rhythms of city life. The narrative emulates the urban scope and quiet, unassuming tone of Mrs Dalloway, a novelistic “account of a woman’s Ulysses-like wanderings around a summery London.” Like Woolf, Jones employs an interior narrative perspective in the tracing of interweaving lives that wander across a busy city during the course of one sultry Sydney day and night. Thematic comparisons with Mrs Dalloway include the cityscape, trauma, mental illness, loss, and self-determination. Regarding the rendering of characters in relation to Woolf, Jem Poster claims, that Ellie “both is and is not Clarissa plunging into the fresh June morning ... while James’s narrative links him to Woolf’s

Septimus ... without obscuring those aspects of his character and experience that are both distinctively modern and distinctively Australian.” In addition to Jones’ contemporary rendering of stereotypical Australia is her masterful portrayal of scales of global and transnational reminiscences. These memory-scapes interwoven with cityscapes encompass national spaces, before moving back to localised sites of individual recollection. Evocations of the glittering harbour in the perennial glow of sunlight sit side by side with snowy landscape sequences from Doctor Zhivago, before returning to individualised experiences. Clepsydras, or ancient Greek water clocks, appear alongside Irish pilgrimage destinations and the sights and sounds of Shanghai, and give way to the smaller scales of Circular Quay and each character’s preoccupations. Revolutionary images of Communist China are interspersed with Western Australian country towns, the wheat belt at larger national regional scales before circling back to scenes of the bleak outer suburbs of Sydney seen from the window of a train. Jones employs lyricism and poetry to explore issues such as private and public grief, death, and displacement.

**City as Palimpsest of Trauma**

The study of space in this chapter is concentrated on the scale of the city as a dynamic locale for a multidimensional matrix of trauma. For Henri Lefebvre, writing in 1974, space is never static, but rather, a social construction that in turn influences spatial experience. Lefebvre’s work was foundational for later spatial geographers such as Edward Soja, Derek Gregory, Neil Smith, and Neil Brenner. Building on Lefebvre’s work, Soja conceived of a “thirddspace”, which incorporates spatiality, sociality, and history. In other words, Soja sees space as socially-produced, where the spatiality of everyday lives and human geography has the same significance as social and historical dimensions. Elaborating on Soja’s ideas, Gregory claims

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that space incorporates the complex interplay of power, knowledge, and geography. With these theoretical articulations of space in mind, as well as Rothberg’s matrix of trauma, the theoretical city in this chapter is not literal but rather conceived as a palimpsest or a readable script, a complicated web of spatial and social experience where circuits of painful histories and memories reside. This model of the traumatic urban space is similar to that in Breath, but the characters in Five Bells re-trigger the trauma that already resides in the city as they walk through the city.

My conception of the city as a readable script, a palimpsest of projected fears, memories, and hopes in Five Bells was inspired by Michel de Certeau’s theory of embodied walking. In his famous 1988 essay “Walking in the City,” de Certeau renders a topography that is experienced, enacted, and walked. Indebted to the Situationist International, de Certeau proposed an ideal for the city that is counter to the structured theories of urban planners. He begins his essay with a synoptic, unified view of New York City. Ironically, he starts from the vantage point of the now defunct World Trade Centre, which was the aspirational symbol of American urbanism, prosperity, and global influence. De Certeau resists this view of the city from afar or from a high-rise in favour of walking the city streets. If the city is circumscribed by governments and corporations who produce maps of a unified whole, walking becomes an embodied act that seeks to liberate the individual from the prescription and control of everyday life. De Certeau, partakes in an act of creative resistance which is both ordinary and unique: ordinary because it is available to most people, and unique because it is tactical and empowering, where each walk, each trajectory, each experience of the city, is different for each individual. In resisting the idea of mapping the city in favour of the embodied walk, de Certeau imposes his own meanings upon the cityscape, creating his own logic, his own rhetoric, his own story. Imbued with a spatial logic, the city becomes a readable script and walking creates meaning: the “metaphorical city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city.”

23 De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 158.
Walking in the city is a catalyst in *Five Bells*, as it prompts the re-emergence of latent traumas which are embedded in the cityscape. As pedestrians who make the journey from their respective homes to Circular Quay and back, the characters re-experience their often painful, individual stories, which are induced by the poetics of the city. Jones employs walking as a language that imbibes the city, speaks of the city, and wrestles with the city. These links between topography and the human body were envisaged by nineteenth-century urban designers as an imagined network of arteries and veins of movement, a place where the individual is both ushered and protected by the crowd. Walking and traversing the urban terrain therefore becomes an embodied act of resistance in an effort to make meaning, re-evoke (painful) memory, and retrieve something that is lost. Lostness is the manifestation of the new urban self, which Roger Luckhurst understands as an identity that may be subsumed in the discord, complexity, or imbroglio of the city. Luckhurst explains that trauma is a response to modernity, where a fixed sense of place and the dense network and social relations typical of a traditional society is “dislocated by a new orientation of the individual to an abstract, national and increasingly international space.” That is to say, localised, cyclical rhythms of time in traditional societies were replaced by standardised time which adhered to routines of labour, economies, and transport systems. In eighteenth-century Britain, with the rise of the modern state, concepts of self-identity were reconfigured from old certainties of village life (such as seasonal cycles), to more abstract identities that participated and lived in industrialised spaces. Reflecting the image of a moving network of arteries and veins, the intricate spatial and temporal journeys of the characters in *Five Bells* pulsate through the psychogeography of the city. Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy explain how this notion of a network of interconnected movements, events, and traumas can be understood through the examination of individual stories that intersect with larger national and international stories, traversing cultural, spatial, and temporal boundaries. The interwoven journeys of the dislocated characters allow for the

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26 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 20.
exploration of the spatial and temporal ways in which trauma is manifested, transmitted, and potentially assuaged. They demonstrate the way the cityscape influences and shapes traumatic psyches and traumatised bodies. The modern city in *Five Bells* is a place of both containment and liberation, two possibilities which are reflected in the characters’ journeys of embodied walking through the city. For the women, it is a place of diversity and possibility despite past traumas. For James, walking in the city evokes latent suffering which traps him in painful memories.

The dislocation of the new urban self at the scale of the city is evident in *Five Bells*, as Jones’ characters are subsumed by the ubiquitous noise of the city, the throng of the crowd, and the insignia of modern technology. The characters in the novel create their own meanings, perspectives, and experiences as they walk the streets of Sydney. They shape the city, as the city shapes them. Jones’ depictions of the city are vibrant and reflect the psychological states of the characters. Ellie’s journey around Circular Quay reflects the embodied walking that links geography and the body in an imagined network of arteries and veins. Ellie is ushered by the crowd as she disembarks from a train, travels down the escalator, where she “caught the crowd” and is “carried outside” (1). The city that Ellie encounters is a lively, dynamic space, both socially and geographically. Jones brings the positive aspects of Sydney to life through Ellie’s eyes by imbuing the city with the sense of excitement that Ellie feels. While traversing Circular Quay, Ellie “sees a shock of sudden light, all the signs, all the clamour” (1). She sees before her a beautiful vista, “a row of ferry ports, each like. A primary colour holiday pavilion” (1). Ellie’s city is beautiful, bright and lively, clamouring with sounds as a “ferry churned away” while “the clang of a falling gang-plank and the sound of passengers disembarking” underscore “a melody of voices” (4). The socio-historical complexity of the city space is rendered through Ellie’s hopeful eyes. She is delighted by the transnational flavour of the “democratic throng,” where she notices an array of tourists, among them Americans and Japanese watching someone playing a didgeridoo (2). In a sharp contrast to Ellie’s apprehension of the city, James, who is “obstinately unjoyful” (4), encounters the same city through the lens of trauma and disappointment. Space and geography are linked with the body as James feels the disappointment of Sydney physically and psychologically. Coming into Circular Quay by train, “through his limbs, he felt the machine breaking and stiffening” (4). He envisages the passengers on the train as “bodies encased in steel” (4).
Travelling down the escalator at the train station, James sees the inhabitants of Sydney as disempowered by the space, “a mobile mass, subservient to architecture” (3). As James walks through the city, the city triggers trauma in him. He flinches with annoyance at a squealing child, takes in the “tawdry quality and ... too little repose” of the ferry terminal, and trundles “automatically, trailing behind others” amid the “cacophony and the vague threat of the crowds” (5). He sees the multicultural crowds as “people of assorted nations” who possessed “a tawdry quality” (5). As he walks the city, he distastefully notes the haughty waiters and unremarkable sites and feels “dull in his own lived space” (7). James initial journey into Sydney hints at the dangerous elements of city life that threaten to overwhelm him.

Contrasting with both Ellie and James, Pei Xing’s experience of the city foregrounds a multicultural space of diverse histories and experiences. Walking in the suburb of Bankstown (southwest of Sydney), Pei Xing notes the Vietnamese and Arab businesses, and is enchanted by the “women in hijabs and scarves walking together in friendly clusters” (42). She reflects that “this version of Australia was Asian and Arab. These people moved in an aura of their own, not afraid to claim space; and among them were other populations, migrants as she, each pulled from another history” (42). Pei Xing’s journey by train to the city also re-evokes painful reminiscences for her, as she remembers her long-dead father, who was killed in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (44-45). These three diverse experiences of walking the city exemplified by Ellie, James, and Pei Xing demonstrate the eclectic experiences of the city, and the last two examples display how trauma may be evoked by traversing the city.

**Trauma as Chronotope and the Spatialisation of Time**

The urban environment of Sydney in *Five Bells* is a chronotope of transnational traumas. These spatio-temporal conflations of overlapping scales reside in the city as part of a network and are inter-cultural or inter-generational circuits of suffering. That is to say, the chronotopes of trauma move along scalar circuits in the matrix of trauma. Disrupted temporality is key to trauma novels like *Five Bells* and *Breath* which play with time, as the narratives incorporate flashback sequences that fold in and out of the present. Thus the temporality in the novel possesses a dual nature which shares paradoxical elements in
relation to 9/11 and the incessant coverage of the collapse of the twin towers, where the real-time of mediated, live images sits alongside trauma-time. Trauma time disrupts and shifts temporality because time is paused, slowed, examined, and endlessly repeated in haunting memories as well as in syndicated news reports. Although the narrative occurs in real-time over a twenty-four-hour period, it is interrupted by a constant return of memories of past traumas that haunt the characters.

James and his migrant mother illustrate the way in which constellations of trauma reside in individual memory as a chronotope and are rekindled by walking through Sydney streets. For James, the inherited inter-cultural and inter-generational transnational trauma moves to his dysfunctional home, and back to the individual scale of his damaged psyche. James’ tragic narrative arc and his eventual suicide attest to the long-standing psychological effects of trauma. He is thwarted at every turn of his life by anguish. Ellie, his childhood friend and lover, makes two astute observations that foreshadow the lifetime of suffering James endures, and symbolise the overlapping of his own historical trauma with a transnational transmission of trauma inherited from his mother, culminating in his suicide by drowning. At various points in the novel, his suffering is also conflated with 9/11 and the wars on terror. Cognisant of the post-9/11 world that surrounds her, Ellie observes in newspaper reports, instances of “the war going on in Iraq, the cruel atrocities, the violence,” as well as “the disturbing continuity of tales about war,” which she interweaves with childhood recollections of James and her anticipation of meeting him (20). Ellie’s second observation is a transnational chronotope that occurs repeatedly in the novel, a tender and haunting moment in time and space that simultaneously recalls James’ small-scale, individual pain while gesturing to global-scale suffering that took place during the wars on terror. The memory takes place at a school in a Western Australian country town. After one of his many nosebleeds, James is cradled by his seventh-grade teacher, Miss Morrison, who administers to him in a symbolic way by “tilting his head back, her left hand placed on his forehead, her right holding a cloth, soaked red” (24). Ellie is struck by the image of submission and suffering and likens it to a “tableau” (24) or “a vision that bound them like a fresco ... shining

28 Trauma time is discussed specifically by Jenny Edkins, quoted in Richard Gray, After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11 (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 8.
its meaning through time as from beneath the archway of an Italian church,” a “pieta” (25). On one level, this chronotope alludes to James’ Italian heritage by evoking Michelangelo’s Renaissance sculpture, the Pieta (1498-1499), a Christian artwork depicting the Virgin Mary cradling the body of her son Jesus after his crucifixion. The image, which moves from local to international and back to local again, is one of maternal trauma, physical atrocity, and unimaginable suffering. On a metaphoric level, this childhood allusion represents the transnational, national, inter-cultural, and inter-generational trauma James inherited from his mother, a trauma that will ultimately lead him to sacrifice his life, just as Christ did. On another level, this chronotope of trauma is a reminder of the world-wide atrocities that followed 9/11 as the Pietà is emulated in repeated mediated images of a Muslim mother cradling her slain child, a victim of America and her allies, and their wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

James and his mother illustrate how trauma can be a quintessential aspect of the migrant experience in Australia. As an only child, James inherits inter-generational, transnational trauma from his long-suffering mother, an Italian woman who struggled in poverty to make a life for her son in Australia after being abandoned by her husband. An academically gifted student, James wins his first scholarship to an elite school in the city, which necessitates moving away from his home and his mother. Ellie recalls his mother’s dishevelled body as she disintegrates into depression and mental illness:

> Ellie saw her living a contracted life, lingering near the letterbox in her dressing gown at the end of the day. She’d not bothered to dress, nor to separate daytime from nighttime. Her face looked worn to a frazzle and her manner was infirm; her matted hair flew up around her sad, rather doll-like face ... She spoke to herself in Italian, further marking her foreign state, announcing to everyone that she had returned to the country of her birth and was immured there, alone, tethered elsewhere by words. (26)

Eventually, Mrs DeMello is institutionalised in a psychiatric facility because she is deemed “a danger to herself” (27). Her fragmenting psyche is linked with her status as an immigrant in
the present and her Italian heritage in a distant past and demonstrates how trauma travels through time and space. For Mrs DeMello, the contraction inward into psychological collapse displays the movement of the scales of transnational trauma into individualised sites. James carries the trauma of an alienated, unhappy childhood, coupled with the guilt of abandoning his ill mother. Starting his life as a promising student, he graduates to medical school but finds himself too sensitive for the rigours of medicine. James is haunted by “panic ... the spectre of an overwhelming loneliness, but also the knowledge ... that he would never be a doctor” (71). Eventually his aversion to blood results in a nervous breakdown. After dropping out of medical school he finds some respite as a teacher in rural Australia, where trauma is again reinscribed for him at the drowning of one of his young pupils on a school outing.

As an adult James arrives in Sydney a broken man shaped by a searing past that in turn affects the negative way he experiences Sydney. The small scale, localised sites of James’ body and tortured psyche are chronotopes of trauma that move around the traumatic matrix of the city as he walks through its streets. James reflects that, “so much of the past returns ... lodged in the bodies of others” (4). An example is when he looks at an old woman’s gnarled hands while sitting on a Sydney train. He notes the intrusion of painful global scales of memories in the returning intrusive history as he reflects that “they resembled his mother’s hands, the sign of a history he did not want” (4), before turning his mind to his own discomfort in the present.

As a transnational symbol of urban fragility, 9/11 haunts the novel at the scale of the city, particularly in James’ experience. James apprehends the potential threat of danger and is often physically and psychologically uncomfortable, self-medicating with analgesics. On the train to Circular Quay he feels “the downward tug of time, of all that marks and corrodes” (4), alluding to his own painful history, as well as the haunted history of Sydney. As James makes his journey across Sydney, the city becomes menacing. Later as he walks down George Street and witnesses the cornucopia of the cityscape, he disintegrates further: “He was becoming fissures and gaps, as if something in his body had torn. Time past was leaking in, and shame, and regret, and too much irksome reality” (38). These psychological projections upon the cityscape reveal how, for James, Sydney is overwhelming and threatens to rupture his own understanding and conception of place in the wider world. This fracturing
is echoed in the non-linear narrative and the non-linear way that traumatised people like James remember repressed memories.

**Transnational Scales of Trauma**

The traumatic elements of Sydney that James experiences have historical and cultural precedence because Sydney is a dialectical place. On one level, *Five Bells* plays on the projected, imaginative city, the global-scale image of Sydney projected through tourism campaigns, touted as a place with a mild climate, an international, cosmopolitan flavour, and a stunning harbour. Countering this depiction, historically, Sydney was founded through the trauma of British invasion, occupation, and subjugation of its original inhabitants, the Gadigal people. As Australia’s most populous and multicultural city, the capital of the state of New South Wales is home to a population of 5.13 million people in its greater metropolitan area, according to the 2017-2018 estimate.\(^{29}\) In addition to its growing eclectic population, Sydney presents itself as culturally expansive, espousing a transnational scale of consciousness. Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid call such spaces which aspire to global ways of thinking, new urban spaces, places of “rapidly changing geographies of urbanisation and urban struggle under early 21\(^{st}\) century capitalism.” Brenner and Schmid argue that the terms *urban* and *urbanisation* are categories rather than empirical objects. Instead of relying on built environments and “*bounded* spatial units of the late nineteenth century,” new urban spaces are outward extensions of planetary urbanisation.\(^{30}\) In other words, global cities are linked to other global cities by modern flows of communication technologies, and often come to look more like them, rather than being connected to their immediate regional or national contexts. Sydney is such a city, an urban space possessing the cultural and capitalist impetus to expand virtually outward into the scale of the world beyond its geographical strictures. Often referred to as Australia’s global city, or an international city, Sydney is considered Australia’s primary link to the scale of the transnational world and

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global economy. Nonetheless, Sydney’s prominence as a global city is a point of contention by many residing in Melbourne, who claim it will overshadow Sydney in population and global aspirations by the middle of the twenty-first century.

Moving from the city-wide scale to smaller localised sites, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Opera House, and Circular Quay are more than just familiar landmarks of an international city, they are chronotopes and metonyms for the city itself, anchoring visual focal points amid the glittering blue of Sydney Harbour and its historical and temporal symbols. From the 1880s, the developing tourist industry designated this harbour as one of the finest in Australia and in the world. Thus, Sydney was presented and perceived as a leisure city, a place of sunshine and relaxation. Jones also establishes these alluring, aspirational, and commercially-projected chronotopes in the opening pages, as Ellie recounts her initial impressions of the city: “Circular Quay: she loved even the sound of it … she saw the Bridge to her left ... Familiar from postcards and television commercials, here now, here-now” (1). Struck by “the shock of sudden light,” Ellie infuses the scene with notions of vacations and freedom: “the row of ferry ports, each looking like a primary-colour holiday pavilion, and the boats, bobbing, their green and yellow forms toy-like, arriving, absorbing slow lines of passengers, departing” (1). Likewise, as Catherine approaches Circular Quay, she is struck by the international mix of holidaying tourists from Scotland, France, China, and elsewhere frolicking happily in the sun (15). Originally from the cold and grey climate of Dublin and later London, Catherine continually comments on the comparative vividness of the city as she enjoys “a bright January day with light pouring from the heavens” (15), and to her left the “Bridge, water, harbour, ferry... were ablaze, all illuminate. This part of the world collected light as if funnelled double-strength from the sun” (16). For Catherine, this city seems mythical and bright, which she attributes to “some refractive quality of the water, or

32 Lynette Finch and Chris McConville, Gritty Cities: Images of the Urban (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press, 1999), 201-203. Later Sydney beaches such as Bondi became part of this leisure landscape, though always secondary to Sydney Harbour, the Harbour Bridge, and the Opera House.
those shining petals [of the Opera House] ... or the winking skyscrapers on the far shore,” all of which merge in “an increased incandescence” (16).

However, these depictions of Sydney as hopeful, carefree, and leisurely, promoted in tourism advertisements to the outside world, are too simplistic, neglecting a tragic undertone that runs beneath the radiant city of perennial sunshine. Delia Falconer concedes that Sydney is a dialectical city, a city of opposing forces, whose “misty sunshine is never far from noir” and whose “beauty has never been far from rage, and perhaps even the urge for destruction.”  

Beneath the beauty, brashness, and superficial façade that Falconer calls “almost a kind of unplanned holiday resort,” lays a sombre foundation:

Perhaps you need to have grown up here, as I did, to see that its fundamental temperament is melancholy. Everything else is a side effect, a symptom of darker emotional currents that run so deep they are almost tectonic. Sydney may look golden, but this is the sunniness of Mozart, whose bright notes, especially at their most joyful, seem to cast themselves out across a great abyss.

Falconer attributes this traumatic undercurrent to a haunting, due in part to the fact that Sydney is a city built upon ghosts, upon the memories of stolen land and stolen lives, upon the attempted destruction of Indigenous cultures and languages. This included the colonial destruction suffered by the Eora, Cadigal or Gadigal peoples, the original inhabitants of Sydney Cove. Sydney was built upon suffering and “human tragedy,” which causes “existential dilemma. For to live here is always to feel the place has a secret life that resists you.” Indigenous Australian writer and scholar Jeanine Leane explores this loss or erasure of indigeneity in the settler nation in relation to its literature. Although she does not explore

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33 Falconer, *Sydney*, 3.
36 The British called the indigenous people the “Eora”; when asked where they came from, these people would answer: *Eora*, meaning “here” or “from this place” in their language. For more information see Kohen, “First and Last People,” 76-85.
*Five Bells* directly, Leane sees settler fiction as a product of the settler imagination, which erases Aboriginal presence in its narratives.\(^3^8\) This is because settler fictions are set in places that are “not empty spaces, they are already named by the original inhabitants”, then renamed by contact and so are overwritten.\(^3^9\) In *Five Bells*, Sydney is such a place. Leane claims that is not just about seeing what is there, but rather seeing and acknowledging what is *not* there. Although Jones attempts to articulate the pain of colonial violence, the erasure is palpable in *Five Bells*, where there are no Indigenous characters, nor an Indigenous perspective offered. Although place is central to the novel, Indigenous presence only resides as an absence, and colonial violence is reduced to a lingering pain and anxiety that haunts the white and migrant city-dwellers. Likewise, it may be argued that the scalar terms which I have adopted such as globe, nation, region, and city all overwrite Indigenous concepts of Country. In answering these valid arguments by Leane, I recognise my position on the side of the settler imagination and I would posit that the multidimensional matrix of trauma does not obliterate the foundational violence suffered by Australia’s Indigenous peoples, but is a methodological lens imposed on a novel in order to trace, not erase, infinite and endless suffering. My aim is to explore the traumas of the past and how they form the identities of the present in an inter-cultural way, where Indigenous suffering allows other articulations of trauma.

A sense of loss and longing informs narrative as an inherited post-traumatic stress. For Falconer, this unconscious sense of unease is a hauntedness of geographical proportions.\(^4^0\) She identifies it as the foundational cause for a frenetic sense of overcompensation, leading to the more unsavoury attributes of Sydney, such as its flamboyance and brashness, as well as “our tendency to judge, to boast, to act out, to bully, to look for visions.”\(^4^1\) For Lorenzo Veracini, the pain at the heart of the Sydney-sider is symptomatic of the postcolonial condition that haunts the whole of the nation, imbuing it with unsettling anxieties. Veracini claims that settler societies are “premised on the traumatic” and violent, but need to

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\(^3^9\) Jeanine Leane, “Tracking Our Country in Settler Literature,” 3.

\(^4^0\) Falconer, *Sydney*, 10-11.

\(^4^1\) Falconer, *Sydney*, 11.
disavow and repress these atrocities in order to exist. This results in ongoing concerns with “existential threats and a paranoid fear of ultimate decolonisation,” including fears of “racial contamination … [and] … inappropriate demographic balance,” or the fear that the land will turn against the settler. The fear of invasion for the settler regarding displacement by other newcomers including the Chinese and/or Japanese is historical in Australia and has its own genre known as the invasion scare novel, which dates back to the 1890s and beyond. In the post-9/11 epoch, this includes fear of asylum seekers and invaded borders. Linked to this idea of invaded borders is the foundational uneasiness of Australia in relation to global geography. Elizabeth McMahon claims that Australia’s particularity as an island is itself a “contradiction and inversion, a space that contains an otherness within itself.” At times, Australia’s border appears diffuse; at other times its boundaries as a sovereign state seem impenetrable. While it attempts to espouse global connectedness, its designation as an island continent suggests an enclosed inwardness. This became particularly problematic after 9/11 when Australia presented itself as an ally of America, a global participant in the war on terror, yet at the same time was anxious about its borders in relation to asylum seekers, and when, in an effort to protect its borders, it introduced mandatory offshore detention.

In addition to its anxiety over borders as a coastal city, which is part of an island-nation, Sydney, like Australia as a whole, is a place that is deeply traumatised. In *Traumascapes*, Maria Tumarkin explores the way in which landscapes are shaped and inscribed by trauma, and opens a dialogue about “the enduring, tangible imprints that suffering and loss leave behind.” Tumarkin embarked on an international pilgrimage to six different sites in order

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43 Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 81.
to better understand and write about places impacted by trauma, violence, and suffering.\textsuperscript{49} She employs the term “traumascapes” to define “a distinctive category of place, transformed physically and psychically by suffering, part of a scar tissue that now stretches across the world.”\textsuperscript{50} These sites are inscribed and haunted by violence, overwhelming loss, death, and shared human suffering:

Because trauma is contained not in an event as such but in the way this event is experienced, traumascapes become much more than physical settings of tragedies: they emerge as spaces, where events are experienced and re-experienced across time. Full of visual and sensory triggers, capable of eliciting a whole palette of emotions, traumascapes catalyse and shape remembering and reliving of traumatic events. It is through these places that the past, whether buried or laid bare for all to see, continues to inhabit and refashion the present.\textsuperscript{51}

As an element of the wider multidimensional matrix, traumascapes correspond with the idea of circuits where painful events are cornerstones of place. Australia’s traumatic past refashions and circumscribes its contemporary identity, haunting it with earlier stories of extreme trauma – the suffering, dispossession, and loss of Indigenous inhabitants. Tumarkin does not specifically examine Sydney (or the Western Australian setting in \textit{Breath}) as traumascapes per se, although she does assert that suffering, cultural devastation, imported disease, and violence against Indigenous peoples occurred throughout Australia. Here, as in all settler colonies, from the nineteenth century until the 1930s, Indigenous bodies massacred by the colonisers were simply dumped in the ground.\textsuperscript{52} Western Australia was the site of many such atrocities, including the Pinjarra Massacre or the Battle of Pinjarra, where twenty-five soldiers, police, and settlers, led by Governor James Stirling, attacked a group of

\textsuperscript{49} Tumarkin, \textit{Traumascapes}, 4.
\textsuperscript{50} Tumarkin, \textit{Traumascapes}, 13.
\textsuperscript{51} Tumarkin, \textit{Traumascapes}, 12.
\textsuperscript{52} Tumarkin, \textit{Traumascapes}, 165.
eighty Noongar people in 1834. Violence against Australia’s Aboriginal peoples is the origin of the nation’s collective trauma. This foundational story stretches across time to haunt the topographies and the psyche of characters where the trauma is experienced and re-experienced endlessly. Many massacres also took place in greater metropolitan Sydney, and around the state of New South Wales (Appin and Bathurst, among others). Sydney Cove was the original site of the invasion in 1788, with the arrival of the First Fleet. This haunting history is literally and metaphorically embedded in the very soil. Thus, for Tumarkin, a traumascpe is haunted by “a past that enters the present as an intruder, not a welcome guest ... [and] ... refuses to go away.” Falconer affirms this traumatic foundational narrative of Sydney as she meditates on the city of her birth and formative years. She cites the human tragedy and destruction of the Eora people’s language and culture as the cause of a deep melancholic longing, “a nagging sense that something is missing.” Falconer claims that Sydneysiders have to live with this absence and loss that permeate their frenetic lives.

Sydney evinces this paradox as a conflicted city of beauty, with inflections of violence, of parochialism coupled with global yearnings. For Patrick Wolfe, the violence of settler colonialism is evident in his mantra, “invasion is a structure not an event.” Wolfe challenges the argument that settler colonial policies are merely racist or discriminatory, and claims they are genocidal because “the settler colonial logic of elimination has manifested as genocidal.” In *Five Bells*, it is James who exhibits settler anxiety where “indigenous genocide/or displacement interact with other traumatic experiences” such as “the dislocations of migration.” At times, James experiences this anxiety while in Circular Quay as revulsion, physical discomfort or illness. At other times, James possesses a feeling of dislocation, remoteness and listlessness where he feels “dull in his own livid space” (7).

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54 Tumarkin, *Traumascapes*, 12.
57 Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” 387.
58 Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 76-77.
Unlike James, Ellie is an optimist who sees Circular Quay and the Opera House as magnetic and full of sensual possibilities: “the bowl of bright water, swelling like something sexual, ... the blue, unprecedented, and the clear sky sloping upwards, she knew from the lilting words it would be a circle like no other, key to the new world” (1). Similarly, Catherine is eager to see the iconic building and is charmed by its appearance as “a bowl of white roses,” which is “nestling before her, its folded forms stretching upwards, its petal life extending” (14). For Pei Xing, the Opera House is “a fixture she relied on. The shapes rested, like porcelain bowls, stacked one upon the other, fragile, tipped, in an unexpected harmony” (12). This reference to porcelain bowls not only recalls her heritage but also the hard-won fragile peace, harmony, and security, she has achieved in Australia.

James, on the other hand, already made fragile by lifelong suffering, experiences Sydney as a traumascape. James knows “in his bones that he would be disappointed” (4). As he approaches Circular Quay, the Opera House appears hostile and predatory, its iconic white shells “almost like teeth” with “its maws opened to the sky in a perpetual devouring” (5). The image evokes a “memory-siege” (6), a nightmarish recollection intruding on the present, fragmenting his mind and foreshadowing his drowning death by suicide at the end of the novel. As Luckhurst points out, trauma is a disrupter of both identity as well as memory. Tumarkin defines a traumatic event as more than intensely painful or extremely unpleasant, but rather undeniably overwhelming, so much so that an individual’s understanding and conception of their own place and of the wider world is irrevocably fractured. This fracturing or fragmentation is evinced in the non-linear way traumatised people remember an incomprehensible or unassimilated past, the full impact of which may often be felt in subsequent years. For James this constitutes a loss of self, “Loss of faith. Loss of face. Some closing down of what once he might have dreamed or become” (30). To borrow Falconer’s idea of Sydney as haunted, characters like James are susceptible to viewing the city in a menacing and apocalyptic way.

59 Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 1.
60 Tumarkin, *Traumascapes*, 11.
The projection of the past onto the present disrupts the chronology of the narrative, as distant memories are inspired by and interspersed with depictions of the city. James remembers a terrifying visit to a carnival sideshow, Monsters of the Deep, where he saw “the yawning jaw of a shark … an inadmissible, unspeakable threat” (6). His recollection of the gleaming teeth and their elderly guard with “an aspect of decay” (6) overlaps with his pain over his student’s drowning, and imbues the Opera House with apocalyptic dread, resulting in a sense of dislocation: “Death was like that … shaped in ivory triangles” (6). Here the Opera house is equated with the threatening image of an opened-mouthed shark baring teeth displaying how James initial journey into Sydney hints at the psychologically threatening elements of city life that overwhelm him.

While James is incapable of transcending the trauma of his family’s immigrant story, Pei Xing’s offers a note of optimism. Despite a tumultuous life and horrific suffering under Mao, Pei Xing is determined to find hope and redemption, and to claw back her dignity. She undertakes a weekly pilgrimage across the city, from Bankstown to Circular Quay by train and then on to a North Shore nursing home by ferry, in order to work through her past trauma by reading to and feeding Dong Hua, her former prison guard in China, who is now paralysed after a stroke. Pei Xing insists on these visits over her son’s objections, because she recognises that “there were forms of forgiveness that make life go on… Reading had taught her that actors in history must find a logic beyond violence” (113-14). Pei Xing’s trip across Sydney is a movement towards healing and exemplifies the masterful way in which Jones weaves the city with identity and attempts to ameliorate the painful past.

**Negotiating a post-9/11 Australian Identity**

In *Five Bells*, conflicting and conflicted depictions of Sydney therefore mirror the psyche of each character as dialectical elements of Australian identity. While viewing the Harbour Bridge, Ellie is struck by “its modern shape, its optimistic uparching” (1) and conjures in her mind’s eye Janus, the Roman “god of bridges, since bridges look both ways and are always double” (2). Janus, the god of beginnings and transitions as well as endings and time, is a fitting personification for Sydney (and indeed Australia) in transition between large-scale global concerns and the small-scale inwardness of the bounded island-nation, between
hopeful and apocalyptic worlds. This double movement, inward and outward in scale, is highlighted in the memories of the characters, in the atrocities committed against Indigenous people, and in the discrimination and malignant nationalistic racism that can be part of the immigrant experience.

An example of Pei Xing’s experience with racism occurs as she is jostled in the crowds at Circular Quay:

No one saw her, she knew; just a nondescript grey-haired woman, and an Asian at that.

*Can’t tell us apart. All Ching-Chong-Chinaman.* (8)

Despite the racism Pei Xing encounters in Australia, she finds the urban hustle and bustle “a beautiful thing” as she observes and interacts with other marginalised people, like Aristos, the old Greek fisherman turned ice cream seller, who “looked vulnerable ... [because] ... Death was swooping towards him” (10). Pei Xing also encounters the belongings of Mary, the homeless woman, “bedraggled ... searching for a drink” who lived under the railway arch (11).

Echoing these images of marginalisation, James contemplates how past cruelties impinge upon the present landscape, a landscape he only sees in small, sullied portions. Sitting in a café in full view of Sydney Harbour, he turns his back on the panoramic scene and contemplates the unpleasant minutiae, the remnants of capitalist consumerism:

Everywhere around him James saw detritus – a serviette crushed into a flowery ball, ring-pulls from drink cans, a chocolate bar wrapper, its form origami, torn sugar sachets, food scraps, the bits and pieces of commercial junk people left everywhere in their wake, setting a litter trail, as in a fairytale, to be found in a mythical dark wood. (8)

Already sensitised and marginalised, James exhibits the sense of exile and dislocation that underpin settler anxiety, evidence of the loss and trauma at the core of Australian identity.
The detritus of civilisation is conflated with painful memories and mirrors James’ disintegrating psyche as he contracts inward, while Sydney is reduced to a small-scale site of decay. Luckhurst demonstrates how trauma’s psychic imprint may manifest in such “unprocessed fragments” which are part of a larger trauma that resides in the unknowable, inaccessible part of the unconscious. This notion of the vast unconscious is evoked by the allusion to a foreboding and impenetrable “mythical dark wood.” James is on the verge of tears, recalling “a favourite quote” from Karl Marx, as he realises the horrible burden of history: “The traditions of the dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (8). This tragedy informs modern-day metropolitan Sydney and can be read through John Docker’s definition of epistemological vertigo which is caused by “phenomena that cannot be faced directly ... [but rather] ... are displaced into other representations.”

Although Jones does not directly conflate James’ suffering with the Indigenous owners of the land and frontier atrocities, the mention of “traditions of the dead” hints at Indigenous deaths at the hands of settlers. James’ suffering and memories bring this past trauma in to the present city, which is resonating with its own traumas after 9/11. Circular Quay thus becomes a traumascape where James becomes susceptible to his own lifetime of grief, that he is unable to speak of, or name, and fuses this with the collective historical trauma of Indigenous peoples. Through the Joe Lynch story and the trope of drowning, Circular Quay also gestures to James’ own individual trauma, coupled with the national traumatic pasts included in the migrant experience, reflected and enacted in the wave of 1950s Mediterranean migration to Australia by sea, arriving at Sydney Harbour. Thus, the transmissibility of trauma across the generations, outward from mother to son, inward from the world to the colony, is embedded in depictions of Sydney.

Ellie’s reflections on Australia’s Bicentennial commemorations in 1988, with attendant nationalistic fervour, also invoke shameful historical violations: “Into this very harbour, in 1788, Captain Arthur Philip had sailed his first fleet of convicts ... A criminal nation boldly

61 Luckhurst, The Trauma Question, 13.
inaugurated” (135). Ellie remembers how her Western Australian community “arranged farcical forms of celebration ... patriotic rituals and historical pageants. Ellie happily missed being chosen for a landing re-enactment” (135-136).63

James found himself duly nominated as a convict, which he rather enjoyed ... A group of ethnically mixed teenagers were chosen as ‘natives': it was their role to welcome the arriving colonisers, to bow, to remain silent, to be ceremonially obsequious. (136)

Again, James is subtly linked to the plight of Indigenous suffering, this time in the role of perpetrator. Apart from the absurd essentialisation of the ethnically-mixed teenagers, and indeed all people of colour, this re-enactment of the invasion of Australia, which took place all over the island-continent, gestures towards the painful convict past under the British empire and retrogressive myths of a white, British Australian identity. The school sketch omits the traumas and dispossessions enacted upon the Indigenous inhabitants. In their hideout later, James explains to Ellie what he has heard about the Aboriginal protests, the demonstrations, the Aboriginal flags. “Aborigines had called Australia Day ‘Invasion Day’, and the year one of ‘mourning’” (137). For Ghassan Hage, incidents such as these patriotic re-enactments of the Invasion uncover a paranoid “discourse of Anglo-decline,”64 a nostalgic lament for a dominant Anglo-Celtic myth of egalitarianism and whiteness, which found one of its most influential expressions in Russel Ward’s The Australian Legend.65 In this nostalgic view of a real or imagined Australia, what Hage calls a “White nation fantasy” is located at the centre of an idealised (imagined) national space.66 This space has only become more prominent since 9/11, with an intensified patriotism and looking back towards nationalist sentimentality. As an extension of this inwardness and insularity, there is a fear of the

66 Hage, White Nation, 18.
transnational world, and what Suvendrini Perera explores as a “territorial nationalism in Australia, the island-continent.”

Tseen Khoo calls this territorial nationalism a “Fortress Australia” mentality, in which we are encouraged to celebrate Australian society’s successful multiculturalism on one hand, yet on the other hand, witness xenophobic politics that target refugees as well as an extreme and paranoid media which vilifies Islam, depicting it as alien. This parochial perspective is not interested in engaging inclusive or constructive social agendas to end persecution, but rather seeks to establish an idea of “free” sovereignty, which hypocritically silences any dissent or critique of the government or nation. Such silencing is evident in the re-enactment of the invasion that glosses over Indigenous suffering and the migrant experience through conflation and erasure. The parochialism and insularity of Fortress Australia depicted in fraught images from a faraway outside world are exemplified when Catherine watches on the television nightly news:

She found the remote and flashed the severe world into vision. There were the usual foreign wars, tribulations, massacres, collapsing economies, there was global warming and economic downturn and apocalyptic predictions. The war in Iraq: never-ending. Afghanistan: never-ending. Somewhere beyond balmy Sydney on a Saturday evening in January, the world was heartsick and haywire. (176)

Ellie also reads about a fraught, traumatic, transnational world from the localised safety of her inner-city Sydney flat:

There were the usual horrors. The war in Iraq, bombings in Afghanistan, the rapacity of large powers and the subordination of the small. There was a photograph on the front page of a distraught

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woman in a headscarf, bending in torn, rigorous grief over the body of her son. It was generic and familiar. She was a no-name mother who had lost a no-name son, the convenient portrait of another attack, and selected because the contortion of her face, and her anguish, and the plea of her uplifting hands, told in dumbshow what exceeded the journalist’s skill. (21)

These images feature large-scale chronotopes gesturing towards a distant transnational world after the trauma of 9/11. These places are out there, far away, imbued with threat and danger. Standing across from the Opera House, James looks out over the vast body of water and imagines listening to Wagner’s Götterdämmerung (literally, the collapse of God’s regime that results in implosion through violence). He recalls hearing that the “US army was playing death metal to al-Qaeda in Baghdad … [and] … Nirvana’s ‘Tourette’ was an instrument of torture at Gitmo” (150). James links the smaller-scale Australian icon of the Opera House with America’s ongoing wars and atrocities committed since 9/11.

According to Bennett and Kennedy, images of collective mourning act as transnational chronotopes of suffering and disaster, signalling trauma too terrible to face or elucidate. These images of contemporary trauma in a globalised world are so horrific in magnitude that they are unspeakable, yet at the same time unforgettable. Perera examines how the white Australian gaze may totalise transnational trauma, conflating it, and at times appropriating it into a “representational and affective spectacle … [where] … the western subject is positioned as both spectator and actor.”70 In this way, as exemplified above in Jones’ narrative, global chronotopes of trauma are conflated in the Australian consciousness, and thus work to “obscure their materiality and their political causes and consequences.”71 In her essay “Sorry in the Sky”, Jones draws on Dominick LaCapra’s distinction between empathetic unsettlement on the one hand, and the fusion of absence and loss on the other.72

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70 Perera, Australia and the Insular Imagination, 79.
71 Perera, Australia and the Insular Imagination, 89.
cautions that we should feel “empathetic unsettlement” at the trauma of others, but not appropriate it or generalise it. He argues that empathy should be interrogated and unsettled, in order to resist falling prey to over-arousal, totality, and sentimentalism, because “a post-traumatic response ... becomes questionable when it is routinised in a methodology or style that enacts compulsive repetition.” This is analogous to Tumarkin and Falconer’s concept of trauma and loss that reside beneath the Sydney façade. If James is to be read as pathologically melancholy or sentimentalised in this way, it is partly because of a maudlin conflation of various national and transnational traumas – historical migrant trauma and Indigenous trauma, as well as the context of Australia after 9/11. If this is the case, then Jones herself may be open to the accusation of conflating absence with loss because James’ trauma, and the pain he feels in the city, has nothing to do with Indigenous loss. Although Falconer and Tumarkin, and even Veracini, attest that as subjects of modernity, many white Australians feel the historical pain and loss of the Indigenous peoples, according to Perera they may not lay claim to it, nor conflate it with their own experience of pain as James does. I claim however that James does not conflate his pain with Indigenous trauma, or post-9/11 trauma. Rather, the confluence of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples and James’ inherited migrant trauma, as well as the traumas in his own life, are overlapping scales in the matrices of trauma that reside in and are reinvoked by the city. Like the other characters, James experiences diverse elements of historical and contemporary trauma which are embedded in the conflicted city space.

Jones therefore explores an Australian identity that fluctuates and moves along inward and outward scales in a paradoxical pull between regression in the face of global catastrophe, and the desire toward transnational impulses, between nationalism and transnationalism. In an interview, Jones rejects the term globalisation, which refers to the way in which communities respond to global changes. Instead, she asserts that the global and local are not reconciled in her work so much as “existing in a sort of charged juxtaposition ... like an electrical charge ... Where the local and the global come together is often a place of strenuous feeling ... a kind of instability and energy.” These charged juxtapositions in Five

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74 Quoted in Royo Grasa, “In Conversation,” 9.
Bells are chronotopes of trauma, conflicted in their movements outward and inward upon scalar trajectories in the matrix of trauma. This model of trauma brings the transnational spaces and histories into the realm of the local. By transnationalising trauma, this matrix model also brings the local and individual suffering into the context of the global space. Like Angelus and Sawyer in Breath, Sydney in Five Bells possesses these charged unstable contradictions, localised and far from the global world, yet paradoxically transnational. In Breath, this is evinced by the reference to 9/11, the traumatic image of global trauma that intrudes into the suburban landscape of Perth at the beginning of the novel and the transnational scales of the oceanic in the images of surfing.

Resilience after Trauma?

My examination of Breath and Five Bells has revealed how a traumatised Australian subjectivity in the years after 9/11 is formed and shaped by the city. The exploration of the city and its influences demonstrates how Australian identity is haunted by histories of national and transnational traumas. These inflections of trauma drive the way the city is apprehended in both novels. I would like to end this chapter by working toward a trajectory of healing and the possibility for the amelioration of trauma in some instances. Resilience after traumas such as 9/11, illustrated by the rebuilding of the World Trade Centre, is a vital and imperative aspect of human survival. In his concluding chapter of The Trauma Question, titled “Afterwards,” Roger Luckhurst considers the possibility of resilience in relation to trauma theory and the experience of trauma in the contemporary world. Rather than claim a final victory over trauma in what he refers to as the “thoroughly theraped West,” he concludes by hinting at the “development that might point to the limits of the trauma paradigm.” He claims that PTSD may not be the only possible response to extreme events, but rather that there is also an emergence of resilience, defined as “positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity.”75 I would add to this definition that resilience also denotes the reclaiming of a sense of self, a cohesive identity. The exploration of resilience emerged in the 1970s in an attempt to understand how children growing up in extreme environments that included parental mental illness, socio-economic deprivation, or community violence, were able to develop and prosper in a healthy manner. Luckhurst

75 Luckhurst, The Trauma Question, 209.
points out that resilience within the paradigm of trauma theory is limited. The studies of grief, adaptation in war contexts, and reactions to traumatic events were flawed, with signs of resilience merely pathologised by trauma scholars and psychiatrists as an “absent grief,” or “simply enduring mourning in an undemonstrative way.” Additionally, in the 1980s early psychiatric studies showed that extensive therapy may be detrimental because “early intervention might actually be inducing the very syndromes that they aimed to prevent. In regards to later studies in the early 2000s, Luckhurst explains that ironically it was the cohort who did not receive intervention, that were able to recover. While Luckhurst does not diminish or discount the long-term effects and the severity of trauma, he asserts that theories of trauma in the humanities are derived from established psychiatric practices in the West. With 9/11 and its after-effects in mind, Luckhurst makes this claim:

Of course, resilience remains just another kind of post-traumatic reaction. It does not displace the predominance of trauma so much as assume a different or parallel response to psychic depredation or collapse ... It is hardly a replacement for the predominant trauma theory: if it were, the risk of denial of traumatic effects would be increased rather than reduced.  

Luckhurst here is responsibly canvassing the clinically significant problem of encouraging resilience without underestimating the power of trauma, where there is a risk of denial and the dangerous return of symptoms. Allowing for Luckhurst’s note of caution about the efficacy or universality of resilience, I extrapolate from Five Bells the provisional hope for positive urbanism in relation to aspects of Australian identity after 9/11. For example, Catherine finds sanctuary in Sydney, far from the turmoil of Dublin, while Pie Xing’s weekly visits to her former Chinese captor “encapsulate a gracious kind of bearing witness and an active meditation on the possibilities of forgiveness.”

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77 Luckhurst, The Trauma Question, 211.
_Breath_ is a mesmerising novel, with varied depictions of trauma in relation to identity and the city after 9/11. Although it is James who drowns in _Five Bells_, the characters in _Breath_ are at moments in the narrative, metaphorically, in their own traumatic past/s. The oceanic currents, as large transnational vectors, are chronotopic signifiers of complicated national and outwardly global, elements, yet also impacting locally and personally. For Pike, they are a momentary sublimation of his personal trauma in the impersonal forces of the transnational waters. Described by other characters in _Five Bells_ with awe and sublimity, the oceanic is a threshold onto the global scale. Although neither Pike nor James is resilient, Pike experiences momentary sublimation (as well as trauma) in transnational waters, while James seeks eternal peace, an end to his torment, by drowning himself in the waters of Sydney Harbour. These movements in the novels towards the vast watery landscapes spatially signify outward movements towards transnational vectors and away from insularity and inwardness.

Winton is critical of the idea that masculinity must be dangerous and heroic and can only be galvanised by fear. This flawed, gendered construction, in conjunction with the dysfunctional relationships Sando and Eva instigate, doom Pike to an alienated life on society’s margins. Ultimately, although Pike concedes at the end of the narrative that he finds a modicum of grace in the waves and some semblance of satisfaction in his vocation as a paramedic, but by no means has he moved beyond his trauma. He is still melancholic, circumscribed by the past, plagued by nightmares and unable to make true connections with people, particularly women. Pike, Sando, and Loonie in _Breath_, represent an outmoded notion of heroic masculinity. Winton deliberately depicts a gendered, white construction to critique the way in which it is doomed by its narrow and non-inclusive strictures, which are ultimately damaged by trauma. Bruce Pike represents a fragmented Australian identity, scarred and impeded by historical transnational trauma, unable to find an inclusive, cogent sense of identity in the years after 9/11.

In contrast to _Breath_, _Five Bells_ offers some elements of hope after trauma. While Jones also depicts doomed pathological masculinities in the figures of James as well as Catherine’s deceased brother Brendan, whom we only briefly encounter in her memories, they are
extinguished in the course of the narrative, each meeting an early demise. This confirms Luckhurst’s valid point about risking the denial of trauma in the search for resilience. Catherine’s brother rendered briefly as a heroic, valiant character, is suspiciously murdered in Ireland after revolutionary activities. In the figure of James, Jones exemplifies how past trauma can haunt the subject, fragmenting identity, disorienting consciousness. Like Pike, whose identity is linked with images of drowning and choking, James’ identity is also submerged as he drowns himself in the waters of Sydney Harbour:

He felt the water of the Harbour enter his body. His chest was filling. The black wet pushed its thumb-balls in. He felt the sad sinking of giving up and letting go. He was washed and washed into mothering darkness, a release, a release, as sound releases; into the wake... and into waves, in waves. (208)

Curiously, Jones uses the image of release and being washed into a larger sea of “mothering darkness”, evoking the melancholic image of James’ mother, the inception of his childhood trauma, which ultimately, even in death, subsumes James’ consciousness and identity.

Jones, however, does not conclude her novel with this doomed image of a drowned man; she focuses on the women who espouse optimistic urban narratives of resilience and hope. Although Catherine remembers her dead brother, mourning him “and still speaking to him in silence, summoning his company in the torrential night” (215), she also recalls happy memories with her family in Ireland. The city proves a panacea for her, and enchanted with Sydney and in awe of its radiant beauty, Catherine falls asleep visualising peaceful images of the Opera House and Circular Quay, pondering the idiosyncrasies of this new city, and reminding herself that she “must Google Woolloomooloo, must Google Woolloomooloo” (215). Pei Xing, who arguably triumphs the most and finds healing despite her traumatic life, is about to seamlessly integrate her past into her new life in Australia. Unlike James and Pike, who are submerged and frozen by their respective pasts, Pei Xing falls into a gentle sleep remembering “old people performing cloud hands ... [a]Tai Chi practice, walking backwards ... always seeing what lies behind” and realises she has “reversed into her own history ... walking forwards backwards” (216). Pei Xing has made peace with her past,
accepting the beauty and the pain, forgiving and tending to the woman who formerly abused her. She has a strong sense of herself and her place in the city. In “walking forwards backwards,” she acknowledges and reconciles her past with her present-future and moves beyond traumatic memories to create a new life in a new city.

Jones concludes *Five Bells* with the reflections and thoughts of Ellie, perhaps the most fulfilled character in the novel. Ellie has a strong sense of self, diametrically opposed to the fragmented and tormented James. Her new life in Sydney as a postgraduate student is an opportunity she relishes. As she walks between Circular Quay and her inner-city apartment, she sees Sydney rendered as an almost mythical place and apprehends it with a sense of wonderment. She falls asleep thinking of her former lover James, reminding herself to call him the following day. As she drifts into slumber, Ellie is submerged in beautiful images of “the Harbour swept shining and mystical by rain light” and imagines “Circular Quay ... rain-glazed,” while “Harbour buoys with their red flares” send “messages across the water” and seabirds ascend like angels (216). For Ellie, the city is a place of boundless possibilities. It is telling that Jones chooses to end with Ellie and her hopeful, focalised constructions of the city, rather than doomed, traumatic conceptions focalised through a defeatist lens.

This gendered argument which denies resilience to masculinity, ties back to the historical personification of the settler nation as male. Apart from the obvious masculine trope of Russel Ward’s bushman as representing Australia, Perera also explores a nation that has been historically reproduced through constructions of the self as “normalized white and male” and threatened by alterity.79 To be fair to Winton however, *Breath* itself is a deeply knowing critique of toxic masculinity. Additionally, my argument about gendered resilience is not meant to offer simplistic interpretations, nor to give Australian women readers, triumphant narratives that provide facile “uplifting messages or optimist self-serving scenarios.” 80 I do not wish to offer readings that fetishise, totalise or deny trauma, or seek to declare a way out of what Veracini calls the colonial present which espouses the ongoing oppression of the structure of colonialism. My aim in this chapter has been to offer an

80 LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss,” 723.
original examination of the impact of (urban) trauma in relation to Australian subjectivity after 9/11.

In summary, this chapter explores the city, trauma, and Australian identity construction in *Breath* and *Five Bells*, which are post-9/11 trauma narratives and possess the aesthetics of such accounts. I extend the idea of the Australian urban consciousness of alienated characters, in order to explore how the traumatic effects of the city may circumscribe subjectivity. My formulation of trauma as a chronotope is a way to trace the transmission of trauma and its spatio-temporal movements around the urban topography, as well as the trauma manifested in the bodies and psyches of the characters. In extending this argument further, the scalar movement of trauma, along inward and outward trajectories, evinces an Australia that is fraught and complex, contracting into introspective insularity and yet at the same time aspiring towards the transnational world. Although I examine trauma and urban malaise, there remain elements of triumphalism, represented by the women in *Five Bells*, who move beyond past traumas, towards resilience. This idea of resilience does not apply to all aspects of Australian society. Unlike the women in *Five Bells*, James represents aspects of migrant and settler societies that are unable to overcome the atrocities of the past in order to flourish. Additionally, it is important to note that concepts of resilience may not have the same implications for Indigenous peoples, who have had to endure genocidal atrocities, dislocations from community and land, and ongoing racism, and whose plight is not explored in these two novels.
Part B

The Apocalyptic Metropolis After 9/11
In his third novel *Dead Europe* (2005), Christos Tsiolkas weaves fable with confronting realism to depict an imagined haunted history, which is transposed onto a hostile apocalyptic geography in the four years after 9/11. The European cities in the narrative possess the Gothic tropes of ancient terrors, blood libels, and haunting spectres. *Dead Europe* differs from the other four novels discussed in this thesis, as it is primarily set in European cities as well as villages, although focalised through a Greek-Australian protagonist’s perspective. This dying urban Europe is contrasted with Melbourne, which offers a provisional and ephemeral hope. As Andrew McCann argues, *Dead Europe* “has come to play an important role in academic discourse ... as a result of its ability to organise theoretically driven discussion” around topical issues such as “cosmopolitanism, spectrality, trauma, memory, governmentality and bare life.”¹ Despite its grim subject matter and Gothic depictions of dystopia, ruin, and death, the resolution of *Dead Europe* seems to offer a conditional moment of redemption, not only for the protagonist, but also for Australia as part of a new world. This contrasts with the relentless bleakness and dismal outcomes of Richard Flanagan’s *The Unknown Terrorist* and Andrew McGahan’s *Underground*, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

At its heart, *Dead Europe* is a fraught tale of origin, familial identity, place, blood, and anti-Semitism in which Tsiolkas weaves twin narratives that both diverge and converge. In the present-day story, Isaac is an art photographer in his mid-thirties, the Australian son of Greek immigrants. He returns to Athens for an exhibition, then embarks on an increasingly hellish journey through Europe. The European cities he traverses are conflicted, decadent, and dying, struggling under the historical weight of a long history of anti-Semitism and ensuing events, primarily the Second World War, the Nazi Holocaust, the rise and fall of

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communism, and the Cold War. Although Jacques Derrida famously claimed that “A spectre is haunting Europe- the spectre of communism,”² in Dead Europe, communism is only one element in a trans-historical array of traumas that weighs heavily on Europe. The collapse of the Berlin Wall, the formation of the European Union and its attendant homogenising and corporatising aspirations, as well as haunting historical guilt around the Holocaust, inform each of the characters and hover in the periphery of various situations and relationships. In 2005, Europe is also grappling with fears of terrorism, the marginalisation of Muslims after 9/11, and the displacing effects of the wars in the Middle East. The narrator/protagonist Isaac leaves his partner Colin at home in Melbourne and embarks on a nihilistic journey of sex and drugs through Europe. When he visits his mother’s ancestral village, he discovers that his family is cursed. After examining photographs he took en route, Isaac notices the figure of a boy who was not there when he shot them, and discovers that this ghostly figure is travelling with him.

The second narrative thread is written as a haunting fable set in Greece during World War II and the Nazi occupation. Isaac’s grandmother, Lucia, an exquisite but barren beauty, is married to Michaelis. They offer to hide Elias, the son of a Jewish couple, in a basement under an abandoned Church to escape the horrors of the Holocaust. Elias lives lonely and malnourished in the stench of his own excrement until one evening when Lucia goes to feed him and seduces him. In doing so, she unleashes a family curse that reverberates through the generations and stalks Isaac as he traverses the doomed metropolises of a fallen and corrupt Europe, which has become a hell on Earth. Isaac’s rootlessness and predatory journey can be conceived politically as a discursive exploration of Australian settler anxieties about place and identity in relation to European historical trauma. I read the novel’s apocalyptic cities as moral wastelands, corrupted and haunted by networks of various traumas. They are trapped in cycles of suffering, and their demise is a salient warning to Australia about its past atrocities and current injustices. Due to contemporary Australia’s heritage as a settler society, it is a new world with links to the old world of Europe; it has inherited Europe’s haunted legacy. For Lynda Ng, this linking of Australia with broader

European history is deliberate and offers a “savage critique of the effects of globalisation and late capitalism.”3 Continuing along the same trajectory as Europe in the post-9/11 epoch, Australia risks a twofold haunting – a painful colonial legacy combined with current injustices regarding refugees and asylum seekers, resulting in a dual and mirrored damnation. In *Dead Europe*, the trauma of antisemitism and the horror of the Holocaust transmogrify into the post-9/11 apocalyptic anxieties around Islam and asylum seekers in both Europe and Australia. Tsiolkas dismantles the binary of naïve and innocent Australia in contrast to corrupt Europe. By linking the two, he foregrounds how layers of inherited traumas and our own historical and contemporary atrocities infect Australian cities.

**Apocalypse and Trauma**

Urban space in Europe is uneasy, treacherous, imbued with apocalyptic demise, and peopled with inhuman entities. Nicholas Birns acknowledges this doomed version, claiming that “Tsiolkas does not romanticise Europe as a locale of cosmopolitanism and tradition.”4 Rather, it is a hellish and Gothic landscape with little hope of renewal:

*Dead Europe* contends that the only European tradition still prospering is that of vampirism, as Isaac ... preys on other people’s blood. The radiant future is not only haunted but despoiled by the ghosts of the past, and Europe, in a prescient anticipation of the political problems of the mid-2010s, is less revived by the post-communist era than zombified by it.5

The novel’s Gothic sensibility, apocalyptic imagery, and particularly the vampire motif allow for the return of the haunting past, where “the fascination with transgression and anxiety over cultural limits ... produce ambivalent emotions and meanings in their tales of darkness,

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3 Lynda Ng, “*Dead Europe* and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature: Globalism, Cosmopolitanism and Perversity,” *Australian Humanities Review* 54 (May 2013): 121.
Tsiolkas’ depictions of vampiric desire and bloodlust are confronting, but when adapted to the international political and cultural climate in 2005, the pursuits and transgressions of the vampire and attendant notions of apocalypse generate prescient commentaries on past and present traumas. In the final pages of the novel, the various traumas endemic to an already disintegrating Europe hurtling towards self-destruction are projected onto an Australia already contending with its own historical and contemporary traumas as a postcolonial nation. In the novel, Melbourne is not apocalyptic like European cities, but if historical and contemporary traumas are not addressed, the inference for Australia is that it too will decline.

The logical endpoint of apocalyptic landscapes in monster theory is the monster figure. The return of the Gothic monster, in this case the vampire, represents deep-seated haunting guilt. In adapting the theoretical lens of monster theory to the Gothic elements in *Dead Europe*, I argue that the vampire is an embodiment of the multidimensional matrix of traumas, past and present, that haunts Europe and threatens Australia’s demise. Monster theory is congruent with the Gothic mode of the novel because Tsiolkas utilises the language and imagery of Gothic horror fiction as the realist elements of the novel give way to phantasmal depictions. Monster theory explores the way in which difference and deviance are lived and experienced in the contemporary world and provides vessels for the management of collective anxieties. Monsters represent historical guilt as well as social, cultural, and economic anxiety. The vampire is a doomed monster figure, always thirsting for blood. According to Ken Gelder, although vampires may be immortal, “they also carry with them a heightened sense of change, death and loss.” In *Monster Theory* Jeffrey Jerome Cohen explores what happens when monstrosity is considered as a mode of cultural discourse. Cohen demonstrates how “the manifold boundaries (temporal, geographic, bodily, technological) that constitute culture become imbricated in the construction of the

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For Cohen, the monster resides in a category at the furthest edges of “marginalisation, an abject epistemological devise basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and identity formation.” In other words, the monster classification is a spatial and temporal anomaly that unsettles what is thought to be natural and/or human. The monster is not bound by time, but rather haunts it, bringing the past and the present together, and eradicating totalising notions of history. In this way, it simultaneously encompasses past and present traumas in a collective constellation. Cohen also argues that monsters are “an embodiment of difference,” a non-categorical “resistant Other known only through the process of movement.” It seems fitting therefore, to explore the novel’s monstrous iterations only through the process of movement.

The anxieties and traumas that haunt urban spaces take Tsiolkas away from realism into Gothic and apocalyptic fantasy as ways of representing unspeakable and catastrophic horror. Frank Kermode argues in The Sense of an Ending that “fictions of the End” come about “under varying existential pressures” during which we imagine the end of the world. 9/11 represents one such contemporary existential crisis that left many writers and observers speechless. Richard Gray recalls “the blank stare of the actual” as witnesses confronted the “irreducible reality of what had happened.” Dead Europe proffers an apocalyptic elucidation in response to post-9/11 trauma. Coupled with historical European atrocities, the landscapes that Tsiolkas depicts are consequently haunted and bleak. Literary critics have questioned the place of fiction after 9/11 and how writers may represent such extreme catastrophe and suffering without substantiating or complying with the culture that produced it. In 1949, Theodor Adorno summarised the ethical challenges and responsibilities of aesthetic and fictional creation in the aftermath of historical traumata in his famous dictum, “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” (better known as, “there can be no

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10 Cohen, “Preface,” ix.
11 Cohen, “Preface,” x.
poetry after Auschwitz”). This typifies what many scholars have branded as the unspeakability of the Shoah or Holocaust. To categorise the Holocaust as unspeakable, paradoxically deems it a notion inflected with indescribable horror that warrants sanctity, taboo, and consideration, and at the same time attests to the impossibility of accurate representation of lived experience. As Anna Richardson states, Adorno foregrounds not only the writing of poetry per se, but rather the “tension between ethics and aesthetics inherent in an act of artistic production that reproduces the cultural values of the society that generated the Holocaust.” The notion of unspeakability is similar but not equal to the speechlessness in the face of the existential horror of 9/11 that I have explored as part of trauma theory. Of course, this in no way equates the extreme horror of the Holocaust with 9/11, but merely ponders how literature in Australia has responded to and attempted to explore the experience of 9/11, its long-term international consequences, and the ethical consequences of doing so. Michael Rothberg’s concept of the multidimensional matrix is intended to explain how such multiple events of collective trauma may be simultaneously apprehended in the public sphere. Surveying Holocaust studies and postcolonial studies, Rothberg argues against a competitive model of trauma, which blocks comparative articulations of specific traumas in relation to others. Instead, it is necessary to move beyond what he calls Holocaust exceptionalism or competitive memory to incorporate seemingly incompatible legacies of trauma and subsequent group identities that may be examined side

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by side.\textsuperscript{18} While recognising the specific atrocities and horrors under the Nazi regime, Holocaust studies has enabled the articulation of other narratives of human victimisation.

Although \textit{Dead Europe} depicts innumerable incidents of maltreatment and suffering, the city of Melbourne, which appears only briefly, is problematically depicted as a place of hope. As a city which presents itself as an antipodean contrast to declining Europe, Melbourne appears to offer Isaac’s family the potential for healing and hope in the uncertain world of terrorism and global displacement after 9/11.

\textbf{Consumption, Catastrophe, and Late Capitalism}

Amongst other traumas, the apocalypse in \textit{Dead Europe} is precipitated by the depredations of late capitalism. The Europe that Isaac traverses as he moves through the cities of Athens, Venice, Prague, Berlin, Paris, and finally London, becomes an increasingly terrifying terrain of economic uncertainty, common currency, and illegal immigration, as well as the negative impacts of a globalised and exploitative mass consumer culture. In the country of his ancestors, Isaac, who had been to Greece twelve years earlier, remarks repeatedly to himself how Athens has changed and how it unsettles him. While observing that “the alleys and arcades behind Ommonia had been cleaned up,” he also notices that there were elements of grotesquerie.\textsuperscript{19} He watches “a giant inflatable corporate clown ... high above the entry to the old market square and imagines that its “monstrous grinning face mocked the Greeks smoking and drinking below” (29-30). Isaac also perceives the corporatised global elements in the city, including “the five rings of the Olympic movement,” remnants of the 2004 Games, which were everywhere alongside “the red and orange circles of MasterCard” (30). Athens is extremely polarised, affluent Europeans contrasting sharply with the marginalised poor eking out a living. The son of communists, Isaac laments how the Athenian streets are filled with wealthy locals and tourists, where “the square of the Megalo Horio” is surrounded with “Prada, Gucci, and Versace, and everyone sat drinking, eating, and speaking loudly and ostentatiously on their mobile phones” (80). A materialistic journalist

\textsuperscript{18} Michael Rothberg, \textit{Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1.
\textsuperscript{19} Christos Tsiolkas, \textit{Dead Europe} (Milsons Point, NSW: Vintage, 2005), 29. All subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text.
who interviews Isaac about his photography is “a suited young man barely out of his teens who did not take off his Calvin Klein sunglasses” and proceeds to complain “about the slack habits of his Albanian maid” (34). Isaac notes with distaste that even cousin Giulia, a resident of Athens, is impacted by the globalising prosperity of Europe, replacing the baggy denim “of a Communist Party cadre” with expensive, thin, silk shirts (81). Isaac demonstrates his own consumerist corruption when he pays young boys for sex.

The profoundly uneven impacts of wealth and power, coupled with the homogenising aesthetic of late capitalism displayed in Athens, offer a sharp critique of globalisation as a totalising world system, which sets the scene for the horror at the core of the novel. Andrew McCann suggests that Tsiolkas’s writing “approaches the death drive at the centre of consumer culture ... [with] ... its empty dream of enjoyment.” As a result, Tsiolkas presents cities in the novel that reflect the underside of this rampant global culture, with its devouring machine of capital that leaves ugly degradation in its wake. The Athens that Isaac encounters is littered with the homogenising markers of global capital, which is a consistent feature throughout his European trip. He distastefully mentions the ugly concrete structures around him, “the dust and the perpetual grey residue of the Athenian air,” and a prominent “billboard for the Agricultural Bank of Greece” obstructing most of the view outside his squalid hotel room (25). The corporatised emblems of global commodity culture jostling against urban filth and decay are replicated in the ruined cities that Isaac encounters throughout Europe. For Emily Apter, global commodity culture is merely another term applied to the economic neo-imperialism of America throughout the world. Applying Apter’s concepts to Dead Europe, it is evident that Americanised consumerism in Athens is part of a one-world system, which Apter would call a “supranational entity” comprising corporate global capital. Tsiolkas, like Apter, critiques the homogeneity or “aesthetic systematicity” of the culture of globalism. This is reflected in Isaac’s disgust at these aesthetically homogenised and degraded cities.

22 Apter, Against World Literature, 71-72.
When the sun sets on the grimy Athenian streets, other subterranean creatures emerge from the shadows; marginal, dislocated, and poor, they offer a striking contrast to the city’s better-off residents. At night, Isaac encounters a city peopled with young, malnourished, migrant rent-boys (25) and an underworld of “whores and pickpockets and thieves” (43). After his failed photography exhibition in Athens, he makes “a drunken path through the crowded, carousing city” (37) to a park at Thission where he had paid a young boy for sex the night before:

Many more youths were out that night ... There were men who wandered in the shadows and if I had not been drunk, I would have feared for my life. There were plenty of Russians, women and men, girls and boys, there were Greek whores and Albanian whores, there were Romanians and Poles, but I couldn’t find the boy. (37)

Through the characterisation of Isaac, Tsiolkas presents the reader with a realm of “extreme ugliness” where “the human qualities most likely to be found universally lean towards the sordid and sinful.”

Dead Europe is filled with recurring depictions of urban poverty in which displaced inhabitants are commodified, rendered inhuman, or made monstrous by rapacious capitalist consumption, reducing them to subsistence on the margins. This recalls Giorgio Agamben’s examination of the ancient Roman concept homo sacer (literally, sacred man) which permitted citizens to kill an outcast with impunity. Agamben analyses the obscure edict to theorise those living a bare life, residing in exclusion outside the law.

For Fredric Jameson, this is symptomatic of what he calls “the whole global, yet American postmodern culture ... [a] new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world,” the underside of which is “blood, torture, death, and terror.” Similarly, Michael Titlestad contends that such apocalyptic depictions are symptomatic of late capitalism’s

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23 Ng, “Dead Europe and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature,” 131.
effects and the way in which they “create temporal and spatial zones of collapse, approximating the hyperboles of dystopian fiction.” As part of this dystopian logic of catastrophism, the poor and homeless become signifiers of apocalypse because “they inhabit a condition that threatens to become universal should society collapse entirely rather than ... only at its margins.”

Thus, the vulnerable and marginal are often depicted with apocalyptic imagery, which utilises the Gothic conflation of sex and death. Existing at the urban fringes, the novel’s young male sex workers are often threatened with violence while the socially and financially stable show “indifference to the sight of beggars and gypsies on the street” or “sour disapproval of the new immigrants” (134).

Depictions of the daytime moneyed and materialistic Athenians juxtaposed with the impoverished night-time denizens personify Jean Baudrillard’s “violence of the global” postulation, in which homogenisation produces fragmentation, as “discrimination and exclusion are not accidental consequences” but rather, globalisation’s logical outcomes.

This is particularly pertinent in Tsiolkas’ criticism of the formation of the European Union (created in 1993), and its causal links with poor and vulnerable migrants within the zone. Cousin Giulia’s friend Andreas declares that he prefers “Amsterdam for LSD and for Ecstasy” (82). As for hashish, however, it “is best when it is directly received from the hands of a young Pakistani peasant boy,” he smirks (82). It is clear that Andreas views recreational drugs as well as poor migrant boys as exotic commodities for personal consumption. Initially, Isaac appears critical of this new global Europe with its systemic inequalities, corporatised aesthetics, and social divisions. He conflates capitalist aspirational elements with the detritus of debased Athens and his own inner turmoil:

I could not bear their obsession with the accrual of possessions: Prada, Gucci and Versace. I could not get settled back in the city ... I was

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27 Titlestad, “The Logic of the Apocalypse,” 100.
sensing the world through another’s skin. The noise and dirt and dust
of the city all seemed amplified: I could not find peace. (134-135)
Any chance of finding hope in Greece in the villages away from the city is dissipated and
moves further towards trauma, death, and apocalypse. Tsiolkas deconstructs the romantic
fancy that classical pastoral pleasures provide an antidote to urban corruption and ruin.
During a brief interlude at Agrio Dassos, his mother’s village, Isaac finds further reminders
that this place, this land, is perishing: the only young people in evidence are Albanian
migrants, “thin young men working shirtless in the fields,” while a nearby cottage has only
“one good wall remaining, the rest of it rubble” (104). Giulia shivers and mutters “to telos
tou kosmou,” which can be translated as both “the edge of the earth” and “the end of the
world” (104). There is “no sign of life in the village,” (104) shrouded in a silence that “lay
heavy and oppressive on the rocks and trees” (105). Andreas urges Isaac to take his
photographs before the village becomes extinct, exclaiming, “This is a dying Greece” (105).
Here, the rural world, traditionally juxtaposed with the urban, is also decayed, degraded,
and expiring.

The End Times
The concurrent degradation of Greece’s inner cities and countryside is part of a larger
discourse of catastrophism and end times thinking that infuses Dead Europe. End times
thinking incorporates concepts of crisis and disaster as well as eschatological biblical notions
of apocalypse, which refer to divine judgement before or at the end of the world. For Slavoj
Žižek, the “End Times”, constitutes the reality of economic, political and ecological crisis. He
argues that “the global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point.”30 He
utilises biblical metaphor to denote what he calls the “four riders of the apocalypse” –
ecological crises, the negative impacts of the biogenic revolution, inequalities in the struggle
over food and raw materials, and growing social divisions and exclusion.31 Žižek also cites Ed
Ayres’ four accelerated developments that will result in doomsday: “population growth,

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Žižek, Living in the End Times, x.
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consumption of resources, carbon gas emissions, and the mass extinction of species.”

For Žižek, this approaching zero point or apocalyptic “ecologic breakdown is something completely outside collective human experience”, so much so that we may not see it or refuse to see it, even though the evidence is overwhelming. Tsiolkas, an avid critic of late capitalist globalisation, reflects such unimaginable horror using the imagery of apocalypse. His ruined European cities are spaces of ecological crisis. Apprehended through the eyes of Isaac (who is not as critical), Prague is dissipated and derelict:

I walked the dark city, past whores and beggars, drunkards and dopers, revellers and madmen shouting out the varied names of Paradise and Hell ... there was a city called Prague and that once hope existed in this city, and I kept walking and walking but dawn came and I had found no hope. (233)

Isaac dismisses Berlin as “a putrid sewer of filth and waste,” a bleak and colourless city with a chemical stench (260). Later in Paris, Tsiolkas reminds the reader of the capitalist imperative that creates ecological ruin. Previously, Isaac thought of the city as full of “prim and pretty facades and ornaments of architecture,” but is now confronted with a place of “darkness and shadows. Sweat, drugs, excrement and the caustic traces of the city” (301). Also, in Paris Isaac remarks on the same ugly corporate symbols of American neo-imperialist consumerism that he first saw in Athens, and throughout the cities he had travelled. It is a European city interchangeable with many others. Isaac remarks, “This was not a Paris I knew at all,” deeming it nothing more than “a flat-blasted concrete shithole as far as the eye could see”, where the only marker that it was France is the “French type on the banners for Pepsi and Nike flying across the shopping mall exterior” (269). For Evan Calder Williams, images of apocalyptic decay, waste, ruin, and consumption are signifiers of the collapse of late capitalism. This decay is evident in Dead Europe in:

32 Ed Ayres, quoted in Žižek, Living in the End Times, 327.
33 Žižek, Living in the End Times, 327.
the unfathomable amounts of waste filling this world, in the oceans of trash, slabs of concrete, rusting infrastructure, all the hallmarks of a catastrophe that left its mess to be cleaned up by the survivors.\textsuperscript{34}

For Williams, the environmental and urban catastrophe is a capitalist apocalypse, the collapse of economic and social order which necessitates brutal violence, and the exploitation and mass consumption of natural and vulnerable human resources, reflected in abundant images of decay and refuse. Tsiolkas’ decaying, inhospitable cities evoke the consequences of environmental degradation and the gradual encroachment of climate disaster. Rob Nixon’s \textit{Slow Violence} is a study of anthropogenic environmental damage, which unlike customary notions of violence, is not spectacular or instantaneous, but rather incremental, so much so that it is not typically viewed as violence at all. For Nixon, this “occurs gradually” and is “a violence of delayed destruction.”\textsuperscript{35} These stories of increasing greenhouse gases, extinction of species, and ravaged habitats are all cataclysmic, but their effects are postponed and not actually felt for generations.\textsuperscript{36} Nixon suggests that the novel is one format which can still capture the spectacle of this slow violence because of its ability to suspend time, dramatise and explore singular events, and depict delayed, unresolved outcomes.\textsuperscript{37} In \textit{Dead Europe}, this assault on the environment is ignored by the hungry mechanism of capitalism that antagonises ecosystems and aggravates the plight of the poor, the precarious, and the displaced. Capitalism fuels global dispossession as it stimulates conflicts in places which are already at risk, and where the poor struggle to sustain life. This slow violence is evident in Tsiolkas’s depictions of environmental decline and ruin as part of an apocalyptic terrain.

The slow violence enacted in the novel is not only one of environmental damage but also brutality against vulnerable and marginalised people. The narrative is littered with child exploitation, as young people, mostly migrant children, sell sex to survive in Europe. Isaac

\textsuperscript{34} Evan Calder Williams \textit{Combined and Uneven Apocalypse: Luciferian Marxism} (Winchester, UK and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2010), 46.
\textsuperscript{36} Nixon, \textit{Slow Violence}, 3.
\textsuperscript{37} Nixon, \textit{Slow Violence}, 51.
seems momentarily repelled by this, but then becomes a consumer of underage sex himself. When witnessing the young male prostitutes of possibly Slavic, Russian, and/or Greek descent, Isaac admits to being, “a little frightened by their youth and poverty” (26). He appears cognisant of the hostility in Athens and the extreme abjection of the poor when he witnesses a young boy being savagely beaten, remarking that “violence had made me keenly aware of the strangeness of the world around me” (43). Yet later, in Prague, these concerns become secondary to his own sexual desire as he is aroused while witnessing a live sex show involving a minor.

As part of a violent and dehumanising impulse in Dead Europe, pornography operates as the dystopic synecdoche of global capitalism. Disturbing scenes of explicit sexual activity involving children “present consumer culture as antisocial, if not pathogenic,” and work to foreground how “the violence of pornography” operates as the underside of consumer culture in ubiquitous, exploitative, and morally transgressive ways. As Isaac partakes in the global consumer culture of Europe, his is transformed into a vampire, the Gothic symbol of consumption and degradation. In Prague, his photographer friend (nicknamed Sal Mineo for his resemblance to James Dean’s Rebel Without a Cause co-star) and his boss Syd produce child pornography starring young (mostly under-aged) migrant boys. Sal Mineo offers hypocritical commentary on the new Czech capitalism after the fall of communism: “Tourism and fucking, That’s the Czech Republic for ya” (182). Isaac experiences Prague as a city filled with “sexualized consumerism: a network of pornographers, brothels, and sex clubs,” a commentary on the “creation of victim populations with limited or no legal rights. In his sexual participation with young minors, Isaac is implicated in this dehumanising commodification of Europe. Although Sal Mineo’s commentary is an attempted economic justification of an exploitative consumerism, he too is implicated and complicit in the commodification and consumption of boys. Similarly, the ethical status of Tsiolkas’ critique is significantly problematic, due to his pornographic depictions of explicit, sometimes violent, transgressive sex in the novel. In other words, Tsiolkas, partakes in the very thing (exploitative pornography), that he is attempting to critique.

38 McCann, “Christos Tsiolkas and the Pornographic Logic of Commodity Capitalism,” 37.
39 McCann, Christos Tsiolkas and the Fiction of Critique, 37.
Tsiolkas problematically utilises the shock value of pornography to make a critique of late capitalist excesses. Exemplifying this process of commodification, pornography “embodies both a crystallisation of commodity culture’s logic, and the point at which that logic seems to infringe on a version of the human in ways that are understandably disconcerting.”

Pornography is stigmatised because it conflates transgression, taboo, and pleasure, pushing consumer logic to excess and inherently dehumanising the subject. If pornography in the novel is a “volatile textuality that summons the disfiguring logic of capitalist modernity,” as McCann claims, then the traumatic and inhuman result of capitalism’s predation also make way for the ultimate consumer – the vampire. McCann makes causal links between pornography, trauma, commodification, and catastrophe in the way that pornography “seems to symptomatize a general sense of disintegration, or even traumatization, that is latent in the fabric of modern life ... a general and nebulous sense of the damage caused by political and economic forces.” What emerges in this dystopic space is endless cycles of suffering because there is a potential for catastrophe in the present, as well as the terrifying future. Ultimately, Tsiolkas dismantles the dream of a unified and prosperous Europe, espoused by the move to a market economy for former Eastern bloc countries, along with the failed hope that capitalist “initiative and competition” will stave off “terrorism and poverty” (211). The result is apocalyptic cities, traumatised by catastrophe, poverty, and human suffering.

**Marginalisation, the Vampire, and Hell**

Haunted by the history of the Holocaust and coupled with the after-effects of 9/11 in the present, the European cities in the novel are caught in a multidirectional matrix of trauma, hellish spaces of urban suffering, dislocation and fragmentation, paving the way for the reappearance of the vampire. The vampire infiltrates a wealthy globalised Europe after 9/11 as an undead phantasm that haunts the imagination with notions of blood contamination, sexual transgression, indulgence, and predation. The vampire is dialectical, incorporating

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41 McCann, “Christos Tsiolkas and the Pornographic Logic of Commodity Capitalism,” 33.
42 McCann, _Christos Tsiolkas and the Fiction of Critique_, 67.
43 McCann, _Christos Tsiolkas and the Fiction of Critique_, 66.
both decadence and depravity, opulence as well as abjection and horror. In “The Dialectic of Fear” (1982), Franco Moretti makes the case for reading Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* as a metaphor for capital, and the active, lascivious, consumptive greed of capitalism. He utilises an analogy by Karl Marx linking the industrial proprietor to vampirism, claiming that “Capital is dead labour, which vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour and lives the more labour it sucks.” The vampire is both dead and yet not dead: “he is an Un-Dead, a 'dead' person who yet manages to live thanks to the blood he sucks from the living.” The main impetus for the vampire is consumption. In terms of the vampire’s consumptive link to global capital, McCann states that Isaac’s vampiric monstrosity is a “predatory transnationalism” where mobile cosmopolitan elites prey upon the (often non-Western) poor as sex tourists. Corrupted by lust and excess, Isaac epitomises this monstrosity, which robs him of all empathy for those he victimises. In Amsterdam, he plans to “wander the streets and cross the bridges ... while I glory in my omnipotence” (302). Isaac proclaims that “The fire in my blood is still roaring ... no longer ... saddened by the rote masturbations of the whores parading their grotesque bodies in the clear glass windows” (302). Here, Isaac epitomises the wealthy predators who abuse the young, the poor, and the marginalised. Eventually, his disdain for the poverty and degradation of his victims evolves into an impetus to annihilate them. Disgusted by “their snarls for money,” he proclaims, “the urge to wipe the wretched scum from the earth ... [and] ... extinguish them all from memory” (302). In a declaration reminiscent of Dracula, Isaac admits, “I wish to have my fill of bodies, to consume and devour... I will feel no guilt, I will experience no shame” (302). Utilising the fallen figure of Isaac, Tsiolkas makes caustic commentary on the predatory, vampiric aspirations of the West upon the rest of the world.

At the same time as evoking images of predatory and decadent consumption, the vampire represents the dehumanisation of the individual in a hostile and fallen world. As a Gothic monster, the vampire “registers otherness,” giving voice “to the effects of exclusion,”

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45 Moretti, “The Dialectic of Fear,” 73.
46 McCann, “Christos Tsiolkas and the Pornographic Logic of Commodity Capitalism,” 38.
persecution, oppression, and confinement, all of which feature in the haunted cities of post-9/11 Europe. The vampire articulates “hidden narratives of abuse” linked to the conflation of memory and culture that often reside within the Gothic, because it is concerned with bodily terrors and bodily harm. Fred Botting argues that the Gothic monsters which appeared in narrative and film, particularly after the horrors of World War II, were transgressive inversions of reality, “the face of terrors and horrors accompanying the emergence of a new world order.” They challenged “rational, moral and ideological frameworks which, in modernity, had shaped the world”; ideas such as “freedoms, anxieties, monstrosities associated with otherness, power, bodies, and sexuality.”

Isaac becomes a vampire as he feeds on the blood, refuse, gloom, and brutality of each city. Travelling through progressively degraded urban spaces, he is impacted by images of the otherness, abject persecution, and deprivation of the migrant. Isaac gets angry at the manifest poverty of “new immigrants,” especially the “beggars and gypsies on the street” who face the indifference or “sour disapproval” of those better off (134). Tsiolkas imbues the disturbing depictions of migrants with a spectrality. For Nikos Papastergiadis the ghostly image of the migrant is an indictment of the dominant discourse’s limited construction of migrant subjectivity. Papastergiadis claims that “almost all the migrants in the novel are described as possessing desperate groping eyes, and appear condemned to a life of prostitution and violent crime.” All the immigrants Isaac encounters occupy marginal positions: “Slavic prostitutes in Greece, illegal migrant labourers in France, Albanian refugees in Italy, Russian-Jewish sex workers in Prague,” and “Serbians cleaning the halls of Cambridge.” As “non-normative citizens, refugees, and ‘illegals’,” they are “economically exploited with no legal rights or recourse for justice,” while there is no impetus in this apocalyptic Europe to address these social and economic inequalities.

48 Botting, Gothic, 172.
50 Botting, Gothic, 172.
destabilising figure, the vampire is pertinent here to the depiction of a ruined, doomed Europe. Botting claims that the vampire will “obliterate the possibility of ... any final human order and unity,” because it interrogates notions of rationality, progress, and civilisation which then cede to new forms of irrationality, excess and inhumanity. While Isaac himself becomes a vampire, the embodiment of migrant trauma and abjection, he is also haunted by a demonic vampire. The figure of the vampire ties together varying elements of trauma in the matrix- past and present, binding together the atrocities of the Holocaust and World War II, with the abjection of migrants in Europe after 9/11. The ghostly boy shadowing Isaac personifies not only the vestige of a family curse, but also the dehumanisation of the migrant, in this case the Jew, in a culturally and economically divided Europe. The spirit of Elias, now named Angelo (the Greek word for angel), is a symbol of extreme marginalisation and dislocation. When Isaac has his photographs of Europe developed in London, they are not the shots he took, but rather pictures of this abject boy dwelling in cities of death, where “bodies in these cityscapes ... seem ancient, damaged and broken” (366). In print after print, “there appeared the same reptilian face” (336). As a vampire, Elias is a haunting, “dark, ghoulish boy, his face ... leering, sometimes grinning, always emaciated, always hungry, always reaching out grimly towards my gaze” (336). As Isaac partakes in capitalist Europe’s depredations, Elias’ grip on his psyche increases, transforming him into a vampire and almost killing him. After coming to Europe to rescue him, Isaac’s mother sees the ghostly Elias/Angelo next to her dying son, “his boy’s body curled up beside ... [him] ... his thin fingers ... stroking Isaac’s skin” (396).

As part of a network of traumas that include economic divisions, marginalisation, poverty, and racism, the vampire embodies historical guilt as well as contemporary urban anxieties. For Robert Manne, Dead Europe is primarily “a book about ‘the Jews’, in part because their entirely fictitious supposed existence, as a single sinister purposive collectivity, remains unquestioned throughout.” Whilst Dead Europe is rife with disturbing anti-Semitism, the

53 Botting, Gothic, 173.
historical plight of the Jews and their depiction as a menacing coterie is one great unspoken warning in the novel, and a great shame of European history, an “unspeakable trauma that must never be forgotten yet can never be completely spoken.” Isaac is unable to feel compassion for the plight of the Jews. In two separate encounters with Jewish men on two different trips to Europe, he shows his disdain for the Jews and the act of remembering the Holocaust. In the first incident with a middle-aged attendant at the Jewish History Museum in Thessaloniki, Isaac is forbidden to take photos (88-89). Although he does not curse out loud, he wishes he had said, “Fuck off, you paranoid Jew, I have nothing to do with this history” (90). On the second occasion, he encounters a mute elderly man in the Jewish ghetto in Venice, who grabs Isaac’s camera and bites him in the struggle. In this instance, Isaac calls the man a “fucking Jew” (154). After the Jewish man bites him, Isaac reveals his monstrosity by releasing an anti-Semitic refrain, a curse that he had “been yearning to utter ... since the beginning of time” (154), a curse that has haunted his family for generations. The bite foregrounds the viral notion of anti-Semitism as well as the circular way in which past traumas inform and encroach upon the present. Later, in Paris, Isaac is in full vampire mode as he licks the blood from the face of a Jewish woman, Anika, who has been bashed by her husband, Gerry. After “drinking in the vital carnal liquid”, he feels “the beat of her heart in the thick drops” that ooze down his throat (297). Sated, he listens to Gerry recount the “grim tragedy of annihilation” Anika’s family underwent during the Holocaust but remains unmoved “by these lamentations” (299). Unable to feel compassion or empathy, Isaac contradicts Adorno’s pronouncement, declaring that:

There is poetry after Auschwitz ... There is poetry and life and adventure and pleasure and movement ... Life doesn’t stop, suffering does not end ... There is nothing to apologise for, nothing to regret.

(299)

Here Isaac revels in his true nature and monstrosity as an anti-Semite and Holocaust denialist. His reaction to the atrocities of Jewish history in his earlier trip to Europe.

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exemplifies that he has always been a monster but has lacked the critical self-awareness to admit it.

As well as the trauma of the Holocaust, the vampire also represents contemporary post-9/11 anxieties of Europe and the wider world. As a manifestation of the matrix of trauma, the vampire is transcultural as well as trans-temporal, incorporating past and future atrocities as a reminder of the human capacity for cruelty and destruction. For Cohen, “the undead returns ... to be read against contemporary social moments or a specific, determining event.”

In Europe after 9/11, anti-Semitism exists alongside other ethno-cultural prejudices, including Islamophobia, engendering hell on earth. The mention of 9/11 is a turning point in the novel. In Cambridge, Isaac’s reaction to 9/11 precipitates the novel’s horrific, apocalyptic climax:

You know, when I saw those planes hit the World Trade Centre towers I was scared ... But what shocked me about my response was the excitement I also felt. I thought it could be the end of the world and part of me wanted it to be the end. I thought it would be good if the whole world did go to fucking Hell, that it was the start of Armageddon. I thought that would be just. Maybe I still do. (346-347)

This invocation of Armageddon and the resulting hell is pertinent, as the mention of 9/11 unleashes a proverbial Pandora’s box of contemporary traumas that resonate in the heightened orgiastic vampiric images of bloodlust that are unleashed in the novel. In the following scenes, the cities become more apocalyptic as Isaac’s vampiric impulses are sharpened. London is a place of waste, consumption, degradation, infection, and putrefaction. As his bloodlust increases, the cityscapes become more hellish, the culmination of all human horrors, atrocities, and refuse. In Cambridge, Isaac’s spectral epiphany is confirmed: “Europe stank, it stank of ghosts and shadows” (358). In London, Isaac is no longer repulsed by the “putrid, accumulated odour of tense, neurotic bodies and ... the obscene effluence of the murky Thames ... a charged, chemical stench ... like a mutant

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nimbus over the sprawling city” (373). Later that night, in Earls Court sometime after midnight, he wanders the deserted streets and “draws sharply on the squalid air ... thick with ... Layers and layers of shit” (374). Images of the futility and meaningless of life and the endless repetition of historical traumas fill the empty streets of London at night:

History, manure, blood and bone under my feet. The dust of death, life, death, life, endless death and life, repeating repeating, this is what my body is propelling itself through, this is what life on this dirty soil means ... The sky above me now is cramped and petty ... I can’t see the edges of any universe. The dome of London reflects back on itself. Europe is endless Europe. No promise of anything else. (374-375)

As Isaac walks this ruined city, depravity, waste, and deathly undertones become apparent among the doomed city-dwellers:

I turn into Warwick road. There are prostitutes outside the closed gates of the Earls Court tube station. I sniff. Rats and sewage, shit and piss and blood ... The first woman smells of heroin ... the abrasive caustic smell is unappealing. The second woman smells of decaying flesh. I know at once that she is dying. (375)

Isaac moves through the dying city, “into the vastness of Hell,” becoming “the Devil ... [who] ... knew what Evil felt like,” as he contemplates murder (377). This urban inferno, which Isaac traverses in search of blood, is not just physically terrifying, but also one of psychological horror. Propelled toward his apotheosis, or rather his descent into the depths of vampiric depravity and demonic madness, Isaac finally understands the links between past and present human atrocities with the true nature of hell:

What I believe is that we will kill each other, that we will hurt each other. We will destroy our neighbours and we will exile them. We will sell our children as whores. We will murder and rape and punish one another. We will keep warring and we will keep hating ... We will
pursue pleasure and destroy one another in these pursuits. We will abandon our children. We will do all this in the name of God and in the name of our nature. We will create poverty and illness ... obscene wealth and the depravities that arise from it ... We will hate and kill and piss and shit on one another ... We will create Armageddon. In the name of God or in the name of justice, or simply, because we can. This is what I believe. (379)

This remarkable speech is a litany of human atrocities, indicating that for Isaac, the one unifying human experience is the age-old hatred for each other and the endless desire to subjugate, consume, and kill “simply because we can” (379). For Derrida, the past irrupts into the present in a circularity of deferred meaning and origin. Applying this logic to the novel, the ghost or spectral entity represents this circularity of deferred meaning: in this case the vampire, which is neither dead nor alive, but a phantom from the past signifying repeated cycles of endless trauma. The vampiric entity, signifying the historical family curse irrupts into the present to possess Isaac. While incorporating past traumas the vampire also gestures to failed and apocalyptic futures depicted in the dying Europe. The vampiric Isaac becomes an embodiment of this circular trauma in his realisation of the culmination of historical and contemporary hatred. Europe has become a necropolis, a Hell on earth that will repeat past atrocities. After partaking in a bloodbath, at the climax of the novel and at the pinnacle of his monstrous evolution, Isaac makes the choice of damnation claiming, “I choose ... the demons, I choose Lucifer... I choose Hell” (390). This may be an allusion to John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), in which Satan says “I ... myself am Hell”. Here, Isaac demonstrates that it is not God or a misguided faith in God that makes a monster; rather, it is his own choice to oppose what he believes God wants. To grasp the true horror within himself, Isaac must embrace the culminations of past and present human atrocities.

The circular repetition of historical traumas is demonstrated in Isaac’s photographs. When Isaac’s mother and lover Colin go to London to bring him back to Melbourne because he is

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57 See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx.*
dying, Rebecca sees his spectral photographs and realises “the truth of Europe”, that “it has suffered Hell” (404). As well as the past, Rebecca sees that the present and future of Europe is also doomed. In relation to the inhabitants of London, she can feel “their fear, their anxiety ... [that] ... suffused the city.” Her epiphany comes when she realises that “Isaac had not photographed the past, he had captured the future” (405). She understands that historical traumas will be repeated in the future. In response, Colin retorts, “Fuck Europe. What Hell do they know? The truth of Europe is money. I fucking hate Europe” (404). For Colin, the catastrophe and calamity that is Europe is consistent with notions of apocalypse as symptomatic of late capitalism. For Rebecca, however, Europe is an ongoing Hell due to its historical trauma, namely the Holocaust. Together, Colin and Rebecca identify the cause of traumas afflicting Europe —the painful recollections of the Jewish Holocaust as well as the contemporary apocalyptic images of alienation, predatory sex and urban and environmental ruin. The post-9/11 cities of Europe are fragmented, haunted, and dying.

**Hope in the New World after 9/11?**

*Dead Europe* is more than an exploration of historical and contemporary European traumas; it is also a salient warning to Australia in the post-9/11 era not to emulate the historical and contemporary atrocities committed in Europe, despite the fact that this warning for Australia may be too late. Although much of the novel takes place in European cities, Tsiolkas also incorporates a scathing commentary on the brutalities committed in Australia. The European cultural history of anti-Semitism and the contemporary marginalisation of largely Muslim migrants after 9/11 are interspersed with Australia’s own historical and contemporary atrocities, which include maltreatment of the Indigenous inhabitants and the offshore detention of asylum seekers since 9/11. While *Dead Europe* offers no triumphant resolution for Australia’s plight in the troubled times after 9/11, there are vestiges of conditional hope, contingent upon confronting the traumas of Australia’s past – the city of Melbourne is not yet infected with the apocalyptic tropes of the European cities.

Tsiolkas does not subscribe to depictions of Australia as a naïve nation in juxtaposition to the historically tainted Europe. Ng explores how the novel dismantles convenient binaries of old world links to England and the new world of Australia, which was “reinforced in the post-war
period by the waves of European immigrants that sought safety and a new beginning in the
geographic remoteness of Australia.”\textsuperscript{59} Ng posits that under this old binary formation,
Australia was depicted in opposition to Europe, with Europe being the “urban and cultural
centre,” while Australia, more youthful and innocent, was defined through vivid literary
depictions of landscape and the “struggle to build a nation, in the harshest of climates.”\textsuperscript{60}

\textit{Dead Europe} includes repeated references to the apparent innocence of Australians. In Paris,
Sula remarks that she sees Australians as possessing an innocence that America has lost
(282). This image is contested when Isaac becomes increasingly pathologised and corrupted.
Tsiolkas questions the concept of antipodean purity, with its perennial sunshine, naïveté and
hope, connecting “Australia to a much broader and deeper European history, offering a
savage critique of the effects of globalisation and late capitalism.”\textsuperscript{61}

\textit{Dead Europe} interrogates notions of globalism, cosmopolitanism, and nationalism in
relationship to Australia as well as Europe. In the novel, globalisation and cosmopolitanism
are defined against “prescriptive and unitary impulses of the nation,” which imply the
belonging to all parts of the world.\textsuperscript{62} Ng critiques this as a universalism which espouses
nothing more than “Eurocentric or Amerocentric leanings,”\textsuperscript{63} particularly regarding global
commodity culture. As I have argued, this global culture is representative of the inhuman
potential which culminates in the monstrous vampire as the ultimate symptom of
globalisation and its forms of production in capitalism, which are based on inequalities and
hierarchical divisions. The arrival of the vampiric Isaac on Australian shores exemplifies that
Australia is not immune to malignant forces of globalisation, nor the atrocities that haunt
Europe. Ultimately, this reaffirms Birns’ argument that the only true global tradition which
prospers in the novel is the vampiric entity that haunts Isaac, that is timeless, and not bound
by national borders.

\textsuperscript{59} Ng, “\textit{Dead Europe} and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature,” 120.
\textsuperscript{60} Ng, “\textit{Dead Europe} and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature,” 121.
\textsuperscript{61} Ng, “\textit{Dead Europe} and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature,” 121.
\textsuperscript{62} Ng, “\textit{Dead Europe} and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature,” 121.
\textsuperscript{63} Ng, “\textit{Dead Europe} and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature,” 125.
As a new Australian with historical links to Europe, Isaac becomes corrupted in Europe in two ways: via his consumptive predation and his ignorance of the past. In *Dead Europe*, "everyone is involved in the greedy process of capitalism and everyone’s hands are tainted by the past." Significantly, it is Isaac’s denial of the traumas of the past which allows him to become reinfected by the curse. This is reflected in his comment regarding the possibility of poetry after Auschwitz, which negates the atrocities of the Holocaust. He partakes in capitalist excess and the “banal modernity of the city … as if history never happened” (261). He affirms this neglect of history as symptomatic of Australia as a whole: “In the New World we had no layers of history to our architecture, no beauty in our concrete, steel and cement. Beauty was only in our skies and horizons” (179). This looking outward towards the global scale into skies and horizons negates the true haunting history of Australia, which lies not in its buildings, but in the very sediment of the soil. In Cambridge, nearing the height of his pathology, Isaac yearns for Melbourne: “I want to be home, in pure, vast Australia where the air is clean, young” (375). In the same breath, however, he acknowledges the true horror of Australian history:

I was not fooling myself. There was blood there, in the ground, in the soil, on the water, above the earth. I am not going to pretend that there is not callous history there. (375)

Isaac elucidates the settler anxiety that haunts even the most recent immigrant who "automatically inherits the (mis)fortunes of Australia’s colonial past.” Embedded in this past is the uneasiness or “uncanny” feeling that haunts a settler nation such as Australia, with an “unsettledness” which “folds into the taken-for-granted mode of occupation,” making home a strange place. Isaac articulates the “theme of homesickness, of exile, and return” (35), and the brutal Australian history that haunts the migrant settler. Tsiolkas employs the vampire as a forced reckoning with both European and Australian history. More than a symbol of dehumanising globalised capitalism, the vampire represents anti-Semitism.

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64 Ng, *Dead Europe* and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature,” 133.
and racism as viral phenomena. Additionally, the vampire in its mobility symbolises the horrors of colonisation in the act of attaching, biting, and drawing the lifeblood from the victim. To borrow a metaphor from Lorenzo Veracini, imperialism and colonialism can be linked with viruses and infection, particularly in the way that viruses first “attach to host cells, then penetrate them,” sometimes killing the host, other times, subjecting them. Isaac’s ignorance of European and Australian history haunts him until he metamorphoses into a vampire, the embodiment of colonisation with its attendant trauma, feeding on the poor, dislocated, and marginal.

Tsiolkas attacks the binaries between Australia and Europe in two ways. First, by depicting Europe or the “Old World” not as a culture of “wisdom and civilisation” but rather “a dead Europe, its people merely ghostlike spectres who are physically and spiritually adrift in a world with no future.” Australia, by contrast, should be “the land of the living with a nod to the processes of globalisation,” but in a technologically mediated world where the distance between Europe and Australia is rapidly decreasing, Australia emulates Europe’s decline and collapse. For Ng, Tsiolkas also attacks this binary by outlining the increasing parallels between Europe and Australia. Although Australia is geographically distant from Europe, their cultures and histories are intertwined. The problems of Europe also exist in Australia. Isaac’s lover, working-class, all-Australian Colin, has a neo-Nazi past. As a man of Anglo-Celtic heritage, Colin’s racist background is formulated through a mindset in which “whiteness is a fantasy position of cultural dominance born out of the European expansion.” According to Ghassan Hage, this discourse of paranoid nationalism “bemoans what it sees as an attack on core British values of traditional White Australia” where the mainstream Australian or the “traditional Aussie battler” is perceived as a victim of a “conspiracy to change the very nature of the country.” Colin is just such an Australian man when he first meets Isaac. A blue-collar worker of humble origins, Colin and his colleagues espouse racist ideologies: “They should shoot fucking boat people, shoot any cunt illegally trying to get into this

68 Ng, “Dead Europe and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature,” 122.
69 Ng, “Dead Europe and the Coming of Age in Australian Literature,” 122.
country. ... *We’ve made it too easy for them*” (214). They also have a disdain for New Australians, Asians (“Asians Out”) (215), and especially Aboriginals: “*if you’re an Abo they give you everything*” (215). These maligned groups sit aside references to the Holocaust and the virulent anti-Semitism inherited from Europe: “*Six Million was Not Enough*” (215). These racisms, some imported from Europe, some inherently Australian, demonstrate Australia’s historical connections with Europe, the inherited normalisation of whiteness that negates any idea of Australia as innocent and free of the traumas haunting Europe.

Like Europe, Australian cities are also haunted with post-9/11 anxieties. In Cambridge, Isaac’s former high school teacher, Sam, asks about the state of Australia after 9/11. Isaac replies, “Same as here, really. It’s all national security and fear about terrorism and refugees” (342). It may be worse in Australia, however: “You lock up children? In the desert?” Sam’s housemate, Vera, asks incredulously (342). Although Isaac recognises these Australian atrocities, he tries to ignore them because “talking about Australia in Europe still shamed me” (342). This comparison and inclusion of Australia in reference to the plight of displaced migrants, particularly Muslims after 9/11, widens the critical lens as an indictment of Australia’s mandatory detention policy. Sula, an illegal Muslim immigrant smuggled into Paris by Isaac’s family friend Gerry (himself a dislocated Jew), exemplifies that precarious existence of asylum seekers after 9/11. Gerry explains that because Sula is Muslim, “Europe is no place for her, Europe is not good for her” (271). Under the misapprehension that a Muslim refugee living in hiding in Europe “will be free in Australia” (272), Gerry requests Isaac’s help to smuggle Sula to Australia. Isaac remarks on how Australia has changed and, in the post-9/11 world, is rife with “xenophobia and suspicion of strangers that had long been part of the Australian character” (273). In explaining what Sula will face should she enter Australia without “official papers,” Isaac informs Gerry that “they’ll send her back, or put her in detention” which is “like a prison ... No, it’s like a concentration camp” (272). In the end, however, Sula is arrested, betrayed to the police by Gerry’s bitter wife Anika, who subscribes to the “Send them all back send them to Hell. What the fuck do I care?” (which is sarcastically uttered to her by Gerry to elucidate Anika’s thought process), school of thought (296-297). This anti-Muslim sentiment is espoused by Australia as well as Europe.
Australia is still informed by this traumatic and problematic link to European history which runs deep and informs Australia’s identity in the world. Suvendrini Perera explains that this culmination of the present-day notion of Australia as an “extraterritorial prison” or an “island outpost” originates in its history as the “ultimate penal colony of the British empire.” Australia’s past, its “self-image as an island fortress” is remembered and assembled as an “outpost for western civilization ... a local surrogate for larger imperial powers.”

Although *Dead Europe* is a primarily bleak and traumatic novel, there is a conditional argument to be made for ephemeral hope in the Australian city. The Melbourne that Rebecca and Colin bring Isaac back to is not yet apocalyptic, and he eventually recovers. As they walk through Melbourne Airport Rebecca “felt a gust of biting Antarctic wind and was astonished by its clarity. There was no blood in this wind: it was intoxicating” (406). There is a small sense of hope in Isaac’s return to Melbourne, removed from the horrors of Europe. On the flights home, Rebecca and Colin keep Isaac alive with their own blood (407). Finally, at his home in Melbourne, Isaac transforms from his monstrous state back to himself, as “the sickness did pass. Its passing was swift. Isaac returned to the world” (410). The suggestion here is that Australia’s link to its European history is like Colin’s swastika tattoo which has lingered as a shameful reminder of the racism of his past but has faded and softened as he has matured. In offering Australia this conditional redemption, it might be argued that Tsiolkas espouses an Australian exceptionalism that is complicit with a nationalist Australian impulse. A more accurate reading of *Dead Europe*, however, would recognise that long before his trip to Europe, Isaac had already been a monster, and that there is no salvation in Australia or Melbourne until past colonial atrocities against Indigenous inhabitants and contemporary atrocities enacted upon asylum seekers after 9/11 are recognised and accounted for.

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Chapter 4

Apocalypse Now: The Unknown Terrorist by Richard Flanagan¹

Published just five years after 9/11, Richard Flanagan’s The Unknown Terrorist (2006) is an astute work of speculative political fiction that captures the terrorism hysteria that gripped Australia at the time. The novel was written while the wars on terror were in full effect and after a series of international incidents of terrorism, including the 2002 Bali bombings and those in Madrid in 2004, and London in 2005. Flanagan’s world is one where fears of terrorism feed into national anxieties that are then inflamed by the media. In the novel, these fears and traumas reverberate transnationally, resonating down to the scale of the Australian city and ultimately into the life of one ill-fated individual. The novel is a particular example of the way Australia and America were united after 9/11, sharing “the common experience of terrorism and its aftermath.”² Part of this experience for American allies such as Australia was what Richard Gray calls the “myth of the fall,” the belief that “cultural time had been interrupted” by a new epoch, or a new way of life, where there was an impetus for Western countries to align themselves with America in the fight against terrorism.³ In the novel this produced an anxious social and political climate which is intensified in recurring images of urban decay, human exploitation, and corruption. According to Frank Kermode, such anxiety about a looming apocalypse is symptomatic of “interpretations of Apocalypse … [which] … assume that the End is pretty near.”⁴ In The Unknown Terrorist, the end is envisaged as a terrorist apocalypse, which is the collective hysteria of annihilation via acts of Islamist terrorism. At the height of this fear Flanagan’s protagonist, the Doll, through misguided circumstantial evidence, is constructed as the ultimate terrorist-monster. Set in

¹ I have borrowed this title from Francis Ford Coppola’s film Apocalypse Now (New York: United Artists, 1979).
² Nicholas Birns, Contemporary Australian Literature: A World Not Dead (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2015), 12.
contemporary urban Sydney, *The Unknown Terrorist* rapidly devolves into a dystopic nightmare. The narrative blends suspense, scathing satire, and social commentary in a story of a Sydney stripper, the Doll, who becomes a suspected terrorist after a brief sexual encounter with a man of Middle Eastern appearance by the name of Tariq al-Hakim. After three unexploded bombs are found at the Homebush Olympic Stadium, Australia is on a heightened terror alert. The mysterious Doll, who has no fixed identity and works in a Kings Cross lounge as a pole dancer, is seen on surveillance video during this one-night stand. When the corpse of her lover Tariq is discovered in the boot of a car, the Doll finds herself represented as the number one terrorist suspect by a ubiquitous, hyperbolic, and intrusive media. The Doll is forced to watch in horror as the threads of her scant life disentangle, as the frenzied media, keen to exploit the nation’s heightened fear of terrorism, falsely characterises her as an operative of an Islamic terrorist cell. A suspected terrorist, “she tries to vanish into the cityscape as police, local media and urban Australians turn her into Public Enemy Number One.”

The Doll’s clandestine journey takes the reader into various layers of urban Sydney, a landscape familiar to many contemporary Australian readers, with its shopping malls, electronic communication, mobile phones, and twenty-four-hour news broadcasts. At the same time, “Flanagan’s Sydney is a city at the end of time, crammed with beggars and junkies and tormented by sinister heatwaves and freak hailstorms.” Sydney is in decline, a city of disposable dreams, disposable freedoms, and disposable people. It is revealed to be a city of monsters, a wasteful, corrupt, and merciless city that eliminates those like the Doll, whom it views as potential threats, such as the asylum seekers smuggled in from Shanghai who suffocate in a shipping container. All are victims of this post-9/11 apocalyptic environment. In *Telling Terror in Contemporary Australian Fiction*, Tino Dallmann explains that terrorism in the novel is “an event and a non-event at the same time.”

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perpetrators who planted the unexploded bombs are never found. Despite the title of the novel, there are no actual terrorists, “only possible suspects and suspicions that are formulated by experts, journalists and politicians.” The Doll’s plight is a cautionary tale and critique of “the Australian media and the government’s use of the politics and rhetoric of fear during the post-September 11 Howard era.” While the fear of terrorism is real to a degree, ironically, there are no acts of terrorism in this novel, and even “the ‘terrorist’ is not really a terrorist at all but is only labeled as such ... and must suffer the consequences of being mislabeled.”

Australia has always been a nation that is fearful of the outside world. Nathanael O’Reilly explains that this “centrality of fear” is ever-present in Australian society, although the object of fear may change. This anxiety varies in response to local, national and international events as well as the degree to which the government and media attempt to inflame those events. Suvendrini Perera links this xenophobia to the geographical position of Australia as an island-continent, and of “terra nullius”, the “shaky premise” that the land was unoccupied, providing the grounds for the brutal colonisation of Australia. This enclosed construction of the island shapes, defines and secures it; it “frames the vacancy inside” while frantically fending off “the other monstrous geography, ‘Australasia.’” In other words, Perera argues that as a self-enclosed, vast island with vulnerable borders, there is a sense of blankness within and oceanic expanse without, that threatens to engulf it. In this world view,

8 Dallmann, *Telling Terror*, 102.
10 Richard Jackson, “Sympathy for the Devil: Evil, Taboo, and the Terrorist Figure in Literature,” in *Terrorism and Literature*, Peter C. Herman, ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 380.
national security is imagined on the basis of a “bounded and vulnerable identity in perpetual opposition to an outside ... Other”, which threatens Australian integrity and safety. Over time, other monstrous entities were constructed in the fearful Australian psyche and have included, “Indigenous peoples, the physical environment, immigration, invasion by Asian nations, multiculturalism ... Islamic fundamentalists” and other real or imagined threats. Flanagan offers a scathing critique of this politics of fear, xenophobia, and terrorism, while constructing Sydney as an apocalyptic city. This chapter builds upon these arguments by incorporating more recent theories of monstrosity and terrorism studies as a way of understanding trauma and apocalyptic thinking. I once again use Michael Rothberg’s mosaic model of trauma, in which collective memory avoids the privileging of certain traumas over others because it binds together “diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites.” Yet Rothberg concedes that at times even such multidirectional memory may “function in the interests of violence and exclusion instead of solidarity.” In The Unknown Terrorist, the figure of the monster embodies this diverse network of past, present, and future anxieties. In this chapter, I argue that the Doll becomes a terrorist-monster, an urban construction, which is symptomatic of deeply-rooted fears around Islam and terrorism. My study consciously adapts monster theory, which arises from the non-realistic horror genre, to the very different genre of speculative political fiction, which utilises a realist mode in depicting people, places, and events. In doing this, I deliberately utilise the concept of monstrosity and the figure of the monster to play a theoretical rather than generic or literal role. Likewise, in my usage of the terrorist-monster, I marry the frameworks of monster theory with terrorism studies. Theoretically speaking, the monster represents the conundrum at the heart of post-9/11 Australia, where the need to be an active participant in the global fight against terrorism competes with a parochial national ethos and a violent colonial past.

15 O’Reilly, “Terror, Paranoia and Manipulation,” 156.
17 Rothberg, Multidirectional Memory, 12.
Apocalyptic Sydney

*The Unknown Terrorist* explores the paranoid logic of the years that followed 9/11 under the Prime Ministership of John Howard, and features a world reeling from trauma and imbued with media reports of global catastrophe. Theodore F. Sheckels, who explores *The Unknown Terrorist* comparatively in relation to depictions of Sydney, claims that the novel is very tied to the city, “its streets, its neighbourhoods, its structure.” He claims that “Sydney functions as a synecdoche for Australia and, beyond that, the world,” which is morally poisoned by a lack of love and cruelty that renders it apocalyptic. While concurring that Sydney does represent Australia as a whole and that it is a hostile terrain, I contend that it remains separate from the outside world in a troubled and paradoxical relationship after 9/11. Flanagan’s Sydney in the novel aspires to be an international city, which like the Doll, espouses the markers of global affluence embodied in the luxury European bags and international designer clothes she buys. At the same time, however, the Doll and her city are xenophobic, possessing an inward parochialism that espouses only “national values, national lifestyle, national security.”

In 2001, John Howard had invoked a nationalistic mode of response to 9/11 and the asylum seekers attempting to find refuge in Australia from the wars on terror. In response to the Tampa and the Children Overboard affairs he pledged his support for America and the Coalition of the Willing in the fight against terrorism. Howard’s very pertinent and now-famous 2001 election campaign mantra states that “we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come”, (an antecedent of Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s Team Australia, that would come later in 2014). This was an exclusionary mode that focused on the Islamic Other and continued as a political focus until 2006.

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21 Richard Flanagan, *The Unknown Terrorist* (Sydney: Picador, 2006), 187. All subsequent references are to this edition and appear in parentheses in the text.
22 Quoted in David Marr and Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 323.
Internationally, 2006 was also a difficult year marked by terrorist incidents. These included threats by Al Qaeda, the continuation of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars as a result of 9/11, and the continued influx of global asylum seekers to Australia, many from war-ravaged countries. *The Unknown Terrorist* was published in 2006 when the world had not yet entered its critical stage of global economic recession. Regardless, there is a prescient sense of economic anxiety that haunts Sydney. Economists since have indicated that the Global Financial Crisis or the Great Recession was the worst economic catastrophe since the Great Depression (1929-1939), with its ramifications still being felt years later, particularly in Europe. Writing with the Global Financial Crisis firmly in mind, and against any fantasies of progress or economic restoration, Evan Calder Williams’ in *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* takes the pessimistic approach that contemporary apocalyptic tropes are fantasies of our collapsing era and symptomatic of “a late capitalist mode of accumulation predicated on global growth, related state forms and foreclosed political horizons.” For Williams, the apocalypse is not something that will be sudden, but a slow historic and contemporary unravelling of the systemic global order, a default in financial markets, and a gradual descent into chaos.

While contending with global economic instability, Australia in 2006 was also suffering through a year of ecological disasters such as savage droughts, heat waves, and multiple bush fires. It was a nation struggling with transnational aspirations while simultaneously contending with nationalistic impulses. These issues resonated in Australia many years after the publication of the novel. Prophetically, *The Unknown Terrorist* can be read in the context

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26 Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, 3-10.
of Prime Minister Tony Abbott’s 2014 slogan “Team Australia,”\textsuperscript{27} which evoked a nation of endemic xenophobia and Islamophobia, and haunted by the potential threats of terrorism and invaded borders, while also trying to establish a clear identity on the world stage. Abbot’s “Team Australia” is interchangeable with notions of a “national space” that needed to be strictly monitored in terms of “who stayed in and who ought to be kept out of that space.”\textsuperscript{28} After these exclusions, what is left of Australia is what John Frow calls “UnAustralia,” a term that constitutes more than simply “the absence of the thing negated, but its continuing presence as a ghostly or uncanny absence.”\textsuperscript{29} UnAustralia is “an expulsion of the extraneous, of whatever comes from and seems to belong to an outside, of the stranger without and within.”\textsuperscript{30} This idea of UnAustralia was prevalent during the tenure of the Howard government (1996-2007), with the adoption of “a hostile and fearful vision” in relation to refugees and paranoia that led to a harsh asylum seeker policy.\textsuperscript{31} The Doll herself becomes a symbol of this UnAustralia, an uncanny figure, the stranger within, who is pushed to the margins and constructed or perceived as monstrous.

*The Unknown Terrorist* embeds fear of the Other into national allegory and articulates an Australian identity that partly necessitates an us-them dichotomy to establish itself. Ghassan Hage explains how this mode of thinking was a quintessential part of Australia’s “paranoid nationalist culture,”\textsuperscript{32} which Howard’s rhetoric moved from the historical margins of white colonial paranoia to central prominence in the Australian psyche.\textsuperscript{33}


\textsuperscript{30} Frow, “UnAustralia,” 39.

\textsuperscript{31} Frow, “UnAustralia,” 41.


\textsuperscript{33} Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, 3.
Combining Hage’s paranoid nationalism with Emily Apter’s notion of oneworldedness emphasises Australia’s problematic relation to the transnational world. While incorporating inherent nationalism as well as a separatist impulse in relation to the rest of the world, this uneasy identity which espouses global connectivity is to borrow a phrase from Apter, a “paranoid oneworldedness.”\(^\text{34}\) For Apter, this paranoia is a world system, the underside of planetary utopianism or a transnationalism that signals the negative aspects of the global village. It refuses to acknowledge causality or “the butterfly effect (the chaos theory principle that tracks how a desire for a product in one part of the world may be linked to a damaged ecology in another part of the world).” Paranoid oneworldedness posits that entropy and “increased disorder diminishes available energy within the confines of a closed system.” It is a bleak theory, therefore, that fails any would-be optimists of the left or right “by endorsing the idea that there are legitimate reasons to be paranoid in a world bent on civilizational self-destruction.”\(^\text{35}\) This is a malignant and catastrophic modernity. In the novel, these global imperatives combine with home-grown anxieties, resulting in an apocalyptic literary terrain, a manifestation of the complexities and seeming danger, which have become part of post-9/11 modernity in Australia.

In *The Unknown Terrorist*, these contemporary anxieties about the local and the global are depicted as apocalyptic tropes. These tropes are at times hyperbolic and speak of an entropic world that is unstoppably hurtling towards its own decimation. As the Doll lies on Bondi Beach for example, she hears the news on a nearby radio and is besieged with catastrophes, conflations of the local and the global, embedded into a long litany of modern tribulations:

> More bombing in Baghdad, more water restrictions and more bushfires; another threat to attack Sydney on another al-Qa’ida website ... a late unconfirmed report that three unexploded bombs had been discovered at Sydney’s Homebush Olympic Stadium and the heatwave was set to go on, continuing to set record highs. (12)


This enumeration demonstrates the way in which constructions of “national trauma” and “global tragedy” can be “generalized, shared and vicariously experienced through media representation.”36 The media utilise “world memory” as a totalising impulse that echoes the reports from cultural centres such as America. These American interests masquerading as globalisation sit uncomfortably with other anxieties such as climate change, corruption, and threats of terrorism, which are inflamed by the media. For Apter, the struggle and ambivalence towards a globalising world and an ensuing apocalyptic postmodernity “envisages the planet as an extension of paranoid subjectivity” that becomes vulnerable to persecutory fantasy, catastrophism, and monomania.”37 In Flanagan’s Australia, this paranoid subjectivity under the guise of the global is synonymous with the sovereign and neo-imperial interests of America, which is itself nationalistic, self-interested, and anxious about terrorism.

Like Australia, the Doll herself possesses a paranoid subjectivity, which attempts to be global, but at the same time is nationalistic and fearful of the outside world. She is as much a site for paranoid urban projections as she is a self-made cosmopolitan creation and as such, her identity is problematic, fluid, and projected onto the cityscape, as well as being trapped and shaped by it. As a consequence, she seeks refuge in the anonymity of inner-city Sydney, away from an impoverished abusive past in the western suburbs. She knows she “was always going to leave the west, but she was surprised as a young woman how little she felt she had left behind” (6). Motivated by money, she recreates her identity in the city. She becomes the Doll, real name Gina Davies, working name Krystal, and lives as a quintessential outsider-misfit figure that exists on the social margins. The Doll lies about her age (she is 26, not 22 as she states) and her origins. She is a loner with an amorphous identity, few friends, no bank accounts or credit cards, and no electronic or virtual footprint. This fluid identity is shaped and circumscribed by the city that she traverses while on the run. As her plight worsens, she tries to embed herself in the anonymity of the unforgiving urban fabric. The

Doll can be read as a manifestation of Apter’s “paranoid subjectivity” who “tries to vanish into the cityscape as police, local media and urban Australians turn her into Public Enemy Number One.”  

At first, the Doll’s identity reflects the anonymity of the city and she is able to find moments of solitude and respite. As the plot develops however, the disparate elements of her life become a national myth. At first, the thwarted bombing attempt at Homebush Olympic Stadium is not directly linked to the Doll and she only becomes a suspect after Tariq’s disappearance. Later, in a coffee shop, the Doll sees newspapers linking the Olympic Stadium bomb threat with al-Qa’ida. It is only when footage of the Doll entering the apartment with Tariq is released that she becomes a terror suspect. The footage is run on a continuous loop on news programs and current affairs shows, with her story becoming increasingly fictionalised and epitomised as a national trauma. This is intensified to an almost absurd extent, articulating an effective response in order to “remind people of what horrifying things may happen” (112).

As the narrative evolves, the city around the Doll moves further toward nihilism. The dream of an affluent Australian way of life is continually conflated with apocalyptic events such as climate change, and outside global forces such as terrorism and economic instability. In the novel, this economic anxiety is implied in apocalyptic overtones, and inextricable links with global catastrophe. Sydney’s economy seems to be moving toward future hardships. The city’s affluence is mentioned in relation to global influences such as terrorism which, “when it happened in other countries – had such a positive effect on Australian real estate prices” (30). The post-9/11 tourism industry had improved since the “Americans love Sydney, because we’re beautiful and safe” (30). Similarly, an unsustainable property market, out of reach for many Australians, is conflated with global environmental catastrophes resulting from climate change. Flanagan depicts the stratification of Sydney along lines of wealth using apocalyptic metaphors. On the one hand there is Kings Cross: “old world sleaze ... a run-down strip mall ... the junkies and the pros, the pervs and the homeless” who gaze at “their daily shrinking atoll with as much bewilderment and as little hope as the inhabitants

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38 Carr, “The Unknown Terrorist,” 184.
of some South Seas micro-nation, knowing whatever the future might hold, it held nothing for them” (18). Contrasted with this are the “gentrified tenements ... of Darlinghurst and the ceaselessly refurbished mansions of Elizabeth Bay,” which rush up on “the incoming tide of property values and inner-city hypocrisy,” again being linked to climate catastrophe as they rise “inexorably and pitilessly as the nearby globally warmed Pacific Ocean” (18). The slow, gradual rise of a warming ocean is reminiscent of Rob Nixon’s concept of slow violence, which is gradual like Williams’ ideas of apocalypse, and which contrasts sharply with the “the spectacular” cataclysms such as wars, terrorism, and 9/11, which are often venerated by the media.39 In the novel, the warming sea and the subsequent heat are reflected in the greed and capital accumulation with their attendant gentrifications. According to Nixon, such environmental destruction is a gradual product of a neoliberal “assault on resources.”40 This spectre of global climate change, which is ultimately caused by consumer capitalism and greed, encroaches upon the city of Sydney as a recurring motif which contributes to the overriding notion of global catastrophe. Sydney is a metaphor for Australia as a whole which is particularly vulnerable to global warming because of its already warm climate, variable rainfall, and extensive arid and semi-arid areas.41 The preoccupation with a warming globe is reflected in recurring references to the environment, particularly the relentless heat and the blinding sun. At the beach, the Doll hears a distant radio speak of heatwaves, “water restrictions and more bushfires” (12). In the city, “the temperature had not dropped below thirty-eight for five days and the humidity was stuck at ninety-four per cent” (22). The Doll is often sweating as she walks the streets in the “blinding white light of Sydney” (25), and she is afforded no relief in “the pungent sticky heat of the night” (53), where “the noise of mozzies cut the thick heat in an unpleasant way” (58). Impending fears of global catastrophe are embedded in depictions of the city and heighten the novel’s apocalyptic atmosphere.

The nightmarish streets of Sydney represent the underside of late capitalism with its attendant greed, decadence, overconsumption, and degradation. Sydney is often bleak

40 Nixon, Slow Violence, 4.
41 See Joëlle Gergis, Sunburnt Country: The History and Future of Climate Change in Australia (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2018).
daunting, and nihilistic, a place where “everything that was done seemed to serve no greater point” (248). The Chairman’s Lounge, where the Doll works as a pole dancer, is located on the nexus between two worlds, two paradoxical faces of Sydney: one of the opulent Darlinghurst and Elizabeth Bay, and the other the ruined wasteland of Kings Cross, inhabited by “brothels and sex shows and streetwalkers” (18). Although these two sides of Sydney are vastly different, Flanagan intimates that both are apocalyptic and doomed by the global anxiety of climate change. For Slavoj Žižek, such growing social divisions are indicators of capitalistic greed coupled with ecological breakdown, which he claims will signal the approach of an unimaginable gradual catastrophe.42

**Fearful City**

Unimaginable horror haunts the city and incorporates fears of climate catastrophe and terrorism. These fears compete with transnational aspirations as components of a conflicted Australian identity. The Doll’s plight encapsulates this conundrum at the heart of Australian identity. Physically, she looks like an exotic outsider: “A small dark woman, her fine-featured face and almond eyes were set off by woolly black hair” (5). She appears to embrace global interests alongside incompatible provincial, nationalistic attitudes while her paranoia and anxiety are conversely related to her consumer aspirations. Flanagan’s Sydney aspires to be an international city, which like the Doll, espouses the insignia of global affluence embodied in the luxury goods she buys. At the same time however, the Doll and her city are xenophobic and inwardly parochial and nationalistic. As Nicholas Birns argues, “The Doll – a tough, manipulative, no-nonsense exotic dancer” is an “embodiment of neoliberal self-interest.”43 She is the product of a city that only looks outward for its own gain; for instance, being concerned about the effect of terrorism on real estate prices. Perhaps that is why Flanagan depicts the Doll as something of a racist, obsessed with designer clothes, and an ambition to save enough money for a deposit on her own piece of real estate. Before she becomes the unknown terrorist, she echoes the racist sentiments of the radio shock-jocks who vilify outsiders saying, “They should shoot the bastards” (87). The Doll repeats this to an old man in a coffee shop “because it’s what you said, and in so far as she thought about such

43 Birns, *Contemporary Australian Literature*, 84.
things, it was more or less what she thought” (87). It is only towards the end of the novel, when the Doll flees for her life, that she concedes she is as cruel and indifferent as her city (and nation):

To her horror she saw that, as she had never cared or wondered or questioned, nor now would anyone care or wonder or question the stories they heard about her. As she had helped no one, how could she now expect anyone to help her? And as she had in a chorus condemned others, how could she be surprised that others in a chorus were now condemning her. (186-187)

Inflamed by endless mediated images of the Doll as a terror suspect on news programs and current affairs shows, Sydney is shown to be an apocalyptic city of disposable dreams and disposable people, a city where potential threats are eliminated like the Doll, an innocent woman, murdered at the finale of the novel. Thus, the cityscape becomes a place “between urban dysfunction and psychological projection”, where subjectivity and citizenship are technologically prescribed.44 Policeman and former detective sergeant with the Kings Cross drug squad, Nick Loukakis, pointedly reflects that Sydney is a city where innocence is consumed by a prevailing and inevitable horror. When he looks beyond the safety of his house and children in the suburbs, Nick reflects on a nightmarish vision of a dying city:

Outside he knew there was horror, corpses floating in the harbour, bones mortared into dank flats’ walls, flesh raked with gunfire; outside there was violence and evil, people waiting to hurt each other, hurting each other at that very moment … It was inescapable. It was unstoppable … he embraced the evil, the horror. He believed it would make him feel better to meet and deal with people whose

44 Emily Apter, Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 232. In this earlier book, Apter discusses the idea of paranoid subjectivity in relation to the virtual world (which I am not examining per se, but which is present as part of a larger mediated context), but in subsequent writings, she extends this notion of paranoid subjectivity to encompass transnational ideas of oneworldedness, which I am focusing on here.
problems were worse than his own. It didn’t. For the same reason, he read books about Hitler and Stalin, about genocides and totalitarian states. That didn’t help either. (75)

Nick’s reflection evokes the multidimensional matrix, in which a constellation of varying traumas resides in collective and individual memory as dynamic, cumulative, and historically diverse. The dangerous and overwhelmingly traumatic aspects of the city are thus linked to some of the greatest catastrophes of human history, such as those committed by Hitler and Stalin. Flanagan here foregrounds the notion of “totalitarian states” and links them directly with apocalyptic cities such as those that existed in Nazi Germany and Communist Russia. Of course, it is important to note that Rothberg’s argument against the exceptionalism of the Holocaust may not be accepted by all, for many will continue to see the Nazi Holocaust as exceptional. Regardless, in Flanagan’s cities, oppressive forces and violence render human life cheap. Flanagan underscores the notion of greed and xenophobia in a political critique of Australia as a whole. He depicts this nation as one which renders people expendable with the final image of twelve male asylum seekers, illegally smuggled from Shanghai a month earlier, left to suffocate to death in a shipping container (317). This nihilistic notion of disposable lives is evidenced in Williams’ definition of the apocalypse as the collapse of late capitalism where the machinery of greed and consumption dismantle and imbue the world with violence and catastrophe. The end result is that the city becomes a lethal force, annihilating its more vulnerable human inhabitants, treating them as disposable commodities.

Monsters in the City

As the apocalyptic city becomes increasingly nightmarish in The Unknown Terrorist, symbolic indicators of alterity erupt into notions of monstrosity that inhabit and threaten the cityscape, haunting reminders of Australia’s xenophobic past and ongoing problematic present. The definition of monster foregrounds an idea of the Other, in contrast with the subjectivity of the Self that classes the monster as alien in some way. As the mysterious

45 Rothberg, Multidirectional Memory, 3, 11.
Other, the Monster makes the emotive impact of terror and dread. In the *Unknown Terrorist*, monsters and their attendant apocalyptic ideology inform the narrative and thus allow non-conforming individuals to be vilified. Michael Titlestad believes that a pervading contemporary apocalyptic ideology has led to fascinations with zombie films, environmental disasters, as well as pandemic cinema. He explains that representations of the poor and homeless, and in this case the marginal, often function as exemplars of the apocalypse. After 9/11, however, these monstrous incarnations incorporate racial and religious Others that also function as avatars of the terrorist-apocalypse. The Other in dystopian allegories such as *The Unknown Terrorist, Underground* and *Dead Europe*, now manifest as something post-human and savage, bringing to mind colonial narratives such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902). These monstrous figures are culturally imperative because they draw our attention to traumatic and problematic aspects and fissures of the contemporary world, as well as repressed aspects of the past, by foregrounding a survivalist mentality that arises in times of uncertainty or catastrophe. These repressed monsters from the past can also be read as iterations of Australia’s monstrous colonial history, elucidations of historical pain as part of the matrix of trauma, returning with a vengeance to haunt the contemporary city. The theme of invasion is “the nightmare in which the past repeatedly reappears, in a variety of guises to haunt the future of island-Australia.” Fascination with monstrosity as a mode of cultural discourse attests to the human desire to explore ideas of invasion as well as prohibition. Writing presciently in 1996 in anticipation of the post-9/11 era, Cohen claims that “we live in a time of monsters”, and this fascination with monstrosity is a mode of cultural discourse that attests to the desire to explore ideas of difference, prohibition and predation. For Cohen, demons, freaks, and ogres are symbolic expressions of contemporary fears that infiltrate a society, in turn shaping its collective behaviour. Historically, the notion

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46 Waterhouse, “*Beowulf* as Palimpsest,” 28.
of the monster or monstrosity is conflated with ideas of the city in St. Augustine’s City of God, where monster is derived from the Latin monstrate: to show or display. For Renaissance readers, “this tradition confirmed the idea that monsters were signs sent by God”, apocalyptic messages that portend God’s will or wrath. In the novel, the monster is also conflated with the Australian city as an apocalyptic signifier of coming catastrophe, not from God but rather from collective human provincialism, nationalism, trauma, and intolerance, that returns from the past to erupt into and haunt the present. The monster is a reminder of repressed settler anxiety.

Doll’s depiction in the novel becomes monstrous as she is deemed a dangerous terrorist. She encompasses elements of terror, dread and mystery, particularly in relation to her unknown origins. Embodying deviance in some way, the monster is the harbinger of catastrophe in the apocalyptic city. Undead monsters such as vampires and zombies have long held a morbid fascination, not only in a literary context, but also in cinematic contexts and in popular culture, as signifiers of apocalyptic anxieties, consumption, illicit desire, or the possibility of survival beyond death. As Noah Charney puts it, monsters fulfil the human need to “name and see abstract horrors,” so we “monsterise people who embody those fears.” To “monsterize” is to “horrorify, [sic] to make terrifiable. It helps us to feel that Nazis or members of ISIS or Trump are somehow Other, dismissible, understandable in the context of life only as cartoon contortions of reality.” In other words, doing this “saves us from the notion that they are more like us than we like to think ... that we might carry a monstrosity within us.” Thus, we turn to monsters “to explain away bad things, to let off steam, or, in the case of Trump, to speak the unspeakable on some of our behalfs [sic].”

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55 Charney, “The Monsters We Create.”
56 Charney, “The Monsters We Create.”
57 Charney, “The Monsters We Create.”
practice of demonising political figures, political antagonists, and Others as monstrous, corroborates Cohen’s assertion that the contemporary era is a time of monsters. In the post-9/11 era in Australia, these fears include fears of terrorism and asylum seekers.

Constructions of the monster and monstrosity relate to the surrounding culture. The culture in turn “becomes imbricated in the construction of the monster – a category that is itself ... an extreme version of marginalisation, an abjecting epistemological device basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and identity formation.” 58 In applying Cohen’s monster theory to The Unknown Terrorist, Underground and Dead Europe, depictions of mythical beasts, devils, zombies, and vampires represent symbolic configurations of the racial or religious Other as monstrosities. In accordance with Cohen’s claims, monsters reveal collective societal fears and foreground “the relationship between monstrous and cultural bodies.” 59 The monsters in Dead Europe, The Unknown Terrorist, and Underground manifest deviance, not only in their appearance but also psychologically, as collective social fears and anxieties are projected onto them. Cohen argues that the “monster is best understood as an embodiment of difference ... and a resistant Other, known only through process and movement.” 60 The monster’s placement in the city defines it. In The Unknown Terrorist, the mythology of the Doll’s villainy or monstrosity as a supposed terrorist operative becomes inflamed by a hyperbolic and ubiquitous media. As she moves undercover through an increasingly apocalyptic city, her plight depicts the fate of vilified outsiders in the contemporary Australian city. Rendered an outcast, the Doll is not merely a pedestrian of the city or an active agent, but regarded as the ultimate modern-day, post-9/11 monster – a terrorist. As the narrative continues the mythology of her monstrosity grows as the pervasive television screens in public spaces declare, “TERRORISTS STILL ON RUN. SYDNEY ON HIGH ALERT” (158). The Doll’s clandestine journey takes the reader into the seedy underside of Sydney, in an ominous and increasingly hostile and apocalyptic landscape. She faces her own demise, as she apprehends a city under heavy police guard: “she expected them to shoot her at any moment ... and part of her no longer cared if they did” (157). Circumscribed by oppressive forces of government and law enforcement, the Doll wrestles

59 Cohen, “Monster Culture,” x.
60 Cohen, “Monster Culture,” x.
with a malevolent environment that seeks her destruction. This world continues to roll on and is made apocalyptic, “inescapable, tormenting, as undeniable and all-encompassing as the heat she could already feel building outside the sealed window’s glass” (211). Similarly, the Doll’s identity morphs into something unspeakably horrendous, and she perceives “a world in which she was no long the Doll but someone and something else altogether” (211).

Devils and Deviant Bodies

The idea of equating terrorism with monstrosity, as exemplified by the doomed plight of the Doll, has become increasingly familiar since 9/11 and with the frequency of terrorist incidents in Western cities. Newspapers and media outlets speak of “The monster of terrorism,” and “the ominous rise of this existential threat,” as well as the need for world governments to eradicate it and outlaw all “terrorists, militants, extremists and insurgents.”\(^\text{61}\) Osama bin Laden was called a “monster” who was “overseeing a web of hate.”\(^\text{62}\) His followers in Al Qaeda were labelled “terror goons”; Taliban fighters were “diabolical” and “henchmen.” According to Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, in a world of absolutist moralities such people are regarded as “terrorist-monsters” inhabiting a “shadowy evil” domain and must be eradicated at all costs because they are “the opposite of all that is just, human, and good.”\(^\text{63}\) Therefore, the monster is a totalising taxonomy, often used in contemporary mass-mediated political and social discourse to ameliorate rising fear and uncertainty about global, economic, and cultural tensions, which are increasingly conflated in our technologically connected times. Increased mobility and displacement of peoples after 9/11 have heightened collective social anxieties in the twenty-first century. Monster theory, rather than being an impetus for change, facilitates an understanding of how change is lived and experienced in the contemporary world, and offers a way for those collective fears, and uncertainty to be managed or even alleviated.\(^\text{64}\) The Doll’s monstrosity is heightened and


\(^\text{63}\) Puar and Rai, “Monster, Terrorist, Fag,” 118.

made more abject by her supposed deviance. As a deviant body, she is a site for political struggle as well as for projected catastrophes “over the representation of what is normal and what is not.”

In other words, the deviant body encompasses the intersectionality between the bodily construct and power. Deviant bodies are “bodies that have been territorialised, inscribed, contained and dispersed in relation to high stakes political positionings about what should be permitted and what should be forbidden.”

The Doll is made more monstrous, her body colonised and considered deviant through powerful seemingly-contradictory conflations of sexuality and terrorism because she is accused of posing as a pole dancer in order to “have access to some of Australia’s top political and business leaders” (140). The Doll is demonised and denounced as a new type of threat, “an Aussie turning on her own – an unknown terrorist” and killer (107). In special current affairs editions, the Doll becomes emblematic of global terrorism as her image is falsely conflated with international attacks, such as 9/11, the Bali bombings, the London train bombings, the Madrid train bombings and the massacre of school children in Beslan. Even more absurdly, footage of the Doll stripping in a veil for a buck’s night at The Chairman’s Lounge is released and she is dubbed “The Black Widow,” supposedly “the same name given to militant Islamic women prominent in suicide attacks in Russia” (140).

In *The Unknown Terrorist*, the concept of the monster is therefore conflated with post-9/11 fears of global terrorism, Islamophobia and fears of militant Islam, coupled with migration of largely Muslim asylum seekers fleeing countries afflicted by the wars on terror. As a public figure, Richard Flanagan has expended a good deal of his personal and cultural capital in advocacy supporting asylum seekers. His essays and public speeches illuminate many of his concerns in *The Unknown Terrorist*. Flanagan has spoken out against the Pacific Solution, which is the Australian government’s policy of transporting those seeking asylum to island nations in the Pacific Ocean, rather than allowing them to land on mainland Australia. In his essay, “The Australian Disease: The Decline of Love and the Rise of Non-freedom”, he expresses his concern over Australia’s treatment of boat people in terms of “the racial and social panic whipped up to win an election in 2001”, taken hold to such an extent that

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“neither party can conceive how to approach the matter without resorting to more hysteria.”67 For Flanagan, “Australia does not have a refugee problem”, but rather as presented in The Unknown Terrorist, it possesses a public life “bereft of courage or humanity and has created a national myth” that Australia will be overrun with “hordes of refugees”, unless harsh policies are enacted.68 Although the notion of Islamophobia as cultural racism has a long-standing history, a contemporary definition is concerned with bigotry, fear, and hatred of Islam and Muslims as a lingering result of 9/11.69 Additionally, in the United States, Europe, and Australia the fear of Islam as a militant or political force is linked to the prevalence of Muslims as an increasing global presence. The notion of Islamophobia may also possess an anti-immigration or anti-multicultural ethos. According to Gabrielle Marranci, increasing Islamophobia in the West is directly related to a growing critique of multiculturalism and the fearful view whereby Islam is constructed in binary opposition, as the most resistant cultural force against Western Judeo-Christian heritage and democratic values.70 Marranci concludes, Islamophobia is actually a phobia of multiculturalism, and the perceived transruptive effect (the perceived obscuring of national identity), that Islam has in Europe and the West, through the transcultural processes.71 Linda Briskman argues that various anti-terror raids by the police in Australian cities after 9/11 are in fact institutionalised forms of Islamophobia, implemented under the guise of war on militant Islamic groups such as Islamic State. While the threat of Islamist terrorism in Australia is real, paranoia and panic are inflamed by the media, which presents the dangers as being more imminent than they actually are. According to Briskman, “Many commentators declare that Australia will always be racist, and that at particular points in time different groups will be

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71 Marranci, ”Multiculturalism, Islam and the Clash of Civilisations Theory,” 105-117.
the object.”72 Briskman associates the brutal colonial beginnings of white settlement and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples with racially selective immigration policies, such as the White Australia Policy and Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, as well as the deportation of Chinese peoples and initial refusals to take Jews who were fleeing the Holocaust. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton refer to Australia’s “colonial archives of terror” to contextualise contemporary narratives that portray an innocent Australia under threat and attacked.73 According to Dallmann, the violence enacted in The Unknown Terrorist actually “originates from the state and resembles the violence of the former colonial power.”74 This rises from deep-seated anxieties that the country “does not rightfully belong to the (white) Australians who are defending it” at the beginning of the twenty-first century.”75 Therefore, as Hage claims, the nation as a space is structured around “White culture, where Aboriginal people and non-White ‘ethnics’ are merely national objects to be moved or removed according to a White national will.”76 This leads to a paranoid nationalist culture that incorporates fear of an Islamic Other. Briskman asserts that 9/11 was a turning point, and that “Islamophobia in Australia is a relatively new phenomenon that stems particularly from the modest rise of immigrants identifying as Muslim.” Furthermore, it arises from “global trends where immigration and terrorism have become conflated, including Muslim second-generation immigrants.”77 In this geographically remote and ocean-bordered nation, asylum seekers and refugees have been targeted due to a “fear of invasion… shrouded in security discourse that positions asylum seekers as potential terrorists.”78

The demonisation of Islam, as well as its conflation with terrorism and asylum seekers, occurs at various points in the novel. To impress a young graphic designer at an affluent dinner party, prominent Australian journalist Richard Cody “begins inflating several stories he had heard of “dangerous Islamic types” who had been allowed into the country, playing

73 Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton, quoted in Dallmann, Telling Terror, 30.
74 Dallmann, Telling Terror, 30.
75 Richard Carr, quoted in Dallmann, Telling Terror, 30.
76 Hage, White Nation, 18.
up a few well-known names with whom he had, if he’d been honest, only the vaguest connection” (28). Cody defends Australia’s tough stance on mandatory detention by claiming, “it’s not as if we are Nazi Germany” (28). Dinner party host, Katie Moretti, gossips about a sexy Syrian man she met at a salsa lesson. Katie exoticises the unnamed man as “pretty gorgeous, whatever he is” and conflates him with terrorism, calling him “Salsa Bin Laden” (30). Later still at the dinner party, fortified with expensive wine and his own egoism, Richard rails against what he fears is the Islamisation of Australia:

    The era of sentimentality is over ... Our civilisation is under attack—why, even an afternoon such as this would be illegal under the new barbarians—neither wine, nor women allowed to dress as they wish, nor dancing ... (31)

Ironically, the fictional Richard’s assertion that “the era of sentimentality” is over presages a similar pronouncement actually made a decade later in 2016. Australian Prime Minister at the time, Malcom Turnbull, warned citizens not to be “misty-eyed over” immigration and the mandatory detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island, a large population of which are Muslim, many fleeing Middle Eastern countries such as Syria and Iraq that have been affected or invaded by the West after 9/11.79 Declarations that tolerance of diversity and a compassionate approach to those who seek asylum are over-sentimental or “misty-eyed” reflect the long-term hardline approach taken by successive Australian governments in this complicated post-9/11 era.

Richard Cody’s fictional comments and the Australian government’s actual hardline stance since 9/11 reveal underlying elements of xenophobia. Cody later refers to Islam as “an irrational evil lurking out there” (32). In order to inflame images of “conspiracy, fanaticism, horror,” he assumes the guise of informed journalist and regales the dinner party guests with “dark tales of terrible plots foiled, of the mass poisonings and bombings and gassings

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planned and ... how Australians might otherwise have died en masse in the very heart of Sydney” had it not been for vigilant law enforcement working under Australian government directives (32). Here, Sydney is not only apocalyptic and filled with pervasive dangers, but also inherently racist. Like Richard, the Doll is also racist, and “would on occasion give vent to being pissed off by slopeheads, dirty boongs” among others (11). While walking through the city, a woman in a black burkah accidentally walks into her. The Doll projects her racism and fear of terrorism onto the woman, conflating her with all manner of contemporary collective fears:

the police with their guns and black uniforms looking like death ... the Homebush bombs, and then the woman appeared to the Doll not as another woman, but as something terrifying and unknown, an evil spectre she had seen so often in films, a short, stubby Darth Vader. (93)

Collective paranoia, inflamed by the media, results in the projection of the Doll’s fears onto the woman, rendering her a monster. She yells racist invective, often heard in contemporary Australian society: “Fuck off! ... Just fuck off back to wherever you’re from” (93). Monstrosity is thus emblematic not only of difference, but of communal fears and xenophobia. Just as the Doll unjustly regards the Muslim woman as a monster, so too society considers the Doll a terrorist-monster. Fear of global and national terrorism enables this parochialism and racism resulting in depictions of monstrosity.

Monster theory problematises and challenges a totalising concept of history. This is because the monster embodies past cultural transgressions, anxieties, and traumas that are brought into the continuous present of a society. “The monster haunts; it does not simply bring past and present together, but destroys the boundary that demanded their twinned foreclosure.” For Cohen, the dual elements of repressed trauma and projected alterity comprise notions of monstrosity, for “The monster is that uncertain cultural body in which is condensed an intriguing simultaneity or doubleness: like the ghost of Hamlet, it introjects the disturbing, repressed, but formative traumas of “pre-” into the sensory moment of

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80 Cohen, “Monster Culture,” ix-x.
“post-” binding one irrevocably to the other.” The monster’s command is hard to ignore as s/he commands, “Remember me”: restore my fragmented body, piece me back together, allow the past its eternal return. Borrowing from Briskman, I claim here that the depictions of monstrosity in Dead Europe, The Unknown Terrorist, and Underground are haunting embodiments of Australia’s traumatic and racist past that demand to be addressed in a contemporary context. Benedict Anderson’s classic concept of nationalism and the nation in terms of imagined communities facilitated by the news media incorporates an identity that is socially-constructed by those who perceive themselves as part of a community. In the context of Australian white settlement history and current issues around asylum seekers after 9/11, however, the imagined community is fragmented and discontinuous while also being “bounded by a power which seeks to enforce sameness, repress diversity and diminish the rights of ... those who are thrust outside its protective embrace.” The Doll’s troubles demonstrate the plight of those who reside on the margins of the imagined community and the way in which they may become increasingly demonised. Depicted as a terrorist-monster, the Doll becomes a hunted outlaw as her city becomes ever more hostile. In a foreshadowing of her violent death at the novel’s finale, she imagines the city inundated with gore: “There was blood everywhere; the world seemed to thrive on it; up and down the street, people seemed to have trouble seeing and breathing, their eyes and throats were so full of it” (157).

As a terrorist-monster, the Doll becomes the narrative articulation of “oneworldedness,” where the trope of national allegory becomes paranoia. Although the Doll is not an actual Muslim, the circumstantial evidence that marks her as a terrorist is shaky. She appears on CCTV footage after her affair with the murdered Tariq who himself is wrongly suspected of being a terrorist and she was once filmed performing erotically in a burkah as The Black Widow (40). The symbolic logic at work here is that this may happen to any Australian citizen who is unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, because the

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81 Cohen, “Monster Culture,” ix.
conspiratorial media and divisive government need an antagonist in the fight against terrorism. The Doll reiterates this notion of a necessary and apocalyptic mythmaking in the face of catastrophism when talking to her only friend Wilder about her predicament:

People like fear. We all want ... somebody to tell us how to live ... and think ... And that’s the Devil’s job. That’s why I’m important to them ... because if you can make up a terrorist you’ve given people the Devil. They love the Devil. They need the Devil. That’s my job. (166)

The Doll herself becomes the ultimate monster or devil in contemporary, post-9/11 Australia. As the aestheticisation of post-9/11 catastrophe, the figure of the Doll as a supposed terrorist inspires the social imagination and provides the government a vehicle with which to elucidate, re-enact, and re-imagine future catastrophes, as a way of preparation. Coupled with monster theory, Julia Kristeva’s classic theory of abjection is useful in order to understand the reviled position of the Doll at this point in the novel. As well as being a monster, she is an abject body, something that is situated so far outside the symbolic order than she inspires trauma and disgust. Kristeva explains that when faced with the abject, we need to assert boundaries between it and ourselves, or it will overcome us. The abject “is something rejected” and yet “it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.”

Defining the Doll as “the Devil” epitomises all that is horrific, and yet at the same time, as a pole dancing terrorist, she is seductive. She threatens the order and propriety of society to such an extent that she needs to be cast off. Through this terrifying allegory of the Doll, Flanagan demonstrates that when the threat of the real (terrorism, ecological disaster) overwhelms, we may regress into paranoid, hyperbolic, apocalyptic fictions where the simple discourse of good versus evil is played out, with the good prevailing. The bitter irony is that the good or the innocent do not prevail in The Unknown Terrorist. The Doll was merely a sacrifice to a national hysteria, because the bombs in Homebush Olympic Stadium were planted by ASIO with government sanction. The Doll’s lover Tariq, a man of Middle

Eastern appearance, was not in fact a terrorist but a drug mule and the Doll was not a monster, just a pole dancer living on the fringes of society. Within days after the Doll is shot at Chairman’s Lounge, business continues as usual, despite “the blood that will never be completely steam-cleaned out of the still-damp carpet … the blood that’s colouring the sky and flowing in the rivers and filling the seas” (320). In this image of the staining blood, Flanagan concludes that the Doll’s death changes nothing; she is merely a dispensable sacrifice on the altar of national hysteria. However, Flanagan does humanise the monster before her death, and the reader understands how the Doll herself is a traumatised figure. One of her last stops as a fugitive is the cemetery. Fleeing a childhood of sexual abuse by her father, the Doll’s attempt to make a family of her own tragically ended with the death of her stillborn baby (236). After the death of her son, the Doll arrives in Sydney, planning to make enough money to buy an apartment, to become someone else. In one scene, she covers her body with paper notes, vowing that when she was completely covered, then “her new life would begin” (58). Although located outside the city centre, one can read the gravesite of Doll’s son as the cold, dead heart of the city, that, like the Doll, is shaped by trauma which it attempts to sublimate in excess and materialism.

**Conclusion**

*The Unknown Terrorist* exemplifies the way in which collective historical trauma linked with contemporary urban paranoia and Islamophobia after 9/11 results in the production of apocalyptic tropes and monstrosity. The novel explores what happens when apocalypse and paranoia reach their apotheosis. Kermode explains that the “apocalypse-crisis” is due to a decadence that requires renovation or restoration, a new age brought on via the painful purging of what he calls, “The Terrors” - the full experience of chaos and catastrophe. Kermode’s curious use of the word terror does not relate to terrorism, but rather the unfolding of apocalyptic events. In the novel, however, the word takes on the dual meanings of apocalypse and terrorism. As supposed terrorist, the Doll, becomes the epitome of a decadent, late-capitalist apocalyptic crisis and is constructed as a mythic monster who must be eliminated to bring about catharsis and societal restoration.

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The doomed allegory of the Doll demonstrates the implications of extreme paranoia, hysteria, and collective fear of terrorism upon the innocent, the marginal, and the luckless. For Dallmann, the Doll’s loss of orientation in the pursuit of materialist gains signifies the nation’s loss of its “founding ideals such as freedom and egalitarianism.”88 In the novel, Sydney, and by extension Australia, are revealed as historically haunted, anxious, and fearful of the outside world, while at the same time, economically drawn to it. Ultimately, Dallmann’s assessment of the novel is bleak, claiming that it displays the “triumph of hate over love.”89 The nation depicted in the novel is a place where an excess of violence comes ironically not from monsters, terrorism, or the feared outside, but from the very centre of Australian society.

88 Dallmann, Telling Terror, 106.
89 Dallmann, Telling Terror, 106.
Chapter 5

Dead City, Fortress City: *Underground* by Andrew McGahan

Adopting the style of speculative fiction, Andrew McGahan’s *Underground* (2006), is a post-9/11 novel about identity, truth, freedom and conspiracy in the face of oppressive government. This chapter explores notions of urban apocalypse and catastrophe in the hyperbolic post-9/11 Australia that McGahan constructs. This traumatised and afflicted nation is under heavy government surveillance, eradicating civil liberties. Initially, it seems that the anti-terror legislation is warranted, but as the narrative unfolds, the reality of government manipulation becomes apparent. Large sectors of the multicultural society, particularly Muslims, are racially and religiously profiled and sequestered in ethnic ghettos within the cities of Sydney and Melbourne. These cultural and religious Others are perceived as monsters that embody a confluence of historical, contemporary and future anxieties. Australia in *Underground* is haunted by a trans-temporal web of traumas,¹ which includes cruel historical nationalism and contemporary mandatory detention of asylum seekers. Future fears for a warming climate are reiterated in an incident of natural disaster as well as the nuclear annihilation of Canberra. For McGahan, who died in 2019, this novel was different from his other work because of its overt message. In a 2011 interview, McGahan claimed, “I have strong enough political views privately, it’s just that I don’t think they belong – *Underground* aside – in my fiction.”² McGahan examines a volatile contemporary urban Australian identity at a time of social and political hysteria but takes a worst-case scenario approach. His Australian cities after 9/11 are places of conflicted identity, simultaneously parochial and global, an extension of an America which has itself become isolationist and nationalistic.

*Underground* is set in a possible future more than a decade after 9/11 and like Richard Flanagan’s *The Unknown Terrorist*, published in the same year, it offers sharp speculative political fiction, but with more satire. For speculative fiction to succeed, “it must begin from recognizable situations” and then “speculate about the direction in which they point us.” McGahan successfully does this, taking a familiar world and imbuing it with dystopic strangeness. Steven R. Luebke describes the novel as “a *1984* for our time”, due to its nightmarish version of a totalitarian society. The novel imagines a near future in an Australia after the John Howard years that has moved further along than the catastrophic trajectory depicted in *The Unknown Terrorist* and bears less resemblance to the Australia of today. For Luebke, this world is one where “everything seems to be coming apart,” as McGahan “weaves enough layers of conspiracy to frighten even Thomas Pynchon.” The war on terror wages on, and the sitting Prime Minister, Bernard James, a caricature of John Howard, runs an ultra-right wing conservative government, fully allied with a fearful America. After Canberra is decimated by a bomb, Muslim Australian citizens are herded into ghettos and there is a permanent state of emergency. Extreme security measures, citizenship tests, identity cards, detention without trial and diminishing personal freedoms have led to the emergence of a police state. The Prime Minister wields unchecked power from Sydney, while an ineffective and powerless parliament sits in Melbourne.

The narrator of *Underground* is the Prime Minister’s twin brother, Leo, a fifty-nine year old failed businessman, an ordinary Australian larrikin everyman character “blithely unequivocal about his unscrupulous behaviour.” When Leo is abducted during a cyclone by a group called the Southern Jihadists, his brother refuses to come to his rescue. After being kidnapped by Islamists, then rescued by government agents, Leo is once again kidnapped by a resistance group called the Oz Underground (also known as Australian Underground or just Underground) whose mission it is to overthrow the James government. Leo’s kidnappings spark literal subterranean journeys in which he is smuggled across Australia by various

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3 Tony Smith, review of *Underground*, *Australian Quarterly* 78.5 (Sep-Oct 2006): 38.
groups. Eventually, he becomes captive to powerful political figures, revealed to be the American secret service agents controlling Australia.

The novel is presented as a posthumous text, written from imprisonment within the House of Representatives chamber and addressed to Leo’s interrogators. After narrating his plight, and the way Australia has been “transformed from a liberal democracy into a totalitarian police state,”7 Leo concludes with his thoughts on the current political situation in Australia before he is unceremoniously shot. For Tino Dallmann, “Leo’s narrative is presented as a memoir and can thus be seen as a testament – not only of himself, but also of Australia as an older, happier place.”8 Although Leo undergoes character development, he functions primarily as “a vehicle to transport the criticism of contemporary Australian society that is formulated in the novel.”9

It may be argued that McGahan’s futuristic depiction of Australia is merely exaggerated satire, a political statement against parochial, intrusive government that came to power after 9/11. Since 9/11, there has been a palpable shift to the political right in many countries such as America (with the election of Trump), the United Kingdom with the Brexit referendum to leave the European Union, as well as the rise of nationalist anti-immigration parties in France, Austria and Germany. This rise of right wing nationalism is exaggerated in the apocalyptic cities in Underground and presented in foreboding depictions of a future possibility in which this current movement in the West towards right wing nationalism is a step closer to dystopia, and where Australian identity is ruptured, divided, and subsumed by America, becoming a literal outpost for the United States Army. Speaking of post-9/11 fiction, Richard Gray calls America’s necessary transnational positioning after 9/11 a “reterritorializing” – a shift from earlier isolationist tendencies.10

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9 Dallmann, Telling Terror, 132.
heralded a new era for the American psyche because the “mainland ... [was] ... not only invaded but attacked from the skies.”11 Since the end of the nineteenth century, “wars had always been fought on foreign soil. To have war brought home was an unusual experience for America.”12 As a result, following 9/11, American perceptions became more transnational, opening outwards to the world, but only within the narrow definitions of terrorism and counter-terrorism. *Underground* exaggerates Australia’s allegiance and acquiescence to American “extraterritorial expansion”13 as a warning of what could happen if the nation proceeds along this current trajectory, particularly in regard to nativism, and the vilification of religious and racial Others in the fight against terrorism.

**Apocalyptic Canberra**

*Underground*’s depictions of a dystopian urban Australia resonate in two striking incidents of catastrophe. The first is a tsunami-like natural disaster, which batters the coast of Queensland. The second is the destruction of the nation’s capital, Canberra, which is then used as a justification by an oppressive Australian government to foment terrorist hysteria and control the fearful masses. Frank Kermode explains that apocalypse is contingent upon a recorded past and an imaginatively depicted future that can be figurative or literal.14 In the novel, these two calamitous events are literal. The natural disaster in the opening pages sets the scene for the human catastrophe and brutality that follow. For Michael Titlestad, catastrophic depictions are imperative in apocalyptic writings as they are preconditions for the erosion of social cohesion and the human regression into atavism.15 Social cohesion in the novel has been eradicated, replaced by paranoia, conspiracy, and the literal social division into cultural ghettos. These speculative fictive tropes of dystopia and catastrophe set the scene and unnerve the reader, wrenching one from recognition of the realist narrative genre into apocalyptic fiction. These anthropogenic disasters alert the reader to a natural world that is more dismal and hostile than the world of today. McGahan’s Australia

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11 Gray, *After the Fall*, 4.
12 Gray, *After the Fall*, 4.
13 Gray, *After the Fall*, 17.
has become gradually more violent socially as well as ecologically. To borrow a phrase from Rob Nixon, Cyclone Yusef is the culmination of a hostile future of “slow violence,” a gradual, calamitous unfolding of decay. Slow violence is the “incremental and accretive” assault on the environment, including natural disasters that are occurring currently in our present world, such as “climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift … deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars … [and] acidifying oceans.” As a result, McGahan’s future is familiar, yet alien and unchartered, with the hurricane marking “a shift away from the reader’s reality to an alternative vision of Australia.” In the novel’s opening lines there is an apparent narrative realism in terms of place and event, before it shifts stylistically into the language of dystopian speculative fiction, explaining that “a state of emergency decree from the government” is ordered due to a category five tropical storm with the tongue-in-cheek name Yusuf. The curious name of Cyclone Yusef sets the scene for the demonisation of Muslim Australians that is to follow. Leo explains the official policy practically dictates, “If something looks big and dangerous, then find a means to link it to Islam” (3). Cyclone Yusef was treacherous, “the biggest cyclone to hit … the Queensland coast in decades” with “Winds gusting over two hundred and ninety k; walls of horizontal rain … and a storm surge that had lifted the Pacific Ocean by twenty murderous feet or more” (3). This linking of the cyclone to Islam exemplifies Titlestad’s notion of the “avatars of the apocalypse”, as poor and marginalised groups become emblematic of coming catastrophe.

Following this natural disaster, the narrative turns to the alarming in a depiction of the destruction of the nation’s capital. Leo recalls that the pivotal moment for Australia comes many years after 9/11 with the bombing of Canberra orchestrated by the Australian and American governments in collusion with their joint armies. In fact, as Nathanael O’Reilly asserts, “the most significant event leading to Australia’s transformation was not 9/11 but

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18 Dallmann, *Telling Terror*, 139.
the detonation of a nuclear bomb in Canberra, the nation’s capital.”\textsuperscript{21} This televised (fake) nuclear catastrophe is pertinent because, according to Jean Baudrillard, since 9/11, images such as “the events in New York have radicalized the relation of the image to reality.”\textsuperscript{22} In other words, the visual image is privileged as engaging and impactful for the viewer, who readily retains “the site of images and their fascination.”\textsuperscript{23} From a Sydney bar, Leo describes this staged spectacle, conceding despite his initially cavalier tone that the elimination of Canberra is like Armageddon, which ushers in a sequence of apocalyptic events:

\begin{quote}
It sure as hell changed Australia. True, we’d been fighting the war on terror for years, and we already had some of the toughest security laws in the world, but this was Armageddon on a whole new level …
The state of emergency, for instance—suspending all normal due process and individual freedoms and replacing them with martial law … the decree that effectively outlawed Islam and began the process of rounding up all believers into the camps and the cultural precincts.
\end{quote}

(30)

This is the second instance in the novel where catastrophe is linked to Islam. Such destruction at the hands of perceived terrorists leads to “the disruption of the experience of safety,”\textsuperscript{24} resulting in social upheaval and trauma. For Slavoj Žižek our “socio-political reality” in the world after 9/11, imposes multiple versions of external intrusions and traumas, which are brutal and meaningless, but act on a psychic level as “interruptions that destroy the symbolic texture of the subject’s identity.”\textsuperscript{25} I use Žižek’s argument about these brutal and psychic interruptions to identity to read McGahan’s depiction of violence in the novel. Starting with 9/11 and continuing with the bombing of Canberra, I posit that violence

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} O’Reilly, “Government, Media, and Power,” 302.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Jean Baudrillard, \textit{The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays}, trans. Chis Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 26-27.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Baudrillard, \textit{The Spirit of Terrorism}, 26.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Robert J. Ursano, Carol S. Fullerton, and Anne E. Norwood, eds, \textit{Terrorism and Disaster: Individual and Community Mental Health Interventions} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Slavoj Žižek, \textit{Living in the End Times} (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 292.
\end{itemize}
interrupts the identity of the whole country as it contends with reoccurring trauma. This sets the scene for a reactive and oppressive government to take control, resulting in paranoia, surveillance, and American neo-imperialism. This is a frighteningly Orwellian “new Australia” (93) with a conflicted identity. While clinging to strange parochialisms, such as spontaneous Citizen Verification Tests, which examine and reinforce jingoistic propaganda, Australia also sees itself globally as an extension of an America fixated with its fight against terrorism. With this mandatory, unquestioning political allegiance to America, the Citizen Verification Test also demonstrates “central concepts which are connected to the Australian identity that has been negated in the ‘war on terror.’”

McGahan’s fictional destruction of Canberra has precedence in earlier Australian literature. Although Canberra epitomises idealistic impulses, its reality as a city evokes paradoxical anxieties and desires in the Australian psyche. Originally conceived by Walter Burley Griffin as a “planned” and “ideal city ... of the future,” Canberra was perceived along utopian lines: it “occupies an uncanny place in the Australian imagination” as a new type of city, a communal “bush capital” or “garden city”, a balance of pastoral and urban. However, Russell Smith claims that although the city “should be something Australians are proud of, both as a representation of the nation as it is and as a symbol of its ideals”, the reality is that “Canberra is widely unloved, and often derided as the most un-Australian of Australian cities.” Of course, Canberra’s status as the nation’s capital, as Smith points out, makes it a prime target for potential foreign nuclear attacks.

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26 Dallmann, Telling Terror, 140.
McGahan satirically takes the conflicted symbolism of Canberra to an absurd extreme to highlight the paradoxes of Australian identity. In the novel, the city is not only emblematic of a failed utopian ideal, but appears to be a dead city, devoid of people, infrastructure, and, most importantly, hope. Leo James expresses his avid dislike of Canberra at various points, calling it an “inconvenient place. Off in the middle of nowhere” (29). Canberra is “stinking hot in summer. Freezing in winter. And totally soulless all year round” (29). Early in the novel, he claims that his brother “Bernard was the only reason I ever went to Canberra ... I didn’t much like the place” (13). For Leo, the stand-in for the ‘Australian Everyman’, Canberra is a hostile utilitarian city, a place of sterile empty corridors and “overly polite security guards” who despise him (13). The city exists only as “a garrison town for the public service” (28). Leo jokes about the emptiness of Canberra, with its small population of three hundred thousand people: “if ever a city was made to be abandoned quickly, it was Canberra” (28). Both in the novel and in reality, this city is far from its originating ideal, being neither “bush capital” nor “garden city” but rather “sprawling, spacious suburbs, surrounded by empty freeways and native bushland” (28). Leo compounds this notion of a sterile, utilitarian place when he asserts that Canberra is not “a place that many residents had a history in” (28). Even his brother, the Prime Minister, prefers to live at Kirribilli House in Sydney because he “hated the whole city” of Canberra (16), although he attends when Parliament is in session. On the other hand, this maligned city does provide business opportunities “for a developer and real estate entrepreneur of dubious repute” (13) such as Leo, and gives hapless, unsuspecting potential investors the illusion of access to the corridors of power.

In narrating the destruction of Canberra, Leo evokes the ambivalent feelings of many Australians for their capital city with quintessentially irreverent Australian humour, self-deprecation, and irony:

    Poor old Canberra.
    How did that joke go, afterwards?
    *What if they blew up the capital city, and nobody noticed?* (27)
Despite his dismissive attitude, when Leo reflects on his memory of the event, he employs alarming, apocalyptic imagery:

I switched on the TV and there it was, blazing across the news on every channel. An Islamic terrorist group, who gave no name, claimed to have planted an explosive thermonuclear device somewhere in Canberra ... They had sent photos of the bomb, and blueprints of it, to the Federal Police and to all the media ... And it was set to detonate seventy-two hours after the first warning. I hardly need describe the bedlam that ensued. (27)

News reports of the bomb and the three-day warning arouse a sense of collective trauma and incite social upheaval as the city is evacuated. Canberra's civic population quickly departs, “like troops decamping from a military compound ... [as] ... people loaded up and got out fast” (28). Leo narrates the television footage of the Prime Minister, the “Last Man Out” (29), ceremoniously leaving Canberra fourteen hours ahead of the deadline, leaving behind only a filming crew:

The solemn lowering of the flag, the final salute, the official party wafting away by helicopter, eastwards, fading into the ironic sunrise as hope and beauty die. Not a dry eye on the house. (29)

The destruction of Canberra in the novel becomes an international media event, “the most highly rated moment in television history—throughout the world, not just here in Australia” (30). After 9/11, such mediated and traumatic events had the globalising tendency to be presented as what Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy call “world memory.”31 This world memory emanated from cultural and economic centres such as America. These all-encompassing notions posited that global trauma overshadowed national and local experiences. Likewise, In Underground, the media constructs this national Australian trauma

(operating in terms of American interests), as a global tragedy, through which the world can vicariously experience the event as a shared trauma. This places Australia at the centre stage of world events that unleash a cataclysm in the Western world at large. Leo recognises the absurdity of Canberra being at the forefront of international news conceding, “A live nuclear explosion was news, even if it was some unheard-of little city far away down-under” (30).

Contrary to what Australian (and global) audiences have been told, terrorists or foreign forces did not attack Canberra. The CIA perpetrated the elaborate deception because America wanted to utilise Canberra as a “secret, virtually purpose-built home-base for the operations of a covert global oligarchy of world leaders from politics and big business, from the US President to Osama bin Laden.” Smith claims that McGahan’s is a pastiche of various conspiracy theories that are part of “Canberra urban legend” and include:

- tunnel networks under the Embassy;
- secret CIA spying facilities hidden in the mountains around Canberra;
- underground bunkers beneath Parliament House;
- even the notion of Canberra as ‘Capital of a New World Order’.

These conspiracy theories concur with a tradition of theories about the CIA influence in Australian politics. One theory posits that the CIA engineered the dismissal of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1975. Wider CIA conspiracy theories have included a faked moon-landing as part of a media event, among others. McGahan employs Canberra as a symbol of doom, part of global conspiracy theories that align with Emily Apter’s conceptions of oneworldedness, which is critical of globalisation theories that conflate territorial

33 Smith, “The Literary Destruction of Canberra,” 541.
35 Australian writer Peter Carey believes the CIA was instrumental in the dismissal of Whitlam and has made it the subject of his political thriller Amnesia (New York: Vintage, 2015).
In the novel, the ceding of Australian sovereignty is literal, as Australia becomes a territorial extension of the United States. Apter insists that American literature is far from being the only national literature to privilege paranoid psychosis, a “cognitive oneworldism ... [that is] ... exitless.” Although McGahan is writing from an Australian perspective, the psychosis of the global village in Underground likewise feels exitless and endlessly cyclical, a catastrophic modernity where the destruction of Canberra sets off a chain reaction of war and terrorism panic in Australia, America, and the Western world. There is no escape from this global network, with its attendant system of oneworldedness. Australian civil liberties are eroded as the oppressive Australian government appeases the more powerful Americans in the endless war on terror which seems to have neither spatial nor temporal boundaries. Leo laments the death of “the old Australia”, replaced by “this George Orwell nightmare in which we all now live” (275), a world where America is sovereign. As Australia is beholden to the dictates of the United States in this oppressive and alarmist world system, the characters in Underground are in turn oppressed by their own government. The truth is suppressed by lies and shrouded in conspiracy. Roadblocks and checkpoints mark the Australian landscape and spontaneous citizen tests are mandatory. This spatial and temporally boundless idea of crisis can be read in Underground as a oneworldedness which is paradoxically used to justify boundaries with the national space of Australia. In other words, this paradoxical production of local delineation and constraint is a consequence of the mythology of global territory.

McGahan utilises the contemporary wry trope of Canberra as the empty city to satirically exaggerated proportions, presenting it initially as a dead city. This recurring trope of Canberra as a necropolis is evoked in the novel when Oz Underground operative Harry brings Leo and fellow captive Aisha to Mt Ainslie at night. Expecting to see the ruins of the destroyed city, Leo is surprised that “before us lay the supposedly dead city of Canberra. Alive and well, after all” (240). Likewise, as an undead city (that seemingly returns from the dead), Canberra symbolises not only the unspeakable horror of annihilation, but the incomprehensible reality of government mendacity. As an undead city, Canberra, “appears

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to precipitate the collapse of popular democratic resistance,”38 both to the Australian government’s agenda and to the larger American military-industrial complex. Tellingly in *Underground*, the location of Australian democracy and government, and the symbol of an idealised and hopeful Australian identity, has not only been emptied and made void, but like the undead monster, is “soulless” as Leo claims (29). Ironically, as a capital city, Canberra in the novel has long been rendered useless in any case because the majority of government decisions were made elsewhere.

**Dead Cities and Strange Suburbs**

Outside the dead capital, I also read the other cities in *Underground* as dead because they are places where democracy and freedom have been overshadowed. The government utilises the fear of global war and annihilation in these cities to install martial law, employing upside-down Orwellian logic, where “freedom is slavery”.39 Rather than cities degraded and ruined by unending capitalist aspirations, such as those in *Dead Europe* and *The Unknown Terrorist*, the cities in *Underground* are empty, fortified by militia, subjected to hyper-surveillance, and delineated by checkpoints and borders. Leo’s subterranean journey through Australian cities as a captive of various Islamist, anti-government, and freedom-fighting groups, reveals an urban and regional topography that is radically different from the Australia of today. In *Underground*, Australia is marked with innumerable government checkpoints, officially titled “Citizenship Verification Stations” and “Designated Freedom Access Points” (88), and everybody must carry an “Australia Safe Card” at all times or risk imprisonment. This radically patriotic Australia is not only a militaristic extension of the United States but also a cultural one. In this world, the observance of Islam has been outlawed. To borrow a concept from Apter, Australia and indeed this fictive world has descended into, “planetary paranoia marked by cyber-surveillance, cartographies of cartels, and webs of international relationality within and outside the nation and the edges of legality.”40 With Apter in mind and applied to the novel, in this age of so-called globalisation, the production of global space (that is American space), in turn has produced constrained

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local spaces in Australia. Whereas Apter speaks about it happening in Palestine or Afghanistan for example, the irony here is that it is happening in Australia. Like Orwell’s Oceania, Australia here is a nation of surveillance, secret intelligence, covert arrests, and state-sanctioned murder. Consequently, Australia becomes a dangerous place, with an “endless spate of terrorist attacks” and car bombings (31). There are assaults on oil depots, communication networks, and sporting events. Additionally, Australia is beset with political kidnappings and assassinations, including the videotaped beheading of public figures such as the Deputy Prime Minister and a High Court judge, among many others. This is the price Australia pays for its naïve entry into the global space.

Australia in *Underground* can be read as a microcosm of Apter’s theories on border crossing and translation zones within her concept of oneworldedness. Apter is critical of seemingly porous global borders, where the “politics of actual borders – whether linguistic or territorial – has been attenuated.”41 Apter argues against earlier and often utopian theories of globalisation, such as Arjun Appadurai’s influential model of global “flows” in *Modernity at Large*, which explores globalisation in terms of its cultural dimensions, and the interconnectedness of migration and mass media.42 Apter claims that this idea of thin or permeable transnational borders is a misleading one because, in fact, “sovereignty legitimacy is tested by the architecture of walls, checkpoints, transit stations, and virtual barricades of surveillance.”43 Furthermore, sovereignty operates in the interests of the dominant American power, which territorialises the nominally global space as its own. This transnational model of checkpoints and surveillance is evinced in *Underground* on a microcosmic level in the depiction of a post-9/11 militarised Australia where the suburban streets are nothing like the ones of today. Cities are peopled with Australian Federal Police, undercover ASIO officers, and other security forces. The Department of Immigration has been renamed “The Department of Citizenship” (89). Traversing Australia by vehicle, Leo and his captors must pass dangerous military checkpoints where the flash of an Australia Safe Card allows one to pass through roadblocks. In an absurd scene of proof of allegiance to

41 Apter, *Against World Literature*, 100.
43 Apter, *Against World Literature*, 100.
Australia and proof of identity, Harry is made to take a “CVT” or a “Citizen Verification Test” because his identification card has expired. This CVT is particularly aimed at “some hapless non-Aussie looking individual” and failure to pass could result in “strip searches, beatings, or even detention” (91). It comprises seven questions that must be answered correctly if one is to avoid arrest and physical harm, and the “inability to speak English is certainly no excuse … as many luckless older migrants could confirm” (92). The questions are an exaggeration of actual Australian citizenship questions and include queries about “Don Bradman’s Batting Average” and the first line from Banjo Patterson’s *The Man from Snowy River* (92). Finally, the CVT requires a successful recitation of the Australian Oath of Loyalty” that swears allegiance to “the Commonwealth of Australia … [and] …its government” and to “respect all alliances, most of all … the United States of America” (94). Ironically, this new Australian identity is not particularly global but merely an addendum to an insular American identity.

The depiction of the suburban space as foreboding and alien in *Underground* is pertinent in the novel because suburbs and suburban life are an imperative aspect of the history and identity of Australia. This identity is paradoxical, because while suburbs signify modernity, they also highlight its settler history. According to Brigid Rooney, the suburb, although home for many, can also be a place of urban flux and amnesia because it is contingent upon “global capitalism and continuous with the longer history of colonization, particularly in a settler society like Australia.”44 For Rooney, the suburb is a conflicted space, both globalised and localised, opened and closed, and always “charged with ambivalence … both intimately felt and alien.”45 Using the work of ethnographers who document suburban encounters, particularly in suburbs popular with new migrants, Rooney explains how “globally driven forces disruptive of belonging … make the local, familiar places strange,” where the migrant-as-stranger is continuously displaced by later arrivals.46 Thus, the notion of home is made strange. Applying these ideas of suburban space to *Underground* demonstrates the discrepancy between the familiar world of contemporary Australia and the alien world of

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McGahan’s bleak near future. In his southward journey from Hervey Bay in Queensland, Leo remarks on the uneasy feeling of the suburban world now:

It should have felt wonderful—a big blue sky, a warm breeze ...
Instead, I felt acutely visible, and acutely vulnerable. We were only walking out onto a front lawn in an average small-town street—houses, parked cars, pushbikes in driveways—but it was an average street in an Australia at war with terror, an Australia nothing like the old one. Every window, every closed curtain—who was hiding behind them, and what could they see? And who did they report to? ... AFP and ASIO and the other security forces these days. There are informers, too. Some paid to do it, some blackmailed ... Report Anything Suspicious, demand the television advertisements. Anything and anyone. For the sake of freedom, for the sake of democracy. (84)

Suburban modernity in *Underground* is made strange by globally driven forces. There are no new migrants inhabiting the suburbs, because ethnic diversity has been eradicated to be replaced by the global interests of America, bringing with them a culture of surveillance. As a fugitive, Leo is a stranger in what would ordinarily feel reassuringly familiar. According to Rooney, the ambivalence felt in the suburbs is “symptomatic of an anxiety wrought by globalization” which affords “connections over vast distances, but at the same time erodes connection at local, proximate, neighbourhood levels.”\(^{47}\) In the novel, this is taken to extremes as the ambivalence and strangeness (even danger) in the suburbs is wrought by the global allegiance to America which has eroded all local connections, replacing them with anxiety, surveillance, and conspiracy. McGahan’s terrifying futuristic world of checkpoints and sovereign borders exemplifies Apter’s assertions that “language is weaponised during situations of war and conflictual cultural nationalism.”\(^{48}\) The Australian Oath of Loyalty is an example of weaponized language wielded as proof of legitimate Australian identity in an apocalyptic, ultra-patriotic society, where Australia has become conflated with the

\(^{47}\) Rooney, *Suburban Space*, 160.
\(^{48}\) Apter, *Against World Literature*, 100.
(self)interests of America in its fight against global terrorism and its expansion of a conspiratorial, nativist, totalitarian ideology.

**Monsters and Zombies**

In similar fashion to *The Unknown Terrorist*, monsters and conceptions of monstrosity in *Underground* are revealed as Australian cities become increasingly foreboding. Following the methodology I used in *The Unknown Terrorist*, I marry two very difference generic frameworks in order to offer a new reading of *Underground*. Although McGahan uses the realist mode of speculative fiction, I utilise the theoretical framework of monster theory, and the horror genre in order to read a novel that is not actually horror or Gothic. That is to say, the monsters and the zombies in the novel are not literal, nor are they something inherent in McGahan’s language, which borrows from the realist mode that contrasts with the heightened and extravagant language of monster theory. In adapting these seemingly incongruous theoretical frameworks of monster theory and speculative fiction, I reveal problematic aspects of Australia identity in the novel. Monstrosity in *Underground* serves two purposes in relation to Australian identity. First, it allows undesirable Others to be vilified, feared and suppressed. Second, monsters can be read as scathing satirical political commentary on a conflicted Australian identity. Here they inhabit not only the dead city of Canberra, but also the euphemistically titled “cultural precincts”, which are actually internment camps or ethnic ghettos: Brunswick in Victoria and Bankstown in Sydney’s southwest.

Using monster theory, and following the trajectory of the reading of Canberra as apocalyptic, I argue that as the “empty core” of Australia, a hopeless “dead city”, it is populated with monsters: the Australian and American military personnel, who operate covertly in a city that was thought to have been destroyed by nuclear attack, are the equivalent of zombies or the undead. Working with international, conspiratorial cabals, these zombies manipulate national perceptions of the government, the United States, Islam, and the war on terror to control, spy on, and subjugate the Australian population. Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet Lauro’s edited compendium, *Better off Dead*, offers three iterations of cinematic and literary zombies: the “classic mindless corpse, the relentless instinct-driven newly dead, and the
millennial voracious and fast-moving predator.” The zombies that appear in Underground are configurations of all three representations, with the first two iterations inhabiting Canberra as mindless, newly dead automatons. The third representation is the millennial monster, animated, fast moving and futuristic, inhabiting the ghettos and gesturing to the twenty-first century as a future model of a post-human society. Considered cultural predators or threatening terrorists, these zombies signal the opposite – the possibility for inclusivity, diversity and cultural multiplicity.

The conception of the zombie is particularly pertinent in this discussion of apocalyptic texts as the zombie interrogates the very myth of human civilization. Christie and Lauro explore this fixation with the zombie by asserting that “we question whether the zombie resembles our prehistoric past, acts as a mirror reflecting our present anxieties or suggests whether the future will house a more evolved post-humanity or merely the graves of a failed civilization.” From the inception of the zombie myth, imported to the United States via Haitian folklore, to the twentieth century millennial zombie, to the current post-human, the zombie phenomenon has been a staple of popular culture horror genres and apocalyptic writing. Suspended between life and death, this soulless ghoul, stalking and preying upon humans, and shuffling mindlessly, haunts the edge of our nightmares. In Underground I read zombies that inhabit Canberra as exemplifying this conundrum, as they are remnants of what was thought to be the core of Australian identity but is now an emptied centre. Canberra is merely a site for American military and Australian government officials, as well as a site for future acts of suppression by the American and Australian governments. As an apocalyptic city, Canberra inhabits a liminal space as an undead city of zombies, thought to have been destroyed but operating as a covert base for global activity. In relation to

49 Deborah Christie and Sarah Juliet Lauro, eds, Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post Human (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 2. For contemporary examples of the current fascination with zombies and a comprehensive and critical exploration of the zombie phenomenon, this book examines three distinct twentieth century manifestations of the zombie of the twentieth and twenty-first century, in a cinematic, literary, as well as a wider interdisciplinary context. In particular, Kevin Boon’s introductory section, “And the Dead Shall Rise,” traces the journey of the zombie from its early incarnation in Haiti and the African diasporas, to its emergence in American popular culture, early radio shows, and films such as White Zombie (1932) and George Romero’s classic, Night of the Living Dead (1968).

Underground, the zombies’ function as part of apocalyptic fiction is twofold. First, as Christie and Lauro claim, the zombie acts as a “fictive monster on which we stamp our society’s latest fears”; second, as a prototype on which the authors have applied modes and methods of reading. Concurring with this claim that the zombie embodies society’s collective fear, I read the zombie as prophetically emblematic of contemporary society’s overriding fear of terrorism and Islam in a traumatised post-9/11 era. Additionally, the zombie is a vestige of the past which embodies painful and traumatic injustices that have been committed by Australia, particularly in its treatment of migrants, asylum seekers, and people of the Islamic faith. In relation to apocalyptic fiction, the zombie is a useful theoretical apparatus as it transforms the way in which we may read these narratives, because it is an eruption of the past into the present and the future. In other words, “the possibility that the zombie is post-human, illustrates that we are already living in the period of the post-zombie.” This notion of post-human is pertinent when reading the zombie in the ghettos in Underground as possibilities for an evolved, post-human Australian identity in the future.

The zombie in Underground functions as a prescient metaphor for modern technological society in the age of terrorism. Nick Muntean explores the “trauma zombie,” an entity so disrupted by a collapse of ideology or social order, that s/he is “unable to maintain a coherent identity and thus enters a muted, dazed state of being not unlike the traditional zombie.” This zombie “becomes both victim and perpetrator of its own affliction.” Muntean believes that this trauma zombie manifestation is a way to articulate threatening and incomprehensible social realities that reside in the collective consciousness. One of these collective social anxieties is the conundrum of society’s technological advancement – it may aid social progress, but simultaneously it may increase society’s capacity to destroy itself. Canberra, as an undead city in Underground, is emblematic of such a society. Prior to the supposed deadline for nuclear annihilation the Australian capital is emptied of frenzied human activity and becomes a city of zombies, “populated purely by soldiers and police,

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51 Christie and Lauro, eds, Better Off Dead, 2.
52 Christie and Lauro, eds, Better Off Dead, 2.
54 Muntean, “Nuclear Death,” 82.
55 Muntean, “Nuclear Death,” 82.
some still searching for the bomb, but most of them sweeping through the suburbs ... to make sure everyone was gone” (29). After the simulated nuclear attack televised on international broadcasts, Canberra in effect “ceased to exist” as a city in the minds of the Australian public (31); “declared a national shrine, to be left untouched in terrible desolation forever, a memorial” (33), its significance as the Australian capital has been expunged. The notion of containment, which is a paramount factor in the collective fear of zombies, applies also to the depiction of Canberra as an undead city inhabited by such monsters. Leo muses, “when an entire city is fenced off and protected, what need is there for any special security around an airport?” (250). In one pivotal moment, Leo, Harry, and Aisha see the “US Ambassador to Australia” (255) and witness the ultimate terrorist-monster in the psyche of the west, Osama bin Laden, described in phantasmal terms:

It was a ghost. A vision. A tall man, slightly stooped, with a look about him of one prematurely aged. Plain peasant dress, a robe, a long wispy beard gone grey. Intent eyes, oddly peaceful, and a serene half smile on his lips ... A man who couldn’t possibly be there. A man who was supposed to be dead. (256)

Seeing Osama bin Laden alive, well, and welcomed onto Australian soil by the Australian and American governments, leads to the revelation of a transnational network of conspiracy which includes Western countries, in addition to Russia, China, Japan, the supposed terrorists and the CEOs of the major transnational corporations; these also included Oil traders and arms dealers (262-263). Canberra is a meeting point for all these global players. Leo learns that bin Laden is in Australia as part of a global “unifying purpose” (263), a month-long international conference to decide how to carve up the world. Leo’s American interrogator reveals that governments need external enemies for the sake of internal, national stability:

The blacks, the Hispanics, the poor, the left wing, the religious crazies—they’re a big problem for us, even now. But they’d be burning down our cities if we didn’t keep them busy fighting someone other than their own government. (263)
Ultimately, the most shocking revelation (yet not wholly unexpected, at this point) is the existence of a “double war”—on the face of it, a war between the West and Islamists, which is merely a cover for the secret war that “neither the western governments nor the Islamists want ... to end” (264). According to the American secret agent, the Islamists and the Western governments form an alliance against the civilians who are caught in the middle, in order “to keep the war going, and the status quo intact” (254). In Underground, terrorism and countermeasures are actually conspiracies by governments and transnational corporations designed and maintained to control and monitor national populations and global resources. In this cynical scenario, the government produces and manipulates malcontents and their acts of violence. According to Harry from the Oz Underground, the government’s aim is to “Tame terrorists to carry out an attack or two when it’s needed, the population stays scared, and the security regime remains in force. With the bombing of Canberra, the crowning glory of it all” (254).

I have argued that Canberra in the novel embodies the very paradox of Australian identity—global interests coupled with nationalism and inwardness. McGahan’s depiction of the undead city, however, takes this paradoxical identity to a ridiculous extreme. The ultimate irony and global joke is that Canberra, the symbol of Australian identity, is not only parochial—an isolated place far from transnational troubles—but is also (un)dead, populated by trauma zombies. Paradoxically, Canberra is also the site for transnational conspiracy, a place from which to “run the world” (262), as Leo learns.

Of Middle Eastern Appearance

In contrast to the undead city of Canberra there exist other underground cities, inhabited not by trauma zombies but by religious and ethnic undesirables. These cities are teeming with vitality and are in stark contrast to the (un)dead cities and hostile suburbs in the novel. The fear of these zombies leads to forced containment, and I incorporate here the idea of the fortress city borrowed from Tseen Khoo and adapt it to the novel. Khoo critiques the hypocrisy of the mentality that emerged in Australia after 9/11:
On the one hand, Prime Minister John Howard condemned the firebombing of Australian mosques, the violence against individuals or businesses of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. On the other, he and his ministers ramped up the national apparatus for detaining asylum seekers (many from Afghanistan) in exploitative arrangements with South Pacific neighbors and in Australia itself and redrew our national boundaries (twice) to keep ‘them’ out.\(^{56}\)

For Khoo, the disturbing aspect of the need to protect national borders after 9/11 is that this fearful mode of thinking “oozed beyond cultural or national affiliations and entangled itself with religion.”\(^{57}\) Khoo talks about the modes of surveillance and judgment, particularly over Muslims, coupled with raids on Muslim-owned properties as part of Howard’s jingoistic vision of “Fortress Australia.”\(^{58}\) This Fortress engages exclusionary social tactics, rather than social movements to end persecution. Khoo points out that while this fortress establishes notions of “free sovereignty”, at the same time it eradicates difference or dissent.\(^{59}\) The paranoia about vulnerable borders and a retreat from the global into “territorial nationalism”\(^{60}\) are taken to extreme and inhumane lengths in *Underground* with the imprisonment of Muslims and other non-white ethnic and religious groups. I use Khoo’s concept of the fortress to read McGahan’s fictional cities and to understand the justification for the fearful xenophobia. The white hysteria exhibited in the novel also brings to mind what Ghassan Hage refers to as “the fantasy of a nation governed by White people, a fantasy of White supremacy.”\(^{61}\) Fantasy is used both literally in relation to an idealised good life, and in the Lacanian sense to denote an idealised image of the self/subject living a good life. Hage claims that “People don’t have fantasies. They inhabit fantasy spaces of which they are a


part.” This fantasy space is inhabited by those in power, who then decide who should be included and who should be kept out. For Hage, the origins of this fixation, which he calls “paranoid nationalism,” stem from Australia’s history as a British colonial-settler society and “the contradictory colonial tendencies” whereby “first world wealth and democratic institutions are built on decimation of the continent’s Indigenous population and on the social, political and economic dispossession of those who remain.” Hence this anxious sensibility is a result of the continued desire of a colonised political will that attempts to reassert its sovereignty over territory. Dallmann describes this contradiction at the centre of Australian national identity, a country with a history “reading back tens of thousands of years,” yet at the same time the site of current conflicts such as the so-called war on terror. It is a geographically remote country, yet “aspires to be in the centre of world politics.” It is a nation purportedly founded on “egalitarianism and mateship”, but rapidly “abandons these in order to defend itself against an ambiguous threat.”

Ironically, the cultural ghettos depicted in *Underground* are stark juxtapositions to the white fantasy space of the wider dystopic cities. In contrast to the undead Canberra, the ghettos are functional, vital and teeming with rich cultural experiences. Deemed by their society in the novel as social outcasts and monsters because of ethnicity and/or religion, these multicultural inhabitants offer a post-apocalyptic way of living, a new type of society. The transnational zombie is diverse, multicultural, and empowered as a post-apocalyptic survivor of the dystopic world and the dead cities. Formulating the zombie in this way takes the “tendency towards the dehumanisation of migrants in the old dominant paradigm” and asserts “rehumanisation in the new discourse” on migrant identity, thus allowing for an expanded discussion of human rights. Nikos Papastergiadis employs the term “wog-zombie” to denote an unsettling identity, at once fully and partially formed, occupying the

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62 Hage, *White Nation*, 70.
space of what is human and spectral. Papastergiadis demonstrates the complexity and contradictory images that are used to portray migrant identity, offering various snapshots of human and non-human elements. While the monstrous tropes are usually “interpreted as a sign of the migrant’s political nihilism and cultural alienation,” I prefer to view the Muslim and/or migrant subject in *Underground* from a position of agency where their separate existence from the dying culturally-homogenous world is a strength. If the monster’s body is a cultural body, “composed of a multitude of fragments, rather than smooth epistemological wholes”, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen claims, then the moniker transnational zombie best encapsulates this eclectic identity, incorporating multiple histories and diverse cultures. In borrowing a concept from Evan Calder Williams to elucidate this point further, I contend that the “zombie apocalyptic fantasy,” the rise of zombies that take over human populations, can be understood in terms of what it reveals about the conditions of the *living*, and the violence and hardships that may be seething beneath daily life. The zombie apocalypse, therefore, produces possible ideological challenges, but it also offers “utopian possibilities.” That is to say, transnational zombies signify something futuristic, hybrid, and post-human: a new world order. They are entrapped within ghettos because they are regarded as potential terrorist-monsters, yet, like the figure of the zombies in the horror genre, they are the true survivors of the apocalypse, having constructed functional, hospitable communities. Their Australian identity is one of multiplicity and inclusivity. The transnational zombie, like other manifestations of the zombie, is the mirror of collective social fears often linked to race and religion. Unlike many iconic fictional freaks, such as Frankenstein’s creature, “the zombie proper emerges from religious and cultural origins of the African diaspora” where a racialised and anxious Western discourse projected fear of difference onto the African Other, particularly in regards to Haitian culture and voodoo, to create the literary, cultural,

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72 Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, 84.
and cinematic zombies in the horror genre we understand today. While not every mutant embodies racial fear, “horror has persistently endowed the primal forces it unleashes with ... racial overtones.” Although Underground is not horror but speculative fiction, the zombies in the novel are not literal figures but rather a conceptual framework adapted to the novel, in order to read the plight of the many Muslim and/or Middle Eastern peoples that embody racial anxieties which are then conflated with terrorism. The national fear inflamed by the government necessitates their containment as they are declared “a poisonous two per cent of the population that needed to be dealt with” (199). This trend of containment in the novel is pervasive in Western cities, as Leo reflects how, “in the wake of the Canberra bombing ... Brunswick became one of the designated detention suburbs ... [but] ... by no means the biggest Muslim ghetto in the world ... downright tiny compared to those in America or England” (199) and smaller than the one in Bankstown, Sydney. For Australia, containment is a convenient method “of collecting the Islamic community into central locations” (199) and creating a fantasy of a white-dominated nation, a regression into the nationalism of the historical White Australia Policy (1901).

Vilified as monsters and aliens, these “transnational zombies” signal the idea of a new society replacing the old order in a post-apocalyptic world. The old-world order does not intrude upon the ethnic ghetto in the novel, as “it seems the authorities have been content to leave the inmates to stew in their own juices ... Who can they blow up or terrorise, apart from themselves?” (199). Just as the Doll is made into a devil or terrorist-monster in The Unknown Terrorist, so too are the Muslim and ethnic Others in Underground. Like Doll, they too become manifestations of Emily Apter’s formulation of paranoid subjectivity, a consequence of a planetary globalism that espouses catastrophism, in this case, the looming threat of terrorism and annihilation. This is exemplified when Leo describes the way the

73 Chera Kee’s essay offers an excellent introduction to zombies entitled “‘They are not men ... they are dead bodies’: From Cannibal to Zombie and Back Again’ in Christie and Lauro, eds, Better Off Dead, 9-23.
75 This was a series of policies that were aimed a forbidding immigration to Australia for people of non-European ethnic origin. These policies were eventually dismantled between 1949 and 1973.
government rouses Islamophobic hysteria to shape public sentiment by depicting Muslims as nightmarish threats and something other than human:

They were the internal nemesis against which we had all been warned. Looking like us, sounding like us, existing as us – and yet hell-bent, according to the government, on our overthrow. (200-201)

An assemblage of projected emotions, the monster in Underground is a government creation, reflecting Cohen’s definition of the monster as “an embodiment of a certain cultural moment” that incorporates “fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy.” In fact, “the ghettos have become the one part of Australia that isn’t constantly under surveillance … no video cameras, no hidden microphones, no phone tapping … no laws” (199-200).

When Leo is smuggled into the Brunswick ghetto by the Oz Underground, he uses the language of the Other to describe the first time he sees large groups of Muslims, a rare occurrence since 9/11: “a strange lot they were. I mean, by their very presence I knew they had to be Muslims … it felt weird to be sitting amongst them” (200). Similarly, Leo thinks of the Muslims he has encountered previously as “foreigners. Aliens” (200). As a consequence of their separation from the rest of society and containment in the enclaves, however, these transnational zombies are free to establish a new, diverse, post-apocalyptic society. Although initially Leo projects his fears onto the inhabitants of the cultural ghettos, these anxieties dissolve as he begins to view them as eclectic and Australian: “Maybe I was just too brainwashed … They’d been the enemy for so long” (202). In the Brunswick ghetto, he concedes that “they didn’t seem foreign at all … many of them looked vaguely Middle Eastern, but their accents were Australian, their clothes were Australian” (200). As the friendly group offer food and clothing, Leo is relieved that “for once no one was yelling at me, or pointing a gun” (201). In the ghettos, he receives the hospitality that is not afforded to Muslims in Australia. Jacques Derrida explores the idea of generosity among marginalised or victimised populations in Of Hospitality, asserting that even though it necessitates starting “from the certain existence of a dwelling … the true authenticity of hospitality” can only

begin with “the dislocation of the shelterless, the homeless.” This is because for Derrida, “only the one who endures the experience of being deprived of a home can offer hospitality.” This unconditional generosity is the opposite of the conditional variety, which is legalistic, bound to duty, and presupposes national (or other) sovereignty. Examples of conditional hospitality include the type extended to asylum seekers and immigrants, which only tolerates the guest while reminding them that they are not in their own home. In the novel, Australia does not even offer such conditional hospitality to people of Muslim faith, who are deprived of the very basic human right to freedom. Conversely, what Leo experiences in these ghettos is an unconditional hospitality where he is neither stranger nor foreigner, but unequivocally welcomed: “They gave us cold Turkish pizza to eat and new clothes to wear and we all reclined on the rice bags” (201).

Later, as Leo is taken around the ghetto, he encounters a multicultural society of “Albanians, Bosnians. Even fair-dinkum Aussies who were dumb enough to convert” (203). In contrast to the government and media depictions of dead and damned cities, Leo apprehends a festive environment, like a “fete or street party … with a pleasant hum” (203-204). He finds comfort in the “smells of food cooking … a burst of singing, and more laughter amongst the crowd” (203) and wonders, “So where was the misery and poverty I’d heard so much about, where was the violence?” (204). Sequestered in their fortress cities, these racial and religious Others have created the opposite of the undead cities of Canberra and the strange foreboding suburbs beyond. This is a new Australian identity to counter the insular parochialism and troubled globalism of wider Australia. It is vibrant, inclusive and multicultural, a panacea to an older, corrupted identity.

Conclusion: Post-apocalyptic and Post-human in a Post-truth era.

In this post-9/11 era of political upheaval, amid the current rise of right-wing, populist, insular, and nativist governments, many commentators have argued that we currently live in an age of post-truth and post-truth politics, where debate is largely inflamed by hysteria,

78 Derrida, Of Hospitality, 56.
79 Derrida, Of Hospitality, 22-27.
social media, and appeals to emotion rather than details of fact and policy. Written a few years after 9/11, Dead Europe, The Unknown Terrorist, and Underground prophetically depict and encapsulate the consequences of current world trends towards tribalism and insularity. Their doomsday cities and the monsters that inhabit them serve as a commentary and warning about the future direction of Australia and Australian identity. Worldwide uncertainty, turmoil, and the global displacement of predominantly Muslim peoples from the Middle East, have led to vilification, victimisation and cultural anxiety, as Australia gives in to nationalistic tendencies. In chapters 3, 4, and 5, I have used these three Australian texts to analyse the literary representation of this trauma coupled with cultural paranoia manifest in apocalyptic depictions of urban topographies. Images of damned cities inhabited by urban monsters speak of Australian anxieties and conflicts in navigating a contemporary Australian identity amid global concerns, especially fears of Islam combined with potential threats of violence.

If we are to read The Unknown Terrorist, Underground, and Dead Europe as post-9/11 narratives, as I have argued, then their aesthetic manifestations are iterations of our collective fears and anxieties. These three works are prescient and relevant to our fraught contemporary political times, in which images of the collapsing twin towers in New York continue to haunt the urban Western psyche. The novels are still germane today as we grapple with the after-effects of 9/11, the so-called wars on terror, and the real and imagined threats of terrorism in our cities. Apocalyptic cities and depictions of degraded urban landscapes are unique qualities of post-9/11 fiction. These harrowing literary iterations attest to a pessimistic, conspiratorial mode of thinking in many Western countries, Australia included, as it tries to negotiate its place in a rapidly changing world after 9/11. The monsters in the novels represent not only our projected fears of the Other in Western societies, but also embody the ways in which cultural and religious Others are vilified as less than human. Rather than debating the plausibility of the apocalyptic adventures in Underground, Tony Smith argues that a better approach might be to question “whether the

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society we are creating today contains the potential to unleash the inhuman events described so lucidly by Leo James.”

If these depictions of containment coupled with heightened surveillance and paranoid nationalisms in *Underground* seem outlandish, I turn briefly to consider here the global political events that have occurred in more recent history. The fractured political climate since 9/11 has led to the election of United States President Donald Trump, who campaigned on the promise to build a wall along the border with Mexico to prohibit Latin Americans crossing into the United States. He also promised to deport eleven million mainly Hispanic undocumented migrants. Later, under his presidency in 2018, Americans were confronted with the horrific images of children separated from parents at the US/Mexican border and detained in enclosures resembling cages. While campaigning, Trump proposed a Muslim registry, a ban on Muslims entering the United States, and heightened levels of surveillance in Muslim communities. After his inauguration on 27 January 2017, Trump signed Executive Order 13769, titled Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, often referred to as the Muslim travel ban, under which more than 700 travellers from specified Islamic countries were detained and visas were provisionally revoked. Theorists

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and journalists have tried to rationalise this in terms of 9/11, claiming that “terrorist violence can make the previously unthinkable suddenly seem acceptable,” justifying the infringement of civil liberties, going so far as to suggest “the segregation and internment of Muslim citizens.”

These right wing notions have been replicated to different degrees in Germany, Greece, and Italy.

In Australia, the Minister for Immigration Peter Dutton made the case for racial and religious profiling in 2016, suggesting that in the 1970s Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (1975-1983) should not have allowed people of “Lebanese-Muslim” backgrounds to immigrate, citing as evidence the small cohort of Lebanese Muslim individuals who have been charged with terrorism offences. Previously, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott expressed his “Team Australia” concept in 2014, which warned people (particularly Muslims): “don’t migrate to this country unless you want to join our team.” On the surface, Abbott’s declaration that “everyone has got to put this country, its interests, its values and its people first” seems reasonable and justified in the climate of increasingly frequent terror attacks on Western cities. Upon closer consideration, however, it subtextually re-enforces and emphasises the notion of an insular fortress Australia as parochial and distrustful of the outside world. Abbott’s, Dutton’s, and Trump’s views betray a xenophobic fixation with border containment as well as the sequestration of racial and religious Others following 9/11. This right-wing political rhetorical has in turn licensed the rise of white terrorism. In the three novels, these fantasy spaces are manifest in the Orwellian nightmares, places emptied of many of their multicultural inhabitants. The cities in Underground, especially Canberra (the dead/undead city) as well as the larger regions in Australia, are marked by suspicion and the pervasive

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87 Robinson, “A Frightening proposal.”
90 Owens, “Don’t Migrate Unless You Want to Join our Team.”
presence of military personnel. These cities signal the end of days, when the social fabric of society is marked by discrimination and suspicion, and (multicultural) civilisation lies in ruins.

If we are heading towards self-destruction, what of Australian identity, post apocalypse and post humanity? I have suggested that the ghettos in *Underground* signal a twenty-first century model of an inclusive post human society, with the possibility for diversity, inclusivity, and the simultaneous existence of a plurality of cultures, or what Kathryn Murphy calls “inclusive patriotism.”

In the current post-9/11 climate, open markets, globalisation and movements of people across borders have created a “mass nostalgia for sovereignty, particularly in nations where politicians haven’t done nearly enough to distribute the economic benefits fairly within their populations.”

Regarding Britain in the wake of Brexit, this notion can apply to our conflicted Australian identity. In a time when “we’ve ceded the narrative to the extreme right,” we need to assert an alternative “that brings us together, rather than blaming the migrant, the refugee or the Muslim for what is going on in our country.”

With their dire depictions of apocalypse and monstrosity, *Dead Europe*, *The Unknown Terrorist*, and *Underground* retain their relevance and offer a warning to Australia. Using the conventions of Gothic horror, speculative political fiction and satire, these three novels deliver sharp critiques. Their apocalyptic scenarios explore imaginative outcomes for Australia if it continues to vilify racial and religious difference as it has done in the longer course of settler history, and more recently after 9/11. The warnings offered by the three novels are caustic and clear: in creating monsters to fight the war against terrorism, Australia risks creating its very own nightmare society.

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92 Murphy, “As Nationalism is Weaponised.”

93 Brendan Cox, quoted in Murphy, “As Nationalism is Weaponised.”
Afterword

Taking a broad global historical perspective on traumatic occurrences such as wars, as well as human and environmental catastrophes, it might be argued that the events of 11 September 2001 have received an incommensurate amount of literary and media attention. “Although the attacks lasted only hours, and resulted in comparatively limited death and destruction,” according to Jen Web, “the effects have been global in their reach.”¹ In this thesis I have explored the way media commentators have asserted that the world changed irrevocably after 9/11. I believe that this assertion is justified in part: the world had indeed changed, only not in the way the Western media claimed. While portions of the globe remain largely unscathed, others are still feeling the effects of 9/11 two decades later. For example, the Western (largely American-based) media, would have us believe in the rise of Islamism and the constant threat of terrorist acts in Western cities. Meanwhile, in the Middle East there have been “about 500,000 people dying in Iraq and likely a comparable number of deaths in Afghanistan.”² As a result of these wars, many people in these countries are displaced, suffering, and seeking asylum.

This thesis applies a limited timeframe soon after 9/11, the six years between 2005 and 2011, in a close, textual analysis of five literary novels by Australian authors. In examining Tim Winton’s Breath, Gail Jones’ Five Bells, Christos Tsiolkas’ Dead Europe, Richard Flanagan’s The Unknown Terrorist, and Andrew McGahan’s Underground in relation to the literary city, I have demonstrated how cycles of trauma were intrinsic to Australian identity following 9/11. I have argued that at the time of publication, anxieties and perceived

² Sandro Galea, “Fifteen Years Later: Learning from 9/11,” News and Events, Boston University, School of Public Health (11 September 2016). Accessed 12 June 2017, https://www.bu.edu/sph/2016/09/11/fifteen-years-later-learning-from-911. It is difficult to ascertain the exact number of deaths because the Western media has largely neglected specifics.
dangers at the global scale echoed through the national and local levels in Australia. I have also claimed that the city, and depictions of the city, played an integral role in this complicated Australian identity. I argue that during that time, Australian subjectivity was caught in a complex web of traumas. Modelled on Michael Rothberg’s multidimensional matrix of trauma, this network of traumas operated on global, national, city-wide, and local/individual levels, and included varying inter-cultural, and transtemporal traumas. At times, these traumas extended into apocalyptic depictions of landscapes; at other times, they were embedded in the city. As part of this matrix of traumas, I count the influential mediated traumas of 9/11 and the wars on terror, which also resonate in the five novels.

Writing with the privilege of hindsight in 2019, and apprehending the international political landscape of the day, I contend that the long-term after-effects of 9/11 still ripple transnationally, but again, not in the way that governments and media outlets declare. Afghanistan and Iraq have been decimated by the American-led wars on terror. Poorer nations have suffered the most, and since 9/11 Islamist terrorism in non-Western nations has increased. I am cognisant of our Western-centric media bias, which makes scant reference to international terrorist attacks, too numerous to mention here, that kill far more people in number than any attacks that have taken place in Western cities.3

3 Such incidents include the al-Mourabitoun (linked to al-Qaeda) attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali (20 November 2015), in which 20 hostages were killed; the Daesh-linked suicide bombing attack on a bus in Tunis (24 November 2015), which killed 13; the Daesh bombing in the Sultanahmet district, Istanbul (12 January 2016), which killed 13; the Daesh shootings and bombings in Jakarta (14 January 2016), which killed 10; the Daesh shootings and suicide bombings in Kabul (8 March 2017), which killed over 100; the al-Shabaab-linked suicide truck bombing in Mogadishu, Somalia (14 October 2017), which killed 587; the Daesh shootings and suicide bombings in As-Suwayda, Syria (25 July 2018), which killed 258; the Boko Haram and Daesh-linked shootings in Borno State, Nigeria (18 November 2018), which killed 118; as well as many more attacks in Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, and others. These attacks were undertaken by or attributed to various militant Islamic groups such as ISIS, Al Qaeda, Al Shabab and others. For more information on these various groups see, Jonathan Kealing, “This Weekend’s Terrorist Attacks...” PRI’s The World (22 March 2016). Accessed 12 June 2019, http://www.pri.org/stories/2016-03-22/paris-there-have-been-hundreds-terrorist-attacks-many-have-gone-unnoticed).
Meanwhile, in other wealthier and more privileged parts of the world, many Western European nations such as Italy, Austria, Spain, France, Germany, Sweden and Austria have seen the rise of populism, nationalism, and the far right. The United Kingdom reverted to anti-immigration sentiment in its Brexit referendum on 23 June 2016, resulting in a decision to withdraw from the European Union.

Turning to the United States, the country saw the unexpected election of the nativist nationalist Donald Trump, who dubbed his election victory “Brexit plus.” The outcome mirrored events in Britain, with voters opposed to immigration and angry at trade policies they believed disadvantaged them. Trump rallied nationalist sentiment during his election campaign, running on a divisive anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, “America-first” policy, promising to build a wall along the Mexican border. It is ironic that until the 1846-1848 wars, the south-eastern portion of what today is the United States had previously been part of Mexico, whose economy was permanently crippled by the US annexation of those territories. After Trump’s election, America has seen an alarming rise of reactionary nationalist policies, which in some cases have not only eroded civil liberties, but also human rights. In Chapter 5, I mentioned the deportation of Hispanic migrants, and detention of children at the US/Mexico border in what were in effect nothing more than cages. It has been argued that Trump’s nationalist rhetoric has emboldened the normalisation of racism in America, to the extent that white supremacists descended on Charlottesville, Virginia, carrying “tiki torches, swastikas and semi-automatic rifles” and chanting slogans such as “White lives matter” and “Jews will not replace us.”

6 Chadbourn, “How a Donald Trump Victory is Similar to Brexit.”
counter-protester with his car, Trump provoked outrage by claiming that there were “very fine people on both sides.”

What of Australia in this fraught transnational climate? A survey of recent acts of terrorism shows that although it is geographically remote, Australia is not immune from the far-reaching impacts of 9/11 and the wars on terror. Ghassan Hage is scathing of the Howard government’s “paranoid nationalism,” which espouses “a paranoid border disorder,” and posits that “the nation, instead of being a reality that needs to be protected, becomes a fantasy that needs to be protected from reality.” Part of this fantasy is John Howard’s “recentring of an always existing but until now a marginalised subculture of colonial White paranoia.” The attendant social and political milieu after 9/11 is what allowed Howard to regenerate anti-Muslim, anti-immigration white paranoia.

After 9/11, Australian politicians and commentators espousing strict border control intentionally conflated asylum seekers with terrorism, and “the terrorist as a symbol of New Australia defined against an older, safer country ... [became] ... a recurring thematic pattern.” This argument can be broadened to incorporate not only the “terrorist” but all maligned others, including people of colour. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the theorisation of this treacherous new Australia was juxtaposed with the predictable, older, safer one in the controversy over asylum seekers and border control. I have outlined in my Introduction and Chapter 4 how the Howard government perpetuated false narratives in the “Tampa Affair” and the “Children Overboard Affair” (which happened just before and soon after 9/11, respectively), to rally support for re-election in 2001. Howard capitalised on the paranoia and gained widespread support for the Pacific Solution (2001-Present), which decreed asylum seekers were not allowed on mainland Australia, but rather kept in

9 *Politico Magazine*, “What Charlottesville Changed.”
detention centres on Pacific islands such as Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Subsequent Australian governments have maintained this hardline stance on asylum seekers.

The five examined novels were published during and after the Howard years, when fears of terrorism dominated the national psyche. Nathanael O’Reilly explains that Australian society was reeling from national and international events during Australia’s participation in America’s war on terror. Subsequent terrorist incidents, such as the Bali Bombings (2002), and the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) inflamed “Citizens’ fears of a terrorist attack in Australia,” which were then “manipulated and heightened by both the media and the federal government.” At the end of 2005, a physical confrontation between white lifeguards and a group of young Muslim Lebanese-Australian men at Cronulla, a southern beach suburb of Sydney, ignited race riots that soon spread to additional suburbs. Many of the young white Australian men involved draped themselves with the flag, and suddenly, it seemed acceptable to yell racial epithets at Muslims. Although they were largely condemned by local, state, and federal levels of government, the street fights and vandalism revealed civil unrest and an ugly side of Australian racism that seemed to be bubbling just beneath the surface. This incident highlighted the “spatiality of nationalist phenomen[a],” in which the “spatially dominant … masters of the territory” believe they have managerial rights over “racialised/ethnicised groups” who are constructed as manageable objects. Another incident that can be included in the long-term after-effects of 9/11 in Australia is the 2014 Lindt Café Siege in Sydney, also known as the “Sydney Hostage Crisis,” during which a lone gunman held hostage ten customers and eight employees. During the ensuing police raid, two people were killed, and three other hostages and a police officer were injured. Even though the perpetrator’s motives were questionable,

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After Trauma and Post-Apocalypse?

These examples of global and national atrocities indicate three things. First, history, as well as trauma, is cyclical and endlessly repetitive. Second, these circuits of trauma demonstrate that Australia, despite its isolationist tendencies, is implicated in world events, and these traumas resonate on national, local, and individual levels. Third, these atrocities demonstrate that the post-9/11 epoch is not over, and the repercussions are still felt in Australia and around the world in 2019.

In examining the elements of trauma and apocalypse after 9/11 in the five novels studied, I have outlined the ways trauma manifests at both individual and collective loci, as well as global, national, and local sites. I have utilised the theoretical framework of Roger Luckhurst’s *The Trauma Question*, which advances the field of cultural memory by drawing on earlier clinical definitions, such Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and examining the nature of “trauma culture” in relation to literature, journalism, and film. For Luckhurst, trauma functions as a great disrupter, an event that may rupture identity in peculiar ways.\(^{20}\) This fragmentation or disruption is reflected particularly in *Breath* and *Five Bells*, in the intrusive quality of persistent memory and the way the narratives play with temporality. Exemplifying the aesthetics of trauma novels, these two texts capture repetition, guilt, and haunting memory that the characters experience both at a local scale, and as part of a broader national subjectivity. I have selected these two novels precisely for this exploration of localised and globalised urban trauma. Each novel is a portrayal of urban alienation and human suffering, where trauma can be transmitted inter-generationally, or inter-culturally.

I have also relied on Michael Rothberg’s multidimensional matrix of trauma to theorise a complex and inclusive framework that can understand collective and historical memory, and explore this in an intercultural way, not circumscribed by time. Rothberg’s model brings seemingly incompatible, yet painful legacies of history to explore “What happens when different histories confront each other in the public sphere? Does the remembrance of one

history erase others from view?” Applying the model of multidirectional memory to these case studies has allowed me to answer Rothberg’s questions. When different histories confront each other, they are nestled together in a scalar mosaic of trauma. Remembrance of one history does not eradicate the other from memory or view, but rather results in an inter-cultural, trans-temporal contextualisation. In other words, in a model where no one trauma dominates, the matrix articulates how Australian subjectivity is haunted by both the past and the present, by various circuits of suffering. The historical legacies of settler colonialism combined with harsh contemporary policies against asylum seekers haunt Australian identity. Trauma that is inflamed by the after-effects of 9/11 and the wars on terror interacts with media-perpetuated fears of terrorism, as well as economic fears for the nation, and anthropogenic fears of climate change.

As is appropriate to my study of the interplay and the movement of trauma in and from the city, and interplay of varying elements of traumatic memory, I have adopted a scale-sensitive approach to both trauma and space. I employ scale to explore the public/private realm, as well as reading trauma on global, national, and local/individual registers. I have explored how the individual may be afflicted by the matrix of trauma, which in turn manifests in the mind and the body. I have also argued for the primacy of the city as an integral part of a traumatised Australian subjectivity after 9/11, as it is a locus for the intricate circuits of different traumas and is integral in the transmission of trauma. I read Breath and Five Bells in the context of Australia after 9/11, where trauma and the city are essential. My application to trauma studies of Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope, an amalgam of time and space, charts the multi-scalar shifts of trauma in the two novels.

In light of outdated and homogenising definitions of globalisation, the scalar model of trauma is also very pertinent to space. Moving from outmoded theories of globalisation that were pertinent in the 1990s, I have critiqued the tendency of the media to present American interests as global interests. The immediacy of 9/11 in the technologically connected twenty-first century illustrates what Jill Bennet and Roseanne Kennedy call “world memory,” which

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does not encompass the world at all, but rather echoes the globalising perspectives of the media that arise from cultural and economic centres such as America.\footnote{Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy, “Introduction,” in World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time, Jill Bennett and Roseanne Kennedy, eds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 5.} I have recognised and critiqued notions of globalisation that privilege the West and the trauma of the West as all-encompassing, totalising constructs such as “global tragedy,” and moved towards a scalar approach to space which is more relational and inclusive of the local in relation to the global, the individual experience in relation to collective memory. In my study, I have also recognised a problematic Australian subjectivity. My analysis has revealed a paradox at the heart of Australian identity after 9/11 – the desperate need to be seen as America’s ally and a player on the world stage, particularly after the wars on terror, the anxiety over borders and asylum seekers, and the contraction into nationalism.

The second half of my thesis, exploring apocalyptic cities in relation to 9/11, builds on the ideas of trauma and extends them to apocalyptic depictions of cities in Dead Europe, The Unknown Terrorist, and Underground. These three narratives are parallel in structure in the way that they feature troubled, dislocated protagonists who apprehend and traverse troubled and increasingly merciless cities. These degraded cities exhibit varying degrees of cultural hysteria and oppressive power structures. I claim that the three novels are generically 9/11 novels where 9/11 or its immediate after-effects play a vital role. For Richard Gray in After the Fall, “one of the curiosities of the ‘war on terror’ that followed soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11 was the way it sustained and even reinforced a slippage between fact and fantasy, history and (often nightmarish) dream.”\footnote{Richard Gray, After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11 (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 11.} As part of this nightmarish dream (for Afghanistan particularly), Gray cites how unequal the war was because it possessed a “morally obscene... asymmetry.”\footnote{Jürgen Habermas, “Fundamentalism and Terror: A Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas,” in Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, Giovanna Borradori, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 28.} In other words, Gray claims that in the Afghan war, the fighting was by opponents from distinctly unequal worlds. On the side of the Americans, “the concentrated destructive power of the electronically controlled
clusters of elegant and versatile missiles in the air” fighting against the “archaic ferocity of ... bearded warriors outfitted with Kalashnikovs on the ground.” Regardless of the disjunction between apocalyptic nightmare and reality, apocalyptic fictions allow an elucidation of the greatest of human fears: the fear of annihilation. In an anthropogenic context, apocalyptic narratives articulate fears about climate change and the ravages of late capitalism upon humanity and the environment. Monsters are an embodiment of these apocalyptic fears.

The depictions of apocalyptic cities in the three novels vary in intensity and horror, the worst being the supernatural Gothic terrain in Dead Europe, as urban societies spiral towards their own destructive ends. I read the monster here as the embodiment of terrorism, as well as fears of Islam, asylum seekers, and the Other in the changing urban demographics that dominate our cultural landscapes. As part of apocalyptic fictions, I adapt the framework of monster theory to the various novels. When read in this way, the fictive monsters in the three novels articulate various aspects of the matrix of trauma. They embody articulations of colonial settler anxiety, as well as fears of terrorism and the cultural/ethnic/religious Other. My study has examined how these fears and anxieties after 9/11 may devolve into hysteria, demonstrating how we make monsters of the vulnerable.

Modern day monsters haunt our contemporary world in various iterations. In 2016, the eruption of a curious global monster phenomenon surfaced, known as “Clown sightings.” Allegedly, people reporting seeing individuals dressed as evil clowns in incongruous settings, such as near forests, in quiet suburban streets, or around schools. By mid-October, in the wake of hundreds of such accounts, there was an increase in crimes committed in clown guise. The phenomenon, was a kind of media hoax, a promotion for upcoming Hollywood films, that had spread throughout the United States and Canada, then from North America to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Latin America. Many commentators

25 Giovanna Borradori quoted in Gray, After the Fall, 11.
26 In particular the remake of Stephen King’s IT (New Line Cinema: 2017). Stephen King and New Line cinema have denied reports that these clown sightings are promotional tools for the film. Social media such as Facebook groups documented and reported many clown sightings in Australia and abroad.
called it an “epidemic of threatening clowns,” often menacing low socio-economic communities in the United States, while frightening and reputedly attempting to lure children away from their homes. Author and folklorist Benjamin Radford, in his non-fiction exploration of clowns, claims this craze is an example of the snowball effect, whereby contemporary social concerns are conflated with rumour, becoming hyperbolic cultural stories. Other commentators and sociologists have interpreted the clown phenomenon as a sign of the politically tumultuous climate after 9/11 and the ongoing war on terror. Clown sightings have also been linked to the rise of Donald Trump, whose reactive nativist rhetoric has instilled a fear of multiculturalism into a disenfranchised, regionalised, largely white American population. On the other hand, other commentators and world leaders have demonised Trump himself as “monstrous,” because he allows for the articulations and representation of the most basic of primal human fears.

In conclusion, I assert that the effects of 9/11 still resonate nearly two decades later, as depicted in the urban landscapes of a collection of five Australian narratives. The worlds in the narratives are problematic and the identities explored are paradoxical. Thus, my thesis is a case study offering a unique Australian perspective, a cultural artefact of a six-year time period dealing with the aftermath of 9/11. My reading of these Australian novels exploits an original combination of theoretical tools, particularly trauma theory and multidirectional memory, and contributes an original point of view to the examination of world literatures. As to whether there is a curative measure to ameliorating trauma and surviving (metaphoric) trauma.


28 Teague, “Clown Sightings.”

29 Benjamin Radford, Bad Clowns (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016).

apocalypse, I turn again to the matrix of trauma and the circuits of history where terrorism is not just committed by militant Islamists, but also militant white extremists. What is a post-9/11 consciousness? I would argue that it is mindful of history and careful not to repeat the traumas of the past. I would also argue that it is traumatised but hopeful. For Australia, in so far as it can be said to have a single national identity, I would argue that its identity is largely urban, one that is neither inward, nor beholden purely to the interests of America. Furthermore, in terms of Australian subjectivity, I would argue for a scale-sensitive identity that is intercultural and transhistorical, diverse, eclectic, resilient, and mindful of its colonial past. In terms of resilience, I would caution that amelioration of trauma cannot apply equally to all. For example, Indigenous people continue to encounter repetitive cycles of suffering, dislocation, and discrimination. Edmund Burke’s warning is pertinent here, that “People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors.”31 In terms of the cycles of history, it is imperative to remember the atrocities of the past so they are not repeated in different contexts and iterations in the present.

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