Bordertown was initially exhibited at Conical Contemporary Artspace, Melbourne and at Artspace, Sydney, between February and March 2008.

Dedicated to Alma and Kelly, two women who have faced great hardship but kept going.

Acknowledgments
Stacey's voice: Chloe Armstrong
Anna's voice: HaiHa Le
The Woman’s voice: Evelyn Krape
Sound editing and production: Byron Scullin
Sound recording: Ben Dudding
Architectural consultation: Thom McKenzie

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the area (Albury), the Wiradjuri peoples and in so doing, I have followed Wiradjuri Elders Liz Heta and Yalmambirra. I recognise the Indigenous Australian people as the first people of this continent and that, as the Original Owners and Custodians of the Land, they have a specific and unique cultural and spiritual relationship with the country, its sea and its rivers. This acknowledges that the Indigenous peoples have a right to continuing Indigenous customary laws, beliefs and traditions, and that this country was invaded and settled without treaty or consent. The historic and ongoing illegal dispossession and oppression experienced by Aboriginal Peoples continues to limit their ability to exercise their human rights in regard to their Land. Reparation and compensation for cultural dispossession needs to be made through a Treaty with the Australian Government, that includes Aboriginal representation in Parliament, which will restore ownership of the land to the original and rightful custodians of the nation, the Aboriginal people. I am committed to both the spirit and the process of reconciliation between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous peoples of Australia.

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INTRODUCTION

This project is a study in conflict, social partition and border construction in Australia. The investigation is centred on a town that straddles two states, a place renowned for historic conflicts. For those living in Bordertown today, existence consists of daily confrontations with an impassable barrier: a wall being constructed along the border at the frontier of two Australian states that divides the community into two territories, North and South. A series of interviews documents the experience of two women who live in Bordertown. One has been dispatched as migrant labour to an internment camp on the outskirts of South Bordertown; the other is an angry and disenfranchised young local from the poorest part of town. Both are witness to escalating antagonism and the social exclusion of women and other minorities in the community. Conflict and aggressive engagement are inevitable, and the divisions are fuelled by political authorities who seek to maintain their dominance. Yet borders are not substantiated in mountains, rivers or walls but the people they separate. As defensive strategies of global politics and urban militarisation trickle down into everyday life, combative tactics become apparent in the two women’s interactions with others. Meanwhile, Australia’s brutal history pierces the present in language and architectural structures that defend and divide, like the wall in Bordertown. As the two women in this study resist their subjugation, conflicts with authority arise. Through a series of assertions their vulnerability is transformed into solidarity through aggressive expressions of courage and resistance.

The pages of this book contextualise Bordertown within the broader framework of the situation of women in Australian rural townships and other contested spaces. Over my seven weeks’ investigation, I have examined the town’s history within a national context of division, border defence and conflict. Presented in three parts, this volume opens with a journal I have kept of my research, explicating, day by day, in an unorchestrated manner, Bordertown’s wider social and political landscape. In the middle of the book are a series of photographs documenting significant places and scenes in Bordertown, as well as other sites relevant to my research. The third section is a transcript that interweaves several interviews with the two women. The material here is extensive, but I hope this investigation of Bordertown is useful. For myself, I have realised that while there is no escaping the consequences of the past each time we are confronted by history there is an opportunity to strive for transformation.
Bordertown journal

WEEK ONE
Monday 25 January

It’s a searing, hot dry spell. Late summer is always the same in rural Australia. It’s dry as dust but the Mazda is cranky as if it’s rusted after the rain; only there isn’t a drop of it out here. I arrived this morning in a small country town. As I turned at the T-intersection into the main street, the metal ground in the car’s joints. I’m here to investigate the role of women as agents of social change in rural communities. I have two interviewees: Stacey Brain, a 22-year-old local, and Anna Pham, a refugee who recently arrived in Bordertown. I’ll be here for seven weeks. It’s only my first day and I’m already sweating.

Even though I’m from Melbourne, I’m aware that life in country towns is often idealised by city people, so I expect that my work here will be challenging. Why have I chosen this town? The situation is very complex; the reasons are numerous. The town has a specific and decisive history of colonial contestation, border construction, militarisation, Indigenous oppression, migrant encampment, social division and civilian violence. Comparisons can be made between Bordertown and the lasting conflicts, injustices and inequalities in Australia. It’s instructive for those who hold out hope for transformation. It’s a kind of parable of the whole country. Still, Bordertown has been doing it tough. The last two decades have seen a deepening crisis due to drought and economic rationalist policies in country towns. I plan to investigate the historical and contemporary contexts of women and migrants in Australia. This will mean drawing on social and political theory, as well as local history.

All my life I have been inspired by strong women. My twenties were consummated in the heady days of early 70s Feminism. At the time, we thought the battle had been won for future female generations. But the struggle has not ended. This study is a way to acknowledge the power that women have to transform the social and political circles they move in. I want to highlight the resilience of the mothers, sisters, daughters and friends around us.

I should point out that I am investigating the very specific situation of these two women in Bordertown. I don’t intend to denigrate the change that has come about in country towns. Transformations in the historical imbalance of gender are making a huge difference to life in country towns. In the last two decades, women have become prominent in rural Australia, as independent business owners and in securing local government jobs. Yet the process of change for young women like Stacey is not without trouble. She does not have the advantage of coming from a privileged or wealthy background. Stacey has to confront those holding onto power. The discrimination that held fast in country townships for many decades, affects her life today. She grew up in Lamington in the poorest part of Bordertown where disadvantage has perpetuated the patterns of patriarchy and a culture of violence. Young women from Lamington note that ‘macho culture’ is hard to avoid. The incidents of violence against troubled young women in Bordertown are still high. Yet the prevalence of physical aggression enacted by women is not often mentioned. I gather that young women from the ‘wrong side’ of town are playing a key role in this theatre of aggression. Anna’s experience as a camp intern is yet another story of incredible female resilience to hardship. I am deeply inspired by these accounts, and the revolutionary possibilities of women such as Stacey and Anna.

This image of an Australian town struggling with conflict might come as a surprise, however communal contestation is one of the most prevalent sources of violence today and the risk of its escalation is high. While I am here, I intend to identify the motivation for repetitions of hatred in Bordertown. Australia is said to have an insubstantial history. The denial of our past is an attempt to conceal horrific crimes. But, like repressed desires, history lurks and re-emerges at unwanted moments. Traumatic events leave deep wounds in the psyche of a place. They may be forgotten quickly but violence inhabits collective memory like a rote-learned rhyme. It modulates and sublimates contradictory forces but provides yet another platform upon which the next conflict will be based. This conflict may well resolve itself and end in harmony, but I fear that it is about to spiral out of control. Similarly, in Bordertown prior injustices threaten to pierce the smooth skin of this apparently harmonious town. While those in power come and go, history is endlessly present and its return is inevitable. Change brings new hope, and I think this is exactly the right time to demand that the stages of transformation toward a fair, just and truthful society are carried out,
even if making such demands comes as a surprise, as they have to the authorities in Bordertown.

**Tuesday 26 January**

It’s Australia Day. In Bordertown this is a celebration of failed nationalism. There’s meant to be a big parade but hardly anyone ever turns up. There wouldn’t be any good reason to, there’s not much to see: no kids, no flags, no fireworks. Usually it’s 35 degrees. A few diggers stagger past at one o’clock. So much for the legend of the Anzac. But at least the Australia Day parade looks colourful and proud on TV. Stacey’s got it on, blaring.

In our first conversation Stacey described Bordertown as a divided community, there’s the ‘North’ and there’s the ‘South’. This is a reiteration of the colonial division that separated north from south at the Murray River crossing. The wall is the frontier now. Stacey is from Lamington, the poorest suburb on the northern side of Bordertown. Most people from the North call the South Struggle Town and the inhabitants Southies. Stacey has a low opinion of anyone south of the wall, which is how most Lamington dwellers also see it. Migrants are also equated with anyone from the ‘other side’. The paradigm that those closest in social rank are the greatest threat is true for the underprivileged inhabitants of Bordertown. The anomaly of this state of affairs is not obvious to Stacey; she just thinks the people across the river are a destabilising force that could unhinge the Bordertown way of life. The ruling parties of Bordertown are happy to have the conflict continue, locking the weak into a struggle that ensures the hegemony of authorities is not questioned.

Stacey’s words are intriguing. The measure she applies to social status is space rather than scale-based. Bordertown is set in a large valley surrounded by rolling hills, and as we drive around town it is evident that Stacey’s gauge of status had been formed by topology; the elites ‘up there’ occupying the high ground while the underprivileged live ‘down here’ in the flatlands. Despite being so sharply attuned to the dichotomies before her, trouble is impossible for Stacey to avoid. Bordertown has a remarkable amount of violence being perpetrated by young women because girls have started looking for ways to resist subjugation. In Stacey’s mind she is reacting to what she sees as injustice, but cannot work out exactly who is to blame. She swears she’ll leave Bordertown and never return. But tearing herself away is not easy when her identity has been formed within an arena of conflict, where her actions can only be played out in theatrical stagings of spontaneous violence. You’ll notice in the photographs that Stacey wears military-style clothing. Although urban camouflage is a universally fashionable style, Stacey’s urban militant outfitting signals latent frustration. It’s an aggressive façade, a costume of war.

**Thursday 28 January**

I saw Anna Pham this morning. We met in the garden of the St. Cabrini Catholic Church. Seated on a stone bench, under a wrought old Moreton Bay fig tree, Anna told me that her real name is Ly Thi Pham. She spoke about her arrival in this country, forming her words very slowly, and softly, I listened to her. I thought about the journey she’d made and how Australia’s borders are maintained by cultural exclusion, a conflict founded in the violent appropriation of the sacred lands of the Indigenous peoples. To imagine Australia as entirely and homogeneously white, British and masculine is absurd. The reality is different, as we all know. Australia is home to diverse people, cultures and histories. My own family is a patchwork of backgrounds. The first was a convict transported for stealing novels, yet another was an Englishman who pioneered land near Warrnambool, and then in the aftermath of World War II, a refugee arrived who was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust. Multiculturalism has had a mixed reception in Australia. Immigrants come here with great visions for the future but for many this country is truly the fatal shore. Some dare to tell their story. Anna is one of those people. She has arrived in the Bordertown camp and is struggling to survive. Although its implementation has been gradually accepted by most Australians, multiculturalism has not been comprehensive; as social stratification, inequality and integration coexist. A latent discrimination remains in the proposition that any one of the ethnic groups arriving on these shores might be more able to ‘assimilate’ than another. But 200 years of occupation is a terribly short span of time compared to 60,000 years of inhabitation. An eon opens up: settlers, convicts, migrants; we are all aliens here. The real origin of our dark, discriminatory history is in the genocide performed on the Indigenous peoples throughout colonisation and in every instance of Aboriginal assimilation to Anglo-Australian culture. The sovereign impetus to kill was prescribed in the thousands of convicts whose death sentences were commuted to a life in exile by transportation to terra nullius, or a state of total annihilation. I think of the blood, the bleeding, pointless and horrific transubstantiation, death without atonement.
Under the boughs of this great fig tree there is the voice of just one woman. Yet I know Anna Pham’s story is only one of many refugee and migrant experiences. Refugees in the process of migration today are often in the greatest need of care and protection, firstly because they are stateless, and secondly due to the human rights violations that made them into refugees to start with. Those coming to Australia can face the same kind of incarceration they suffered in their country of origin, or in limbo as refugees in camps set up on the frontiers of wartorn nations. In conjunction with the trauma of indefinite detention, they exist under threat of deportation (if their Temporary Protection Visas are not renewed) and probable punishment or death upon return to their country of origin. Anna is living under this reign of terror. I see her shivering at the thought.

Friday 29 January

From the Travelodge window I look down Mean Street. Just like a history painting, Bordertown illustrates the divisive disposition of Australian colonial history. The Murray-Riverina region is a rich landscape of pastures and farmlands. As a major source of water in a dry place, the ‘Mighty Murray’ naturally drew people to its banks, and so the Murray was the most populated frontier in the nation. On the north side, the River was an ideal resting place for weary travellers, and a townsitewas formed called ‘The Crossing Place’, or ‘Bungambrewatath’ in Wiradjuri. The settlement to the south, called Belvoir, only developed once the gold rush took off in the 1850s. Unsurprisingly, the placement of the colonial border was fiercely debated and the two territories wrangled over its demarcation for more than a century. Surveyors plotted while the two governments schemed. Initially the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1840, Lord Russell, selected the Murrumbidgee River, a few hundred kilometres to the north, instead of the Murray River. But then, due to an administrative error, the boundary was drawn along the Murray River. This cemented inter-colonial rivalries that continue today, with the Riverina region between the Murrumbidgee and Murray Rivers being frequently slated to secede from the two colonies. In a local historical study from 1954, William Bayley notes that in “1872 the Albury and Riverina districts seriously considered seeking annexation by Victoria or entire separation as a new State, going as far as drawing the boundaries of the proposed new State. Separation meetings were regularly held”.

Even as the country looked forward to Federation, a statement published in the Border Post on 30 January 1867 proclaimed, that the “Riverina should be a Sovereign State”. Because large numbers of Victorians had settled on its fertile lands in the latter part of the 19th century, the area known as the Riverina continued to function as a zone of contact for the two States well into the 20th century.

Except rivers are notoriously poor frontiers. Riparian rivalries have been at the core of some of the bloodiest confrontations in human history. The mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers at the Iran-Iraq border has been the site of fierce semantic and geographic disagreement going back centuries, being known by two separate names: the Shatt al-Arab by Iraq and as Arvand Rud in Iran. The extent of riparian contestation is reflected in an international agreement called the Thalweg Principle. This defines the border between two sovereignties separated by a watercourse as lying along the dividing line at the line of steepest descent along the riverbed. As this and other examples of border conflicts over river boundaries attest (like the Jordan and Nile Rivers), the waterway itself becomes a zone of contest along with rights of access to a rich resource and route of transportation. Rivers are an arbitrary or ambiguous dividing line. The New South Wales-Victoria border is generally agreed on as being at the high water mark of southern banks, which changes all the time. The Murray River has also gradually changed its course over the time it has been surveyed, shifting and blurring the boundary as a result.

I have more to say about Bordertown’s historical contestations. The Murray River is the second largest waterway in Australia. It’s wonderfully winding, and peopled with ancient River Red Gum eucalypts. It was once central to the life of Bordertown, so when the surveyors fixed upon the River as the boundary between Victoria and New South Wales, the town and the region was instantly contested. Although the two territories were independent of each other, they mostly functioned as competitors. The colonies defended their prospects with border guards, gates and fencing, and other protectionist policies, like the regulation of migrant populations, and bans on certain goods and imports. Tariffs were set on many items being carried across the River, and customs houses were established at crossing points, as the two governments quickly realised the profits that could be made by imposing cross-border taxes. This set up a paradigm of opposition that caused lines of division to be drawn between any groups with a conflict of interest.
British free settlers were hostile to other migrants like the Chinese, and the colonial population in general were at variance with the Indigenous inhabitants.

The river barrier at Bordertown frustrated local inhabitants because it made free passage and trade very difficult. The Border people railed against the system and its inconveniences, making complaints in constant public meetings and published protests in the local papers. In 1867, a complainant in the Border Post expressed the frustration “that people on both sides of the Murray River are subjects of the same Queen... speaking the same language and following the same pursuits, and they cannot conceive why the fact of a river running between them should cause them to be treated as foreigners to one another, and subject them to fiscal annoyances such as do not exist between Great Britain and the leading continental nations.” A border customs war ensued when both colonies continued to increase tariffs and impose new customs fees. Eventually, about thirty-three customs officers were posted at the thirteen crossing places along the Murray River. The protectionist policy of the South did not change for over a century. Higher taxes placed on export goods increased trade for North Bordertown. Life was made difficult for Southies, many of whom moved to the North where the imposts were not as restrictive. For this reason the North made great progress over the South, which has been the ‘poorer cousin’ ever since. The consequences of these fiscal distinctions had some amusing consequences. One local yarn tells of Southies going shopping in the North where clothing was cheaper, then walking back over the border wearing their new clothes to avoid paying tax on them. Most of the time, however, this contested boundary was a daily impediment and source of antagonism for locals until Federation in 1901.

The River’s impending demise is a source of resentment for everyone in Bordertown. Centuries of regional mismanagement through irrigation, damming and harmful farming practices have perpetuated conflict over its usage and resources. Today, Victoria refuses to sign the National Water Initiative set to manage the crisis in the Murray Darling Basin (harking back to the policies of its protectionist past). The Murray River started to dry up a decade ago, and many of the majestic River Red gums are literally dying of thirst. Its mouth has closed over for only the second time in recorded history. On many days you can walk over the stony riverbed and not even get wet, so it is useless as a barrier. That’s why the Government built the wall.

Saturday 30 January

A week into my research, a remarkable architectural style has slowly become evident to me. It’s a distinctive kind of building found along many state or national frontiers, similar to the Spanish mission style, with the white stucco arches on shopfronts and hotels. It’s oddly out of place but the Mexican reference is not lost on Bordertown inhabitants. As I drove over Gateway Island with Stacey she joked about the “Mexicanos”. In Bordertown, one motel even has a spa bath in the shape of a sombrero.

Local antagonism is such that the rather indeterminate zone along the boundary of the two States has been unofficially branded ‘The Border’. The discursive means of The Border region’s sense of segregation is best illustrated in advertising and shop signage. Just this afternoon I was wandering about town and I took some snapshots like ‘The Border Barber’ and ‘The Border Mail’. In the past, local authorities hyphenated the old names of the two towns as ‘Belvoir-Crossing’. But this practice was relinquished at Federation in favour of the unifying ‘Bordertown’. The hyphenated name is still faintly visible on the faded and peeling painted walls of 19th century storefronts. Bordertown inhabitants have been known to draw a comparison to Budapest, once Buda and Pest. Or so I was told this morning by local historian Bruce Penney, who believes that successful unification is possible. Locals are adamant, however, that the list of anomalies is insurmountable (the two States have a register of unresolved disputes running into the thousands). Coincidentally, Bruce and I met in the Commercial Club, a monstrous palace of poker machines that fed off the liberal New South Wales gambling laws. Border disputes, as well as differences in legislation, disrupt the daily lives of most Bordertown residents, such as the 25-minute time difference between North and South, which Bordertown inhabitants had to endure until Eastern Standard Time was introduced across the Nation. With such rivalry, it seems unlikely that unification of the two sides will be possible without civil unrest. In 2001, locals were exasperated at celebrations marking the centenary of Federation, as politicians from the capital cities turned up and pronounced an amalgamation of the two cities, much to the chagrin of the gathered crowds. At one such celebration, attendants hurled abuse at the visiting Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks, when he
joined forces with his counterpart from New South Wales. The wall has only exacerbated a rise in mutual suspicion and abhorrence. To me, it’s more akin to the ramparts and defences of former Berlin’s boundary between the East and West than a simple partition. At least that’s what it looks like when I walk alongside the border exclusion zone.

**Sunday 31 January**

I didn’t have any meetings today, so I found a map of Australia and spread it out on the hotel room’s worn carpet. I’ve always seen Australia as a unified shape, with an unassailable coastal perimeter. Now that I know about the fissures running through the land, it’s impossible to see a singular, impregnable object, despite Australian government efforts to have the nation fortified in this way. With Federation in 1901, migration across regional borders was no longer under the jurisdiction of the individual states, because defence had shifted to the national coastline and was the principal responsibility of the Commonwealth. It is no coincidence that the Australian Immigration Restriction Act was brought in across all the states in the same year, a law designed to protect Australia’s shores from migrants of ‘unsuitable’ racial origins. Alfred Deakin, Prime Minister incumbent in 1901, stated ‘unity of race was an absolute essential to the unity of Australia’, and that the strategies being employed were intended to restrict the number of ‘aliens’ residing within its borders. Immigration policies of this calibre bolster national identity and its sense of security, yet they require ongoing reliance on British imperial rule under a constitutional monarchy. Australia’s continued deferral of republican independence is tied to the perceived exposure of *terra nullius* to sovereign claims that might arise if the colonial protectorate (or the Queen and her representative, the Governor-General of Australia) were to suddenly be disengaged as Head of State, claims to native title that are justified for the Indigenous peoples.

The politics of border protection are now more trenchant in the ideological defence of our shore than ever. Because forming a protective shield around its perimeter is literally impossible the focus has been on establishing a racialised frontier so that all unwanted arrivals by sea are deemed a threat to national security. I’m going over all of this because the residents of Bordertown believe that the community is suffering from an analogous threat. The proposition of Victoria being partitioned off from New South Wales now sounds like an anomaly, but it offers a critique of contemporary divisive and protectionist policies. The simple comparison to the community of Bordertown makes the absurdity of Australia’s fixation with borders and racial distinction plain. There’s a patent psychology to this division that requires all members of the community to subscribe to a polarised view. The demarcation of the Southies as ‘the enemy’ demands their total subordination. It’s a thoroughly documented trait described by UNESCO, which ‘declares that wars begin in the minds of men... So with the consciousness of the nation, all citizens displace their hatreds and animosities upon and external enemy who conveniently serves as scapegoat’. Such a mentality is a precondition of long-term conflict, in which individuals are invariably bolstering the attitudes promulgated in the broader political sphere (and promoted by elites and rulers). As soon as the opposing sides are brought into contact, negative stereotypes proliferate and scenes of conflict arise, such as those seen on Sydney’s Cronulla beach in late 2005, which many would point to as a restaging of nationalist preoccupations with racial purity. Variances in Bordertown carry on unabated. In the Border Morning Mail on the 2nd of March 1944 it stated, ‘there have been occasions where frustrating border anomalies have given the impression that, within federated Australia, New South Wales and Victoria were “like two Balkan states”.’

After a week of discussions with Stacey I can see that clashes with the Southies have established a combative approach to her relations with ‘outsiders’. Seemingly ordinary encounters with the Southies are underscored by this violent and destructive impetus. Peers and parents sanction this attitude, as they too act out scenes of belligerent aggression. Stacey tells of the way ‘Southies’ infiltrate the North. In one interview, she described a scene in the Lamington pub in which a group of ‘Southies’ comes in ‘looking for a fight’. The violent confrontation that ensued is an indicator of the perceived threat that cross-border ‘invaders’ pose to the maintenance of an ideally ‘homogeneous’ community, free of external ‘contamination’. Like most residents of the North, Stacey thoroughly approves of the wall for this reason, even though this structure is a major intervention, inconveniencing residents on both sides of the border.

Stacey has constructed her identity around an ideology of conflict. She likes to act ‘macho’ and it looks worryingly like this attitude signals
that she has acquired a taste for violence. Only Stacey’s aggression is not exactly a war of attrition. Nor is the violence only mirroring the shocking behaviour she has witnessed in men around her, such as the blokes in the pub, or the army jerk in the pizza restaurant. Stacey has gained a sense of power by standing up for herself. She’s compared the equally problematic tactics of her Mother and Stepmother and decided that ‘standing up for yourself’ is better than being weak or ‘pathetic’.

Stacey claims to have no fear. Tales of conquests as a young rebel, jumping off the bridge, beating up blokes and picking fights with young women from the South, all contribute to a mythologised identity as an urban warrior, a local hero. She says it herself: “No one messes with Stacey Brain”. Not all of her role models are bad. A lot of Stacey’s strength has been drawn from an intimate relationship with her father. Like many country girls, Stacey grew to love guns by going out shooting rabbits with her Dad. Underneath the ‘aggro’ exterior, Stacey is vulnerable. The fights are often a confused attempt to make things ‘right’ too. The ‘wild girl’ identity has been built up to fit in with the competitive violence being perpetrated by her mates in response to the conflict in Bordertown. Because it is almost impossible for a young, uneducated woman from Lamington to identify the legacies or agents of patriarchy, the town’s contestation between North and South provides Stacey with something to lash out at, a way to show her strength.

**WEEK TWO**

**Monday | February**

Last night was particularly sticky, so I left the window open to the evening breeze. The sound of the trains echoed across the darkened landscape and through my sleep. Their beguiling whistle prompted me to consider the influence of the railways in the region, and so this morning I decided to have a look at the Bordertown Railway Station. According to a historical flyer I found in the foyer, titled *Connecting two railway systems*, the station is a “signature place” for Bordertown City, as well “as a national cross-border marker”. A grand red and white brick building in Italianate style, it stands as a symbol of power, one in keeping with the development of railway transportation as a point of competition and rivalry. The railways became an important tool in the separatist effort as the two colonies sought to maintain spatial, economic and political distance from each other. Each State lay distinct track gauges as a conscious avoidance of unification. Victoria’s booming trade from Port Philip required that it establish the first connection between the two railways. This occurred when the Melbourne and Essendon Railway Company constructed a new section of the Bordertown-Melbourne line in 1860. Inter-colonial rivalries were partially quelled in 1883, when tracks on both broad and standard gauges were laid for a few kilometres across the river flats and bridges. Railways remained the source of symbolic disunity for many decades to come, because the two governments had ensured their long-term partition when they established their railways on differing gauges. This differentiation lasted until 1962, when a standard gauge track finally ran all they way from Bordertown and Melbourne.

Stacey informs us that Bordertown station has the longest platform in the southern hemisphere. This is an exaggeration; it’s actually the longest in New South Wales and third longest in Australia. This was built because, as soon as the railways were connected, Bordertown became the exchange hub between the two capitals, even with the impediment of the break of gauge. The station was a major interchange for travellers, and the streams of foreigners heading for the nearby migrant camp, whose piles of baggage stacked up all over the platform, as they unloaded their worldly possessions. It was also a checkpoint for goods being brought across the border by train, and had the largest facilities in the country for freight transhipment. Customs inspections took place at the station, but this annoyed and inconvenienced passengers. The impropriety of customs officers searching through ‘ladies’ luggage’ in public was just one of their objections. The anomalies between the colonies became vividly incongruous on the Bordertown Railway Station’s platform as during the period in which the Station had two clocks. This served to advise travellers of the 25-minute time difference between the North and South. Even with the extraordinary size of the platform, delays and inconveniences abounded; Border customs protocols became so problematic for the exchange of trains that, from 1886, customs inspections were done at Spencer Street Station in Melbourne. Over an extended period, however – as the railways forged ahead – opportunities for trade, communication, travel and prosperity
opened up. When the premier express train, *The Spirit of Progress*, made its debut in 1937, its sleek, all-steel streamlining inspired Australians with visions of technological innovation that would unify the modern nation. But somehow, the echo of the trains ploughing over the land still sounds like a declaration of colonial ascendancy in Bordertown.

**Tuesday 2 February**

I’m reading the *Connecting two railway systems* pamphlet that I picked up at the Station yesterday. It says that Bordertown’s development of the railways as part of a defence system extends back to 1889, when the New South Wales Premier Henry Parkes made the first call for a federated national railway network. As the basis of the fledgling Commonwealth’s strength and unity, the lack of transportability across the border was evidently a major concern in 1901. The new Federal Government even conducted their earliest military exercises at Bordertown, to test the capacity of the National Defence Force to load and unload troops and equipment efficiently at the break of gauge. This is common to the international formation of military forces at a frontier, especially a formation that occurs simultaneously with a change of railway gauge. I have heard of at least one other town with the same situation: Port Bou on the boundary of France and Spain, a frontier that maintains its break of gauge to this day as a useful aid for border control.

In wartime, railways are central to bolstering military protection. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the break of gauge at Bordertown was a strategic weakness. Government and military planners deliberated how to overcome the issue of how to rapidly transport troops and arms across the border. Dealing with the issue of defence force implementation became a focus of national security, as Australia prepared for a suspected Japanese invasion. Enemy submarine activity had severely diminished coastal defences and the shipping of goods by sea; so operational cross-country transportation routes became vital. The break of gauge was an insurmountable impediment, so military strategists decided to build up defences at the border, instead of trying to cross it. The first was in 1929, at Wirlinga, where a major explosives depot was sited near the break of gauge. In the years between 1939 and 1945, a whole series of platforms were constructed specifically for the transfer of military equipment.

During the war, rigid restrictions were imposed on travelling interstate; Bordertown consequently became a key checkpoint. The build up of defence forces at Bordertown was directly linked to the railways. Forces had to be ready to rapidly transport troops and arms to either Sydney or Melbourne, depending on which city would be invaded first. More bases were established along the border during the war period, to allow for ammunition and troops to be moved quickly either way. The South had both the Bonegilla training camp and a massive supply base at Bandiana. Airfields, ammunitions, training units and bases were built all along the river border at Tocumwal, Mildura, Narranderra and Corowa, the intention being to protect the nation more comprehensively by decentralising its military capabilities. During the war, Bordertown’s station was the busiest in the country, as thousands of transiting and locally based Defence Force troops took advantage of the comforts of the station’s refreshment rooms.

I’m trying not to think about it too much but I am having trouble putting my mind to rest. The signs of military supremacy in Bordertown keep racing through my head. For those passing through, Bordertown looks like a peaceful rural centre. But the land around the town is highly militarised. War memorials, avenues of honour and various armaments left over from past battles mark the landscape of Bordertown. Cannons, tanks, planes and even warships rest uneasily in public parks and gardens. The military presence is still strong with bases situated in surrounding countryside on both sides of the town. Army bases surround the entire area in a nightmarish fortification. To the south are the remains of the camp founded at Bonegilla inside Latchford Barracks. A few kilometres away are Gaza Ridge Barracks, containing the massive Bandiana Training Camp. All along the border are surveillance cameras, electric and hurricane fencing, and retaining walls. And when I turn off the light I think can hear the sound of the troops marching in the distance.

**Wednesday 3 February**

Borders are the obvious location for a build up of armaments, yet there has been a rise in this kind of infrastructure all over the world. In the construction of secure spaces today, a whole array of military technology is infiltrating urban spaces. Sometimes the infrastructure is apparent, but the equipment is imperceptible in many other cases. In international discourse the rise of this phenomenon has been called ‘military urbanism’, of which there is extended discussion on the
blog, Subtopia: A field guide to Military Urbanism. In this country, the prevalence of Defence Force occupation of urban spaces has been a consequence of escalating fears of terrorist attack and various unidentifiable and ambiguous threats, epitomised by the Australian Federal Government’s colour-coded security risk alert ratings.

The conception of a border as a danger zone is usually founded on a violent conflict or contest between two groups of people, and the presence of the military informs its inhabitants that an area is under threat. In the first decades of settlement, Bordertown’s defences were used to control and suppress outbreaks from local Indigenous peoples. A military strategy was developed to defend against them. Guard posts were placed along roads and stock routes, and settlers were warned to carry arms in defence of the ‘black threat’. Towns slowly developed all over The Border region, from which Indigenous peoples were socially excluded. But this has never been enough. Once a border exists it must be defended at all costs, so that the conflict between the colonies has been translated into defence against all supposed external threats. Processes of inclusion and exclusion define this border. This is the same process by which Anna and Stacey have been denied access to the social and economic enclosure occupied by the wealthy and privileged, whose zone of exclusion is literally set apart, up on the hills around Bordertown.

Thursday 4 February

In our most recent discussion Stacey told me about an article she saw on the cover of a free tabloid, advocating army enlistment. This was aimed at school leavers who might join the Defence Force’s gap year scheme. Stacey read that you can earn up to $50,000 and she was tempted by the offer. Australians don’t tend to think of the nation as being particularly militarised. In the recent official Australian citizenship publication, Becoming an Australian citizen, the following statement was very revealing: ‘While service in the Australian Defence Force is voluntary, should the need arise it is vital that all Australian citizens be committed to joining together to defend the nation and its ways of life.’ Although we don’t yet have compulsory military service, the Howard Government has made a big effort to get younger generations to consider joining the Defence Force. You’ll see army representatives in schoolyards, and at major sporting and entertainment venues. The big ‘sell’ seems to have been successful. Last year’s new recruits have increased to numbers that have not been exceeded since the 1960s. In The Sunday Age a few weeks ago there was a story about one young recruit who dreamt of escaping his hometown of Seymour: ‘I’m excited I’m moving away and being paid to run around with guns and play sport...’ When asked if he could shoot a man, he replied: ‘I reckon I could. They train you to do it.’ This and many other instances of the coercion of underprivileged rural youth into national service is evidence of a far more insidious militarisation of this country than we would like to believe. The attempt to attract women (who by all accounts make up 15 percent or less of new recruits) is another emblem of the mobilisation of Australia as a military nation. Previously, it has only been in times of total war that women have been invited to participate in armed conflict. In the Second World War, for example, women took on roles as workers and participants in the national labour force. Apart from this, women have generally been excluded from the armed forces in Australia. But gender has now been dropped as a distinction. So, in the grand scheme of the nation at war, under which all citizens are expected to make the same sacrifice, both Stacey and Anna have been invited to do military service. Anna decides to join an organisation called the Women’s Land Army, as a way to escape the migrant camp labour. Stacey signs up for the Army Reserves. She is not taken in by the heroic imagery but intends to use her training to stand up against the forces she perceives to be oppressing her: the government, the rich people, the blokes, and the wall.

Friday 5 February

I’ve noticed that troops draw a lot of water in this town. The thousands of troops and trainees in the surrounding army bases have a big impact on life in Bordertown: barbers offer discounts for defence force members, and on a Friday evening army buses line the main street while the cadets are taken out for a night on the town. Locals must, unhappily, share their pubs and clubs with swarms of young men in uniform, desperate for a good time. Stacey’s attitude to the military has been formed by her daily encounters with these troops, who she calls ‘AJs’ (army jerks).

Stacey and I walked through the botanical gardens. She boasted about the Bordertown Anzac monument up on the hill. She paused in thought for a second then started to recount the astounding story of her fight with an unwitting army cadet who was simply ordering
pizza after a night out in Bordertown. The most striking part of this story was how Stacey defended the interests of the women working in the pizza restaurant where the fight took place. In the interview, she described her reaction being due to the AJ’s sexism, that he denigrated the female staff in Sweethearts, Bordertown’s inhabitants, and women in general. Stacey lashed out at this young man’s abuse, employing the only tactic she had at hand, her wild temper.

After walking up a steep incline, Stacey and I ended up on top of Monument Hill. We stopped under the Anzac tower. I stood there thinking about how such a big deal is made of the Anzacs in Australia. The Anzacs have a strong visual presence in Bordertown too. This is a symbol of national heroism that has even greater significance in a contested space, surrounded by military bases. Although legends don’t mean that much to Stacey, she was filled with civic pride at the sight of the monument. In reality, it’s a kitschy stucco tower with a tiny light that’s turned on at night to represent the eternal flame.

**Saturday 6 February**

Listening to Anna’s interview again this morning brought back all the hype about ‘border protection’. Since the bill of the same name was passed in 2001, any number of politicians deploy the catchy phrase. I turned on the TV a few weeks ago to see a program called Border Security: Australia’s Frontline on Channel Seven. Sensationalised commercial shows like this have been selling the Howard Government’s paranoid campaign to the public. It’s obvious that the construction of a border is essential to the creation and definition of a nation. In Australia, however, the concept taps into a deep-seated insecurity and paradoxical bind going back to the nation’s foundations. Its maintenance requires a zone of indistinction, a depoliticised space in which aggressive demonstrations of exclusion can be acted out on foreign, undesirable bodies. These externalised, non-democratic acts are the perversely necessary political means to define the ‘democratic’ state within.

Why can’t we confront this issue? Sovereignty and its definition for any nation is a convoluted affair. There wouldn’t be a single country in the world today sanctioning the free flow of people across its borders, regardless of its ability to monitor or defend them. Territories define statehood in the way people come and go across borders. The flow of human traffic has been a global dilemma for centuries and has only increased in intensity with the sharpening of definitions of global political and territorial spaces in the last two hundred years.Patterns of access and denial tend to reveal the historical construction of identity as nationalism plays out in the decisive inclusion and exclusion of chosen bodies within a space. The defence of geographic and legal perimeters has become a mainstay of sovereignty in the sanctioned arena of international political law. For all that this is neatly tied up in Constitutions, physical aggression is an unavoidable constituent of border protectionism. As a state or nation seeks to fortify its limits, the frontier is defended more fiercely, with unilateral forays into international territories. Through surveillance, military presence, cross-border postings and large scale fear campaigns, the demarcation between the interior and the exterior is blurred.

The fact that global civilisations have been largely established by waves of migration, exists as a flagrant contradiction to public perceptions of newcomers as the source of many problems in pre-existing communities. Alien threat is ubiquitous, being both within and without. This is particularly true of Australia, where the Federal Government has applied all kinds of political and military exercises to the border, expanding or contracting the reach or limit of the frontier. Migration zones are summarily excised. maritime defences and postings are stretched, employing small Pacific nations like Nauru as offshore detention centres, and engaging in regional paternalism in troubled countries like East Timor and Fiji. Even suburbia is unsafe, as the Howard Government’s National Security campaign has had ordinary citizens on the lookout for potential terrorists in our midst, leading to the arrest and incarceration of a range of formulaic ‘suspicious types’. Sometimes I wonder how I can still bear to call this ‘my country’. It’s like it has a gentle, pretty face but when it smiles it reveals an ugly set of teeth.

**WEEK THREE**

**Monday 8 February**

Anna has been talking about her time in the camp at Bordertown. She wonders why a majority of the interns are women, where the number of men in migrant detention centres usually far outstrips the
women. The cause rests with immigration minister Arthur Calwell's 'Beautiful Balts' campaign, which saw post-World War II refugees being hand-picked according to their suitability for assimilation into the town's British cultural lineage and heritage. Women were specifically chosen and promoted in flyers and advertisements put out by the Chifley Government as a demonstration of their beauty and refined qualities. Departmentally scripted stories of romance, marriage and integration in the ideal Australian family were run in glossy magazines and newspapers. In reality it was not quite so idyllic. Most women emigrated to Australia on work schemes in which they were bonded for two years' labour placement in government-allotted positions.

After World War II, thousands of people were shipped to Australia under the Displaced Persons' program. The need to find housing for such large groups pushed government facilities to the limit and the only available accommodation at the time was on army bases. The military context re-established the practice of confining 'alien', undesired people in defended spaces, a strategy that has been a constant feature in this country ever since colonial prison camps were founded under British rule. Accommodating the newcomers within militarised zones also meant they could be monitored and sectioned if necessary. Bases were fitted with rudimentary tin structures called Nissen huts, living quarters that were remembered (not so fondly) for their low, domed form and lack of insulation. Bordertown's site was particularly desolate, even depressing, for its residents. These camps were not suitable environments for long-term habitation or for young families. Yet in the quiet times, resilient and hopeful men and women in the camp found alternative amusements. Anna recollects how there was an electric atmosphere of communality as the radios buzzed incessantly throughout the Nissen huts.

During 1950s, large numbers of men and women who had been promised work on the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme and other major state-sponsored projects were accommodated at the camp. Many interns, however, found themselves waiting several years for the jobs to become available and they were not permitted to leave the camp until their work bond expired. While some inhabitants were happy to wait it out, as the prospect was still better than the memories of war, the sense of powerlessness and isolation for others engendered in the camps led to uprisings. I heard about this from Anna when she told of a demonstration in the camp and the slogans written on the signs. Anna, like the others, feels she has been reliving a nightmare, as if there is no escaping the past. When she describes herself as a ghost in a portrait, she speaks of a loss of identity. But Anna is holding onto the hope that she will be given the chance to make the new life that she has dreamt of in Bordertown.

Wednesday 10 February
I'd like to talk more about the situation of the migrant camps inside militarised zones, but I need to attend to defensive landscaping in Australia first. We take great pride in the Australian landscape as an image of freedom and equal opportunity. Yet there is a dark side to this picture, which is represented in the environment as a display of a morally and ideologically corrupt past. It looms over the country and perpetuates inequity by its actual, physical presence; its fields, roads, towns and suburbs as well as the designation of public space for the presentation of governmental power. Tracts of land and their management are a symbol of strength and a form of propaganda. Political leaders might talk of reform, but the command of place and space is embedded in the landscape. Neither the ideological foundations nor its physical constructs are easily altered.

A sense of security is a primal human need. In perilous times, modern populations seek reassurance from authorities, happily relinquishing a 'few' civil and human rights in the process. In contemporary life we have become accustomed to the oppressive presence of 'security' as a result. Urban and rural spaces are increasingly designed to ideologically defend territory, to set up a perceptual frontier rather than literally form a protective shield. The technology that monitors such a zone is practically inextricable from the space itself. Yet there is a long lineage to this kind of human manipulation of the environment. A study of civilisations, as far back as the rampsarts of Babylon 2000 years BCE, reveals the importance of aesthetics to warring and embattled urban cultures. A walled or moated city conjures up epic battles on a Trojan scale, and we would scoff at the idea of brandishing our defences to such a degree today, only, not so long ago, bomb shelters proliferated backyards. My Grandfather built one in the 1940s, under the family home in Bendigo, central Victoria.
Apparently the Japanese ‘invaders’ were going to target sleepy rural towns. There’s no way we would be so paranoid today. Or would we?

Australians are usually wary of military constructions in a domestic context, but under capitalism we have accepted purchasing rights that allow for the exclusionary fortification of private and public space. Defensive landscapes are consequently becoming more predominant in many Australian domestic environments. This is part of a global militarisation of everyday life in communities all over the world, which has seen urban and civic designs constructed according to what they keep out, instead of including or harmonising people within a social space.

I made a presentation this evening in the Bordertown Civic Library. I described to the locals how it felt to walk alongside the wall through the centre of town, that its impact on one’s body is overwhelmingly threatening. Standing beside the Berlin Wall or at the gates of the Maribyrnong Detention Centre you’d expect to get a chill down your spine. But, I said, as far as I knew, the Bordertown wall’s design was not a deliberately divisive instrument. The rhetoric of government officials assured locals that this was merely an object of mutual conciliation and security. A middle-aged, ‘well-to-do’, woman interrupted me. She was adamant that the wall intentionally cleaved the community, economically, socially and politically. Others agreed that they were extremely conscious of the expression of power embodied by this form of material and symbolic capital. The woman complained that the wall had cut her off from the civic centre, and denied her relatives in the South access to key public service. I didn’t know that people were being separated from their relatives. I was surprised at the degrees of injustice it had activated. A quiet unrest is brewing. Bordertown has seen uprisings before but it has never before erupted. The military are adjacent, ready to quash civil unrest. I remembered what Anna told me about the protest she saw in the migrant camp and they way the army rushed in and smashed the signs the internals had made. Perhaps because the slogans on the signs told the truth: this is a barbaric system.

**Thursday 11 February**

Up until March 2007, the highway wound through the streets of Bordertown. It was all bitumen, lights, trucks, tyres, buses, dust and people. For decades the road brought goods, commuters, tourists and lots of business into the heart town. In that mode, the highway was like the River causeway that carried vital goods and supplies up and downstream on paddle steamers (so the Murray was at once a barrier and the artery of the town). But with global capitalism and privatisation taking precedence over local interests, the highway that once chugged into the centre of the community has become a super freeway that both dissects and bypasses the town. In one way, the freeway, which runs alongside the boundary line, is like the River in its appropriation of a transport route and goods conduit as a border. However, everyone zooms straight through on the new road, and it cuts the community in half with its 12-metre high black walls. This afternoon I walked across a freeway overpass in the middle of town. It was enclosed in wire caging, with heavy steel framing and security cameras. Because it’s the only way to cross the freeway from North to South, it functions like a checkpoint. Locals describe the wall as an obstruction and a symbol of collusion between private and public authorities. It also reminds residents of their economic and physical subordination.

In Bordertown, private corporations, under the direction of local government, have undertaken a series of public building projects that clearly demonstrate an ideology of apprehension. The wall’s design and fortification presents a menacing image. The overpass is like a technocratic frontier. Its materials are impenetrable: cold dark steel and painted black concrete. Large sheets of glass and walkways enclosed in hurricane fencing provide pedestrians with views of the road, yet they are distressing to encounter. If I pass through the checkpoint I will undergo biometric filtration of the kind seen in science fiction films like *Gattaca* (1997). I know I am under surveillance.

Walls are presumed to have one primary function. But look around any ordinary urban setting and it is obvious that they can differ greatly in purpose, intent and meaning. In Bordertown the message is clear: don’t touch; stay back; this is out of bounds. I wonder if the wall could adequately perform its role without brandishing such threats. At twelve metres high, the structure is insurmountable. Once you start to compare this partition to others that are smaller, below eye level, or more integrated with the landscape, it becomes evident that this wall creates a razor-sharp distinction between the two sides. No one is able to cross over or approach it without being aware of this cleavage. Erected to shield against an undesirable ‘other’, defensive walls
perpetuate the ontological insecurity at the core of such exclusionary practices. Bordertown’s wall engenders fear and anxiety about the sharpened edge at the border. Nobody wants to get cut.

**Friday 12 February**

I would have thought the wall would have made Bordertown residents feel safer. It really doesn’t seem to have helped. Each home has its own barricade: fences, brick walls, even barbed wire, sensor lights, alarms, cameras and private security patrols. I’m not sure how effective these arrangements are in terms of defence, however the psychological impact should not be underestimated. It’s a potent show of hegemony, implicit in design. Stakeholders and owners contribute to the appearance of space according to the maintenance of their interests. If we search back over human civilisation, landscape is not only used to defend but is also integral to class demarcation. Over many centuries landscape design has evolved as an effective means of social, economic and political segregation. The practice of erecting walls throughout Europe has been established over hundreds of years in the enforcement of class division, by which landed aristocracy kept out the impoverished masses. Travel through villages and towns anywhere on the European continent and you will see the remnants of city gates and ramparts.

Landowners have every right to proclaim and protect their property with boundary markers like fencing. While some zones are discriminated by signage, security cameras, gates and elaborate fencing, others are rarefied by means of subdivision. In the desolate reaches of outer-suburban in America, Australia and many other western countries, the phenomenon of gated communities is on the rise. The walled-in community takes the imperative of protection and turns it into a regime of absolute partition: ‘undesirable’ outsiders are definitely not welcome. The patrol and monitoring of these residential spaces is more concentrated than most high security prisons. Their prevalence in the United States stems from a frontier mentality, in which small pioneer communities and families were thought to be under constant threat of ambush by armed Native Americans. This is a codified class (and race) structure in American culture that holds to the belief that wealthy, middle class (usually white) people need to be protected from external crime and violence. I wonder if the emergence of these residential spaces in Australia is the return of a repressed ‘frontier’ mentality, being weirdly acted out in middle-class, paranoiac urban developments. The irony of partitioning is that barriers tend to be a magnet for ‘undesirables’: kids want to jump them and thieves are keen to see what it is that is so worth protecting inside.

Petty crime is an unremarkable event in the built environment but when highly defensive perimeters partition communities, the physical object of division is often fiercely contested. A friend of mine told me about one man in suburban Melbourne who formed his own resistance movement. A freeway wall had been built a few metres away from his house in Mitcham, and he hated it so much that every few months he carved a small hole in it. Authorities quickly patched it up, but within a couple of weeks he would return to re-enact his remonstration. When I consider the individuals confronted by more severe instances of segregation, I am impressed by their remarkable struggle to overcome those restrictions. If they can’t squeeze through a gap, they crawl under or climb over; all that is left is to attack the offending object or authority. So we see walls everywhere being painted on, chipped at, railed against, and demolished by protestors.

**Sunday 14 February**

In Bordertown some residents have begun to condemn the wall but nobody has any idea how to bring it down. It’s even more frightening to hear that in zones of conflict they’re going up faster than ever. This coincides with rising geopolitical division and associated disorder in hundreds of locations. Fences and walls have been constructed on the Mexican-American border, at Israel’s West Bank and along the Gaza Strip, at the frontiers of North and South Korea, of Iraq and Iran, Iraq and Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan, along the Moroccan perimeter of the Western Sahara (The Berm), in the disputed territory of Kashmir (along the Line of Control between Pakistan and India), and throughout much of Eastern Europe. For some nation states this is a means of immigration control or a method of containment and protection for those within. Others are perpetuating sovereign violence on alien bodies who are considered as a threat to the sanctioned members of that territory.

Equipment like thermodynamic cameras and other hyper-technological designs are the invisible eyes of today’s border guards. In other circumstances there is a mortal division, with high voltage
fences deploying instant electrocution with a shock ten times the lethal charge required for any human death (the rift is thus an abyss). Technological advances aside; walls are clearly unable to alter the basis of any conflict. Neither peace nor unity has come to cities like Baghdad, where occupying American forces are constructing a wall to enclose the Sunni group, Adhamiyah. With the enlargement of the Schengen zone and the dissolution of political borders across the European Union, there are fears of unchecked human traffic from the Eastern-bloc and beyond (from the Middle East: Lebanon, Kurdistan, Iraq) into the EU. These fears are realised in highly militarised defences at the eastern-most boundary such as the short, rugged frontier of Ukraine and Slovakia (managed by the European border agency FRONTEX).

Many of the people hoping to pass through political exclusion zones today are economic migrants seeking employment in more prosperous neighbouring states. Efforts to stem the massive movement of illegal workers are remarkably ineffective. Governments don’t seem to care, and are making even more expensive outlays anyway, like the Thai-Malaysian alliance to extend border fencing along hundreds of kilometres, or the notorious US effort, ‘Operation Gatekeeper’, at the San Diego and Mexico frontier. While the flow of migrant labour across political lines is problematic enough, the number of refugees is burgeoning in camps and at key entry points of perceived spaces of safe-haven. Spain is constantly reinforcing fencing around its enclave city of Melilla on the northern Mediterranean coastline of Morocco. The fence is only just holding back assaults by Sub-Saharan asylum seekers, who are making intrusions through or over the fence (using self-constructed stairs), in the hope of gaining entry to the European Union. Other current futilities of perimeter constructions exist at the interface of Iran and Pakistan, and along the Paraguayan border in Brazil. All of these constructs have one thing in common: the show of force being incommensurate with the actual threat the people pose to the State they are trying to enter.

In September 2007, Sydney hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). This was an astonishing demonstration of the Australian Government’s martial force. Residents hurriedly left town, as what looked like a precinct under armed attack was constructed, with three-metre high barricades enclosing the entire central business district. Armed security guards and police were granted special grounds on which to search and arrest civilians who approached the ‘Declared Area’. Similar international conventions, like the World Economic Forum and G8 Summits, are becoming travelling sideshows, with the host city as a stage, world leaders the actors, and its inhabitants as extras. The fencing even comes in kits. Although Australians baulked at APEC’s conversion of Sydney’s streets into a militarised zone, the show of armed force was meek compared to the most recent 2007 G8 Summit in Germany, where tanks, troops, helicopters and razor wire attempted to keep thousands of protesters away from the world’s most powerful leaders. The flexing of force is not pretence; its deadly show of state power is not a rehearsal.

Border defences are a flourishing worldwide industry, with extensive investment and research conducted by companies into surveillance and bio-scanning technologies. International trade fairs showcase the hardware in a terrifying biopolitical war on the bodies of citizens and non-citizens alike. No one wishing to travel in the near future will be able to avoid the socio-economic and racial filtration they administer. Everyone will face the same biometric interrogation, the same threat of state-authorised exile or death. Regardless of sovereign and nationalistic interests, the enclosure and encapsulation of people excluded by these systems and barriers is one of the greatest issues of human rights today. It flies in the face of primary civil liberties, such as the freedom of movement. Walls have become a primary controlling force, representing a greater threat to democracy than any dictator. It’s reminiscent of George Orwell’s 1984, a total omniscient system with an invisible elite bureaucracy controlling it all at a safe distance. I don’t think I’m exaggerating this, or being overly paranoid. Just have a look at the photos of the wall through Bordertown.

WEEK FOUR
Monday 15 February

There’s been a devastating drought here for six years. The Wonga Wetlands are drying up. Anna would be shocked to see that the mud she struggled to shovel away during her time in the Women’s Land Army has hardened to rock. It’s taken decades to make even minor physical reparations to the damage done to tribal lands in The Border region. The injustices committed against the Indigenous peoples remain unresolved, because the nation’s constitution still hinges on the myth of white history having erased all time prior to colonisation.
Unsurprisingly I have found it hard to locate evidence of past inhabitation in The Border area. This does not mean their presence is not apparent – for trees that show the scars of canoes having been cut from the bark by local Wiradjuri are being located everyday – it’s only that I am looking with a white person’s eyes. I think colonial blindness is one of the key contributors to dispossession today. Accordingly, I cannot venture to speak on behalf of the traditional Aboriginal owners of this area, like the Wiradjuri people (one of the many tribes). I have no knowledge and no right to do so. I remain aware of the reiteration of history in attempting to speak about any of the events in the region, especially because I have relied on non-Indigenous sources for much of my material. The truth is that as long as non-Indigenous Australians recollect and adjudicate on behalf of the Aboriginal peoples from whom we divested land and sovereignty from in the first place dispossession will be perpetuated. Yet, in Bordertown, I have been able to see the past in a different way. It has pierced through my blindfold. I think that the recognition of history from an Indigenous perspective is a significant way to generate better understanding between the ancient and recent inhabitants of this country, as a way towards reconciliation. I hope that what I am saying conveys my belief that action needs to be taken to make reparation and compensation for cultural dispossession, and restore ownership of the land to the original and rightful custodians of the nation, the Aboriginal peoples, through a Treaty with the Australian Government that includes Aboriginal representation in Parliament. Borders, like the coastal perimeter that skirts Australia three kilometres offshore, are frequently blurry, abstract and accordingly contested. While the two colonies at the border squabbled over riparian anomalies and the profits to be made from its riches, local Aboriginal inhabitants continued to look to the River as a communal space. The Indigenous people freely camped along its banks with no concern for territorial boundaries. Only white settlement rapidly impacted on local Indigenous populations. By 1858, according to Ship’s Captain, Francis Cadell (who partially navigated the River Murray), the river was ‘spotted with towns’ from which [Aboriginal people] were excluded socially and economically and at least one observer thought that they were ‘almost extinct’ on the Upper Murray’.14

All sorts of lies are told to keep a myth in place, and Anna didn’t believe the teacher in the camp when he told her that Aboriginal people were gradually dispersed from Bordertown’s surrounding area. She knew straight away that this was a pragmatic deceit for the colonisers. Aboriginal women working on the Wonga Wetlands shared stories with Anna that challenged the settler myth. The truth is that traditional owners on the border never willingly relinquished their occupation of the land. Violent clashes with settlers and police was a common occurrence. Armed intervention, however, was the defining method of arbitration whenever white occupation was threatened. In one instance, in April 1838, seven stock drovers at Broken River, near Benalla, were killed by local Waveroo men, prompting many settlers to retreat from the inland area back to the Murray. A month later, mounted police arrived from a larger regional centre called Goulburn. Yet the violence went unabated, escalating into open combat between the Indigenous people and police. Reprisals and raids carried on between settlers and local tribesmen for several months. The strategy the colonies took next was to build up a series of military posts along all of the major stock routes between Sydney and Port Phillip. These posts (which later became townships) provided protection for white travellers, with a special ‘Border Police’ unit established by Governor Gipps to defend them. This was a unique police unit because they operated throughout the district as an organised national army defence force would.15

Violent encounters perpetuated the notion of the ‘black threat’ for another half a century. On the 7th of August 1875 the Border Post reminded people that The Border district had been aggressively contested: the Aboriginal peoples “were not ‘docile and tractable’, rather they were “numerous and traitorous, so much so that we were obliged to carry arms for protection”’.16 The local Aboriginal peoples continued in a combative mode until they could make no further resistance most being subordinated through segregation in reserves, or sent away. Throughout the 20th century, white people on The Border have done the necessary forgetting. Yet a number of Wiradjuri and other tribes of Indigenous peoples live in Bordertown and the surrounding area today. The elders and traditional owners of the local tribes are already re-determining Bordertown’s history, even though innumerable impediments stand in the way of this process.

This brings us to the crux of the Native Title Act of 1993, instigated by the Keating Government. This act followed the Mabo No 2 case (1992) that recognised the continued ownership of land, through native title by Indigenous inhabitants (the 1996 Wik case opened up
legal channels once again when it found that there was Indigenous right of access to Crown land held under pastoral leases. The Native Title Act was a legislative attempt to pull back the slim recognitions accorded by Australian common law to native title. A paradox lies at the core of this Federal legislation, because to prove that native title is continuous Indigenous inhabitants must show that their people have survived genocide. Under this law, if the traditional owners of that place cannot prove they escaped annihilation, native title will be deemed extinguished.\textsuperscript{12} So, in yet another frightening nullification, the Australian judiciary risks justifying the crime of genocide and its aims of extinguishing native peoples from their land when it delivers verdicts on Native Title’s survival. Moreover, the Australian Constitution maintains colonial sovereignty through an inveterate perversion of justice in the continuous expurgation of Aboriginal law. This and other commensurate efforts to arrive at the total subordination of Aboriginal people, through both assimilation and population reduction, have been very effective. Although the 430,000 Indigenous people living in Australia today are arguably greater in number than the population in 1788, they make up only 2.3 percent of the total number of Australian inhabitants. So, while documented instances of massacre and the crime of genocide should not be understated, overall white Australia has surreptitiously overwhelmed rather than flagrantly erased the Aboriginal peoples of this land.

Let’s remember then that we, the remaining 97.7 percent of inhabitants, are migrants, having arrived here in the recent past. The notion of any one migrant group maintaining greater territorial rights over another subverts the Indigenous peoples’ ongoing deprivation of sovereignty. In this impossible space of racial exclusion it makes absolute sense that a racial border might be maintained through practices of distinction and partition. Citizenship tests, detention centres, deportations, language exams, excisions of large swathes of maritime Australian territory from the migration zone, as well as elaborate media stunts, single out migrant and refugee groups as ‘not-quite-white’ and a threat to ‘our values’ and ‘way of life’.

Today it rained on the wetlands. The frogs sang. But within seconds the water had disappeared, running off into the thirsty mouths of the eroded riverbanks and waterholes.

**Tuesday 16 February**

The news is showing footage of the recent deployment of military forces in an Indigenous community under the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act. The picture is blurry, an amateur video taken through a small dirty window. It’s still shocking. I can see army trucks rolling down the street. The reporter is saying that this is the Federal Government’s response to the 2007 publication *Little Children are Sacred*, a report that found neglect and abuse of Aboriginal children had reached crisis levels. No one would deny the need for radical action to alter the situation in these communities, but the Emergency Response Act is not just a matter of coming to the rescue. It has involved the compulsory acquisition of land held under provisions of the Native Title Act 1993, and legislative exemption from the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975. Only Aboriginal people are subject to this kind of intervention. This is a brazen reiteration of the colonising subjectification of Indigenous peoples to hangovers from the European Enlightenment. In 2006, a revealing statement by the previous Federal Health Minister, Tony Abbott, suggested a ‘new paternalism’ would be employed in Indigenous affairs. This comment falls in line with the rhetoric of colonial subordination through government programs of ‘protection’ and ‘civilisation’, which in reality have served to continually discipline and control Aboriginal lives. It is difficult to see how the NT National Emergency Response is a sign of good ‘patronage’. After all, such an aggressive form of assimilation surely has at its heart the demonisation of those who are different.

It’s difficult for members of the armed forces to question such interventions. Few members of the military have any substantial perspective on their function as participants in questionable political pursuits of government agendas, such as we are seeing in the current Indigenous Intervention program. Even though there is little room for dissent, either ideologically or physically, Defence Force members are able to influence the political sphere, as the Tampa affair of 2001 demonstrated, and their status as individual actors can be reinstated within military service. There is a further case to be made for the potential agency of insurgent members within a closed social group. The aggression of women, for example, can be more powerful when it is performed in unexpected contexts that contradict stereotypes, such as the idea that armed aggression and war are masculine exploits.
The picture on the hotel TV is not a scene of collective restoration by community members, but another instance of oppressive sovereign rule by men in uniform.

**Wednesday 17 February**

September 11, 2001 transformed the global political arena, and the Howard Government lost no time in staging a coincidental ‘war on terror’ on the arrival of a number of STIEVs (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels) in Australian territorial waters. The passengers, or ‘enemy infiltrators’, were most conveniently Muslim Iraqi or Afghan in the majority. The Australian citizenry duly accepted Howard’s show of force. In 2001, the Government got on with hyping up the public with talk of ‘invasions’, while rolling out remarkable amounts of the Defence Force equipment across the waters to the north of the country. The Federal Border Protection Bill was introduced in the same year, which is officially described as an “Act to provide for the removal of ships from the territorial sea of Australia, and for related purposes”. This bill was condemned by many advocacy groups as undermining core international human rights guarantees, such as the right of non-refoulement, in which ‘refouling’ is the return of a refugee to a country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened.

This action formed a potent strategy, tapping into latent ‘invasion’ anxieties, the fear being that if the sea border is breached Australia will be instantly overpowered (nobody seems to be so worried anymore about invasion by air). What happened next was so timely for the Howard Government it was as if it had been stage-managed. On 19 October 2001, a boat travelling through international waters sank along with its 353 passengers. A great deal of parliamentary and public debate ensued because the boat, or ‘SIEV X’, the acronym it came to be known by, was actually within the declared border protection zone being patrolled by Operation Relex. Many questions have been raised as to how much the Australian Government knew of the impending sinking of the boat, and if it allowed the asylum seekers on their way to Australia, those 146 children, 142 women and 65 men, to drown without any attempt at a rescue. That the people on the ‘invading’ vessel should lose their lives rather than Australia risk a ‘violation’ of national security, is an incomprehensible sacrifice. These events occurred just ten days before the Liberal Party campaign launch for the 2001 Federal Election, which was rather convenient in bolstering Howard’s ‘border protection’ campaign.

The Border Protection Bill also brought in legislation that excised the offshore territories of Christmas Island, Ashmore and Cartier Islands and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands from Australia’s migration zone. Anyone entering into this area could consequently be legally detained, or sent offshore to Nauru or Papua New Guinea to assess whether they might be ‘legitimate’ refugees. The extremity of the Government’s intentions was highlighted when they announced that the Australian mainland was also to be excised from the migration zone. I’d like to make the point that the detention camps on Nauru and Papua New Guinea are not terribly different in purpose to Britain’s treatment of Australia as its own offshore camp for convicts under the British Transportation Act of the 19th century. In official terminology, interned people are presumed to be unlawful or illegal entrants. And, being ‘un-Australian’ non-citizens, they must be set apart from collective humanity, their suffering concealed from general society. Presumed inimical, those seen as detrimental to the state undergo a governmental necrosis. These histories are not irrelevant to Bordertown. The lines drawn in the sand between Australia and its Others are the same lines that course through this nation’s history, even through this country town. The failure to remember and acknowledge the past is undoing the future of all the people who live here.

**Thursday 18 February**

This morning I was thinking that perceived threats have not altered much between the 19th century and now. The neo-conservative manipulation of national psyche is apparent in Australia’s renewed construction of citizenship as being racially and linguistically based. We know from cases, such as Vivian Alvarez Solon’s, that if you don’t ‘look’ or sound Australian, you may be deported as an unlawful non-citizen. Since 2001, over 200 Australian citizens have been unlawfully locked up in detention centres, and all of them were of non-Anglo ethnic backgrounds. The current internal policing of the border holds to an ideology of racialisation that is not far removed from the White Australia Policy. This policy embodied the radical nationalism of the newly federated Australian Government and its Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. The mainstream view of the nation at that time was that
most citizens felt that Australia was British in culture and allegiance. The Government in 1901 focused on racial homogeneity as essential to maintaining social cohesion. ‘Alien’, particularly Asian, immigrants were seen as potential producers of division and it was feared that large numbers might create a foothold for foreign powers in the country.

The basis of the White Australia Policy continued well into the 20th century and was upheld in 1945 by Arthur Calwell, the first Minister for Immigration. While Calwell was responsible for liberalising immigration policy, he also made sure there were strict guidelines in place that monitored how many migrants would enter, as well as of what ethnic background they would be. There was great concern in Australia at the idea of the migration of any other kind of people apart from Europeans. Some of this fear was a consequence of the Second World War, which rekindled the flames of racial apprehension and the fear of Asians in relation to Australia. Going back further back, one could point to white settler reactions to the influx of Chinese during the gold rush. The prevalence of this perceived threat should not be under-estimated. In 1944 the Hon. F. M. Forde, Minister for the Army said, ‘History will one day reveal how close Australia was to being overrun. Divine providence was on our side. We may not be given another chance. We must be realistic in regard to the necessity for a scientific migration policy’.21 The paranoia of the near-invasion of Australia by Japanese forces during the war prompted a massive intake of post-war displaced persons. This was an absurd effort to secure its territory through mass population, because the war had revealed the vulnerability of Australia, with its tiny population and their inability to defend such a vast territory.

Arthur Calwell made it his personal duty to handpick the newest candidates for migration. He visited the displaced persons’ camps of Europe and felt that the people there were appropriate candidates for relocation to Australia. But these were non-British people and Calwell needed to establish whether Australians could accept their differences. He started by sending a few shiploads of Displaced Persons as a trial run. Calwell planned to use this first shipment as a campaign, so selections were made very carefully, with blue-eyed and fair-haired types being preferred.22 Some of this approach was maintained up until the 1950s, when Italian and Greek people started to arrive on Australian shores. Up until then, mainstream Australia was sceptical of non-British intake, so the Government was forced to restrict the number of migrants from southern European nations. Calwell remained responsible for establishing and populating the camp at Bordertown. Anna has told us what it was like to be an intern there.

**Friday 19 February**

When I came here to interview Stacey, I had no idea that Bordertown would be such an incredible anthology of Australian history. The later decades of the 1800s saw the settlement of the whole area along the River, which brought with it an exponential increase in human traffic across the border. Stricter conditions of passage for local residents served to exclude some from crossing at all. Although the removal of colonial boundaries upon Federation promised harmony for local residents, policies and practices that differentiated the political authority of the two states continued to secure the perceived ‘limits’ of the border.23

The nation’s geographic border, its white sandy beaches and clear blue sea, is imagined to be a protective sheath against this threat of contamination, yet total defence of the Australian coastline is impossible; as impractical as stopping fruit flies from crossing the Murray. The fear of infestation and disease is constantly touted as a threat to national security, and is tied into a racial construction with Asian bird flu, SARS and anything from the ‘north’. This is commensurate with the historical notion of Asia being inseparable from the perceived ‘threat of invasion’. As a microcosm, Bordertown has historically replicated this national fear of Asian infiltration. During the gold rush of the late 1800s, the river crossing was an efficient way to control the flow of people into Victoria, and a toll was collected from each Chinese person entering the colony. Over the years, the colonies became far more explicit and extensive in their nomination of who might be excluded as the laws were extended in 1898 to prevent all non-Europeans from entering their territory, even if they were British subjects.24

In modern times, the border has been used to aid the protection of both sides from the entry of ‘undesirable’ individuals and diseases
they might carry. In the early 20th century it became an important checkpoint for screening animals for maladies like anthrax, and in the prevention of vermin being carried on produce between the States. On a number of occasions, customs officers policed the crossing to arrest the spread of contagious human disease: once in 1919 during the influenza plague, and again to check that children had not come into contact with the crippling polio virus. In the 1960s, the Victorian Department of Agriculture caused nuisances for travellers passing through Bordertown, demanding all fruit to be handed over to inspectors. Today the imminent threat of the fruit fly’s invasion remains prominent throughout The Border. A fruit fly exclusion zone still runs for 10 kilometres along the highway; the explicit signage is hard to miss. A few months ago the outbreak of horse flu saw patrols and permit checks being conducted at river crossing points. The continued use of the border as a shield reiterates historical divisions in the landscape, as power and defensive tactics always do in contested spaces.

**Saturday 20 February**

There’s only a dozen huts left at the old Bordertown migrant camp. Nothing has been touched since the early 60s. The taps in the washrooms drip. A pile of old luggage has been abandoned under some shrubs. I’m standing in the empty grounds of the migrant centre outside Bordertown. The grounds echo with voices from the past. They’re asking why are they in this place.

But the internment of migrants is not the only version of the camp in this country. The strategy of the camp was a feature of colonisation, as Aboriginals and convicts alike were subject to incarceration under British rule when Australia was founded as a penal colony. The island itself functioned as a prison camp for convicts; its shores the impenetrable boundary. Categorised as reserves or mission stations, the confinement of Indigenous people in settlements on Flinders Island, Palm Island and Coranderrk (near Healesville, Victoria) was actually a form of segregation for the purposes of dispossession. These sites, established in the mid-1800s, continue to define Australia’s treatment of the Indigenous peoples in terms of death or its equivalent: the annihilation of culture. Disturbingly many of these spaces still operate as settlements today. Prior to Federation, a government body called the Aboriginal Protectorate was established and new reservations were set aside for the ‘benefit’ of future assimilation. These laws in fact oppressed and alienated Indigenous people. Civil rights were seriously undermined in the process of segregation on settlements and reserves, the paradoxical justification for this treatment being that Aboriginal peoples would eventually be granted citizenship. Regardless of the intentions of these ‘protectionist’ policies, the result was that, by 1891, the Aboriginal peoples along the border were being severely affected by the rapid settlement of the region and were dwindling in number.27

When I found out that, during the late 1800s, the land set aside for Indigenous reserves all over The Border was being reclaimed by the Government for white settlement (under the Aboriginal Protection Act of 1886), I saw it as another feat of dispossession.

The defiance of Aboriginal people on The Border in the face of government programs is not often cited. According to Bruce Pennay, the local historian I met a few days ago, they resisted “the new dispersal policies and the attempts to take their children away...” and “took part in many protests”.28 When officials threatened to remove their youngsters, the women would frequently take flight carrying their children over the border out of reach of the State authorities. Some girls even swam across the Murray to elude police capture. Forceful removals continued up to the 1930s. In 1997, the *Bringing them Home* report identified the practice of taking Indigenous children from their families as a systematic destruction of Australian Aboriginal peoples. It stated that: “They were an act of genocide, aimed at wiping out Indigenous families, communities and cultures, vital to the precious and inalienable heritage of Australia.”29 The people separated from their families are identified today as the Stolen Generations. These violations continue to tragically affect Indigenous peoples’ lives today.

Incarceration has been central and definitive in Australia’s colonial relationship to the ‘first people’ and the treatment of the Aboriginal population has proceeded in this manner. Although the number of missions and reserves has declined over the last hundred years, figures for Indigenous people in custodial spaces such as prisons, juvenile detention centres, mental health institutions and police cells arguably overshadow the number ever kept on reserves. I’ve never visited an Aboriginal mission or settlement so I cannot account for the state they are in. Like a lot of Australians, my only knowledge of what is happening in these spaces is provided by the media, and these tend
to be presented as places of abjection, far removed from mainstream
society. When I consider the common characteristics of those
subjugated to Australia’s sovereign authority and the power of exile or
exposure to death it wields, the comparison of the Aboriginal camp or
reserve to immigration detention centres is not so far fetched.20 I also
can’t help thinking that the migrant camp and Aboriginal reserve have
always served the same purpose: apartheid.

Sunday 21 February
I’ve been staying in this hotel room for almost five weeks. I feel far
from the city now. I could be anywhere, in anytime: Botany Bay in the
early 1800s, Auschwitz in 1944, Woomera in 2002, Guantánamo Bay
in 2005. I am reluctant to make comparisons with the model of the
concentration camp but its role as an instrument of sovereign power
over prisoners is consistent with some of the features of incarceration
in Australian detention centres. Giorgio Agamben explains this aspect
of the concentration camp in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life
(1998). Agamben argues that the camp operates as a space of exception
because detainees are necessarily rendered stateless, being denied civil
and political rights. This is because, in sidestepping constitutional law,
the zone of the camp sits outside the nation, while being the vehicle
of state power at the same time.21 In Australian detention centres like
Woomera, Maribyrnong and Villawood, the inmate is excluded by the
Federal Government via incarceration (or inclusion) in a space in which
their political life is annulled. In this way, refugees are construed as the
‘antithesis’ of the Australian citizen, so the process of exclusion is a
practice that continually defines the constitution of the nation’s limit,
or political border.22 The epitome of this policy is found in the Howard
Government’s Pacific Solution, operational since the Tampa affair of
2001, which has seen illegal immigrants sent offshore to the Topside
Camp on the island of Nauru.

While camps were founded, as a product of war against the original
inhabitants, under British colonialism, they have carried on without
interruption. Australian spaces of detainment have not always been
as fortified as Woomera, Baxter or Maribyrnong detention centres. In
the past, they have served as temporary accommodation for post-war
displaced persons, new settlers, imported labour and slum relocation
programs. From the early 1900s until the 1950s, a large military base
was located in Royal Park, in the inner city Melbourne suburb of Parkville.

After World War Two, the Federal Government used the Nissen huts as
transit camps for displaced persons, and called it Camp Pell. It was not
renowned for its comfortable quarters, yet residents were at liberty to
leave the area if they wished, as the site was not fenced in. Anna and I
went to have a look at the remnants of the gatekeeper’s posting in Royal
Park, which still stand in the far eastern corner of the grounds.

After taking some photographs of Camp Pell, Anna and I went the
Midway Hostel in Maribyrnong. The Hostel was one of the government
accommodation facilities established in the 1950s to help migrants
making the transition from the camp to private housing. Today, the
site is a Victoria University student accommodation village. I’d heard
a rumour that the camp’s buildings were in a panoptic layout. I was
very surprised to find the configuration still intact. Nothing much had
changed at all; signs still stand in front of each accommodation block
and are named after an Australian Prime Minister; the most remarkable
attributed to the first Prime Minster, Edmund Barton, who introduced
the White Australia Policy in 1901. This was eerie enough, but it was
far more confronting to find the Maribyrnong Detention Centre situated
right next door. Anna and I wandered down the concealed driveway
and ended up at a massive set of gates. I took pictures of her in front
of the metal grill. We thought we were being subversive. A minute
later, guards came out and threatened us. I felt the terror of the state’s
power. On our way, out we saw a student from the village. I stopped
her and asked what it was like to live there. She replied that she’d only
realised what she was living alongside when she heard screams one
night. It seems quite careless of the authorities to have constructed the
militarised centre adjacent to the hostel, as if they had no concern for
the comparisons that might be made between the two approaches to
migrant induction into (or captivity in) Australian society. The Villawood
Centre in southwestern Sydney is also located on the site of the disused
Westbridge Migrant Hostel. Because these correlations are not isolated
definitions, examples, it seems, at some point, the Government must have had an
organised scheme of conversion from open plan accommodation to
penitentiary-style facilities.

In Bordertown, the migrant camp is a good fifteen kilometres out
of town, on the south side. Upon release, the interns are housed in
specially constructed units located along the border. However, the
area is about to be reclaimed as part of the exclusion zone between
the North and South. Anyway, local residents endorse this program of
segregation. They don’t want the ‘alien’ population to slide unnoticed
into urban and rural habitations.
The concealment of Bordertown’s camp from the town exemplifies the practice of setting migrants apart from the main population, in this case, a mainly Anglo-Saxon population. The defended space of the camp is symbolic of the way that the segregation of ‘alien’ residents is bound up with conflict in communities. The paradox of setting ‘outsiders’ apart in order to ‘assimilate’ them is a process of defining the constitution of the state through ‘normalisation’, which in modern states, as Michel Foucault asserts in *Society Must be Defended*, is predicated on racism: “If the power of normalization wished to exercise the old sovereign right to kill, it must become racist. And if, conversely, a power of sovereignty, or in other words, a power that has the right of life and death, wishes to work with the instruments, mechanisms and technology of normalization, it too must become racist.” Although it is not totally fortified, Anna – like many other migrants – describes the camp with a mixture of fear and hope. Located within an army base, the interns are aware of being under constant surveillance and the gaze of an invisible omniscient authority. Australia has, at different times, had a surprising number of migrant camps situated on former or current Army Defence Force lands. Other examples are Woomera, Baxter (on the El Alamein army base), the Curtin RAAF Base, and Camp Pell in Royal Park. Woomera is particularly notorious for a history of brutal governmental acts. In the 1950s, the testing of atomic munitions at Maralinga was conducted while the Aboriginal peoples of Maralinga Tjarutja were still living nearby. Because local inhabitants were not warned properly of the explosions, many consequently endured horrific after-effects. Then there is the continued clandestine use of the rocket range for the testing and development of corporate and international armed forces’ weapons.

In the last two decades, the trend in the militarisation of detention and prison systems has escalated worldwide. The latest debate is over the ‘Titan’ super-prison models being introduced to Britain at the moment. These are based on American and South African large-scale incarceration in warehouse-style buildings, fully equipped with cutting-edge technology like biometric scanners. An unfortunate corollary has been the increase in instances of brutal subjugation of inmates, in a revolution of behaviour modification techniques that are widely employed in spaces of incarceration all over the world. These are essentially devices of ‘mortification’, such as extended isolation, deprivation of basic human needs, and of legal representation and other fundamental civil rights. Other means of coercion can be less extreme, with restricted access to welfare, demoralising processes of administration, and the general patronising interference of government into the private affairs of people. By all accounts the Federal Government and the private contractors managing Australian immigration detention centres have adopted many of these strategies. It’s awful enough standing in line at Centrelink, but the horror of spending year after year in a detention centre like Maribyrnong is inconceivable to most Australian citizens.

**WEEK FIVE**

**Monday 22 February**

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault critiques the birth of the penal system and its control of populations through subjugations of bodies (and the panopticon, no less). He states that the ‘body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs’. This was expanded by Foucault in 1976 in *The Will to Knowledge*, where he takes up the term ‘biopolitics’ to define the formation of the modern state’s demonstration of power on individuals and their bodies. Stacey and Anna’s lives are determined by this same domination; Anna as a alien resident and camp intern; Stacey as a socially excluded young woman who gives herself over to the state by joining the army. Under this ‘biopower’, the two women are subjugated to an extended moment of non-death or the administration of ‘necropower’, which, according to Achille Mbembe, is not always murder, but the “right to kill, to allow to live or to expose to death”. Expulsion, rejection and political death, through corporeal segregation in the confinement or incarceration of the socially ‘objectionable’, asylum seekers, and the Indigenous peoples alike, is a thoroughly integrated yet undisclosed national policy. Yet for Foucault, power is not only control over the members of a society but is constituted by the people. They are a medium for the dissemination of power, as influence (or covert power) works through people rather than only on them in the acceptance of belief systems that define the authority’s constitution. Citizens are not without responsibility, even when seemingly disenfranchised.

After the Second World War there was surplus army accommodation at Latchford Barracks just outside Bordertown, so a migrant camp was established there, beside Lake Hume in 1947. While said to be
a matter of available space and accommodation, this was a revealing conflation of governmental violence and confinement. Many migrants had come under the Displaced Persons’ program as refugees from war-torn Europe and the presence of the military made those residents fearful of a repetition of the past. Moreover, camp interns were often confronted with worse conditions than they met in their countries of origin, even in the refugee camps of post-war Europe, some of which had been converted from prison camps. Between 1947 and 1950, a total of 170,000 displaced persons were brought to Australia. Of the 47 immigration centres operational in that period, the camp at Bordertown was the largest, and more than 50 percent of the total post-war intake of migrants was housed at Bordertown. Camp facilities were initially able to deal with 1,500 people; by 1950, they were expanded to provide shelter for over 7,000. Over its entire period operation, 320,000 people from 31 nations have been accommodated in its huts. I went again to the site today and, for the first time, noticed a visitor’s book in the reception area. Every page detailed the testimony of someone who had returned after many years, and how they had overcome hardship with courage. The book tells of having to come so far, to such an isolated place, and the strength it took them to make a new life in Australia.

Officially, the site was set up as a ‘staging camp’. Migrants had “free passage to Australia for two years of labour at the Australian Government’s choice. After this service, migrants were free to make their own way”.

Most interns at Bordertown have been happy to be bonded, because for them work has been equated with freedom (despite the uncanny resonance with the slogan ‘Arbeit macht frei’, or ‘work shall set you free’, which adorned entrances of Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust). In Bordertown, the reality has been that, under work bonds, the migrants have not been permitted leave without being placed in employment. Large numbers found themselves unemployed year after year, exacerbated by delays on big jobs like the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Power Scheme, a project that ultimately employed over 100,000 migrants from more than 30 countries. But the first groups of people brought to Bordertown to work on the Scheme were stranded in the camp. For many, the wait was unbearable and a number of interns even committed suicide. Following this, there was unrest and a series of demonstrations. On one occasion protesters were shocked as armed forces raided the site, rounding up the hapless despairing people, aiming guns at them. Other efforts, including making migrants acquire English, were said to help assimilate immigrants quickly, yet language was used to subjugate the bonded worker once again. Conditions were applied, such as the contract of: “No English; No Job”. For refugees on a work bond it was common to end up in unskilled labour due to their lack of fluency in English, and the consequent oversight of their educational and professional experience and skills. Anna understood the authority given to the factory supervisor under the work bond’s terms. He could dismiss her very easily, and she knew she had to stay there if she was ever going to be free.

**Tuesday 23 February**

I’m still trying to unravel the politics of immigration programs in places like Bordertown. Why bring all these people out here? It’s the middle of nowhere. Apparently, Arthur Calwell’s initial intention was to repatriate refugees but it was also to rapidly increase Australia’s population. He spoke of Australia’s ‘national vulnerability’. Although this is an ambiguous phrase today, back then Australians felt their lack of physical occupation of the land left them open to foreign invasion. Calwell carefully designed his migration scheme, and sold it to the Australian public with campaigns, such as ‘The Beautiful Baits’ promotion that depicted naked men being cleansed (not without Christian biblical inferences) in the River Murray. There was also a careful selection (or screening) process in place. Although Calwell would have preferred to take in British immigrants, the number of willing immigrants was too few for his planned program. Then, while in Europe in 1947 Calwell visited a Displaced Person’s camp and he was apparently “deeply impressed by the bearing, physique and industrious character of the Baltic people”. Even with such brilliant qualities, new migrants were still expected to assimilate as quickly as possible, and were informed that they should or would “become Australians within five years”.

Bonded migrant labour is, in my opinion, a reiteration of the British Empire’s dumping of convicts on Australian soil in the 1800s. Under Britain’s Transportation Act of 1718, prisoners were exported (from the floating prison hulks) to populate the colony but rather than simply undergo detention, convicts were used to develop the fledgling nation.
PLEASE STAND BEHIND THE YELLOW LINE.
Convicts were either assigned to government positions or to work for small landholders and free settlers: men built roads, causeways, bridges, courthouses and hospitals; women were sent to the ‘female factories’. This was a key resource in the development of the colony, although some people thought that such a scheme made convicts ‘slaves’ and settlers ‘slaveholders’. Some migrants in Bordertown have found the road to freedom to be a form of peonage, as their time in captivity has conscripted many to several years’ hard labour in tough circumstances, like Anna’s job in the dog food factory. After hearing her account of the conditions there, I wanted to see it for myself. I drove over the border and arrived at the industrial estate’s gated entry. I pulled over the car and took a photo of the company’s giant billboard, which features a smiling labrador. I didn’t get any closer because security came out to tell me I was trespassing. I wonder what they had to hide.

**Wednesday 24 February**

In my daily encounters at the corner store, in the supermarket and in cafes, the North Bordertown residents frequently remark that the presence of camp members in the community is problematic. This is because the migrants’ exclusion in the camp has identified them as ‘aliens’. Informal social encounters in the town are rare, so locals sometimes find cultural differences uncanny or disturbing, resulting in misunderstandings. The impediment of language is exactly that: a barrier. Bruce Pennay told me that in Bordertown, if English is not fluently spoken (and even when it is), locals reply to the speaker very slowly and at an embarrassingly loud level, as if the interlocutor concerned were linguistically or intellectually deficient. A few days ago, I happened to sit down next to a Baltic woman on a bus heading south who whispered to me, “Perhaps the most important thing is to learn to speak the language of Australians”. Up until the mid-1970s, some people in Bordertown would stop and stare when anyone spoke with an accent. Migrants in the town have always been aware that talking in their own language on the street would be conspicuous and that the townspeople would make them conscious that they were strangers. Without being aware of the impetus, alien residents are met with disapproving rejoinders if their grasp of the prevailing language is anything less than perfect. Just before getting off the bus the woman added, ‘If you don’t speak English, you don’t exist’.

**Thursday 25 February**

Being a “marker of identity”, language represents the hierarchical or competitive structure of a society. It orders that structure too. Words alter the way people perceive themselves and others. When situations of conflict arise, verbal communication becomes critical because a culture’s use of language specifically defines and binds its members and its speakers, from within and without. Those in positions of power are well aware of the role of rhetoric. Linguistics is crucial in exchanges of ideas between the general public and political leaders. Authorities and their representatives are very influential in structuring the relationship that the public has to authority and they must carefully shape the expectations its people has of them. I can’t help thinking of a television interview with an Israeli Government Minister I saw in late 2006, and the personal nature of the vitriol he aimed at Palestinians. I realised in this intimate and inflammatory mode that his words would be a direct affront to his opponents. I thought of all those powerless individuals who would suffer because of the escalation of conflict in retaliation to these few phrases, Syntax is not to be underestimated. Mass media journalists and politicians all over the world know the use of particular grammar, such as active and passive forms and the use of personal pronouns, can determine how a statement is understood. In some contexts, it functions like a weapon, with the deployment of loaded terms that access deep-seated ideological conflicts. Place names are one of the most historically specific resources in culture, and are consequently a powerful tool in marking out the terrain of a political ideology. This direct affect of language is particularly potent in local communities, and it exposes the historical divisions in that place, where a thesaurus of particular words that inflame and incite moralised exclusion and hatred are collected and repeatedly employed. It’s clear how the play of semantics is effective in the intensification of conflict, where ingrained disdain for another person or nation is implicated in every statement and conversation. In Bordertown words have definitely become weapons. I’ve heard things said on the street such as: “Why don’t you speak English the way I do?” And “You’ve lived here for five years and never spoken to me”. Stacey’s comments on the factory floor are also emblematic: “You shouldn’t talk like that. I can’t understand you.”
Friday 26 February

Stacey’s declarations are ringing in my ears like sounds from a megaphone. She’s unaware that the words reflect her cultural ascendancy. It’s not usually apparent to an outspoken culture that it’s drowning out those around it. Take for instance, the burgeoning influence of American culture. It might look like mass media is the culprit, but it is just a loudspeaker. The English language in fact dominates political, economic and social discourse, and its promulgation is a factor in the decline of global cultural diversity. As an unreservedly mono-linguistic society, Australia has basically adhered to an Anglo-centric view of language since colonisation. Clearly, there is as much relation of language to power in politics as there is in the role of economics with regard to intolerance in multicultural societies. When a social group feels that they are under-resourced or economically disadvantaged, the identification of ‘outsiders’ as competitors is frequently made through linguistic distinctions.

Social and racial distinction is just one function of language. There can be no denying the aggressive function it has had in colonisation. It’s all there in our history. The Australian colonial assimilation of the Indigenous peoples saw the proliferation of a ‘British’ education, and the provision of children with English names, under Christian missionary tutelage. Since then, newcomers of non-British background have been confronted with the same unrelenting linguistic homogeneity. Until the Second World War, Australia’s sense of identity was closely bound up with Britain. Citizens conformed to that British heritage and professed views that all others should do the same regardless, especially if they were from somewhere else. Migrants were expected to adapt as quickly as possible. The concept of naturalisation as a process of civilian cohesion is still prevalent today. Those who don’t conform, assimilate or relinquish their ‘mother tongue’ are perceived in some circles as a threat, holding out against or standing in opposition to mainstream society. This conformity to British modes and custom has as its corollary a notion that multi-lingual sectors of the community can diminish ‘proper speech’, as though ‘standard English’ were under attack. In many ways, Australia has squandered the rich cultural heritage of its non-British populace. If migrants of a non-English speaking background are divested of opportunity to employ their original tongue, and it falls out of use, the complex array of social customs that sustain a culture start to deteriorate. “But at least there has been a general increase in the tolerance of diverse languages, that is, compared to the 40s and 50s, when people could be told off for speaking out loud in public in a foreign language.” To be fair, Australians’ acceptance of diverse cultures has dramatically improved in the last two decades.

Saturday 27 February

Yesterday I expressed some optimism in the changing attitudes of the Australian Citizenship population. But the recent implementation of an Australian Citizenship test has revived English as an insidious instrument of border protection. It harks back to a fifty-word dictation examination that was given to prospective immigrants in the 1940s and 50s, under the White Australia Policy. The earlier test was usually provided in a ‘prescribed’ (European) language unfamiliar to the applicant. This was an indirect yet obvious effort to block the immigration of non-Europeans, for Europeans were usually not required to take the exam. Furthermore, it was specifically given to resident non-citizens, with the intention of deporting large numbers of Chinese and Pacific Islander labourers.

The inequitable dictation test was finally abolished by the 1958 Revised Migration Act, which introduced a simpler system for approval of entry. Yet policing the constituency of the government clearly goes beyond the point of arrival, permeating every stage of integration up to the authorisation of citizenship. Along the way, a migrant can be denied access to any number of basic civil rights that are otherwise automatically provided to citizens. The treatment of non-citizens is at the forefront of human rights and the equal distribution of justice. How refugees and temporary residents are handled is a measure of democracy. It is constituted in the freedom and equal right of the demos, or ordinary people, whether citizen or non-citizen, to participate in of a nation’s system of government. By testing an applicant’s knowledge of the English language, as well as details of Australian history and cultural values, the new Citizenship protocols are essentially a way to exclude those, whose culture is not in line with conservative Australian expectations, from free and equal participation.

A few weeks ago, in The Age newspaper, I read that Victoria’s Governor, Professor de Kretser, recently attended the Victorian multicultural awards at which some of the post-World War Two migrants
being recognised praised Australia in "English that was still not polished". Professor de Kretser then mentioned some of these award winners may not have been able to pass the citizenship test because, "It focuses not only on language but also on some aspects of our history which are certainly not representative of the wide and diverse backgrounds of our current citizens". In Becoming an Australian citizen (2007) the Commonwealth of Australia has declared that "... new citizens are expected to have a basic knowledge of English", and this is because it "helps to foster a cohesive and integrated society with a sense of shared destiny and, should the need arise, shared sacrifice for the common good". I wonder what kind of commonality is being suggested here? Would it be a communal sacrifice by all Australians, or only those otherwise powerless to decide for themselves?

Sunday 28 February
Woodstock, Broadford, Seymour, Euroa, Benalla, Glenrowan, Wangaratta, Chiltern and Rutherford. They're the settlements on the road to Bordertown. Most of the time, place names seem unremarkable but attribution is a trenchant colonising device, with powerful cultural, territorial and mnemonic resonance. Titles assert possession on behalf of occupants or invaders, designating the names of those who discovered, settled or took over the land. Possession lives on through language in Australia, performing the erasure of Indigenous oral history, memory and ownership through native title. In Victoria, many of the names are English. In The Border region, though, a number of Indigenous names have been given to natural features such as rivers, mountains and parks. These attributions regrettably do not offer local traditional owners any additional rights in terms of recognition or land ownership. Moreover, the origins are lost on the non-Indigenous population, often being thought of as English (like the national capital Canberra, for example), because it has been subsumed into the overall linguistic matrix.

In contested spaces all over the world, signage is usually in language of the dominant culture or political group, even in multilingual territories. Exceptions arise only in circumstances of committed reconciliation and acts of acknowledgement and restoration. The contest and historical differences between the two British colonies has been played out on Bordertown's public signage. Local naming rights have shifted many times in The Border region, even in terms of what to call the town itself: The Crossing, The Border, Belvoir-Crossing or Bordertown. Overall, however, signage on shopfronts, government buildings, on street signs, maps, private homes and parklands, seal in a singular, white, colonial history. The Government has always allowed for some local Indigenous (mainly Wiradjuri) naming, but the attribution, organisation and control of Aboriginal sites is predominantly in the hands of the Government. On the surface the hegemony is seamless, yet there are ways to disturb linguistic equilibrium. Influential cultural theorist Michel de Certeau has identified the use of language as a form of resistance in terms of the 'speech act'. He outlines the way in which ordinary repeatable actions of daily life can affect the socio-political sphere. After seeing Stacey stand up to the factory supervisor, Anna decided to use her own language as a means of opposing the mono-linguistic culture of Bordertown. I think the daily practice of enunciation, as an act of resistance, is one way that Anna may be able to assert herself within the oppressive regime of the town.

WEEK SIX
Monday 1 March
Stacey and I are out on the edge of Bordertown in Lamington. It's the suburb where she grew up. Apparently the Government built the pre-fabs out here to put up the war veterans. But they didn't know about the heat. It's all asbestos, they say. Local authorities aren't doing anything about it. There's nowhere else for the people to go. These are 'rough' types.

Australian country life is renowned for its isolation, and for many rural people, life is not getting any easier. Aside from the success stories of a handful of towns with weekender attractions for city folk, small towns and regional centres have been in decline if not deep depression for over twenty years. The last decade has been marked by an increased inequality in Australian society and rural areas have arisen as the locus of disadvantage. In 1999 the Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the National Party, John Anderson stated that, "the sense of alienation and being left behind in rural Australia was deep and palpable". There are many complex, deep-rooted reasons for the rise of in the severity of the situation for rural Australia’s underprivileged compared to urban centres since the early 90s. Among them are a relentless program of privatisation in which rural services have been 'rationalised' and located squarely in larger centres and capital cities, coupled with hardened
attitudes to welfare recipients. These policies have run their course through a generation of disadvantaged country people, many of whom already suffered the blow of successive economic downturns and the drought.

Some rural people are more adequately equipped to cope with these losses than others. Family support and the advantage of reasonable education provide those with a better start in life a greater chance of overcoming hardship. Poverty is a key factor for others, yet a greater dilemma exists for those who find themselves further out on a community’s perimeter. Many people are at risk of the experience of ‘social exclusion’; they are the young people, recent migrants of non-European background, and Indigenous Australians. Unemployment, a lack of skills and education, low income, poor housing and living conditions, high crime, bad health and family breakdown all contribute to a sense of despair. Moreover, a sense of alienation is often cited as a key factor in many cases of depression. The unequal distribution of disadvantage can be identified in Bordertown in the differences in living standards. There’s a big contrast between the “beautiful homes” in hills (as Stacey calls them) and the run down pre-fabricated housing Lamington in the North. The South, however, suffers from a degree of social exclusion on a whole other level.

Tuesday 2 March

I just drove across Gateway Island with Stacey. It’s a very weird environment. The Government call it the exclusion zone. The highway is suspended over the top of a massive floodplain. On the island itself are a series of public buildings and entertainment facilities. These have fallen into disrepair, since neither the people from the North nor the South of Bordertown have been keen to spend time on the island. By developing the space for public use, and calling it a ‘Gateway’, the government has attempted to emphasise the freedom that appropriate residents from either side would have when they make a border crossing. But as we were driving toward the South, after crossing four bridges, Stacey became confused. Like lots of people in Bordertown, she has no idea where the actual border is. There wasn’t a single sign. But, paradoxically, we didn’t need to see one. People always know where they belong and will stay clear of places where they are not welcome. When we’d made it onto the banks of the South, Stacey was instantly uneasy. It was not a crossing patrolled by police but we felt that were being watched: it was ominous in an intangible way. In another second we’d turned the car around. On the way back, Stacey cheered up, laughing as we passed Harvey’s Fish Farm as she remembered that she went to her first rave party there.

Wherever there are borders, there are exclusionary practices. Australia has been increasingly criticised for violations of asylum seekers’ human rights and for its border protection tactics, particularly its policies of mandatory detention and the Pacific Solution. This is an awful state of national affairs. Yet the most powerful form of exclusion or apartheid is everyday, in marginalisation and biases in terms of class, race and gender in local communities. The past treatment of local Indigenous people in Bordertown is a specific example. In the days when there was a large Aboriginal population, many were employed on local farms and stations along The Border. As labourers they were expected to work as equals (even if wages were asymmetrical), but as inhabitants they were excluded from social life in towns through physical segregation. This took place in housing, at school, and in public spaces such as the local cinema, where seating was partitioned for black people. Although apartheid is no longer an obvious practice in the town, migrants have found themselves excluded from communal life, as distinctions are made culturally, linguistically and even geographically. Many, after being released from the camp, have been relocated to housing along the frontier of South Bordertown. Locals always prefer it this way: societal segregation ensures that the stronger group’s identity and its monopoly of social advantages are protected. Practices of exclusion are still key components of power struggles in Bordertown. Although many resources are shared and social cohesion can be strong, the contests over social space are common in small communities. With little prospect of employment, education, entertainment or cultural enrichment, Bordertown is a space of captivity for many local residents of the North. Over time, they’ve felt increasingly isolated, divided and frustrated. Not knowing whom to blame, the downtrodden can look for a convenient target such as a differentiated racial or ethnic group. Sanctioned by governing bodies, opposing groups – such as the Lamington residents of the North against the Southies – generate fear and hate for each other. Changes introduced by new cultures can be seen as ‘threatening’ the status quo. In this way, migrants can be made into ‘scapegoats’, and accused of being the cause of social issues, like lack of housing and employment. The scapegoating of
outsiders is based on a long history in The Border region. The ongoing narrative of the ‘Aussie battler’ is predominantly a white settler myth, and such myths are central to bolstering the dominant ideology in a conflicted community. Attitudinal change is hard to bring about because contemporary community perceptions are a conglomerate of past structures and communal episodes built up around its oral and documented history. The paradigm is not easily invalidated; on the contrary it is far more likely to be re-enacted. With residents of the North as the ‘eyes and ears’, monitoring the South as ‘outsiders’ in the community, the migrants’ confinement in the camp is almost unnecessary. But spaces of confinement reassure ordinary citizens that the power to detain and exclude remains in the Government’s hands. Now I can see how the wall in Bordertown functions as a psychological security device, and why it is indispensable.

**Wednesday 3 March**

Stacey expresses paranoia about cultural dissolution and the incursion of ‘outsiders’, but does not wholly adhere to her mate’s views. Sometimes, she appears to sympathise with the migrants’ underdog status. She wants to speak to them as equals. Why? A certain political naivety? An innate goodness? I rather think that it might be because of her own experiences of social deprivation and Bordertown’s heavily patriarchal class structures. When she talked about the workers in the supermarket, Stacey described their social position as lower than hers and was shocked at how little they resisted that subjugation.

In the last few years, Federal Government settlement programs have seen refugees from war-torn nations such as Afghanistan or African nations like Sudan, being deposited in rural towns. This has been done without much consideration for the local impact of this influx of new people, few of whom speak English or have an awareness of the customs that are so particular to country towns. Many people reach out in sympathy to the newcomers, who are frequently on Temporary Protection Visas and have very uncertain futures. Yet other locals unfortunately revert to old, ingrained fears of alien invasion. The predominant perception of such people is that the migrant workers ‘take’ local jobs. Migrant positions, however, tend to be underpaid, as they have no union protections. So, what looks to one person like opportunity can quite often be exploitation. Bordertown’s reaction to migrant labour is the same as in many other country towns. I realised this when I saw a documentary on television a few weeks ago, about the experience of a group of Afghans in the New South Wales township of Young. The program illustrated the nature of local scepticism toward outsiders, and the racism that all too easily arises in response to their presence. But these young men were just poor meatworkers. Life was very uncertain on Temporary Protection Visas, yet they were making the most of their opportunities and forging friendships with the townspeople who were reaching out to them.

The breakdown of civil harmony in Bordertown is all too convenient for authorities, who are able to divest their civic responsibilities onto the warring parties. Once relations start to break down it is common that the most aggressive elements of a discordant community will start to drive the situation. We don’t need the assistance of journalists or politicians to incite antagonism, but when they join the fray it can have terrible repercussions. I tuned into the radio this morning to hear Federal Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews saying, “The Horn of Africa is an entirely different place to the suburbs of Australia”.

This was in relation to the planned 2007 cutback of immigrants from Sudan, which the Howard Government said was due to the failure of ‘African’ people to properly integrate into Australian society. In an article in Brisbane’s *Courier-Mail* on October 8, Mr Andrews was quoted to say that the “African migrant intake had been filled until July next year.” The same article mentioned the Liberal member for the Queensland seat of Moreton, Mr Hardgrave “had backed his Government’s decision to slash Australia’s intake of African immigrants”, because his community was “exhausted by an influx of refugees from that part of the world.”

Pauline Hanson didn’t waste any time speaking up on the subject: “Do you wanna see increased crime? Do you want to see your daughter end up with AIDS, or anyone else for that matter?” Public consensus has not followed. There has been fallout from the announcement, due to the Government’s seemingly rapid change of heart. People also questioned its switch to taking in Burmese refugees, and it was suspected that this was merely because it would garner pre-election favour in light of concurrent public sentiment towards the Burmese people, following the September 2007 military junta crackdown on protesting pro-democratic Buddhist monks. It remains an obvious paradox that a number of Burmese refugees have been simultaneously stranded on Nauru without any prospect of being granted asylum for more than a year.
In Bordertown, media commentaries have incited a backlash against local foreign workers, escalating fear and tensions between the locals and migrants. Late last year, a local radio personality apparently stirred up paranoia about migrant labour by claiming that the refugee workers pushing the supermarket trolleys were ‘scabs’ (a term to describe non-union labour), because they had taken jobs away from the local intellectually disabled workers. But the truth is that both the handicapped and the migrant workers have been equally underpaid and exploited. The refugees, including Anna’s husband, started coping abuse from Northies because of the talkback host’s comments. Although locals are very protective of the employment pool, the reality is migrants tend to fill gaps in the labour market. The precise nature of Bordertown’s labour situation was eventually exposed in The Border Post in September 2007, when the Workplace Ombudsman “announced the prosecution of the company and director responsible for sacking and underpaying trolley collectors on The Border”. Even though the company was taken to court, there was no mention in the local paper that it was the migrants who were being exploited. This is the kind of whitewash that the local media always apply to issues of racial or social conflict (arguably to stem the backlash).

I first heard about the migrant supermarket workers from Stacey. She described the trolley pushers’ lack of interaction with her. The next time it came up was when her boyfriend began to talk about them having taken jobs from the “retarded people” and how unfair this was. Stacey abruptly corrected him: “it’s handicapped”. While the exploitation is obviously deplorable for both parties, the migrant workers have been in a somewhat less advantageous position. Local supermarkets have been trucking up male refugees from Melbourne to fill in the empty positions. The men are totally isolated from family, friends and advocacy groups, so are powerless to do much about their circumstances. The company provides their employees with temporary accommodation but, according to one local refugee advocate, Mary, the housing usually has little furniture, bedding or basic domestic appliances. I commented to Mary that this was like bringing Mexicans across the border. She agreed.

Thursday 4 March
The conflict in Bordertown has not yet escalated into open combat, because local authorities are quick to dampen instances of vilification or threats of violence. Bordertown officials are aware of the migrant workers’ economic contributions to the town and fear that hostility will drive the workers away. The reason that immigration exists, after all, is that it provides a vital labour force and can enhance population growth, both of which contribute to a nation’s economic development.

Australians can be remarkably open-minded in embracing new and diverse races and ethnic groups, however many can also simultaneously be disinterested in and uninformed about other cultures. Very distinct races tend to be lumped into one group; Ethiopians and Somalians who were previously at war, are just ‘Africans’ to some people. Such simplification disregards the way migrants’ varied customs and traditions might be contributing to Australian culture. Moreover, in Bordertown, new migrants are subjected to Anglo-conformism, because the town has a strong connection to values and customs of a British nature. The experience of Anna and other interns at the Bordertown camp verifies this as an ongoing practice. One instance of this is told by Anna, when she describes the signs in the dog food factory, which were only in English. Migrants find the townspeople can sometimes avoid them or speak to them strangely, such as the old lady cutting roses who withdraws to the house when she see Anna coming. These circumstances are not aided by sensitivity to censure, which causes migrants to shun social interaction. Prejudice can easily take hold, as differences in taste and behaviour contribute to the differentiation of ‘aliens’ from the mainstream culture, consolidating the exclusion of that group from the rest of society. International cuisine is still difficult to find in the cafes or delicatessens of Bordertown. Even so, the closest encounter that many people in the North might have with another culture is in a restaurant.

Friday 5 March
Many Lamington women today are not at all passive. Most would say that they are the driving force within their family and community. A lot of women have found ways to transform their circumstances. But female residents of Bordertown don’t yet openly subscribe to Feminist ideology. For several generations, both men and women in the town have believed that to be a wife and a mother is sufficient in itself. It is has been very difficult for women in rural communities to overcome the cultural expectations of motherhood and of community-building work in clubs and welfare groups. While the involvement of women in the workforce has made major changes to these expectations, many find they are working in part-time jobs, and making unpaid contributions to
the family business, on top of managing childcare and housekeeping duties. This slow pace of change is due to the specific social and economic pressures that exist in rural Australia. Hegemony pays substantial dividends to its proprietors. The patriarchal dividend is no different, and in country towns this concept can explain the investment that men have in maintaining an imbalanced gender order. The majority of senior positions in politics, religion and law are still held by men. A further look at the usage of public space in rural communities reveals an ongoing inequality of power and privilege. Most large areas are taken up by playing fields for male-dominated sports: football, cricket and most recently skateboarding.

I went to a footy match in Lamington last Saturday afternoon. Out on the oval the blokes did the barracking. A surprisingly stereotypical cast of women served tea and biscuits in the clubhouse. Joining the team seemed like a good idea at first, but Stacey discovered that the footy field was not a good place to test the limits of social transformation. When a hairy pre-adolescent grade-sixer Robert made a suggestive move instead of a standard tackle, she went for him. The result was that Stacey was banned (clearly a form of social exclusion) from the club, at least for a while. Regardless, I think Stacey’s rebellion is indicative of a hangover of past male hegemony that has carried on in disadvantaged sectors of the community. I want to explore what prospect there is of real empowerment for women in Stacey’s situation.

**Saturday 6 March**

For lots of young women, moving away is the only avenue of escape. Only many do not have the financial or social support to get out. The pressure toward conformity in matrimony awaits many who remain, and marriage is still a powerful vehicle for the transmission of gender inequality in Australian country towns. While lots of girls get married young for lack of another occupation, Stacey’s reaction to the rural female ideal is to typecast herself as a ‘misfit’. The reasons are complex. Firstly, she belongs to the ranks of young women who are socially excluded in regional areas. Secondly, Stacey refuses to submit to male violence or their dominion. It is easy to surmise that there is still a different measure of acceptable aggressive behaviour for men and women. Young men are rewarded for their aggression, following the precept that, socially advantageous, violent exploits are morally acceptable. In contrast, in many social settings, there is little tolerance of youthful female resistance. Yet it is possible that the violence I’m observing in Lamington is an expression of resistance to generations of male aggression, as young women from lower socio-economic backgrounds are far more likely to resort to physical acts of aggression. One problem is that great differences exist in levels of criminality according to social status.

**Sunday 7 March**

I’ve been thinking about my earlier proposition that violence might be a means of resistance for Stacey. After close examination, I have to say it’s a complex and paradoxical situation. While there is often confusion over whether a woman is the perpetrator or the victim of violence, there has also been more recent awareness that some women can use physical force as both a defence and to form a strong identity. Bordertown is no exception here. A number of girls are combating systemic and personal abuse with aggression. Stacey is not the only reactionary. Locals tell of women getting involved in fights on a weekly basis, and I’ve heard lots of Bordertown girls boasting of their violent exploits. While it’s true that Stacey’s methods – such as the scene on the footy oval and the attack on the female Southee – are unconventional and seemingly futile, they are a reaction to the aggression directed against women in her social group, as well as the collective memory of violence and subordination that resonates in the town. In this context, I see the fight with the army jerk, (which is documented in the interview) as an expression of Stacey’s newly formed sense of female solidarity. On the other hand, the violence being directed at random individuals is not helping her cause; that’s why Stacey’s access to collective power through an alliance with Anna could change her life.

**WEEK SEVEN**

**Monday 8 March**

After six weeks of talking with Stacey, Anna, and other residents and migrants of Bordertown, I can see some of the causes of conflict in this community. When human needs are revoked or denied, the predictable impulse is toward destructive behaviour. The urgency of these needs is not always ranked in terms of immediate provisions for existence, such as food and shelter. Sometimes cultural, social and emotional oppression can rise to the top of the list because frustrations have been kept under control over a long period. The situation of many
post-colonial nations has revealed the urgency of cultural needs, as the continuation of an ethnic group’s cultural life is as essential in the long term as basic needs are for daily survival.

For many minority groups, their culture is kept alive through the notion of having a ‘voice’. This is seen as the collective expression of an ongoing solidarity that brings past, present and future identities into one unified form. Difference is easily accommodated in the group’s ‘voice’. As a primarily subjective thing, it can be heard by any person (individually or collectively) who chooses to identify with it. It can carry its message over many generations and thus function an unstructured oral history. The lack of a ‘voice’ is a catchcry for many dispossessed peoples. In Australia, the want of opportunity for those from ‘other’ backgrounds to speak for themselves has meant that that their voice can be seemingly scattered or incoherent to its listeners. Although many of us may not view the successive governments of this country as authoritarian, there has been a distinctive dampening of autonomous expressions of culture over many generations. This dampening was set out most recently in the amendments to Sedition laws, included in the 2005 Anti-Terrorism bill, a move which sparked public outcry about the potential for the new legislation to stifle free speech. The Howard Government was obviously concerned about the potential of powerless individuals to draw on existing conflicts to disrupt their authority, as it’s true that those with little power are often in the best position to focus on change. The question is: how can these voices be collectively represented and empowered under the constraints of an impervious dominant culture. Bordertown is not of itself a dominant culture, but it contains dominant cultures, and these may tie back into a Federal or State base of dominant cultures. Although the minority has to compete to be heard within a hegemonic setting I wonder if, like a raised voice, it will become stronger as a result.

**Tuesday 9 March**

While the awareness of women as powerful players is apparent in Bordertown, underprivileged women in Lamington continue to live with some of the legacies of the old order of patriarchy. There are very complicated shifts occurring in Stacey’s social group, as male physical might has lost much of its meaning in a quagmire of confusion over role models, resulting in competition over possessions, territory and power in backyards, footy fields and in public bars. The heroes of our rural past - explorers, outlaws and farmers - are typecast as traditional ‘Aussie battlers’. A number of Australian male icons are violent men. This ranges from figures in our colonial past like Ned Kelly, to the diggers of Gallipoli. In modern times, Australians have idolised a string of sports stars with a penchant for brawling, as well as the media celebrities, like Sam Newman, who valorise the brutality of some sportmen’s actions. Perhaps it is simply that a patriarchal constituent of Australian society is ferociously defending the last of their perceived territory.

Some women, sick of the violent conduct of men, can be seen to act like ‘one of the boys’. Their sense of injustice stems from a disproportionate experience of violence that foments frustration and anger in such contexts. By all accounts, this is a kind of Feminist stance for the young women of Lamington. That women have been denied the right to show aggression within any social echelon is another instance of the repression of agency. Allowing women to take charge of their actions is central to their empowerment. With enough outsider status to resist without being crushed, Stacey and Anna are starting to wrest this role away from the kind of futile aggression seen in the front bar of the Bordertown Arms on a Friday night.

**Wednesday 10 March**

Bordertown loves a fight. As an uncivilised or deviant aspect of society, open conflict is usually thought to be catastrophic. But violent encounters do not always perpetuate in pointless ongoing violence; they can be a constructive part of everyday negotiations between human beings. In the same way that certain people show their anger more than others, some cultures have aggressive qualities that are beneficial for their own survival, New Zealand’s Maori people being a good example of this. History features numerous examples of violent confrontations that have been constructive in the process of a major social transformation, distinguished by collective choice.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau proposes that people who counteract totalising systems are effectively undermining authority. They use tactical subversions that seek to infiltrate social, political or territorial space, rather than take over, if only to regain lost ground. This is the hallmark of revolution
as opposed to war, a distinction Hannah Arendt makes throughout her book On Revolution from 1963. Revolution can allow those in a subservient social or political situation to delineate their strength and potential for emancipation. More specifically, in differentiated societies, coexistence can breakdown in disagreements over values and resources, and is not resolved by segregation. In a stalemate, conflict is arguably an essential component in rupturing the situation, forcing the opposing groups to communicate and potentially progress toward conciliation. On an individual level, a supporting argument exists for displays of aggression in that they can act as a ‘safety valve’, releasing frustration in an extremely angry person. The same can be said for pent-up rivalries on a communal scale. Supressing the contest between conflicted groups of people can lead to negative concepts becoming deeply ingrained, and consequently more difficult to resolve. The greatest danger is that in contests between minority groups the disempowered can be co-opted by a dominant authority as unsuspecting parties to a program of aggression through the manipulation of latent fears. This is at the crux of the debate over the construction of walls as barriers; accordingly Bordertown’s wall is at risk of exacerbating the very conflict it is attempting to suppress. Stacey is caught up in a similar dialectical struggle. She doesn’t want to hurt anyone; her gestures are theatrical. She needs to let off steam. She needs people to hear what she’s got to say. The problem is no one is listening to her anymore. I can see that her frustration is at boiling point.

Thursday 11 March
I’m reading an essay about the border crossing of philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin. While the story took place in a totally different historical context, it has some bearing on Australia’s border contestation. On 26 September 1940, in flight from the Nazis, Benjamin, a German Jew, found himself at the mercy of Spanish forces after a clandestine crossing of the frontier of France and Spain, after having scrambled over the Pyrenees’ impossible terrain clinging to a heavy black briefcase. He died that same night by his own hand in a lonely hotel room, in the frontier town of Port Bou. He was buried in an unmarked grave and the contents of the briefcase were never recovered. But Benjamin’s death has not been forgotten. It stands today as story of peculiar resistance by one of the most influential thinkers of the early 20th century Europe. In his final book, the Theses on the Philosophy of History of 1940, Benjamin wrote that, “The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. The claim cannot be settled cheaply.” Benjamin’s words are powerful because they propose a collective historical recuperation, the kind that Australia needs to employ to begin the process of reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples and truthfully acknowledge rather than deny the past. Benjamin’s border crossing offers a new perspective on Bordertown’s division too. When I think about Anna and Stacey, I realise their circumstances can be overcome. The wall can be confronted, and the border is not an insurmountable barrier, it just depends what needs to be carried over.

Friday 12 March
I had a meeting with June Peters, a local therapist, over coffee and cake on Mean Street at 10am today. She is a counsellor in an organisation that helps refugees to settle into the community. June moved to Bordertown in 1978. At that time, forty percent of the population had lived there for less than five years. The population boom was the result of Gough Whitlam’s regional expansion program of the late 70s, a scheme designed to arrest the uncontrolled growth of Australia’s large coastal cities. There were grand plans to turn Bordertown into a major inland city. This brought about massive growth on both sides of the River and enticed a whole generation of visionary and socially conscious individuals to settle in the town. These people were committed to community building. Many have departed since Bordertown’s decline, but a sense of resilience remains, and the spirit of ‘town progress’ is still a strong undercurrent in the face of hardship, violence and conflict.

That solidarity persists under duress, and over such an extended time, indicates that profound political bonding occurs in small towns. Women, like June Peters, form action groups but they do not concern themselves with public presence. They mobilise on social and political issues, such as refugees’ welfare, and combating
drug addiction and domestic abuse. For example, an Indigenous reconciliation collective in Bordertown is finding new ways to overcome old divisions and, through interaction and connection with one another, they are working toward recognition, healing and justice for indigenous and non-indigenous people in the community. These groups are independently generated and operate outside state or town governance. But they’re not necessarily homogeneous; they sometimes work in opposition to widely held views of leaders and townsfolk, and can have untold influence.

Unorchestrated bonds forged between individuals are just as powerful. Stacey and Anna have discovered that kinship is a powerful impetus for challenging institutional authority and its insidious manipulations: coercion and centralisation. Capitalism has championed methodologies of state-sanctioned collectivism, with Western political theory retaining concepts of justice and liberty while largely abandoning the notion of ‘fraternity’. I wouldn’t normally use such gendered terminology, so let us conceive of ‘fraternity’ as a reconstruction of communality, in which difference is recognised and embraced as an inseparable component of every human life. In the same way that a dialectical process of resolution has a concept passing over into and being fulfilled by an opposing concept, achieving coherence in a divided community can involve transformation through the confrontation of its opposing sides. So it may be possible that, even in circumstances of outright conflict, nothing is lost or destroyed. Instead, every disparate part of that conflict is (while not necessarily resolved) subsumed in a spiralling momentum of change.

Saturday 13 March

Back in Bordertown, Stacey has rebelled against authority again. But her argument with the factory supervisor is remarkable because, this time she’s recognised that her suffering is shared by another woman. Stacey is fighting for Anna now.

When regimes attempt to control or quash dissent, it is an indication of the threat it poses to them. Walls are the evidence of escalating fear and defensive behaviour, on the part of nations, states, private companies and ordinary individuals, and these fears do not become any less divisive or political over time. We are living in an age of exclusion, even though, when it comes to peacemaking, history tells us that blockades tend to fail. Unless we gather to resist them, walls will continue to carve up the land, and those on the ‘wrong’ side will be left to wander along the boundary, hoping to find a way into utopia. But those who have good reason to traverse the barrier (for love, family, faith or money) will fight to find a way to cross over, by transcending or directly opposing that construct. Thousands of refugees, illegal workers, and politically segregated family members traverse borders everyday. Then there’s Walter Benjamin and his briefcase.

When we remark upon objective features of antagonism, such as Bordertown’s wall, the defiance of ordinary inhabitants can go unnoticed. Yet the people caught in the crossfire always decide if conflict occurs; everyone has some kind of role or determining influence on their environment. As Certeau suggests, change is the onus of the individual because she or he can undermine the foundations of power “in unexpected ways in everyday practices”. For Certeau, the “democratising of resistance” might be as simple as the way people walk, where they shop, who they speak to and what they say. He claims that ordinary practices possess agency because they seize power from authorities and its system. In the interviews at the end of this book, you will find two stories of powerless people bravely confronting their dominant opponent. In the first, Anna recounts the story of the Aboriginal girl on the border braving the settler’s guns to save an elder from her clan from being shot. The other is the account of Stacey and Anna’s opposition to the wall, at the end of the document. As an “art of the weak”, Stacey and Anna’s weapons of resistance – which you can see in the photographs – may not be military or mighty, however, in de Certeau’s system, the revolutionary potential of small-scale, counter-hegemonic activism is not to be underestimated. In this way, the small incision in the physical boundary that Stacey and Anna are making is an act that could break out of the ideological stranglehold that the wall has over them.

Anna and Stacey recognise their enemy. The wall in Bordertown is the image of oppression. Domination by governments, armed forces, men, teachers, family, and police is embodied in this architectural
object. They understand the power that elites have invested in the barrier, and that because of it they can be excluded or dismissed at anytime. But the two women have also realised that they must find a new way to take a stand. As underdogs, they have the opportunity to engage in insurrection. Their courage is an additional tactic of dissent because it breaks with expected behavioural codes for women. In fact, it is precisely because the word ‘hero’ is a masculine term that these two women can use it as a shock tactic. Solidarity is formed in struggles for survival, for justice, equality and freedom. It provides traction for those without political influence. The only problem is that it’s hard to tell who the heroes are anymore. I wonder if they’re ordinary people, like Anna and Stacey, who can offer a sign of transformation. The two women remind me of the archetype that playwright Bertolt Brecht exhorted as sages: resourceful, “human nobodies” who, with sober patience, are “wearing down the hardness” of historical circumstance. If cutting a hole in the wall achieves only one thing, it will be to create a symbol for those struggling under the conflict. The action they are taking is, I believe, of a powerful kind, perhaps even the right kind, of aggression. I think that their union may be able to transcend political and social divisions. Stacey and Anna may just be a catalyst for the town’s transformation as the border crossing reawakens a desire for the community cohesion that once thrived in Bordertown.

Sunday 14 March

It’s my last day in Bordertown. Seven weeks’ research has shown me a lot about the forces at play in this town, and I have been truly inspired by the struggle its inhabitants have mounted. I’ve packed up all the books, photos, flyers and reams of notes. I am going to try to arrange all of it into a catalogue so that it can be read by others. Except I don’t think I could ever encapsulate the lives that have passed before me. I want to stay to see what happens to Anna and Stacey. I can tell things are about to change.
The Bordertown interviews

STACEY: When I was growing up, I just wanted to get out of fuckin' Bordertown ... Fuck! Everyone, like, knows me. They'd see me coming in my gear, with the cammo and all that khaki army stuff. I wear it 'coz the whole town is at war ... and there's like two towns here. Us and them, kinda thing. It goes up and down as well. In the hills they're all stuck up, snobby and rich. And over the river are the Southies, and they're a real mix of types. But mostly bad, at least that's what I hear. I dunno, I never been over there. The wall keeps 'em in their place ... 'coz they're not like us.

They say it's my wall. That's because I learnt real young to hate Southies. I remember my dog, Rex and me were walking and stuff and a stranger from the other side, over the river, he went to like come at us, or somethink like that, and Rexie's ran up and he was like "Rah, rah, rah!!!" And he protected me ... That guy, he went running, like soooo fuckin' fast. He, he! But I tell ya, I was real lucky he was there for me. Rexie's like that, he's totally loyal. But that Southie, you know, he's not gonna forget it ... he'll be back for us. I'm just waitin' for it. I'm not scared ... I'll show him who's boss. Still, sometimes I think that they're gonna take us over y'know.

ANNA: With my sister Pamela, I leave my country. No passport. No name, no shoes. When we first come to Melbourne we put into migrant camp in Royal Park. It not so good ... reminding me of other camps before. But I think it going to be okay, we start new life in Bordertown soon.

STACEY: I grew up in this poor part of the north side called Lamington. Ha, yeah, yeah, like the nana cake ... I know. It was real poor and I had to live up to that a bit, but only because it was associated with a kind of feral side, not like the scum over in the South but. Anyways, the rest of Bordertown was associated with a prestigious atmosphere, especially up in the hills. Being a kid, I remember just running around the footy oval with my dirty face and eehhh ... "Dirty! Dirty!" I went up to a Catholic school when we moved out to Lamington and I was living in Calwell Street, and there was a school right there. So I went to Holy Spirit. Ha, yeah, 'holly spew-up', eehhh, ha, ha! And when I was a little kid, we used to give my teachers hell and stuff. I remember the last days, 'coz I only lived down the road, we were screaming out like, "I hate you Mr Mandrill" and, "Blah-de, blah, blah, blah". But he was fucked 'coz he was from the posh streets, and I started to hate rich people 'coz of him. Even though he was from up there he stank like a monkey. And my other girlfriends who I was with, someone ended up calling their mothers and saying, "Your kids are leaving the school ranting and raving and yelling out". Yeah, and "Bloody nonsense and stuff..." yeah. They all got in trouble except for me. Nobody was tellin' Stace what to do!

But with Lamington in Bordertown, there's always been two separate areas. If you said ya lived in Lamie like 20 years ago, people would kinda look down on ya. And have this sense of like 'up here with us': And I have always been a Lamington girl. Up there they've got all the big houses on those hills, y'know? I never knew that those homes costed in the millions, until like I started getting more of an idea about money and stuff. Or when they caught us hanging around. And yeah, especially up in the hills there are some beautiful old homes. But we're not welcome there. The army dudes look after the high up ones more. It's bloody wrong and it makes me real mad ... I'm totally critical of this shithole. I say like: "I can't stand it anymore. I'm gonna leave and I'm never gonna come back", blah, blah, blah. And you end up hating the day you were born 'coz nobody fuckin' sees how crap it is either. I reckon I gotta show 'em how it is. One day I'm gonna get outta here. I got it in me, and nobody messes with Stacey Brain, tell you what. He! They still cross the road, even though I'm the smallest chick in Lamington. It's 'coz I got the dirtiest mouth and to the meanest knuckle punch. I snap at the smallest thing and everybody knows it!

Those are all like the commission flats. That's a migrant block, there's one in Lamington too ... there's a couple of them actually. I dunno why they're here. They're all meant to stay in the South. Yeah, anyway the migrants think they are like down there lower than us. They've been given all the trolley pushing jobs and stuff and so when you shoppin' in Lamington now, instead of seeing what you normally see, you see these migrant guys. And, and you,
if you try and speak to them and stuff like that and ohhhhh ... I
dunno I think they look at you as if you’re up here and they’re
down there and they don’t have authority to speak to you n’ that.
Me mates say that it’s their own problem ‘coz they’re taking the
jobs from the handicapped peoples that used to do it. But the
supermarket’s just using whoever they can. We don’t really give a
shit about that, we just don’t want the Southis over here.

ANNA: After 3 weeks we go to Bordertown in the train ... In the
new camp they put the Nissen huts, all metal and noisy, because
it is in the army base again, far away from the south side of town.
All over Australia, it’s the same. The army big here in your country.
We have little sections in the huts. Each one 2 beds, 2 single beds ...
Then it start to rain. It rain a lot. The mud everywhere ankle
depth on the ground ... not much blankets, and it get so cold. We
sleep like that for a month. I have the picture they took of me that
day. You can see my eyes, I looking into the face of nowhere. We
look like ghosts in the portrait. Still, I believe there is future for
us here.

STACEY: We all used to fight and smoke and jump off the
bridge into the river. You know I was in the ‘it’ crowd. The big
tree was Stace’s. I’d be the one right up the top, jumping orrrrr.
Yeeooooow!!! Crazy bitch Stacccccceeee! I weren’t scared of anything.
And we all kind of knew each other and stuff like that, but I wasn’t
fuckin’ happy. After I decided to get out, I never thought I’d come
back to this fuckin’ place, ever. Except then I had to stay, ‘coz
my Stepnum, she left me Dad. It sorta fucked us up. But then I
thought: ‘Hey, it’s better’. She’s just a fuckin’ cow. And so I’m
lookin’ after me Dad now.

STACEY: This is the Lamington footy field that we always used to
come up to every single weekend. And oh, um, I’ve many stories
from here ‘coz I had to just watch the match from the side and I
never thought it was fair ... y’know? The other girls didn’t care but
I wanted to join the team. I cut all me hair off and all, and I swear
looked like a boy, I really fuckin did! After they told me to piss off I
used to shout out shit at the local boys from behind the goalposts:
“You’re a load of wankers! You wouldn’t know how to drop kick
a rabbit!’ I wasn’t going to do the fuckin banner sewin’ or sit in
the tuck shop. No fuckin’ way. One day this big hairy grade sixer,
Robert, came up to me during the third quarter and tried to kick
me! Ha! Idiot. I got him square in the nuts! I wasn’t allowed on
the footy oval for a bit. My hair grew back pretty fast. After that, I
reckoned the war was against the blokes. I would stand up to ‘em
heaps. Always screamin’ at ‘em, ‘Youse fuckin’ shits!’ “You think
youse own us!!!’ They’ get around me in a circle and rile me up. I
swear that’s what it’s like out here. The men have always got the
real jobs, the proper clubs, and more money, and all that. I reckon
it fuckin’ stinks. And when somethink’s shi’ I get like a knot in my
gut. I’m telling you it ends up real ugly.

I wasn’t like that before. Nah. I learnt a lot of it from me Stepnum.
Sorta that women can be tougher. When me Dad got remarried I
saw whole ‘nother side. Like when she threw an ashtray at his
head. Awww Ha, ha! It was full and all. He! She was real violent. Not
always in a good way, but, ‘coz it was me and Dad who she was
hurtin’. I just reckon me real mum is fuckin’ pathetic. She’s never
stood up to anyone ever, and that’s worse. ‘Specially with most
guys the way they are, they’ll use ya, if you let them. So I thought I
had to be like them, to fight the same way as the boys, n’ that.

ANNA: Here it as if there is war and we are enemy: guards, big fence,
gates. Many guns. It very hard for the children and us women. See
a lot of fighting in the camp. We think, here it not safe. I don’t have
knowledge how to forgive for what I have lost. I am blame myself
for bring my sister to such a country. I not strong enough. I wish I
have more courage to standing up to guards. I think: No point to
speak back at the soldier with guns ... That day they come with the
big black guns in the hut. My sister hiding behind me. We keep our
memories for very long time. I am dreaming it going to change for us.

STACEY: The Southis always been over the river. That’s like our
border. That’s what they call this whole area, ‘The Border’. With a
capital ‘B’. It used to be like two different countries. With guards and
guns and taxes and that. Nowadays they call them States, but they
was always separate. The people here are so sick of it. We wanted
to make The Border a whole ‘nother state, when that Bracks dude
turned up here saying like he’s gonna amalgamate the two sides.
You should’a seen the howling crowd! Nobody here wants it. We
hate the other side ‘coz they’re real different to us. They’ve got their own road rules, pokies laws, and there’s heaps of fights ‘coz one side gives way to the left at the lights and the other gives way to the right. You can ride your bike on the footpath in the North but not in the South. Fruit is cool up here, but ain’t allowed over there. If youse buy a car from over there and drive it here you get a fuckin’ fat fine, unless you change the plates! One day a bloke drowned in the river and none of the police would get him out because they weren’t sure which side he was on. It’s all true, I swear.

But when the river dried up we started seein’ Southies all the time over here. You can just tell. It’s they way they talk, a kinda attitude. You see, I was just walking down Mate Street one day and this Southie fella blew a kiss at my boyfriend. She fuckin’ knew it was gonna make me totally mad, and I went off. I got so angry; I yanked her back by her fucking hair and punched her out. Now they knows what to expect. I can’t tell which one it was ‘coz they all look down when I’m coming towards ‘em now. Hey, and the government knows about ‘em anyways. That’s why they’ve built this fuckin’ great wall ... And I seen more troops coming up the highway. I’m pretty stoked mate.

Did you know about our island between the two rivers, Gateway Island? It’s like no-man’s land. Guess what? I been to three or four raves there ... and my first ever rave party. And they were at the ... mmmm, he, he, this sounds funny ... ha, Harvey’s Fish Farm. And the whole park was made into a rave ... they were awesome. Oh, but we’re in the South now. As soon as we cross that bridge, that’s uhhhh. Oh, hang on. No? This bridge. No, I dunno. Fuck it! Yeah. We call these like the Mexicans, ‘coz they’re over the border. Heh, heh, the Mexicanos ... If you like ... But we should really go back now ... it ain’t real safe for us here.

One day I crashed into a Southie. It was me Stepmum, actually. And, man, she just went off, like blew up, yellin’ and chuckin’ all her empty ciggie packs at them ‘coz that’s all she had in the car. I threw that shit at ‘em as well. Later on, after I was 18, I was in the party scene and I was going out every weekend, and it was like when they came out in Bordertown you’d always know that they were Southies. And there’s a lot of tension between everyone, the South and North side, plus between the Lamington crew and the hills. It was just to be better and number one, kind of. And, and like, you climbed. It was always in Bordertown, in the going out scene, about who knows the biggest stud-boy and kind of that stereotypical thinking. Me friends are just in a fuckin’ scrum. Nobody’s watchin’ our backs, so I’m doin’ it. They’d never expect that from a girl! ... But I’m the secret weapon in Lamie. I been goin’ out shooting shit with me Dad since I was five. See that paddock over there? That’s the Small Bore Range. It’s real good coz it’s got a long open bit that gives you an ace shot when youse come outta the bushes. I’m out there a lotta weekends, y’know? I love getting the guns ready; taking it all to pieces, polishin’ each of the parts, the barrel, the, the muzzle, down the breech into the chamber, and rubbing the cold steel with the rag, up and down. Squeezin’ just one finger on the trigger. Squeeze, squeeze. Bang! Dead.

ANNA: In the camp there is many women. I want to ask why most of us are women. We work very hard but not have really freedom. For those two years, we must work for the Government. The story of the people who stay in the camp is that there no jobs and we going to be here for a long time, maybe years. Then there is ... is ... is that terror ... they have the absolute power that can do anything... take away your life. Maybe we dead already. I hear the guard say this country is the ‘fatal shore’. The first white people, they come here sentenced to death by English. They already dead men. We same: sent to this place calling it terra nullius; it worse than death. We know this is true. It nowhere! All around the camp is just dirt. No body living near, no homes... just the long road to Bordertown. We try to hang onto some hope. Funny things happen in the camp make us laugh. Not long before everybody all buy the radios. Each one is very loud: ‘buzzzzzzz’. Everyone listen to program in own language, like home. One hundred different tongues at once. We laughing at this.

STACEY: Awww. That’s the Bordertown monument. It’s a momentous statue that remembers our Anzacs ... you know, there’s like heaps of army bases down in the South, and stuff like Bundoora ... and um, oh I dunno what it’s called. And I saw in that paper on the train, y’know the free one? Yeaaaah ... I was reading in it about how the Prime Minister’s saying in your first
year out of school that you do some army time. Not compulsory, like military service ... I know in some places overseas you have to do the army when you turn 18, and that, everybody has to do it, even girls ... maybe that's what the Government means, kinda.

Except I don’t really like army people ... Nuh. I got into a fight with one a couple of years ago ... Sweethearts is like this place, and they sell pizza and stuff of a morning, and they’re like our saviours! And a couple of years ago, when I was going out, me and Michelle she went up and ordered, you know, a slice of pizza and stuff. And this dude was like ... oh, you know, “I ordered my pizza. Why isn’t my pizza here yet?” And she said, “You’ve ordered a full pizza, the girls have just ordered a slice”. And so, yeah, he was from Sydney and wouldn’t have a bar of it, and started calling all the women behind the counter fat bitches and sluts and stuff ‘n ... But, y’know they’re our saviours of the morning, and I was saying, ‘there’s no need for that language, and blah, blah, blah…” And I just ended up getting so angry that I punched him right in the face. Eeehhhh. Haaaaah!!!! And he kicked me, and my girlfriend went like, “Don’t you kick her!!!” And we got in, like, an all-in brawl. It was six o’clock in the morning, and the cops came and everythink ... and me and Mish had to go into the copshop and testify ... and he ended up losing his licence for ‘Aj’ ... Like umm, y’know, like ‘army jerk’? ‘Aj’ - army jerk.

I think it’s just like the ones with a bit of power look at it as if they’re kinda up here ... Above people and stuff like that. This dude we ran into, he definitely had issues. I think, like, that he really just wants to blow stuff up! They all do, those kinda people. Uh huh! He, he. And maybe the Government thinks he’s a good person, representing, you know, what Australia is and should be. But he just wanted to be in the battlefield and blow some shit up. Why should he have that right? Y’know? Sometimes you gotta do something about it. Sometimes you gotta make the first strike against people like that... He was a bit of a chauvinistic pig, I think, the way his story was. He just didn’t have any respect for women at all, and I didn’t like that. And so, I put my foot in...

ANNA: In the first days I come to Bordertown, they tell me to start work. They call it work bond. For two years I stay in camp I must go to do job for Government. Thinking I be sent to clean school or hospital, I very surprised they send me to big private factory for the dog food. I clean the factory and I not happy because animal meat everywhere and on the floor. I must to sweep it up. Blood on my clothes and staining under the fingernails. It smelling very much. One day it make me sick. Foreman he angry at me: ‘You’re not working. Why you stop?’

Go to migrant camp school. I study. It too hot in the shed. Smelling like piss. They say ‘possum’s piss’. It very strong. No shade. Dust on paper as we writing. In the class we learn about Australia. They say not many of the original people living here before the government come. They say many ran away. I know it lies. We hear the stories. Learning too, that Bordertown had big river, before this is the border. We laugh because we know it’s dry. The river was big before the rain stops, full of water all the time. It dead now, they say. The water was keeping the North and South divide. The people over there in North, they come here first. And they very protective, not wanting us coming into the town, so they build that big wall now instead of river.

One day walking to work I make mistake. I go wrong way, turn a corner ... then suddenly I stop because for first time all I see is the wall. It twelve metres up. Soooo big! They paint it all black. Big metal frame sticking out at me. It look like ... like frontier of country with war and guns, or prison. I look up and there is cameras ... four, five, no six! I shaking again. The fear is back. I think they watching me, following me. Sometimes the police come to our hut, and ask for this and that.

STACEY: Oh... things are a bit different now, for sure. I heard years ago women weren’t bloody allowed to be in the pubs before, unless they were with their husband ... It’s different now, but I think that chauvinist thing is still around, the barrier between the female and male. Yeah!! Some blokes just expect that women will like cook and clean ... When that Aj was abusing the girl, I snapped. He just kept going and going. I don’t know what made me do it. I just went boom! And then he kicked me. And I jumped out a little bit ... like that. And so I wasn’t like fully kicked. And Mish’s like: “How dare
you hit my friend!” And then she’s punched him. And then he’s pushed her. And then her head’s flung back, and her head’s flung forward, three times, and he’s just cracked her in the face, those three times. And then that’s when I jumped back in the pit, and I was like, “You bloody don’t hit my friend!” And we went rolling out of the Sweethearts onto Mean Street. And I remember kinda waking up, coming to, and had these guys on top of me and stuff, ‘coz I think by then some other outsiders were like, “Look what’s going on here... Why is he speaking to them like that?” n’ stuff. And I’ve woken up and kind of come to. And I’ve seen... I think I was knocked out for like a bleak second... yeah... And I’ve woken up, and I’ve seen Mish with a metal chair folded, and she’s just standing over this army guy going: “Get the hell off my fuckin’ friend!!!” And just slamming it into his head. And then Mish was draggin’ me out. I was like, “Ohhhhh, ohhhh!” After this, we was locked up for a while. The jerk was too, but. Ha, ha!

ANNA: They make me always scared, so I have bad dream... Dark night coming over the city. Shutters down, bang, bang, over the shops. Many women running every direction. Carry lot of shopping bags. The people running from the streets to somewhere else. Anywhere. Not near the wall. It guarded. We told they will shoot us. I think I get out... The wall is not straight line. Confusing. All in a circle, like a walled city. I get lost. Now after curfew. The wall keep on changing. It first made by rock. The kids climbing over it, throwing them rocks. Then it get more strong. Concrete blocks, bolting into ground. Only one way for crossing over, I must go through the centre. I do this now. I am in the centre. Not safe zone. Not for me. I see the city change. It has a dark face at night. Holes in the buildings open before me... They are terror. Snipers promise death. Shoot no question. No other women running by. I am alone. In the middle of the road no chance: both sides of the street have the clear shot. My skin is scraping close to wall, moving fast. Panic. It not really me here. No way out. Not breathing... They call it keeping peace, but it really war zone.

Teacher says we must have English. English very important in Australia. Can’t do anything unless it better and before we allowed to go live outside, we do test. So I am learning but my accent strong. No one understanding me. The teacher saying we not Australian enough. We try! But Aussies not speaking to us. They think we from South, wrong side. It was not always seem so bad you know. We hang onto a lot of hopes.

Yesterday I coming home from the factory in afternoon and there is old lady in garden. She cutting the rose. But from the corner when she see me, she stop cutting and go inside. When I am going past I think I see her in the window looking at me. They more scared. The young boys call us ‘coconut’ even though we not. It’s okay, they only joking. But it also says that I shouldn’t do things different to them, or be the way I am, talk the way I do. It not easy to be yourself outside the camp, so now I am staying inside a lot.

I hear the Bordertown radio man saying we take jobs from the poor people. How he think this true? You see they send the men away to work now. My husband he gone to work in another town many hour away. He push the shopping trolley. After the radio man talk, people come to him very angry. One day a man in the car park grabs the trolley. He short with big stomach, hairy arms and wearing t-shirt rolled up over shoulders, and mirror glasses. Man with no eyes stop my husband from pushing trolley with foot and ask him where the local pushers had gone. My husband stand still; no speak back. Not a word. We never speak to them if they come to us like this.

Us women all lose husbands. We not see them for many months. Coming back they not the same. The house they given is sharing with many others, no furniture, no heating. I think it could shock the city people but they not know about us, we invisible... I don’t know. No use if I speak. What do I? I not have barrier like the others. Only hope to make a good life.

STACEY: I’ve just started working in the dog food joint... y’know the big one on the Southie’s side. Crossing over there, I ain’t fuckin’ scared but it’s like hell. I’m working in there with all the migrants who’ve came here on the trains. They live in that camp outta town. We ain’t allowed nowhere near there, no way! I heard they brought thousands of ‘em here to work. Like I said, I seen ‘em in the North, at the supermarket pushing trolleys. And they’re workin’ out in the mountains, on that big electricity thingy. The Government hand picked them to look like us, more white and that. But in there now, I’m treated no different. Me job is fuckin’ crap. I’m just a dead shit to the bosses. Still, the Southies from the camp, they’re lower down
than us Lamington crew. At the bottom like. I guess that’s what you want. At least that’s what most of us think: it’s good ‘coz there’s someone lower than us. I’m kinda not sure about that anymore, but.

Then guess what happened? I was walking along the river and coming the other way is this girl. I seen her in the factory. She was cleaning there but never once looked up from the floor, so hey, fair enuf, she mightn’t know who I was. When she got closer I thought she might say ‘hi’, but she looked away. I was going over, but before I could speak to her this car full of dickheads comes burning round the corner, and then I was dealing with those fuckers. I dunno where she went. So the next day in the factory I seen her and I go up and say: “You’ve lived here for five years and you can’t look me in eye”. She says something to me but it’s real soft, and all the machines are goin’ off and, and it’s not fuckin’ English. I says: “You can’t talk like that, you know I can’t understand you”. I was just trying to help, y’know? Then the foreman comes in and straight away he’s picking on her. I blew up, tell ya what ... I got real mad, you know? But not with her. I actually felt real bad, ‘coz she was kinda scared and started to cry. I just couldn’t take their shit no more! It was just coz I tried to speak to her!! The bosses are treatin’ all of us like animals. Actually, I reckon she wanted to ask me somethink but like the trolley pushers she wouldn’t look up. Too scared. I read her name on the security tag but ... she’s called Anna. I’m sure it’s not her real name but. Afterwards the boss gave me the sack but I learnt somethink that day. I seen another side to the Southies. They ain’t the bad ones.

**ANNA:** We poor all this time. I look up there toward hills ... the big houses. They say they one day we get house in suburb. After the camp we hope to have this home, but others saying they not trust us. Then we hear the land with houses for migrants is not for us anymore, the Government going to make this the exclusion zone between North and South.

We wait such long time. In the camp we start to be very restless. First complaining a lot. One day there is demonstration. The men they go outside with painted wood signs. One say: ‘We get angry. We promise we don’t like your system.’ Another one is: ‘We want work.’ The men also make bigger signs like, ‘Your barbarian system is only worthy of the Stone Age.’ But the army come rushing in from the base with big guns. I never seen our men run like that since at home. Soldiers smash the signs. Lock us up in huts. We very scared. We think we die. My sister she never the same because of this. Now she gone; my last relative. The empty Nissen hut very quiet ... Only sound of footsteps in the dirt outside. Every day I want to bring her back.

**STACEY:** But two years ago, before being in the factory and looking the girl in the eye, I remember being out and fightin’. All my friends were mainly boys back then. There was just a couple of us girls. I was in Lamington one day and all these Southies came into our fuckin’ pub. And then ... and I don’t know why but you just instantly knew they were from the South’s side, and then ... they were tryin’ to fight us and just saying, “Fuckin’ Southies are better”. Or you know, saying random stuff like that. And I was trying to keep my friends outta the fight and that. I ended up keeping some of ‘em out of it. And then, I think it just kind blew. Someone’s glassed a Southie on the head and then there was a bit of bashing goin’ on. Uh he! I know how to handle that shit for meself. I agreed with the boys though ... you gotta stand up for yourself and the people you know.

People reckoned I wanted to have a go at everyone back then. You won’t believe me, but I don’t really like using violence. I’m not just lookin’ for a fight, just sometimes, in that moment you gotta lash out. It’s like animal aggression, tigers, walruses, dogs, and roosters n’ that. It’s fuckin’ okay for the blokes, right? They’re all totally proud of each other’s battles. So I reckon, only if you let that weak side be a part of your life, it will be. Us women have done that for far too fuckin’ long. And then there’s some fuckin’ dick who’s power-trippin’ and needs a wakeup call. Right? Now these days we got the rapper women, like Maya, who’s speaking out now. ‘Coz I reckon being a chick means you can see things clearer, above the brawlin’’. There’s some scary things goin’ down in Bordertown.

**ANNA:** I remember my father. He was army commander. In the photo, he was in uniform with his machine gun. Very happy and strong man. I love him. He smile a lot. He killed by rebel militia. So proud of fighting for the country. So in Bordertown I not understand
why the normal people they wear soldier uniform. You know, I see them here like they have to fight in a war.

One day, a girl walk beside the river. Even though she is very small, I think she man at first. I know she is from the other side. Got a warrior stance, wearing arm clothes. Because I stop, she sees me and I think, you stupid Anna, it very dangerous to be seen. Other migrant say this all the time. She coming over to ask me something. But we both surprise because from nowhere a big ugly car, colour of mustard, turn corner very fast. It full of rowdy boys. They shouting, arms all out the window. Soldier girl is very, very mad. Walk in a straight line to car. Standing in road, she force car to stop. She is next to the driver, but the boy has put up the window so she smash her fist on bonnet - like ‘smash!’ He desperate and scared, he want to drive off, but she looks like she is about to break the glass. She telling him to wind down the window. The boy looks like pug dog, shrinking into fat neck. Funny, ha! But he follow order. Army girl tell him, he “not know how to drive”. Ask how he get license. Point at him in face, she swear, “You fucking loser!” I impressed but still scared. At least she not see me now. I sneak around corner. Run back to camp.

STACEY: It’s crazy mate! Just last week I took the army gig, even though I hate them fuckin’ army jerks ... They was calling me up, offering real good pay. But that isn’t really why. The truth is, I’m learning to fight properly now. Shoot straight and that. You probably reckon it’s self-defence but I’m planning to take the first strike. I’m gonna be like the sheriff. It’s still the same shit. There’s still two towns, and I just don’t wanna get stuck on the wrong fuckin’ side. I’m waiting to get my letter from them army jerks. I’ve got all the gear ready to go.

Hey, you did see the train? Our station is the longest platform in the Southern Hemisphere. It is! It’s massive. I think that it was for all them migrants ... and the cases and boxes they had with ‘em ... it was ‘coz of the border. All of the stuff brought over had to pay taxes on it and the army gear too. It was like for everythink. So that’s how Bordertown grew ... They even wanted to make it the capital, y’know? But if you’re real quiet you can hear the trains here, the trains... listen: “hmhhhhm ...

ANNA: When I go to the factory next day, I find boss treat me worse than ever because ... because ... I don’t know. Then I see the soldier girl. Why she here? Everyone is rich on the north side, I thought. I want to ask her, but I too scared, so I stare again. She see me, and I think she get angry and is coming over, so I pick up my work and go out back. Except she go up the foreman and is saying all this stuff about how he bad man for picking on me, even though she been in trouble before. He don’t care, just say, “You’ve had the last warning young lady. Now you can leave.” She shout at him: “You better watch out! I’m from Lamington. I knows how to get youse back.” He laughs. “Lamington? You’re the scum of Bordertown ... You must be joking!” She goes hot in the face. Then the kind of white you see in hospital tiles. She has a hammer. Gets close to him, pushing iron into his chest. “I’m not scared”, she sneer. “You can’t tell me what to do. Treating everyone here worse than dogs ... See that woman there?” pointing at me, “She’s not a dog!” “You arsehole, you can stick your job up your arse!” She chuck the hammer. It hit the window glass smashing everywhere. We all frozen to the ground! She walk out tall. I want to be like this. But I still scared because now foreman will be very cold and hard. After this he order me, “Do this, do that!” But I keep thinking about her. Now I have a hero. The other worker tell me her name, they whisper: “she called Stacey”.

STACEY: So it was all lookin’ ace for me. I stood up for meself, and it was for a good thing, not just fightin’ ‘coz I could. My plans for doing time in the army reserves were sorted. So I never expected that things could go wrong. When I get home after being fired, and pissin’ it up at the pub with the other bludgers ... it’s like Ruxie’s been bashed. I never felt like this before. It’s gotta be one of the Southies getting us back. There I was on the street, like a crazy bitch, blaming the world. I was screamin’ at the South: “Wanna smash your head in. But it’d be a pity if you was dead, ‘coz I wanna hear you cry the way I am.”

THE WOMAN: It’s 6 o’clock in the morning in the vet clinic. Stacey sits quietly with her head hanging. Looking up anxiously at the ceiling she says there’s a smell like fear in the room. She waits. It’s too early. She is disturbed and increasingly agitated. A young assistant at the counter in a nice white lab coat motions to her.
Stacey approaches: “Is me dog hurt?” She’s rocking against the counter.

STACEY: I’m going over the story with the lady, sobbing and cryin’ ... Now I’m real cut ‘coz they’re saying I gotta put Rexie down.

THE WOMAN: The assistant touches Stacey. She jerks back. Paper and pen are pushed across the counter. Stacey must sign. The pen snaps. Stacey wipes the ink from her fingers on the paper. There’s another pen and some new forms. Stacey scratches her name and walks out without a word. But within a second she’s back: “You can’t have him. Rexie’s mine. He’s comin’ to die with me!” She takes the dog outside but he won’t walk with her. He just stares. He’s always been loyal, but Stacey knows Rex is leaving her now. He is making a stand.

STACEY: I give up. I let ‘em take him. But as soon as I get onto the street I change me mind. I’m fuckin’ so angry with myself. There’s no way I can let ‘em have him. I go back and kick at the door of the vet’s. I grab Rex and carry him out of there in me arms and put him down outside. But he’s not happy. He stops, looks me in the eye. He’s made up his own mind, it’s against me: I’ve fucked it all up. He wants to leave me now. I nod to say ‘okay’. Then he turns around and goes off down the street. Like it’s his place... Bordertown, and he can die how he wants to. After that I lost it, but I wanted them Souties to know what I really thought. I went home and was grabbing stuff out from the back shed to go shootin’ and I saw a badge ... Fuck! It wasn’t that guy from the South at all. It was that AJ. Fuck it, you know? I was wrong. Fuck ... No more Bordertown, I gotta get outta here right now.

I want to go live on the south side ‘coz I was so wrong ... the people from the South aren’t like I thought. I’m not against ‘em anymore, and I guess being here I couldn’t forget Rexie. Only when I got to the border, I wasn’t allowed to go over. Jeeeesus, I never thought the Government was keeping us locked up too.

The wall ain’t good no more. I used to think it was ‘coz it kept us apart. We were meant to be scared of Souties, and hate ‘em. It’s crazy that it can be so easy, like it was just pile of rocks, then a few bricks. But one day there was no way for us to cross fuckin’ over anymore. But we didn’t really notice. Now the wall is all the way through the middle of the town. We’re separated by this slab of black fuckin’ concrete. It goes on and on, and on, forever! Sure it divides the South from the North, but it cuts the whole town up. I can’t understand how Anna or anyone is livin’ over there. At least now I know who the real war is against, but.

ANNA: I decide I not give them my life. No way! I remember my Grandmother when I am just a little girl ... she the strong-will woman. I watch her work very hard to get us the food. I look for the way so I not the prisoner here. Now I get stronger. I know I can defend myself. I going confront them with words in my own language. Not shame anymore.

Next week I look at the notices on machines at work. The factory man stupid, he not thinking that no one read English. I say to him it is better to make his signs in our language. He look at me very angry; “If you cannot speak English properly then you go”. “You are in Australia now. We only speak English here.” He say, because I am troublemaker, I lose my job. So I really cry a lot. It not good to lose job. Not easy for the woman to find this labour. Then I think of Stacey. She go out so big. Not broken. So I get mad like her. This is fucked.

Stacey is right, I find other job soon. I hear about Women’s Land Army, working on the Wonga Wetlands. ‘They want us make wet land dry place for new houses. This job no point. Even though pay is bad I join. We work for the same money as the Aboriginal women. They same like us, not seen, very bad life. We wear uniform: the green wool top, brown pant and brown hat. Together, we feeling very strong. We talk at night about the things we can do, like make hole in the wall. It is the hope of my freedom from being the dead person under the Government law.

Sometimes I scared because action is violence and against the Government men. This is dangerous for your life. But you see in this world, you must risk it to keep it. If we no fight, it all over. In the Land Army, the Aboriginal women tell stories about heroes. I hear about a girl who stand up to powerful man just like Stacey.
THE WOMAN: The story is of an English squatter, Sir Edward Curr, who came across an Aboriginal fishing party on The Border: “His fishing spear quivered in his hand, and... he howled, howled, abused and spat at me... asking... Why I came to the Moira? Whilst the poor fellow was giving vent to his fury, every soul who had found shelter was yelling at the top of his or her voice for him to come away and join him, as I fancy they expected to see me raise the gun which I held in my hand. In the meantime... a middle-aged man who seemed to have grown desperate jumping about with his spear... [he] dragged a girl from behind a tree... [and] pressed her towards us, clear of the cover. The child... looked me full in the face, and without altering her course... with a somewhat stately step, passed close before the gun... Addressing him in a low, soft tone, without further notice of me, she took his hand in hers... he lowered his spear, and in silence, the girl led him back to his descendants.”

But now it’s Australia Day... in Bordertown it’s a celebration of failed nationalism. There’s meant to be a big parade but hardly anyone ever turns up. There wouldn’t be any good reason to, there’s not much to see: no kids, no flags. No fireworks. Usually it’s 35 degrees. A few diggers stagger past at one o’clock. So much for the legend of the Anzac... But at least the Australia Day parade looks colourful and proud on TV... Stacey’s got it on, blaring.

STACEY: I got that letter. It’s on top of the cabinet. It’s got one of those plastic windows. Me name’s there: Stacey Ethel Brain. There’s a logo on the left, all navy blue with spears and spikes and a helmet, the same as the little badge I found out the back... Australian Army Reserves. It says I start in two weeks at Gaza Ridge barracks. So I’m not free no more. And I reckon they gonna make me shoot at the Mexicans... I used think that was good but it’s different now. It’s not them Southies we gotta worry about. The power to kill is with the people who built that wall, so it all looks fucked. But I have a secret tactic all worked out. On the inside, in the army, I can be stronger and use that power against them, like use their own weapons against them. Gotta remember, Bordertown was only divided when the Government came along. Back in the times when only the Aboriginal people was here, everything was shared. No one had to fight. There was no North; there was no South. No border. No wall. So I’m gonna take things back to how they were before. But I gotta find Anna first. We gotta do it together.

ANNA: The wall, it tell us we are not free. It look like impossible barrier. I know over the wall there are the mountains. They called the Great Dividing Range: blue mist, outline, layers. The mountains separate the north from the south and the east from the west. They been holding many things back for thousands of years... sometimes they protect us from danger, like the weather and invaders. I see the storm coming over now. Like the clouds, I can make it over the mountain, swim across the river. Nothing is divided anymore because I know how to make the border crossing. For first time, I look in mirror, seeing myself strong enough.

I walk from the camp down to the wall. It still big, black and powerful. I have pliers and the saw. Get down close to ground, take cutter and snip wire to make a hole. Then I see a shadow coming... It Stacey. She have those green coloured pants on. Boots. The army jacket. She ready to fight with me now. Chest and shoulders square. The high cut pants. Shirt tucking in. She got a tiny waist... That cap pulled down over her eyes. Very tough. I used to be frightened of her, but now I know we the same. Stacey stand next to me. The dog is back too. We together, resisting the power, we showing our strength; we showing aggression. Rexie, he look at me, tilting head like a friend. Then finding the hole in wall the dog squeezing through... he is gone to the other side. Stacey has that weapon. We get through this, I know it.

STACEY: I’m walking down to the wall. I sees Anna. She’s cuttin’ a hole. We both know what she’s gonna do. And then me dog, Rexie, he’s back. But it’s just to say goodbye one last time. He’s squeezin’ through the hole Anna made... Now I got me weapon set up like an urban assault rocket launcher. We’re confronting the fear, and I reckon, if we both are resisting it’ll make a mark. Even if we get taken, after we go, the others will see there’s a way to cross over the border.
Notes

1 The Australian Women’s Land Army was operational in Australia from 1942 to 1945. The aim of the AWLA was to replace the male farm workers who had either enlisted in the armed services.

Notes for Bordertown journal

1 Coincidentally, St. Frances Xavier of Cabrini (1815-1919) is patron saint of immigrants and impossible causes. She was the first United States citizen to be canonised.
3 Bruce Pennay, From Colonial to State Border: A Federation history of the social construction of the border between New South Wales and Victoria as a frontier, barrier and contact zone, Albury: Charles Sturt University, 2001, 24.
4 Border Post, 2 Jan 1867, in From Colonial to State Border, 24.
5 Pennay, From Colonial to State Border, 26.
8 Pennay, From Colonial to State Border, 5.
9 'Defending the nation' in Connecting two railway systems at Albury (a flyer), 2001.
10 See: www.subtopia.blogspot.com
For further discussion see Christopher Board, New Insights in Cartographic Communication, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1984.
12 'Farewell into arms', Peter Munro, The Sunday Age, 4 Nov 2007, 15.
14 Quotation of Ship Captain, Francis Cadell, 1858, who formed the River Murray Navigation Company, cited in From Colonial to State Border, 17.
15 Pennay, From Colonial to State Border, 15-16.
16 Pennay, From Colonial to State Border, 16.
19 Article 33 of the Refugee Convention prohibits States Parties from returning ('refouling') a refugee to the frontier of a country where his or her life or
freedom would be threatened (accessed 10/01/08)


24 Roberts, Australia’s Immigration Policy, 18.

25 Pennay, From Colonial to State Border, 69.

26 Pennay, From Colonial to State Border, 38.

27 Pennay, From Colonial to State Border, 49.

28 Pennay, From Colonial to State Border, 91.


33 Bruce Pennay, The Bonegilla Migrant Experience, date unknown.


37 Mbembe, op. cit., 12 & 39.

38 Pennay, The Bonegilla Migrant Experience.

39 Bruce Pennay, Calwell’s Beautiful Balts (a flyer) date unknown.

40 Pennay, Calwell’s Beautiful Balts.

41 Pennay, Calwell’s Beautiful Balts.


44 Roberts, Australia’s Immigration Policy, 52.

45 Roberts, Australia’s Immigration Policy, 50.

46 Citizen test puts ‘partial picture’, by Farah Farouque The Age News, Tuesday October 9, 2007, 3.

47 Becoming an Australian citizen, Commonwealth of Australia, 4.


51 Australian Broadcasting Commission, Lateline news 03/10/07


53 The Courier-Mail, 7.

54 Quotation from Pauline Hanson, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Classic Radio News, 6pm Friday 5th September 2007


60 Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, 54.
