



Discourse of Identity in

The World Waiting To Be Made ¹

Qiang Huang ²

Abstract: This paper addresses the nature of Australian and Asian identity through an examination of the novel, *The World Waiting to be Made*, by Simone Lazaroo, the story of a young woman born in Singapore of Malaccan heritage but growing up in Perth, Western Australia. Acutely aware of the Asianness which sets her apart from mainstream Australians, the unnamed narrator in this first person novel struggles to establish a sense of herself at different periods of time, demarcated in this paper as her childhood, her adolescence and her adulthood. The story in Lazaroo's first novel is of an outsider—a Eurasian young woman from a mixed Portuguese and Chinese background, born in Singapore but with ancestors in Malaysia, fighting to find a place where she can belong, with the narrator trying to change her appearance and behaviour at various stages of her life to conform to what she perceives as genuinely Australian. Having failed to establish her own identity in Australia, the narrator travels back to her father's family in Singapore and Malacca, where acceptance is no easier than in Australia, although for different reasons, until she meets her Uncle Linus in Malacca, highly respected in the family as a bomoh, or wise man with special powers.

Erik H. Erikson's psychological definition of "identity", together with traditional critical analysis of literary meaning, provides a theoretical framework to approach the issue of individual identity in relation to national culture in *The World Waiting to Be Made*. The analysis highlights the narrator's frustration and struggle against ethnic displacement and marginalization, which she chooses to fight against with different pseudo identities—an Australian self, and mysterious Asianness. Finally these false identities lead to the total loss of her self—until she meets her Malaccan Uncle and claims a new identity. *The World Waiting to Be Made*, as Kate Temby states, "provides a sensitive searching of questions of nationality, ethnicity and identity as it charts the multiple journeys of its nameless Eurasian narrator." (*Westerly* No.4, Summer, 1994, p.148.)

¹ Simone Lazaroo, *The World Waiting to Be Made*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Perth, 1994. All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of the essay.

² Qiang Huang, PhD candidate of University of Western Australia. Associate professor in Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin, China.

1. Introduction

The World Waiting to Be Made, as Kate Temby states, “provides a sensitive searching of questions of nationality, ethnicity and identity as it charts the multiple journeys of its nameless Eurasian narrator.” (*Westerly* No.4, Summer, 1994 p.148)

This paper addresses the different “identities” that the protagonist establishes at different periods of time, namely, in her childhood, her adolescence and her adulthood. Erik H. Erikson’s psychological definition of “identity”, together with traditional critical analysis of literary meaning, provides a theoretical framework to approach different identities of the protagonist in *The World Waiting to Be Made*. The analysis highlights the protagonist’s frustration and struggle against ethnic displacement and marginalization, which she chooses to fight against with different pseudo-identities –an Australian self, and mysterious Asianness. Finally these false identities lead to the total loss of her self, until she meets Uncle Linus and claims a new, genuine identity.

As far as “identity” is concerned, there are many different definitions. Some analysts define it as “presence”, or “the condition of being oneself”, while Freud defined it as “ego”³. Some use “identity” to refer to the culture of people; others use it to indicate common identification with a collectivity or social category. Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke suggest that the term “identity” is used with reference to parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies. (Stryker, 2000) That is to say, “identity” is, in a sense, a self. Different parts of the self give meaning to the roles one plays in the society. At the same time, societal factors affect self and self, in turn, affects social behaviour. Similarly, the construction of a self depends on many factors, of which societal influence, interactions, and relationships are of prime importance. Different selves can be constructed in different situations and across different time. “Identities sought confirmation by finding or creating situations in which they could be expressed. Self is understood as partially a structure of multiple identities.” (Stryker, 2000)

As Erikson observes, the usage of the term “identity” “has become so varied and its conceptual content so expanded that the time may seem to have come for a better and final delimitation of what identity is and what it is not.” (Erikson, 1968) Erikson, built firmly on Freud’s work, yet further modifies and extends it. He asserts that “identity” is “as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive”, and that it “deals with a process that is located both in the core of the individual and in the core of the communal culture.” (Erikson, 1968) He emphasizes personal continuity in the continuing synthesis of the ego, and that the sense of identity is the feeling of being “all right”, of being a worthy person (Erikson, 1950). In this sense, different stages in this “process”/ “continuity” may form different identities, which are subject to one’s “mental functioning”, the way s/he is judged, and changing environment and surroundings. Also, the “synthesis of the ego” that is formed at one stage may influence the formation of it at the next stage.

Identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. (Erikson, 1968)

The notion of identity, one’s idea of who one is, how one defines oneself, as J.E. Marcia, A.S. Waterman, D.R. Matteson, and S.L. Archer note, has been a

³ Peter Gay. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1989

dominant theme in literature and the social sciences (Marcia et al, 1993). This is especially true for the works of diasporic Asian-Australian writers working through the impact of the White Australian Policy. The “White Australian Policy” is a term used to describe a collection of racist Australian policies that restricted non-white immigration. The key legislative enactment of it was the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901, which ensured discrimination against non-white immigrants, especially immigrants from Asian countries. It was born out of British nationalism and beliefs in eugenics, and later fuelled by anti-Chinese racism during the gold rushes of the 1850’s and labour union protests of the 1880’s. As Alison Broinowski writes in *The Yellow Lady*,

Fear, ignorance, and bigotry fomented hostility and drove the colonial governments to abandon their liberal schemes and adopt a succession of discriminatory exclusion measures against Asians, which the federal Parliament in 1901 endorsed among its first Acts. (Broinowski, 1996: 4)

Although there had been Asian students in Australia since 1904, and their numbers had grown rapidly under the post-war Colombo Plan, until the 1980s Australian-born writers of Asian background were still a rarity (Broinowski, 1996).

The publication of Mena Abdullah’s *The Time of the Peacock* (1955) marks the beginning of an increasing number of texts, which tell of the Asian migrant experience in Australia. Such literary texts include Brian Castro’s *After China*, Alex Miller’s *The Ancestor Game*, Beth Yahp’s *The Crocodile Fury*, and Simone Lazaroo’s *The Australian Fiancé*. Most of the novels express a sense of not belonging, and/or a lack of identity.

In novels that followed his *Birds of Passage–Pomeroy* (1990) and *After China* (1992)–he (Brian Castro) continued to record what he saw through the fictional telescope of his mixed heredity: ‘I want to be someone else somewhere else in order to see myself.’ It was the revival of the immigration debate in Australia that caused him for the first time to sense a ‘kind of schism’ between himself and other Australians, to feel that ‘people are looking at you in a different way, and that you don’t really *belong*’. (Broinowski: 229)

The sense of not belonging is equally felt by the protagonist in *The World Waiting to Be Made*. In order to ‘belong’ somewhere, she tries different disguises, and tries to claim different identities in her coming of age.

2. An Australian Self

An Australian self is what the protagonist attempts to establish in Australia, since on the day of her arrival, her Asian identity is denied. The novel begins with the family’s last day in Singapore. The narrator, a young girl, experiences her last touch of her own culture–visiting “Tiger Balm Gardens”, attending family “communion” and receiving the unique “chium”. (11-21) Then she leaves Singapore with her family, for the world waiting to be made–Australia, a land full of “anticipation and optimism” to her father, “a land of opportunity and wide open spaces.” (12, 16) When they arrive, the little girl faces a series of prejudices and discriminations against Asian people. First of all, the “dead-fish-eyed” customs officer openly shows his disdain, and his remarks of “Looks like we might be having curry for dinner, Jim”, and Jim’s “Sure as hell’s not yellow enough for chop suey” is a way of attributing certain characteristics to Asian people, a clear demonstration of anti-Asian prejudice. He then “picked up the spices [...] and dropped them, one by one, into the bin behind him”. (25) Miriam Lo, in her

“Shopping and Cooking for the Hybrid in *The World Waiting to Be Made*”, interprets this action as dismissive of Asian identity:

So with one swift series of gestures, non-Anglo ethnicity in Australia is associated with undesirable trash. The “Southeast Asian Eurasian” “part” of the narrator’s identity is defined negatively, as something unwanted, something to be ashamed of and punished for. (Haskell, 2000)

The words “on a bush shelter across the road from our house”–“ASIANS GO HOME”– intensify her sense of her own Asianness and her family’s outsider status in Australia. The narrator also finds it difficult to fit in at school because she is Eurasian. Their ethnicity and difference cause her and her siblings “continued bleeding from undiluted manifestations of the White Australian Policy”, both physically and at heart. As Carole Tan observes, “For many, it was in the classroom and the school playground that difference was first realised, due to the practices and actions of white Australian teachers and peers.” (Murphy, 2003) Under such circumstances, the protagonist is filled with feelings of not belonging, confusion, and insecurity. The sensitive and helpless protagonist tries every means to denounce her Asianness, and to become an Australian, actions which she believes can drive away the insecurity and all the prejudice. Dorothy Wang observes, “Her act of gauging ‘Australianness’ is based on the acquisition of American dolls, whose models include ‘California Ken’ and ‘English Gentlemen Ken.’” (Gilbert, 2000) The present writer would argue that it is through “Sue”, a typical Australian girl, that the protagonist gradually acquires some Australianness. Also, the Australian “pickings” she adds to her Singaporean souvenirs demonstrate the gradual acquisition of what she believes to be Australianness.

At the same time, she begins to refuse “curry” (28-9)—an open way of refusing something she has been having ever since she was born, and something she believes labels her Asianness, and above all, the symbol of her own culture. She imitates the Australian accent, and hides away everything that would remind others of her Asianness.

Her feeling of insecurity and not belonging is intensified by the unhappy relationship between her father and her mother. She feels haunted by the “Devil Genius Demons”, and the arguments of her parents make the ground around her shake. (26) She then turns to something Asian, which can offer her a kind of security. The “*!Good Morning! Towel*” seems to become the only thing that can give her some strength to fight against her fragility and fright. Her fright and desperateness are vividly presented to the reader through the description of her mother’s escape on the night of the Meckering Earthquake. (33-5)

The father in this narrative is a paradoxical and ridiculous character in a sense. He is even more eager to be an Australian than his daughter, by trying to do away with everything that would remind him of his Asianness. He tends to abandon all the traditional Eurasian ways and adopt the Australian ones. But at the same time, he requests his daughters to observe the traditional Eurasian mores of keeping virginally intact, and avoid becoming “itchified” (81-2). So while claiming a new Australian self, he retards the protagonist’s building a self in Australia. A father’s place in the family is crucial. In one’s childhood, a father usually forms a “guiding image” in the formation of one’s identity (Erikson, 1950). However, the father in *The World Waiting to Be Made* is not a good “guiding image”, because of his uncertain and paradoxical behaviour.

The war experience of the father, as Simone Lazaroo declares in the interview with the writer (Fremantle, Western Australia, 8 Sep. 2006), does exert a great influence on the formation of his character, which helps to explain why the

father in the narrative believes that there should be “a face to wear”. (36-37) To understand the father’s behaviour, it is necessary to associate the “survival stories” told by the father with the historical facts, thus to uncover what happened to the Eurasians during World War II in Singapore and Malacca.

As Eunice Thio records, (Chew, 1991) The island was no longer Singapore but Syonan (or Shonan–Light of the South). The year 1942 became 2602, according to the victor’s calendar, and clocks were moved forward one and a half hours to follow Tokyo time. Japanese policy institutionalized ethnic distinctions and ossified communal differences. “The Eurasians with direct antecedents were interned” (Chew, 1991), and some left Syonan for Bahau, where they faced a harsh environment and a hard life.

The father’s knowledge of the necessity of wearing a mask comes from the hole in his earlobe, which is used to cheat the hantus. During the war, the father lived with his family in Bahau, “a jungle camp for the Aliens” (60). Because of the harsh conditions there, the father’s brothers fell ill one after another, which had the locals believing “the devil put fits and fevers into them” (37). Grandmother, terrified by the possibility of losing another son, “pierced” the father’s ear lobe. Thus the father is viewed as a girl, since only girls have their ears pierced and wear earrings; it is a mask he wears in order to survive (63).

As recorded in *A History of Singapore*, food was always scarce during the war. “Catholic nuns together with the orphans in their care were reduced to eating a stew made from snails and grass.” (Chew, 1991: 108) No wonder that the “ant boy” was so thin and died of hunger.

The Indian boy’s wounding happened in a bombing attack launched by “a cluster of Japanese aeroplanes” (71). To protect themselves from the bombing, the father’s family went to hide in a drain, where six other families were hiding. When a boy from one of the Indian families stood up to peer over the edge of the drain, the Japanese bomber fired at him, and claimed his life, with half of his face blasted off. This incident warns the father that “when strange things happen, don’t look, don’t ask” (71), which is also the rule that he requires his daughters to follow when he leaves home and later divorces his wife. Simone Lazaroo is highly condemning of the Japanese atrocities in the description of the history-related “survival stories”. The “Evil Genius Demons” she describes are actually the Japanese invaders, who brought the people in South-east Asian countries a terrible nightmare, a great disaster. The father’s “wearing masks” theory greatly hinders the narrator’s adaptability in Australia, and brings her more trouble and frustration for not being able to feel placed in Australian society, and for not being able to find her own identity.

The war experience teaches the father that he needs to wear masks and be adaptable to strange new things. His readiness to take on Australianness is a demonstration of this adaptability learned during World War II, and a strong belief in the myth of equal opportunities in the ‘world waiting to be made’—a presupposition that the “immigrant becomes ‘Australian’ by sheer hard work and a pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps mentality.” (Gilbert, 2000: 45)

Before the day of their departure from Singapore, he takes his children to Tiger Balm Garden. Once they are there, he is eager to familiarise his children with animals that are typically Australian, and “he could barely contain his sense of anticipation of optimism.” (12) His eagerness to establish himself in Australia is clearly shown in this sentence. However, he is fully aware of the obstacles in achieving that. One key obstacle is his tradition and the other is his wife. Therefore, he becomes keen to discard them. As his daughter notes, before their departure from Singapore “my father [was] trying to shed it [Singaporean Eurasian culture],

as if it embarrassed him” (22) He also regards his own father’s handwriting script as “unscientific categorization! Unmodern! Useless!” (15).

His later divorce from his wife, who is a constant reminder of his past and of his alienness, is a demonstration of his readiness to tear away from his past and assimilate into Australian society. He believes his wife is “impractical”, and always “loads them down” (13). The papier-mâché figure in the Tiger Balm Gardens (12-13), which intends to kill its wife as a cure for the pain (13), also foreshadows his getting rid of his wife. The father’s frenzy in planning to live in a real Australian house further demonstrates his desire to merge into the Australian society, to “prove that he was not an Alien in this new country” (63). For him, an Australian house could make him feel being at home, and feel located inside rather than outside Australia. Simone Lazaroo is highly ironical when she writes, “So, will this house make us real Australians?’ my twin sister asked cynically.” (66) The father’s restlessness in searching for an Australian house continues until he finds the right one for him:

True Blue Romeo, where are thou? Open plan living for *Australians* who love living in the land of wide open spaces. Feature walls, balcony, bar, minstrels’ gallery. Sliding doors, patio, pergola. Sumptuous drapes. For true blue Aussies with a taste for international sophistication, this one includes at no extra cost a bidet. (65-6)

By being greatly fascinated and attracted by this advertisement, the father reveals his inner desire to become a real Australian who can appreciate the complexity of the world, and also his belief that he has come up high enough in this world to be accepted as an Australian.

As proved by experiments, “father variables seem especially important in identity formation for both males and females” (Marcia et al, 1993). This father’s openness in pursuing Australian ways, together with his requests of his daughters’ abiding by the traditional Eurasian mores, intensifies the protagonist’s identity crisis. His “wearing masks” theory, at the same time, leads the protagonist into buying different disguises.

Whole wardrobes of faces to wear were what I thought I needed for such sliding around as I was doing; between Eurasianness and Australianness, good daughterliness and bad daughterliness (116).

This echoes her father’s words “Everyone needs a face to wear. To protect yourself, you must sometimes let the world think that you’re not who you are. Particularly I think you need this in Australia (37).” It also illustrates her frustration in struggling between her Eurasianness and Australianness, because she is fully aware of the fact that “what I needed was something that would bring me back to myself” (116). Wearing a face/mask is merely a disguise, whatever your face may appear to be.

The subtitle “Born Again” in Chapter Six is highly ironical. The protagonist believes that she will be born again and show others she knows well “how to be an Australian” as she enters high school and leaves everything Asian behind. She exaggerates the coolness of the Australian teenagers there. Although her “Asian disease”—her appendix—is cut out (110), to the protagonist a demonstration of having gotten rid of her undesirable Asianness, she is still constantly recognised as being Asian. For example, the “relief teacher” picks her out immediately as different; the shop assistant “hissed, ‘they might bargain where you come from, but not in this country’” (114-115); and Sue recommends Asian clothing styles to her.

Sue paused at a rack of Indian kurtas and batik camisole tops in K Mart. ‘You’d look good in one of these,’ she opined as she smoothed out the lace insert in the back of a camisole top, ‘why don’t you try one on?’ (114)

Embroidery and “batik” are considered to originate from Asian countries and are thus used to represent the Asianness in the narrator. Her inner struggle, and frustration caused by her craving Australianness and being constantly refused it through all the years of her childhood and adolescence, is well mirrored in the conflict between the narrator and her twin sister, who appears to be “a good Eurasian girl” by all standards (107-110).

3. “No Name of No-Man’s-Land”

Adolescence is the continuity of one’s childhood. It is the “last stage of childhood”, as Erik Erikson notes. It can never be made complete without a clear and complete childhood identification.

Adolescence is the last stage of childhood. The adolescent process, however, is conclusively complete only when the individual has subordinated his childhood identification to a new kind of identification, achieved in absorbing sociability and in competitive apprenticeship with and among his age mates. (Erikson, 1968)

The protagonist’s identity is destined to be incomplete, if not totally lost, in her adolescence, owing to the frequent refusal and denial of her identity in her childhood. As Tseen-Ling Khoo notes:

Lazaroo refuses to name the narrator of *The World Waiting to Be Made*, and when the depth of racist feeling to which this character is subjected constantly in her teenage years is considered, the not-naming strategy allows her to function as an allegorical figure, an unplaceable coloured person in a land where white is right. In the conservative suburbs where the narrator grows up and goes to school, her foreign looks, which are not immediately identifiable as Asian but only as not-Australian, allowed others’ assumptions and presumptions to be framed around her. (Tseen-Ling Khoo, “Someone’s Private Zoo: Asian Australian Women’s Writing”, Paper presented at the 18th Annual Association for the Study of Australian Literature Conference held in Brisbane, Queensland, 6-11 July 1996)

These “assumptions and presumptions” further prove the narrator’s being “allegorical”. That is, she can be taken for an Arabian, a Mauritian, a native of South-East Asia, “I was any wog people wanted me to be” (81). At the same time, being “allegorical” can also mean that the protagonist’s experience of being displaced and discriminated can be shared by any Asian or European migrants, be they Arabian, Mauritian, or South-East Asian.

The break-up of her parents’ marriage, together with her uncertain Asianness, intensify her identity crisis, as does her dealing with sexuality, which can be illustrated by the encounter with her boyfriend Max Swift and her “premarital sex” with him (170).

The youth who is not sure of his identity shies away from interpersonal intimacy or throws himself into acts which are “promiscuous” without true fusion or real self-abandon. (Erikson, 1968)

Her “premarital sex” with Max, in this sense, is an outlet for her long felt and suppressed frustration, rather than “fusion” or “real-abandon”, as Erikson notes.

The belong-nowhere “souvenir collection” is brought to sight again by the author, which is highly symbolic in that it reveals exactly the protagonist’s position. The constant shifts between her Australianness and Asianness leave her belonging nowhere. Her Australianness is denied by people around her, and her Asianness is denied by herself and her father. This double exclusion is clearly illustrated by the description of Eddie.

Eddie is a Chinese boy the narrator meets in high school. Although Tseen-Ling Khoo observes that “the narrator’s behaviour towards Eddie, [...] embodies her feelings towards herself at different times in her life” (Tseen-Ling Khoo, 1996), the present writer would rather argue that Eddie actually sets an example of failure, an example that would warn the narrator away from becoming Australianised.

Eddie is totally Westernised. He may have experienced what the narrator experiences when he first arrives at the new country. Both his academic brilliance and his talking with an Australian accent prove that he, under the similar circumstances, has been trying to prove himself and to imitate the Australian way. The fact that both of his parents died indicates that he may have taken Australia as his own home, and that he may also have taken himself as an Australian, since he belongs nowhere else. He is homosexual and dies of AIDS—“the supposedly ultimate ‘corruption’ from the west” (Tseen-Ling Khoo, 1996). Yet he is still labelled as a Chinese, and is never accepted as an Australian, because in the eyes of the Australians, he simply mimics them, and no matter how perfect the imitation is, he is still an ethnic. As Bhabha’s understanding of Lacan’s ideas indicates:

As Lacan reminds us, mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically. (Bhabha, 1994)

At the same time, Eddie is excluded from the Chinese community, because in their eyes, he is too Westernised to be one of them. In the process of his imitation, he, they believe, actually brings them a very bad reputation. The reaction of the Chinese restaurant owner clearly shows Eddie’s exclusion from his Chinese-Australian host community. When they see him, “The faces of the boss and his wife betrayed some interest in him, but closed up again when they heard his accent.” “He’s a smart-alec with a Chinese face trying to be Aussie. He gives us a bad name.” (100-1) They expect this Chinese-looking boy to speak Chinese or awkward English.

Eddie’s example is a lesson, a warning to the narrator. If she wants to claim a new self in Australia, she has to, as “Uncle Linus” tells her, accept pleasantly what she is, and at the same time, become absorbed into different cultures, as “Infinitely Great Grandmother” has done. (See 3.3)

When she goes to teach in a remote place in the north of Western Australia, she witnesses the dispossession and alienation of Aboriginal culture, which resonates with her own displacement. The description of the landscape presents a site of cultural separation between White Australia and the Aboriginal community.

There was no mistaking this settlement for the Aboriginal settlement fifteen kilometres away. [...] They [the lawns surrounding the teachers’ houses] were largely uninterrupted by shrubs or trees, and ended abruptly at the front gate of each yard, as if they were the beginning and end of each resident’s responsibility to upholding civilisation against the wild yonder. [...] The houses were all wide-fronted fibro and cyclone mesh flywire screens, uniformly pale grey. [...] Beyond the fence a short walk away I could see the Aboriginal settlement, fenceless yards of each around doorless houses, old iron bed frames subsiding under trees. (177-8)

The author is highly critical of the White Australians’ belief that the Aborigines are primitive people—people of “the wild yonder”. The Aborigines are still outsiders, the “Others” in the eyes of the white/mainstream Australians, even though Aborigines provide the very beginning of Australian culture. “European culture arrived in Australia with a gun and a whistle. Three days after the First Fleet sailed

into Botany Bay, Captain Watkin Tench of the Marines went ashore with a party which encountered some Aborigines..." (Hergenhahn, 1988)

Besides the description of the landscape, the staff's behaviour manifests their rooted belief in keeping far away from the primitive Aborigines. The headmaster, first of all, warns them not to mix with the Aboriginal community. The teaching staff's frenzied way of keeping clothes white also reflects their fear of "going native" in the far outback and their prejudice against the "dirty", "uncivilised" Aboriginal people.

As our clothes grew gradually less white, I noticed Debbie began going at her share of the house cleaning and her own car-cleaning in a more and more frenzied way. [...] Not only did all the women teachers seem to become more ritualistic with their cleaning, they became more public about it. [...] And the lawn-mowers rattled and blared, driven across even the stony patches by the men every fortnight precisely (182-3).

The protagonist's loss of identity and her displacement are fully demonstrated by the death of the Aboriginal baby who is named after her, and the gaze of her white peers upon her departure. Her decision of going up north to teach is made in an attempt to feel accommodated in a remote place, far from monolithic white culture. But the death of the baby is symbolic. It shows that there is no place for her, even in the outback. Her loss of name, presumably because her name would remind the Aborigines of the dead baby, indicates her loss of identity. She thus concludes, "That sums me up. No name of no-man's land." (202)

When the protagonist is leaving the settlement, she is confronted with the marginalising gaze of white Australia.

One of my last memories of Debbie and the other teachers as a group: They were sitting on the verandah of the house opposite in their short shorts, legs splayed, polystyrene stubby holders in perpetual transit somewhere between their burnt mouths and their wide chests, staring at me. They stared at me as if they were quite dazed. (202-3)

This gaze, as the protagonist concludes, "made me a stranger". As Kate Temby observes:

The description of this gaze, however, works as much of the novel does, in exposing and then critiquing the attitudes of an Australia that believes itself homogenous, impervious and secure; making conspicuous its active marginalisation and oppression of those who are different. (*Westerly* No.4, Summer, 1994. p.149)

Although this discrimination is not as open as that of the boy who hits her sister in the playground, the discrimination is still there, marginalising, isolating everyone ethnic. At this stage, the protagonist is nothing but a "No name of no-man's land"-feeling the total loss of her identity.

4. Her True/New Self

Having failed to establish her own identity in Australia, the narrator decides to go back to Singapore and then Malacca, which is where her family came from originally, in search of her beginning.

The beginning/origin of the Eurasian is presented in this narrative by way of "Infinitely Great Grandmother's story". "Infinitely Great Grandmother's stories not only present the origin of the Eurasian, but also foreshadow what the narrator and her family and those like them are going to experience in Australia—an alien land. At the same time, the "floating stories" illustrate the close tie between the Eurasians' origin and their recipes. If one refuses the peculiar spices, peculiar

smells, then he or she is losing him/herself. “Infinitely Great Grandmother” found herself in the recipe she made by bridging two different cultures while the narrator’s refusal to eat curry demonstrates that she is losing herself gradually.

As Burton Raffel writes in his *The Writer’s Sense of the Past: The American Experience*, a person would get a better understanding of his present if he has a “vivid, living understanding of the past”:

T. S. Eliot wrote in his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* that the “historical sense [...] makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity”. Just as it is difficult and perhaps impossible to know one’s own country without learning other countries, so it is difficult and perhaps impossible to know the present without exactly the kind of vivid, living understanding of the past that writers provide. (Singh, 1987: 9)

This narrative describes vividly the origin of Eurasian culture in the “floating stories” told by the “mother”. Eliot believes that “historical sense” sharpens the author’s consciousness of his/her place in the contemporary world, and the present author would argue that historical facts offer a sense of belonging. Therefore, it is helpful to learn a little of the historical background in order to understand the protagonist and the narrative better.

According to Robert Tan Sin Nyen (Nyen, 1990), the first Portuguese to land in Malacca in 1509 was Admiral Dom Diego Lopez de Sequerah. He came with the intention of establishing trade relations, but the local traders did not welcome competition. Admiral Dom Diego Lopez de Sequerah’s expedition was, therefore, a total failure: his ships were attacked, and his entourage captured. Nonetheless, Admiral Dom Diego Lopez de Sequerah managed to escape from Malacca and returned to Goa, India, where he reported his experiences to the Portuguese authorities. This resulted in the Portuguese conquering Malacca on 25th July 1511 under the command of Admiral Alfonso d’Albuquerque. After the Portuguese became the masters of Malacca, many Portuguese priests and sailors arrived on the merchant ships. Thus the Portuguese not only enjoyed the control of the spice trade in Malacca, but they also brought Roman Catholicism, to this region.

Compared with the Portuguese invaders, “Infinitely Great Grandmother”, in the “floating stories”, made a more mysterious debut in Malacca. “When Infinitely Great Grandmother was young, she appeared as if from nowhere in the marketplace in the middle of Malacca”.

It is interesting to note that the experiences of “Infinitely Great Grandmother” overlap the narrator’s. The author here, in a sense, is critical of the Australians for being as ignorant as the Malaccans who discriminated outsiders hundreds of years ago.

Like the narrator’s attempt in Australia, “Infinitely Great Grandmother” was also “desperate to be accepted by the community”. “Infinitely Great Grandmother” experienced discrimination from the local Malaccans, and she felt threat loomed around, so she tried to find good omens to encourage her (42). The narrator, similarly, suffers from being different in Australia, and she frequents the beach where she looks “for rituals and familiar signs to comfort me in my solitude.” (121)

But unlike the narrator, “Infinitely Great Grandmother” knew well how to adapt to the local cultures, learned to gather strength for survival from good omens, and most important of all, learned to combine two completely different cultures. It is this strength and the ability to absorb two cultures that helped her to survive, and to find her place. “She had learned to take a little from the kitchens of two different cultures to make something new”, something that “combined well” (48). While “Infinitely Great Grandmother” was accepted by the native Malaccans through combining two completely different recipes, two different cultures, the narrator could also be able to find her own place in Australia by

reconstructing her hybridity, something she finally achieves with the help of “Uncle Linus”.

The story of Eurasian origin indicates that a Eurasian has to be strong both in body and in mind, and to know their place in order to survive in harsh conditions. As Middle Aunty puts it, “Eurasian women have always had to be tough.” (216)

This strength and knowing her place that “Infinitely Great Grandmother” demonstrated set an example for all her descendants.

Although her birth, her disguise and her marriage had each been conducted under different flags, miles away from each other, which caused her great turmoil, she never lost her place in the world because she never stopped making everything around her, even new things in strange lands, into a sign that gave her strength (46).

The same strength and knowing her place can also be found in Eneah. The incident of Eneah’s visit, though brief, offers more than the words can show. First of all, it elaborates the narrator’s inner struggle and the embarrassing awareness of being alien in her childhood (see 4.2). Secondly, Eneah intends to tell the children that they need to acquire such strength and know their place in a foreign country, which is illustrated by her telling the children how to manage fear.

Eneah, with the strength to survive in harsh environment and the determination to find her place anywhere, is confident and strong enough to manage any fear she encounters. By showing the children the “limp crushed feather” (90) she grabbed on her second ride on the ghost train, she is actually telling the children not to be afraid of the seemingly frightening things in this new country. Although the protagonist gains a sense of confidence from her at that time, she is obviously not strong or confident enough to face bravely everything she encounters in the world waiting to be made.

Miriam Lo in her “Shopping and Cooking for the Hybrid in *The World Waiting to Be Made*” observes that Infinitely Great Grandmother’s mythic act of cooking also provides a useful model for a non-racist hybridity. (Lo, 2000) In order to invent a new cuisine, a new culture, Infinitely Great Grandmother revalues each set of ingredients as equal but different. Although those ingredients from different cultures seem to be unrelated, they can be combined well.

The hybrid food that she produces is clearly a derivative of two different cultures—one can see how she mixes the parts—but it is simultaneously something altogether new, something that is more than just the sum of its parts. (Lo, 2000)

“Infinitely Great Grandmother” is great in the sense that she not only invented a new “gene pool”, she also invented a new culture—a culture that has no traditions. She is also great in that she set a role model for all her descendants who might suffer from racial discrimination, and who might lose themselves and find no place in the world, since Eurasian culture is a culture of survival, a culture in-between.

Even if “Infinitely Great Grandmother’s stories” fill her with pride and dignity, the protagonist is still too young to understand what to derive from them when the stories are told in her childhood. As she travels back to Malacca, what the stories intend to tell gradually become clear to her. She seems to understand that Eurasian women are born to be tough.

The protagonist’s real turning point occurs when she goes back to Malacca and meets Uncle Linus, who has a reputation for magical powers. Uncle Linus’ story in *The World Waiting to Be Made* is derived from the stories of Patrick Nonis—Simone Lazaroo’s father’s relative. He was a very interesting character

throughout all the author's childhood stories, and she has visited him a couple of times in Malacca (interview with the writer, Fremantle, Western Australia, 8 Sep. 2006).

Patrick Nonis, who is called "Uncle Bad" in the family, was actually her father's cousin. Since he was nearly twenty years older than her father, her father called him "Uncle" rather than "Cousin". As described in the narrative of Uncle Linus, Patrick Nonis was a very wise and compassionate man. He married a beautiful Chinese woman who unfortunately died at around thirty. He didn't marry again, and had three children to raise. He apparently became very interested in various forms of old religion, which Simone Lazaroo names only as "a particular form of religion"—the power, with which he visited his relatives in spiritual form.

From the description in the narrative, it is easy to learn that Uncle Linus is both respected and somewhat feared in the family, since everyone in the family believes that "he knew who'd been naughty and who'd been nice. [...] he could at will see and hear what people were doing; even those like us who lived in another country." (123) His special power is called "oracao" (223) by those who respect him, but "black art" by Oldest Aunty who obviously is afraid of him (229).

It is not important whether Uncle Linus has such supernatural power or not; what really counts in the narrative is that he makes the narrator understand the simplicity of life and that what she has been searching for—her identity—is actually what she already has. Their encounter also revives her pride in being an Eurasian (263).

The simplicity of life is fully demonstrated by his house, the meal they have together, and the simple, "unembellished conversation" they have. "There was no other piece of furniture in the room. No pictures, no shelves or tables holding knick-knacks. No souvenirs." (252) "All the walls of his house were bare." "They served this lunch on thick white plates in a kitchen with nothing in it but a stove, a table, four chairs, a window the size of a tea-towel". (251) In this simplicity and bareness, everyone knows his/her place in the world.

This accords with the Chinese interpretation of simplicity. there is an old Chinese saying, "fan pu gui zhen" (return to one's original nature, recover one's original simplicity), which tells the universal truth that simplicity is the ultimate level of all worldly sophistication. That is the level which is devoid of all complexity in the world. Yet only the few who are morally clean and peaceful can attain it.

"The process of re-valuation that takes place during this meal has a power that belies its simplicity," and "Not only does the curry lose its pejorative association with despised ethnicity, but the ritual of the family meal is re-invested for the narrator with associations of confidence, security and love." (Lo, 2000)

I banked this meal, in my memory as much as in my stomach; as surety against appetites I had experienced in Australia that might take me from knowing who I am. (252)

It is true that "curry" in this meal does "lose its pejorative association with despised ethnicity", but "the surety", the security, the present writers believes, comes from the calmness Uncle Linus passes on to her, and from the effect the cool and unembellished house produces on her. This security is temporary. What really lasts comes later from what Uncle Linus tells her. The disjointed sentences of Uncle Linus' utterance, on the one hand, invite reflection and consideration; on the other hand, they reveal the protagonist's gradual acquisition of the essence of his words. "When ... you ... look carefully and ... sincerely, you ... will ... be surprised to find ... what you already have. Already ... have," (254) and "Don't be afraid of being yourself." (259) Only when one accepts whatever s/he is placidly,

can s/he feel security, come to self-knowledge and finally a sense of belonging. He is sure of his place in the world.

He teaches her the wisdom of accepting herself for who she is, and teaches her not to try to buy her identity through shopping, makeup or the acquisition of material objects.

When you make any sign *prayerfully, sincerely*, you free yourself of the limitations of your body. When you make that sign *sincerely*...you are holding onto a very strong rope...that can take you to the other shores. (257)

This “strong rope” is the strong belief in being happy with whatever s/he is and surety of his/her place, a belief that could help to survive all discriminations, alienations and marginalisations, and claim a clear identity. In him she finally meets someone of integrity and strength, and she comes back to Australia a renewed person who has “a home to live in wherever I am” (263).

5. Conclusion

The World Waiting to Be Made presents us with the process of the protagonist’s formation of her own identity. In the process, the protagonist experiences such pseudo -identities as an Australian, and mysterious Asian, which are a result of her own sensitivity, the negative influence of her father and the assumptions and presumptions of the others around her. At the same time, Simone Lazaroo criticises the monolithic Australian culture, which places ethnic people in an isolated and marginalised place.

Two lines intertwine perfectly in the narrative, with the dominant line describing the protagonist’s coming of age in Australia and in search of self-realisation, and the accompanying “floating stories” and “survival stories” illustrating the family’s origin and the historical background of the Eurasians.

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