

EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOLING OF STUDENTS WITH FORMER YUGOSLAV  
ETHNIC BACKGROUND IN A WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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(Tomaž Lašič)

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## Abstract

Ethnicity is an important social construct mobilised in the discourses of multicultural education. At present, little research exists on the way ethnicity impacts on the schooling experiences of students with former Yugoslav background (SFYB) in Australia.

This qualitative study looks at the daily realities of twelve SFYB at a Western Australian government secondary school. Particular attention is paid to the management of their ethnic identities to achieve their educational, social and other goals.

Data gathered from the twelve in-depth, guided interviews with SFYB is analysed through the lens of critical multiculturalism, posited as one of several notions of multiculturalism and one with a specific social justice agenda. Theories of hybridity developed by Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall are translated into the critical multiculturalist framework and provide a further development of the analysis of the data in which hybridity is seen as both experiences and enactments.

The study findings suggest that these SFYB embody the principles of critical multiculturalism as skilful managers of contingencies of ethnic identities, aspirations and challenges they encounter at the school. The study also proposes that the notion of critical, power-conscious hybridity could be useful as a conceptual tool in the future work of critical multiculturalists.

## Introduction

The claim that Australia is a 'nation of migrants' is widely accepted in Australian society. Over the past 50 years, degrees of acceptance of ethnic diversity in the contemporary Australian society have been enshrined through policies of integration, pluralism, and multiculturalism. These policies and the attitudes they have engendered have generally been accepted as "integral to Australian national culture and identity" (Stratton & Ang, 1994, p.2) and a key to social harmony. The 2001 Census statistics (ABS, 2001) confirm the large extent of ethnic diversity within Australian society. In 2001, approximately 23% of Australian population was born overseas while approximately 25% of persons born in Australia had at least one overseas-born parent. Western Australia had the highest proportion of overseas-born people (27%) and fourth largest proportion (11.8%) of people born in Non-English speaking countries (NESC) among Australian states and territories. Within this wide range of nationalities, people born in the territories of former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Former Yugoslavia including Montenegro and Serbia, and Slovenia) represented approximately 1% of population in Australia and approximately 0.9% population in Western Australia<sup>1</sup>.

### *Personal Background*

In 1992 I migrated to Australia from Slovenia, a recently independent country and a former republic of the Yugoslav federation. In 1991, Slovenia, together with Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and later Macedonia, split from a political union, which, in various forms, had lasted for over seventy years. However, the ethnic groups of Southern Slavs ('Yug(o)' can be translated as 'South(ern)') had shared the territories for centuries before that. Despite the religious, linguistic, cultural and other significant differences between the larger ethnic groups, the similarities and joint histories among them could warrant their identification as 'former Yugoslav' (FY) in this project.

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<sup>1</sup> Approximation of figures is due to the classification difficulties acknowledged by the ABS.

Although I have declared my ethnic background as Slovene on Census nights, I could equally identify as a 'former Yugoslav'. I grew up in Slovenia, worked for nearly a decade in Croatia, served my army service in Serbia, travelled extensively through the territories of former Yugoslavia, and even represented Yugoslavia (and later Slovenia) in international sport. I read and write fluent Slovene, Croatian and Serbian languages, and have a working knowledge of Macedonian. While I never directly participated in the military conflict, I experienced the war in Slovenia and Croatia first hand before migrating to Australia in 1992.

In Slovenia, and the larger former Yugoslavia, I was a member of a dominant and powerful ethnic group. As I arrived in Australia I was immediately positioned as a member of an ethnic minority within an outwardly 'multicultural' society, deeply rooted in the cultural values of the Anglo-Australian (AA) majority. Many of these values which guide the social, economic and political structure in Australia, were different to the ones I had experienced in FY. Ever since my arrival in Australia I have continued to better understand, negotiate and fit in the AA society to succeed.

My initial enthusiasm to 'act' more Australian and to integrate into the Australian society as quickly as possible has gradually given way to a more circumspect notion of Australian-ness. During my first few years of living in Australia, I was beginning to realise the impossibility of not only becoming Australian but the tenuous impossibility of Australian-ness itself. This was happening as I immersed myself further into the mainstream Australian society by improving my English language, getting a job, attending tertiary studies, building personal relationships in Australian communities, and even representing Australia at the highest level of international sport. As time went by, the sense of liminality between my past in Europe and my present in Australia kept growing. Sometimes this sentiment would grow into a rather nostalgic lament against 'rootlessness'. Increasingly, I see this in-betweenness as a useful advantage. I could easily and often step back and have and/or merge 'the best of both worlds'. As I reduced my immediate cultural contact with people and events in my country of birth, I could more easily step back and examine the cultural ways of the past I enacted in the

new settings. At the same time, my cultural background allowed me to step back and examine the Australian cultural norms, the unexamined 'common sense' of Australian-ness and its strengths and weaknesses. With every year spent living in Australia, I could feel becoming less Slovene yet more attuned to my Slovene-ness at different times and contexts (for example, visiting Slovenia or talking to my parents). At the same time, I could feel becoming more 'Australian' yet at the same time selectively choosing to downplay my Australian-ness. My duality, even multiplicity, of living Australian-ness and Slovene-ness or Yugoslav-ness, has been a hindrance in some cases when not being accepted as 'one of us'. However, it has also provided many opportunities to carve out a position in-between and beyond these two major cultural contexts in my life. I could begin to examine them critically and fuse the useful parts of both to advance my life chances.

I outline my brief personal background not because this thesis is an auto-ethnography but to show that I share a similar cultural background and sets of experiences with the students who are the focus of the project. These experiences have shaped my political and ideological positionality and informed the assumptions I bring to this project. As a teacher/researcher who has worked at the research site, I intend to build on the common cultural background and migrant experiences I share with 'students with former Yugoslav background' (SFYB) and my developing understanding of the issues affecting these students at the school. I do so with a sense of empathy of understanding of SFYB rather than sympathy of unreflectively siding with them. Rather than seeing my personal experience as a bias-generating hindrance, I see the background I bring to the study as a potential benefit in the collection of high quality, in-depth research data. My access to and interpretation of such data may indeed be an advantage in generating rich data and useful insights into the experiences of SFYB at the research site – "Lake College".

*Lake College*

Lake College is a middle size, metropolitan Western Australian government school, with a relatively high degree of multi-ethnic student population. At the time of collecting research data (2003), the students in the school mainstream came from 35 different countries. If the students in the Intensive English Centre (IEC) are added to these figures, Lake College caters for students with 44 different nationalities in the total population of 701 students. 25% of students in the school mainstream were born overseas, 21% of them come from Non-English Speaking Countries (NESC).

The 21 overseas-born students with former Yugoslav background (SFYB) represent 3% of the mainstream school population and are the largest NESB group of students at Lake College. They account for 12% of all overseas-born students and 14% of students from NESC. There are also 11 second generation students (born in Australia) with a FY background but they are not included in the target population of this study. All of the SFYB in the target population are IEC graduates<sup>2</sup>.

The IEC at the school is one of the three such centres in the Perth metropolitan area. Its aim is to develop the English language and learning skills of recently migrated students to the point where they can graduate from IEC and become a part of the mainstream student population. In 2002, the IEC had 58 migrant students from NESB backgrounds, including 3 SFYB. In 2002, IEC students were up to 15 years old and the majority of them study in IEC classes for 12 months. Students with limited or severely interrupted high school experience in their home country may remain in IEC for up to two years. Between 2000 and 2003, between 55% and 70% of IEC graduates became a part of mainstream classes at Lake College.

Due to its ethnically diverse student cohort, the school has been sensitive to the needs of NESB students. This has been particularly the case since the arrival of the current principal in 2002. The principal is a second generation Croatian-Australian and a well respected member of the local Croatian community. Regular English-as-Second-

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<sup>2</sup> All but two of the interviewed SFYB attended IEC (ILC before name change in 2004) at Lake College. The two students attended an IEC at a different school in Western Australia.



Language (ESL) classes, written and explicit school policies on valuing different ethnic backgrounds, additional counseling and psychological support for migrant children, and keen participation in Harmony Day activities are some of the ways by which the school demonstrates its goal to accommodate and support the needs of NESB students. Lake College strongly upholds a mainstream notion of multiculturalism, promoted through slogans such as 'living in harmony' and 'unity in diversity' in its events, publications and other public endeavours.

### *The Promise of Multiculturalism*

Despite the initiatives and general good will towards multiculturalism and with it acceptance of SFYB at Lake College, I felt uneasy about the ideas and actions of several staff members. These staff members believed that ensuring the migrant children have an acceptable proficiency in English is as far as catering for their special needs should go in order to level their chances of success with those of English-speaking, Anglo-Australian students (AS). While language provision is certainly very important, I felt that ignoring the difficulties and challenges in negotiating cultural differences and other important issues of migrant students could generate a false sense of equal opportunity for SFYB. A number of events at the school stirred further unease in me. Due to an atmosphere of anxiety about 'Yugoslav gangs' among some staff members and AS students, many SFYB, and indirectly myself, were explicitly or implicitly branded as 'prone to violent behaviour and outbursts'. Several times I heard one or more teachers labelling a group of SFYB walking from a bus stop as a 'gang' by a teacher, while a group of AS walked past unlabelled. I even heard a teacher yelling "This is Australia, you go and fight your wars somewhere else" at a SYFB after splitting a fight between the boy and his AS peer.

During my work at Lake College, teachers and school staff would regularly ask me to talk to or translate messages to SFYB parents and see if 'they would understand what the school is trying to tell them', and to 'keep an eye out' for SFYB's problems and possible aberrant behaviour. I helped resolve a number of incidents involving SFYB by

simply speaking their language, knowing the students', and their families', specific cultural contexts and being sensitive to them. In many cases, SFYB and their parents held low expectations, lack of faith and sometimes open distrust in the ability of AS students, teachers and/or school administration to listen to the voices and needs of SFYB. At the same time, many SFYB students seemed to lack a sense of agency within the school to do much or say anything about their concerns. However, when approached by a native speaker like myself, SFYB and their families were more willing to act to address their concerns individually and/or as a group.

While SFYB were experiencing, reacting to (often inappropriately), or ignoring stereotyping and prejudice aimed at them by individuals, I began to realise the more insidious challenges and barriers they faced. In SFYB's striving for inclusion and success, differences began to matter instead of one-size-fits-all solutions. A multiculturalism of 'celebration of difference' did not help if the difference meant being considered a 'gang' instead of a group (or be invisible at all). At the same time, multiculturalism of 'unity' did not help if unity was constructed mostly on the terms of Anglo-Australian (AA) culture which SFYB possibly may have (partially) rejected but possibly not understood enough or at all. Multiculturalism meant little when curriculum content had to be taught to 'get through the unit', regardless of sometimes baffled looks by SFYB, who would rarely ask for help in class. SFYB were affected more by the structural reasons of performing as 'proper students' rather than by personal prejudice against them.

At the same time, some SFYB I taught or otherwise engaged with at Lake College, displayed incredible ingenuity and initiative to succeed. These students were not helpless subjects but often very astute managers of their daily realities. Also, they were not always 'innocent' victims. Sometimes they would take advantage of their power niches when acting in groups, speaking different languages etc., even if at the expense of other students. My initial impulse to help SFYB at Lake College to 'raise their profile and voice' and provide them with their own cultural space gave way to the need to better understand them first. Before engaging towards any systemic changes

and initiatives, I sought to understand SFYB's aspirations, expectations and challenges they face, particularly as a result of their ethnicity,

Soon after trying to read and learn more about similar experiences of SFYB I noticed the paucity of literature dealing with the experiences of migrant SFYB in secondary schools in Australia and other countries. The apparent lack of research provided additional motivation to begin this project. Hence, the project is a formal continuation of my curiosity and ambition as a migrant and a teacher, to gain a more comprehensive and informed insight into the schooling experiences of SFYB. I am particularly interested in the ways in the ways SFYB at Lake College deploy, hide or otherwise manipulate their ethnic identity and with it a particular set of cultural practices to achieve educational success. While the dynamism of ethnicity and its effects provides the focus of my research, I wish to provide a more comprehensive, holistic view of SFYB's experiences of schooling at Lake College. A narrower focus on ethnicity could stifle the richness and nuance of data. It is from this holistic picture that the focal issue of the project will be elucidated.

The insights gained could open possibilities for more sensitive, inclusive, culturally and politically more meaningful schooling of SFYB. Exploration of the dynamic negotiation of ethnic identity by SFYB could offer valuable understandings of current policies of multiculturalism from a perspective of an ethnic and language minority in a government school. These understandings could also inform further studies in the field of multicultural education and its role in the examination and development of a wider, more inclusive Australian society in which differences from the Anglo-Australian norm can enhance, enrich and contribute to 'Australian-ness'.

### *Research Aims*

The main aim of this research is to investigate the dynamic experiences and deployment of ethnic identities by SFYB in order to achieve social, educational and material success. I attempt to do so through the exploration of experiences, concerns and expectations of SFYB in a mainstream Western Australian government school.

The research will examine the ways in which different cultural norms and expectations underpinning structural arrangements position SFYB at Lake College. The ways SFYB use and position themselves in relation to these forces as members of a particular ethnic group will be of parallel concern. While it is important to understand the ways in which ethnic identity is assigned to these students by themselves and members of the larger school community, my focus will be on the narrative experiences of a group of SFYB at Lake College. The research will also attempt to map and understand the challenges faced by SFYB and the support systems SFYB access to overcome these challenges.

A further aim of this research is to begin to understand some of the special needs of SFYB and how government schools may assist in meeting some of these needs beyond support in English proficiency. It may well be that these needs are generalisable to other NESB students and this may be a further contribution of this research.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The data that is generated by this research will be viewed through a particular theoretical and political lens. In this study, the lens is provided by the development of elements of a critical multiculturalism. More specifically, I translate the notion of hybridity from the field of cultural and postcolonial studies to sharpen this lens and connect the theory of hybridity to the larger framework of critical multiculturalism. This theoretical framework is developed in the next chapter but for the purpose of orientation I state its fundamental premises here. These premises will be elaborated further and supported by examples throughout the text.

Theories of critical multiculturalism of hybridity enlisted in this project draw strongly on the insights provided by the elements of postmodernist<sup>3</sup> theory. Postmodernist theory 'opens up' and questions systems such as education, which

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<sup>3</sup> In the next chapter I clarify the use of the term 'post' to incorporate postmodernist and poststructuralist theories and the common ground between them. Over the past three decades, the 'post' theories have been used extensively in emancipatory theories and projects such as feminism, critical multiculturalism and others.

orders people into certain roles as a result of an historical nexus of power and knowledge. This power/knowledge nexus is a part of cultural dynamics and material effects and experiences 'used' by various interests. I take the position that power is not a tool of repression 'used' by the dominant and hegemonic structures but it can be deployed for various purposes by people on the margins of the societal norm. Postmodernist theory steers away from unhelpful, rigid, and linear binaries based in the Enlightenment idea of progress from 'bad' to 'good' through 'rational' scientific pursuit of knowledge and certainty. At the same time, postmodernist illumination of the historical nexus of power and knowledge is not normative. It can create opportunities that provide spaces for the marginalised and less powerful to critique and challenge meta-narratives that speak of and for all members of a culture. Alternative, subordinated or even transgressive voices are encouraged as meta-narratives are challenged from within and without. While the postmodernist theory provides spaces and opportunities for these voices to be heard it does not stand 'for' any of them. Relativistic ambivalence and lack of normative stance of 'what ought to be' to guide, particularly collective, action is the most commonly criticised aspect of the 'post' theories. However, Lather (1990) posits that even the act of questioning discourses of power is in fact an act of resistance and as such cannot be accused of pointless relativism. In the next chapter, I discuss the ways in which the 'post' theory is both used and questioned by critical multiculturalists as a framework for questioning of discourses of power in the name of greater social justice and equality.

Critical multiculturalists analyse the ways in which social divisions of ethnicity, race, class, gender etc. give rise to structural inequalities. While the intersections of these divisions are ever present, this project focuses on ethnicity and the dual process of people (like SFYB) shaping and being shaped by their ethnic identity in their attempts to succeed. In this process, critical multiculturalists are concerned with improvement of 'life chances' rather than 'life choices' or 'life styles'. In this thesis, I draw on the work of contemporary critical multiculturalists from Australia (Bell, Castles, Cope, Jayasuriya, Kalantzis, Rizvi), United States (Aronowitz, Giroux, Kanpol,

Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg) and the UK (May, Gilroy). These authors<sup>4</sup> draw on elements of postmodernist theory to view ethnicity and culture as social constructs which may significantly affect people's 'life chances' and carry positive or negative, yet tangible, material effects.

The notion of hybridity adds a dimension to the experiences and enactment of ethnicity pointed out by critical multiculturalists. It posits that there are no pure ethnic identities. People of any ethnicity are constantly hybridised and at the same time continuously hybridise their ethnic identities. What varies between 'ethnic groups' and their members are two factors: the qualities of hybridity they experience and enact and the investments they need to make in order to gain (equality of) opportunities to succeed in their endeavours and reach their goals. Here hybridity is not considered as a mere site of cultural mixture. Instead, it is seen as experience and a tool to investigate how people hold different cultural positionings in tension and negotiation. The intensity and extent of experience and deployment of hybridity varies as a result of structural arrangements as well as personal positionings, whether they are conscious or not. For its potential to be assimilative or transgressive, empowering or threatening, I suggest that critical multiculturalism of hybridity is no panacea to achieve an inherently imaginary social harmony, yet offers a more nuanced, insightful view into people's daily realities than modernist binary categorisations and claims of universality.

### *Methodology*

#### *Background*

Qualitative research is not a clearly defined, monolithic form of inquiry. It connects a variety of methodological approaches under its research tradition by "asserting the critical importance of the social context in which events, actions, answers to questions, conversations and other forms of human (inter)action occur or fail to occur" (Neumann, 2003, p. 146). It "tells a story" (Patton 2002, p. 47) through the

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<sup>4</sup> While the extent these authors draw on as well as critique the postmodernist theory varies, they all acknowledge and mine its possibilities in their work.

researcher's personal interpretation of individuals or groups and their lives. This distinguishes it from the objectivist, experimental quantitative research, which seeks to condense the understanding of the world into measurable, context-free laws and principles.

This project is an ethnography of SFYB at the participating school. Ethnography is one of many different forms of qualitative research. The foundational question of ethnography is "what is the culture of this group of people?" (Patton, 2000, p. 81). Rooted in anthropology, it "aims to recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices and behaviours of a group of people" (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984, p. 2). The primary data collection strategy of an ethnography is participant observation in the field. Other strategies to study participants' experiences and world view can be used to complement the field observations. In-depth, individual guided interviews and participant observation were the main data collection processes used in this study.

#### *Guided interviews*

An ethnographic interview is a purposeful, interactional event through which aspects of social reality can emerge by understanding others' points of view, interpretations and meanings. Participants' perceptions of self, life and experience are expressed through conversation in his or her own words (Minichiello, 1995) and the dialogue allows the researcher and the participant to make meaning together.

In a guided or semi-structured interview the researcher/interviewer asks open-ended questions with topics specified and outlined in advance. The researcher decides the sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview (Patton, 2002, p. 349). This keeps the researcher and the participants focussed while allowing individual perspectives and experiences to emerge (Patton, 2002, p. 344). While a guided interview remains fairly conversational, it provides a more systematic and comprehensive data collection than an informal conversational interview. A guided individual interview allows the researcher to seek clarification, probe or prompt further

reflection and gives the participants a chance to elaborate and clarify responses, thus increasing the richness, comparability and meaningfulness of data.

In this particular project, guided interviews offered the possibility of reducing the potentially intimidating formality of an overly scripted interview to the participants (adolescent migrant students), who may not have otherwise volunteered sometimes very personal and sensitive information. At the same time, the key questions maintained the focus of the inquiry and minimised unnecessary digression into topics unrelated to the aims of the study. Varying levels of age, maturity, competency in either English or native Bosnian, Croatian or Serbian language, potential disclosure of sensitive personal information and possible pressure due to the different ethnic backgrounds within the sample group warranted the use of individual interviews ahead of perhaps more economical group data collection strategies such as focus groups. Individual interviews eliminated any undue pressure or influence from other members of the sample group and offered a potentially safer environment for the conduct of interviews.

Individual guided interviews may have also had some unintended limitations. During group interviews such as focus groups, participants could have new thoughts and ideas triggered by statements made by other participants in the group. There is also the potential in a group situation to increase participant comfort by being surrounded by peers. While the individual interviews offer an opportunity to gain deeper understanding of each individual, they rely solely on the level of trust and comfort between the researcher and the participant, and the skill of the researcher to probe and stimulate responses.

In comparison with group interviews, individual interviews may increase the chance of the participants feeling threatened by the authority of the researcher. Before the interviews I personally interacted with all but two of the interviewed SFYB through teaching in some of their classes, conversations in the school yard or intervening in incidents involving SFYB. Through these interactions I established, directly and



indirectly, a good rapport with these students. Despite the mutual familiarity and rapport, I held a form of authority as an adult and a teacher (formerly at the Lake College) and as such ran the risk of overly influencing participants' responses during the interviews. The risk became more obvious as several interviewed students expressed a strong sense of respect for authority<sup>5</sup> as a result of their upbringing. The consequences of the presented power imbalance could lead to a well known phenomenon in social research called the Hawthorne Effect, in which "the participants respond to the influence of the researcher and seek to give what they perceive as the correct answers" (Neumann, 2003, p. 256).

I attempted to dilute my influence in several ways. Before and during the interviews, I consistently reinforced the message that the interviews were not a test of SFYB's ability with right or wrong answers. At least two days before each interview, I personally checked with each student his or her preferred day and the time of the interview, reminded them they are in no way compelled to attend the interview and gave each student the list of the seven main questions we would discuss during the interview. This was done in order to (re)establish a non-threatening and personal contact with each participant and increase the chances of successful completion of interviews.

I advertised the interviews as an invitation to speak in confidence about SFYB's own experiences and stressed the open nature of the interview questions. Having ceased my work as a teacher at Lake College four months before the interviews, I pointed out to the participants that I am now, much like them, "just a student". The participants were also offered the choice to conduct the interviews in English or their native language or in the combination of the two. The aim of conducting interviews in native languages was not only to moderate the power imbalance between myself and the participants but to add integrity, enhance the richness of data and show to the participants their voice and their cultural background is valued. Four participants

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<sup>5</sup> I address this particularly salient issue elsewhere in this paper but it is necessary to note it here in the context of research methodology.

completed their entire interviews in either Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian language. The other eight participants used words or phrases in their native language to varying extents to enhance or enable their explanations and responses to the interview questions.

### *Sampling*

A sampling strategy where the researcher selects participants with a specific purpose in mind is known as purposive or judgmental sampling (Neumann, 2003; Patton, 2002). Using purposive sampling, “participants who could be particularly informative in illuminating questions under study are often chosen to participate in the research” (Neumann, 2003; p.213, Patton, 2002). The insights gathered by in-depth interviews with purposefully selected participants may assist in formalising hypotheses that may be tested by quantitative research methods and could be generalised to a broader population (Neumann, 2003). The primary aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of individuals through information-rich interviews and not so much to generalise to a larger population of students. Purposive sampling was an appropriate strategy in conducting field interviews with a specialised population like SFYB at Lake College.

Although the choice of purposive sampling warrants a caveat against the results representing the entire population (Neumann, 2003, p. 213), this sampling technique increased the range of responses and was more representative of the small population (n=32) of SFYB at Lake College than random sampling. At the same time, it provided the opportunity to gain insight into specific subgroups, the similarities and differences between them and possible reasons for these differences.

The study sample consisted of 7 male and 5 female students from the total population of 21 SFYB students at Lake College who had migrated to Australia between 1997 and 2003. In 2004, 32 SFYB<sup>6</sup> represented nearly 5% of all students at

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<sup>6</sup> The figure includes 21 overseas-born SFYB and 11 SFYB born in Australia (second generation).

Lake College. In 2004, SFYB were the largest NESB group at Lake College, at 19% of the total NESB student population in mainstream classes.

The entire population of SFYB at Lake College was split into three groups according to the school year they were in at the time (Year 10, Year 11 and Year 12). All students in the sample had spent between six and twelve of their first months at the school in the Intensive English Centre (IEC; referred to as 'ILC' by the participants), located on Lake College grounds. After graduation from the IEC, the sampled students completed a minimum of twelve months in the mainstream classes at Lake College. All of them had established contacts with other IEC and mainstream students (FY and non-FY background). Inclusion of Year 10 students enabled participation of students who may leave school after the compulsory completion of Year 10. Younger SFYB in Years 8 and 9 were either still attending IEC classes or had less than a semester of schooling in the mainstream classes. These students were not included in the study due to the short period of their experience in the mainstream classes.

Four students were selected from each of the three year groups. Two students in each year group were classified as 'low risk', and two students in each year group were classified as 'high risk'. Selection of students at the extremes ('high' or 'low') is a less contentious strategy than trying to organise students into more contentious and possibly unclear groups in the middle of the at-risk continuum.

Using Gordon and Yowell's (in Kronick, 1997, p.5) criteria for assessing risk level of high school students, the following factors served as a guide in allocating categories of students 'at risk': (a) personal characteristics, (b) conditions of life, (c) situational circumstances, and (d) interactions with each other and other mainstream students. In addition, I also considered students' level of academic achievement (e) in judging the 'at risk' level of students. Three Lake College staff members assisted me in the process of final allocation of students into the *high* and *low* 'at-risk' categories: the principal of Lake College, a second generation Croatian migrant who knows SFYB student population at Lake College very well, an IEC teacher, who had taught each participant in small IEC classes for a period of six to twelve months, and a mainstream

teacher, who has either taught or known the participants for at least one year and at the time held the position of a Year 10 coordinator at Lake College. It is important to note that assigning the students to groups was open to the subjectivities and conjecture of those involved. Still, the staff members helping with assigning students to these groups had a strong understanding of the students selected.

Students in the *low risk* group had three or more of the following features as identified and agreed upon by myself and the assisting Lake College staff members: (a) sound participation in the mainstream classes and school activities, (b) few behavioural problems at the school, (c) positive interaction with peers from various ethnic backgrounds, (d) consistent achievement or striving to do well academically, and (e) solid educational support by family members. Students in the *high risk* group had four or more of the following features: (a) difficulties in participation in classes and school activities, (b) poor English language skills, (c) history of behavioural problems at the school, (d) less willing and/or less ability to socialise at school with peers from non-FY ethnic backgrounds, (e) consistent achievement below academic averages and (f) less (educationally) supportive family circumstances<sup>7</sup>.

In regard to the academic criteria, it is important to note that some students may not be familiar or comfortable with processes of assessment (for example, completing written reports and lack of oral assessment) and the marking or grading system (for example, student outcomes rather than numerical or letter grades). This may directly influence students' academic success and with it the perception of their 'at risk' level (Hargis in Kronick, 1997).

### *Conduct*

The 12 potential participants were informed of the research project in a brief 10 minute meeting in the school library, conducted by the principal and me. At the meeting, each of them received a Consent Form (Appendix A) outlining the aims and

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<sup>7</sup> Further in the text, I refer to the members low risk group also as 'high achievers' and the members of the high risk group as 'low achievers'. I use these labels to indicate a strong relationship between the 'at risk' levels and achievement in the categories used to select the participants.

requirements of the study. All of the 12 briefed SFYB agreed to participate in the study and returned the Consent Form, signed by themselves and their parent or guardian. At least two days before each interview I contacted each participant in person. This was to confirm their participation and to give them the list of seven main interview questions they could prepare for.

The interviews were conducted in a meeting room at Lake College Student Services. All of the participants were familiar with the space and none of them reported any discomfort before, during or after the interviews. The length of interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 60 minutes, averaging 50 minutes without breaks. The interviews were conducted either in the participants' study time or class time of their choice in order to minimise distraction. Permission for these absences was granted by the school for all of the 12 interviews. The interviews followed the prepared set of open ended questions attached in Appendix B. During the interview, I took notes on the main points made by each participant. At the end of each interview, I read these notes back to the participant to check if they were satisfied with the general interpretation of the data. All interviews were recorded on audio tape with the consent of the participants and transcribed afterwards.

### *Ethical considerations*

All the research conducted in this project conformed to Murdoch University's Ethics Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects.

Access to students on specified terms and dates was approved by the teachers and the school principal, who has personally encouraged and supported the project. All study participants read and signed the Consent Form which followed the Murdoch University Ethical Research Guidelines. Participants under the age of 18 also had the form signed by a parent or guardian. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the project at any time with no adverse consequences to them or the school.

Patton (2002, p.407) states that “qualitative methods such as in depth interviews are highly personal and interpersonal and as such more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests and other quantitative approaches”. While the interviews addressed potentially very sensitive issues, participants were at no stage forced to cooperate by the researcher or provide any information against their will. To the best of my knowledge, the interviews did not represent a threat or caused any discomfort to any participant in any way.

Before the interview, each participant was able to choose a pseudonym from a supplied list. This way the participants’ identity remained confidential and known only to me and the participant. I transcribed, and where necessary translated, the audio tapes from interviews. All interview records are being kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office and will be destroyed after five years.

The participants were informed that a 500-word summary of research findings will be made available to each participant and his or her family. The school principal will be given both a written summary and the copy of the entire study. In this way it is hoped that this research can benefit the Lake College school community in their planning and their pedagogical strategies with AA and non-AA students as well.

### Towards Critical Multiculturalism of Hybridity

This study is situated in the domain of multicultural education. Despite the wide use of the term *multicultural* in educational literature, government policies and everyday discourse of Australian society, multiculturalism is not an un-contested notion. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997, p.1) assert that “multiculturalism means everything and nothing and no one can speak of multiculturalism without specifically delineating what he or she means”. The numerous meanings of multiculturalism lead to conceptual confusion and ambiguity. This ambiguity is the force of multiculturalism as it occupies often competing and irreconcilable positions and enables decision makers to make use of any these positions to justify their claims of providing multicultural education (Rizvi, 1987; May, 1994). As a powerful instrument of production and maintenance of a particular social order, education plays a strong role in fostering distinct uses and understandings of multiculturalism.

The chapter is organised into two main parts. In the first part, I briefly trace a history of multiculturalism in Australia and outline three dominant Australian political and ideological perspectives. I then take a closer look at critical multiculturalism as an alternative to the dominant understandings and uses of multiculturalism and the conceptual framework for this project. In the second part of the chapter, I explore the notion of hybridity by drawing on the work of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall among others in the field of postcolonial and cultural studies. I translate parts of their theory to critical multiculturalism and by doing so set the understanding of the process of hybridity as a further sharpening of the lens that critical multiculturalism provides for analysing the data of this research.

#### *History of Multiculturalism in Australia*

The term ‘multiculturalism’ entered the public discourse and government policy in 1972 by Al Grassby as the Minister for Immigration in the Whitlam Labor

Government (Jamrozik et al., 1995; Rizvi, 1987). Similarly to the experience of USA, Canada and UK, the purpose of developing multiculturalism in Australia has been to help galvanise and articulate the competing social and political interests of diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Grant & Scales, 1995). Previous models of assimilation, integration and cultural pluralism as policy responses to increased ethnic and cultural diversity by the Anglo-Australian majority proved ineffective (Jamrozik et al. 1995; Bell, 1997; Castles et al., 1993; Rizvi, 1987; Cope et al., 1991; May, 1994). These policy failures threatened to disrupt not only the economic progress, fuelled by large scale postwar migration, but also the image of legitimacy of the State in providing social conditions for the accumulation of capital and maintaining allegiance of poorer, largely migrant sectors of the community (Rizvi, 1987).

Although assimilation and integration were officially discarded as government policies with the advent of ‘multiculturalism’ in the 1970s, these ideas and their influence have not left the public discourse regarding migrations to Australia. Jamrozik et al. argue that the shifts from the initial, long-standing, colonial policy of assimilation to current policies of multiculturalism “did not represent any radical policy change but were aimed at merely slowing down the assimilation process” (1995, p. 92).

### *Assimilation and integration*

A policy of assimilation was in place from the late 1940s until the middle 1950s.<sup>8</sup> It followed the assumptions of the development of a homogeneous, harmonious Australian society under the ‘White Australia policy’, formally installed in 1901 (Cope et al., 1991). The policy was underpinned by ‘the ideology of settlement’, which guided attitudes towards migrants and directed migrants how to ‘act’. Australians were considered to be “democratic and individualistic, free of class

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<sup>8</sup> Dates of various stages of policy and their definitions vary between authors. This is possibly due to the lack of consensus on defining moments of change and policy overlap which makes the demarcation more difficult.



prejudice, essentially generous-hearted and open-minded towards anyone who shares their [Australian] central values” (Jamrozik et al., 1995, p. 94). Migrants were expected to fit into the exclusively Anglo-Australian social, economic and cultural forms and consider themselves ‘lucky to be here’. The Australian nation was seen as a politically, culturally unitary and indivisible whole and any forms of immigrant organisation were seen as a threat to social harmony. Migrants were largely selected for their similarity to the white Anglo-Australian majority and chances of seamless assimilation to become ‘New Australians’ (Jamrozik et al., 1995).

Assimilation was considered to be individual activity and the successful adaptation of migrants dependent on the individual goodwill of the ‘settlers’ and the ‘newcomers’ rather than structures or policies of the State. Migrants were permitted to maintain only those traditions which would not undermine the dominant culture and its structural stability. The promised equality of opportunity or ‘fair go’ was “framed almost entirely within the terms of Anglo-Australian cultural participation” (Bell, 1997, p.40). Rizvi (1987) concludes that the policy of assimilation was “unambiguously designed to preserve the hegemony of the white, Anglo-Australian ruling class” (p.10).

In the educational domain, the notion of ‘egalitarianism’ meant a deliberate absence of any special provisions for immigrant children, including those who could not speak English (Rizvi, 1987; Bell, 1997). Such consideration or assistance would be seen as unique privilege, contrary to the prevailing egalitarian values and detrimental to assimilation of migrants (Jamrozik et al., 1995). In schools, children of migrants were left to ‘sink or swim’ and become assimilated into a homogeneous Australian culture through osmosis by interacting with Anglo-Australian children, teachers and other members of the community. The assimilationist ideology was implemented by a combination of deliberate inaction of school authorities to acknowledge the presence of non-English speaking migrants and the absence, suppression or control of information regarding migrant students. Rizvi (1987, p. 11)

states that “policy makers and educators were thus able to effectively neutralise and marginalise any contentious issues as well contain any resistance or contestation from the migrant communities.”

Due to the increasing labour demands of a growing postwar Australian economy and reduced numbers of culturally similar migrants from United Kingdom and Northern Europe, Australia increased the intake of migrants from non-English speaking (NES) areas of Southern Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. By the mid 1950s and more prominently in the early 1960s, policy makers were facing growing militancy, reluctance and/or inability of NES migrants to assimilate, as well as increasing questions of the effectiveness and morality of assimilation policy from parts of the Anglo-Australian (AA) majority. Their response was a gradual transition towards a culture and policy of integration (Rizvi, 1987; Cope et al., 1991; Castles et al., 1992; Jamrozik et al., 1995; May, 1994).

While integration resulted in relaxation of assimilationist pressures on migrants from the mid 1950s, ethnic and cultural diversity was still not accepted as a permanent feature of Australian society (Jamrozik et al., 1995). The paradigm of integration was to maintain social cohesion through a softened version of assimilation (Cope et al., 1991). Still within the framework of integration, government policy in the mid 1960s gradually shifted towards cultural pluralism or what Bell calls “soft multiculturalism”, with a focus on life styles of migrants (1997, p.40). ‘Exotic’ cultural practices of migrants such as folklore or food, were sought to simultaneously entertain Anglo-Australians without threatening the dominant culture and social order and keep the immigrants appeased and ‘happy’. ‘Ethnic’ communities began to develop their organisations and activities through which they retained their cultural identities. However, these cultural concessions did not disturb the political hegemony of Anglo-Australians enough to trigger a governmental policy shift.

Studies of school performance in the 1960s showed that NES students had difficulties in coping with school work due to the poor command of English language

(Rizvi, 1987, Castles et al., 1992). The government faced a crisis of legitimation as the children of the first NES migrants needed more than a gratitude for a refuge, offered by Australia to their parents. Many first-generation immigrants expressed their desire to provide better educational opportunities for their children as a major reason for moving to Australia. At the same time, tens of thousands of NES children lacked academic achievement while being classified as 'slow learners' due to their ethnic background and lack of language skills. This led towards disappointment for the migrant parents, dim futures for their children, and potential unrest founded in the diminished belief in the much promoted 'equal opportunities' supposedly provided by their newly adopted country (Rizvi, 1987).

From deliberate ignorance of their needs under the previous assimilationist policies, education of NESB children became a 'problem' which policy makers needed to solve in the interest of social stability and cohesion. The Federal Government started funding remedial English classes in 1970 but the poor allocation of resources and lack of facilities meant that many NES students continued to experience serious educational disadvantages (Jamrozik et al. 1995). Interestingly, despite the meagre resources allocated to remedial programmes, the Government highly publicised the initiative, framed in integrationist metaphors such as 'fitting in to benefit the host country', resolving 'migrants' problems' and promotion of 'successful integration' (Rizvi, 1987). This rhetoric served the function of reassuring the Anglo-Australian majority that it is the migrants and their children who will have to change their cultural outlook with no loss or changes to Anglo-Australian way of life.

#### *Multiculturalism as official policy*

'Multiculturalism' was first named and installed as Australian federal government policy in 1972. Migrants were assisted by the Labor and Liberal Governments as a matter of deliberate policy not only to preserve and celebrate their cultural background but to facilitate their settlement into Australia as members

of the 'family of the nation'. Translation services, 'ethnic' media, multi-lingual welfare services, encouragement of political organisation and participation of migrant communities were just some of the initiatives borne out of these shifts in policy.

Foster (in Rizvi 1987, p.21) asserts that by the early 1980s "multiculturalism had not penetrated the solid defences of status quo" in schools. Despite the rise of bilingual teaching, increased toleration and celebration of diverse ethnic backgrounds, the most common multicultural educational program was still English as Second Language (ESL) teaching.

The underlying paradigm of the largely pluralist multiculturalism of the 1970s and early 1980s retained important elements of the previous policies. While immigrants had the legitimate right, even encouragement, to preserve their ethnic and cultural identity, they accepted the responsibilities of common citizenship, based on the unchanged social, economic and political institutions of the Anglo-Australian majority (Cope et al., 1991; Jamrozik et al., 1995; Rizvi, 1987).

The commitment to 'core values', amplified through the rhetoric of 'access', 'equity' and 'citizenship' became the feature of multiculturalism in the mid 1980s to the early 1990s. Funding cuts to the migrant services and initiatives of the 1970s were justified by an economic downturn and notable differences between the major political parties on immigration issues emerged for the first time (Cope et al., 1991). The Labor Government anticipated that some of the 'common core values' would change as a result of multiculturalism and encouraged migrants to become 'truly an Australian' by accessing and equally enjoying the benefits of the 'great traditions' of core institutions of Australian society.

As a Leader of the Opposition in the late 1980s, John Howard proposed a 'One Australia' policy based on questioning the pace and direction of immigration policy and multiculturalism as a possible threat to social cohesion. This was perhaps a foresight into two trends of the past decade: the more conservative interpretation of multiculturalism of the Liberal Government, and the increasing challenges to

multiculturalism as a policy in dealing with an increasingly diverse Australian society (SBS, 2004; Galligan & Roberts, 2004; ABC, 2006) by the two major political parties.

Despite the claims of the 'demise', 'unworkability' or even 'death' of multiculturalism from many political corners since the first years of this decade, multiculturalism has held a prominent place in the discourse of Australian nationhood. Australia's ethnic and cultural diversity continues to be generally accepted and positioned as a 'way of life' in Australia, integral to Australian national culture and identity. Cultural practices have been the vehicle for construction of Australian identity and with it construction of various notions of multiculturalism<sup>9</sup> (Stratton & Ang, 1994). The 'unity-in-diversity' approach has located 'ethnic' communities as sites of particular culture, which together constitute an Australian culture. In this respect, the main positive effects of discourses of multiculturalism in Australia have been the acceptance of national identity as fluid, in the process of becoming rather than something fixed and historically given. The main negative effects have been the synthesising, naming and thus 'freezing' the fluid, unruly identities for the purpose of managing an imaginary harmonious unity-in-diversity. Further, the construction of binary relationships between supposedly homogeneous 'ethnic' communities and 'Australian society' instantly 'others' the former at the margins of the unnamed, invisible, non-ethnicised yet dominant and powerful Anglo-Australian cultural core (Stratton & Ang, 1994). The judging of these effects as positive and negative is a political act which will become clearer later in the exploration of critical multiculturalism as the conceptual framework for this study.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the aim of this overview is not to explore state policies in detail but to help understand the shifting, ambiguous

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<sup>9</sup> Stratton & Ang (1994) point out marked differences between Australian and American (US) discourse of multiculturalism. In contrast to Australian experience of multiculturalism as an official and 'top down' policy, the politicisation of multiculturalism in America has occurred largely from the bottom up with 'race' as the key exclusionary category. This has important implications on the reading of texts on (critical) multiculturalism by American authors. Their positioning of race and what Morgan (1997, p.24) calls "a more hortatory rhetoric" compared to Australian multiculturalist writers, reflect the point made by Stratton & Ang (1994) and call for careful translation of their ideas to the discourse of Australian multiculturalism this study is situated in.

meanings of multiculturalism in its historical development. Ambiguity has remained the persuasive force behind the continuous use of the word 'multicultural' (Rizvi, 1987) in justifying various policy means and ends. With this thought mind I turn to a brief outline of three different understandings of this often (ab)used term.

### *Changing Multiculturalisms*

#### *Conservative multiculturalism*

Under the conservative multiculturalism agenda, "everyone would be better off if exposed to the glories of Western civilisation and its assumed manifest destiny" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 3). Differences among individuals and groups are seen as divisive. The only way to build a functional society of people with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds is through consensus, harmony and a sanctified concept of a 'common culture'. In an Australian context, this would mean that the cultural practices of white, Eurocentric, Judaeo-Christian, Anglo-Australian majority form the 'common culture'. The 'common culture' is imbued with traditional, 'heritage' values and practices which are seen as an unquestionable. Because they have 'stood the test of time', these values and practices acquire a strong normative force and provide the necessary glue for various social and political bonds. The central effort of conservative multiculturalism is to assimilate everyone who is capable of assimilation into a white, middle class, Anglo-Australian standard.

Non-white, poor, migrant or other children outside the standard are seen as 'deprived' or 'deficient' while an 'excellent' school is often predominantly white and middle class. Under such a model of education, problems are located within the individual and not within the cultural background of poverty, sexism, racism or other larger structural realities.

*Liberal multiculturalism*

The fundamental premise of liberal multiculturalism is that people share more commonalities than differences. People in a nation share a 'primordial', natural equality and common humanity (Rizvi, 1987; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). They are deemed "equally able to achieve the liberal ideals of self-autonomy, openness and self-development if the fundamental criteria of equal opportunity and basic education are satisfied" (Hatton, 1998, p. 76). Liberal multiculturalism celebrates diversity as an enrichment of a society but seeks to achieve racial and social accord through 'sameness' of rules for all people in the society. The rules are based on an abstract notion of fairness, "a culturally unmarked medium for the defence of individual rights" (Heyes, 2002). Migrant minorities are portrayed as 'regular people' and as such become acceptable by being culturally invisible through the promotion of sameness (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). The aim of such portrayal is to make the minority and, importantly, the majority 'feel good' about living together by glancing over differences and celebrating commonalities.

Liberal multicultural education is seen as a neutral, value-free enterprise. An ideal product of such education is a rational, autonomous individual, who chooses to pursue personal 'excellence' and 'good citizenship' and is de-politicised regarding problematics of race, ethnicity, gender, class etc. In Australia, a liberal multicultural model of education tacitly approves Eurocentric, white, male standards of the dominant Anglo-Australian majority as the norm of reference for achievement of 'excellence'.

In its concern for rational sameness and importance of 'life choices', liberal multiculturalism tends to overlook the significance of power relations affecting the life chances of different individuals and groups. Similar to conservative multiculturalism, it does not address structural differences but locates problems in the individual and his or her inability to make 'proper' use of inherent and available resources. The

much touted notion of 'equality' in liberal multiculturalism then looks more like "erasure of socially subordinate identities" (Heyes, 2002) rather than their genuine incorporation into polity and the inherent challenges this brings.

### *Pluralist multiculturalism*

Pluralist multiculturalism shares two important characteristics with liberal multiculturalism. Both notions of multiculturalism celebrate diversity and aim to ensure equal opportunity. In opposition to liberal multiculturalism, a pluralist version focuses on differences instead of similarities. Pluralist multiculturalism links race, gender, language, culture, (dis)ability and other concepts in a larger effort to celebrate human diversity and equal opportunity. Cultural pluralism focuses on people's 'life styles' where differences becomes exoticised and fetishised through events such as 'where-do-you-come-from days' and 'food days' (Castles et al., 1992; Kalantzis & Cope, 1986; Kalantzis et al., 1989; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Rizvi, 1985, 1986). Differences are valorised from the position of the dominant Anglo – Australian culture, which is assumed as universal, neutral and objective. Diversity is not only celebrated but actively pursued and encouraged in order to raise the 'feel good' self-esteem of minorities and improve the ability of the majority to interact with diverse minorities. While a denial of different cultural histories is considered as cultural violence under pluralist multiculturalism, the model "assumes that minorities will increasingly identify with the dominant host culture" (Bell, 1997, p. 40).

Pluralist multicultural education aims to build pride in students' cultural heritage and seeks to include texts, practices and languages other than those of the dominant culture. In return, "students from different cultural backgrounds would learn to operate in the cultural mainstream to gain equal economic and educational opportunity" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 16). The focus of pluralist curriculum is on negotiation, management and tolerance of cultural differences. In Australia, initiatives under pluralist multiculturalism in the 1970s until the early 1980s included



studies of 'ethnic' cultures, promotion of bilingualism, teaching of community languages and other school practices aimed primarily at raising the self-esteem of migrant students as well as increasing the awareness and appreciation of the pluralist nature of Australian society by Anglo-Australian students (Rizvi, 1987). In this era of pluralist multiculturalism, ESL programmes for NESB students were "significantly strengthened in order to improve the chances of NESB students to equally participate and succeed in the wider Australian community" (Rizvi, 1987, p.25).

In their critique of pluralist curriculum, Kalantzis and Cope (1986) argue that it "represents no more than 'talking *them* into *our* way nicely" (p. 86, original emphasis) and that the (naïve) pluralist 'tolerance for all' stance contradicts deliberate action against racism and prejudice. Kincheloe and Steinberg see pluralist multiculturalism as a "form of 'cultural tourism', which fails to understand the harsh realities of race, class and gender subjugation" (1997, p.16). Cultural pluralist multiculturalism is similar to the liberalist and conservative notions by its unwillingness to address deeper, structural inequalities shaping the lives of minority groups. Instead, it places the burden of 'success', as defined by the majority, on the shoulders of a seemingly equal but possibly unequal, disadvantaged individual. Still, this approach does in some ways position NESB migrants for greater success primarily through ESL provision and acceptance of cultural and ethnic differences by the dominant population.

#### *Similarities between conservative, liberal and pluralist multiculturalism*

The three notions of multiculturalism outlined above have several shared elements. They all occupy their own clearly defined and generally non-dynamic position. Each of these positions is based on an understanding that a group of people shares a set of delineating properties or essences with no formal recognition that ethnicity and culture are dynamic and changing (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

As indicated in the outline of the three multiculturalisms, all three of them share the 'problem' of balancing the increasingly diverse and politically astute migrants against the maintenance of national cohesion and unity. They have all been used at various stages as a legitimising position of the State in pursuing the primary goal of reducing tensions generated by ethnic and cultural differences within the Australian society, often at the expense of justice to migrants (Rizvi, 1987; Jakubowicz, 1985; May, 1994).

Conservative, liberal and pluralist multiculturalism are jointly reluctant to locate problems and solutions in structural realities and tensions of poverty, racism, ethnocentrism, sexism and other forms of social division. Within these models of multiculturalism, the problem and solution lies in the individuals, who are considered to be rational, free and "able to act as autonomous agent[s]" (Bell, 1997, p. 42). As a result, success as well as failure can be attributed to individuals and their (lack of) 'desirable' attributes and motivations and not to larger social experiences that construct and shape the lives of these individuals.

At the heart of each of the discussed multiculturalisms lies the idea that the immigrants would assimilate into the host culture and respect, use and promote the core institutions of the Anglo-Australian majority as a necessary condition of social accord, harmony and success. While the extent and speed of the desired assimilation had to be adjusted over decades due to changes social, political and economic circumstances, the underlying motivation directing government policies in Australia has remained unchanged.

Setting out of the different multiculturalisms in a developmental way from conservative to pluralist in this chapter does not necessarily mean they have been experienced in a linear fashion. Instead, these perspectives have continued to overlap. At present, the favoured discourse of multiculturalism by the Coalition government leans heavily towards the assimilationist, conservative model of multiculturalism. For example, the latest initiatives of the Coalition Government

include omission of the word 'multiculturalism' in favour of the term 'integration', with fears among the members of the Government-appointed Council of Multicultural Australia that the slogan 'unity in diversity' will lose the reference to diversity (The Weekend Australian, 2006). The reason for the initiative to scrap 'multiculturalism', as stated by the current federal Coalition Government is that "[multiculturalism] means all things to all men and all women and there are a lot of ways that what is being mentioned can clearly be expressed" (The Weekend Australian, 2006; ABC, 2006). This open-ended and politically malleable statement confirms the basic suspicion by a view of multiculturalism I present and use in this project as an alternative to the three versions of multiculturalism outlined so far.

### *Critical multiculturalism*

I turn to critical multiculturalism as a different form of multiculturalism to the three previously discussed. The intention is not to valorise critical multiculturalism as the 'correct' form of multiculturalism and/or a theory to produce authoritative knowledge, but rather to present how different forms of critical multiculturalism critique and move beyond the forms of multiculturalism already discussed. I begin by outlining the main ideas of critical multiculturalism and its possibilities as an alternative in conceiving the relations among individuals and groups in an increasingly diverse and complex Australian society. I will then tease out some of the congruencies as well as inconsistencies and tensions between postmodern thought as the underlying paradigm of critical multiculturalism and the aims of critical multiculturalism as a social project. This will set the broad parameters for understanding of critical multiculturalism into which I translate the notion of hybridity in the second part of the chapter. In the last section of the chapter I outline how useful the framework of critical multiculturalism of hybridity is for reading and analysis of the interview data gathered in this study of the selected SFYB and their experiences of schooling at Lake College.

### *Features of critical multiculturalism*

One of the most prominent features of critical multiculturalism is that it is difficult to define as a single, unitary notion. As outlined earlier, the term 'multiculturalism' is an ambiguous term and has been used in a variety of social, cultural and political interpretations. 'Critical' is another loaded, hard to define term, which has signified a range of meanings from a description of purely cognitive abilities to reason and logic at one end, to study and critique of discourses of power and privilege at another end (Burbules & Berk, 1999). The use of the word 'critical' in this project is closer to the latter interpretation and hints at the postmodernist foundations of the understanding of critical multiculturalism. There are differences in definition and contextual understanding of critical multiculturalism among the authors writing in the field of critical multiculturalism and their critics<sup>10</sup>. Ideas of authors in other fields of enquiry such as feminism and critical pedagogy, to name only two, could be included within the otherwise loosely defined boundaries of critical multiculturalism. This suggests that we could perhaps speak of critical multiculturalisms rather than of one, unitary 'critical multiculturalism'. It is more useful to think of critical multiculturalisms in this discussion as there are a variety of developments and uses of the term from a variety of theoretical positions. In this text, I will use the singular form as the varieties of the term are significantly similar in a number of respects.

Unlike the three types of multiculturalism outlined earlier, critical multiculturalism has neither openly manifested itself as a popular policy option nor has it been applied to date as a policy in mainstream Australian politics. This has been the case despite the arguments for the introduction of its perspectives in Australia, found in the works of Jamrozik, Rizvi, Kalantzis, Cope, Hatton, Jayasuriya,

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<sup>10</sup> I have previously pointed out the differences in writing of Australian 'critical multiculturalists' (Rizvi, Castles, Kalantzis, Cope, Jayasuriya etc.) to US authors (Aronowitz, Giroux, Kincheloe, Kanpol, Steinberg, McLaren etc.) and UK authors (May, Gilroy).

Castles, among others<sup>11</sup>. Despite the lack of clear political presence and corresponding projects, critical multiculturalism can be significantly relevant in understanding the experiences of migrants in schools as important institutions of the Australian political, economic, social and educational landscape.

Critical multiculturalism argues for social change from certain political positions of preferences for a more egalitarian and socially just society. The reason for naming this particular form of multiculturalism as 'critical' lies in its attempt to address everyday practices intended to interrogate, rather than ignore, glorify or celebrate, particular historical, situated systems of advantage and disadvantage. It can be used to analyse and contextualise the dynamics of power in the local, everyday, mundane, lived culture of present and past, and looks at the ways the play of power has legitimised different forms of inequalities (Kanpol & McLaren, 1995; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Critical multiculturalism does not seek to blindly celebrate nor dismiss people's ethnicity or culture. It can be used instead to interrogate the processes of celebration or dismissal of these constructs and the material effects they create for individuals and groups. It does not reify culture as a thing unto itself, independent of other spheres in life, but "concerns itself with the entire range of practices that involve dynamics of intercultural relationships in people's actual lives" (Rizvi, 1998, p.81). Celebratory focus on culture is met with suspicion as it stifles the exploration of historical, economic, political and social factors and the ways these factors influence the assertion of ethnicity (Rizvi, 1986; May, 1994, 1999) and other forms of group affiliation.

Critical multiculturalism can be used to analyse the ways in which social divisions of ethnicity, race, gender and class and their intersections not only give rise to inequalities but might also offer coalition-building opportunities across these divides. None of these social divisions is privileged in the analysis as the primary

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<sup>11</sup> While they could not be precisely described as critical multiculturalists, these authors critique forms of multiculturalism in terms close to the understanding of this study hence they are used as a reference point in development of Australian critical multiculturalism.

category of disadvantage. As this study focuses on ethnicity and the way it impacts upon the schooling of SFYB, intersections of class, gender, race and other forms of cultural dynamics or difference are unavoidable but are not explored in greater detail.

Critical multiculturalist perspective accepts tension and conflict in social relations in attempts to interrogate the power of the dominant, 'non-ethnic', and seemingly ahistorical, acultural, benevolent, white middle class discourse of social harmony, tolerance and equality of opportunity (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Critical multiculturalists seek to illuminate how the choices of members of minority groups may have been shaped by 'life chances' this dominant discourse and sets of practices render to them. Here I refer to 'life chances' as the abilities of individual members of non-dominant economic, political and social groups to effectively use and potentially challenge the structures and standards, set and seen as 'common sense', 'natural' or 'fair' by the dominant majority. The ultimate aim of critical multiculturalism is social empowerment and improvement of people's 'life chances' instead of solidifying their position by cultural maintenance and focusing on their 'life choices' and 'life styles' (Jayasuriya, 1992; Kalantzis et al., 1989; Rizvi, 1998). Critical multiculturalists are suspicious of any universalising harmony and recognise that neither the process nor the outcomes of their interrogations may be palatable and/or acceptable to all social actors involved. Such recognition positions critical multiculturalists as self-critical and aware of their own social positioning and construction.

Critical multiculturalists conceive an important possibility of coalition building between members of different groups to overcome, or at least alleviate the effects of, various structural inequalities. Membership in these coalitions can be both dynamic and temporary to reflect and react to the changes in the reasons for their existence. Such coalitions are not necessarily static nor are they a result of some essential or pure conceptions of culture or identity. Critical multiculturalists are

generally careful not to see the coalitions along a single social marker such as ethnicity in absence of others. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) put this point across succinctly when warning against extending the notion of 'white privilege' to all white students:

It is difficult to convince a working class white student of the ubiquity of white privilege when he or she is going to school, accumulating school debts, working at McDonald's for minimum wage and unable to get married because of financial stress and holds little hope of upward socio-economic mobility. (p. 214)

Awareness of multiple inequalities acting across the often essentialised social divides has important implications for this particular study. I have already acknowledged that the study focuses on ethnicity and does not raise the questions of gender, race or class. However, it is important to state that I do not position AS (Anglo-Australian students) as a universally privileged group in this study since many of them may experience similar structural inequalities (for example, misogyny or poverty) as do some of the SFYB. By examining one form of inequality in relation to others, critical multiculturalism has the potential to cross socially constructed borders of ethnicity, race etc. This view leaves open a hope that some SFYB, unequal in the positioning of ethnicity to AS, may well form a coalition with some of the AS students in addressing forms of inequality that may be (temporarily) experienced by both and thus alleviate commonly felt experiences and disadvantages.

The highlighting of multiplicity and dynamism of inequalities brings us closer to a fundamental premise of critical multiculturalism and theory of hybridity examined later in the chapter – rejection of binaries. Critical multiculturalists challenge the dichotomies of 'us' and 'them', the 'included' and 'excluded', the 'otherness' and 'sameness', the 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' (Peters, 1995; Kanpol & McLaren, 1995; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). These dichotomies are grounded in essentialist

notions of fixed identities, which members of a particular race, gender, class, ethnic background or other social groups are deemed to possess and share. Conservative tacit declaration of one group's superiority over another, liberal celebration of 'primordial' sameness of human species, and pluralist celebration of cultural diversity are all based on the premise of fixed identities of groups and individuals within them. Critical multiculturalists seek to unfreeze these fixed identities (Kanpol & McLaren, 1995) and refuse to engage in more conservative forms of identity politics. Differences among groups or individuals are not seen as oppositions but rather as specific variations produced by the boundaries of identity. From critical multiculturalist perspectives people's identities are seen as dynamic, fragmented, non-unitary, contextually contingent entities, "formed on a terrain of conflict and political struggle and a process of both emancipation and oppression" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p.92). Formation of identity is a never-ending, continuous process in a discourse, constituted by the nexus of power and knowledge. Critical multiculturalists are generally interested in the ways in which individuals assign their own identity and how discursive practices simultaneously 'fix' individuals into identities. Such practices may lead to inequality and social injustice which critical multiculturalism tries to highlight and empower<sup>12</sup> people to overcome.

As the language and concepts of postmodernism enter this development of critical multiculturalism it is important to take a look at these theoretical paradigms, which have continued to inform a number critical multiculturalists as well as theorists and activists from a range of other emancipatory theories and projects over the last three decades.

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<sup>12</sup> Here I borrow the understanding of the term 'empowerment' from Lather (1990), who sees it "not as individual self assertion and upward mobility but something done as a process of analysing and seeing oppression by oneself, not 'to' or 'for' someone else." (p.4)



*The Postmodernist Connection*

The term 'postmodern' has been one of the mostly widely (ab)used and less understood terms in academic circles and broader society over the past three decades. The 'postmodern' is difficult to define due to its indeterminacy of meaning as well as crediting (or blaming) a number of authors as 'postmodernists'<sup>13</sup> despite great differences in their interests and works. Despite the confusion over the definition(s), several common elements of postmodernity can be identified. I do so with a caveat that this is not intended to be an exhaustive account of postmodern theory but an attempt to clarify some of the main ideas from the body of knowledge that could be and has been interpreted as postmodern theory. I do not wish to argue in favour of a particular postmodernism but only to illuminate the potentials for and shortcomings of the work of critical multiculturalists. An overview of postmodernist thought is also timely in setting the scene for exploration of theory of hybridity, which draws heavily on the insights of the 'post'.

'Postmodern' is a social condition of contemporary Western civilisation which has emerged from global structural economic changes of (late) capitalism and changes in the ways culture is produced, circulated, read and consumed (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 38; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p.64). The fundamental premise contained in various definitions and descriptions (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Shapiro, 1995; Giroux, 1995; McLaren, 1995; Kanpol, 1995; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991) of the postmodern condition could be what Lyotard (1984) called 'the incredulity towards meta-narratives'<sup>14</sup>. Meta-narratives are those overarching perspectives that seek to provide members of a society with the definite understanding of what 'reality is' and how it operates. From a postmodern

<sup>13</sup> For example, although considered by many as one of the most influential postmodernist thinkers, M. Foucault stated that he did 'not understand what either the term modernity or postmodernity meant' (Peters, 1995, p. 24) although he comments on these.

<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that all definitions of postmodernism are the same. For example, Jameson (in Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991) challenges the nihilism of such definition of postmodernism and instead proposes that postmodernism is a 'cultural logic' of the third stage in late capitalism and as such an epochal shift. Foucault sees postmodernism as a 'limit attitude' and writes of meta-narratives as discourses (Peters, 1995, p. 6).

perspective, there is no one universal reality or truth but multiple ones, constructed in and through discourses<sup>15</sup> people operate in.

Discourses determine what can be said and thought and with what authority. In order to be heard, the speaker must operate within the assumptions of a particular discourse in order to be heard as meaningful. Discourses actively police and discipline meaning which arises from power relations. They are socially constructed and as such cannot be politically innocent. Internally, they are constituted by inclusions and exclusions of what can and cannot be said or thought. Externally they stand against other discourses, other possibilities of meaning, claims and positions. They are both instruments and effects of power as they produce their own 'truth effects' rather than universal, 'objective' truth (Ball, 1990; Shapiro, 1995). Educational sites such as Lake College are strong generators of modernist discourse particularly through their objectification of knowledge by classification and division. They propagate, disseminate and control access of individuals to various kinds of discourses (Ball, 1990, p.3).

Postmodern thought is a "critical attitude" (Giroux, 1995, xxiv), a mode of thinking in relation to modernist notions of reason, rationality and human agency based in the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment rather than their termination or separation from them. It challenges the "Eurocentric, Enlightenment meta-narrative of historical progress and the promise that through knowledge humanity will be emancipated from debilitating ignorance" (Shapiro, 1995, p. 193). It rejects the notion that the historically unilinear, scientific pursuit of objective knowledge, certainty and immutable laws presumably untainted by social and historical forces,

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<sup>15</sup> The post-structuralist notion of discourse(s) has strongly influenced development of post-modernism. Definitions of post-modernism and post-structuralism remain highly tenuous as labels identifying particular, separate theories. While they have different histories and trajectories they are sometimes used interchangeably as they share a range of theoretical positions. Both theories espouse indeterminacy and contingency of claims of truth and reality. Postmodernist concern with disintegration of modernist, universal systems of order in culture and polity and poststructuralist concern with language as a form of signification of any realities in many ways complement each other. For greater economy of words in this work, I do not necessarily split the two theories as I name one of them or use the word 'post' to signal their presence.

will emancipate a rational and autonomous subject towards truth and freedom. In its challenge to traditional disciplines, postmodernism questions the 'sacred' canons of knowledge, views fixed boundaries of knowledge with scepticism, denies rigid duality between high and low culture, truth and error, science and ideology, and in many other ways rejects the claims of truth and reality based on epistemological certainty. Reality or rather 'representations of reality', are socially constructed and contingent on language, metaphor and context, imbued with renditions of power, instead of being 'out there', independent of people and waiting to be discovered.

#### *Possibilities and Tensions Between Postmodernism and Critical Multiculturalism*

What are then the possibilities of postmodern thought for critical multiculturalism? The most useful feature of postmodern theory for critical multiculturalists is its "healthy suspiciousness of all boundary-fixing and the hidden ways in which we subordinate, exclude and marginalise" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p.115). This offers "an opportunity to open up boundaries of discourses and begin new investigations" (Peters, 1995, xiv). It makes visible the ways in which domination is prefigured and redrawn and points to shifting configurations of power. Critical multiculturalists enlist postmodern theory to "illuminate the ways privileged, totalising meta-narratives of modernity operate before pointing out how these can be challenged" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991 p. 120). Postmodernism challenges any homogenising views of history and gives way to consideration of local and suppressed histories. Similarly, postmodernism views all culture as "socially constructed and not subject to abstract notions of equality, thus all cultures are equally worthy of investigation" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p.115). Critical multiculturalists use these views of history and culture to give voice to marginalised groups and individuals in their quest for a more egalitarian society and not one forced through the limitations of a traditional Enlightenment project.

The postmodern view of identity is particularly relevant in the context of this critical multiculturalist project. Modernist views, which permeate much of the current educational discourse in Western Australian secondary schools where the research takes place, see individual's identity as fixed and unified (for example, 'member of a Yugoslav gang' or 'good student'). This is a derivative of the notion of a rational, self-determining, conscious individual, a 'subjective self' capable of 'free' action and decision-making. According to this notion of 'subjective self', each student can then be classified, organised and 'normalised' according to their characteristics and (in)actions. From a postmodern position, "identity becomes a pluralised and fluid narrative space" (Giroux in Peters, 1995, i). As SFYB, much like other students, spend their time in school, their identities do not remain the same as they actively shape and are simultaneously shaped by discourses in which they operate.

Critical multiculturalism and a number of other emancipatory theories which in some way use and subscribe to the possibilities of postmodernism are expectedly aware of the limitations of their own frameworks. The most common shortcoming of postmodernism is that despite its strength as a meta-theory, it remains "anaemic" (Nicholson, 1995 p.81) as a form of social critique and a basis for action. While it provides valuable insights into the ways power is produced and circulated through cultural practices, postmodernism can be highly relativistic and non-committal, thus "undercutting its own political possibility" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p.121).

Political possibility is necessarily connected with notions of agency and it is here that postmodernism is in tension with critical multiculturalism, feminism and many other emancipatory theories. Poststructuralist theory, which much of the postmodernism is indebted to, sees a person, a subject, as a heap of fragments, constructed by language and bereft of any self-consciousness. As such, the subject "bears neither the possibility nor responsibility for agency" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p. 78). A number of feminist theorists brand as a flaw of postmodernism its lack of attention to ways in which subjectivity can be linked to the notion of agency

where self-reflective, capable political selves become possible (Lather, 1990, Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). The notion of agency is inherent in critical multiculturalism as it seeks to overcome injustice through actions of empowered, self-aware subjects. In contrast, individual agency is questioned by postmodern theory as a contentious fiction rather than a 'real' possibility. While acknowledging that realities may in fact be fictions, produced by discursive practices of power and knowledge (who speaks and what counts as valid), critical multiculturalists name and stand for 'fictions' which 'matter more' than a relativistic, playful pastiche of comparable truths (Shapiro, 1995; Kanpol & McLaren, 1995; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991).

In line with the postmodern analysis, critical multiculturalists accept ethnicity and culture as dynamic constructs of historical social, political and economic forces. However, they do not stop at mere assertions of difference but interrogate what do certain assertions and celebrations of ethnicity and culture provide and for whom. Even though critical multiculturalism and many other emancipatory theories have "largely problematised the notion of an autonomous, self-fashioned, free-willing individual by the view of a subject constructed through relationships to social power" (McLaren, 1995, p. 94), they similarly claim that the hope of people as agents of change must remain a possibility.

The tension regarding the possibility of individual agency can be translated to the possibility of unity and solidarity between subjects. The postmodernist position holds that unity of experience is not 'real', thus people can never experience totality of experiences in the same way. Postmodernism denies the usefulness of categories such as ethnicity, race and others on the grounds that they are always dependent on the discourses in which they are deployed.

Such fragmentation and contingency grinds not only against the recognition of these subject-unifying categories by authors in critical multiculturalism and other emancipatory theories, but also against their commitment to overcome the

inequalities that categories of social division may produce. Normative questions such as 'what ought to be' and/or 'what is to be done' as well as the question 'what difference to the world does our theory try to make?' (Lather, 1990, p. 154) go largely unaddressed in postmodern discourse. As a result, the task for workers in critical multiculturalism then becomes one of "how to write political back into postmodernism" (Peters, 1995, xiii, xiv). Feminist writers such as Lather (1990) and Ellsworth (1989) address this conundrum between contingency and commitment through their work in the field of 'resistance postmodernism'. While it is beyond the scope of this study to further explore these tensions I do wish to take the position of Kanpol (in Peters, 1995, p.153) who accepts the postmodernist position of contingency but contends there still can be sets of experiences that bind and commit social agents together despite their differences of race, gender, identity or other forms of social division.

I now turn to the concept of hybridity, which steers this critical multiculturalist study in a particular theoretical direction. Having outlined the main premises of critical multiculturalism and postmodernism, I will attempt to connect the notion of hybridity back to the two throughout the theoretical elaboration of the term. By doing so I hope to show how the particular notion of hybridity 'fits' into the larger critical multiculturalist framework and how it could be useful in this particular project. At the end, I summarise the development in the three major sections of the chapter to present my theoretical position from which I will analyse my data.

In this project, I draw on the works of writers from the field of cultural studies. Writers such as Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, generally considered postmodernist, have not been commonly connected with the work of critical multiculturalists. As I point out later in the text, critical multiculturalists have often critiqued, even dismissed postmodernist cultural studies, including theories of hybridity, for their 'intellectual gaze' and a lack of relevance in addressing issues of material inequality and social injustice. However, theories of hybridity posited by Bhabha, Hall, Gilroy

and other writers whose work I draw on, share some very important common ground with the work and concerns of critical multiculturalists. Most importantly, they share a particular view of culture as a dynamic, fluid social construct. The construct is created, maintained and directed into particular ideological directions by and through the nexus of power and knowledge. Any culture assigns people into roles and identities, but at the same time, people assign their own. In the words of Hall (1996a) identity is a:

...point of suture, between, on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us all or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as the subject which can be 'spoken'. (p. 5-6)

This view, shared by a range of cultural theorists and critical multiculturalists, can then be applied to examination of various identities which influence and are influenced by structural arrangements. Structural arrangements, as critical multiculturalists point out, often give rise to inequitable material positions which need to be examined and challenged to achieve greater equality and social justice. It is from this position I begin to detail the theory of hybridity.

### *Hybridity*

#### *History of the term 'hybridity'*

In its Latin origin, the term 'hybrid' means a mixture of two or more pure elements. Since mixing of elements has always been an ubiquitous feature of natural and social worlds, the term hybridity has been used to describe a vast range of phenomena from genetics of agriculture to analysis of consumer behaviour (Pieterse, 2001). For centuries, people have engaged and mixed with individuals and groups from different cultural, political, religious or other backgrounds. Colonisation, globalisation, information revolution and other vehicles of interaction

have increased flows of people across the world and accelerated the rate of mixing of people and ideas from different parts of the world. In other words, hybridity is not only nothing new but is becoming increasingly prevalent and socially significant.

The concept of hybridity in the social sciences has moved from its pernicious use in racist discourses to a more nuanced understanding of social fluidity. The discourse of hybridity “emerged in the 18th century as a result of increased interracial contact resulting from colonisation and conquest” (Kraidy, 2002, p.319). The discourse was used to warn of 'dangers of miscegenation' and 'amalgamation' of races while positioning a clear racial superiority of White Europeans. Concepts of purity and exclusivity positioned hybrids as a “threat to the fullness of selfhood and invariably invoked the negative boundary positions of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Papastergiadis, 1997, p.257).

Hybridity took on a new meaning with the development of decolonisation movements in the 19th century and gathered momentum in the decades following World War II. From *mestizaje*<sup>16</sup> ideology of mediation of Spanish colonial ideology and indigenous assertions of nationhood through the attempts of postcolonial cultures of Africa, Latin America, Asia and the diaspora in the West, the notion of hybridity was used to invigorate a cultural renewal of what Gilroy (1993) called the 'mongrel cultural forms' (Kraidy, 2002, p. 319).

The understanding of hybridity in this study draws principally on the work of Homi Bhabha in the mid-1990s. Bhabha disentangled hybridity from its racial connotations to the field of postcolonial and cultural studies (Kraidy, 2002). His work on hybridity is influenced by the post-structuralist rejection of categories of social distinction as easily classifiable singularities within a unitary understanding of truth, reality and progress. Post-structuralism opened the possibility for understanding of constant construction and re-construction of multiple subjectivities within discourses

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<sup>16</sup> Kraidy (2002) points out that *mestizaje* was actually a deeply racialised concept.



and the ways these subjectivities are mediated by the interplay of power and knowledge. Bhabha's theorisation of hybridity as a subversive and transformative social and political force deployed by minorities to reappropriate dominant discourses has spilled from the context of postcolonial studies to a number of other fields of enquiry concerned with social justice. I expand on the features of Bhabha's theory I use in this work and the critique of the theory later in this section.

As a 'floating signifier', hybridity has become a "master trope across many spheres of cultural research, theory and criticism" (Kraidy, 2002, p. 316). Hybridity has been used in cultural theories of globalisation as a by-product of transcultural dynamics between tradition and modernity and/or the local and the global (Appadurai, 1996; Pietersee, 2002), semiotics of culture (Bakhtin and Lotman, in Papastergiadis, 1997), postcolonial studies (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1992, 1996; Spivak, 1993; Gilroy, 1993), feminism (Spivak, 1987, 1993), performance studies (Werbner & Moodod, 1997) and a range of other fields of academic literature. This is certainly not an exhaustive list of uses of hybridity in cultural and other academic research literature and any more detailed analysis of uses in various fields would have to be done elsewhere. However, even a brief review of the use of the term signals that hybridity is a widely used term. This suggests danger for ambiguity of its interpretation and with its appropriation for different and often very divergent political uses.

#### *Theories of hybridity – an overview*

There is no clear or singular 'theory of hybridity' one can draw on. The proliferation of uses of hybridity across various fields of study referred to earlier makes it necessary to lay a theoretical groundwork for a particular understanding of hybridity in this study. To formulate my theoretical view of hybridity I draw mainly on the work of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, and authors who have used Bhabha's and Hall's development of the notion of hybridity in their work. Throughout the section I

connect the theoretical understanding of hybridity with its potential use in the larger framework of critical multiculturalism in which this study is situated.

Importantly, the term hybridity is used in this project to encompass both an experience and, at times, a deliberate performance of hybridity. Unless specified otherwise, I use the term to describe both dimensions of hybridity. The distinction between the two is not always clear due to the shifting degrees of intensity and influence on each other. Hybridity is a process, an experience, emerging out of particular structural arrangements. People may have little or no say in these arrangements or changes to them. In the context of this study, SFYB experience different dominant cultural, social, linguistic and other types of norms and often unreflectively incorporate them into their daily experiences. Government policy on provision of ESL classes or family decision to move to Australia are only two examples of such arrangements, where SFYB simply 'play along' and in the process become more 'Australian'. This is hybridity as a process, a dynamic experience of always becoming something/someone else.

However, this process of becoming can be accelerated, delayed, directed to a new trajectory or otherwise manipulated by SFYB through deliberate enactment or performance of hybridity. They enact different identities and their extent at different times and for different purposes. Positioning as more or less 'Australian', 'Yugoslav', both or neither but something else can often be a matter of SFYB's deliberate strategy to achieve their goals. This suggests a degree of agency as a necessary ingredient in the hope for greater social equity and justice - a goal of critical multiculturalism.

Described broadly, contemporary theories of hybridity oppose essentialist, primordial ideas and theories of group identity based on conceptions of distinctive cultural, political, geographical or other marked sources of origin. In the context of this study, hybridity offers the possibility that SFYB can operate in both pre-migration (FY) and post-migration (Australian) cultures simultaneously. They could hold a dual

attachment to both and with it dual, hyphenated identification. They can also identify as members of neither of the two cultures<sup>17</sup> but occupy a 'third space' with elements of both. Hybridity allows them to be constructed as neither fully 'Yugoslav' nor fully 'Australian', and to identify themselves as "*neither the One...nor the Other...but something else besides*" (Bhabha, 1994, p.41, author's emphasis).

The potential of hybridity for social change lies in "the agency of finding a voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty" (Bhabha, 1996, p. 58). To Bhabha, hybrid space provides room for the voices of marginalised elements of culture to speak and disrupt the dominant narrative. This partial culture gives form to the narrative of the minority - the outside of the inside; the part in the whole. Hybridity can be a site of ambivalence and resistance to the production of cultural differentiations by the authority of the dominant discourse (Williams, 2003) and to the asymmetry of power relations within it.

Despite its potential for achieving greater social justice called for by critical multiculturalism, hybridity is not a panacea. Its potential for being uncomfortable, confronting and counter-productive to the marginal should be recognised. Hybridity does not necessarily produce a happy pluralistic society or an easy reversal of binaries but could breed conflict or silences in which the members of minorities could end up losing rather than gaining their voice. In the process of hybridity as a response to the dominant culture, differences of class, gender, race, ethnicity etc among people collectively lumped together as 'marginalised' do not necessarily disappear<sup>18</sup>. Instead, these differences may be exacerbated and may lead not only to conflict but also to fragmentation of a collective voice. The voice of the marginal,

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<sup>17</sup> An important criticism of Bhabha's theory of hybridity as actually being essentialist itself is that in order to argue the possibilities of the liminal, in-between space, the theory must 'essentialise' two or more cultures as fixed points. While I certainly do not see Yugoslav or Australian culture as fixed points, I use such constructions to facilitate an understanding of hybridity as a theory and its application in my project. Indeterminacy of definition would serve a possibly endless discussion on/of indeterminacy and with it (inadequately) touch on a vast body of inquiry dealing with these problematics beyond the scope and purpose of this work.

<sup>18</sup> Williams (2003) gives an example of such conflict in description of hostility between men from Middle East and women from Southern Africa in her class about the proper gender roles each should be playing in society and at home. Spivak (1993) is particularly vocal in her critique of unproblematic, culturalistic uses of hybridity which fail to account for differences of class, race, gender and ethnicity.

the hybrid, could become appropriated and normalised by the dominant discourse with loss of its potency for transformation (Chan, 2004). Hybridity as a process of distortion of identities could also be very threatening and could “lead to withdrawal and aporia as much as it could produce better understanding and empathy between social actors” (Williams, 2003, p. 604).

I pursue my understandings of hybridity by looking at three important fields of negotiation that constitute it – identity, diversity/difference, and power. These fields could not be arranged taxonomically as they constantly overlap and influence each other. As a result, my explanation of each of these three fields necessarily includes elements of the other two.

### *Identity*

Construction and negotiation of one's identity is one of the central themes of the theory of hybridity. Drawing on ideas of the ‘post’ theory, Hall (1996a, 1996b) and Bhabha (1994) describe identity not as an essence fixed in the past but as set of strategic positionings within the discourses of power, history and culture. Such positionings are performative, 'best suited' rather than somehow 'true'. People don't hold one but multiple identities as dynamic “points of temporary attachment” (Hall, 1996a, p.6) to other people or ideas. Aware of the impossibility not only of a fixed, essentialised identity but also of the problem of using the term ‘identity’ itself to fix a meaning of an irreducible notion, I use the concept of identity in the way described by Hall:

Identity is an irreducible concept, constantly 'under erasure' since a notion of identity as an integral, unified and originary identity is untenable but continues to be used in its deconstructed forms due to an absence of an alternative. In short, identity is "an idea which cannot be thought in the old way but without which certain questions cannot be thought at all" (Hall, 1996a, p.2).

Hall (1996a) translates the view of identity from the individual to the stage of cultural, group identity. While people may share a code of solidarity and imagined homogeneity through a mutual history or lived cultural<sup>19</sup> practices with a group of people, there is no 'core' that would stabilise, fix or guarantee our unchanging 'oneness" or cultural belongingness. Within imagined homogeneities there are individual points of difference, produced and changed by positioning of the 'self' in various discourses people operate in. These positionings are mediated by factors such as language, cultural practices and power. The important implication of this view is that hybridity does not try to homogenise but asks the question of how people come to be both as individuals and groups and that both are in constant flux.

The constant work of multiple and changing identities is performed on two levels of relation to other people. Identification requires recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person, group or ideal. Difference to other people then consolidates the process of identification (Hall, 1996a). The constant play of socially constructed and arbitrary rather than fixed, transcendental recognitions and differences, positions people in and out of multiple and often contradictory identities. By fixing the boundaries between the insiders and outsiders, difference reproduces power relations between them through the capacity to exclude or leave out. (Hall, 1996; Bhabha, 1994, 1996).

In order to disrupt the power of discursive boundary fixing, hybrid identities are dynamic, flexible constructs where multiple identities are not only allowed but expected (Petrunic, 2005). In this study, hybrid identity is not imagined as an exclusive and fixed combination, accumulation, fusion or synthesis of various components but rather as "an energy field of different forces" (Papastergiadis, 1997,

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<sup>19</sup> This is an important point in understanding the term 'culture' and 'cultural identity' as used in this work. Much like the notion of identity, culture is a strategic positioning, always 'under erasure', dependent on representation and never bounded and complete in a transcendental finality or essence. 'Identity' and 'culture' alike need what Hall terms "a natural closure of solidarity and allegiance to sustain [their] existence" (Hall, 1996a, p. 2). They both also remain ultimately conditional and contingent.

p. 258). It is a process *in* constant (re)formation rather than a bounded, finished product *of* a process. This process “unsettles, recombines, hybridises, cuts and mixes - challenges the essentialised, stable constructions of identity and ethnicity” (Hall, 1996b, p. 447). The heterogeneity and instability of hybrid identity makes it more able to slip beyond and/or work against the attempts of the dominant discourse to define it and control it (Bhabha, 1994, 1996; Williams, 2003; Hall, 1996a, 1996b; Luke, 1995). The presence of the Other in the dominant culture as "*somewhere between the too visible and not visible enough*" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 41) is exactly the “site of ambivalence and resistance to the attempts of the dominant culture's inscription and control” (Williams, 2003, p. 603).

Views of identity used in hybridity theory align with the project of critical multiculturalism, particularly in its rejection of essentialist identities in favour of multiple identities constituted by and through race, ethnicity, class, gender and other categories of social division. It is important though that the examination of cultural or any other form of identity (ethnic, language, etc) is not divorced from examination of power and knowledge that gives rise to assertions and/or erasures of identity. This is a charge often directed at the more benign, positivist views of cultural hybridity (Friedman, 1997; May, 1999; Chan, 2004; Kraidy, 2002; Spivak, 1987, 1993). However, a charge of ignoring the interplay of fluid and asymmetric power relations can hardly be made against the theory of hybridity developed by Bhabha and Hall.

### *Diversity and difference*

As a theory trying to explain the experiences of people operating between different cultures, hybridity does not conflate diversity and difference. Earlier in this chapter I have outlined the conservative, liberal and pluralist notions of multiculturalism and their shared view of culture and identities as generally static and unitary. While the conservative perspective of multiculturalism makes no attempts to allow for difference in its unequivocal pursuit of assimilation, difference is central to

liberal and pluralist multiculturalism. Liberal multiculturalism ignores difference (social, political, economic or any other) in favour of transcendental ideals of equality of all humanity. Pluralist multiculturalism views difference as a thing to be celebrated and allowed to flourish and facilitate greater understanding among people from different cultures. These two views of multiculturalism conflate difference with diversity but they do see culture as changing, although from a relatively fixed position.

Diversity is a central concept of the liberal and pluralist multiculturalism. The concept "simply draws on the boundaries of culture and assumes that different forms of culture can easily, and therefore should co-exist" (Kuo, 2003, p.229). This upholds the fantasy not only of bounded cultures but of their equal representation and recognition. Cultural diversity, advanced particularly by the pluralist multiculturalism, becomes a process of assignment and celebration of pre-given contents and customs to minority groups (Bhabha, 1994; Kuo, 2003).

While the liberalist perspective of multiculturalism may differ from the pluralist perspective of multiculturalism in its use of diversity, the outcome remains the same. By dismissing instead of celebrating diversity, liberalist multiculturalism covers up an invisible, presumably 'neutral' cultural norm by which other cultures are judged while providing a set of categories and choices for the minorities to occupy and make.

In other words, the two multiculturalisms mentioned above require a framework of bordered cultures. These cultures disguise the way in which their boundaries are set through manipulation, inclusion and exclusion according to a specific, normative set of values. They also downplay the intervention of privilege and exclusion in sustaining cultural diversity in order to contain cultural difference. A stress on cultural diversity makes difference more difficult to recognise and acknowledge. Construction of people as members of 'ethnic communities' "papers over differences between them and ignores their position as bearers of particular

histories and positions them instead as bearers of something called 'ethnic culture' “ (Langer in Diaz, 2005, p.8).

How then is difference different from diversity? What is meant by difference in the context of hybridity? Hybridity comes into practice at the moment of articulation of social and cultural practice both from the old forms of tradition and new historical trajectories. Bhabha (1994) holds that:

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference is not to be read hastily as a reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in the moment of historical transformation. (p.3)

Processes of differentiation signify authority. When a cultural authority tries to assert itself through the process of differentiation, the minority may subvert the fixed position the authority tries to act from. The 'subaltern', the minority, appropriate some of the cultural signs of the authority and fuse them with those from their or another culture. The strategy of survival is inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity and differences that constitute it and not the exoticism of multicultural diversity of cultures. This strategy challenges the divisions of the past and the present, tradition and modernity, pre-migration and post-migration not by negation and exclusion but by negotiation in the interstitial 'Third space' between and beyond them. At the same time, hybridity as a process of relating to otherness and a force for mobilisation of cultural difference can become potentially any of these - subversive, transformative, dangerous, rewarding and so on. Hybridity “subverts categorical oppositions, challenges a fixed local cultural order and creates a condition of a critical cultural self-reflexivity” (Kuo, 2003, p. 234).



Hybridity can be understood as the “ongoing condition for all human cultures, which contains no zones of purity as they constantly undergo trans-cultural change” (Rosaldo, in Diaz, 2005, p.10). Recognition of hybridity of all cultures as a way of negotiating rather than containing difference can be therefore tactically deployed against any racial or ethnic purist claims (Bhabha, 1994). What is necessary in understanding such deployment is an understanding of power arrangements that underpin such processes. Unless examination of hybridity is ‘power-conscious’, it runs a significant risk of: (a) reducing hybridity to a “mere descriptive device to describe a site of cultural mixture” (Kraidy, 2002, p. 317), (b) mere accommodation and complicity to the larger social order, interested in the maintenance of unequal social, economic and political relations (Chan, 2003; Ahmad in Kraidy, 2003), and (c) re-creation of cultural essentialism positioning 'hybrids' as another category.

With these points in mind, I elaborate how power plays an important role in performance and understanding of hybridity.

### *Power*

One of the most frequent charges against theory of hybridity<sup>20</sup> is that it does not pay enough attention to the political (Hutnyk, 1997; Mitchell, 1997) or the issue of power and the influence it has in the process and enactions of hybridity. To examine the charge I again draw on the work of Bhabha and Hall as well as the work of authors who have pointed out the necessity for exploration of power (Williams, 2003; Werbner, 1997; Friedman, 1997; Pieterse, 1999, 2004) in the process of hybridity. As an important theme in grounding a theoretical view of hybridity in this critical multiculturalist study, the issue of power has been already referred to hence some necessary overlap in coverage of it here.

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<sup>20</sup> Most of the charges I refer to here are aimed at what is called 'cultural hybridity'. I revisit the charges against (cultural) hybridity in the review of literature later in this chapter.

The ambiguity and the "careless overuse" (Williams, 2003, p. 600) of the term makes hybridity an easy target for appropriation by a range of discourses. I take up Williams' (2003) argument that hybridity can be appropriated by liberal and pluralist multiculturalism without exploring the issue of power, thus making it a highly apolitical and falsely optimistic term. 'Melting pot' analogies, parodies of dominant culture and reversed appropriation of its symbols are often described as forms of hybridity. However, as Hall points out that this is simply a continuation of essentialist politics where the binaries are reversed and "the bad old essential white subject is replaced by a new essentially good black subject" (1996b, p. 444). Such naive, essentialising use of the term hybridity and unproblematic re-inscription of symbols of authority have been used to advance a "benign and ultimately progressive and positivist multiculturalist synthesis that creates a new culture of pluralistic tolerance" (Williams, 2003, p. 600). The exoticised hybrid is introduced into the dominant culture, celebrated and 'normalised' (Chan, 2003) but the dynamic relationships of power remain unexplored.

Ignoring of power relations in the use of the term hybridity has also led to a papering over of differences in the name of common humanity (Olson, in Williams, 2003). Despite its claims of universal humanity, such liberal multiculturalist positions actually maintain the dominant culture in the invisible centre and define the multicultural and hybrid space on the margins. While this position "argues for equal cultural worth it actually maintains a centre/margin worldview that does not recognise the borderline temporalities of partial, minority cultures" (Bhabha, 1994, 1996 p. 56).

How then can power be seen in the process of hybridity? What is the potential of hybridity as a political force in the project of critical multiculturalism? To Bhabha (1994, 1996), hybridity is a process and "construction of cultural authority within conditions of political inequity or antagonism" where power plays an important role. Bhabha (1996) asserts that

Hybridity is not a benign synthesis of interaction of two cultures but a way of negotiation and estrangement of cultural signs of authority by a minority. While power in this process is unequal, such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration (p. 58).

Hybridity transforms a minority subject into a 'partial' presence - partial as both virtual and incomplete. It is in this disruption, the partiality of the subject, that the possibility of hybridity enters into the power and discursive relationship, thus creating the possibility for resistance or withdrawal or both (Williams, 2003). Luke (1995, p. 87) posits that hybridity is about strategically deciding how and where to deploy which identity in relation to material power, the "knowing of where and when to pick your spots".

I have established that experience and performance of hybridity relates to differentials in power. Hybridity has the potential to disrupt, transform and/or subvert dominant power relations. To avoid a superficial coverage of the issue of power individuals and groups deploy in the process of hybridity, discussion of power in hybridity must acknowledge the power differentials between the cultures that members of minority group live in, the amount of engagement each of them has, the access they have to the condition of hybridity, and the affective and political investments they have in wanting or refusing hybrid identities (Chan, 2004; Diaz, 2005; Pietersee, 1999).

Looking at hybridity through the lens of power disrupts the notion that the theory of hybridity is relativistic. Power-conscious hybridity (Finn, 2005) can help in identifying multiple identifications across different axes of identification such as ethnicity, class, gender and others (for example, being Yugoslav or Australian are not the only two referents SFYB negotiate to establish identity but also male/female etc - this study focuses on ethnicity while acknowledging other social markers play an important part in negotiation of identity and the process of hybridity). Certain

identification such as views of the role of women and men might make performance of Australian-ness difficult for SFYB. Ethnicity, gender, class and other referents may work together but they may work against each other too.

Examining the power relations in hybridity also disrupts its labelling as 'essentialist' (Finn, 2005). The cultures that SFYB draw upon in their hybridity are not equal in the position of relative power. I posit that in the discourse of schooling in Australia, 'Yugoslavness' is marginalised and performance of hybridity is a reaction to the presentation of such culture as less attractive in relation to 'Australian' cultural forms and norms the educational system is trying to propagate. Thus the discourse of Australian culture has the power to define others. Some SFYB may want to be more 'Australian' while some SFYB may want to for example, defend negative portrayals of 'Yugoslav' culture as 'violent'.

Finally, attending to power relations in hybridity provides an opportunity to locate and resist essentialism. Location of particular anxieties with regards to (multiple) identities can be illuminated (Finn, 2005). Some SFYB wanting to challenge the notion that 'Yugoslavs are violent' may want to identify as Yugoslavs in their efforts to present a different picture, one of SFYB being able to peacefully and constructively negotiate a disagreement 'as Australians would'. In such case, representation of Yugoslavness could be redirected to reach a better balance with the notions of 'Australianess'.

#### *Useful Literature on Theory of Hybridity*

In the otherwise expansive and loosely defined field of writing on multicultural education, there is a notable paucity of works exploring and using the notion of hybridity in the sense used in this study. The lack of success in searching the field for comparative work can possibly be attributed to the relative novelty of the development and application of Bhabha's and Hall's understandings of hybridity in educational contexts. Another possible reason for lack of writing is that the

researchers have been following the more established trajectories of diaspora studies, transcultural studies, studies of acculturation and similar fields or lines of enquiry into the experiences of mostly geographically (dis)placed people.

I have extensively referred to some of the seminal works on theory of hybridity by Bhabha, Hall, Gilroy, Spivak, Kraidy, Pietersee, Papastergiadis, Werbner and Moodood in the development of this chapter. These works generally develop and/or affirm theory of hybridity developed in Bhabha's seminal work *Location of Culture* (1994). Stuart Hall and particularly his work on development and change of hyphenated, diasporic identities (1996a, 1996b) strongly supports and complements Bhabha's notion of hybridity. Bhabha himself often uses Hall's insights in his work. In a significant early work using the concept of hybridity, Gilroy (1993) looks at hybridity through construction and distribution of items of popular culture of and by black artists. Spivak (1993) interrogates power relationships in the notions of hybridity in the context of feminism and postcolonial studies and points out the need for examination of intersections of race, gender, class and ethnicity on the processes of hybridity. Werbner and Moodood's (1997) text is a useful gathering of insights on the notion of cultural hybridity. As the name *Debating Cultural Hybridity* suggests, the work presents a range of views on hybridity from critical (Friedman, 1997; Hutnyk, 1997) to affirming (Papastergiadis, 1997) and cautionary (Werbner, 1997). The works of Pietersee (2001, 2004) and Kraidy (2003) are highly supportive of the theory of hybridity and present an excellent overview of main arguments for and against theory of hybridity. Pietersee's counter-arguments in favour of hybridity and Kraidy's sketching out of critical hybridity as the next stage in the development of theory of hybridity were invaluable in constructing an understanding of hybridity for this work. Here I mention only the key texts in this construction, with a number of other authors using and/or critiquing hybridity in their work referred to in this and other chapters.

Expectedly, the theory has had a number of critics and I briefly map out the main works where hybridity is questioned. This is by no means an exhaustive list of arguments against theory of hybridity in the literature. Friedman (1997) and May (1999) charge the theory of the very essentialism it tries to avoid, in a sense that it needs to construct binaries to justify its imagining of a hybrid space. While a discussion of whether the theory of hybridity is guilty of essentialising or not is beyond the scope of this study, it is useful however to sketch out a challenge to the claim. While Werbner (1997), Pietersee (2001) and Baumann (in Noble & Tabar, 2002) reject hybridity as dichotomous to essentialism, they recognise that essentialising can be “mobilised by both the dominant and the demotic discourse for different purposes” (Baumann in Noble & Tabar, 2002, p. 132). However, they argue for a distinction between a reification of essentialism and an objectification as a form of self-essentialising necessary to imagine a community (Werbner, 1997).

In her support of a ‘modern hybridity’, Werbner (1997) questions the usefulness of postmodernist imagining of hybridity as a universal phenomenon for the purpose of social change – if we are all hybrid, why bother? This argument leans strongly towards the most significant critique in the context of this critical multiculturalist study. The most common theme among writers working in and across various emancipatory theories (Mitchell, 1997; May, 1999; Spivak, 1993; Werbner, 1997; Chan, 2004; Chowdury, 2002; Friedman, 1997; Hutnyk, 1997; Finn, 2005) is a caveat against premature, culturalistic celebrations of hybridity as a universally effective tool for greater cross-cultural understanding and empowerment of the margins. To realise their potential for disruption of and/or resistance to dominant, hegemonic sets of practices, processes of hybridity need to be examined against arrangements of power in relations in which hybridities are deployed. This seems to be a stem for a range of lines of critique some of which I list but not answer here. Mitchell (1997) laments the lack of writing to investigate the ways that performances

and embodiment of hybridity and similar terms<sup>21</sup> have not been investigated for their potential to be reinserted in the 'old' geographies of power but instead got lost in abstract 'intellectual gaze' (Kraidy, 2002) and language games of theorists (Sidhu, 2004; Friedman, 1997). Ahmad (in Kraidy, 2002) is particularly critical of hybridity as a re-inscription of cultural claims of hegemonic trans-national capital. Similarly, Chow (in Kraidy, 2002) and Chan (2004) warn that hybridity and particularly its institutionalisation is a strategy of co-optation used by the power holders to neutralise difference which may threaten the hegemonically constructed interests in a society.

It is important to note that proliferation of the term 'hybridity', often prefixed with 'cultural', and the corollary ambiguity in its use has often caused uncertainty in this literature review in determining whether the arguments for or against refer to the theory of hybridity developed by Bhabha, and largely supported by Hall, or other conceptual understandings of hybridity. This observation is supported by Kraidy (2002, p. 322), who posits that the "conceptual ambiguity of hybridity is amplified by divergences of the meaning and implications of hybridity". Use of hybridity in theory is mired in two paradoxes. First, it is understood as both subversive and pervasive, exceptional and ordinary, marginal yet mainstream. Secondly, the extreme openness of the term allows for arbitrary, exclusionary closure by anyone to mean anything (Werbner, 1997). This could render hybridity as conceptually disposable and useless for examination of material experiences of (dis)advantage. Thus the importance of examination of social, economic, political and cultural relations and the underlying power configuration in which hybridity is imagined and performed again cannot be overstated in this critical multiculturalist work.

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<sup>21</sup> The proliferation of terms like 'in-betweenness', 'liminality', 'diasporic identity', 'spaces', 'networks', 'flows', 'rootlessness', 'transience', 'boundary crossing', 'third space', 'glocalisation', 'disjuncture' to name a few of the terms similar to hybridity or used to describe it, does indeed make it difficult to assign a coherent, workable meaning to this family of concepts in a sense that they can be cross-examined for their political effect and potential.

Several studies working with the notions of hybridity were particularly useful and relevant to this project. These studies are either placed in educational sites or have very strong implications for education. Williams (2003) uses theory of hybridity to reflect on her own teaching practice at an international college in the U.S. The highly cross-cultural educational setting of the study where hybridity is a particularly prominent strategy of managing difference, a thorough coverage of the important issue of power, and well thought out self-reflexive writing on the positioning of the teacher/researcher makes this work very useful and highly translatable to other educational contexts. The work by Luke & Luke (1999) on hybridity in interracial marriages carries important insights for Australian educational contexts. Halilovic (2005) investigates hybridity following particular patterns of migration of people from Bosnia to Australia after a temporary stay in Germany. These migration patterns and associated experiences would be almost identical to the ones experienced by a number of SFYB participating in this study. In the dearth of works using hybridity as the conceptual tool and with this specific population, the work by Halilovic is particularly useful.

While not using hybridity as a conceptual tool for analysis, Miller's (1999) account of the experiences of schooling of a young Bosnian refugee, Miskovic's (2005) study of acculturation of Bosnian women, and Colic-Peisker's work on Bosnian refugees (2000) and Croatian immigrants (1999, 2002, 2004) provide rich, and in the context of this study, very valuable insights into the experiences of individuals and families from the territories of former Yugoslavia who have recently migrated to Australia.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Mansouri and Trembath's (2005) recent work in education of Arab-Australian students provide a valuable background in creating a

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<sup>22</sup> The volume of studies of immigrants in Australia is much too large for any in-depth investigation to be attempted here. I mention the work of Miller and Colic-Peisker, whose work I had read as a teacher before engaging a great deal with this thesis in trying to better understand and frame the experiences of SFYB and their families at Lake College where I worked at the time.



picture of NESB student experiences in which hybridity may have been deployed but where such deployments were not the focus of the authors' writing.

During the research of literature it was interesting to note a point made by several authors (Pietersee, 1999; Halilovic, 2005; Noble & Tabar, 2002; Mansouri & Trembath, 2005; Cressey, 2002). These authors found that the younger people are generally more likely to deliberately experience and deploy hybridity in their management of their social, political, educational, economic and cultural realities than their less culture and identity-savvy parents or other older people. This bears hope for the future that more researchers will use the concept of hybridity in their work in compulsory education and thus contribute to the currently sparsely populated field of studies of youth and multicultural education that deals specifically with ethnicity as the focus of hybridity.

Cressey's (2002) account of strategic and pragmatic deployments of hybridity among young Pakistani and Kashmiri youth in the UK bears very close resemblance to similar accounts of hybridity explored in Australian contexts. Study of children in the Australian Latin American diaspora by Diaz (2005) explores the role of language in hybridity. Importantly, Diaz reflects the issue through the lens of power in identity formation and assertion of difference against the backdrop of current discourses of multiculturalism in Australia. Perhaps the closest study to this project in terms of its aims, methods, theoretical approaches and population they work with is Noble and Tabar's (2002) exploration of performance of hybridity among Lebanese Australian youth in Western Sydney. The authors illuminate dynamic experience and mobilisation of hyphenated identities in private and public domains by Lebanese Australian youth as a strategy to "broaden their scope of personal freedom and increase their 'cultural resources' against parental authority and the discrimination found in the broader community." (2002, p. 143).

*Why use theory of hybridity ?*

Having outlined a particular view of the process of hybridity from what can be perhaps better described as theory *on* hybridity instead of theory *of* hybridity I now wish to answer a question: Why is hybridity useful in this study? I have so far tried to incorporate my particular understanding of theory of hybridity into the project of critical multiculturalism to sharpen the lens for reading the data of this study. Now, I propose the way this understanding of hybridity will guide and help interpret the collected data in this particular project.

Hybridity is an infinitely unfinished process that avoids fixity and allows multiplicity and fallibility. I have chosen to imagine the process of managing social realities in shifting and hybrid cultural, social, political, educational and other spaces as a more useful way to understand people's experiences than affirming those spaces as exclusive and bounded. This could be particularly useful in this study where SFYB occupy quite divergent, shifting, but tangible, positions of language, social practices, schooling experience and others to those of the bulk of the mainstream population of AS students at Lake College. The study seeks to illuminate the investments SFYB make in, costs they concede and advantages they take from existing in-between different positions.

The insights of a number of authors who have written on the experiences of immigrant FY people (Colic-Peisker, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004; Halilovic, 2005, Miskovic, 2005) and/or particularly of SFYB (Halilovic, 2005; Miller, 1999; Henry & Edwards, 1986) suggest that the process of hybridity, rather than assimilation, seems to be a valuable survival strategy for members of minorities like SFYB. Many of the SFYB come from places<sup>23</sup> where they had to learn how to negotiate, subvert and transform their ethnic identities and cultural background since these identities and backgrounds could cause persecution and harm, much due to the 'narcissism of

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<sup>23</sup> Those SFYB who do not come directly from such places would still be very familiar with the problems experienced by SFYB who had lived there and experienced the phenomena first hand.

minor difference'<sup>24</sup>. In the either/or arrangements of “boundary fetishism” (Pieterse, 1999, p. 234) that emerged during the war in FY, hybrids, once common, normalised and celebrated became prosecuted. In her exploration of identities of people of FY, Petrunic (2005, p. 3) quotes Antic’s suggestion that “the history of ambiguity of determining a Balkan identity in itself is an essence of hybridity”. With these insights in mind it would be interesting to see if and how SFYB experience and enact hybridity to manage their experiences at Lake College. It is important to note that I am not attempting to position all SFYB at Lake College as ‘masters of hybridity’. I acknowledge that some of them may have had strong experiences of the process of hybridity and have even deployed their hybridised identities towards their interests in the sense used in this study.

At Lake College, discourse of ethnicity positions SFYB as a minority, on the margins of the dominant AS centre. Exploration of hybridity in this study may move the understanding of SFYB’s ethnicity towards Hall’s ‘positive conception of ethnicity of the margins’. Commenting on the work of black artists in the UK, Hall (1996b) calls for:

...a recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of particular history, out of particular experience, a particular culture without being contained by that position as ‘ethnic artists’. We are all ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are. But this is also a recognition that this is not an ethnicity which is doomed to survive, as Englishness was, only by marginalising, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other ethnicities. This precisely is the politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity. (p. 447)

The strength of Hall’s conception of ethnicity is tied to the acceptance of the work of hybridity as a global process of strategic, conditional positioning of ethnicity

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<sup>24</sup> A phrase coined by Ignatieff (1993) and used by Petrunic to describe the way “feelings of ethnic nationalism are exploited by exaggerating the minor linguistic and cultural differences of the Balkan peoples.”

common to all, not just to SFYB. But importantly, while the process may be common to us all, at Lake College it may be more intense for SFYB than for their AS peers.

Understanding of hybridity may lead to a dialogue, described by Bhabha (1994) as a “temporal process of ‘negotiation’ rather than a fixed, transcendent and prescriptive ‘negation’” (p. 37). In such negotiation SFYB’s ethnic positioning could be contested, (re)affirmed or rejected at any time, instead of it being affirmed, celebrated or ignored as a fixed category. Hybridity could disrupt, if not rupture, the ‘deficit theories’, used in different contexts and to different extent to guide the practices of schooling of SFYB and other ethnic minorities in Australia. It is important here to restate two points made earlier. Firstly, the outcomes of such negotiation and rupture of dominant discourses could be positive as much as they could be negative for SFYB. Secondly, the use of hybridity as a conceptual tool in this study would necessarily remain conscious of the (im)balance of power in the process of negotiation. Assertion and negotiation of ethnic identities does not happen on a level playing field in any setting and SFYB are no different. Acceptance of SFYB’s identities would be highly dependent on the context and relations of power in which they are located.

#### *Summary of My Theoretical Position*

So far I have presented some of the main features of critical multiculturalism as a distinct form of multiculturalism from three other understandings which have continued to frame the notion of multiculturalism in Australia in overlapping fashion. I have outlined the ways the work of critical multiculturalists has been informed by postmodern theory but has departed from potentially highly relativistic contingencies of the ‘post’ to identifiable points of commitment to greater equality and social justice. I have then explored some particular understandings of the notion of hybridity and its usefulness as a possible conceptual tool in the project of critical multiculturalism and more specifically in the context of this study.

I now wish to bring this development together by stating some of the key points of my theoretical position which incorporates elements of critical multiculturalism, postmodernism and hybridity. To avoid constant mentioning of now established overlap, compatibility and tensions between the concepts I have discussed, they will not be extensively referred to in this outline of my theoretical stance. The following is a brief summary of the development of these concepts and the way I will use them to analyse the gathered data.

Probably the most important point in my theoretical position from which I act as a researcher, is that I avoid binaries. I do not see SFYB as a powerless, oppressed minority group at Lake College as opposed to powerful, privileged AS. SFYB are indeed acted upon by the dominant discourse of schooling from classifying them according to their ethnicity to sets of teaching practices and in various other ways. At the same time, they are not helpless as individuals or group(s) but deploy strategies to manage their schooling experiences according to their goals. One of such strategies in managing their 'ethnic' identity is performance of hybridity. Through this process, they can be (n)either Yugoslav (n)either Australian or both and they have the power to choose the positionalities, whether conscious or unconscious. The circumstances of their hybridity and reasons for it may not be necessarily a matter of personal preference but of structural position of (dis)advantage they find themselves in.

I do not view SFYB as a homogeneous group but I imagine instead that there may be significant differences between them in terms of schooling and other experiences, including those of hybridity and its deliberate deployment. The intensity of the process of hybridity, investments SFYB make in it and access to the processes would no doubt vary between individuals and assumptions of homogeneity could marginalise and silence complex local, individual differences. Homogenisation and essentialism of group members and their characteristics are not a pre-condition for coherent understanding of their individual and collective

circumstances and experiences. While some clustering and generalisations may well be drawn from the data based on frequency and depth of particular responses for illumination of similarities among SFYB, they cannot be generally clustered together as one. In my own naming of SFYB as a group I merely acknowledge their greater access to a very similar cultural capital and sets of practices and norms loosely called 'former Yugoslav' as distinct from those (again loosely) called 'Anglo-Australian', which underpin the dominant curriculum and schooling practices at Lake College.

I also do not view SFYB in terms of their 'deficits' that need to be overcome. I recognise that the positionings of 'deficits' are a construct of a dynamic arrangement of social, economic, political and educational sets of practices currently in ascendance at Lake College and the larger system of education the school operates in. The form of hybridity I have developed in this chapter is a conceivable way of challenging, overcoming, even hiding from the material effects of 'deficits' positioned as such by the dominant Anglo-Australian culture.

In addition to structural arrangements of schooling and individual aspirations of SFYB, the extent of their hybridity is moderated by their lives outside of school. While family influences are not the focus of this study they would probably have considerable effects on management of social realities of SFYB at Lake College.

I recognise that SFYB are not the only students at the school experiencing and deploying hybridity in the process of schooling. Performance of hybridity as a way of managing their 'ethnicity' may indeed be more deliberate, intense and taxing compared to their AS peers. However, they may share the process of hybridity with AS students or other NESB students who may need to deal with a common form of inequality or, equally, an opportunity for advantage. These cross-ethnic coalitions are conceivable but are not explored in great detail in this study<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> These aims reach into the field of another emancipatory theory – critical pedagogy. Throughout the development of my position on critical multiculturalism I quote authors such as

The aim of critical multiculturalism which forms the conceptual framework and the political stance of the project, is achievement of greater equality and social justice. I posit that hybridity may be a fluid cultural state and a valuable strategy which SFYB deploy with varying levels of intensity in their management of social realities to improve their material, significant 'life chances', not only their 'life styles' or 'life choices'. Performance of hybridity may not be just an individual response to changing individual preferences but also a response to particular structural arrangement at the school. This view does not extend only to students like SFYB in this study, or other NESB students, but to all students, who may be disadvantaged as a result of particular assignment of social markers such as ethnicity, race, class, gender, culture and others and their ordering by the dominant discourse of schooling and the wider society.

Finally, I affirm that this research, like any other form of research, is not politically neutral. I position myself not only as a teacher/researcher but as an activist who uses the suspicion of the postmodern thought to view and interrogate the operation of the power/knowledge nexus in constructing particular sets of practices that are seen as valid, real and desirable. I do so purposefully with a set of practices that could ameliorate structural (dis)advantages in mind. At the same time, my normative, political stance of 'should' and 'must' is moderated by what Morgan calls "the 'is'es' of each moment's teaching work" (1997, p.28) and the 'is'es' of each moment's student negotiation of difference through the process of hybridity. An insight from Morgan (1997) encapsulates my position:

If we accept that emancipation and oppression are alike situated within discourses and practices in which knowledge is inseparable from power, then 'emancipation' will be understood as shifting, limited, incomplete process

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McLaren, Aronowitz, Giroux, Kincheloe, Shapiro and others whose main research interests and activism lie in the area of critical pedagogy. The similarities of aims and methods in the fields of critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism may not have been pointed out more explicitly in the text but they certainly do exist and are well documented in literature.

towards ends we can never be certain are in all ways beneficial. If this makes for more humility in our goals, more provisionality and tentativeness in our agendas and more diversity in our curricula, then more may be gained from less. (p.27-28)

It is from this understanding that I act and analyse the data collected in the interviews with the participating SFYB at Lake College.



## Student experiences

In this chapter, I begin to tell the story of the SFYB interviewed and interacted with at Lake College. I use the word ‘story’ deliberately for two reasons. Firstly, I use a narrative format to organise the gathered interview and convey its main themes to an audience. Secondly, while these are snapshots of the lives of participating SFYB at Lake College, they are significantly informed by the past and will continue to be lived in the future, each following their own trajectory and creating own story. The story I refer to here is my attempt to organise data into the main themes that emerged through the interviews and weave those themes with examples of quotes that either best convey the level of general applicability to all or most SFYB at Lake College, stand out from the general trends of the group or are simply most poignant in making the worlds of SFYB accessible to the reader.

I try to present a more holistic picture of the experiences in a combination of description and interpretation. This is an approach more common to qualitative research, instead of a more linear model of description-then-interpretation, more common to quantitative research. In this description-rich chapter, interpretation is still at first-level. Neumann describes first-level interpretation as “learning about the meaning of the statements for the persons interviewed and trying to see the personal reasons and motives for their behaviour and experiences” (2003, p. 148). The ordering of data into themes, selection of certain quotes and the connecting narrative in this chapter are a first-level way of making sense of the findings, a way of “imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world” (Patton, 2002, p. 480).

### *Difference and “Fitting In”*

All interviewed SFYB<sup>26</sup> expressed a feeling that they do not want to be treated differently, favourably or unfavourably, by anyone at the school. The

<sup>26</sup>

A reminder that SFYB is an acronym for ‘Students with Former Yugoslav Background’

sentiment was clearly stated by Ivo<sup>27</sup> (Year 10, Male, Lower, Yugoslav<sup>28</sup>): *“I don’t like separate treatments, I want to be like all other kids and treated like them”*, and Davor (Year 12, Male, High, English): *“I wouldn’t change anything for ‘naši’ [used Yugoslav phrase]<sup>29</sup> students, any change would make the difference between Aussies and us even bigger.”*

The pattern of socialisation of SFYB at the school is a useful indicator of their attempts to ‘fit in’ into the increasingly wider groups, as described by Branka (Year 11, Female, High, Yugoslav):

*When I first came to school I hung around with our [Yugoslav]<sup>30</sup> kids because I didn’t know anyone. Then I met a lot of new friends in ILC who are not from Australia and when I transferred to mainstream I got Australian friends.*

When they first come to the school, SFYB operate in their linguistic and social safety zone where they help each other, a pattern confirmed by Ivo: *“Mile (Year 11, Male, High, Yugoslav) and Vlado (Year 10, Male, Low, Yugoslav) were there to help me in my first days, I will never forget that.”*

SFYB improved their English, self-esteem and social network over the six to twelve months they spent at ILC<sup>31</sup>, where they mixed with other migrant students. As they graduated from ILC into the mainstream classes and the wider school community, they all reported having one of the most difficult times in their entire experience at the Lake College. Boris (Year 12, Male, Low, Yugoslav) spoke of his transition difficulties:

<sup>27</sup> The names of all subjects and schools in this text are pseudonyms.

<sup>28</sup> First reference to each participant contains, in brackets, information on their school year, gender, level of achievement as classified by Lake College staff, and language in which they chose to conduct the interview. Please note that I use the term ‘Yugoslav’ to label different Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian languages/dialects.

<sup>29</sup> The participants commonly used the term “naš(i)” (same in all major languages of former Yugoslavia), literally translated as “our(s)”, to describe students and/ or other persons originating from the territories of former Yugoslavia. Even some of the students who conducted their interviews in English used the term in their native language during the interviews.

<sup>30</sup> “Yugoslav” and “former Yugoslav” refers to the territories and languages of the state of Yugoslavia from 1929 to 1991.

<sup>31</sup> ILC is an acronym for Intensive Language Centre. The ILC was renamed in 2004 as IEC, or Intensive English Centre. All of the participants used the older term (ILC) during interviews hence the use of the term ILC throughout the text.

[One of the biggest challenges was the] *transition from ILC...In ILC there were lots of 'ours' and when you get to mainstream you can't talk in our language, all English. I had to meet a lot of new people again in mainstream, there were very few or no Yugoslavs in my class.*

Seeking contacts with AS<sup>32</sup> became very desirable to SFYB, particularly in order to improve their language, keep up with the curriculum, and overcome loneliness in class, as Ivo recounted: *"More and more I am trying to fit in and connect I, really want to be friends and it helps with my English...I am finding more and more things in common."*

The ethnic background of new and/ or old contacts did not seem to matter to any SFYB in their choices of whom they socialise with at school. Dunja (Year 10, Female, High, English) stated: *"It doesn't matter where they [people she meets at school] are from, a person is a person."*, and Sonja (Year 12, Female, High, English) described how: *"I try to explain to [my] parents [wary of greater ethnic mixing] that it doesn't matter where my friends come from, it's the good heart that matters."*

Six participants<sup>33</sup> expressed a preference towards socialising with fellow SFYB as they understand the cultural features such as type of humour, as explained by Ivo: *"People are the same but they are not the same...I can't explain some Yugoslav humour to Australians, I grew up in Yugoslavia and there are just different ways of joking."*

As they spent at least six months at Lake College, SFYB mostly kept the newly established relationships among them. However, they became gradually more critical and selective of those relationships, particularly after graduation from the more closely-knit, small-class environment of ILC. This quote is from Davor, who spent his first few years mainly socialising with SFYB but has since shifted his views:

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<sup>32</sup> AS is an acronym for "Australian students" and represents students with Anglo-Australian ethnic background.

<sup>33</sup> Four of these students were low achievers and two high achievers. All of these students conducted the interview in Yugoslav.

*I am mainly friends with Aussie people now at school, for some reason I just don't get along with Yugoslav students at school, some aspects of things they do really annoy me, like the way they behave on the bus and to the girls – they are “seljaci”<sup>34</sup>.*

Many SFYB played out the tension between the highly valued wish to remain “good friends” with fellow SFYB and spending more time with AS and other non-FYB<sup>35</sup> students. The example of Rajko (Year 10, Male, High, English) and Ivo, former friends now mere acquaintances typifies such tension. Rajko claimed: *“I still have friends and talk to Yugoslav students but I still hang around more with people from Australia... Yugoslavs are a bit more rowdy and like to cause more trouble.”* Ivo, who wants to and does mix with non-FY students as well as SFYB, talked disappointingly about Rajko: *“He showed me around in my first days and he has a good heart, really, but I can't be with him any more because he is with Australians mostly and he only socialises their way... he is more Australian than ‘ours’.”*

SFYB considered the expansion of their social network to include non-SFYB, non-ILC (other recent migrants) important for operating in the mainstream classes and achieving academic success.

Several student responses indicated varying degrees of closeness to other SFYB at the school. For example, Slavica (Year 11, Female, High, English) reported of *“not being that close to a lot of people in Yugoslav group”*, while Dunja actively refused greater contact with this group as she didn't *“like some people in the group”* and warned that *“hanging around 24/7 with the same people would just end up in fighting anyway”*.

Dunja and Rajko, both of whom attended ILC programmes at their respective Western Australian primary schools and not at Lake College, were less inclined to

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<sup>34</sup>

An offensive term used to describe uneducated, ignorant peasants.

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FY and FYB are acronyms for “Former Yugoslav” and “Former Yugoslav Background”

socialise more exclusively with SFYB while being more critical of the behaviour of SFYB. On the other hand, Boris, who is an older student in Year 12 with poorer English skills than his peers and smaller social network at the school, stated that he socialises almost exclusively with SFYB as he can “*talk to people*” and understand them in familiar ways.

While all SFYB student reported varying degrees of continuous involvement with other SFYB at the school, they mostly had one or two “*real friends*” among them, as Ivo pointed out: “*I love getting new friends but I want to keep old friends, I don’t just forget them when meeting new ones. But in a relatively large circle of friends I have two whom I trust and they trust me* [spoken in context of favouring FY friendship type over Australian].”

All except one participant, who remained indifferent, disliked pointing out their own ethnic background by themselves or by other people at the school. Vlado put it very clearly: “*I don’t want to be ashamed of being Yugoslav but not everyone has to know that I am Yugoslav.*”

Many of the interviewed SFYB strongly resented other people categorising them all as “Yugoslav students” and basing prejudice and even stereotypes on past negative experiences with SFYB at Lake College. Dunja felt that “*one problem is bagging all Yugoslavs together, the guys got a bad reputation, particularly last year [after many fights].*” Rajko gave his view of stereotypes: “*Stereotypes on Yugoslavs are that they speak little English, always loud, noisy, swear a lot...I really don’t like stereotypes, everyone is different.*” Mile provided an example of another harmful association: “*After last year’s fights teachers see us as one group, they suspect we are the troublemakers.*”

Some of the stereotypes about Yugoslav people have been reinforced by reported teacher’s remarks such as “*you Yugos all want to be taxi drivers*”. Occasionally even the actions of well-meaning teachers upset SFYB. Vlado provided an example of teacher’s inquiry into the occupation of his parents, who are both

tertiary educated professionals currently working in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs: “*I felt upset when [a] teacher said ‘many Yugoslav parents do cleaning jobs’. I said to her ‘that is all they can do because of their poor English.’*”

The ‘ethnic’ or ‘Yugo’ tag generated feelings of disappointment, even shame among SFYB as it denigrated their efforts to become less visible in the mainstream. Dunja gave one such example: “*All Australians and Yugoslavs are the same to me except some Australian girls go ‘oh, you Yugo’ if I speak with some Yugoslavs.*” Slavica told a story of Yugoslav refugee boy: “*He got asked by a teacher ‘Do your parents ever feed you?’ and it was a huge shame for him, he didn’t say a word. It wasn’t a joke, she knew where he comes from.*” Vlado was very clear about his expectations:

*The school expects me not to cause trouble, not to show too much I am a Yugoslav and boast around about being a Yugoslav, not to make a difference. They [the school] expect me to be just like anyone else and that’s OK.*

As the participants reported their experiences of unwanted ethnic identification and even denigration, an interesting tolerance emerged from their responses. Many of them adopted a ‘can’t blame them, they don’t know better’ position of towards AS and teachers while having a far less tolerating position towards any such infringements by fellow SFYB themselves. The two quotes below are from Slavica:

*People in Australia don’t understand, they meet one person and they think all are like that – so they don’t know. Maybe that teacher [considered “racist”] had a bad experience with a Yugoslav in the past and thinks we are all the same...*

*What really hurt me in Australia was a remark by a Bosnian girl 'How can you say you are Bosnian, you have no heart'<sup>36</sup>. I think the only person that can really hurt you is your own kind, they know. In Australia, people don't know but Yugoslav people - they do.*

None of the interviewed SFYB felt that their ethnic background is negative as such, it is only the negative association with "bad" SFYB and the feeling of difference that they dislike. Vlado again provided a succinct view:

*I don't mind being Yugoslav at all but I don't know why some students keep boasting about being Yugoslav, there are so few of us here and so many Australians. Sometimes I feel ashamed of being a Yugoslav for what others [SFYB] do, we have to respect Australians for accepting us, not the other way around.*

SFYB recognised the great majority of staff and AS as very accepting and helpful. However, several SFYB reported that individuals, rather than larger groups, either treated them differently or that they felt like those individuals saw them differently. Boris commented: *"Teachers never really deliberately didn't help but sometimes I feel different as if you are not Australian they won't help."*

While most of such instances of differences were negatively framed, even the occasions where the intentions were positive, or were meant to be that way, some SFYB still felt uncomfortable. Gojko (Year 12, Male, Low, Yugoslav) provided one such example: *Apart from these few teachers who try to avoid us they are all fair and make no difference Yugoslav – Australian...sometimes they are even too keen to help Yugoslav students, like the teacher always kept asking but we rarely needed help.*

The school uniform is mostly disliked and questioned by many SFYB as a necessary condition of education, or as Davor asked: *"What has the uniform to with*

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<sup>36</sup> "Kako ti to možeš reći da si Bosanka, ti nemaš srca". Spoken in native language while conducting the rest of the interview in English.

*my knowledge?"* However, many SFYB understood its purpose of reducing difference among students in terms of identity, style and cost and was therefore appreciated. Dunja summed up the attitude towards the school uniform: *"I don't like the uniform, it's annoying but I can see the point in it."*

### *Schooling as Opportunity*

When asked about their expectations of their schooling, responses of SFYB varied from Boris stating *"just finishing the school"* to several higher achievers stating they want to finish the school with *"highest possible marks...A's and B's"*. Importantly, not a single SFYB interviewed considered pulling out of school before they finished Year 12. Most of them would see non-completion of Year 12 as a personal failure and/ or a failure to respect the wishes of their parents. Parents of several SFYB have a strong influence on the choice of their children's future careers. Ivo described the (lack of) choice:

*Whether I like it or not, I will go and do everything to finish the [nursing] course. I respect the work and help my parents have [given] and constantly put in me...nursing or medicine is not so much my wish as my parents.*

Vlado expressed a similar aim: *"Grades are very important to me, my parents came here to give me better education. I could have finished school in Yugoslavia but we came here, the school is better."*

At the same time, Slavica and Sonja reported almost identically that their parents have told them they are *"free to choose whatever career they like"* (Slavica) and that they would not interfere with the girls' choices.

All of the interviewed higher achievers, as well as some lower achievers, mentioned on strong parental pressures on them to keep the level of (high) grades they had held before coming to Australia. Sonja explained her situation: *"There is*



*pressure to do well in school by parents. Before we came to Australia, 4's and 5's were fine, 3's were 'no way', 1's were a disaster. It's pretty [much the] same here.*<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, Sonja noted how her parents "...don't know this culture and schools they back off a bit", but added "if you don't force yourself you will get lazy...you really need good self-discipline."

Most of the participants were very aware of the future paths they would like to undertake and opportunities in their personal and professional life offered by education. When asked about the purpose of doing well academically at school, Sonja responded:

*I am going to school to provide [myself a] better future. In Yugoslavia, even after you finish school there are few jobs and you have to live with your parents for a long time. In Australia there are more chances for job and independence.*

To SFYB high grades were the measure of academic success and the most important reason for attending school. However, not all SFYB sought the same levels of success. To some higher academic achievers like Slavica, Rajko, Mile or Branka, finishing school with good marks represented a step towards university and a professional career. The other two higher academic achievers contemplated vocational courses, at the expense of disappointment by their parents and teachers. Sonja stated: "*I am interested in doing a Diploma for beauty therapist...parents and teachers tell me that's a waste of my brain.*" [laughs]

Some of the interviewed lower achievers experienced a dissonance between their after-school ambitions and their parents. Vlado stated: "*I would like to do accounting but my father wants me to be a doctor, he says I will have work wherever I go.*" Other lower achievers either had no particular career plans and are even happy, like Boris to "*just finish*" Year 12.

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<sup>37</sup> The five point "5, 4, 3, 2, 1" grading system is identical to "A, B, C, D, F" in Australia.

A number of SFYB mentioned education as an opportunity to escape unskilled or semi-skilled jobs their parents or other family members (many of them tertiary-educated and highly skilled) perform in Australia. Mile was one of these SFYB: *"I want to finish school because I don't want to be a cleaner"*.

Mile also reflected with a comparison with AS on the perceived greater *"maturity"* which SFYB frequently mentioned in regards to their education and career(s):

*"Our" kids mature earlier than Australian, they think what they want to be in 10 or 15 years, Australian kids don't care, they are like "I don't care, I'll find a job, go and work with a builder or something". They don't understand that [these jobs] can be really bad for your health, like your back.*

The importance of education and preference for a challenging, more content-based curriculum is clearly reflected in the next several quotes which typify SFYB's general dislike of teachers they consider as poor and what they consider to be an unchallenging curriculum

A number of participants commented particularly strongly on the curriculum in Years 8, 9 and 10. Slavica thought that *"...education from 8 to 10 is not good, people don't really have to work...teachers don't push you hard.* Davor suggested: *"The school should be more into teaching information at lower school. It's too basic and people are not pushed at all."*

Year 11 and Year 12 students reported on a shift to post-compulsory level as *"more work"* and *"more serious and challenging"*, particularly to students, who *"relaxed"* before Year 11. The following is Mile's view:

*School is easy here, all easy in 9 and 10 by the time a lot of people got to Year 11 and 12 they got soft and they got a shock and got lost...I didn't really get a shock as I went to school in Germany.*

Davor added: *“I never ever studied in 8 to 10 [Years], now I study... I am bombed with TEE<sup>38</sup>.”*

SFYB in Years 11 and 12 noted a sharp distinction between the compulsory and post-compulsory level but seem to approve of the perceived difficulty, home workload, grading and seriousness in Years 11 and 12. Even Gojko, a Year 12 lower achiever, conceded:

*It’s all easy and OK here but the problem is I am lazy. In Yugoslavia I studied two or three hours every day, here half an hour at most. In Yugoslavia I got 4’s and 5’s [top two grades] in Australia I get C’s and B’s, which is lower. I don’t know, because it’s easier I study less.*

All participants had had some experience of schooling outside Australia in either former Yugoslavia or Germany. Mile’s statement summarised a general view of all SFYB who compared Yugoslav and/ or German schools with Lake College:

*School in Yugoslavia was much harder than here, a lot of the things in primary school are here in Year 10 and 11. In Yugoslavia you were expected to study more, you had more tests, oral tests, you really had to follow and stay on course or you got a bad mark straight away.*

Overall, school is seen as “*serious business*” by SFYB and their parents, Slavica and her parents even compared it to a job: *“I am not working and even if I wanted to work my parents wouldn’t allow it, because my job is to study and to get good education.”*

### *Challenges at School*

When directly asked about the biggest challenges in their schooling, SFYB overwhelmingly stated three of them – language problems, lack of social and academic background, and unfair treatment by teachers.

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<sup>38</sup> TEE (Tertiary Entrance Examination) is a method of high school graduation used in Western Australia to guide competitive entry into tertiary, particularly university, study.

SFYB considered the (lack of) knowledge of English language as the biggest obstacle in achieving their social and academic aspirations at the school. When asked about his greatest challenges at school, Mile replied: “[My greatest challenge is] *English [language] and the expectations of teachers we’ll be just like the native speakers and to write and work like them and use the language the way they do.*” He continued: *“I want to be a good student with average marks, well behaved and causing no trouble but I don’t expect to be the best student due to language.”*

Instances when poor English proficiency represented a serious challenge ranged from being unable to talk to people, feeling differentiated and left out. Boris stated: *It hurt sometimes I couldn’t speak English so I couldn’t meet new people then I socialise only with Yugoslavs.*” Dunja replied: *“Now that we learned the language is fine, we all feel like the same people not like ‘the Yugos.’”* Ivo commented on his difficulties with English language this way:

*I would like to have all best grades but it is difficult because of my English, writing and understanding some things. I try to work hard and I currently have mid levels but I need Level 5’s for my TEE in S & E<sup>39</sup> and Science.*

Lack of confidence was particularly acute among the lower achievers like Nina (Year 11, Female, Low, English):

*English was my biggest problem...I had lots of questions to ask and ask for help but I didn’t know how to. Sometimes I forget how to say it when given the opportunity to ask and was a bit shy...I had the fear everyone will laugh at me and not understand me if I speak and make a mistake.*

and Boris:

*I was a bit afraid and a bit ashamed of saying things because everyone would laugh...No one really laughed at me but I feel silly to talk as I don’t speak well as everyone else.*

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<sup>39</sup>

Studies of Society and Environment (S&E).

Even some of the higher achievers like Branka reported significantly lower outcomes and grades in heavily language-dependent subjects: *“I picked the relevant subject for graphic design and I get regular A’s and B’s but English I have almost permanent C.”*

It is important to note that while most of the SFYB reported problems related to their level of English, it should not be always seen as excuse for perhaps poorer academic achievement, as shown by Gojko’s admission:

*There are just more things to do in Year 11 and 12, it is harder but not so much because of the language. It is more the case that I can’t be bothered or simply can’t do the work required.*

While SFYB achieved a basic level of English proficiency in ILC, the transition to mainstream again required them to manage greater language demands and expectations. Ivo recounted his experiences:

*The teacher expected us to spell and understand everything immediately after ILC but it was impossible for us. When we asked for things to be written on board she yelled at us “You should know that!”*

SFYB’ efforts to master English included extensive use of dictionaries at home and school, interaction with non-FY and particularly ES students, sitting deliberately with ES<sup>40</sup> in classroom and other strategies. Gojko’s statement captured the experience:

*Mainstream is even better than ILC. In ILC I spoke Yugoslav<sup>41</sup> with lots of Yugoslav students but English when doing the work. Now in mainstream it is full time English and I improved my English a lot because you are forced to speak English or you fall through.*

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<sup>40</sup> ES and ESB are acronyms for “English speaking/ English speakers” and “English speaking background”.

<sup>41</sup> A uniform “Yugoslav” language never actually existed. The term “Yugoslav (language)” commonly refers to (any of) the three major languages (Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian and their mixtures) spoken in former Yugoslavia by the majority of the population.

SFYB frequently interpreted to their parents, fellow FY students and even siblings. Their parents could offer very little or no support with most of the curriculum materials due to their poorer English skills. Dunja explained how *“Dad knows [English] a bit after so many years, mum still doesn’t and we speak our language at home... they can’t help with my school really.”* Nina pointed out a similar situation while laughing at the *“funny way”* the way she played the role of family interpreter: *“When the phone rings at home, they [Nina’s parents, sometimes even her brother and sister] all wait for me to pick up the phone to interpret for them.”*

In addition, and related to the challenges of learning and using English, many SFYB felt the absence of growing up in Australia made it difficult for them to participate and understand the curriculum and accepted mainstream social practices. Ivo observed: *“I know I come from Yugoslavia and I was not born here and I can’t be like them [AS] but I just need to have a bit of feeling that I am comfortable [switched to English] here.”*

This became particularly obvious, again, in transition from ILC to the mainstream classes, where much more background knowledge was assumed and teachers had less time and resources to deal with any students more individually. As explained by Sonja: *“The transition was very hard...teachers treat you differently, they have less time for you in mainstream, other students have more background and I missed out a lot on.”*

Davor’s anecdote showed a similar lack of background and assumed expectations: *“Before I came to Australia I had no idea who the Aborigines were, where they came from and all that...Suddenly I was expected to know everything about them.”*

Perceived unfair treatment by a small number of teachers was another serious challenge reported by several participants. The perception of unfairness and even prejudice extended usually to one or two teachers, with whom SFYB felt

differentiated or even less preferred, and not to the majority of teachers and school staff, whom all SFYB saw as very fair.

Slavica described one such teacher: *“She prefers Australian students and is not like that just to people from Yugoslavia, you can tell”* and later added an analogy:

*Teachers have nothing against us or hate us but some still prefer Aussie kids. They will help them more, it’s a bit like in a divorced family having your own and someone else’s children, you know.*

Eight students, six male and two female, reported prejudice by teachers against SFYB as calling them *“troublemakers”* due to previous history of frequent fights involving SFYB at Lake College. SFYB felt that the trend has continued even though the fighting has decreased, particularly after the intervention by the principal. Mile claimed: *“We have changed since we were told [by the principal] that teachers don’t like us because we are’ troublemakers’.”*

Boris noted how the situation has improved since the arrival of the current principal: *“With Savich<sup>42</sup> [the principal] at school, the treatment of Aussies and Yugoslavs is more the same, before Aussies got it lighter. I still think some teachers think that we are the problem.”*

Most of these SFYB also pointed out perceived preferential treatment of AS particularly over the issue of fighting and conflict. Mile provided an example:

*Australian students would rarely get in trouble when we have conflicts...the school questioned both Yugoslav and Aussie kid then Aussie would get one day suspension and our kid two days for the same thing.*

The main reasons for many fights in the previous school year were teasing, name-calling (*“Speak English, this is Australia...dirty Yugos, go back and fight where you came from”*) and similar provocations by a particularly inflammatory group of AS to an older group of SFYB, who often reacted very quickly and violently.

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<sup>42</sup> Regardless of their opinions on Mr Savich, the school principal, all SFYB students referred to him simply as “Savich” without prefixing the name with a title (“Mister” or “Principal”) as they would with other staff members.

The number of fights and tension has greatly reduced in the previous year and SFYB contribute the trend to the departure of “*older guys*”, improved interaction with AS “*now we are mixing more with Australians*” and principal’s intervention “*he told many of us that there are teachers who want you [SFYB] out of the school and not to get involved in fights*” as recounted by Gojko.

The death of a father of a very popular SFYB also made an impact on a number of SFYB and their behaviour as described by Slavica:

*When his dad died it made me realise I was really stupid fighting. It made a real effect on me, I was shocked because he [the particular SFYB] is not a negative person and that he has lost all his family now.*

#### *Boundaries and View of Authority*

While these students disagreed on types and severity of physical school boundaries (for example, range of opinions on the front gate made of steel bars goes from “*very good*” as “*no one wags*” by Mile to “*terrible*” and “*looking like a jail*” by Slavica), all of the SFYB in the sample group sought and appreciated consistent and often strict boundaries at school and maintenance of authority by the teachers and school staff.

SFYB’s own family “*discipline*” was a clear generator of these preferences, made clear by Sonja: “*If the family does not discipline then who will other than school?*” Branka supported such view: “*The way you behave at home is the way you behave at school, home upbringing has a lot to do with your behaviour at school.*”

The sentiments were underpinned by a feeling of due respect for older people, transferred from their family environment. Older people are seen to have the power to set the rules, which may even be seen as unfair but SFYB felt they have to obey them. Nina stated:

*I never backchat...we learnt in our country to when a teacher or older person tells you something it’s rude to talk back. That is something my parents insist*



*on too... if they are wrong I might tell them back nicely and politely if I feel I have to.*

Even certain older peers of SFYB were to be respected, listened to, and obeyed. This is how Ivo (Year 10) described Gojko (Year 12), who is one of the oldest SFYB at the school and considered a leader of SFYB at Lake College: *“Gojko is like a ‘boss’ to us, he is the oldest and we will do what he says...he is the wisest.”*

Another significant source of their preferences was their previous schooling experience in FY or Germany (where several SFYB migrated after leaving FY and before coming to Australia). For example, Ivo wished: *“I would like the teachers to be more strict...I am used to it from Yugoslavia.”*

A preference for clearly delineated and hierarchic power roles was expressed in several responses like Sonja's: *“I wouldn't go to Savich with a personal problem, it's just wrong to go to the principal with that. Even if he wasn't Croatian I wouldn't.”*

SFYB placed faith in persons with authority to *“do the right thing”*. Teachers fulfilled such faith mostly by: (a) caring for the individual: *“This teacher really cared about me and helped me, I love this teacher and will do things for him.”* (Slavica), (b) acting with wisdom: *“[ILC teacher] ... gave me really wise advice what to do, I really appreciate and respect that”* (Gojko), (c) knowing their subject well *“the good teacher knows what they are talking about and we can learn something”* (Slavica) and (d) maintaining the power distance: *“[Bad teacher] ...allowed herself to be really petty and drop to our level.”* (Davor)<sup>43</sup>

Their preferences were particularly obvious when they judged appropriate classroom behaviour and the way different teachers managed their classes and enacted the authority invested in them by SFYB. It is important to note that all of the SFYB in the group considered a 'good student' someone who is quiet, diligent, hard-

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<sup>43</sup> Similarly, many SFYB invested their parents with high levels of faith and authority 'to do the right thing' as a results of parents' experience and displayed personal sacrifice: *“[My parents have] done everything for me, whatever they say I will do”*. (Ivo)

working and doesn't talk or interrupt in class. Branka voiced her expectations of behaviour: "[There is] no *difference from what school expects of me* [and what is expected at home]...*Behaviour as it should be in school - decent and listen in class. It really annoys me when people talk and don't listen in class.*"

Many interviewed SFYB expressed dislike for teachers, who allowed excessive talking, swearing and other transgressions in class. Slavica got upset with a particular teacher: "*She expects me to be quiet but she can't control the class.*"

Some SFYB were critical of 'poor discipline' even if they were the offenders themselves. For example, Ivo described a teacher he did not like much: "*Even though he is good, he has a good heart and tries, he likes kids and lets us go a bit too far.*"

Even though discipline and boundaries rated highly with SFYB, teacher's 'knowledge of the subject' seemed the most important feature of a successful teacher as an authority figure. SFYB' had a clear preference for teachers, who exude authority with their knowledge of the topic. Slavica stated that:

*A good teacher knows what they are talking about and present it well and doesn't have problems controlling the class. He can be sometimes a bit harsh but fair.*

Davor made the point with an example:

*The science teacher I like is really strict, I have hated him and I thought he was an asshole but he forced me to do work and I did well. This other teacher was really easy going, kind, no pressure, and I had to put in more work for myself...Working wise, I prefer the science teacher, classroom wise I prefer the other teacher...if I had to choose between the two I would choose the science teacher.*

A number of students reported the tension between their appreciation of teachers being friendly and accommodating, their establishment and maintenance of class discipline and teacher's knowledge. Davor thought: "*Some teachers offer*

*friendship and I respect and like that – but they are not ‘teachers’. Sometimes we are just left too much to ourselves, they are not pushing us.”* He added an example of a teacher he particularly disliked:

*One teacher was really strict but did not teach us anything. If you ask her one thing she doesn’t know or answers some other question. She doesn’t know her subject and she is teaching at TEE level...I didn’t like that.*

Gojko described his difficulties in another class:

*My most problematic subject is Business. The teacher is nice but no one respects her, I can’t work out what to do, she just talks, students are openly rude to her, no one knows anything, there is lots of MSB’s.<sup>44</sup>*

The last quote links with the question of disadvantage several SFYB felt in a more “lenient” environment. Mile was particularly frank on this topic: *“I don’t like the students talking all the time then study just before the test, it’s not fair to those of us who want to work hard.”* He provided an example of perceived disadvantage:

*We [Mile and another SFYB] try to listen in class and in that one we actually sat forward. The teacher told us this thing and then it was in the test next week and we knew it straight away. Some Australian students that just talk all the time at the back didn’t hear it and complained that we didn’t do that in class so the teacher didn’t count it. We felt penalised for listening and knowing the answer.*

### Support

All interviewed SFYB expressed great gratitude for the efforts of teachers and school staff for the help they have received through their schooling at Lake College. Branka stated: *“Just the fact that you have someone who supports you is of great help”*. The graduates from the ILC programme at Lake College particularly

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<sup>44</sup> ‘MSB’ is a Management Student Behaviour slip students get for infringements of school rules. Parents or guardians have to sign to allow the student to continue attending the school or the particular class, where the infringement slip was issued.

appreciated the efforts of ILC staff with some of the most superlative comments on their care, attention and personal support throughout and after the ILC programme. Sonja considered the ILC programme as *“the greatest thing anyone can do for you.”*

The most appreciated, supportive and most respected staff members at Lake College were described by the following features:

(a) Genuine attempts to understand SFYB at the personal level. Davor stated: *“I like it when they [teachers] don’t look at you as students but as people”*. Slavica explained: *“If you don’t know students the lowest expectation of the school is to pass. If you know them individually, you could expect more of them.”*

(b) Efforts in trying to speak, listen and talk at the student’s level, particularly when their English is less advanced. Davor explained: *“[The best teachers] try to understand you at personal level, they look at your individual needs and they put a lot of effort in talking, speaking, listening at your level”* and gave an example: *“This teacher tried to be nicer to me, he was careful how he spoke and he spoke a little slower and explained things...He offered me so much more.”*

(c) Keeping confidentiality, as shown in a statement by Slavica:

*Everyone likes him (Head of Student Services) because you can go to him and tell him if you have some concerns...he will keep it confidence and if you say you don’t want it to go any further that’s OK and he will keep it that way.*

(d) Extending their trust and help with small amounts of latitude when needed while keeping the boundaries. Gojko described it in this way:

*I can talk to him like a friend, he understands me...he doesn’t bug me with little things like little variations on uniform because he knows I will always wear it in class...he gives me a chance and likes a joke. Sometimes he warns me and I am OK with that, no problem, I know the limits and I will not cross it...he treats me like an equal person but boundaries are known.<sup>45</sup>*

<sup>45</sup> Gojko’s statement also confirms the previously discussed preference of all of the interviewed SFYB for clear boundaries and maintenance of teacher’s authority.

Slavica had her own example of the extended trust:

*Some teachers even give us their phone numbers for any help with TEE subjects. It's great how they trust us and I would never abuse that ... I really like Mr Thompson, he gives you a chance.*

But a number of students also described this in reverse. Vlado described one teacher this way: *"I have mixed feeling about too much extra help with words by this teacher. I feel really inferior but I suppose she has the best intentions so I don't mind too much."*

Several SFYB recommended a brief one-on-one help by the teacher after class, preferably initiated by the student as a preferred solution to such situations. Boris recounted: *"Best help is when a teacher comes after class and does a little one to one. It is much better and easier to talk for me."*, and Gojko suggested: *"They should hold them after class, one on one and tell them 'If you have a problem you are free to come to me, I won't come to you to embarrass you but you have to come to me'."*

A clear trend appeared in identifying sources of support accessed by SFYB. Teachers and to a lesser extent FYB peers, were the first and only options of academic support. In view of many of the interviewed SFYB, all but few classroom teachers were ready to help them with academic work for which the students either asked for or the teachers offered. A number of SFYB commented how much they have liked the genuine effort of most Australian teachers to help them and make themselves available. Branka commented: *"Australian teachers really want to help and they are much more accessible than some really arrogant teachers in Yugoslavia."*

SFYB reported using a particular group of people to help them with non-academic, largely behavioural problems (fights, conflicts, insults, provocations) and problems in coping with school. Mr Thompson (Head of Student Services) and Ms

Martin (Head of ILC)<sup>46</sup> were often consulted due to their calmness and fairness in resolving disputes. Ivo expressed his gratitude in this way:

*Ms Martin knew what was going on that black week<sup>47</sup> for us when everyone was against us, there was lots of unfair guilt on me...she gave me good advice...she talked to Mr Thompson and Savich, checked if any records were made against me and things like that. I am so grateful to her.*

Older SFYB, particularly Gojko, who is considered as the leader of SFYB at the school, and one or two teachers (particularly their former ILC teachers) whom SFYB have a very good relationship with, were the other points of assistance, as stated by Mile: *"If [I] have any problems I would go to ILC teachers first, they know us better than mainstream teachers."*

Although seldom sought after, the principal was also named as a possible point of assistance these SFYB. Mile stated: *"If there was a problem with nationality he [the principal] would understand us better than Mr Thompson."*

The principal's efforts and his cultural knowledge were much appreciated as shown by Davor: *"I feel sometimes he treats Yugoslavs a little special...even simple greetings really feel good."* However, the principal's (in)ability to empathise and act fairly and honestly was more important than his ethnic background, which was seen as an advantage *"He knows our people and will help..."* but also as an added responsibility: *"He should know better than Australians not to say that<sup>48</sup> to us."* pointed out by Slavica.

One or two 'best friends' at the school remained the most commonly used, and first, point of support for all non-academic challenges of SFYB during their schooling at Lake College. Apart from Rajko and Dunja, all of the SFYB reported their best friends being of FY or at least NESB. However, a number of SFYB

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<sup>46</sup> Just like Savich (the principal), Mr Thompson and Ms Martin are pseudonyms.

<sup>47</sup> 'Black week' refers to a week during which several SFYB were involved in serious, violent incidents after altercations with a particularly provocative group of AS.

<sup>48</sup> The principal, second generation Croatian, allegedly stated: "I have had enough of you Serbs" to a group of Serbian-background students after a schoolyard fight.

expressed reservations about seeking too much support for their problems within the SFYB population for the fear of gossip and malice within their small community at the school and, possibly, in social circles of FY people outside the school. Sonja explained her situation:

*I don't bother anyone with my personal problems at school. It's like in Bosnia, you just don't talk about your problems. You have chaplains and people like that to talk about stuff, if you are hurt you have a nurse. You know Yugoslav people bitch a lot so you don't want someone to talk behind your back, you keep your private stuff to yourself.*

Many SFYB were also openly reluctant to seek support from either staff or friends.

Two quotes by Gojko show a good example of such reluctance:

*If I see a teacher that doesn't offer help, I'll get through myself and if I can't work it out I won't ask for help. If she [the teacher] sees that I can't do something but doesn't offer help it means that she won't help me but there is no way for me to go and ask for help, it puts you down....If I have a problem I don't see anybody or I go and work it out with Dragan [best friend] and we see who and what. We are supposed to go to teachers if there's trouble but we would never go to office first. If teachers come [to us] – fine, if not, we deal with it. It might be easier for us to go to teachers first but then you look like a 'sissy' [switching to English] and lose respect.*

Similarly, Sonja, who is another older student in Year 12, stated: *"I don't go to Student Services if I have problems, I don't want other person to know about my feelings and I don't like to talk about it. I would say to people to leave me alone."*

### *Management Strategies*

The interviewed group of SFYB employed a range of strategies to manage their schooling experience or, to use a sporting analogy, to 'play the game' of schooling. Socialisation patterns aimed at alleviation of differences in school,

seriousness about the value of education as opportunity in their lives, use of particular support systems in school to cope with challenges of schooling and view of boundaries and authority as means of orderly and fair progress have been rendered in previous sections. In addition to these, three significant strategies SFYB deploy in their process of schooling, emerged from the data collected.

### *Staying Silent as a Minority*

Two thirds of the interviewed SFYB critically acknowledged some of the less 'attractive' characteristics of people of their own ethnic background and how these could contribute to a negative view of SFYB at the school. Slavica pointed out: *"You know what our people can be like, we are quite loud and outspoken which can be seen as threatening or scary...we are stubborn, ten times more stubborn than Aussies."*, and Vlado stated how he blamed the *"Yugoslavs"* for *"thinking it must be their word last."*

These two SFYB were not the only ones to admit the perceived shortcomings of *"Yugoslavs"* as possibly their own and see how they could isolate them at the school. At the same time, these SFYB are very aware of their position as a minority in the school, particularly in conflict situations. Mile claimed: *"We know we are at a lower level and if there is trouble we will cop it more."*, and Gojko's experience was similar to the accounts and feelings of several other SFYB: *"This teacher told us that we have more to lose as a minority by fighting. I agree with it and it's not fair."*

Many SFYB rejected acting in racist and ethnocentric ways and recognised them as something that could be damaging to them if they were to inflict other students in the school, particularly Australians. Vlado's view was: *"Why should we be racist and make noise...there are so few of us and so many Australians...what are we going to achieve?"*

However, very few SFYB have acted or would be prepared to act on experiences of racial, ethnic or other forms of prejudice against them in a way



considered appropriate in the Australian mainstream. When several SFYB took the opportunity to voice their concerns and views in 'appropriate' ways (for example, telling school staff they are being verbally abused and teased), they sometimes found themselves in a lose-lose situation from which they felt they had few alternatives but to stay silent and withdraw. Mile's example was particularly poignant:

*This Aussie guy [who had teased him] and myself got called in the office and all that Aussie student was told is that he shouldn't say things like that... later he wouldn't stop and even pushed me for dobbing him in. What was I supposed to do?*

In another example, Davor had to choose between helping a FYB friend in a fight and getting reported or staying on the side doing nothing and possibly losing a friend. This was particularly difficult as the principal, as reported by a number of SFYB like Davor, had advised them to "stay out of trouble as there are teachers who want you out of the school" and many of SFYB's parents warned them not to get in trouble fighting.

In order to "make a good impression to teachers" noted by Sonja, SFYB not only avoided conflict but sometimes suspended what they felt was valid criticism and input. They did not wish to look incompetent by making mistakes or create problems by 'sticking out' as recounted by Slavica:

*I don't want to open my mouth and get in trouble so the teacher thinks bad of me. Teachers can be biased and they might give you even just half a point less sometimes...I wouldn't complain to her, maybe I would last year, in Year 10, but not now... now I just smile and say OK.*

*Bicultural Friendships*

SFYB showed to be very adept at switching between different cultural codes. One of the most prominent of such codes is the meaning of friendship and the way it is understood and enacted by all interviewed SFYB, including the two arguably most acculturated students Rajko and Dunja.

While all SFYB were happy to socialise with AS at school, they mostly left it on a more superficial level of “*just chatting and stuff and mucking around*”. They generally did not share any more serious problems with AS. Several SFYB described AS as having a “looser” and more transient perspective of friendship, where one could have a good time but trust less with serious issues or have a more emotional connection with them. Mile stated:

*Australian friendship is today, tomorrow it can fall apart again...there is a great difference, our people understand more about a friend and the meaning of word friend.*

Davor put it this way:

*Aussies are easy going and sort of inconsiderate which is good and bad. They do something but you are expected to feel the same way they do...like if they insult you are supposed to see it as a joke.*

Branka reflected:

*I am a person who finds it difficult to trust and it is something other Yugoslav kids at school have a problem too. In Yugoslavia I had three or four good friends and we were together in school and outside. Here it doesn't happen. Everyone is 'friendly' [gestures with a forced smile] but it stays like that at school...They are not friendly and good enough to become a 'true friend' [points to her chest], which happens with people [of FY background] I see after school.”*

Most SFYB seemed to relax the most and best after school in the company of FY friends and/or family members of similar age. They are happy and often proud of being different from “*Australians*”. In these private spaces they engage in a number of activities such as sport and extended family gatherings such as “*regular big family dinners with lots of [FYB] people at our place*”, mentioned by Davor.

At the same time, many SFYB said they would or already do, welcome non-FY peers into their life outside of school but remained sceptical about the success of such relationships due to different interests and values of friendships and intimacy. Rajko, who socialises mostly with AS at the school, put it simply: “*Aussies just stay indoor all the time and play Playstation, Yugoslavs get out and are more active, I always play with friends in the park...I prefer being active.*” Davor provided an illustrative example of a welcome into his “after school” world:

*Once my Australian friend visited our place and he couldn't believe how many people there were and food and how they just talked to each other...I was really happy for him to see it and notice it as really good, it just made me really proud and comfortable.*

However, Davor also offered a caveat on friendships: “*Sometimes Australians don't care about things that mean everything to me, like my family...I don't know, it's just a different kind of friendship most Australians have.*”

### *Bilingualism*

SFYB used their bilingualism, in some cases multilingualism, as a powerful tool in managing experiences at their school. While there were clear differences among the interviewed students in their proficiency in FY languages and willingness to use them, it is reasonable to state that all SFYB interviewed spoke at least one FY language fluently.

SFYB speak English at school and their native language at home as a matter of convenience and 'common sense'. Davor stated: *"I like to speak English at school, most of my friends at school speak it and it's just simpler for me. At home, I speak Yugoslav."*

Most of the interviewed students are very aware of the potential of speaking a language not too many non-FY persons speak or understand but they use it judiciously. When asked about their choice of language when speaking with ES, all SFYB reported they generally attempt to speak English to be understood and avoid *"being rude to people"*. Sonja put it this way:

*I am aware of others, I try to speak in the language so people around me can understand, I am used to it from Germany...If they are worried about what we are talking about I tell them generally what it's about, I am glad I can help people understand.*

SFYB can use languages to their advantage and/or to avoid offending or escalation of problems, as pointed out by Slavica: *"Sometimes I get mad and don't want them to know what I'm talking about."*, and Mile, who stated that:

*When we [Mile and two friends, both SFYB] play soccer, others know we are going to talk in our language, we just tell them what we are saying and there is no problem. But we sometimes use it to criticise someone, like how useless player he is and nobody can understand [laughs]. Then when they ask us what we are saying we just say "we were just talking about his improved passing", because we don't want to be rude to him and then get people to hate us.*

When they talk to each other and the topic of conversation does not concern anyone else, they generally use FY languages, often mixed with English words and phrases to simplify explanations, or even "slip into" English, mentioned by Nina:

*“With my Yugoslav friends I speak our language but sometimes we just forget and speak in English.”*

Their statements were confirmed during the interviews as most of the participants occasionally mixed some “Yugoslav” (or English, if interview conducted in “Yugoslav”) words and phrases during their interviews to make a point, provide a clearer description or simply find a missing word to express themselves.

In the next chapter, I apply a theoretical lens of multiculturalism and hybridity to interpret and discuss these findings of SFYB’s experiences of schooling.

## Discussion

The clustering of results in the previous chapter provided a sense of the main themes in the experiences of schooling of the participating SFYB. In this chapter, I use the lens of a critical multiculturalism of hybridity to interpret and discuss the results. Guiding this discussion is the position that the constructions of hybrid identities are what Hall calls “points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (1994, p.6). I make the case that SFYB are not only ordered into certain positions by discourses in which they operate but also articulate their positions in both explicit and tacit ways. These positionalities carry significant consequences for their life chances - a central concern of critical multiculturalism.

I begin the discussion with an important disclaimer. I do not make a case that these findings can be universally generalisable to all SFYB. Rather, the evidence demonstrates the ways these students are engaged in both experiences and deployment of hybridity<sup>49</sup> at this particular research site. Even within the group of SFYB itself, differences among them warrant caution in interpreting results as applicable to all participants in this project or indeed all SFYB at Lake College. It is clear that SFYB at Lake College do not wish to be treated as one entity. By referring to SFYB as a group I do not intend to ignore this important point but, as stated earlier, merely acknowledge their greater access to similar cultural capital and sets of practices and norms loosely called “former Yugoslav” (FY) to facilitate the discussion. In this chapter, I first look at the ways the broad theoretical positions of hybridity relate to the experiences of SFYB. Next, I revisit the three main fields of negotiation that constitute SFYB’s hybridity – identity, diversity/difference and power.

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<sup>49</sup> Unless specifically stated otherwise, I incorporate both the experience and enactment of hybridity when using the term.

Finally, I connect the analysis SFYB's hybridity to a particular theoretical perspective and social project of critical multiculturalism discussed in Chapter 2.

The fundamental premise of contemporary theories of hybridity is that they oppose essentialist, primordial ideas about fixed group identity based on a marked source of origin. Instead, people's identities are seen as fluid constructs and enactments that may seem contradictory but also constellate around discernible themes related to both identity and behaviour. The data points to a position that SFYB hold varying degrees of attachment to the 'Yugoslav'<sup>50</sup> culture they have grown up in and continue to participate in at the school and outside of it. At the same time, they hold, in many cases growing, attachment to the dominant Anglo-Australian (AA) culture they have encountered at and beyond Lake College and in(to) which they try to act to reach their educational and other goals. The following discussion includes many examples of fissures, gaps and contradictions in the way SFYB experience and/or deliberately initiate, delay, redirect or otherwise manipulate their identities during schooling at Lake College. Many deliberate actions of the SFYB confirm Bhabha's observation about the possibility of hybridity for social change that lies in the agency of finding "a voice in a dialectic that does not seek supremacy or sovereignty" (1996, p.58) but a kind of equality of treatment and status. As stated by Ivo: *"I don't like separate treatments, I want to be like all other kids and treated like them"*. Their stories point to cultural adjustments made by this minority within the dominant 'Anglo' narratives of the majority 'Australian' culture, parts of which SFYB actively manage with degrees of acceptance, rejection or ambivalence to difference to reach their goals.

Not all stories and examples of hybridity of these SFYB are stories of success.<sup>51</sup> To some SFYB, their experiences convey significant challenges they

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<sup>50</sup> I had previously indicated that I use terms like 'Yugoslav' or 'Australian' merely to facilitate discussion and that these terms are not to be understood as fixed, ahistorical and unchanging notions.

<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that I do not speak of a uniform notion of success. The SFYB interviewed have varying positions on what constitutes success and I use the term 'success' to

face. In some cases this leads to confusing fragmentation of identities, withdrawal from wider social networks, regrettable loss of friendships and other undesirable effects. The high academic achievers generally showed greater success in adjusting to the experiences of hybridity and active deployment of hybridity. For example, Davor understands and uses both Yugoslav and Australian humour. He may not like Australian humour but through it he grasps cultural nuances such as the use of self-depreciation: *“Aussies are easy going and sort of inconsiderate which is good and bad. They do something but you are expected to feel the same way they do...like if they insult you, you are supposed to see it as a joke.”* On the other hand, Ivo, a lower academic achiever, struggles with the use of humour and withdraws with this explanation: *“I can’t explain some Yugoslav humour to Australians, I grew up in Yugoslavia and there are just different ways of joking.”* This does not automatically mean that negative experience and reluctant performance of hybridity are limited to the low achievers. For example, Branka, a high academic achiever, has difficulties making new relationships among AS. She also has relatively poor grades in subjects which are heavily dependant on the mastery of language: *“I picked the relevant subject for graphic design and I get regular A’s and B’s but English I have almost permanent C.”*

While these experiences and deployments of hybridity may be helpful to SFYB, it is important not to see the extent of it as a determining factor in their educational success. The danger of such a view lies in the possibility of the dominant culture appropriating, normalising and promoting hybridity as a desired model for migrants to be and to act. Hybridity can be seen as a lens to understand processes of multicultural assimilation as modes of containment, extensions perhaps of integration into certain forms of ‘Australian culture’. In such case, hybridity would lose its potency for social and political change towards greater equality between the

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represent the positions largely expressed as culturally acceptable both in Australian society and in the family tradition of the SFYB interviewed.



dominant and minority cultures (Chan, 2004). Bhabha (1994) posited that the transformative value of hybridity towards political change “lies in the rearticulation, or translation of elements that [SFYB] are *neither the One* [Australian] *nor the Other* [Yugoslav] but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both.” (p. 41). Such understanding of hybridity would allay the fear and criticism of Ahmad (in Kraidy, 2002) and Chow (in Chan, 2004) that hybridity would become merely a re-inscription of hegemonically constructed interests in the society.

### *Identity*

In their experiences of hybridity at the case site, SFYB are often positioned by themselves and members of the dominant cultural mainstream as Yugoslav, as Australian, or both to varying degrees. As they enter Lake College as SFYB with limited knowledge and ability (or none) of English and AA cultural capital they are clearly ‘classified’ as migrant, ‘NESB with FY background’ and given certain kinds and amounts of support deemed appropriate for students in such categories within the resources of the school. As they acquire basic competencies in English language and the structures of the WA school curriculum in the ILC, they ‘graduate’ into the mainstream. The term ‘graduation’ itself indicates a step up from being almost exclusively ‘Yugoslav’ to becoming (seen as) more ‘Australian’ students. From the small and very personal ILC environment, where they had generally built a close, trusting and very important relationships with a very small number of teachers, they move into mainstream classes where they are left to ‘sink or swim’<sup>52</sup>. The transition, described by SFYB as the toughest part of their time at Lake College, leads to an assumption by the system of schooling towards becoming Australian students almost overnight. As explained by Sonja: *The transition was very*

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<sup>52</sup> ‘Sink or swim’ is perhaps a (too) colourful description of the process. SFYB are not entirely left on their own unsupported in the mainstream. Speaking from personal experience at Lake College, which perhaps may not be visible here, many SFYB continue to access language support from ILC teachers and other staff in ESL and other, mainstream classes and beyond the formal educational settings.

*hard...teachers treat you differently, they have less time for you in mainstream, other students have more background and I missed out a lot on."* Ivo stated that: *The teacher expected us to spell and understand everything immediately after ILC but it was impossible for us. When we asked for things to be written on board she yelled at us "You should know that!"*

While SFYB blame some teachers for the lack of sensitivity to the difficulties of transition, they realise that teachers have little choice in treating them other than AS. Teachers have often very limited time and resources to listen and attend to their specific needs often due to a range of systemic pressures and priorities.

As SFYB attend mainstream classes, these students report that 'Yugoslavness' of most of them becomes less and less visible to the staff as they generally improve their English, increasingly socialise with AS students and call for less specific attention. At the same time, these SFYB increasingly position themselves in spaces between the two cultures and in spaces unique to either. Just like the dynamic experience of changing their identity, SFYB's deliberate performance of identity is always "under erasure" (Hall, 1996a, p.2)<sup>53</sup>, enacted and influenced by language, socialisation and other factors.

Language is a powerful and highly notable marker of identity which strongly influences negotiations of identity. Through the use of the English language, these SFYB are positioned as more Australian or Yugoslav by both themselves and other members of the school community. Dunja stated: *"Now that we learned the language is fine, we all feel like the same people not like 'the Yugos'.* Learning of a new language by immersion resulting from migration to one or more different countries has been a matter of survival for SFYB. They recognise the importance of mastery

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<sup>53</sup> I contextualise Hall's notion of identity being 'under erasure' and its impact on 'culture' as a shared position by a group of people in Chapter 2. To briefly summarise here, identity (personal and/or cultural) is a site of constant, transient becoming and unbecoming. No one's identity can be reduced to a fixed and somehow permanently achievable fixed point of reference as it remains infinitely multi-layered and contextual.

of English not only for the purpose of managing their identities but for also for the importance of their life chances in Australia.

It is no surprise that learning English language has strongly affected the experience and deployment of identities of these students on the ever-shifting FY - AA cultural dynamic. These SFYB are acutely aware that it is the degree of English language proficiency and the speed of learning the language that impacts the most on success in social and academic contexts in Australia. With better English, they fit in easier into the dominant culture, adjust the level of their visibility, expand their circles of friends and acquaintances and perform better academically. With better English, they can better perform their 'Australian-ness' and not necessarily at the expense of their 'Yugoslav-ness'. This is a dynamic process rather than a set destination of 'becoming Australian', particularly if the destination comes at the expense of denying, ignoring or otherwise losing their 'Yugoslav-ness' in the process.

At the same time, it is important to note that the most proficient English speakers (Davor, Ivo, Dunja, Slavica, Rajko) are also high achievers of the SFYB group, who are likely to have greater engagement with AS. They do so even though such engagement may come at the expense of ties with their school friends and acquaintances with FYB, who may see them as 'becoming more Australian', thus departing from the 'Yugoslav' norms. These hybridisations have myriad of effects and some with exclusionary force. Ivo lamented about his (former) friend Rajko: "...he [Rajko] has a good heart, really, but I can't be with him anymore because he is with Australians mostly and he only socialises their way...he is more Australian than 'ours'." Here, language overlaps with socialisation.

Language and socialisation are very closely related as they often reinforce each other. Better language means increased opportunity to expand social networks to include non-FY students. More opportunities to meaningfully apply and improve their English within an expanded social network that is likely to include more and

more AS students in turn improves SFYB's language proficiency and expands their cultural and social capital. An important factor to consider is the depth and quality of social networks. The notion of friendship is a particularly poignant example of the way SFYB experience and enact hybridity.

Some SFYB perceive the friendship of and with AS as a more transient and superficial relationship that those experienced among their 'true' FYB friends. Mile put it this way: "*Australian friendship is today, tomorrow it can fall apart again...there is a great difference, our people understand more about a friend and the meaning of word 'friend'.*" While most of SFYB actively strive to expand their social networks to include non-FY students with varying degrees of intensity and rates of success, they stress the importance of having 'one or two good friends' at the level of depth and quality expected of someone considered a friend in the Yugoslav and not Australian culture. 'Australian' ways of socialising and maintaining a friendship are not taken up as keenly as some other features of the dominant culture like language (for example, the English language). This is Branka's view:

*I am a person who finds it difficult to trust and it is something other Yugoslav kids at school have a problem too. In Yugoslavia I had three or four good friends and we were together in school and outside. Here it doesn't happen. Everyone is 'friendly' [gestures with a forced smile] but it stays like that at school... They are not friendly and good enough to become a 'true friend' [points to her chest], which happens with people [of FY background] I see after school.*

Nevertheless, Australian friendships outside the SFYB group, or at least the process of getting used to the specifics of 'Australian friendships', remain very important<sup>54</sup> to most of the SFYB in the context of acting to 'fit in'. Establishment and maintenance of friendships with AS peers is an important factor of SFYB's hybridity

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<sup>54</sup> This finding strongly echoes the finding of Halilovic (2005) whose work with a similar population indicated the high(est) importance of friendships in formations of identity.

and the way they enact it. Davor demonstrates the desire and action to successfully 'connect' with AS friend on his own terms: "*Once my Australian friend visited our place and he couldn't believe how many people there were and food and how they just talked to each other...I was really happy for him to see it and notice it as really good, it just made me really proud and comfortable.*" However, not all of the interviewed SFYB share Davor's enthusiasm to engage with AS. For example, Rajko's increased socialising with AS in an 'Australian way' seems to have even turned Ivo away from his former friend, even though Ivo has very likely adopted some of such 'Australian ways' himself in order to better 'fit in' in the school community.

These students experience and enact hybridity – they do not just 'become' more 'Australian' and less 'Yugoslav'. Instead, they occupy new, fluid and changing spaces. They act in new and more 'Australian' ways while also acting in radically different 'Yugoslav' ways. The more proficient English speakers among these SFYB report having a greater engagement and interaction with their more 'Australian' peers and teachers. These reports can be seen as a more 'successful assimilation' but I argue that these dynamics are generally more complicated than what is generally termed assimilation. These students are not enacting spaces that can be described as a movement along a continuum. This for me is why hybridity, experiences and enactments of new and changing identities, is a useful interpretive tool for the work of critical multiculturalists.

The theory of hybridity enlisted in this project does not try to homogenise but instead asks how people come to experience and enact their identity both as individuals and/or as a group. Much like anyone's identity, SFYB's identity is in a constant flux. Importantly, SFYB strongly resist homogenisation and fixing of boundaries of their identity as 'Yugoslav' at Lake College. They do so not because they do not like being 'Yugoslav' but because they do not want to be primarily identified by their ethnicity, a sentiment captured by Vlado': "*I don't want to be*

*ashamed of being Yugoslav but not everyone has to know that I am Yugoslav.*" Stereotypical views, displayed<sup>55</sup> even by some teachers at Lake College, of FY people in the larger community and/or amplification of FY people's departure from the imaginary AA norm, have added to the unease of SFYB in being identified as 'Yugoslav'. Dunja felt: *"One problem is bagging all Yugoslavs together, the guys got a bad reputation, particularly last year [after many fights]."* In the eyes of SFYB like Rajko, stereotypes are exclusively negatively framed: *"Stereotypes on Yugoslavs are that they speak little English, always loud, noisy, swear a lot...I really don't like stereotypes, everyone is different."* Interestingly, none of the SFYB interviewed expressed a wish that the stereotypes would be positively framed, portraying FY people as hard working, disciplined, caring, etc., despite many SFYB working hard to promote themselves as such. These SFYB therefore reject negative as well as positive stereotypes as frames of recognition of group and individual identity. Instead they call for individualised approaches in judging the identity and characteristics of a person or a group, typified by Dunja's statement: *"It doesn't matter where they [people she meets at school] are from, a person is a person."*

At the same time, SFYB recognise a core, albeit very loose, mixture of desirable and undesirable values and characteristics of FY people (including themselves) as pointed out by Slavica: *"You know what our people can be like, we are quite loud and outspoken which can be seen as threatening or scary...we are stubborn, ten times more stubborn than Aussies."* Mile put it this way:

*"Our" kids mature earlier than Australian, they think what they want to be in 10 or 15 years, Australian kids don't care, they are like "I don't care, I'll find a job, go and work with a builder or something".*

SFYB recognise these characteristics and at times take them into account when deploying what Spivak (1993) coined as 'strategic essentialism' to either

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<sup>55</sup> I knowingly avoid the use of the term 'allegedly' since I personally heard remarks of that kind by two teachers at Lake College.

promote or critique the cause of SFYB and FY in general. This is a similar experience to that of Lebanese youth who use strategic essentialism to defend the name and honour of the Lebanese (Noble & Tabar, 2002). As Baumann (in Noble & Tabar, 2002) points out, essentialising is not limited to the dominant culture but can be employed by the demotic, minority cultures. Importantly, just like the Lebanese youth mentioned, SFYB do not reify essentialism but mobilise what Werbner (in Noble & Tabar, 2002, p. 133) presents as a form of self-essentialising necessary to imagine a community and enact it for particular purposes.

In line with the theory of hybridity, SFYB generally 'play along' with the forms and values of the dominant culture and school curriculum. They generally try not to draw attention to themselves and create any (more) negative images of themselves as a group and as individuals. This could well be because of the previously presented negative perceptions of SFYB at the school, which seem to be skewed against them and affecting what critical multiculturalists would recognise as 'life chances' – getting lower grades for being misunderstood, unfairly blamed and punished for a provocation on the basis of ethnicity, etc. However, they use what they see as their Yugoslav-ness in particular niches to try and succeed in their endeavours and/or alleviate structural disadvantages. Nowhere is this more obvious in trying to be what most of them see as a 'good student'. A number of SFYB pointed out the 'good student' qualities of SFYB such as maturity, self-discipline, effective work habits, classroom discipline, motivation to succeed, previous knowledge of some of the content and ability to cope with rigorous systems of grading often in opposition to AS. Sonja stated:

*I am going to school to provide [myself a] better future. In Yugoslavia, even after you finish school there are few jobs and you have to live with your parents for a long time. In Australia there are more chances for job and independence.*

Slavica stated: *"I am not working and even if I wanted to work my parents wouldn't allow it, because my job is to study and to get good education."* These two quotes typify the dedicated purpose with which some of these SFYB approach their schooling.

The high achievers, and less so the lower achievers, within the group have a particularly high confidence in their own abilities to cope and succeed at Lake College. This is possibly one reason why they strongly seek the following two preferences in relation to their schooling. First is strong(er) enforcement of strict(er) and fair(er) common rules of behaviour that would treat students the same regardless of their background. Second is a more predictable, content-driven rather than a fluid, process-driven curriculum, which they are not very used to or even see as inferior to the ones encountered in Yugoslavia. While these preferences of SFYB are very prominent in the data, the motivation for them is less obvious. Viewed from a critical multiculturalist perspective, the above preferences indicate the wish of SFYB to remain in their comfort zone of knowing what to expect and knowing how to 'play the game' of schooling, as stated by Ivo: *"I would like the teachers to be more strict...I am used to it from Yugoslavia."* The aim of many of these students is to level the playing field to gain material effects of educational success. At present, SFYB see the game of schooling favouring the students with AA background, who have spent longer time in the Australian educational system, have the advantage of the dominant cultural background and enjoy what seems a preferential treatment by teachers who know better what to expect from them. This is illustrated in Slavica's analogy: *"Teachers have nothing against us or hate us but some still prefer Aussie kids. They will help them more, it's a bit like in a divorced family having your own and someone else's children, you know."*



*Diversity/Difference*

As a part of the larger educational, social and political system in WA, Lake College upholds the concept of diversity, described by Kuo (2003, p. 229) as “an assumption that cultural boundaries exist and therefore different forms of culture can easily, and therefore should co-exist”. This view serves both the liberal and the pluralist version of multiculturalism. Students from ‘different’ ethnic groups are categorised as such and maintenance of social harmony among those ‘ethnic’ cultures and the dominant, ‘non-ethnic’ Anglo-Australian (AA) culture is a matter of management of generalised differences among them. Through this the dominant AA culture and those seen to be sharing its values, seeks to affirm a particular view of equality of opportunity. But how do notions of diversity and difference play out in the case of SFYB at Lake College?

I have previously noted that SFYB do not like to be grouped by their ethnicity and the likely and reported reasons for their views. In a statement that could be seen as a preference for the mainstream notion of diversity (and with it, multiculturalism) at Lake College, Davor stated: “*I wouldn’t change anything for ‘naši’ [used Yugoslav phrase for ‘our’] students, any change would make the difference between Aussies and us even bigger.*” While Davor, like many other SFYB, calls for equal treatment of all students regardless of their ethnic background, he acknowledges the existence of differences. Hybridity as enactment is not about celebrating or ignoring differences but holding them in tension and activating them in various contexts. SFYB often state they do not want ‘them’ and ‘us’ for the unwanted ethnic identification and, more importantly, the fear of losing ground. But despite statements like this one by Vlado:

*The school expects me not to cause trouble, not to show too much I am a Yugoslav and boast around about being a Yugoslav, not to make a difference.*

*They [referring to the school] expect me to be just like anyone else and that’s*

OK.

SFYB often approve of, actively seek and deploy differences in their contacts with FY and non-FY peers and teachers. Differentiation is an important part of what Hall (1996a) described as a dual process of identification as self-positioning and identification by others.

As noted in the Student Experiences chapter, all SFYB are overwhelmingly grateful for the support they have received by the staff at Lake College. Their gratitude is directed particularly to the ILC staff, mainstream teachers and other school staff who have recognised their needs were different not only to AS but individually, helped them towards equality of opportunity and given them a voice, as expressed by Mile:

*Ms Martin knew what was going on that black week for us when everyone was against us, there was lots of unfair guilt on me...she gave me good advice...she talked to Mr Thompson and Savich, checked if any records were made against me and things like that. I am so grateful to her.*

SFYB acknowledge that if no differences had been recognised and they were either left entirely on their own to sink or swim in the mainstream without the time spent at ILC, or left overly protected in an ILC environment for too long instead of being 'pushed' with some support, into the challenging mainstream, their chances for success would have been greatly reduced.

The support of staff was most effective through close personal relationships where recognition of individual circumstances, needs and differences could take place, as captured by Davors's comments: "*I like it when they [teachers] don't look at you as students but as people*" and "[The best teachers] *try to understand you at personal level, they look at your individual needs and they put a lot of effort in talking, speaking, listening at your level.*" At the same time, Vlado warned of teachers 'overdoing' the support based on the preconceived notions of what SFYB may need with an example: *I have mixed feeling about too much extra help with*

*words by this teacher. I feel really inferior but I suppose she has the best intentions so I don't mind too much.*" This statement by Vlado touches on an important dimension of SFYB's views on difference – suspension and activation of judgement about the way differences are interpreted and dealt with.

Slavica and a number of other interviewed SFYB did not blame or criticise people who were simply ignorant of differences between different cultural groups and individuals within those groups:

*People in Australia don't understand, they meet one person and they think all are like that – so they don't know. Maybe that teacher [considered "racist" by Slavica] had a bad experience with a Yugoslav in the past and thinks we are all the same.*

No such excuse was extended to people for whom SFYB believe they know the important differences but chose to either amplify them or deliberately ignore them. The case of the principal is a particularly poignant case reflecting SFYB's views. The principal of Lake College, a second generation Croatian, has on many occasions connected well with the SFYB through his understanding of the language, SFYB's background and even individual circumstances in and out of the school. SFYB generally see him as a very positive and helpful figure in their schooling. However, this also 'burdens' him with the need for much greater sensitivity than someone who may not know SFYB as clearly seen in a statement by Slavica: *"He should know better than Australians not to say that [I have had enough of you Serbs] to us."*

A similar case from within the SFYB group shows how they constantly negotiate ethnic differences which are in constant tension and can be activated very quickly, as shown by Slavica's remark:

*What really hurt me in Australia was a remark by a Bosnian girl 'How can you say you are Bosnian, you have no heart'. I think the only person that can really hurt you is your own kind, they know. In Australia, people don't know*

*but Yugoslav people - they do.*

SFYB generally suspend tensions between them on the basis of ethnicity (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin) and thus enact what Halilovic (2005) calls “grassroots reconciliation” among the ethnic groups who have only recently fought in wars against each other. This is to support each other as mutually understandable speakers of FY languages and bearers of similar cultural features (for example, types of humour), particularly in the first year of their schooling at Lake College and before they have improved their English and established social networks, including non-FY students. Hybridity of SFYB often changes the dynamic once they enter the mainstream as former SFYB alliances and friendships are lost, strengthened, weakened, ignored and so on. In cases of external criticism against SFYB, most SFYB unite and identify themselves with the group, even if reluctantly. But once again, differences can be activated very quickly among those charged with the knowledge of differences and best ways of (not) handling them, as shown in the above example from a small sub-group of Bosnian students within the SFYB group. This confirms Bhabha’s (1994) and Pietersee’s (2003) observation that hybridity can be both assimilative and transgressive. While it may lead to greater understanding, empathy and equality there are no guarantees enactments of hybridity will do so as SFYB are both located and locate themselves in different social contexts with particular configurations of social relations.

### *Power*

Power may not have been the overt focus of discussion in this chapter. So far, several examples and discussion of SFYB’s hybridity of identity and their management of differences have shown the ways power serves as a conduit in the dual process of experience and enactment of hybridity. Examination of power relations is crucial in making contemporary theories of hybridity useful for the work of

critical multiculturalists. With this point in mind I turn to a more focused discussion of power and its dimensions in SFYB's ways of experiencing and performing hybridity.

Interview data strongly suggests that SFYB at Lake College are fully aware of their minority status as a group. For SFYB who had spent some time living in Germany before moving to Australia, this is not a new position to be in. For those who may have been a part of a cultural and ethnic majority in the otherwise fragmented states and territories of former Yugoslavia, this was a new reality to which they have had to adjust in a relatively short time. SFYB not only realise they are a minority but they are actively told so by some teachers, in good faith, as Gojko's experience shows: *"This teacher told us that we have more to lose as a minority by fighting. I agree with it and it's not fair."* Just like Gojko's, Mile's statement: *We know we are at a lower level and if there is trouble we will cop it more.*, already suggests some of the effects of being an (unpopular) minority with a history of incidents, mostly caused by previous generation of SFYB at Lake College. Male SFYB in particular, are often trapped in lose-lose situations with little space to manoeuvre and defend themselves. When provoked they try not to respond with violence because, according the principal, *"some teachers want them [the male SFYB] out of the school"* and further incidents would serve the case for expulsion. At the same time, they are reluctant to report incidents of/or provocation to staff for either not trusting the procedural fairness:

*Australian students would rarely get in trouble when we have conflicts...the school questioned both [the] Yugoslav and [the] Aussie kid then Aussie would get one day suspension and our kid two days for the same thing.*

or fear of retribution:

*This Aussie guy [who had teased him] and myself got called in the office and all that Aussie student was told is that he shouldn't say things like that... later he wouldn't stop and even pushed me for dobbing him in. What was I supposed to do?*

There were also concerns of losing face among a small group of friends, as noted by Gojko: "*It might be easier for us to go to teachers first but then you look like a 'sissy' [switching to English] and lose respect*". While these concerns could have easily been made by an AS as well, it is again the ethnic dimension of violence that seems somehow 'characteristic' for SFYB. This is in line with Stratton and Ang's (1994) assertion that fights involving 'ethnics' are positioned as:

...giving a bad name to the benevolent multiculturalism of the dominant, ex-nominated AA culture. AA culture of (presumed) benevolence, understanding and tolerance represents a ground and the terms on which cultures other than AA are 'ethniced', enabled to speak to, or fight, each other (p. 18).

Some power arrangements are more positive for SFYB. In many ways, hybridity of SFYB creates the possibilities for them to better manage and improve their schooling. They use a range of strategies to create niches of resistance, ambivalence or withdrawal in order to spend some time in their 'comfort zones' before they learn how to deal with new and existing challenges on their way to achieving their goals. One of the most powerful strategies of shaping power relations affecting them is the use of language as a powerful tool of exclusion from and inclusion in their world. I have already pointed out the ways in which language impacts on their academic achievement and their patterns of identification and socialisation. As they improve their English, SFYB begin to code-switch between English and Yugoslav languages.

Code-switching ranges from (un)conscious and seamless slippage into another language, described by Nina: "*With my Yugoslav friends I speak our language but sometimes we just forget and speak in English.*", to the use of words from either English or Yugoslav to enhance or make a point<sup>56</sup> to sometimes very deliberate language strategies, used both at school and at home, to include and exclude other people from engagement. Mile stated:

<sup>56</sup>

Many examples of that are noted in the chapter Student Experiences.

*When we [Mile and two friends, both SFYB] play soccer, others know we are going to talk in our language, we just tell them what we are saying and there is no problem. But we sometimes use it to criticise someone, like how useless player he is and nobody can understand [laughs]. Then when they ask us what we are saying we just say “we were just talking about his improved passing”, because we don’t want to be rude to him and then get people to hate us”*

SFYB use code-switching judiciously since they do not wish to be or appear rude or disrespectful to other students and teachers by (over)speaking in a language the participant would not understand. They do so as they stand to lose a more than they would gain from damaging their relationships, as explained by Sonja:

*I am aware of others, I try to speak in the language so people around me can understand, I am used to it from Germany...If they are worried about what we are talking about I tell them generally what it’s about, I am glad I can help people understand.*

SFYB’s language strategies contain a strong sense of agency. From linguistic accommodation on one side to resistance on the other, SFYB mobilise cultural differences and challenge fixed notions of Australian-ness and Yugoslav-ness. They become what Bhabha (1994) would call a ‘partial presence’, capable of transforming, even subverting the dominant power relations through an important and highly visible sign of cultural authority – language. The call to “*Speak English, this is Australia*” or similar taunts often aimed at SFYB, are a powerful reminder of the sense of threat experienced by members of the dominant culture resulting from SFYB’s creation of spaces beyond the reach of the dominant culture. At the same time, such taunts are (unwelcome) reminders to SFYB of their unequal, minority position and the limited effectiveness of such subversive practices. While SFYB are aware that they may carve out certain niches of access to power that members of the dominant culture may not have, they are also aware that subversive code-

switching may not be the most productive strategy for them to succeed in the dominant AA culture. Some of the reasons for that are structural. Official curriculum, school rules or community expectations are just some of the structural reasons related to students success, which are encountered by SFYB in the public domain of Lake College and beyond it. It is these structural arrangements that very strongly shape the extent and direction of SFYB's hybridity in achieving their goals.

At Lake College, teachers and students have often spoken of 'Yugoslav gangs' before and during the interviews for this project. Having listened to and analysed SFYB's responses, I can draw a notable parallel between their association in groups and the findings of Noble and Tabar (2002) about the group of Lebanese youth, perceived by wider AA community as 'gangs'. Much like the mentioned Lebanese youth, SFYB 'stick together' since they are empowered to act in their groups as an equal (internal hierarchies aside) and not as a disempowered subject who needs to 'drop their ways' in order to be accepted by larger culture. These groups represent social spaces where they can exert some control over their own environment. It is from these spaces they (could) seek to support each other, defend themselves against stereotypes and actively carve out a more active role in the school community and beyond.

#### *Is This Critical Multiculturalism of Hybridity?*

In summary, the experience and deployment of hybridity of SFYB shows the way towards Hall's "positive conception on ethnicity of the margins" (1996b, p. 447). SFYB call for and recognise that people speak from a particular place, out of particular history, a particular culture without the need or preference for being labelled 'ethnic'. While ethnic locations are common to all people and provide us with a subjective sense of identity, they are not predicated on displacing, marginalising or forgetting others. This is a "dialectic that does not seek supremacy or sovereignty" (Bhabha, 1996, p. 58) but provides the room for the marginalised to exercise their



agency, affect the dominant narrative and with it potentially redress the structural inequities of what can be portrayed as ‘common sense’ in a given polity.

SFYB act according to the constant and complex changes to their identities in different social circles and contexts. They live with the complexity of these changes in their daily lives, and make constant decisions about who to identify with and distance themselves from in a range of often contrasting situations. SFYB strategise and adjust not only in broader social settings but also in the classroom in order to succeed. Slavica spoke of ‘making a good impression’ in this way:

*I don't want to open my mouth and get in trouble so the teacher thinks bad of me. Teachers can be biased and they might give you even just half a point less sometimes...I wouldn't complain to her, maybe I would last year, in Year 10, but not now [at post-compulsory level affecting their career chances]... now I just smile and say OK.*

This and a number of other examples addressed in this and the previous chapter confirm that SFYB can be seen more as active strategists rather than as docile, helpless subjects at Lake College and beyond it. While many examples of strategising in the experience and performance of hybridity would be common to students with FY, AA or other ethnic backgrounds, SFYB's ethnicity, as one of the forms of social division such as race, class, gender and others, seems to amplify the differences they need to manage. This forces SFYB to invest more time and energy into performing their ‘Australian-ness’ than many AS would have to.

As a hybrid, ‘partial presence’, SFYB have the potential to withdraw, resist, collaborate, or assimilate into the mainstream. They can also transform the dominant AA culture in small, mostly personal spaces and in ways differently powerful than systemic, official policies of the day by ‘picking the spots’ to assert their voices and make them heard. For example, by becoming a well-liked, successful student and articulate English speaker (in other words more ‘Australian’) in the school's mainstream, they gain a voice of discursive ‘credibility’ and challenge negative

portrayals of SFYB from inside the dominant culture.<sup>57</sup> In the process, they actively resist the essentialism of bounded cultures, unfreeze the fixed, dichotomous identities of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and illuminate the workings of power in the everyday, lived culture of students at Lake College and communities beyond it. Statements and actions of SFYB across the entire group strongly demonstrate their desire for greater participation and respect by the school community at Lake College and beyond. Like the Lebanese youth in Noble and Tabar’s study (2002), SFYB wish to overcome the unwanted exclusionary practices they experience in these communities. Experience and deployment of hybridity can offer them greater manoeuvrability for achievement of this goal while not foregoing, amplifying or synthesising differences but holding them together in a constant tension for their survival and continuity in the settings which may structurally (dis)advantage them. Hence, SFYB could mobilise their insights from their experience of neither assimilation nor collaboration, gained in the process and enactment of hybridity, to powerful use towards greater social justice and equality – an important goal of critical multiculturalism.

Accounts of SFYB’s experience and performance of hybridity discussed so far bring me to assert that SFYB embody the elements of critical multiculturalist thought – they are critical multiculturalists themselves. While SFYB outwardly often subscribe to the ahistorical, acultural, benevolent, middle class discourse of social harmony, tolerance and equality of opportunity, they recognise and negotiate tension and conflict in social relations to gain material power in the mainstream school community as well as within their own SFYB group. They generally do not seek what they perceive as advantages *over AS* but instead seek equality of life chances. Dunja’s statement, spoken in the context of the importance of good grades as a way of ‘getting ahead’. She states: *“A lot of our [SFYB] kids want to go to uni and do well*

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<sup>57</sup> In stating this I have Davor and Mile in mind. In this work I have noted and commented only on Davor’s example of the invitation of an AS and a friend to his home and the outcomes of the visit. Both these boys hold what could be considered ‘advanced’ or ‘sophisticated’ hybrid identities, with which they often successfully and very tactfully promote understanding between SFYB, and other, more ‘Australian’ students.

*but if they can't they will lose aspirations and stop caring about it".* This quote reinforces the position that SFYB are very aware how their life choices are greatly shaped by life chances they are presented with and at the same time carve out for and by themselves. The SFYB in this study acknowledge the difficulties they encounter in their schooling and the significant support they receive from many staff members at Lake College. However, they wish to rupture the 'deficit theory' positioning which so often informs the actions of some, but certainly not all, staff at Lake College. They do not seek withdrawal of help and support but a more nuanced understanding and an acknowledgement of their individual needs, talents and strengths.

Before concluding this discussion, I acknowledge that the (larger) emancipatory project of critical multiculturalism reaches across ethnicity, gender, class and other forms of social division. The focus of this study has remained on the ethnicity of SFYB. It is conceivable, but not definite, that SFYB's experiences and strategies in hybridising their ethnicity could apply and indeed assist in exploration of other constructs that divide a society by producing inequalities and with them social, economic, political or other forms of injustice.

## Conclusion

The study has unearthed interesting information on schooling experiences of SFYB and offered an example of the ways the notion of hybridity can be enlisted by critical multiculturalists to explore and analyse the circumstances of a particular group of migrant students. Here hybridity is to be understood as a dual and often simultaneous experience and strategy of being more or less 'Australian', or 'Yugoslav', or both or neither<sup>58</sup> at Lake College. SFYB's experience of hybridity comes mainly as a result of external pressures, preferences and expectations resulting from migration to new cultural, social, economic and educational settings. At the same time, hybridity refers to SFYB's strategic management of their ethnic, cultural identity assigned to them by others or themselves.

Just like the experiences of schooling and cultural backgrounds vary among the interviewed SFYB so do the kinds of hybridity they experience and deploy. SFYB do not hold binary identities but hold varying qualities of attachment to sometimes opposing 'Australian' and 'Yugoslav' cultures. This research demonstrates that a primary aim of their strategic, although often unconscious, interstitial positioning is educational, material and other forms of success. Language is shown to be the most notable marker of their identity and the primary vehicle for socialisation and academic success. Language makes SFYB's voices audible and their presence visible on terms they increasingly choose by themselves. While arguing strongly for equality of opportunity and levelling of the playing field of power relations, SFYB are not dismissive of differences between themselves and students with AA background. They (prefer to) negotiate differences rather than negate them. However, structural arrangements (curriculum, resources, etc.) often force them into choosing and acting in ways they may or may not consider as just and equitable. Corollary to their aims

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<sup>58</sup> Both as for example 'Yugoslav Australians' or neither as broad 'ethnics', 'NESB', or even derogatory 'wogs'.

of educational success is their wish to rupture the kinds of 'deficit theories' that are often held about them by a variety of members of the Lake College educational community. Such 'deficit' positions can often engender inappropriate (in)action towards SFYB by teachers and others create an atmosphere of mutual distrust, which can seriously affect SFYB's educational outcomes. Similarly, the data suggests that many of the interviewed SFYB feel that primary identification of people according to their ethnicity lends itself towards unhelpful, unwelcome and possibly very damaging stereotyping and prejudice. The stories these students tell illuminate some of the ways in which they try to avoid, reduce, challenge or transform such negative experiences at Lake College.

Despite the existing support offered by the school staff and the institutional support for the policy of multiculturalism by Lake College, SFYB's chances of succeeding are often constrained by structural rather than personal, individual reasons. This study problematises the notion of multiculturalism as a stage in a linear development of a more socially just and equitable 'nation of migrants' like Australia. Viewed uncritically, pluralist celebration of multiculturalism as a festival of differences, liberalist dismissal of differences in a multiculturalism of 'common humanity', let alone conservative, multiculturalism of 'assimilation for enlightenment', have the potential to dismiss, gloss over and/or seriously undermine the 'life chances' of students like SFYB and their families. Instead, critical multiculturalism is proposed as an alternative in conceiving and managing relations between ethnically diverse individuals and groups in Australian society towards enhanced experiences of social justice.

The notion of hybridity can be effectively employed within the critical multiculturalist project. The key premise that connects the notion of hybridity to the critical multiculturalist project is that that we are all hybrid yet ethnically positioned by ourselves and/or others. 'Australian-ness' is an imaginary, un-achievable social construct which has continued to emerge from particular histories of power and

knowledge. While the construct may be imaginary, it affects material conditions and social realities of those who do or fail to ascribe (to) it to various degrees. The theory of hybridity enlisted in this study acknowledges both the differences and the commonalities among people but focuses more on cultural experiences and actions in tension and as related to power. Through this lens of hybridity, differences as well as commonalities, have material effects, particularly for marginalised individuals and groups.

In my view of hybridity, the in-between-ness and tentativeness of one's ethnic identity is not some kind of weakness. At the same time it is also not a particular strength. Hybridity is also not the 'next stage' of multiculturalism. Long before official policies of multiculturalism, hybridity can be seen as an experience and a strategy of migrants and other minorities to carve out 'comfort zones' and power niches from which they can act to operate with(in) and potentially change the dominant narratives held for them.

It is important to note that this research is a part of a larger social project that seeks greater social justice while understanding social justice itself is a contested, even hybrid, space and activity. Having flagged the ubiquity and potentially increased importance of and for understanding hybridity, I sincerely hope this work will be useful for other researchers investigating experiences and actions not only of SFYB or NESB students but AS as well. The paucity of literature of what could perhaps be termed as power-conscious 'critical hybridity' is an invitation to explore a range of questions generated by this particular study. Some of these questions might be:

- How do hybridities of ethnicity intersect with hybridities of gender, class or race?
- What is the role in and impact of SFYB's hybridity on their families and vice versa?

And importantly for this work:

- How can critical multiculturalism and hybridity theory be used in understanding the lived experiences of students and others from non-AA background and how they might contribute to and benefit from such understandings?

Beyond the complexities of experiences and deployment of hybridity this work points towards more practical concerns. The findings of this study could help staff at Lake College reflect on and adjust their practices, of working for more equitable educational outcomes of SFYB, NESB and possibly AS students as well. Most notably, the study amplifies a call for improved and even extended access to ESL classes for NESB students like SFYB and provision of initial English language support through the IEC centre. However, having demonstrated the imperative importance of language acquisition for 'life chances' of SFYB, I posit that this alone does not automatically 'level the playing field' for them. From the critical multiculturalists' perspective, facility with English language alone can be seen as an essentialist technique, as if by speaking English, SFYB become 'one of us' and 'not a problem anymore' within the three currently most prevalent yet static and binary notion(s) of multiculturalism. This perspective goes beyond the otherwise very significant issue of identity. As skilful critical multiculturalists themselves, SFYB need to constantly reconcile, negotiate, ally with, reject and, ideally, feel comfortable with a range of structural arrangements and activities to improve their chances of success in the school and the broader Australian social, economic and political landscape.

Structural arrangements such as curriculum, assessment methods, pedagogy, allocation of resources, school and/or government policies dealing with migrant students etc. strongly shape the experiences of SFYB's schooling. For example, some SFYB may be quite astute socially and academically compared to their AS peers but the curriculum content, based on the assumed possession of

certain cultural capital SFYB lack, positions them as 'deficient'. And since winners and losers are clearly stated in a ranking order, the rank may be reflected in the social, economic and political order SFYB have been and will continue to be subject(ed) to. Teachers who do or would like to offer additional support and resources to students like SFYB lack incentives and support to do so because of their workload and (other) systemic constraints.

What is needed is an acknowledgment and meaningful negotiation of different cultural systems SFYB engage with and with/through them illumination and interrogation of the existing conditions of schooling available to them. While greater investment of school's resources towards the needs of SFYB would likely improve their life chances this could not be seen as a panacea. As the data collected in this study shows, building of trusting relationships, suspension of judgment and damaging stereotyping, clear definition of boundaries with extension of small, mutually agreeable 'leeways' in case of student's difficulties, acknowledgment of similarly acceptable cultural practices, recognition of students' strengths in certain curriculum areas as a result of prior learning, genuine attempts to understand SFYB's, their past and their aspirations, differences and similarities with their AS peers are just some of the strategies a number of staff at Lake College already use to improve SFYB's life chances. These often small, yet timely and personal acts can hardly be enshrined in a school policy, although the general principles of this teachers' work can be encouraged and supported in a school culture. But while these dynamic, tentative strategies are hard to define and declare as useful or damaging for students' learning and/or success, they hold a great potential for empowerment of the marginalised SFYB, NESB or AS and with it members of the broader Australian society as the effects of their empowerment would ripple through it.



Understanding students like SFYB could be an opportunity to examine the 'common sense' of the dominant AA society and the embedded fear that non-conformity of particularly young people like SFYB will somehow change or 'balkanise' Australian society from achieving the self-approving yet infinitely impossible ideal of a coherent, harmonious, unique and inherently 'good' Australian 'being'. I posit that the differences could better be acknowledged and not 'worked on to be overcome' towards a universally un-reachable ideal of Australian-ness. Instead of fixing identities according to social divisions of ethnicity as examined in this study, social divisions could be negotiated and used to achieve greater equality and opportunity to succeed for all, not just SFYB students. Put differently, instead of being Yugoslav in a high school automatically meaning a student 'in need of help', to be wary of and then to 'watch out for trouble', SFYB would be seen as students with a broad, complex and dynamic range of markers of social identity. As students, not 'Yugoslav students', they would be able to belong in as many or as few of the groups of individuals who would need structural support, much like their AS peers or students with different cultural backgrounds. This could provide opportunities to see how inequalities reach across the divides of ethnicity (for example, poverty) and help formation of alliances in ameliorating the negative effects of such divides. Standing firmly on the side of the marginalised I posit that alliances, not divisions, have a significant potential to arrest ossification of inequality and change the structural factors to a more equitable position.

I finish this project the way I started it – with a personal reflection. While the entire project was unashamedly student-centred, it helped me shape and articulate a particular view of my experiences and actions as a migrant and a teacher. I have gained even more than a sound and helpful understanding of SFYB at Lake College - I have (re)discovered and reminded myself of the way discourses of multiculturalism shape my daily life and the ways I can act to improve my own life chances and the life chances of people on the socially constructed, and yet so real

and possibly hurtful, margins of the Australian society. Put simply, I know even better now when and where to 'pick my spots'. Armed with this deeper understanding, I will look for opportunities to enact and apply this knowledge as a teacher, cultural worker and an active member of the community. My aim in this endeavour is not to preach what SFYB or students in other marginalised groups 'should strive for' or how should the schooling system 'deal with them'. I remain deeply suspicious of the (lack of) ethnic or other fixed, static, ahistorical labelling to achieve a utopian 'harmony' between 'us and them' or between 'us' as members of the same humanity. What matters to me most is the structural empowerment of these students and their families to fully afford them two fundamental features of a democratic and socially just society - to make informed choices they can be responsible for and to have the confidence that their choices stand a realistic chance of realisation, regardless of a label they assign themselves or is assigned to them by others.

**Appendix A**Consent Form

Project Title:

Experiences of Schooling of Migrant Students with "former Yugoslav" Ethnic Backgrounds

I am a Masters student at Murdoch University investigating experiences of migrant students from the territories of former Yugoslavia (before 1991, including Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) under the supervision of Dr James Bell. The purpose of this study is to give a voice to students from this particular region ("former Yugoslavia") and explore their experiences, concerns and expectations at a WA government school. The knowledge gained through this study could improve the understanding of the needs of students from "former Yugoslavia" and help to create a better schooling experience for them.

Your child can help in this study by agreeing to an interview. The interview will take no longer than 60 minutes and during school time as agreed by the teaching staff. During the interview, your child will be asked questions about his or her experience of the school, interaction with peers, problems at school and help in dealing with them.

Participation is entirely voluntary. Your child and yourself are free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalties or any negative consequences. All information given during the interview is strictly confidential and no names or other information that might identify you or your child will be used in any publication arising from this research. Feedback in form of a report on general conclusions will be provided to the school and to you by request.

If you consent to interview your child, please complete the details below. If you have any questions about the project please feel free to contact either myself, Tomaz Lasic, on 0415 638 744, my supervisor Dr James Bell on 9360 6460 at Murdoch University or Mr Allan Blagaich (School Principal) at Melville Senior High School on 9330 3199.

Dr Bell, Mr Blagaich and myself are happy to discuss with you and concerns you may have on the conduct of this study. Alternatively, you can contact Murdoch University Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

If you wish to have this Consent Form translated please circle the language you would like to be translated in (Bosnian / Croatian / Serbian).

Regards and thank you.

Tomaz Lasic

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*CONSENT FORM*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (full name), a parent/ guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) have read and understood all of the information above. Any questions I have asked about this research have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree for my child to take part in the study. I know that I may change my mind and stop at any time without prejudice to my child or myself.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher unless required to do so by law. I agree for this interview to be tape recorded.

I agree that information gathered for this study may be published provided the name of my child or other information, which might identify her or him is not used.

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/ Guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

### **Guided Interview Questions**

- 1. What do you like and dislike in your school?**
- 2. What things would you most like to get out of this school ?**
- 3. How do you get along with your peers who are not from former Yugoslavia?**
- 4. Can you give me examples of the most common or most serious problems you have in school?**
- 5. If you need someone to help you with your problems who do you go to?**
- 6. What do you think about the help that teachers and staff offer you?**
- 7. What other kinds of support would you like from your school?**

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