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I'm happy to be here today as the first speaker on a panel which celebrates a multitude of new beginnings: the launch of this remarkable book, *Transnational Ties*: *Australian Lives in the World,* the first, no doubt, of many engaging volumes in the ANU Lives Series in Biography; the equally fortuitous recent launch of the National Centre of Biography at the ANU and the introduction of the Australian Journeys Gallery at the National Museum of Australia. As for *Transnational Ties*, the focus of this panel, I was immediately drawn to the collection upon reading the first chapter in the volume, 'The Old Commodore' by Cassandra Pybus. And I found, to my great amusement, immediate connections with the research subject, an Afro-American sailor transported here for pilfering in the 1830s after an adventurous set of life experiences, who later became a successful ferryman on Sydney Harbour. Although my life history may not be nearly as colourful or peripatetic as that of Billie Blue, the chances of my being here today are about as slim as his chance was of ending up in Australia, succeeding against all odds, and being given new life as the introductory subject of our anthology.

Both of us born of humble origins with a keen desire to travel and an uncanny ability to escape our country of origin, Billie and I arrived on these shores at a distance of some two centuries: both of us infinitesimal nubs in the substantial tie of transnationalism, who, nonetheless, through the microcosm of our own experiences, reflect the larger cross-currents of the social polity; both transplants who experienced immigrant lives which were, like many represented in this volume, 'enmeshed with the world, bound [in our case *indirectly* to each other but directly to Australia] by ties of allegiance and affinity, intellect and imagination (p. xiv).

 If Billie arrived in convict times to become one of the colony's early settlers, I arrived during the Whitlam era at a time when Australia was searching, seriously searching, for its identity. As Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott remind us in their concise and thought-provoking introduction to *Transnational Ties*, the search for identity is an homogenising impulse, one that held this nation in its grip for some decades of the late twentieth century. I would experience that constriction quite personally and quite early. An anecdote will demonstrate the point. As a proto-feminist American wife, mother of two pre-schoolers and aspiring academic arriving in Bathurst in 1974, one of my first assignments was to take out a loan to buy a washing machine and open a bank account in my own name. With every confidence of success, I set out for the local ANZ bank. Mr. ANZ Manager, of course, politely refused my request for an account and suggested I come back with my husband whose authority and permission would most certainly be needed for the loan. Despite my astonished and prolonged objections, he stubbornly refused to budge. Nonetheless, he sent me off with a jolly 'Cheerio, lovey'.

Cheerio, lovey? As I shook away the cobwebs of incredulity, I knew it felt different to be a woman in Australia. Although the meeting was as maddening as it was comical, it also was fortunate for it became a touchstone for my research and a filament from the past that connects me to our gathering today. I recognised then (or perhaps intuited) that Mr. ANZ was not talking to *me* but to a cultural figment of imaginary femininity which he shared in a taken-for-granted sort of (blokey) way with most, if not all, of his (white male) compatriots. Nonetheless, it was for him my identity, which I experienced as *my difference* in an early 'negotiation across rupture' (p. xviii). That recognition fuelled in me the question 'What does it mean to be an Australian?', which ultimately resulted in a PhD (from an American university as the only Australian university with a Chair in Australian Studies at the time refused my project) and my first book, *Women in the Bush*. It also impelled my subsequent research into 19th and 20th century lives and negotiations of gendered and sexual, ethnic and racialised, national and transnational identities, understood through the lens of empire and colony, nation and globalised worlds.

Coming to Australia in the midst of the Vietnam War also made palpable the anti-Americanism that permeated the cultural landscape. It really didn't matter that my escape was impelled by a disdain for the Nixon era of gung-ho militarism, my accent would provoke immediate resistance in many, mainly left-wing, academic circles. And as the years passed and the cultural dye permeated the pores of my skin, I too would find myself disdainful of 'Americans' when a Yankee voice expressed opinions different from my own. These musings relate directly to Jill Matthews comments, cited in the 'Introduction', about 'the death grip of nationalism' in the 1970s and the cross currents of 'global ties and forgetfulness as Australia [sought] a unique homogenised identity' (p. xv). They also drew me to certain chapters in the book which detail the travails of others caught between the pull of 'home' and 'away' and the awkwardness that results when customs, languages, traditions and expectations clash.

So, at first glance, it may seem odd that the question 'What does it mean to be an Australian?' continues to interest scholars. Upon reflection, however, the question not only remains relevant, it also takes on new salience within a globalised world context. This landmark study reveals to us a new terrain. It introduces many biographically-based approaches to the question and makes the use of life narratives central to its explorations of 'Australianness' beyond the category of the national. The many investigations of micro lives found here force researchers and readers to conceive of and render a more complex, dynamic and colourful picture of the messy, chaotic, dense and often serendipitous histories of individuals caught between worlds. The diligent retrieval of archival materials and the scholarly reshaping of ideas, imaginations and intimacies of the transnational subjects represented here enlarge our understanding of ourselves as Australians and the richness of our Australian cultural histories.

I particularly liked the organisation of the book as it calls attention to different axes of transnationalism reflected in the lives of its subjects. The major thematic headings: Authority, Intimacy, Intellect and Imagination gather articles together and focus attention on different aspects of transnationalism, different axes of identity that shape individual lives—from the ways certain state-based or nationalistic ideologies of power constrain or enlarge certain markers of identity, to the intimate, ambivalent and

uncertain pulls of 'home and away' and the more distant and impersonal trans-national intellectual attachments formed by some subjects through the hybridisation of knowledge, perception and the imagination.

Many chapters drew my attention. I was particularly struck by the media reports of Agnes Breuer's 'captivity' and 'thrilling rescue' from a 'Chinese hell' in the 1930s. Agnes, whose photo, along with that of her husband and child, appears on the attractive cover of the book, met her Chinese husband, William Lum Mow, the son and heir to a successful merchant, in Townsville in the early 1930s. Shortly after their marriage, the couple travelled to China, where she learned that he had been previously married to a local Chinese woman. She was to be second wife. Although Agnes and William maintained a close and loving relationship, they were disowned by his family. Desirous of returning to Australia, she found that her father-in-law could and would block the return of her Chinese-born son; while Australian customs blocked her husband's re-entry. After a sensational press campaign, she eventually gained safe passage for herself and her son, although her husband would never be permitted to return. Agnes Breuer was never held captive, nor was her life in China, beyond her not inconsequential family distress, exceptionally difficult. As Kate Bagnall relates in her article, however, the relay of press reports created a 'sensationalist tale of slavery, immorality, racial pollution, cruelty, kidnapping and piracy mixed together with tropes of female helplessness and the heroism of the white Australian male' (p. 115). This rhetoric closely mirrors media reports of Eliza Fraser's so-called 'captivity' amongst 'savages and cannibals' on Fraser Island after a shipwreck a century earlier, which I detail in *In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories* (1996). Far from being an artless, or a cheap, trick, the coverage demonstrates how captive we remain to media. In the nineteenth century British imperialism, race relations and the perilous control of the frontier led to tales of indigenous savagery. In the twentieth century the White Australia policy conspired with 'wider narratives of racial and national anxiety' (p. 118) to produce Agnes Breuer's sensational tale. In both cases, the 'captive white woman' became an ideological pawn in a power game of sameness and difference in the face of an imagined transgression of national and racial boundaries.

Mary Besemeres' chapter on Australian 'immersion' narratives also drew my interest. Her analysis of the memoirs of three transplanted Australians—Gillian Bouras in Greece, Sarah Turnbull in France and John Mateer in Indonesia - highlights the challenge of cultural assumptions and ways of seeing in the lives of individuals caught between cultures, languages and customs. For Bouras, the mother of three sons, the challenge came in the shift in parent-child relations and in the balance of power between the migrant mother and her children's enlarged Greek community and family. For Turnbull, it was the everyday social exchanges and her own cultural assumptions about behaviour that frustrated her and rendered her invisible amongst her French hosts. For Mateer, a South African-born migrant to Australia travelling as a poet in Indonesia, it was his unexpected and, to his eyes, inappropriate treatment, that made him uncomfortable. Besemeres compares the three memoirs in order to contrast the writers' reactions, from indifference and cultural distancing in the case of Mateer, to a more open embrace of difference in the case of Bouras and Turnbull. The latter cases, in particular, illustrate how the literature of language travel can expand one's awareness beyond a colonising, Western-orientated, 'seeing-man' 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' view of the cultural landscape (p. 246).

Nicholas Brown's chapter on Raymond Watt and the League of Nations also held particular interest for me. Here the book takes up the importance of internationalism to Australian politics and social life in the early twentieth century. Internationalism was envisioned as a movement which offered a wider sphere for civil society, greater scope for disarmament, arbitration and peace-keeping initiatives, greater redress for colonial nations and justice for individuals through the emergence of international rights and protections. Like Edith Campbell Berry, the protagonist of Frank Moorhouse's novels *Grand Days* and *Dark Palace*, Watt had both a personal and an intellectual investment in international social movements. He was an early and avid advocate of the League of Nations. 'An intense, restless man' (p. 80), he campaigned tirelessly for over three decades in Australia, maintaining and adapting his internationalist vision through the changing and challenging political transitions of the postwar years. Although he did not live to witness Australia's increasing involvement with the United Nations and the emergence of concepts of cosmopolitanism in the late twentieth century, his life's work presaged the shift away from the country's identifications with Empire and narrowly-defined nationalisms to greater transnational engagements.

Turning away from specific chapters, I also liked the section introductions by the editors and the way authors referred to each other's work and its relevance to their own investigations in various chapters. These elements build a community within the text. The editorial additions emphasise shared thematic concerns for readers that extend research communities beyond its borders. And they encourage us to follow the nuanced knots, complex textures and twisted meanderings that constitute the transnational ties of many Australians. Moving from the play of authority within individual lives to the intensely personal conflicts, the intellectual attachments and imaginative encounters, *Transnational Ties* makes palpable the ways in which the 'tendrils of thought, emotion, and experience attach "Australian" lives firmly to the world' (p. xx). Further, the book demonstrates the instability of categories of identity, whether understood through gendered, sexual, racial or ethnic categories or through ideologies and imperatives of Empire, colony or nation.

Transnational Ties represents, in part, the growing recognition of the importance of life narrative to cultural and historical research and to the rewards that 'micro' approaches afford readers in our conjoined appreciation of the heterogeneous histories of 'nation'. Not only does the book detail the complex ambiguities of displacement, rupture and belonging, it also extends our appreciation of lives lived across many borders and boundaries of national and personal identity. Having worked with life narratives in the fields of literature, cultural studies and gender studies for some thirty years, I was pleased to find that I had close connections with at least ten of the scholars represented here and shared intellectual ties with many more whose pursuits are taken up in the volume. I am pleased to be in this good company.

Kay Schaffer