

# Diasporas of Australian Cinema

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*Diasporas of Australian Cinema* is the first volume to focus exclusively on diasporic hybridity and cultural diversity in Australian film-making over the past century. Topics include post-war documentaries and migration, Asian-Australian subjectivity, cross-cultural romance, 'wogsplotation' comedy, and post-ethnic cinema. This collection also provides a useful reference text for scholars of Australian film and cultural studies, with material on contemporary film-making and pre-World War II cinema. Containing previously unpublished articles by some of the most recognised experts on Australian cinema, the book is a vital contribution to the burgeoning international interest in diasporic cinemas.

**Bold and innovative...** The essays in this book illustrate how the struggle for the redefinition and redeployment of these ideas, ideals and realities plays out on screen in a white-settler colony under erasure through difference.

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her composure, vomits on the table. In the concluding scene, the three dishevelled women walk out of the casino at dawn, with the camera zooming out until an establishing shot of the monumental casino is in full frame. In a corner, a golden high-heeled shoe floats on the river.

The orientations to chance and risk in the film show how the narrative of gambling foregrounds contemporary Australian society as a risk culture. Using gambling to supplement their meagre income and in the hope of finding fortune, the three women are risk-taking entrepreneurs. Their practices recall Abbas's concept of hedging, for it is these forms of risk-taking that produce the supplementarity and materiality of creative diasporic survival and intolerant multicultural coexistence. This culture, while functioning in the film as a form of escape from routine, loneliness and alienation, also demonstrates, through the space of the casino, its rationalization, commercialization and commodification (Reith 1999). The play with chance and uncertainty, and the increasing management of risk, involves the same logic that saw the southern migration of Chinese risk-taking entrepreneurs to the Australian goldfields in the nineteenth century and the subsequent biopolitics of the 'White Australia' policy. It also parallels the current logic of late Australian modernity and its shameful border-protection policies.

#### Conclusion

*The Last Chip* is an example of a group of recent Asian-Australian films that explicitly use the diaspora to cultivate global circulation and engage international audiences. Rather than being subsumed under the rubric of minority or multicultural cinema, these films are excentric in their modes of production, distribution and representation. In *The Last Chip*, the film's minor transnationality is both enforced and strategic. Although constrained by the devalued status of the short film and restricted by the dearth of professional middle-aged female Asian actresses in the country, the short film has enjoyed international critical acclaim by strategically borrowing from the popularity of the Hong Kong gambling comedy, utilizing its regional intelligibility and translating it with a local social sensibility. Its story about female friendships from migrant Hong Kong, Malaysian and Vietnamese backgrounds is also a narrative about the subterranean transnationalism of the Asian-Australian diaspora. The film is also diasporic in its subversion of dominant colonial, national and benevolent representations of gambling.

This chapter has also deployed a critical reading practice using the concept of ethics to un-celebrate the preoccupation with the hybridity of diasporic ethnic identity. Central to this is the aim of devalorizing benevolent discourses on ethnicity as universal (diversity) and local (difference). Ethics also refers to the negotiated practices of freedom that govern the biopolitical production of the female migrant subject. In this film, the commodification of ethnic and gendered labour is a crucial site to reveal the structures of subordination that shape the gendered ethnicity of the female migrant subject. Rather than the hybridity of ethnic identity, the ethics of ethnic identity provide a more pertinent platform to critically consider risk-taking in film reading strategies, the risk cultures of gambling and the risk management of diasporic immigration. In the diasporas of Australian cinema, it is precisely these supplementary moments of risk-taking that have also enabled minor film-makers to creatively tell stories that are more global and less national.

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### 'I'M FALLING IN YOUR LOVE': CROSS-CULTURAL ROMANCE AND THE REFUGEE FILM

Sonia Tascón

Love is one of the primary processes of cinema, not just at the level of representation (of which it occupies a central role in a great many films), but also ... that cinema deals with, and constantly returns to, love locates it as part of a cultural order. (Fuey 2000: 94)

#### Introduction: Love, ethics and multiculturalism

In Australia during the early 2000s, a number of films appeared, such as *Fish Sauce Breath* (Nguyen 2003), *The Home Song Stories* (Ayres 2007) and *Donkey in Lahore* (K-Rahber 2007), exploring the complexities of cross-cultural romantic love as the reflection of a confidently pluralistic society. At the same time, however, government support for the policy of multiculturalism, initiated in the 1970s, was in retreat. No events showed this more starkly than those surrounding 'boat people' during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the asylum seekers' 'difference' was used to illuminate their unsuitability to be given succour. The term 'boat people' has been used to refer to asylum-seekers who arrived on Australia's shores seeking refuge since the first boatload from Vietnam arrived in 1976; in this chapter, it refers specifically to the wave of 'boat people' from 1998–2003, and who were mostly from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq. Their arrival has usually caused great alarm in the Australian community and produced much public debate. The official retreat from multiculturalism, however, began much earlier. A key moment was Pauline Hanson's maiden speech in federal parliament in 1996 when, as the Independent Member for Oxley, she called for a reduction in Asian immigration and denounced the provision of state benefits to Indigenous peoples. These sentiments were to reverberate through