

# Diasporas of Australian Cinema

Catherine Simpson  
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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 Containing previously unpublished articles by some of the most recognised experts on Australian cinema, the book is a vital contribution to the burgeoning international interest in diasporic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.'

Professor Toby Miller, Department of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Riverside.

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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.

# 4

## '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. (Fuery 2000: 94)

#### Introduction: Love, ethics and multiculturalism

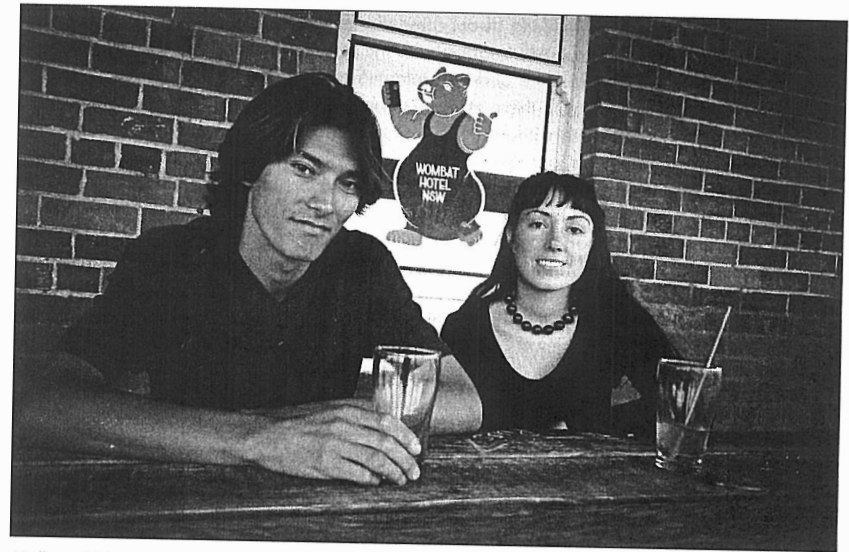
In Australia during the early 2000s, a number of films appeared, such as *Fish Sauce Breath* (Nguyen 2003), *The Home Song Stories* (Ayres 2007) and *Donkey in Lahore* (K-Rahber 2007), exploring the complexities of cross-cultural romantic love as the reflection of a confidently pluralistic society. At 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

the newly elected government of John Howard (1996–2007) and become officially sanctioned through various policies and practices.

Australia's responses to strangers have a problematic history, reflected in the corresponding filmic output. The use of love in films to represent the transgression and crossing of cultural borders has also had an equally problematic trajectory. Early films such as *They're a Weird Mob* (Powell 1966) and *Caddie* (Crombie 1975) depict cross-cultural romances as problematic for Australian society generally. They explore the post-World War II 'populate or perish' cultural terrain which brought many non-English migrants to Australia. Later, cross-cultural films (although not necessarily using romantic love) turn to the next generation of migrants and their hybrid experiences (e.g. *Head On*, Kokkinos 1998; *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, Flanagan 1999; *Looking for Alibrandi*, Woods 2000; *The Prodigal Son*, Radevski 2005). Over time, the cross-border love story was used variously to represent a failed project (e.g. *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Weir 1982; *Turtle Beach*, Wallace 1991; *The Good Woman of Bangkok*, O'Rourke 1991; *Heaven's Burning*, Lahiff 1997), a site of future yet imperfect possibilities (e.g. *The Piano*, Campion 1992) or triumphant (if too comedic) transgression of boundaries against the odds (e.g. *Strictly Ballroom*, Luhrmann 1992). While the theme of cross-cultural impossibility has continued in more current films (e.g. *Japanese Story*, Brooks 2003; in this case, an impossibility redolent with unfinished promise), many more have recently tended towards an exploration of the existence of cross-cultural love as a taken-for-granted phenomenon, and are usually discussions of the difficulties and intricacies of such entanglements (e.g. *Fish Sauce Breath*, Nguyen 2003 (short film); *Everyone Loves a Wedding*, Hayes 2004 (documentary series); *A Pig, a Chicken, and a Bag of Rice*, Gould 2004 (documentary series); *Donkey in Lahore*, Rahber 2008 (documentary series); *The Home Song Stories*, Ayres 2007 (feature film)).

These latter films may be an instantiation of a culture poised and confident with its pluralist values, expressing through their intimate relationships a deeply felt appropriation and application of the ideals and ethical position espoused by multiculturalism. On the other hand, they may suggest an anxious need to inscribe these ideals with taken-for-granted mundanity, given their ominous disappearance from the cultural landscape. If the latter, then we must consider whether the films are using cross-cultural love to reassert and cement pluralist values in the face of governmental hostility.

Engaging with these questions, and given the significance of the 'boat people' events to multicultural values, I will explore two films produced in 2003 that deal with these events through the theme of cross-cultural love. *Molly and Mobarak* (Zubrycki 2003) and *Amanda and Ali* (Hodgkins 2003) are two films that make explicit use of love in the cross-cultural context for political/ethical purposes. 'Boat people' engendered a number of films (e.g. *We Will Be Remembered for This*, Taylor 2007; *Lucky Miles*, Rowland 2007) and an inaugural Refugee Film Festival in Sydney in 2007 ([www.triumphant.org.au/filmfestival.html](http://www.triumphant.org.au/filmfestival.html)). Yet in both *Molly and Mobarak* and *Amanda and Ali*, the use of love to transgress cultural boundaries becomes the integral vehicle for the merger of the personal and the political/ethical, and no mere peripheral thematic. They portray a type of embodied ethics where love is deployed self-



*Molly and Mobarak* (Tom Zubrycki, 2003). Image courtesy of Tom Zubrycki.

consciously and explicitly as a device for the anxious reassertion of the pluralism embedded in multiculturalism. However, they also implicitly critique multiculturalism as an imposition from above rather than viewing it as erupting from within the popular imaginary and hence seeing its failure to engage with the most intimate and vulnerable spaces of everyday, personal life.

The central position granted to love in these films achieves its significance mostly because the films seek to intersect a cultural order which, it is suggested, has become morally suspect by the dismantling of the ethical position heralded by multiculturalism. That is, ethics as the set of values underwriting a cultural order, where official and everyday decisions are made about how we will relate to others, to whom we owe what and to whom we owe nothing, forms an integral part of these films. They effectively raise ethical questions about the interplay between cultural difference and what we owe to those who enter this geopolitical space after us with or without official permission. According to these films, romantic love makes the welcome of the stranger possible in the deepest and riskiest manner. They add to ethics a personal dimension that is usually missing, one which recognizes that ethics is more than mission statements for large organizations, but involves how we behave with others, and what responsibilities we owe others, every day.

Ethics, difference and love form a significant theoretical framework for this chapter, as I propose that romantic love as expressed in the films *Molly and Mobarak* and *Amanda and Ali* suggests

to us that there is a space for thinking about romantic love as ethics. In order to consider the questions posed by these films, I will engage with the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas (1998), whose work on ethics and difference and the welcome of the stranger in his/her difference is significant for those engaged with these topics. Levinas makes an explicit distinction between 'love of the neighbour' as 'love without concupiscence' (1998: 103) and Eros, which is not an end in itself in ethics but the journey towards fecundity and futurity; the actualization of the latter then forms part of ethics, but not so the production of its possibility. I will interrogate this demarcation and propose that the romantic encounter – Eros – as shown in these films is the welcoming of the stranger *par excellence* because it welcomes at the most intimate level of engagement. Therefore, it is the riskiest but also the most potentially profound engagement where we can gain and express some of the fullest dimensions of our humanity as adult beings. It is a welcome, therefore, which is ethics – although in its most embodied form.

### Love and the refugee film

[O]ur culture doesn't recognize passion because real passion has the power to disrupt boundaries. I want there to be a place in the world where people can engage in one another's differences in a way that is redemptive, full of hope and possibility. (Hooks 1996)

For many within the Australian community, the events which demonstrated the erosion of the values inherent in the principles of multiculturalism were those surrounding 'boat people' during the late 1990s and early 2000s. During this time, a significant increase in of the number of boats arriving in Australia carrying asylum seekers produced an uncompromising governmental response intended to keep boats from arriving, and/or to enable the easy return of refugees to their home countries. This included the introduction of legislation to enable the indefinite detention of asylum seekers, the introduction of temporary protection visas (TPV), the excision of national territories for migration purposes, the active turning away of boats from Australian waters, increasing the threat of return to home country, and provision of limited services for those determined to be refugees and released into the community. Many in the community read these events as related to Australia's anxieties about invasion (Burke 2001), as incompatible with its international obligations (Brennan 2003) and, most significantly for this chapter, as eroding a value position of the welcoming of strangers in diversity (Tascón 2001; Lange, Kamalkhani and Baldassar 2007), which to many had become embedded within narratives of nation-building (Tascón 2008).

The films *Molly and Mobarak* and *Amanda and Ali* were produced as a result of these events. The rejection enacted on the bodies of refugees – as those who represented the unambiguous position of the stranger in need of welcome and hence what multiculturalism as policy was intended to fulfil – was the clearest rejection of this as a narrative imbued with ethical promise. The refugee signifies in these films the most ardent supplicator of our ethical responses. If we hold, as Luce Irigaray (2002) does, that 'the wisdom of love' poses for us the most profound questions of our heterogeneous existences, that it pushes us to transgress 'artificial and authoritarian unity' and form 'a loving encounter, particularly an

encounter able to dialogue in difference' (2002: xvi), then we can consider that these films are attempting to begin to represent for us the possibilities inherent in loving encounters across difference. The use of romantic love in these films therefore makes possible the understanding of a loss that can only be conceived of as understood at the space where one and another meet in proximity.

In *Molly and Mobarak*, a film by Tom Zubrycki released in 2003, two Australian women, Lynn and her daughter Molly, a young high school teacher, reach out and welcome into their family a young 22-year-old Hazara (Afghanistan) man, Mobarak, who has arrived in Australia on a boat. He finds work in the local abattoir in the small town of Young, New South Wales, after being released from immigration detention on a TPV. Mobarak, who has not seen or spoken to his family for some years, becomes attached to these women, and they form bonds with him – maternal in relation to Lynn, and romantic with Molly. While the love that Mobarak comes to have for Molly is not fully reciprocated, she is visibly torn between feelings she begins to have towards him and her inability to return the level of love she realizes he needs in order to repair and return all he has lost. Lynn, as a maternal presence, tries to protect both Mobarak and Molly by speaking of 'making boundaries' and emphasizing, very early in the film, that Molly has a boyfriend. Despite this, Molly caresses Mobarak often and their hands entwine tenderly more than once. As the days progress – the film follows a linear temporal sequence – the relationships between Lynn, Molly and Mobarak develop. The depth of emotions that Mobarak is obviously experiencing with regard to Molly becomes untenable, and Molly decides to go overseas for a number of weeks. As her departure date looms Mobarak spirals into utter despair and despondency, and his language increasingly enters into registers of profanity. Molly's ability to flee this intense situation, and Mobarak's mad search for the same intensity in her without return, reaches a poignant turning point as Lynn explains to Mobarak that Molly is fragile and has many things on her mind. Mobarak explains to Lynn that he 'has a lot of problems' too – visa, language, family – but that he still manages to love Molly. Lynn breaks down as she realizes that in the differences between Molly and the damaged Mobarak lies the injustice that whatever love they may give him will never be enough. The unrequited love Mobarak has for Molly is underscored by a situation that is not of Molly's or Mobarak's making, but part of a broader political context over which they have no control and which positions them as unequal partners. All the women can do is love Mobarak as best they are able within the circumstances – and love him they do.

But it cannot be enough for Mobarak, because he is young and also needs parental love; he is alone, he is rejected and misunderstood. These things occur separately to Molly, a young woman with many adventures and possibilities ahead of her. Committing to such a damaged human being – as she eventually realizes he is – is a responsibility she is not yet prepared for. In Mobarak's continuing search for love, which he finds with an Aboriginal girl in Sydney, he recognizes love's redemptive and healing strength. Writing to Lynn after he leaves, he says: 'I am too sad for you and Molly.' He recognizes that they did try, letting him feel his humanity in ways that no other encounter could. Wrenching himself from them in order to seek love elsewhere, a space is created for love to be glimpsed and hoped for. That Mobarak failed in

his search for love with Molly does not negate the gift of love that was made possible, and the future possibility of being in love.

*Amanda and Ali* is a much shorter film – just 15 minutes – by Karen Hodgkins, released in the same year as *Molly and Mobarak*. In *Amanda and Ali*, the movement is different from that of *Molly and Mobarak*; the love that is clearly highlighted here as developing between Ali and Amanda is portrayed against the backdrop of a maelstrom of political events surrounding ‘boat people’. Amanda meets Ali, an Iraqi asylum-seeker, in Woomera Detention Centre as she is protesting outside and he manages to escape. Ali’s face is a smudged presence at the beginning of the film, as Hodgkins films him at night after his escape in a clandestine manner. He is subsequently recaptured, and from that point he becomes a voice on the other end of a phone and a few scribbled words on paper. Some of the phrases from his letters are full of pain and poignancy: ‘I am a bird that has no wings to fly’, ‘I’m grateful that you’re always thinking of me’. Later, words of love appear and grow in intensity: after visiting him in detention, Amanda mentions that he told her he loved her and she returned the sentiment. One of his letters declares: ‘I looked up at the sky and I found your star beside of my star’, and we hear his voice saying to her: ‘I’m falling in your love. It’s your fault, it’s your kindness’. Ali’s only presence in the film, as a blurred face, a voice mediated by the phone and words on a page, as Kyle Weise mentions, ‘effectively emphasizes the isolation of asylum-seekers, the difficulty of getting their voices heard, as well as the importance of this communication and of the wider community’s understanding’ (2004).

The love that openly develops between Amanda and Ali, while non-sexual, is nevertheless romantic. Unlike Molly and Mobarak, whose bodies are able to feel each other, Amanda cannot touch Ali physically, and he refers to this in one of his letters. Yet what they feel is deeply intimate, and Amanda reminisces early in the film: ‘Never in my life have I been so emotionally affected by someone’, later mentioning that his love has deeply transformed her: ‘I wouldn’t be where I am today if it wasn’t for Ali...there were days I couldn’t get up if it wasn’t for his words’. What transpires between them is clearly romanticized and embodies a personal attempt to correct what is happening politically. Amanda, like Lynn and Molly, reaches out to an[‘other’] in a welcoming gesture that involves her bodily in providing the possibility that may become politically significant but is also a personal gesture of love and the gift of hope.

### Love as ethics

Until today what we have found is, at best, to integrate the other: in our country, our culture, our house. That does not yet signify meeting with the other, speaking with the other, loving with the other. (Irigaray 2002: ix)

Can we think through love as ethical? If, as Dayal (2001: para 3) mentions, ‘love...is the telos of melodrama’ and in films is feminized and privatized, does this then place it outside the purview of public significance? In order for love to suggest a way to be together-in-difference, does it then need to go beyond romance to enter ethics? These are crucial questions because, in order

to consider the politico-cultural meanings these films hold, love needs a central place in the analysis; love in these films is not only a private encounter but has significance far beyond the individual stories. Love is not only the sufficient condition for making the political/cultural point in these films, it is the absolutely necessary guiding thread that makes the thinking through of these encounters possible in political/ethical terms.

The questions posed by love, ethics and difference are taken up by a number of thinkers (e.g. Levinas 1969; Silverman 1996; hooks 1997; Nussbaum 2001; Irigaray 2000, 2002) in a variety of ways. Here I take up a question posed by Emmanuel Levinas in relation to the role of romantic love in ethics, as his ethics of responsibility in alterity has been seminal for many critics working in the cross-cultural or multicultural arenas. Levinas articulates romantic love, or Eros, as outside the purview of ethics; this has been interrogated by Irigaray (1991, 2001) and others (e.g. de Beauvoir 1971; Downing 2007; Katz 2001). In Levinas’s formulations, Eros, or the romantic relationship, is that which provides the conditions for transcendence and therefore ethics; however, it is not ethics itself. This occurs as a result of the distinction between erotic/romantic love and ‘love without concupiscence’. The first forms part of the ethical venture only through its performance of ‘the caress’, which ‘consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes its form toward a future never future enough, in soliciting what slips away as though it were not yet’ (1969: 257–58). That is, by ‘soliciting...toward a future’ that is eternally searched for the caress produces the conditions for transcendence, and for ethics, but is not itself ethics. Katz (2001) argues that this movement is clearly gendered and the feminine ‘other’ merely produces the conditions for transcendence, which hence belongs to the masculine. In this way the feminine performs the utility of the possibility of fecundity and futurity, which is ethics for Levinas, but it is the masculine that enacts the ethical. In Levinasian terms, therefore, romantic love ‘remains outside the political, secluded in its intimacy, its dual solitude’ (Katz 2001: 154) and outside the regard of ethics. It is the masculine ability to transcend this intimacy that allows the ethical to take place, although it is the feminine that makes masculine transcendence possible.

In Levinasian terms, then, Eros cannot be the site within which ethics is enacted, but is that which can make ethics possible through the caress as futurity and fecundity. In this way, Levinas draws a distinction between the [privatized] romantic encounter – which may be sexualized or not, but is intimate – and the ethics which is [public and] made possible by the caress but is beyond it. This distinction may indeed be embedded in the traditional distinction between private and public, and the traditionally gendered way in which this has been constructed. While Levinas, as Katz (2001) argues, may not be disregarding or trivializing the feminine in his account of love as part of ethics, the result is one in which the feminine makes possible fecundity only through the presence of the caress; the ethical importance of such an encounter remains outside of that which the feminine provides. The question this raises for the films being considered here is to what extent the privatized romantic experiences the women – Lynn, Molly and Amanda – are seen to provide for the refugee men as ‘other’ can then be seen as part of an ethical project. Is what many Australian women did during the ‘boat people’ crisis – not only give of their time but also form deep and intimate relationships with refugee men – and which are portrayed in

these films, not part of an ethical response? Or are their actions, by becoming part of a love that is closer to Eros than to non-concupiscence, outside ethics? Can we see their actions as only existing within that which provides the environment for ethics to be performed, or were their actions directly ethical?

In *Molly and Mobarak* and *Amanda and Ali*, the women's love, as imperfect, incomplete and impregnated with postcolonial power as it is, offers the men, as 'other', an entry into a place that otherwise rejects their presence. They welcome the men in ways that give hope, but also do so in the face of a political climate where love of any kind is denied them. The love they give is not sexual, and so in a sense it is non-concupiscent in Levinasian terms. But it is of a type that cannot be called unromantic – Molly and Mobarak's entwining of hands symbolizes this, as does Amanda and Ali's open declaration of love. It is the act of love in a romantic sense that begins to redeem, not just the men but so much more. The women are acting from a political motive and orient their bodies and emotions towards an 'other' to whom they open themselves in embodied ways. Connected to the political events that surrounded them, and hence the motives that moved them to act as they did, theirs were also acts that worked within a discourse of national redemption. In Levinasian terms, they welcome the stranger and make it possible for this 'other' to transcend their inhumanity, through the encounter with another in love. Yet in contradiction to Levinas, they enact the ethical possibilities not simply by being the vessel of fecundity but by being that which directly engenders a future possibility for the men. The actions of these women, arising from political motives but enacted in the personal, must be read as an embodied ethics that does not easily divide the political from the personal.

### Conclusion

The task here is different. It is a question of making something exist, in the present and even more in the future. It is a matter of staging an encounter between the one and the other – which has not yet occurred, or for which we lacked words, gestures, thus the means of welcoming, celebrating, cultivating it in the present and in the future. (Irigaray 2000: viii)

Love in the shape of romantic love has had an ongoing and persistent presence in Australian films. Its place in narratives of political and ethical significance has been little regarded, although it has been an enduring vehicle for representing personal applications of the political/ethical. Part of the difficulty in seeing narratives of romantic love as contributing or forming part of narratives of political/ethical importance arises from the uncoupling of the private (where romantic love traditionally resides) with the public (where ethics/politics traditionally resides) in modernity, and the gendered dimensions of this (although there has been much feminist literature contesting this). These films begin to suggest that romantic love does have a place within notions of ethics. I would go as far as to suggest that the fecundity that it offers another human being, far from being on the path to futurity, is the future, whether biologically or physically reproduced in a third being or not, as Levinas suggests.

If, furthermore, love-across-difference is the welcome of the stranger in his/her strangeness, the development towards a future in the warm regard and safety of another, then I would say that these films clearly point to romantic love as providing that possibility. In contradistinction to Emmanuel Levinas, who in every other regard provides us with a powerful vision for developing an ethics of non-assimilatory response to difference, romantic love has been added here not as the mere road to ethics, but as forming an integral part of the ethical project. The embodied actions of the women in the two films are a welcoming of those who have been constructed as absolute strangers. Their gift of the caress is more than a vehicle towards achieving futurity and ethics; this gift is the direct provision of a fecund future for men who as absolute 'other' could not have had this otherwise.

If multiculturalism as a narrative of the national and the ethical has visibly been threatened by governmental policies and practices, especially evident in their treatment of refugee boat people, then these films attempt to reassert the value of the multicultural in areas where it had most abysmally failed: the private and personal. I would suggest that *Molly and Mobarak* and *Amanda and Ali* attempt to reinforce these values by inserting and developing the most embodied, deepest and most vulnerable aspects of human existence, and turning these intimate spaces into ethical questions about who we are and how we treat strangers. In contrasting the actions of these women to those of their communities, the film-makers redirect attention to the ethical promise of plurality and the welcoming of strangers, injecting it with an everydayness and embodiment that made it an ethics complete in relevance and application. Ethics is not something that happens 'out there', or drafted by experts in dark offices, they seemed to be saying; it is how we behave every day with others, what responsibilities are ours in relation to others, and accordingly the decisions we make behaviourally. By showing how one can be taken into the depths of someone else's intimacy, *Molly and Mobarak* and *Amanda and Ali* show how the ethical/political project is entered into at the riskiest and most fraught area of our existence, and therefore ethics *par excellence*.