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IDENTIFYING MISIDENTIFICATION: THE POLITICS IN THE PAINTING BY THE ANGLO-INDIAN ARTIST LESLIE MORGAN

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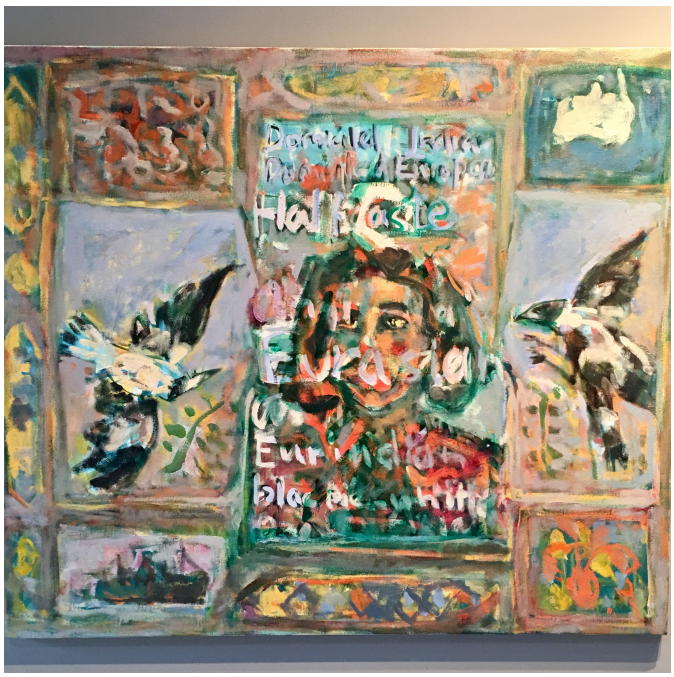
I. The Painting: Identifying *Misidentification*

The painting *Misidentification* is part of the series, *Anglo-Indians sail into White Australia,* by an Anglo-Indian artist, the late Leslie Morgan where he artistically reimagines Anglo-Indian immigration into Australia.



I was instantly drawn to the form and content of *Misidentification*. One smudged word centred in the canvas jumped out at me – "Eurasian". I recognised the 18th Century cognomen used to describe Anglo-Indians in India; a biological description that became, in the eyes of others, a pejorative judgment; a noun which morphed into an objectionable adjective.

Compositionally, *Misidentification* is intriguing. Irregularly outlined tiles containing select iconography dominate the canvas, break it up; there is a push and pull on the multihued surface, here one dimensional and flat, there, tiles suggesting depth. Ensconced inside one large tile a dark haired woman peers out from under a list of freighted descriptions: Domiciled Indian, Domiciled European, Half Caste, Eurasian, Eurindian, blackie white – some of the words fusing into the woman's image. It is as though Morgan has allowed the Anglo-Indian woman to create a selfie of herself, her times, her conundrums, and by extension, that of her community.

I requested Morgan discuss his work with me and over an hour or so we recorded Morgan's thoughts and motivations about his art.[1] This softly spoken, slightly built, darkish, energetic, and somewhat driven man was someone we would have been delighted to know at greater length but he did inform me, "I'm actually quite sick at the moment, I've got cancer and…so I'm dealing with that…just trying to get … things out. And getting my work organised and archived …" (Interview, October 2016). Sadly he passed away within six months of the interview with him.

Regarding the various descriptions fused to the woman Morgan explained his Mitchell Library, Sydney, research: "… around that time I came across a list of names . . .could have been 16 names that Anglo-Indians were known under. There's Domicile Indian, Domicile English, you're Indians, there's all sort of things, so I was interested in this idea of identification…" (Interview, October 2016).

On the use of 'tiles' in his work Morgan explained:

> I was fascinated by the … north face of the fort in Lahore, after visiting it, all those murals, . . . but there's just this series of tile, it's a tiled wall, the north face. It's fantastic … So what I did was I painted it out…I did the painting as straight, naturalistic painting, and then kind of painted it out with tiles and then painted it back in again. I wanted to…bring in…talk about history . . . all of that. In some ways it is almost history painting in a way… (Interview)

I imagine Morgan was referring to the predominance of the glazed Kashkari tiles dominating the Picture Wall of Lahore Fort. Although he did not actually mention the

[1] Leslie Morgan gave me permission to use the interview, which took place near the Foundlings Gallery in Brunswick, in future publications.

Picture Wall in the interview one cannot imagine he did not see the feature.

Morgan was original in depicting historical moments of Anglo-Indian history through his paintings. Immigration patterns of Anglo-Indians 'quitting' India especially after 1947, have been largely documented by academics (see for example, Andrews, 2007; Blunt, 2005) but in the domain of art there does not appear to be a surfeit of examples which address that experience, let alone ones by Anglo-Indians.

One person who had the good fortune to be more closely acquainted with Morgan was the Melbourne journalist, Phillip Adams. Morgan painted Adams for the Archibald prize. During the sittings they both enjoyed many conversations. Of him, Phillips Adams insightfully said,

> Despite his quietness, he threw me around the canvas like one of those twenty stone bullies in world championship wrestling. I liked the way he manhandled the paint, the way he wielded the brushes….I'd been painted before….but the experience had never been so physical… There's an urgency to Les' painting and often an underlying sense of anger. I find this interesting, given that he's such a quiet bloke. (Adams, ND)

Morgan's art is social commentary. In our interview, Morgan made no bones about his work being a social statement. "I was doing a lot of political work…yeah, likely in the 80's… That painting called *Thorn in the Crown*, that was about the Raj . . . So that would be a moment of identification. And also there was identifying with the Black Art movement in Britain." (Interview, October 2016)

II. The Meaning: What *Misidentification* Identifies

Attaching meaning to works of art can be a highly interpretive and subjective venture. The following 'meaning' or interpretation, of Morgan's *Misidentification* is not definitive but is offered without hubris by me, influenced by Morgan's thoughts. The remainder of this article attempts to identify two cultural frameworks relevant to Morgan's oeuvre, especially in *Misidentification*, and then explores how they manifest in his painting, drawing upon an extensive interview with him, as well as other sources such as Glenn D'Cruz's *Midnight's Orphans* (D'Cruz, 2006) and *A passage from India: Anglo-Indians*

in Victoria, curated by The East Indian Club of Melbourne.[2]

The first framework is where Morgan immediately engages on the canvas with commentary on the shifting sands of Australian white supremacist immigration policies towards the end of the 20th century. Morgan's clarity of vision of the period coalesces in *Misidentification*, a painting replete with freighted iconography of the times. The symbolism of some icons is self-evident – the visual pun of a small white chewing-gum-stretchy looking outline of Australia denotes White Australia. He also commented on the two magpies in the picture, "in Australia, they attack….So they were attacking, but they were pulling as well, so there was a tension between them. Maybe that push-pull thing is about this diasporic tension" (Interview, October 2016). The smudgy outline of a ship in the painting is rooted in a somewhat more obscure Australian history, with elements of high farce, and require a longer explanation. The ship in the painting is the HMAS Manoora, dispatched by the Australian Government to rescue British citizens from India prior to its Independence and Partition. The docking of the HMAS Manoora in Fremantle on the 15th August 1947, with some 700 Anglo-Indians aboard, along with twenty Polish refugees, was problematic. Immigration officials, working within the White Australia policy, had expected identifiably British, fair looking people, to disembark but what arrived was several hundred brown people (Blunt 2005). The ship's arrival, Morgan explained, was "…a well-publicised event and for Minister Caldwell, it was a way of rescuing Australians and British people of pure European descent from the violence of Partition" (Interview, October 2016). It became a publicity nightmare for the Australian government and granting entry to Anglo-Indians became by necessity a face-saving decision. Nevertheless, a less than gracious welcome was accorded publicly to Anglo-Indians. As Alison Blunt stated about this Anglo-Indian arrival: "Their mode of habits generally would have to be greatly improved if they were to fit successfully into an Australian community" (Blunt, 2005, p. 140).

Nor was the reception of HMAS Manoora an isolated event. As documented by Blunt, an Australian living in New Delhi was bitterly critical of the admission of Anglo-Indians to a supposedly White Australia. A letter detailing experiences aboard the SS Mulbera,

[2] For more see https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/4776673

headed from Bombay on 31st March, 1947, to Australia provides a typical view:

> The passengers on the ship have been a shock – the ship's officers say the immigration authorities in Australia are going to get a jolt. …You can count the white faces on your hand…[Most] are all Anglo-Indians. You cannot move on the deck for blackie-white children . .. they never go to bed until 11 o'clock, even the littlest one. How all these people have got passages is amazing when the few Englishmen on board have had to fight by fair means or foul…White Australia! It seems a farce. (Blunt, 2005, p. 147)

White Australia was built upon white supremacist notions and a concomitant fear of mixed races and their progeny. Morgan adds,

> …miscegenation that produced mixed races was a threat to this idealised white nation. At this time Indigenous children were being taken away from their families to be raised separately in institutions and this was also to do with the stain of miscegenation . . . (Interview, October 2016)

The second framework I offer for consideration to understand Morgan is outside the frame of the painting but still relevant. Morgan painted at a time contemporaneous with a discernible pattern of increased Anglo-Indian authored publications, especially in Melbourne. Then, as D'Cruz notes, a number of Melbourne based Anglo-Indians published narratives, dissertations and personal histories about Anglo-Indians (D'Cruz, 2006, pp. 208-216).

Was this proliferation the epicentre of a nascent diasporic Anglo-Indian zeitgeist? Were government cultural policies and a certain profiling of Anglo-Indians as 'Good Australians' (a term coined by D'Cruz (D'Cruz, 2006, p. 189)) in these narratives linked? In his seminal work, *Midnight's Orphans* (2006), D'Cruz offers a short and crushing answer:

> …Australian multiculturalism provides the most important condition of possibility for the production of literature produced by Australian Anglo-Indians…that Australian public policy uses Anglo-Indians to promote a particularly narrow form of multiculturalism. (D'Cruz, 2006, p. 191)

I concur with D'Cruz where he states, "…that multiculturalism is an ambivalent discourse; one that simultaneously works to reinstate white normativity while it celebrates cultural diversity" (D'Cruz, 2006, p. 216). I also suggest that Morgan's gritty

representations of the community contrast sharply with some of the airbrushed depictions contained in contemporaneous narratives by Melbourne Anglo-Indians. Furthermore, it may be that whilst "… the works of Gloria Moore, Patricia Pengilley and Christopher Cyril has been significantly assisted, both directly and indirectly by favourable government policies" (ibid) Morgan did not labour under the obligations of any potential government hegemony. His was a vision free of any shackles. In concert with this, as a founding member of the East India Club of Melbourne whose objective was to promote understanding of the community, I noticed that very few narratives authored by Melbourne's Anglo-Indians went against the profile of them being anything but 'Good Australians'. However, that is not to state that the narratives served no purpose. They did, at a minimum, pluck some low-hanging fruit about the community, disseminating basic information about Anglo-Indians, perhaps even rescuing many Anglo-Indians from 'explanation fatigue' – the tedious and repetitive exercise of explaining who they were (Andrews, 2018, p. 230). But was there a cost for being a Good Australian? D'Cruz goes on to argue, "Paradoxically the Anglo-Indian community's integration with Australian society may be so successful that the community may not exist as a distinctive ethnic group within a generation, …a disappearance into the mainstream . . ." (D'Cruz, 2006, p. 216).

Much of this dynamic played out when The East Indian Club of Melbourne curated the first modern exhibition on the community – *A Passage from India - Anglo Indians in Victoria*. I can personally attest, as a committee member in those times, that opinions were voiced by Anglo-Indians for the EIC to 'get it right'. But for some quarters of the community that meant a valorised and sanitised account was required.

Morgan was no stranger to the denigration and valorisation of the species. He had experienced racism first hand in the UK:

> Yeah, growing up in Britain during the rivers of blood stuff in the '70s. It was …pretty full on. And…I think there was only one other non-white person at my school. I think she was Anglo-Indian… And ...it was a hard time, and probably even worse for my dad. You know, in the '50s, working in the factories, for Kodak and things like that. That would have been tough. (Interview, October 2016)

Had he, in those years, identified as Anglo-Indian?

> No. Not really, no, because… you just wanted to be like everyone else.

> Especially when you're growing up. 'Cause we're always Anglo-Indians, but we kind of denied it in a way …as people growing up do… in the late 70s, 80s, with the rise of racism. (Interview, October 2016)

For Morgan, his experience in the United Kingdom found continuities in Australia, as he notes in his book, *Les Morgan: Illegal Action* (ND)

> I arrived in South East Queensland in 1995 to be confronted by the same kind of bigotry and intolerance I had experienced as long ago as 1968 in Britain following Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of blood' speech. Powell's rhetoric and racist fervour precipitated a moral panic with regards to the 'stranger' in our midst. (Morgan, ND, p. 16)

Was being an Anglo-Indian helpful to his artistic perspective? “It is, it is, because you’re writing from that sort of double consciousness, so it’s actually productive… (Interview, October 2016). Colleagues saw Morgan similarly, ”… Wherever he's been, Morgan has always been a foreigner… destined forever to be an outsider, this gives him a critical edge over those who are unable to view their surroundings with the outsider's detached vision clarity of vision (Morrell, ND, p. 6).

Such was the social context of Morgan's work. He constructs the lens of society to snap shot the society. *Misidentification* is an immediate engagement with the experiences of Anglo-Indians in Australia but it also positions itself with more universal themes of immigration, race, and politics. But is there only room in Morgan's painting for social protest? No. Other attributes are obvious:

> …it's easy to assume that he can't see anything else. In fact Morgan’s chromatic sense is just as well tuned. Passages of genuinely lyrical painting creep into his pictures as if by accident. Soft edged patches of muffled colour create warm hazy images that Morgan usually disrupts with sharp or unpleasant details to stop things too relaxed and comfortable…Colour relationships in his work are never just a matter of observing racial conflicts. He paints the colours of Australia with a sharper eye that that. (Morrell, ND, p. 8)

Morgan died in 2017 and left behind a wide range of works in a number of prestigious galleries, such as the Tate Gallery of London. He is also thought to have left other legacies, as described by Dr Dean Chan of Perth’s Edith Cowan University.

> Les Morgan's art is an ineluctable form of social commentary. Through polemical compositions and wilfully perverse juxtapositions as well as sometimes sardonic humour… he cuts through rhetorical multiculturalism and romanticised inter-cultural relations …His art represents nothing less than a sustained critical engagement with the

> imperfect connections that constitute contemporary social life. (Chan, ND, p. 15)

Morgan, by virtue of birth, identity, and transnationalism is an artist drawing upon many codes. In *Misidentification* his iconography is inspired by Kashkari tiles in Lahore Fort, by Australian magpies, by racial verbal abuse – such as 'blackie-whitie' – forged in the United Kingdom, by white supremacist issues surrounding the arrival of HMAS Manoora. Morgan dips into Islamic and Hindu artistic traditions, into the modern and traditional, into the East and West but ultimately, Morgan's art is fusion, hybridised, syncretic. He is an artist who has given expression to a life lived with and in between many codes, registers, and calibrations to create a form and content that is resplendent with those echoes.

Keith St. Clair Butler is an India-born novelist and teacher living in New Zealand. Butler, an Anglo-Indian, writes for literary journals, magazines and anthologies. His awards include winning The Melbourne Age Short Story Competition for *Sodasi* and grants from the Australian Literature Board and Victorian Arts Department for his first novel *The Secret Vindaloo.* Butler has just launched *Ishq: And other essays.*

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW WITH LESLIE MORGAN, OCTOBER 2016, MELBOURNE

After visiting Leslie Morgan's exhibition in Brunswick, Melbourne, we, Keith Butler and Robyn Andrews, met with Les to interview him. We invited him to tell us about his paintings, including the techniques he used, and inspirations for particular works. The interview transcript below is very lightly edited to remove repetitions and 'space fillers' (such as 'ums', 'you knows') and it is in the original sequence. We have added the occasional word to help meaning, which is indicated with square brackets.

With my painting, there is a lot of hit and miss anyway. There's layer and layers, and depending on how many layers, sometimes I'll either stop, or I'll just carry on. Sometimes you carry on, and you just mess it up anyway. That's okay, because that's part of the process. But the question is [about] individual voice, isn't it? So, as an artist, you're a writer [speaking to Keith], really only a writer knows. They know it's authentic don't they? When you've done something which is authentic, you know it's authentic.

Keith Butler: Yep, yep.

So that's really when you know. And I know that, when I first started painting, of course I adopted the tropes of European Modernism, particularly Frank Aardvark. [He] used to paint really thick – with a trowel, stick in the dark, sort of thing. His 1960s paintings. But then, you have to find your own voice. I also liked French Modernism, like Bonnard, and those painters. And that's sort of an Expressionist, it's kind of a European Expressionism. So that's the language. Like we use English language, and the particular way we use it. So that's the form. So then there's the content, in terms of what you do with it, and your subject. And then there's the confluence of both, how one impacts upon the other. And somewhere in that mix, something happens, or it doesn't happen. If it doesn't happen, just keep painting over it, and something else will happen. Hopefully. Sometimes it doesn't.

K: Thinking about your viewpoint, is being from a community such as ours helpful to you?

It is, it is, because you're writing from that sort of double consciousness, so it's actually productive. And that's where my [background is] productive, because you can see things that… You produce something that acts as a critique of society, which some of the host community couldn't produce.

K: I ask this, because Sealy's very good at this, in his book *The Trotter-Nama*, it's an absolute classic.

Robyn Andrews: It's Keith and Allan Sealy, who are the key notes for the Jadavpur [University workshop], it's on literature, film, etc, and I thought I would talk about your painting, as that's another artistic form of representation.

The thing about a painting is, it's harder, for people to engage with it. So people are used to seeing films, as documentary, and it's explicit. Because of the film … and maybe you've got to work a bit harder to work out what's going on … it can work both ways. The painting can work to seduce you in. 'Cause it looks like a pretty bit of Modernism, for instance, and then "is that just a pretty bit of Modernism?". And then you look at it and you engage in what the story is about. And then hopefully it can feel a bit uncomfortable. And you sort of begin to understand it. So I think it can work both ways, or it can just put you off, or you don't want to engage with it, because it's too hard. Whereas film, people are more used to looking at film. 'Cause first and foremost, it's got to work as a work of art. There's been so much bad art as propaganda, but bad art. But really, it's got to work as art, first and foremost. So it's that, form and content which comes together.

K: I was very provoked by the epithet 'Eurasian', I think it worked for me. Because of the conflicted interpretation and the battles around that, and I really love that. The word just jumped out at me in your work on misidentification.

It is a conflicted term. Yeah, 'cause it's artful too.

R: Yes, exactly.

Yeah, who do we identify as? How do people see us? There's different layers to it, and then there's the 'miss', as well. And, so there's the gender aspect to it as well. In one of my paintings, that a lot of women are interesting in, Anglo-Indian women. Did you see that painting '*With the Boss"*? There's women just on the outside.

R: One of your ones?

Yeah.

K: Up there? [In the Gallery]

Yeah. The Anglo women were the only women who were allowed to work at that stage. They were right on the outside. And so I just had them in, just, just creeping in.

It was based on an old photograph on my Dad's Kodak. So the white-white guy, in the white suit right in the middle [is the boss]. So it's a painting about hierarchy, and place, and belonging in the workplace, which is really interesting. So you have the British people in the middle, then the white guy and white suit, and then you get the Anglos dressed up in their best, and then you get the gardeners on the next row… so you get this hierarchy thing. And on the outside, you get the Anglo women, squeezed right into the outside.

But anyway [*back to Misidentification*] it's interesting, because I was fascinated by the north face of the fort in Lahore, after visiting it. All those murals. I'd love to go again, but I'm sure I'll never go. But, there's just this series of tiles, a tiled wall, the north face. It's fantastic. I think it probably approximates the Delhi Fort, the same sort of time, I think. So what I did was, I painted it out. I did the painting as straight, naturalistic painting, and then kind of painted it out with tiles and then painted it back in again. I wanted to bring in talk about history and bring in all that. In some ways, it is almost history painting, in a way.

K: I love it.

It's at a particular time in history, like the Manoora.

K: **It's like a social commentary, and a critiquing also.**

I've done this one about whiteness, which you can see in the advertising of Farex. It's called '*Mothering with Farex*' It was a porridge. And interestingly, one of my uncles was the model [for it in India]. Because he was Anglo-Indian and a bit fair and looked a bit Western, right. It was almost an advert for whiteness.

R: Of course, that's the aspiration.

Yes. To be like the old Pears soap. So you feed your kid Farex, and then… So that was about whiteness, and a bit like the Pears soap stuff. But the *Misidentification*, going back to that, there was a magazine called *History Today*, in Australia. And I collected the postcards in Melbourne Uni, they had them from the '40s, or even earlier. And they had these wonderful illustrations on the front. And one of them was these two blackbirds.

They're black birds, not magpies?

Oh sorry, magpies. And magpies in Australia, they attack. So they were attacking, but they were pulling as well, so there was a tension between them. Maybe that push-pull thing is about this diasporic tension. Like the Manoora, they thought it wasn't the Motherland or the Fatherland, because it was Australia. But they thought themselves to be English, British. They were seen not to be.

K: They were stopped from coming out for a little while weren't they?

Yeah.

K: They were barred from entry.

How long was it for?

I'm not sure how long it was.

K: It might be an urban myth, but I read that the people in Freemantle, they expected British people to look like British, they got these guys who look like us! What the hell!

That's right.

R: Looking at that documentary [being played on a loop at the Foundling gallery], they were all different hues, weren't they? That family was quite…

A lot of them in the film they showed though, were the Polish ones.

R: Is that right?

Yes, but I know that there are only twenty Poles, only a small number. It looked as though they were showing the Poles a lot too, to dilute the Britain-

K: I thought I did see identifiable Anglo-Indians.

Oh there are, definitely.

K: The couple of blokes came off with sola topis, and I thought, 'Yeah, I can remember back home. This is what my Dad used to wear, the sola topi.' And my Uncle was a big boss in Sealdah station, he had his own quarters and all that. He used to come back really pink faced because of heat and the sola topi on his head.

There's a kind of 'White Australia' idea there. And the Manoora. And there's sections of design from the '40s, in there, ingrained in there, and I'm getting sort of sections of … And so I think those magpies are attacking, and also pulling. But it's like identification and misidentification.

K: Tell me about the figure of the female again?

Well the female is from one of the photographs I pulled off one of the emergency certificates.

That's so interesting, the emergency certificates, because you think they might have come out on those?

Not necessarily, but if they didn't have a passport. It was done so quickly. This was in '47.

K: I had a passport. Which I still have. I don't know where, but I still have it. But it is a damn nuisance. Made me stateless!

R: The subjectship.

K: The only place I could go was the Andaman Islands. And here I was in 1972, really, Indian, Anglo-Indian, having to report to passport control for a visa so I could live in India! I mean, part of the grand scheme of my Dad's so I could prove British origins

and go to Australia. That was what my Dad was planning. But he dropped me in it. And then Australia didn't take me. I was off to the Andaman Islands.

You would have first. You see, in the late 1960s that white Australia policy was beginning to be dismantled, so you would have been … It was the beginning of the '70s. Yeah, yeah, the white Australia policy was officially ended then.

K: Are you a full time artist?

Oh yeah, but I'm actually quite sick at the moment, I've got cancer and this and that, so I'm dealing with that. So I'm just trying to get things sorted out. And getting my work organised and archived …

K: How old are you Les?

I'm 60, almost 61. *[Discussion of his illness removed from here as Leslie had passed away before we could check with him about including it. It was not part of the original topic the interview].*

K: When I saw that painting I was very moved, by it. But what I like is the provocation in that painting, but not in a nasty way.

I think that's the way, that's a kind of strategy isn't it, to engage.

R: You don't want to alienate. It's thought-provoking.

You've got to seduce, and you can still be as hard hitting as you want it to be.

K: The other thing, in terms of your work, when I said we were waiting for someone like you, the community is absolutely hungry for works of art.

R: That's what I felt when I saw it, I said, 'Finally there's art'.

I've been doing some great work. I did some painting, have a lot on my website, it's called *A Brexit Summer*. I was in London. And it was just a very interesting time, so used that as a metaphor. I bought this umbrella, because it was raining all the time, and it was a British umbrella. It had the UK flag. Of course, it broke. So I thought "Right, I'm going to use this". So it's my first attempt at performance art when I got back, 'cause I got [named person] to video me with his broken umbrella and doing things with it. It was a metaphor for the brokenness of Brexit. And also my back was killing me, so I knew that there was something happening. You just know. And I was in agony for the few months that I was there, but I was determined to do what I had to do there. And it was to make connections with people I used to know, who are painters and academics and people I used to know who were involved in what is known as the Black Art movement in the '80s. So what's happening now is the Tate is [looking at some of my pieces]. Because they're looking at that 1980s work.

R: You were painting it over there in the '80s?

Yes. So some of them [Tate gallery employees] are coming over on a research trip.

K: We better buy before the price goes up (laughs).

No guarantees there, anyway, they're coming. I'm negotiating with GOMA [Gallery of Modern Art] in Brisbane. Someone's coming down quite shortly. But of course [named art works are] now off.

R: I would have thought it would be on for that reason.

That's why I wanted them to be there.

R: That's a provocation as well isn't it?

A week later a short second interview was recorded by phone. The following is part of that interview.

R: What was the inspiration to paint Misidentification?

I think I might have started and then got diverted, or distracted. During part of the research, and you're going back a long time, 2003, I did some research in the Mitchell Library a long time ago. It's in Sydney, it's the State Library. And they had a few books on… quite interesting illustrated books and things like that, on British soldiers in India. Some quite interesting stuff, which was also illustrated. And around that time I came across I don't know what it was now, but there was a list of names of about … 12, could have been 16 names that Anglo-Indian were known under. So I was looking at those. They're domiciled Indian, domiciled English, you're Indian, they're all sort of things. So I was interested in this idea of identification, and also, now picking up on Keith's book, which I just started, and really enjoying, there's this "Who is an Anglo-Indian?" sort of thing. And it also relates very much to that story about who you are, "are you just a British subject by birth?" Because that's on the emergency certificate.

So how do you identify? It's becoming increasingly interesting because, talking to various people, who for instance, come from Sri Lanka or something like that… They might have lived in the Gulf for most of their life, or whatever, and then the UK, and, so "who you are?" and "who you identify as?" That becomes an increasingly interesting thing.

R: For Anglo-Indians or generally?

Well generally. But for Anglo-Indians particularly. I think it's a generational thing. Because my kids probably wouldn't see themselves as Anglo-Indian. So it is going to be historical I suppose.

R: They might say their dad was Anglo-Indian rather than own it themselves, maybe?

Yeah. I think so. Because my son would see himself as Australian. See, the difficulty is, what you see yourself as, and what you're picked as, by other people, that's where the conflict comes in, isn't it? And so this 'part thing' was very much a part of Anglo-Indian culture, wasn't it?

R: Yeah.

And even in the criteria for admission, it was something about European customs and habits, and things like that.

R: Was that for Australia?

Yeah.

R: For the Manoora?

Yeah, yeah.

R: What was your own experience of identity?

Growing up in Britain?

R: You were born in Britain, weren't you?

Yeah, growing up in Britain, during the rivers of blood stuff in the '70s. It was pretty full on. And I think there was only one other non-white person at my school. I think she was Anglo-Indian as well actually. And it was a hard time, and probably even worse for my Dad. You know, in the '50s, working in the factories, for Kodak and things like that. That would have been tough.

R: Did you identify as Anglo-Indian then?

No, not really no, because you just want to be like everyone else. Especially when you're growing up.

R: Was it coming to Australia, or prior to that?

Oh no, before. But I don't know, I don't think there was a time, maybe it's about being confident in yourself, and things like that. Maybe that kind of extended, even later, because I went to Stoke-on-Trent Art School, initially.

R: And your parents…

Yeah, they didn't like it, yeah. And it was even worse there, because there was a whole class difference there. I was a Southerner, and also I was a different kind of Southerner as well.

R: Is it an elite art school?

No, no, far from it. But in some ways it was a mad decision, in other ways it was a good one. It was in the '70s, when things were changing in art schools. And I went to, probably, a more old-school one. I was encouraged to do that, but whether that was a good move or a bad move, who knows.

I think that's actually a very good question about when I actually identified as Anglo-Indian, 'cause while we're always Anglo-Indians, we kind of denied it in a way, because we wanted to be like everyone else. As people growing up do. So, I don't know. I think probably in the late '70s, 80s, with the rise of racism and stuff, in the '80s. We fought against racism, which was a big social movement at the time. And coincided with the anti-nuclear movement in Britain as well. And the anti-apartheid movement.

R: There were lots of social movements then weren't there?

It was just a mad time and it was a very exciting time. So the music thing came as part of that. I think, if you get the article I wrote with Michelle, that might document some. Michelle Lobo. That might document it, I'm not sure. There's also something, a photograph magazine now. Anyway, it's listed-

R: On your website?

Yeah. But I suppose it was in the '80s really …

R: Because you were…

Doing that stuff, and I was doing a lot of political work. Yeah, it's likely in the '80s. So probably then, I think. That painting called *Thorn in the Crown*, that was about the Raj and stuff. So that would probably be… I suppose a moment of identification. And also there was identifying with the Black Art movement in Britain. That was a part of all that. There are a few shows in the Brixton Art Gallery. So I suppose in the early '80s …

R: That's when you started? Because you're done quite a lot of Anglo-Indian subject painting…

Yeah, there's quite a lot that haven't been documented as well. I was looking at the back of photographs. I'm adapting lots of photographs, because Dad was a Kodak person.

R: What did he do for Kodak?

In England he was a technical correspondent, which meant, I think, they dealt with complaints and things. And in London, when he first arrived, he was working in Harrow, and on the factory floor.

R: He had lots of photos?

He had loads of photos, lot of them. So I was reinterpreting the photos in a way. Family photos, all sorts of photos. Reinterpreting, yeah. And, I suppose, in some ways, reinserting an historical narrative as well, in some of them. I quite like looking at the back of photographs and the front as well. And juxtaposing them, and pictorially as well, it made quite a nice juxtaposition I suppose. Also crinkly around the edges, the old photographs. You know, that crinkle thing? And the writing, what people write on the back. So every so often I get the confidence to go back and have a look and think about the past. I did a lot of work a long time ago, based on that. I think it's there. And probably re-emerges in some stuff. We went to Penang recently and I read quite a lot of dour histories of the East Indian Company. I don't know if you've delved into that stuff. A lot of them are about bureaucratic and finance. Because that was what it was about, in a way.

R: Trading wasn't it?

Yeah, trading and pirating and everything. So, I've been looking at a lot of that stuff. And some of the work I did based in Penang, sort of reworks, it reconfigures that as well. So it's kind of never-ending that something's there. I give it a scratch every now and again.

R: You had an exhibition with somebody else in Freemantle, the 2013-2014?

Yes, in 2014 I think it was. It was titled *Being Eurasian*. He's Eurasian in a different way: he's Malaysian, with a Muslim, mother and an Australian father. So, it was a kind of a convenient hook.

R: The pictures, you have very different styles and everything. But that would be a good thing in an exhibition.

Yeah, I think it was.

R: When did you do the paintings for that?

Well, it might have been 2013.

R: The Manoora in the studio, at that the exhibition that we went to, that was inspired by actual event? That particular take was from reading about the incident?

Yeah … I heard about it before I read Alison Blunt's essay. You're familiar with Alison Blunt? I met her a long time ago. And look, it's a very hitting story, in terms of, what they call … I don't know if your work fits into the 'exception histories' genre of history writing. That's what they call it, there's all these exceptions. So that's what historians call it anyway. So it fits into …

R: In what way?

They go counter to narratives. Like the White-Australian policy, and things happened. Like the Manoora, and there were a couple of other exceptions as well. Like from Egypt and things like that. I think that's what historians call it. I think it is a fashionable thing, people are writing these counter-histories, which they call the exception- histories.

I'd heard about it before, and it is written up quite widely. And because the exhibition was going to be in Freemantle, it was just an opportunity to do some archival work, get stuff out of the archives, and shipping stuff. I liaised with the Anglo-Indian community, in Perth.

R: They're quite well set up over there.

Yeah, they are. I haven't heard from them for a while, but we had a meeting over there, and people came. But we didn't get a lot because for the Menorah the thing is, there is something called a Welcome Wall. There's two. There's one in Freemantle and one in Albany. And there are names of people who came, but there's only a few who were on the Manoora on there. And I tried to trace a couple and I didn't really get very far. There were a couple of names identified. I traced some of the children of them.

R: They were still in Perth?

In Perth. But you see, you had to pay to get your name on these plaques. That's probably why not many were on there.

R: Your money would be better off going to food and shelter and clothing.

But there's two. I haven't been down to Albany. Anyway, I did what I could at the time. But there was enough in the archives. Some interesting stuff, like those emergency certificates were pulled off the archives. And a lot of other stuff too. I mean look, it was interesting, which I always make sure …

R: In terms of the archive work?

Yeah, in terms of working on it, because sometimes, like, I can get weighed down with research, with books. It can be a burden as well sometimes.

R: It's getting the balance.

So, it's just one exhibition. I think it was an important exhibition for me to do. Because it was about connection as well. It was about my identification. And it was about connection with others in my group, if you like.

R: In your ethnic community?

Yeah, yeah. So, it was important for me to do.

R: Through doing it did you make those connections?

That's right. Well even if it was just through connections with the WA people. Interestingly I've had connections with the Melbourne lot before, but I haven't had a lot of feedback. But also, importantly for my nieces, people like that in Perth who identify... Because she was over in Perth to do some stuff for me, to do some running around for me, so hopefully that would have impacted on her, her sense of history and whatever.

R: Her identity?

Maybe. I'll have to ask her about that. But I think maybe. Whereas this [exhibition] is performance of it. It's a living performance of it, it's not a museum piece.