# Transnational Audience Mobility – Or How I Learnt to Love Crocodile Dundee

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## Abstract

This article considers what happens when audiences as well as texts become globally mobile. Based on my experience as migrant Australian living in the United Kingdom, this article explores how geographic relocation reshaped my reception of the classic Australian film *Crocodile Dundee* (Faiman 1986). Through detailed critical self-reflection or what John Fiske refers to as 'theoretically structured introspection' (1990: 85), this transnational textual experience is framed here through processes of contesting and reorienting cultural taste, national identity and social belonging, and phenomenological perception.

**Keywords:** Transnational audiences, national identity, Crocodile Dundee, auto-ethnography, phenomenology

## Introduction

This article focuses on the experiences and effects of film viewing by migrants of media content that derives from their former countries of origin – a process whereby audiences confront and mediate the culturally familiar situated within spaces of cultural difference. Such encounters necessarily encompass processes of receiving and interpreting individual media texts and, as such, emphasise questions of personal taste and of audience selectivity and agency. However, precisely because of their particular spatial and temporal qualities, these viewing experiences can also draw migrant audiences into negotiations of identity and belonging that, in turn, situate these textual encounters within broader sociological

dialogues between the self and the wider social world of nations, institutions and other individuals (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 145-149, Athique 2016: 10-16).

The analysis here is based principally on my own experience of moving through the transnational economy, and centres on my multiple viewings of the classic Australian film *Crocodile Dundee* (Faiman, 1986) while living in the United Kingdom as a working migrant Australian in the early-mid 2010s and again from 2018 to the present. I had first watched *Crocodile Dundee* in the late 1980s at the time of its initial release (in my late teens) and several more times in the years that immediately followed and enjoyed these occasions. However, by the time I was approaching my late 20s *Crocodile Dundee* was a film that I had come to regard rather negatively, as a crude and reductive representation of Australia grounded in humour I no longer found amusing. With many films it might simply have been the case it was forgotten, consigned to distant memory and rarely thought about again. Not so with *Crocodile Dundee*, which repeatedly featured in my professional life for over a decade. From 1995 to 2008 I worked in various public film financing, policy and research roles for both government cultural agencies and private companies in Australia. *Crocodile Dundee* had been hugely commercially successful and was one of the greatest success stories of Australia's innovative 10BA tax rebate scheme designed to stimulate private investment in film production. For these reasons, the film frequently appeared in my work, as a reference point for statistical analysis and financial modelling and informed a range of policy and research papers on funding and film industry sustainability more broadly. The result being that this film maintained a regular presence in my conscious thoughts, despite the disdain I had developed towards its cultural merits.

For a long period I would not have considered rewatching *Crocodile Dundee*, yet while living in the UK between 2012-2015 I viewed it from beginning to end at least three times on the British free-to-air television movie channel Film Four. During these encounters I did not cease to notice the elements of the film I found (and continue to find) problematic but nevertheless managed to tolerate them and to take pleasure in the experience, which at the time I found most surprising but did not think on it very deeply. I returned to Australia to live in mid 2015 whereupon this positive regard towards the film waned although this did not consciously register immediately. It was not until a few months after returning I came across *Crocodile Dundee* on television that I was aware of clicking straight past it. In my evaluation of this cycle of actions, I gave for the first time sustained thought to my UK situated re-engagement with the film. Those thoughts were given a more critical focus when I chose to write a paper about my experiences for a workshop on transnational audiences at the University of Wollongong convened by Sue Turnbull in 2016 and this article has been a lengthy work-in-progress since that time.

At one level, my temporary state of forbearance towards, and enjoyment of, the film *Crocodile Dundee* could be considered fairly predictable. Living away from my home country, I was feeling increased warmth towards Australia – and this tempered my attitudes towards the crudeness of some aspects of local culture and the shortcomings of this film in particular. There is some validity in this. However, this was not a straightforward process

whereby geographic dislocation led to romanticisation, and then to a direct and clear alteration of my taste and emotions. Nor did this become a permanent shift as I outlined, any capacity to indulge this film is now gone, even though I again currently reside in the UK (since mid 2018). This perplexing oscillation encouraged me to understand more about how this ambivalence was produced and the means by which it led to a shift in my attitudes.

Through detailed critical self-reflection, or what John Fiske refers to as 'theoretically structured introspection' (1990: 85), I have made sense of this experience through a multi-layered processes of analysis that began with my reception of the text as framed by issues of taste and geography (of both myself and the text), and subsequently through popular ideas about Australian national culture and identity. However, this article is interested in more than simply attributing influential and causational factors to my viewing encounters with *Crocodile Dundee*. It is also engaged with trying to understand the *process* of cultural change. With this in mind, the article also draws upon the concepts of intentionality and perception (as understood within a phenomenological framework) to suggest an approach to expanding the conceptualisation of film audience behaviours.

A further key area of intervention in this article relates to methodology and in particular the use of auto-ethnography as an approach to film audience research. In outlining the processes of critical self-reflection and organisation of ideas my aim is to engage in and further a dialogue around the productiveness and rigour of this method.

## Diversity and Privilege in Migrant Experiences

It is important to be clear at the outset about the circumstances of my migration. These have been central in determining the life I have inhabited in the UK, and setting the terms of my media participation and consumption practices while there. These are also relevant to my processes of self-analysis in terms of guiding me in where and how to look for explanations.

My particular situation of transnationality is not especially noteworthy in itself and certainly not unique. Unlike the issues many migrants can face, establishing my right to work in the UK was straightforward and acquired via inherited British citizenship from my father. Further, I have always lived in the UK with the option (COVID aside) to return to Australia at any time – with the financial means to purchase a plane ticket home and in possession of citizenship by birth that allows me to reside there indefinitely. I moved to the UK for a job offer at a university which assisted me with various aspects of relocation, including financially. This significantly eased the stress of the transition.

Being white and from a country that in many respects may be considered culturally similar to Britain, it might have appeared (superficially at least) that upon my arrival I already held an understanding of, and practiced many of the conventions of, what may be popularly regarded as 'British life'. These practices being registered in various ways including as those

related to clothing and physical appearance, language, food, social habits, and parenting. One of the effects of this outward semblance of conformity is that I came under no societal pressure to adjust or moderate aspects of life connected to my national identity – I encountered little, if any, sense that I needed to change in order to better acculturate. In fact, such is the fondness for Australia in the UK, I have often found my national quirks and differences are viewed favourably and with great interest, sometimes humorously, but never as being strange, suspicious or threatening.

Crucially my foreign citizenship was something I felt able to practice in an unconstrained manner. I do not recall situations where I experienced hostility towards my nationality or where it was prudent to be discreet about this dimension of myself. It gave me the freedom to engage with nationality (or not) on my own terms because I did not feel pressure to change, defend or suppress it. It must be recognised that this is a very particular experience of migration, and one that is highly privileged.

## Methodology and Auto-Ethnography

As outlined above, the material for this article is drawn from auto-ethnography. As a method, auto-ethnography has been deployed across a wide range of studies of culture – examples include critical research on creative writing practice (eg. Reed-Danahay 2021), fan studies (Hills 2021) representations of indigeneity (Tomaselli 2013), participation in leisure (eg. Anderson and Austin 2012), sport, exercise and self-promotion practices (eg. Larsen 2014, Basabain et.al. 2021), and the materialities of technology (eg. Uotinen 2010). However, research based in self-analysis has not tended to feature frequently in film audience research. This is due perhaps to a perception that such studies would be too narrow or unrepresentative, and/or that the lack of separation between researcher and research subject may lead to problems of objectivity and compromise the rigour and usefulness of analysis (Hills 2021: 145). The question of whether we can be sufficiently self-aware to critically analyse ourselves is certainly valid, and one that researchers often work through in detailed reflections of methodological procedure published alongside findings. A more complex, but nonetheless equally important, question that auto-ethnographies must confront as part of their approaches is the ontological nature of the self in relation to the phenomena under investigation.

Reflecting on his own implementation of auto-ethnographic methodologies, cultural studies scholar John Fiske suggested the value of the individual as a research subject lies in one's position as 'an agent of culture in process' (1990:86). Legitimacy is registered not through the generalisablity of findings but through theory and socio-political structure, as he writes:

> What makes it theoretically valid is its systematicity and its amenability to theorization, not its representativeness in an empiricist sense. Neither I or my readings

are typical, but the process by which I produced them is evidence of a cultural system. (1990:86)

More recently, Matt Hills has argued similarly that individual experience taken on its own is not an especially useful source of critical understanding. However, when this knowledge and self-analysis is contextualised within the theoretical frameworks of its relevant academic field/s (in his case fan studies) then not only does it extend empirical understanding, but can also test  (and reconfigure) the limits of those theorisations (Hills 2021: 146).

As these approaches suggest, contemplating the self as a research subject is closely connected with conceptual understandings of the individual not as a stand-alone entity, but as one that exists in relation to systems (the social being one such system) *and* engaged in a continued dialogue and negotiation with those systems. It is directly through these connections and processes that the self is rendered contextualisable. For Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, the self fundamentally organises and mediates the social - as they assert 'we look out on the social as selves' (2017: 145). Similarly, Adrian Athique's detailed study of transnational media audiences draws on sociologist C. Wright Mills' concept of the 'sociological imagination' to theorise the production of identity 'as much an external matter (of relations) as an internal one (of selfhood)' (2016: 13).

While these ideas are central foundations to my own approach, they do not entirely solve questions of rigour in auto-ethnographic based studies. With slightly more orientation toward the practical aspects of doing research, Néstor García Canclini helpfully suggests that careful engagement with form and theory is important for helping researchers move beyond the pre-formed and unconscious assumptions of the individual. For Canclini the immersion of oneself in a phenomena is useful at the point of discovery, but thereafter clear objects of critical study must be constructed, analysed and tested (2014: 180). In this instance Canclini was discussing the challenges of writing with credibility about the situation and culture of countries from which one does not originate. However, I suggest his contention has relevance for all research endeavours, especially auto-ethnography. Canclini asserts it is not the subjectivities of the researcher that legitimises the topics and ideas they write about but rather empiricism, evidence and the thoughtful and relevant application of theory (2014: 181). Following a similar kind of reasoning, I have suggested elsewhere that the overlap of the personal and the political is an inevitable part of academic work. The challenge is how we, as scholars, recognise and account for its influence *and* cohere to robust critical practice (Aveyard 2022: 100).

In terms of this article specifically, as outlined above, I have been working on this auto-ethnographic project since 2016. It has only ever been conducted in retrospect, that is after the events I analyse had taken place. Not all auto-ethnography is conducted in this way and there are numerous examples of projects where observations, notes and reflection are taken concurrent with participating in the experience that is under analysis. The element that was common across the majority of auto-ethnographic projects I looked to for examples of good practice (as cited above) was the extended duration of these endeavours. These

projects are characterised by lengthy processes of documentation, close readings of relevant theory and careful consideration applied to contemplations of multiple explanations and causational factors before findings and conclusions were reached. From the perspective of my own practice, I am very familiar with the use of ethnographic methods, having produced multiple publications based on my own ethnographic research and also reflective analyses of these methodologies. In the case of this particular auto-ethnographic undertaking, however, I am aware of devoting significantly more time and applying greater criticality to it than any of my previous ethnographic endeavours. For me this additional effort was crucial to reaching the necessary confidence in the project, giving assurance as to the rigour and integrity of the work I was producing.

In practical terms collecting the data for this research did not take particularly long. Over the course of several days I made notes about my viewing experiences, in as much detail as I could recall including locations, times of day, viewing partners, and my age and where I lived at different times. From time to time I have added to this account as different fragments of memory have been triggered. I then considered what frameworks might be applied to understanding my changing reception of *Crocodile Dundee* and initially turned to conceptualisations of taste and national identity, both of which still feature in this more complete analysis. Later I became increasingly interested in accounting for the non-linear and seemingly contradictory processes of change I had experienced and was drawn to explanations offered by phenomenology and philosophy more broadly, which are also included here. As mentioned above I gave a workshop paper about my experiences and preliminary analysis in late 2016. I presented a more developed version of this material to a conference in the UK in 2020 and then began work on this article in full. I have discussed this article with more colleagues than probably any other publication I have worked on and sought input on drafts from multiple people. Again, driven by a concern for rigour and to ensure this work succeeds in anchoring itself within the systems that give it critical relevance and meaning (Fiske 1990, Hills 2021), and thereby transcending the triviality of its individualism.

## Watching *Crocodile Dundee* in the UK

*Crocodile Dundee* was made in the mid 1980s at a time when the then new 10BA tax incentive scheme, and its generous write-offs for private investors, was driving a boom in local film and television production (Screen Australia 2021a). Even today it is perhaps one of the most internationally recognised films ever made in Australia. *Crocodile Dundee* had considerable commercial success at home and overseas, and remains the highest grossing local feature of all time (Screen Australia 2021b). The film is credited as a creative collaboration principally between Paul Hogan and John Cornell, the two having previously worked together for over a decade on the long-running television comedy *The Paul Hogan*

*Show* (1973-1984). The film was directed by Peter Faiman who had worked with the pair on *The Paul Hogan Show,* but had not previously made a movie.

Given the domestic and international reach of this film, the story will be familiar to many. It starred Paul Hogan as larrikin bushman Mick Dundee who becomes involved with Sue Charlton, a US journalist (played by Linda Kozlowski) writing an article on the Australian outback. Mick shows her the bush and later joins her in New York for more adventures and ultimately romance. The support cast included Australian cinematic legend John Meillon who played Wal, Mick Dundee's good natured but blundering friend and business partner. The film is set in the fictious town of 'Walkabout Creek', which is recognisable as far northern Queensland/north Northern Territory, the area of Australia where the salt-water crocodiles and water buffalo featured in the story are found.

The film is self-consciously anchored in a familiar set of tropes of Australian masculinity, landscape and European territorial intervention (Aveyard et.al. 2018: 165-166). In terms of masculinity, Australian films have tended to construct heroic male characters through their physical prowess and strength typically demonstrated in the successful negotiation of dangerous situations that often involve the natural environment. In *Crocodile Dundee*, regard for Mick's capability is established through his practical bush knowledge that sees him hypnotise a raging water buffalo and calmly rescue Sue from a crocodile attack, as well as being able to hunt for and survive on edible bush food. Another important aspect of Australian masculinity is 'mateship' – expressed through strict and enduring loyalty to one's friends, traits exemplified in Mick Dundee's long standing association with his bumbling business partner Wal and his cross-cultural friendship with indigenous man Neville Bell (played by David Gulpilil). A third key aspect to traditional representations of Australian masculinity has been a certain disregard for city life as embodied in formalised traditions and institutions and against progressive social attitudes. In *Crocodile Dundee*, Mick's naivety about life in a metropolis and the situations he encounters in New York City are given sympathetic, often humorous treatment. This can be discerned in his interactions with the doorman in Sue's building, his encounters with shady characters and Japanese tourists in the subway and perhaps most shockingly in Mick's encounter with one of Sue's transgender friends whom he sexually assaults at a party (by grabbing their crotch to determine their gender).

In terms of landscape, *Crocodile Dundee* also recycled popular myths of the Australian 'frontier' as a space where important delineations between civilisation and barbarity are contested, both in physical and ideological terms. Typically in film, 'frontier' stories have celebrated the survival and success of Europeans in undeveloped areas of Australia – and can be read as part of a wider colonial project to sanction the territorial encroachment of white people by processes of illegal dispossession of Indigenous populations from their sovereign lands (Aveyard et.al. 2018: 73-75, Reynolds 2021: 13-48). As part of this narrative the Aboriginal character in the film - Neville Bell - clumsily evokes dated cinematic representations of Indigenous Australians as reliable and deferential side-kicks of white protagonists. Hogan and Cornell's script further demanded Gulpilil (as

Neville) mock Aboriginal traditional culture and customs, including the sacred practice of corroboree, as part of the 'humour' of the film.

It is for these reasons, and issues connected with them, I find *Crocodile Dundee* in many ways anachronistic and in parts directly offensive. As outlined, it is a position toward the film I have held for more than two decades, making my willing, albeit transitory, enjoyment of the film between 2012-2015 more difficult to comprehend. While watching *Crocodile Dundee* in the UK I did not cease to notice or care about the issues outlined above, but by some means I tolerated them.

During my viewing in the UK I was aware of enjoyment derived from hearing Australian accents, familiar colloquialisms and light-hearted humour. I warmed to and respected Mick Dundee's mastery of his physical environment as demonstrated through his well-honed skills in bush navigation and survival, however staged and stylised these inevitably were. But this was more than simply appreciating a strong, capable man in action. My feelings were framed very specifically around an understanding of Mick as an embodiment of the stereotypical attributes of the idealised Australian man and by association an idealised notion of Australia. This response emanated from a reactive and emotional realm, one that temporarily upended and overrode my considered and established view of this stereotype as exaggerated and in parts grotesque. I was no less aware then, than I am now, that this stereotype represents a complex and problematic paradox that is exclusionary to anyone not white, male and heterosexual. Nonetheless, as Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra argue, this figure is 'widely claimed to represent Australian authenticity' despite not being 'typical' in any material sense (1990: xv).

A further key aspect of pleasure in watching this film came from seeing and consuming the wild landscapes and the particular built environments of Australian country towns that were part of my childhood. Until I left for university I lived on a farm and spent many weekends and holidays camping, bushwalking, canoeing and skiing in and around the Kosciuszko National Park in southern New South Wales. I fondly regard the times spent in the outdoors as some of my richest and happiest family memories. Significant sections of action in *Crocodile Dundee* are set in the bush and, while not precisely the kind that I knew from my childhood, these nonetheless felt comfortingly familiar. These provided a series of visual and aural cues that facilitated a welcome and pleasant process of nostalgia and reminiscence.

However, the features I have outlined here are not unique to this film. I could have watched numerous other Australian movies to have found similar textual features and prompts for sentimental gratification. The answer may lie in nothing more grand than this film being conveniently available on television on evenings when I had nothing else in particular to watch or do. Nevertheless, I had free choice and was certainly not compelled to see it through from beginning to end, nor was my emotional engagement inevitable.

The shifts in my attitudes toward this film brought into question the solidity of a number of pre-existing ideas I held about myself, the stability of my personal politics and my capacity for reasoning and sensible thought. Through most of my adult life I had not

regarded this film positively and would not have anticipated a situation, after its initial years of release, that I would ever have watched or enjoyed it again. To confront this apparent contradiction disturbed what I previously understood as an identity that had been negotiated, practiced and reaffirmed over many years and in a variety of social modes, including through film consumption. In order to try to make sense of this temporary upending of my film viewing preferences, I was drawn towards the consideration of two key ideas to do with taste - the significance of structure and linearity, and the influence of the educational, economic and social privileges that were part of my migrant experience.

## Taste and Culture

The process of critically analysing the reversal of my attitude toward *Crocodile Dundee* initially foregrounded issues of taste as a potential conceptual framework. While individual taste may be considered to have some fixed properties or parameters, it can also accommodate aspects of fluidity and change, which seemed highly relevant in this case. In attempting to frame an understanding of taste and distinction, Janet Harbord suggests film cultures are constituted by 'the sedimented histories of identity, shaped by education and family [that] form an unconscious framework, a map upon which we orient ourselves' (2002: 8). Harbord acknowledges the grounding of her idea in Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the habitus and the ways in which taste and cultural preference are closely linked with educational attainment and social origin, and maintained through repeated use and performance (Bourdieu 1984: 1-3). These may be regarded as some of the more stable and knowable aspects of taste.

However, underpinning this conceptualisation of taste is an assumption that distinction and preference are established through experiences that occur in a largely chronological sequence. While audience research has for a long time acknowledged the ways in which taste develops and changes in response to factors such as aging, major life events, altered social networks, parenthood, political circumstances and location, there is predominantly a sense that one experience informs the next in a mostly linear trajectory. However, as my own viewing of *Crocodile Dundee* demonstrates, this may not always be the case and certainly should not be assumed. Stuart Hall suggests that self-conceptualisation is not fixed, but always in a process of negotiation. Identity is a state of becoming that is never complete (1996: 3-5). While Hall discusses identification and identity in relation to chronology, he does not address the issue of temporal disruption explicitly. Nevertheless, his contentions hold the possibility of non-linear becoming, such as I experienced in my dislike-like-dislike again relationship with *Crocodile Dundee.*

My experience of migration between Australia and the UK and encounters with *Crocodile Dundee* were framed in crucial ways by my relative economic wealth, and cultural and professional capital. This, together with my 'sedimented histories', worked to give a sense of confirmation and assurance during periods of aversion to this film. Crucially, during

my embrace of the film in the UK, this habitus did not cease to be relevant despite the alteration in my taste. Rather this habitus created significant conflict around accepting this enjoyment - and no doubt also contributed to bringing it to my attention as a potential object of study. This sense of discomfort derived directly from a feeling that this was a film I *should* have been able to rationalise myself away from precisely because of my accumulated socio-cultural knowledge and position. While I acted in contradiction to it, my behaviour was nevertheless framed through a direct conflict with my sedimented history. Coming to an understanding of this helped but the question of why and how I watched and enjoyed the film multiple times was still unclear. It propelled me to look further, and beyond the framework of taste, for an understanding of my experience.

## Negotiating National Identity

At the outset of his book *Cultural Citizenship* Toby Miller emphasises the elemental nature of the relationship between interpersonal connection and socio-cultural life (2007: 1-2). His perspicacious assertion of a crisis of belonging is compelling, and it brought me to the question of what it is I sought (and still seek) to belong to and how that might have been registered or negotiated through my viewing of *Crocodile Dundee*. While my focus on belonging brought me to issues of nationality and migration in this instance, it is recognised that there are many other important forms of social connection that do not derive from citizenship or residency.

There were many inconsistencies in how I felt about being Australian while living in the UK during 2012-2015 and again since 2018. For most of my adult life I have considered manifestations and articulations of nationality complex and conflicting. I recognise and hold dear many wonderful things about Australia. Its landscape in particular is something I have a strong affective attachment to. At the same time, I do not often feel connected to or sense of being represented in many of the country's important national symbols and icons. These tend to emphasise the importance of the British empire and monarchy, the triumphs of war and agricultural settlement, alcohol and gambling cultures and success (preferably winning) in competitive sport. At times I have felt deeply frustrated by the parochialism, racism and narrow-minded attitudes that often get wrapped up in ideas about 'Australianness'. This kind of contrary nationalistic position is sometimes referred to in Australia as 'cultural cringe' – a term that can be broadly understood as a citizen's lack of faith in and/or respect for Australian culture (Hesketh 2013).[1] The term often gets equated with a form of intellectual or cultural snobbery but I suggest it encompasses more than that. The process of belonging to a nation is limiting, it is a way of being that is, by its nature, fundamentally and unavoidably exclusionary. As George Orwell astutely observed at the end of World War II, the tribal nature of nationalism encourages and supports a range of destructive forms of

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[1] AA Phillips coined the term 'cultural cringe' in the 1950s to describe the sense of inferiority many Australians were perceived to have at that time towards local arts and culture, and intellectualism (2006).

othering, alienation and antagonism (Orwell 1945). For me what falls within the scope of 'cultural cringe' is also about questioning and resisting such influences.

With all this in mind it was not especially surprising to me that while living in the UK in 2012-2015 I missed Australia very little, but I was not entirely ambivalent and indifferent to my national origins either. From time to time, I watched other Australia programmes on television (mostly documentaries, including coincidently a series called *Kangaroo Dundee*, and touring cooking shows), although not regularly and did not actively seek them out. Like *Crocodile Dundee* that viewing was largely opportunistic in that I did not plan it in advance of the evening in which it occurred. I used the affordances of the internet to follow the seasons of Australian Rules Football of which I am a fan, but did not follow Australian news particularly closely during this period. The latter a deliberate decision to avoid feeling despondent about the policies and political discourses that circulated during Tony Abbott's term as Prime Minister. I did, however, stay in regular contact with my extended family who all remained in Australia as well as a number of friends.

One of the most significant aspects of my Australianness during this time in the UK was its accentuated performance. This part of my identity became highly prominent, in a way it had never been in Australia where of course in a country full of other Australians it was nothing special. In the UK when I spoke my difference was usually noticed immediately and commented upon. Conversations with friends and strangers about where I was from and why I had come to live in Britain were frequent occurrences. These conversations were almost always pleasant and sometimes fun, and they brought the idea of 'being Australian' and the feelings I attached to that much more into the realms of my active consciousness and everyday thoughts. While I was not conscious of it at the time, my Australian media consumption, including the viewings of *Crocodile Dundee*, was contextualised within this general foregrounding of nationality and the way it gave new energy to my ongoing contestation of self and the state.


## Nationality, Media and Film

Transnational media audience research is careful to emphasise the need to remain attuned to the highly varied circumstances and experiences of international human mobility (for example Georgiou 2012, Dekie et.al. 2015, De Bruin 2019). This work also stresses the importance of not being drawn into overly deterministic or reductive interpretations of how national identities are constituted and practiced (Madianou 2014: 444, De Bruin 2019: 483-487). Mirca Madianou argues that rather than thinking in singular terms about 'identity' and 'belonging' it is more appropriate to consider the simultaneous coexistence of multiple 'identities' and 'belongings' as part of comprehending the nature of cross-border migrant (and media) experiences.

My relationship with Australia is certainly multiplicitous. Sometimes very positively affective but at times also detached, disengaged and appalled. Yet I have never imagined

opting out of it in favour of another alignment. I have full British citizenship (and am very grateful for it), but I do not identify as or aspire to become British. Joost de Bruin noted a similar phenomenon in his recent study of New Zealand migrants living in Australia. In that case the participants in the research demonstrated continued engagement with their former country in a variety of ways and with differing levels of intensity, but as de Bruin observed nationality itself was not considered open to negotiation. Although these New Zealanders were happy to reside in Australia they did not regard themselves as Australian or accept that living there had or would change them, they were still 'Kiwis' (de Bruin 2019: 484).

Benedict Anderson's concept of 'long distance nationalism' (1998: 58-74) has been widely deployed to understand migrants and the nature of their cross-border social and political relationships with their former homes. Long-distance nationalism is generally considered to be constituted by more than simply the maintenance of an individual identification or an attitude of affection toward with a shared culture and history beyond the nation of one's current domicile. It is also encompasses the continued performance of a commitment to that now distant nation. This is often registered through an interest in political or governmental affairs, whether this is through support for a current regime or a desire to agitate for change (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001: 20-22, Sobral 2018: 49-52). Whatever the position, the distinguishing feature of long-distance nationalism is that it is active and engaged. This engagement can take many forms. In media consumption/participation, demonstrations of nationalistic behaviours have been recognised through practices such as regularly taking in news and current affairs from one's former home country and/or an involvement in political or social activism on behalf of that country (for example through activity on social media, membership of political organisations and/or writing and publishing as intellectuals/professionals in exile).

Anderson's concept provides a useful starting point. However, as noted, this frame of understanding tends to prioritise action more than emotion in understanding nationalism practiced from afar. This emphasis limits the scope for recognising and analysing instances of ambivalence and conflict, such as those foregrounded in my experience. At one level, the absence of outward performances of nationalism by individuals might be interpreted as a lack of investment in the nation-state from which they originate, but based on my experiences this seems a narrow interpretation. As I have suggested above, steadfast commitments to national identity occur across a spectrum and can also be highly contested and contradictory.

In addition, they often have a significant emotional and affective component – as film audience ethnographic studies have been very effective in illuminating over the past decade or so. Mirca Madianou asserts ethnographies enable a more nuanced and multifaceted interpretations of identity and belonging because they allow for analysis of a greater range of material, discursive, affective and performative practices (Madianou 2014: 454). No longer focused primarily on the substance of texts or information, contemporary transnational research is also concerned with how individuals interact with interconnected elements such as the accessibility and affordances of communications technologies and

entertainment platforms, and the influences of particular places and spaces and the experience of individuals within them (for example Seto and Martin 2019, Moores 2012, Madianou and Miller 2011).

In addition to taking into account the different materialities and affects of transnational media encounters, it is also important to consider the actual processes through which migrants derive a sense of being part of a nationally conceived collectivity through media consumption. Myria Georgiou's research on Arab television audiences in the UK argues for the continued importance of television (content and viewing practices) as a regularised point of cultural reference and connection for migrants – a process that is often managed individually or within households but with the sense of being connected to a large whole (2012: 305-315). Her work suggests television creates a 'symbolic space of belonging' for migrants that helps them calibrate and reconcile the multiplicities of places and people in their current and former lives (2012: 314-316). The ways in which symbolic (and shared) spaces might be engaged with and held in common is also explored in Dekie et.al.'s study of the consumption of Nigerian films by African and African descended audiences in Belgium. While they noted that films were most often watched online and alone by the respondents, the wider circumstances of their reception constituted tangible practices of collective meaning-making (2015: 308-311). In this case the sharing occurred principally through family and friendship networks where films were recommended and discussed post-viewing, what Dekie et.al. refer to as new 'talking spaces' facilitated by the internet (2015: 311).

I did not explicitly share with friends or family the experiences of watching *Crocodile Dundee*, nor did I participate in any online forums or discussions about it. My experience was personalised and internalised rather than shared, quite distinct from that described by Georgiou (2012) and Dekie et.al. (2015) above. Yet this viewing registered strongly with me as both a performance and negotiation of my position in relation to the socio-political construct of the Australian nation state. It prompted the question: how does one participate individually or in isolation, and still conceive of those actions within the structure of a shared collectivity? I suggest this becomes comprehensible in two ways. First through sociological understandings of the intermeshing of the relationship between the self and social – a position from which inquiry is not so concerned with asking *how* the self becomes connected but begins from the position the self is *already* connected (even if that connection is contested). And second by according critical significance and credibility to processes of affect and perception alongside those of materiality and conscious agency, as discussed further below.

## Affect, Perception and Agency

The mode of analysis I have adopted in this article unquestionably gives priority to conscious action and thought. Or what might be considered 'objectivities' in a philosophical sense - that is I have accorded significance to the objects or materialities of my viewing encounters

and the systems they occurred within. For instance in giving attention to aspects such as the content of the film, the broadcast platform through which it was accessed, the place of viewing, and on the viewer side socio-economic position, education, national citizenship and so on. These materialities have in turn been used to construct interpretations and analysis of my shifting cultural experiences with *Crocodile Dundee*. This approach emphasises human agency through processes of self-conscious intentionality, such as in the capacity to evaluate, deliberate and make decisions regarding thoughts or actions. As explained above, while I was not always connecting the motivations of my thoughts or actions directly at the time they occurred, my methodology implies that with critical reflection these are elements that can be discerned and described later (after the event) as though they emanated from an object rather than a subject centred realm.

However, I have also made frequent reference to affect and emotion as key parts of my *Crocodile Dundee* experience. It must be acknowledged that these have very significant unconscious dimensions – and these unconscious perceptions direct in fundamental ways how humans comprehend and behave in the material world. While not undermining intentionality itself, the phenomenological perspectives of Maurice Merleau-Ponty assert the primacy of perception - the culturally acquired but unarticulated/consciously unrecognised knowledge that determines how humans come to 'an acquisition of a world' (2012: 154). This means that any understanding of embodied thought or action must also consider the accumulated layers of given (or unconscious) knowledge that allow ones' environment to be constituted, and through which thoughts or actions are directed and acquire meaning.

Merleau-Ponty asserts that '[O]bjective thought is unaware of the subject of perception' (2012: 214). While I largely agree, I suggest there are instances where the conscious and unconscious can be brought into situations where they are rendered, if not directly aware, certainly more cognisant of one another. And further, this point of intersection or overlap might usefully point towards the means by which individual perceptions – such as those I have described in this article – might shift and change. Alia Al-Saji's work on race and perception provides a valuable example of how this might be conceptualised *as a process* through what she terms 'affective hesitation' (2014: 143). Al-Saji contends that through a pause or delay to habitual (or unconscious) action, that which was previously unrecognised can be rendered visible or perceptible. And further, it is in such moments of hesitation that the potential for disruption is created which, in turn, opens opportunities for feeling, seeing and acting differently (2014: 142-145).[2] I close my analysis here with the suggestion that my encounters with *Crocodile Dundee* are given more complete illumination by also reading them as instances of affective interruption and

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[2] For clarity, the issue of racial perception is a very serious and important one and there is no intention here to suggest a link between this and the comparative trivialities of my *Crocodile Dundee* experiences. Al-Saji (2014) is drawn on here to aid in the understanding of personal practice and process, specifically interactions of the conscious and unconscious.

recalibration, grounded in the subjective as much as in objective materialities. I further suggest that as far as methodology is concerned, auto-ethnography is a particularly well-suited approach for enabling close examination of such phenomena.


## Conclusion

Understanding and representing the nature of contemporary transnational audiences is a challenge that involves accounting for and reconciling the simultaneous influences of events and forces that circulate on a macro scale with those of individual experience and emotion. My approach in this article has been to prioritise an individualised set of subjectivities (in this case my own) over regional or global scale, but to always conceive of these as interconnected. In doing so, the aim has been to interrogate and in a small way extend some of the key concepts through which critical studies frames the experiences of migrant media audiences.

As scholars such as de Bruin (2019) and Madianou and Miller (2011) have asserted before me, it is not sufficient to understand audiences simply through behaviour and/or actions. Media engagement is more complex than that, precisely because it also has deeply affective dimensions. Disinterest or ambivalence to a set of ideas or a place might be registered through forms of non-participation or disengagement with its media. However, what my own experience with *Crocodile Dundee* demonstrates is the opposite is not necessarily true. To engage does not mean to be in complete or permanent harmony with the particular text or ideas consumed. While media consumption experiences are sometimes self-affirming and satisfying, they can also encompass complex contestations and negotiations of socio-political positions of the self in relation to systems and institutions and in relation to perception and consciousness. As Stuart Hall notes these processes of contestation and negotiation are a lifetime's work (1996: 4).


## Biographical Note

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