

○ VOLUME 7 NUMBER 3, 2008

Credible Witness: Identity, Refuge and Hospitality

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*Who can be a credible witness to the violence and trauma rooted in the depths of national memory and played out in the body politics of 21st century nation-states? In the transnational turbulence of exile and displacement what kinds of subjects can speak and who can be heard? Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Credible Witness* raises these questions and urges us to consider the kinds of identities and violent histories that produce and are produced by forced migrants. The detention centre and the city would seem to be unlikely spaces for practices of listening or hospitality and yet the play shows how such locations enable consideration of the ambiguities of witnessing, testimony and welcome. Against explicit intent we see how the intermittent, non-systematic experience of hospitality in such sites enables refugees and asylum seekers to speak themselves as subjects of future possibility. This article underlines the nuanced cultural and political mobilities of contemporary postcoloniality. Through an examination of Derrida's notions of conditional and unconditional hospitality and Agamben's discussion of witnessing we show how conditions of apparent impossibility open into conditions of possibility.*

Introduction

At an archaeological dig in Northern Greece, Alexander Karagy tells a group of Macedonian children to 'uncover the bands of your history through the witnesses' (Wertenbaker 2002: 185). In the maelstrom of 21st century transnational circulation of people, history, and culture, Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *Credible Witness* presses us to consider who can bear witness to cherished and buried histories. This article uses Wertenbaker's play to examine questions of refugee representation and identity and addresses these issues at two interlocking levels. First, at the level of material questions about what language, speech and embodied evidence comprise credible

testimony to acts of interpersonal violence that defy comprehension, and evoke fear, horror, anger, and revenge, and second in relation to the ways we witness and address violence and trauma rooted in national memory, and played out in contemporary nation-state politics. What witnessing, testimonies, and evidence count as authentic? What are we able to hear when our frames of comprehension are impoverished by demands for unambiguous personal names, territorial designations, historical narratives and embodied evidence? How can unspeakable violence be spoken, and what of the names of forebears and nations negligently, purposefully and thuggishly suppressed in the making of modern states and nationalisms?

In Western postcolonial nations the forced migration of refugees and asylum seekers has been met with hostility, fear and disinterest. *Credible Witness* shows how hospitality and listening occur in detention centres and cities though the creation of unpredictable relations of care and concern as well as antipathy and indifference. The play thus articulates a space from which we might examine the ambiguities of witnessing and testimony (Agamben 1999). Against explicit intent we see how the discontinuous experience of hospitality in such sites enables refugees and asylum seekers spaces to speak themselves as subjects of future possibility. The kinds of testimonies, identities, and violent histories that produce and are produced by forced migrants in the play show how those who are 'exceptionalised' by the nation-state 'manage' the suspension of legal civil law and their positioning as legally unclassifiable, un-nameable beings, able to be excluded from the political system (Agamben 2005).

The play positions the reader as witness to the dead-ends and openings of governmentalities which enable, if not require, refugees to reinvest their condition and themselves with new possibilities—both contradictory and productive. Credible witnesses are presented as products of our own witnessing regimes which demand that refugees and asylum seekers represent themselves with authentically intact ethnic histories, clearly enunciated accounts of violence and trauma, and precise legal documentation so that they may be rightfully 'processed' as either 'legal' or 'illegal' and unmistakably identified as meriting welcome. *Credible Witness* probes the unreasonable absurdity of hospitality and witnessing though the characters and conditions of 21st century postcolonial Europe.

Contemporary developments in technology, transportation and telecommunication have escalated the means and scale of human migration. Many of these connectivities and mobilities were set in place by previous colonial, political and economic regimes. The phenomena of human migration and the presence of immigrants in previous colonial nation-states is, as Bhabha observed over a decade ago, globally significant:

Immigrants, refugees or minorities who live in the midst of the metropolitan centers in the North and South represent the most

tangible and proximate presence of the global or transnational world as it exists within 'national' societies (1994: xxi-ii).

Some 11 million refugees live outside their countries and 26 million others have been internally displaced (UNHCR 2008). But numbers do little justice to the myriad stories comprising the lives of millions of people caught up in voluntary and forced displacement from homes and loved ones. The magnitude of forced migration is unparalleled and yet little attention has been paid to the cultural impact of international and national laws, legislations and official practices, and the ways these serve to demarcate the lives of refugees and asylum seekers.

Globalisation theory in the field of cultural studies, as elsewhere, often assumes that migration is a matter of choice; that free flowing mobility is a key characteristic of the global condition, and that forced migrants fit the same theoretical mould as other migrants. Indeed, the forced migration and mobility of those who have no capacity or desire to 'flow' has rarely gripped the attention of cultural and social theorists of globalisation. As Castles (2003) observes, contemporary theories of identity, diaspora, migration, transnationalism, and globalisation were not generated from, and have little to say about the experience of those who were forced into migration. The play discussed in this article thus offers a noteworthy means of addressing issues of refugee representation and identity.

For forced migrants, deterritorialisation does not straightforwardly transcend national identity and statism to create global interconnections, new ethnicities and identities. Rather, a simultaneous reterritorialisation and re-ethnicisation occurs in response to border protection policies directed towards stemming the movement of refugees and asylum seekers (Mares 2002) and to reinvigorate nationalism based on longstanding colonial antipathies to the Other. In political discourse the threat of terrorism and fears for national security accompany neoliberal erosions of labour security and casualisation, to provide grounds for new discourses of resentment (McCarthy and Dimitriadis 2000; Castells 1997). In an era growing hostility and negative perceptions of refugees based on real and imagined fears about the threat posed by 'strangers', Wertenbaker's (2002) play speaks to issues of postcolonial locatedness and a historical, cultural, and psychological heritage often disregarded in academic discourse.

In short, the condition of those who become witnesses to a violent dislocation from family, friends, homes and histories are rarely addressed in discussions of voluntary migration and mobilities preoccupying a great many theorists of migration, identity and diaspora. In turning to Wertenbaker's work this article seeks to expose the complex and contradictory 'multicultures' and mobilities of contemporary postcoloniality (Gilroy 2005), and in turning to Derrida's notions of conditional and unconditional hospitality and to Agamben's

discussion of witnessing, it notes how conditions of apparent impossibility open into conditions of possibility.

Identity and Naming

In the Introduction to *Plays 2*, Wertebaker observes that 'plays in this volume are essentially about identity' (2002: vii). Much of Wertebaker's work deals with international people and transnational situations; including *Our Country's Good* her Australian based work. *New Anatomies*, *Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, *The Break of Day*, and *Credible Witness* also feature transnational characters in the process of relocation. Wertebaker's own transnational background in Greece, France, America, and Britain inform her accounts of the everyday migrant coexistence, cultural hybridity, and the new ethnicities that have become a significant feature of contemporary Western societies.

When Wertebaker asks: 'in a fluid and rapidly changing world, who are we?' (2002: vvii), she recognises that selfhood is changed by the experience of being foreign. Just as Oedipus became a humble blind exile in Colonus, and ex-convicts became ordinary, respectable citizens in Australia (see *Our Country's Good* Wertebaker 2002); displaced people encounter dilemmas of identity, selfhood and naming. They are renamed and rename themselves. Migration changes perceptions and prompts 'exploration, innovation, and altered conceptualizations of culture and identity' (Haines & Baxter 1998: 9). And forced migration addressed in *Credible Witness* presses this point further. It is not simply the new ethnicities and cultures of the migrant diaspora that are of concern, but the ethics and knowledge production process that establish how we come to be 'ourselves' and see ourselves. In Paul Gilroy's terms, what is at stake are the "truths' that produce and regulate the consciousness through which we come to know', understand and constitute ourselves' (2005: 12). In *Credible Witness*, we encounter the written and unwritten laws that govern who refugees are and who they might become.

Cultural identities, as noted above, borne of mobility and diaspora have been interrogated in cultural and postcolonial theory. The idea that identity 'proceeds in a straight unbroken line, from some fixed origin' has been challenged in accounts of the impact of colonisation on both the colonised and the colonisers (Hall 1994: 395). Colonial alienation, as detailed in Fanon's work, involves the loss of identity, culture and territory (Bhabha 1994: 40-41). What is at large in the case of forced migration is the burden of remembering and yet needing to forget histories of violence and trauma. In the maelstrom of forced migration these collide with similar or entirely different colonial histories of erasure and dispossession. Nevertheless, the weight of oppressed history invariably falls prey to pressing concerns shared by refugees and migrants alike; what language, narratives, speech, statements, testimonies and silence might elicit what kinds of protection, safety and survival? These are not self-evident or

axiomatic. In different times and places it is necessary to determine whether speaking out or keeping silent will secure survival, safety and conditional hospitality.

In 1951, the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees recognised that those with a well founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, and membership of a particular social group or political opinion were entitled to seek asylum in another country. Four decades later it seems that the right of people to seek asylum and the right of states to regulate the arrival of foreigners are entirely at odds. Asylum requires an altruistic notion of opening doors and giving refuge to all those in need, while national security requires human rights and conditions to be enshrined in legal and political documentation so that borders and boundaries can be open or closed to particular groups of people.

The dilemma recalls the *aporia* that Derrida (2000) locates at the heart of hospitality. Hospitality is premised on a territorial identity that allows for the power to exercise generosity. It is not possible for the host to offer up everything in the act of hospitality for that would annihilate the very conditions upon which the act is premised and made possible (Keating 2004). Absolute hospitality as Derrida (2000) observes is not a matter of tolerance, accommodation, political commitment or goodwill but an absolute receiving without invitation and without conditions:

Absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.) but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, that I *give place* to them, that I let him come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 25).

Derrida does not suggest that absolute and conditional hospitality are in direct opposition or contradiction, but that their consideration highlights:

best arrangements, [dispositions] the least bad condition, most just legislation...to calculate the risks, yes, but without closing the door on the incalculable, that is, on the future and the foreigner (2005: 6).

What is important about Derrida's approach is not that it prompts an evaluation of ideal unconditionally or unsustainable conditionality; not that we can pronounce the possibility and impossibility of hospitality in this or that circumstance, but that deconstruction of the term exposes its relationship of mutuality. While this relationship is disconcerting and heterogeneous it need not be theorised as entirely inconsistent. For Savic (2005) this means that Derrida's account of hospitality can actually resolve the 'growing tension between human security and state responsibility'. All that is required is a balance between the '*right*

to conditional hospitality and the duty of unconditional hospitality; between the legal and political (including moral) concept of asylum (Savic 2005: 1).

In *Credible Witness* conditional hospitality is shown to be problematic. The legal conditions requesting that refugees verify names and addresses are often unachievable. In accordance with Savic (2005) the balance means ensuring that conditions imposed are achievable. In Derrida's terms this requires an approach that:

consists of doing everything to address the other, to accord him, even to ask him his name while keeping these questions from becoming a 'condition', a police inquisition, a blacklist or a simply border control (2005: 7).

The problem is of course that legal conditions require that the 'other' has the capacity or power to name themselves, their history and their culture. The capacity to obtain visas, evade repatriation and detention rests on the concomitant ability to express oneself in a language and manner that can be heard. This is problematic in the case of refugees and asylum seekers. In *Credible Witness* we see that asylum can only be gained through the fabrication of identity, history and culture. When Petra, Alexander's mother, arrives at Heathrow airport with a forged passport in the first scene of the play, it is because she cannot divulge her identity or the nature of her quest. Her son Alexander has been missing for three years having been forced to flee Greece for the incendiary act of teaching Macedonian history. Macedonian identity poses a political threat to the Greek nation-state and Alexander had become an anti-government suspect.

Unfortunately, Alexander's attempt to seek political asylum in Britain was rejected because he too had no identity papers. His commitment to the former nation of Macedonia forced him to flee Greece with a forged passport. To complicate matters further, British authorities failed to find records of his name in Greece because his birth was recorded in a town in former Yugoslavia. Greek priests had refused to baptise him with a Macedonian name. In this involved narrative the names, bodies, nations and histories comprising cultural identities seep and bleed across boundaries which cannot help but hybridize, even as they seek to fasten and pinion. Under such circumstances even conditional hospitality becomes impossible.

Alexander, the proud descendent of Alexander the Great becomes a non-person. He has no identity, no home or country. He evades deportation and manages to stay illegally in England, drifting from a community centre school teacher to street sweeper, to leaflet distributor and then to being homeless. The narrative trajectory of Alexander's life reinforces Hall's observation that cultural identity is a matter of becoming as much as it is a matter of being:

It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have

histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found and when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past (1994: 394).

Cultural identities thus belong as much to the future as to the past. Identities are not something we exercise complete control over, but neither are they entirely out of our control. What Alexander and other characters in the play are and become comprise interventions and navigations of history, culture and power.

In the case of Ali, one of Alexander's refugee students at the community centre, we encounter a tale of arbitrary naming which in its extremity is oddly farcical. Ali cannot remember his name, home and family. In forgetting the bad, he has forgotten the good. When Alexander laments for Ali, he describes an absurd list of transformations:

Today we cry for Ali, even though his name is not Ali. Ali came to England two years ago with the name Michel Jeune. That wasn't his name either, but it is easier to get into England with a French name than an Algerian one. When it became clear Michel Jeune didn't even speak French he was put in a detention centre and there he was called Gene because no one could pronounce Jeune. He was only fourteen so he was sent to a hostel where they called him John and then to school where someone decided he was Michael Young. Now Ali answers to any name, Mike, John, Nigel, Young, Old, Hey, You. We call him Ali because at least Ali is an Algerian name (Wertenbaker 2002: 188).

Although names can be adopted for practical reasons of political exigency, in Western cultures they are not so flexible that they are able to be entirely disassociated from culture. They are expected to accord with language background and racial/ethnic appearance and yet they can be modified to ease strain on its ear and tongue.

Henry, another young refugee, knows his real name but cannot and will not tell it to others. He is unable to speak his name because he was forced to bear witness to unspeakable violence to his family. Struggling with the knowledge that this is his punishment, Henry can only refuse to tell his name. His refusal is the effect of intentional power politics designed to gain power by striking fear into the very core of peoples being. When we learn his 'real' name during his final meeting with Alexander we are given little cause to celebrate for as Anna glibly informs us, 'since no one can pronounce it, we still call him Henry' (Wertenbaker 2002: 283).

Witnessing

The vexed question of who speaks for whom debated in postcolonial theory takes an interesting turn in the work of Agamben (1999) where the possibility of testifying to acts of extreme violence is interrogated. *Credible Witness* positions readers as witnesses to the stories of forced migrants. We are vested with the responsibility for witnessing the liminal situations of the witnesses. Wertebaker cannot claim the epistemic privilege of insider knowledge embodied in refugee standpoint but to expect this is to trust or even desire a 'truth' grounded in experience and perception. Being positioned or able to position oneself as 'other' does not mean that 'others' have automatically spoken, or been spoken for (Hall 1994).

The call for authentic authorial standpoints is borne of the expectation that they provide access to the 'inside' of the previously unknown others. However, the desire for auto ethnographic voices may eclipse our capacity to comprehend the importance of ambivalent textual practices which assert difference while at the same time challenging it. The witnessing position offered by the play does not thus reside in the promise of access to unmediated truth of the other or a 'validity of tears', voice and situatedness (Lather 2002: 211). Rather, it is located in a depiction of fluid, mobile and complex others, such as Alexander, who must resurrect and then collapse distinctions and distance.

For Spivak (1988) the important questions are not those of who we essentially are, or are not, but who can speak and who will listen. Since every representation, even those based in claims to authentic witnessing necessarily silence 'others', we must be vigilant about the limits of what can be said. It is not that only Others may speak about and represent Others, or that we must try harder to capture their essence. Rather, we must examine through dissatisfactions and suspicions what Bhabha (1994) refers to as 'third spaces': those points where representation fails, knowledge escapes and binaries collapse.

Agamben's (1999) account of third party witnessing adds conditionality to the discussion. Witnessing, he observes, as currently understood pertains to the legal, ethical and political role of gathering the neutral facts of a matter to make a judgment. He also observes that a further understanding of witnessing is based on the capacity of a person who has experienced an event to testify to it. Such testimony, as detailed in the case of witnesses to Auschwitz, contains a lacuna since witnesses are by definition survivors. Having lived through the experience they can only know it as an observer, not as an experienced witness. Survivors, in other words, cannot be true witnesses. For Agamben, the paradox 'calls into question the impossibility of testimony and, along with it, the identity and reliability of the witness' (Agamben 1999: 33). Citing an Auschwitz survivor he claims that they must speak as proxy pseudo-witnesses who bear

witness to a 'missing testimony' and the impossibility of bearing witness:

We the survivors are not the true witnesses. We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority; we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the Muslims, the submerged, the complete witness, the ones whose disposition would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception (Levi, 1989 cited in Agamben 1999: 33).

Petra and Alexander initially claim the same witnessing position. They testify to the historical, national, and political erasure of Macedonia. They both speak as refugees from a country no longer named in history books. However, Alexander's mission to excavate and preserve this history comes to take second place to his survival in Britain. His mother disagrees. Petra is sent to a detention centre where she appeals to Simon le Brittain, a sympathetic government official who helps her locate her son. When Alexander visits Petra at the detention centre he explains that what he once thought to be important, namely the preservation of Macedonian history turned out to be a burden that weighs down and shackles him to the past. He sees that his story is like so many others:

I came here puffed with my history, Mamou, do you know what I found? Everyone who comes here has a rich and bloody history on their shoulders. I look at people in the tube, all these histories raging in their heads (Wertenbaker 2002: 220).

Alexander stays in England because he has no other choice. He has to stay because if he returns to Greece he will very likely be tortured and killed. Petra knows this but cannot accept the idea that her son prefers to be 'nobody' in Britain over a heroic Macedonian in Greece. She disowns her son and in insisting on patriotic loyalty to Macedonia locks herself into past identity that Alexander can no longer revitalise. Always the teacher Alexander uses his disillusionment and pragmatism helping young refugees to reconcile their grief and remake their future.

Alexander teaches refugee children at a community centre and while his students are from different countries they are all displaced and have experienced trauma. He helps Ali, Henry, and Anna lament the loss of their name, their country, and regain their humour. In this he encourages them to cope with the present and realign themselves to the future. He tells the children:

An exile has lost his house, her village, his country. An exile is a guest in a new country. . . . An exile learns to love and respect his new country. . . . But this will not happen until the exile has lamented his loss, that grim accident of history that chased her out (Wertenbaker 2002: 188).

Alexander narrates the experiences of young refugees calling their names and explaining that to remember the good they must also remember the bad. Anna tells Alexander that, although she sniggered in his class, she did the 'crying homework' faithfully so she could start to 'unfreeze'. Alexander teaches his students to heal by remembering the past and grieving their loss. As Butler (2004) observes in the context of mourning over 9/11, if we want to end violence what we must learn is to grieve without crying for vengeance. Mourning and grieving are not about forgetting but about accepting a loss which changes us forever. We have lost a relationship and a bond; we have lost something that makes us. Refugees and asylum seekers mourn for the loss of loved ones and a language that has been betrayed and laid to waste; such traumas are not easily settled:

Is it possible to forget your own language because it has betrayed, in the way you forget your dead ones? It is a matter of wondering what happens at the death of the foreigner when he rests in foreign territory: you know that exiles, the deported, the expelled, nomads, and the uprooted, share two sources of grief and nostalgia, their dead ones and their language (Wertenbaker 2002: 102).

While sweeping the street, Alexander on encountering Henry, produces various imaginary weapons and takes aim at Henry before recognising him. The dialogue illuminates Alexander's pedagogical role in encouraging Henry to 'think of yourself as a very important guest'. When Alexander asks: 'Why not try to make a life here?' Henry replies with the bitter observation: 'They don't do welcome here'. To Alexander's comment that 'maybe they express it differently', Henry retorts: 'Like: get out! Filthy bogey scum' (Wertenbaker 2002: 203). Predictably, Henry has encountered the racism, prejudice and hostility endemic to Western postcolonial nations. Enmeshed in racist, exclusionary and abusive situations the young people express their frustration. Henry kicks boys, and Anna throws chairs in the classroom.

While they may be grieving, frustrated and angry, the resilience of these young people is not occluded by victimhood. Wertenbaker (2002) does not present victims who demand sympathy or empathy, or who speak with singularly authentic voices. In the Epilogue, Anna tells Alexander that Henry 'has a gardening job for the summer' and she was accepted by 'the best university in England' (Wertenbaker 2002: 237). Henry and Anna are not simply survivors, they are our future. It is no coincidence that Anna will study hysterical/historical paralysis so she might figure out why people 'freeze at certain moments of history' (Wertenbaker 2002: 237).

At the detention centre the condition of adult refugees encountered by Petra is fraught. Aziz is an Algerian refugee with psychiatric problems, Shivan is a Tamil doctor who fled from civil conflict in Sri Lanka, Ameena is from Somalia and was a victim of gang rape and torture, and Leon's situation is unknown, he is unable to speak. If these characters are metonymic figures of a deeply troubled world, the

detention centre represents a liminal space. It excludes from the nation-state those who cannot enter a country or leave it. We are to assume that such people have been detained for trying to get into the country 'illegally' and yet no national or international court would find those who seek refuge and asylum guilty of any crime. They are not prisoners, but they are held in a prison-like place.

Refugees and asylum seekers are at the mercy of a law that is itself an 'illegal' authority. The detention centre is an absurdity. It is an ungovernable government institution. Paul, a guard/immigration officer, distributes pills to the detainees, Aziz cries out that he is mad enough to be prescribed the double potion, Petra refuses to take the pills, Shivan insists that he is a doctor and Paul, unable to deal with the situation ignores everything, like other immigration officials who have been taught to be suspicious of detainee claims. Only after Petra shows Ameena's cigarette-burnt back to Simon, the other government official, and explains why Ameena was unable to bear witness to her own abused condition, is Simon able to document her trauma as 'authentic'. Those whose trauma is less physically able to be witnessed are told to go back to where they came from. The play thus bears witness to the sad and overwhelming hopelessness of detention and the need to lay claim to hospitality in an unfamiliar language.

Hospitality

In an article in *Open Democracy*, Wertenbaker (2001) compares two symbolic communities, 'Fortress Europe' and 'Cafe Europa'. The names pronounce the different natures and atmosphere of two ideal type communities. Fortress Europe defends West Europeans against any possible infiltration of people from foreign shores while Cafe Europa welcomes and embraces people from other parts of the world, particularly from East European nations, and African and Asian countries. Wertenbaker clearly prefers Cafe Europa when she says: 'Let's not build high, expensive and hostile towers, let's put up instead with the noise, the life, the annoyance, the openness and the music of our Cafe Europa' (2001). Likewise it is the 'conviviality' of ordinary multiculturalism that Gilroy (2005) underlines when he discusses the unkempt, unruly and unplanned cultural cohabitation and interaction which have become an everyday feature of British social life. Gilroy (2005) argues that these hybrid spaces comprise the rich and diverse world of British culture. This multiculturalism involves the possibility of 'combining cultural diversity with a hospitable civic order' and it is currently under threat from political and popularist ridicule and abuse (Gilroy 2005: 2).

For Derrida, the principal of hospitality is fundamental to culture and involves welcome without reserve or calculation (Derrida 2005). In pointing to its absolute and conditional elements, Derrida draws attention to the potential of hospitality to precipitate disorder and cultural change. The point is illuminated in the myth of *Oedipus* where

the foreigner is 'a patricide son' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2003: 11) who threatens and destroys the established order and thereby:

shakes up the threatening dogmatism of the paternal logos: the being that is, and the non-being that is not. As though the 'Foreigner' had to begin by contesting the authority of the chief, the father, the master of the family, the 'master of the house,' of the power of hospitality (Derrida, and Dufourmantelle 2003: 5).

Quoting Socrates, Derrida also observes that in Ancient Greece, a foreigner in Athens only had the right to hospitality if they met certain conditions such as having the correct documents. This requires them to speak in a language which is not their own but which is 'imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc.' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2003: 15).

Although Alexander and Petra speak English they are unable express their situation in a way that allows them to claim asylum. Ameena is allowed to stay only when she is prepared to demonstrate the physical scars as evidence of embodied trauma. Like many refugees, Alexander and Petra do not have the correct documents and cannot answer questions put to them. They are denied hospitality. Petra is detained and Alexander survives without support by living outside of the system. However, against explicit intent, the detention centre and the city offer hospitable spaces. The ideal ethics of absolute hospitality is glimpsed in the incident where the 'madness' of the centre is disrupted on New Year's Eve when Paul brings in ingredients and spices for the detainees to cook.

There however, is another more interesting position on hospitality to explore in the play. The tacit connection of the English language and British symbols of racial hierarchy and white privilege provide the backdrop to an inhospitable landscape (Gilroy 2005). Nevertheless Alexander tells the refugee children that they are guests and should respect the hospitality offered to them by their host country. This extraordinary suggestion exposes the absence of British hospitality and yet bears witness to the transformation of a man who once regarded himself as the bearer of a proud and violent Macedonian history; a person who has since become a teacher, a pedagogue of the future and someone who is determined to prise open the possibilities of hospitality under inhospitable conditions.

Alexander's role as a teacher looms large in the play. In the Prologue he accounts for Macedonian history and encourages his students to discover and witness the buried history of 'hoarded memory', 'muttering[s] in the café' and 'suppressed songs'. He cherishes his Macedonian heritage knowing the dangers of its knowledge and he teaches refugee children to lament their own losses and reinvent themselves as guests in their new country. When Anna memorizes the names of the kings and the years of their reign he gently reminds

her all that she is: 'Don't forget your own history, Anna: have the courage to be complicated' (Wertenbaker 2002: 212).

Conclusion

We have in this article pointed to the significance of literature and drama in offering important ways of thinking about new cultural arrangements inaugurated in the maelstrom of forced exile and displacement. In *Credible Witness* the credibility of refugees and asylum seekers is neither automatically given, nor automatically suspect, since they are as much a product of the ambiguities of politics and history as those who desire authenticity and challenge its fabrication. The play, a fabrication itself, highlights the disingenuous and discontinuous nature of contemporary culture and identity, and the relationship of cultural identity to questions of representation, witnessing, testimony and hospitality.

In short, Wertenbaker's work crystallises key elements of the contemporary postcolonial condition in relation to forced migration. While the narrative enables an interrogation of witnessing and a consideration of the ways unexpected and unintentional hospitality is exercised in unlikely locations by those who appear least able to exercise it, the play also points to the hopeful possibilities of a multicultural future. Wertenbaker's yearning for 'Café Europe' is echoed in Petra's comment that England can reinvent itself with 'refugees' or 'ruins'. As Petra informs Simon at the end of the play:

I've been walled, like you. History shifts, we can't hold it. Simon, when we turn to you, don't cover your eyes and think of the kings and queens of England. Look at us: we are your history now (Wertenbaker 2002: 236).

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