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## No place like...: Home and school as contested spaces in *Little Soldier* and *Idiot Pride*

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*The ship could go to Africa tonight - and it could go without him (Little Soldier, p.249).*

*Maybe all us women, men, kids and Wog City secretaries couldn't shake this claustrophobic hole of a place from our bones, even if we tried (Idiot Pride, p.125).*

As the above epigraphs suggest, our lives are inevitably linked to place, and we make decisions about arriving, leaving, staying, and moving on. Movements in time, along 'time-space paths' (Shilling 1991), shape our destinies and re-shape our shifting subjectivities. The above quotations come at the end of the two books, a point when the focalisers' thoughts tell of a decision to remain in place, and of the remains of place. In this sense, they highlight the relationship between location and identity, a key issue of modernist literature and one which has emerged as a significant feature of postcolonial/diasporic literatures.

The presumed certainties of 'identity' located in a particular 'place' with its connotations of a stable, cohesive community have been disrupted not only by the questioning of these concepts in literary texts and academic discourses, but by the political turmoil that has characterised East, West, and South in the past decades. While the 'homeland' may no longer provide support for identity for many displaced and exiled people, their 'homes' may continue to resonate through their imaginations and memories. It is through this form of symbolic and imaginary investment that place becomes 'space', and the relational term, 'spatiality', becomes a mode of daily existence comprising movements, social relations and understandings (Carter, Donald & Squires 1993; Massey 1998). By conceptualising space in terms of complex interacting social relations, it needs to be noted that space is always contested as 'both individuals and social groups are constantly engaged in efforts to territorialise, to claim spaces, to include some and exclude others from particular areas' (Massey 1998, p.126).

For children and young people who find themselves removed from their homelands, their new 'homes' include not only their new domestic spaces, but new social spaces such as school and neighbourhood. School becomes

another location whereby identities are re/formed, and subjectivities are re-enacted and spatially embodied. These young people travel new, but strangely familiar, time-space paths from home to school, from school to home, each step touching new ground and traversing alien environments. There are also those first- and second-generation children whose parents made decisions to make a new life in a new land. These children bear the signs of their origins on their bodies and in their names. Their embodied subjectivities signify their difference, and in a multicultural environment, this 'difference' may also signify a collective identity.

These opening comments raise some of the issues that will be dealt with in more detail in the following discussion. They are also part of a much larger debate and therefore can only be given limited treatment in this essay. As a way of engaging with these issues and others, Bernard Ashley's *Little Soldier* (1999) and Matt Zurbo's *Idiot Pride* (1997) will form the focus texts. Of particular concern are the ways these texts construct aspects of spatiality and embodiment and how social and textual (re)figurations of home and school are organised and contested by class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and 'race'. Before turning to the texts themselves, the following discussion briefly outlines the theoretical contours which give shape to my reading of the narratives.

### Denying difference through spatial discourses

One of the key underpinnings of much modern and postmodern literature for both children and adults is the need for characters to situate themselves in the world which they inhabit. In modern novels, this situatedness is often accompanied by a solid identity whereby there is a confluence of 'who' and 'where'. Many stories written for younger children deal with this issue unproblematically - the child is situated invariably in the domestic space with its boundaries clearly defining movement within and beyond the home, and its social relations making explicit the kinds of behaviours permitted both inside and outside its physical limits. Similarly, school stories traditionally situate the student body 'in' school with the patterns and flow of behaviours and movements in the institutional space clearly known, made known, and observable. Appropriate rewards, punishments, and norms

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operate in both spheres - home and school - to ensure conformity and compliance. However, more recent fiction, especially for older readers, disrupts the smooth lines of flow and uncomplicated selfhood that characterise many texts for children. Characters often find themselves in an alien territory, spatially disoriented. This shift signifies to some extent the transition from modernism to postmodernism and from a concentration on time to a concentration on space (Barrett 1999).

Further characteristics of the postmodern condition entail the notion of multiple selves rather than a fixed identity and a sense of disorientation which results from an inability to locate oneself within an alien landscape (see Jameson 1991). In youth literature, these postmodern signs are recognisable in characters (for example, homeless/street kids, cult or gang members, immigrants or refugees) who appear decentred and attempt to negotiate their worlds by moving across time and space. While the decentredness often seems to be in the situation (the spatial context) rather than in the multiplicity of selves, it invariably resolves itself through the protagonists finding a space for both becoming and belonging.

Recent feminist, postcolonial and other critical theorisations have challenged universalising democratic discourses of assimilation. These challenges attempt to remake identity and remap community by asserting the visibility of cultural differences and articulating the affective social, geographical, and psychic investments they solicit (Massey 1998). Rather than attempt to hide or mask difference, to see it as a mark of shame or inferiority, there is also the capacity for difference or 'otherness' to not be reducible to a subjugated sameness and cultural/social inferiority. The degree to which writers of children's literature express these political sentiments is of course a point of debate, but recent years have seen a marked shift in the ideological representations of cultural difference in books for children and young adults.

A similar ideological reasoning can be applied to schools and schooling. Despite educational institutions' claims to neutrality, social justice, and concern for individual difference, schools and their official curricula are always susceptible to political and economic forces and imperatives which impact on their *modus operandi* and

exert pressure to achieve results. Thus, 'ideals' may be compromised and rhetoric and actions may become contradictory when notions such as 'difference' are reconceptualised as something that can be erased through hard work and appropriate compensatory programs.

McLaren (1995) argues for teachers to 'take up the issue of "difference" in ways that don't replay the monocultural essentialism of the "centrism" - Anglocentrism, Eurocentrism, phallogentrism, and androcentrism, and the like' (p.223). This more relational view of difference allows for the recognition of cultural specificity and heterogeneity (Carter, Donald, & Squires 1993). However, despite many schools' conscious inclusion of diverse cultural narratives and norms in the classroom and curriculum, there still remain, within the textual landscape of the institutional space, the omnipresent signs of a dominant national identity - the stories told about 'our' past, stories rendered as a national literature (and cinema), and stories valued as past and enduring exemplars of excellence.

Another feature of spatial discourses is how they can silence and disavow difference in a number of active and passive ways. 'Space' becomes more than simply a site of social interaction, but a context for different kinds of interactions which can actively constrain the possibilities of individual action, yet provide opportunities for others (Shilling 1991). In this sense, space is contested in that it is gendered, racialised, sexualised and class-marked (Sagar & Stephenson 1998). As Massey (1998) notes: 'All these relations which construct space, since they are social relations, are always one way or another imbued with power' (p.125). In schools, space (classroom, playground, staff room, foyer, laboratories, sports fields, toilets) is constructed according to time, use, and purpose, and is both highly visible and productive of gendered (and other) identities (see Shilling 1991; Gordon & Lahelma, 1996).

One of the most productive means for making difference 'visible' in schools (and other social and institutional spaces) is through language. As Giroux and McLaren (1992) note, 'identity largely resides within the rhetorical dimensions of language' (p.13). While naming of a subject as 'wog' or 'queer' makes difference visible, it

can become a mark or nomenclature of resistance against racist and homophobic hegemonies when reappropriated by the subject and used as an act of agency and not as a sign of defeat and subjugation. This resistance or agency relies on the citational and iterative power of language and how it can both position the individual and assist in the formation of a collective consciousness of a group. However, the collective agency that the naming affords also masks the multiple differences that exist within that category or group.

These relations that exist between space-difference-language constitute a complex matrix of discursive threads which comprise the subject and which are historically and politically configured in spatio-temporal terms. The following discussion will expand upon these concerns in relation to *Little Soldier* (Ashley 1999) and *Idiot Pride* (Zurbo 1997).

#### Little Soldier

The reader is first introduced to Kaninda Bulumba as 'Ken', an abbreviated and Anglicised corruption of his African name. As a further measure of his colonised body, he is also displayed as an object of exotic curiosity, a boy with a hole in his arm, a hole left by a bullet fired by a warring African tribe, the Yusulu, when they massacred his family. In drawing attention to the boy, another boy, Theo, acts as a spruiker and the school yard is transformed into a marketplace:

*'Here, man, come an' have a deck at the hole in Ken's arm. Show 'em your arm, Ken!' Theo Julien was trying to work up a crowd in the school yard like a market-stall man in Thames Reach - with Kaninda Bulumba his stock-in-trade. 'Come on, Ken, give 'em a show!'*  
(p.5)

The hole in his arm, its story of origin, is just one of the many stories Kaninda retells to himself - always silently in the head, never sharing them with others. It is his stories and memories that sustain him and help him to focus on his goal of returning home to East Africa and continuing in his quest to avenge his family's death. School, like his new home in South London, is simply a temporary mark on his spatial trajectory.

#### Memory, mourning, and (re)membering

In many ways, Kaninda represents the postmodern subject as he finds himself in an unfamiliar territory - an urban space with its Millennium Mall, crowded architecture, noisy traffic, suffocating fumes, telecommunication systems, and different tactile surfaces: 'It was hard under his feet, outside. Everywhere here was slab stone. The beaten earth of the Lasai streets kicked up dust, but they gave bounce to the feet' (p.35). Kaninda's journey to this alien space entailed a perversely cyclical process - family membership to homelessness to rebel army to surrogate family membership. His adoptive family is headed by the indomitable Captain Betty, a leader in God's Force army who has saved him - body and hopefully soul - from the dreaded life in his war-torn country. Ironically, both London and Lasai are, by degrees, cataclysmic spaces as both are characterised by warring tribes/gangs.

Kaninda's memory of home is as *ruins*, a space which he frequently returns to in his mind and imagination, sifting amongst the rubble and debris, to find pieces of his former existence which will give a sense of identity and location to his current states of displacement and alienation. When Kaninda tries to recall his family, it is the gruesome images of his family-in-death which come to mind: 'Kaninda had to lie as still as a corpse, share the wet mud of his family's blood on the floor' (p.7). Memory plays an important political function in helping Kaninda not to forget the crimes committed against his family. It also serves as intertextual *mise-en-abyme* with remembered pieces from the past recurring and being compared with similar items from his new life: 'The school yard was crowded like the outside of Victoria Stadium for the Africa Cup' (p.68). The intertextual references to colonial power and his people's subjugation recur as time-space vectors carrying the weight of the past into the present:

*Kaninda read the name at the school entrance. 'Victoria Comprehensive School'. V i c t o r i a, Victoria, Victoria - there were Victorias all over Lasai City ... the Yusulu were happy with the fat English queen whose explorers had found diamonds in their tribal lands.*  
(p.58)

Rather than speak, Kaninda relies on the spatio-temporal aspects of his thoughts to mourn his loss, and to fuel his fire of revenge. Memory and mourning are partners, each serving to keep alive selective parts of the past and to bury those parts that will destroy the hurt and anger.

Kaninda's body also remembers and is (re)membered. Kaninda regards the 'healed-over bullet hole in his arm' (p.5) not as a symbol of pity or an attention-seeking ploy, but as a corporeal sign of his lucky escape from death and his family's fate - 'a guilty medal' (p.69).

It is a hole which he fingers in the night, probing its depths and surfaces. Kaninda's hole in his body functions as a somatic and semiotic reminder of his absent loved ones. Thus, 'the hole' speaks out of death as well as speaks of death - the deaths of the past and the deaths that the future holds.

While the hole serves a metonymic function in its relation to the body and death, Kaninda's whole body is inscribed by history and subject to the instructional technologies of the school and the army, both of which, in a Foucauldian sense, are disciplinary regimes. The contrasting disciplinary practices of African and English schools are clearly apparent - the unruly, talking-back students of the London school appear undisciplined when compared with the silent submissiveness of the Lasai students. However, both instructional spaces seek to contain the students' bodies behind desks, in classrooms, and movement and access are strictly controlled (for example, the staff room is out of bounds, and so too are the corridors at certain times of the day). While Kaninda's teacher back home, Mr Setzi, has 'Big master' (his cane) as his ultimate disciplinary enforcer, Miss Mascall and other teachers in his London school rely on 'the [principal's] office' as the space for disciplinary action to take place. Both physical space and material object serve as disciplinary 'big masters' leaving no doubt regarding the two institutions' hierarchical power relations. In a related way, Sergeant Matu, the leader of the Kibu rebel army, disciplines his soldiers through both language and actions. Kaninda's body and voice as both student and rebel soldier are doubly inscribed through these instrumentalising practices which construct a bodily and linguistic 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1973). When Kaninda

arrives at his London school for the first time and stands before the school secretary who allocates him to a class, his body remembers the postures, silences, and downcast look of the disciplined student/soldier of his past: 'his eyes on the floor, a prisoner's patience' (p.60) and later 'Kaninda was sitting at a desk in a classroom, staring at his hands while a roomful of students stared at him' (p.60). He quickly recognises what he calls 'this game called obedience' (pp.64-5) and disciplines his body accordingly: 'holding himself normal inside he wanted to scream his head off and throw himself into the road under those heavy wheels' (p.65).

Kaninda's body also remembers other ways of behaving which break away from his student bodily habitus. When a teacher introduces him to 'another Lasain boy', a Yusu, Kaninda's restrained disciplined student body is transformed into a combative soldier's body:

*Kaninda felt a killing heat boiling up inside ... [his] eyes went to sniper slits. ... From the boiling Kaninda had gone fighting cold: his blood drained inward, his skin pimpled, his groin tight.*  
(p.99)

The irony of comparison between the two Lasain boys is realised in the ways the teachers are unable to see beyond the colour of the two boys' skin and are ignorant of the depth of difference and hatred that divides the two African tribes to which they belong. The big London male teacher who restrains him 'in a painful lock' after his frenzied attack on the Yusu boy reminds Kaninda of the way Sergeant Matu treated a prisoner. The teacher's aggressive actions defy his words of liberal humanism: 'You're all Thames Reach Comprehensive while you're here, sonny' (p.101).

The veneer of universalism, however, is transparent to other students and their female teacher:

*Jon Bennett called out. '... we're all one big happy family, ain't we?' The class cheered.*  
*To which Miss Mascall said, 'Bollocks!' and restored order.*  
(p. 118)

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*Little Soldier* is a story about physical and psychological displacement. However, displacement brings renewal and the loss of subjectivity is only temporary. Kaninda exemplifies the postmodern condition of a shifting subjectivity as he adapts to his environment through both silence and actions. It is through his mind and eyes that he judges, assesses, and makes decisions on the course of action to take. This interior dialogue and exterior vision ensure that others are excluded from his private deliberations and despair, and a sense of inner selfhood and agency is preserved. In London, Kaninda continues to think of himself in terms of his former life in Lasai. Time is a constant rhythm to his life flowing back and forth comparing his new home with his old. His old life is the norm from which he judges the new. It is also the site of his sense of identity and cultural belonging. But this identity is never fixed as the changing circumstances of his life, reactivated through memory and self-reflection, shape a multiplicity of selves for Kaninda - son, brother, student, rebel soldier, refugee - and eventually effect a new belonging. These states are more than roles he inherits or acquires as they construct his spatial trajectory and spatially define the limits of his existence.

#### **Idiot Pride**

Whereas *Little Soldier* situates itself across two time-space zones - past/present, Lasai/London - *Idiot Pride* (Zurbo 1997) attempts to locate its characters within a specific (oriented) space and (historical) time - a here-and-now account of a group of boys living in Spotswood, an inner city suburb of Melbourne (Australia). The text recounts a year in the lives of a group of boys, not as a chronological sequence of events, but as fleeting fragments in a spatio-temporal world. The contents pages group the 'chapters' (or vignettes) by the seasons suggestive of a familiar heroic quest narrative of a journey from summer to spring. But this is only a ploy as there is no quest, no goal reached, and certainly no hero. In many ways, *Idiot Pride* attempts a postmodernist approach in its non-linear, fragmented structure and its concern with the local.

Zurbo creates spatial tensions by reflecting and refracting socio-economic, cultural, and gendered discourses that contemporary Australian society and schooling have

brought to bear on the lives of the characters depicted. When asked by their teacher to write an essay 'based on your time at school' (p.4), one of the students, Gianpi, responds: 'High school's shitful. It ain't got no stories ... Only a few moments when everything's brilliant' (p.5).

#### **Random 'moments' in space**

*Idiot Pride* is constructed like a photograph album in the ways actual photographs and words offer recorded visions of time and space. It is also an album largely without (human) subjects, mainly of physical places - places without names, captions, street signs. The anonymity of place in the photographs serves to strengthen the insistence on space as a context of social interactions, contestation, and mobility; the death of the subject, a theoretical issue of postmodernism, is literally conveyed in the near total absence of subject in the photographs (Barthes 1977). The photographs appear at random and their subject matter is inconsequential to the contents near which they are placed. This apparently haphazard photographic documentation or embellishment effects a distance between the reader and the spaces depicted as there is no context in which to read their significance. However, the represented images are commonplace, everyday buildings and scenes which pass before our eyes unnoticed, yet 'there', thus giving a sense of (urban) space and familiarity. Though minimal in number, their static images associate them more with space than with time. But they record 'moments' and are, therefore, inevitably temporal and support the book's central motif.

The spatial-temporal arrangement of the narrative(s) in *Idiot Pride* ensures that space and time are always shifting. Time (as sequential, continuous chronological narrative) gives way to spatial discourses, and randomness (a well-disguised narrative strategy) supplants order and direction. The interior and exterior dialogue and commentary are elliptical and are more akin to oral storytelling than literary discourse. These gaps in the narrative space have the effect of giving the reader some slices/slivers of life where there is a vertical slicing through the spatial-temporal layers of the narrative rather than a sequential, chronological tale framed by a logical causality.

Several of the slivers or 'moments' of school life show teachers as objects of the student gaze. This in itself is an

inversion of the more customary position of the student as the object of the disciplinary (teacher's) gaze. The teachers' clothes, hair, and bodies, their personal spaces, are scrutinised and assessed and the resulting summations provide a way of inverting (temporarily) the hierarchical power relations. The gaze also serves to enforce a gendered spatial discourse. Miss Moisten's chair becomes the erotic fetish for a group of boys who sniff its surfaces and simulate cunnilingus on its absent occupier. While Miss Moisten (whose name metonymically conveys her sexual potential) is constructed within the heterosexual gaze of the desiring male voyeur, Mr Muir with his ever-present turtle-neck jumpers, and his 'fat, smug and old' body, is constructed in homophobic terms. In contrast to the desirable Miss Moisten, Mr Muir's body and (speculated) sexuality are seen as ugly: 'Picturing Muir ... necking on the couch with his boyfriend is about as ugly as it gets' (p.3).

The hegemonic masculinist discourse extends to the female students who are similarly categorised along sexual and class lines: the middle class 'pretty set' and the 'commission flat' girls, the scrubbers who 'wouldn't know what "gentle" or "intimate" are' (p.39). While the pretty set are the lookers, they are also viewed as bitchy, spiteful and snobbish. The 'others' comprise a group of assorted individuals - Paula Whora who is scorned by the pretty set but admired by the narrator (Matt) for her independent sexuality, Sonja, a girl Matt meets in her bedroom for secret trysts, and Josie:

*She's the girl who put the big "W" into Wog.*

*She chews her gum, perms her hair, drowns herself in make-up and wears expensive wog clothes two sizes too small for her fat, wog arse.*

(p.25)

The female characters are therefore schematically indexed according to their sexual un/desirability resulting in stereotypical representations. Such clustering of female representations ensures that 'difference' is reduced to a sorting device within a heterosexual (phallic) framework with the result that female specificity, desire and subjectivity are negated or eclipsed.

As the preliminary discussion argued, spatial discourses can silence and disavow difference through the competing and complex social interactions that occur in a designated space (for example, the classroom). In using language to name difference, as in the case of Josie, the social space becomes a contested site in terms of inclusion and exclusion. While the boys who form the focalising characters in the book proudly call themselves 'Wog', they are careful to guard this nomenclature in terms of who uses it and to whom it can be applied. They also use it to marginalise certain group members such as Josie. Josie represents the derogatory end of the term; the one used by 'non-Wogs' to belittle and subjugate the 'Wog' by placing him/her in a position of cultural inferiority. 'Wog' then is not just a signifier in a linguistic system, but signifies a range of relations that exists within and across class, gender, and race/ethnicity.

The use of language to name the subject is a significant element in *Idiot Pride* and highlights Giroux and McLaren's point that 'we both produce language and are produced by it' (1992, p.13). The classroom provides the space where language is actively produced and producing of subjectivities. In one chapter titled 'blame and the beard' (pp.103-110), the teacher, nicknamed 'the beard', insists on the class reading aloud from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The slippage between the teacher's nickname and the nomenclature attributed to the author of the play - b(e)ard - contributes to the language play. As the boys resist the reading of the play with its 'dumb-arse language that died hundreds of years ago' (p.103), the teacher insists on the logic of the text and the textual practices he wants to enforce by telling the class that: 'It's possibly the greatest love story, penned by the greatest writer who ever lived' (p.104). This normalising and reproductive strategy of the English (literature) classroom serves to further stratify the school community which is already a contested space. While the intention of the humanist English curriculum can be seen in its desire to inculcate students into the literary canon, the students' resistance subverts this ideological positioning. As they struggle with the foreign words, the lesson becomes a staging of bored and bawdy performance with the students scratching their 'balls and fannies' (p.103). This bodily

subtext to the lesson provides a 'carnavalesque' (Bakhtin 1968) moment which challenges the authoritative discourse of the classroom and the authorised textual practice it attempts to enact.

Another anarchic moment in the institutional space occurs when Gianpi pins his essay about his time in school on the blackboard. Gianpi's essay, a counternarrative, subverts the teacher's sovereignty in terms of semantic and genre choice, and ideological content. While both Gianpi and Shakespeare produce(d) texts which materially inscribe the space of the classroom, Gianpi's text is a form of classroom semiosis in that it resembles graffiti, and in Sontag's words, 'criticise[s] public reality' (1987, p.130). The ephemeral nature of Gianpi's text signals that his labours may indeed be lost, but its short-term appearance in the classroom space draws a crowd: 'We show up for class the next day and there's Gianpi's essay pinned, by the author himself, to the blackboard, for all to read' (p.6). While Shakespeare's text is bound in a book, and ostensibly permanent, his words drew no crowd, only bored scratching of body parts. Consequently, Gianpi's labour of production finds a corresponding labour of consumption that Shakespeare's text is unable to achieve in that classroom. Thus, the classroom becomes another contested spatio-temporal zone where the past collides with the present, and the authority of the institutional space is overturned and replaced by partisan actions and interests.

These 'moments' in the discourses which run through the classroom spatially configure literary/literacy practices, subject positions, and gendered subjectivities in the way that they marginalise and set up competing (and hierarchical) social relations among the characters. The students' resistance to these configurations is an attempt to disrupt powerful spatial discourses that endeavour to silence difference through universalising strategies which privilege certain texts and textual practices (and disavow others).

#### **Resisting and confirming difference through spatial discourses**

While the preliminary discussion has focused on the ways that difference is denied through spatial discourses,

the following account considers how difference, in terms of gender, ethnicity and class, is used both to resist and to succumb to forces of dominance and oppression. One of the key elements central to both *Little Soldier* and *Idiot Pride* is the complex dual notion of identity and location, a point which takes us back to the beginning of this paper. In exploring aspects of these twin concerns, characters experience contradictory feelings of dislocation, marginalisation, and belonging. The shifting spatial terrains they encounter - home, school, neighbourhood - provide sites for resistance and contestation, as well as for confirmation, and at times, affirmation of their difference. This feature of spatial discourses was noted earlier with reference to Shilling's comment about the possibilities that space and social interactions offer for action and constraint. However, as the previous discussion indicated, these are largely masculinist tales in their focus on masculinist constructions of space and spatial relations, and their marginalisation of the feminine presence and 'voice'. Consequently, the female characters form interesting, though minor, distractions along the spatial trajectories of the male characters and warrant closer examination.

In *Little Soldier*, Laura, the daughter of Captain Betty Rose, struggles against the dominating maternal presence. She is 'a little soldier' in her mother's God's Force army and is a pale imitation of Kaninda who was himself a 'little soldier' in a rebel Kibu army. While Laura too attempts the life of a rebel, her efforts are mild by comparison. She wears 'black lacy mini-briefs' (p.9) as a sign of invisible and silent protest, kisses Theo in his brother's car, flashes her tongue at Kaninda, and dreams of swimming naked in the waters of her mother's exotic (Seychelles) homeland. Her attempts to resist the limits that her mother has mapped on her body and soul are futile. The point of self-reflection comes when she goes on a joy ride in a red car without number plates and a young girl is seriously injured. Laura decides to return to the fold and regrets her enthrallment with a more dangerous life away from God and mother. Her moment of epiphany, however, is cruelly subverted as she is seriously injured after a misunderstanding with Queen Max, the leader of the Barrier Crew gang. Ironically, Laura's near-death state is the prompt for Captain Betty's own epiphanic

turn. She laments her single-minded spiritual quest and how it prevented her from being the 'good' mother. Both mother and daughter are, therefore, punished for their independent, spirited and spiritual behaviours.

*Idiot Pride's* fragmented structure and focalised recounting by Matt do not allow for any detailed characterisations. The subjective accounts of life's moments are framed by masculinist discourses separating self and other, inside and outside, centre and margin. While Matt and his male friends appear to be marginalised by their ethnicity and class, the girls are doubly trapped within the masculinist enclosures of the text. They are always the 'other' either scorned or pitied and always the object of the sexualised masculine gaze as the previous examples of Paula Whora, Miss Moisten, and Josie illustrated.

Another aspect of difference is the way in which allegiances embody resistance and camaraderie in terms of geographical and bodily space. While 'school' is the common space that links the two books, another is the 'neighbourhood' – a conceptual place and a socially-mediated space which is made visible by rivalry and conflict, visual landmarks, and the social enactments performed by individuals and groups.

Throughout *Idiot Pride*, there is an emphasis on masculine solidarity within class and ethnic allegiances suggesting that 'difference' is both affirmed and contested through and across spatial discourses. Matt and his friends retreat to a rooftop above a milkbar as a place for witnessing the comings and goings of the neighbourhood, and a space for hanging out and 'talkin' shit'. The rooftop takes on the geographical and social aspects of a men's club by offering a space for surveillance (and *perving*), privacy, and closed membership.

In *Little Soldier*, the spatial controls of the neighbourhood are realised in the ways rules and codes of conduct are enforced and boundaries and bodies are materially inscribed. For example, the Ropeyard Estate gang members' semiotically-fashioned bodies become cultural signifiers of territory and membership - the belt buckle is worn to the left of centre and a hooded T-shirt completes the uniform. Tagging is another signifier in the visual

landscape of the two contested urban spaces marking ownership and territoriality. It is in their gang naming, uniform clothing, and territorial tagging, that the two groups signify their allegiance to a bounded geographical space. Furthermore, the gangs' initiation rites, acts of revenge, and codes of membership and loyalty are compared with those of the warring tribes of East Africa forming points of convergence on space-time trajectories and a way for the global to be realised in the local.

These spatial configurations of the warring London gangs appear non-gendered in their inscriptions on the urban environment, but their external signs mask an internal gendered hierarchical ordering. Though Queen Max is the leader of the Barrier Crew her masculinised name, toughness, physical build, and free-wielding sexuality are not enough to prevent her from being raped by Baz Rosso, the leader of the Ropeyard Estate, who is the king to her queen, the royal patriarch whose dominion is geographically named: 'King of the flat, of the landing, the block, the estate' (p.108).

Queen Max, like the female characters in *Idiot Pride*, is emblematic of the gendered relations of power that exist in a masculinist space, and which define and confirm difference and otherness. While Paula Whora, Sonja, Queen Max, and Captain Betty may appear independent and in control, their reign and sovereignty are short-lived and circumscribed. Consequently, the feminine and feminine agency are subject to spatio-temporal limits. Furthermore, the physical aggression and fear tactics Queen Max exerts on other younger girls, and the cruel and punitive comments made by 'the pretty set' towards Paula Whora (*Idiot Pride*) constitute a form of 'horizontal' violence and abuse which mimics that of the male characters (and oppressors such as Baz Rosso). While male solidarity is valued in both texts and reinforced through gang membership or friendship cliques, female solidarity is an oxymoron, incapable of manifesting itself within the phallic economy of the represented social worlds of the texts. Hence, the spatial parameters of neighbourhood, gang membership, ethnic and class allegiances, and familial relationships are variously resisted, contested, and confirmed within gendered and other discursive limitations.

## Conclusion

Despite the conclusions in the books (recalled in the opening epigraphs), any notions that spatial tensions will be resolved or a stasis will be effected are disrupted by the inevitability of the instability of space as I have argued in this paper. The dynamism of spatiality which is continually activated by temporal unease and uncertainty ensures that space signifies more than physical location or a stasis in time. Rather, space is a temporal zone of complex social relations and as such is deeply implicated in the production of shifting subjectivities and temporarily assigned identities. In a narrative sense, *Little Soldier*, more so than *Idiot Pride*, provides a space of possibility whereby the particular space-time moments in which the male protagonist finds himself offer opportunities for change, a new direction, and a reassessment of options. Significantly, the two books highlight the ways that space is never neutral, but is always contested according to difference across gender, class, ethnicity/race, sexuality, and other discourses.

School and home are central to the lives of children and adolescents, and as I have suggested, *Little Soldier* and *Idiot Pride* reveal these twin sites as omnipresent spaces which young people inhabit physically, mentally, and emotionally. Their embodied subjectivities are fluid and inextricably intertwined with these social and domestic spaces. In the adult mind, these shifting states recur as revenants of youth, belonging/alienation, and places fixed in time. While this trick of memory to fix time, place and identity is a condition of our biological beings, the tensions that arise from and through spatial discourses ensure that space will inevitably entail conflicting emotional and cultural meanings. For individuals searching for stability within this flux it may indeed seem that there is no place like home, or school.

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