# Multiculturalism and National Identity in the Film 'Looking for Alibrandi'

Multiculturalism inside Australian films offers its viewers a chance to identify, as Australian, productions of social experience that are described by their hybridity. Films like Kate Woods looking for alibrandi, Michael Jenkins, The Heartbreak kid and Aleski Vellis, The Wog Boy portray a state of the intricate pattern of dissimilarities as well as a building of unity. Specifically, Looking for Alibrandi’s Josephine Alibrandi epitomizes the mongrelized Australia navigating an ethnic space for herself inside the Italian community which is also negotiating its significance and form across lattices of racial and cultural diversity.

The film presents a revisionist and ideal outlook of the Australian society, questioning immovable categorizations of Australian society using macho, Anglo-Celtic, middle-class conventions. The closure of this monolithic folklore is implied in Josie Alibrandi’s dawning acknowledgment that Australian society comprises multifaceted connections of generation, class, ethnicity, gender, and locality. The film, therefore, suggests the coming of age that is subjective as well as social.

Multicultural motion pictures highlight the obvious theme of ethnicity and race which is recognized by dialogues such as diaspora, migration, the discovery of ethnic identity, deracination, cultural recognition, cultural conflict, hybridization, old world versus new world and generational conflict.

## Overview

Before the 1970’s, Australia was described as single culture society, that is a mono-cultural society founded on what was perceived to be correct by the British. For one to be Australian, all that was required is to have a nationality but no ethnic identity. Throughout this mono-cultural era, Australia’s efforts for a national identity were defined wholly on how British one was, an endeavor that left out the interests and identities of the big number of migrants to Australia during the twentieth century.

Therefore, earlier than the 1970s, Australian film depicted Australia in the light of an overriding civilization built on Anglo-Celtics. Additional ethnicities, particularly those who originated from Europe, were seconded to this leading culture and described in antagonism to it. Films developed throughout the film resurgence of 1970, therefore, did not show a picture of Australia as being a multicultural and multiracial country in spite of multiculturalism has become a sanctioned strategy of succeeding governments.

 It was only after nation building fell out of indulgence in the state’s film and television financing in the 1980s that the focus shifted to multiculturalism. The formation, in the 1980s of SBS television, concentrating in multicultural programs, was a sign of government policy then. It would appear that the world in the late twentieth century may categorize as one deeply fractured by ethnicity, nationality, class, sexuality, and gender. Different ethnicities were no longer expected to toe the line to the integrated notion of being Australian but appreciated for their diversities to permit them to behave as part of the hybrid and pluralistic oddity of the nation of Australia.

## Multiculturalism in the Film Looking for Alibrandi

In Australian movies centered on identity, home, and migration, young characters, while key to the story, have been inclined to have a peripheral impact. In divergence, more modern multicultural movies have elected against employing mature grownups as their key voice, opting for younger characters to connect the complications of multicultural films in the past, but alluring to a younger culture.

Looking for Alibrandi focuses on a seventeen years old hybrid Australian female. Due to her being excessively aware of her working-class origins and Italian heritage, desires acceptance and popularity among her exclusive and rich peer group (Hynes, 2000). During these multicultural movies the youthful hybrid characters who represent the new world questions the customs and habits of their older relations which represent the old world, to following an autonomous way of life, devoid of family pressures and the ethnic and cultural links that unavoidably accompany them.

The film looking for Alibrandi is mainly on Josephine Alibrandi a youthful first generation Australian, trying to understand her identity and Italian heritage. Josie has to defy the suffocating customary philosophies of her grandmother who is Italian. Alibrandi’s key themes come together to produce the obvious foundation connecting the significance of identity and a nous of belonging inside a restructured Australia. The task is made more difficult by the fact that Josie is not only searching for identity inside herself but inside her particular indigenous society. In Looking for Alibrandi, being Australian is Josephine’s idea of national identity. To her being Australian entails being popular, socially accepted and rich. During her studying at the prestigious St Martha’s Catholic school for girls on Scholarship, surrounded by Anglo-Celtic peers, Josie views these girls’ qualities as being fundamental to her notion of being Australian.

Although Australia can be considered a multicultural civilization, since it is made up of numerous diverse races, the film looking for Alibrandi particularly presents the cultural dissimilarity as mainly a class centered divide. The Italian-Australian Josie is contrasted with an upper-class Australian character named Carly Bishop. Josie is so aware of her class that the insecurity prevents her from acknowledging her real feelings for John Barton, an upper-class son of respected, rich Anglo-Celtic parents and the school captain at wealthy boys’ Catholic high school. Josie craves to live like John Barton and would like to live a life in which she is viewed with envy by people. Nevertheless, Josie is ignorant of the immense expectations that John’s family has placed on him that make him contemplate suicide as a way out. John’s death comes as a revelation to Josie who finally realizes that being rich comes with its own set of problem and that while she might appear underprivileged; she has the freedom to pursue whatever life she chooses.

In addition, when Josie meets her father and forms a bond with him, the circumstances offer her a stable father figure that she craved for, for a long time and assists her in coming to terms with her own unique set of situations and identity. Living without a father had burdened Josie with the outcast tag among her Italian community and a bastard in the Anglo-Celtic community eyes. The presence of her father eventually builds Josie a new image and the pride and protective manner in which he views her father fills her with a renewed belonging.

Looking for Alibrandi’s portrayal of Josie Alibrandi’s social ascendance movement is mirrored by the rising Italian-Australian status in the Australian movie industry (Speed, 2006). The film was enabled by social changes fashioned by multicultural government strategies that have aided and nurtured greater acknowledgment of Italian inputs to the culture of Australian media. For example, the 1980s and 90s brought about improved the prominence of cultural producers like Jan Sardi, Santo Cilauro and Melina Marchetta whose efforts have profited from multiculturalism and impacted modern Australian cinema.

In the film looking for Alibrandi, the implication the word” wog” makes part of a broad pragmatic Australian ethnic identities evaluation. Previously a tag of racial criticism, this word has since been domesticated by Australians of European origin to celebrate and denote their ethnic individualities. The introductory scene of looking for Alibrandi shed more evidence of these celebrations. For example, Josie proclaims she employs the expression “national wog day” to mean “tomato day,” which is her kinfolk’s yearly ceremony of production of tomato sauce (James, 2004).

As a third-generation Italian-Australian, Alibrandi is remote to second-generation Italian-Australian girls’ experiences and encounters difficulties that her foremother cannot appreciate. She is also secluded from peculiarities held by Italian immigrant from diverse regions of Italy. Strangely, unlike her Italian-Australian peers, Josie’s education success is not hampered by her cultural backgrounds. The film emphasizes her desire in a make-believe series where she imagines that she is the Shadow Attorney General and gets married to the Australian Prime Minister.

But even is her fantasy, her nous that she is illegitimate reduces her to an outsider and she aptly put is, that she is encircled by girls who are treated like princesses by their father. They consider themselves to be having everything, which in her opinion is correct. In Looking for Alibrandi, the trials Josie meets gyrate around middle-class ambitions as much as they include the beliefs of her Sicilian descendants.

Each generation of immigrants possesses substantial and visible differences. In looking for Alibrandi, Josie is lured by the generational conflict. Like those in her generation, she questions the old order. For example, Josie Nonna Katia has been in Australia for the past thirty years but still do her things the same way she did them in Italy. Josie however, feels restricted and angry because of freedom limitations and continuing protests against traditional obligations and customs. Finally, most of Josie’s questions are answered, and the fact of her identity is exposed therefore making it possible for her to find out her ethnic identity.

The film demystifies the good Italian girl typecast by portraying Josie’s physical independence. The use of Sidney locations, in particular, is inclined to emphasize Josie’s comparative social and spatial freedom. While Josie considers that her grandmother and mother limit her freedom, the film disputes this visually in acts in which she moves freely around Sydney. For example, numerous series are witnessed as Josie travel to and from school on public transport. Although the characters use such sites to deliberate on the matter they would wish to keep from their parent does not suggest restricted freedom but shows resourcefulness on the part of the characters.

Many of the scenes in the film are shot in public places. The locations for the film which are more than forty sites range from George Street where she gets a lift home from Jacob at night to the Opera House, where Josie takes part in the interschool speech day. The later structure demonstrates the film’s sarcastic treatment of the good Italian girl stereotype.

## Conclusions

The three generations of Alibrandi women present us with a very emotional and powerful story. Each has their own story to tell and complications to handle. In spite of their dissimilarities, they are finally able to learn from one another, and they bid tightly together by their emotional journeys at the end of the movie. The good feeling at the end of the film looking for Alibrandi is very appealing to the youthful audience. The cultural diversity of Australia is unmatched by any other country because a big proportion of its populace consists of immigrants. For these reasons, the Australian culture has been impacted greatly by other cultures from all over the world.

The contemporary, film industry in Australia has not been left behind in this renaissance. Therefore, a movie like looking for Alibrandi that highlights Australia’s multicultural nature, present well the idea of multiculturalism with the depth and respect it merits and hence seizures the difficulties that a lot of ethnic societies encounter to this day, in their pursuit of their place in Australia. Josephine wonders whether everybody will one day appreciate multiculturalism in Australia but contend that the most significant thing for her is that she has finally identified her place in this life.

It is worth noting that the film looking for Alibrandi does not attempt to be discriminatory, but merely highlights the lack of knowledge portrayed by many Australians on the important issue of multiculturalism and the idea of identity. Australians, both Anglo-Celtic, and hybrids may identify with this movie, Australian cinema has been vital in the country’s efforts to tell uncomfortable truths about the community and the significance of diversity and richness of multiculturalism.

The film gives the women their rightful place in the society and highlights their role in carrying and preserving the tradition and culture of their community of origin (Zeilinski, 2006). In a typical, resolutely macho community, oddly Alibrandi looks at the Italian community through the eyes of the women.

## References

Hynes, L. (2000). Looking for Identity Food, Generation & Hybridity in Looking for Alibrandi. *Australian Screen Education Online*, (24).

James, R. (2004). The Reliable Beauty of Aroma: Staples of Food and Cultural Production among Italian‐Australians. *The Australian journal of anthropology*, 15(1), 23-39.

Speed, L. (2006). ‘No matter how far you run’: Looking for Alibrandi and Coming of Age in Italo-Australian Cinema and Girlhood. Screening the Past, 19.

Zeilinski, A. (2006). An overview of contrasting spaces in Australian feature films. Screen Education, (43), 92.