The Self Between Two Worlds:
Cultural Authenticity in Melina Marchetta’s *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Saving Francesca*

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines cultural authenticity as it relates to the teen protagonists in two young adult novels, *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Saving Francesca*, by Melina Marchetta. Cultural authenticity will be assessed and applied to the analysis of the novels with the consideration that cultural authenticity is achieved in fictional works for young readers when characters’ identities display a sense of cultural hybridity. The analysis of cultural authenticity is informed by theorists in cultural studies and studies in teacher education, which outline the negotiation of a cultural hybrid identity and a multicultural identity in multicultural postcolonial nations.
Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ iii

Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... vi

Chapter 1: Introduction ............................................................................................... 1
  Origins of Interest ........................................................................................................ 1
  Rationale for Selection of Primary Texts ................................................................... 5
  Inauthentic and Authentic Cultural Identity .............................................................. 7
  Inauthentic ..................................................................................................................... 7
  Authenticity .................................................................................................................. 11
  Research Questions .................................................................................................... 13
  Significance of Study .................................................................................................. 13
  Overview of Thesis Chapters .................................................................................... 15

Chapter 2: Literature Review ....................................................................................... 17
  Traditional Views on Multiculturalism and Children’s Literature ......................... 17
  The Limits of Multiculturalism .................................................................................. 20
  Categorization and Language of Culture ................................................................ 21
  Understanding Cultural Identity ................................................................................ 24
  Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism ..................................................................... 25
  Cultural Identity and Diaspora .................................................................................. 26
  The Place of Culture .................................................................................................. 27
  Defining Cultural Identity .......................................................................................... 30
  Connecting to Culture as Reader .............................................................................. 34
  Assessing Cultural Authenticity as Readers .............................................................. 40
  Achieving Cultural Authenticity through Life Writing ............................................. 42

Chapter 3: Methodology and Theoretical Approach .................................................. 49

Chapter 4: Primary Textual Analysis #1 .................................................................... 54
  Looking for Alibrandi by Melina Marchetta .............................................................. 54
Identity Formation and Character Development .................................................. 54
Home and School ................................................................................................. 55
Interactions with Friends, Classmates, and Love Interests .............................. 57
Family .................................................................................................................... 60
Cultural Position in Society .................................................................................. 64
Significance of Cultural Identity Integration ..................................................... 65

Chapter 5: Textual Analysis #2 ........................................................................... 67

Saving Francesca by Melina Marchetta ............................................................ 67
Identity Formation and Character Development ............................................... 67
Home and School ................................................................................................. 68
Interactions with Friends, Classmates, and Love Interests .............................. 69
Family .................................................................................................................... 72
Cultural Position in Society .................................................................................. 73
Significance of Cultural Identity Integration ..................................................... 75

Chapter 6: Creative Writing - Writing a Life ....................................................... 76
An Introduction to Identity .................................................................................... 76
Being ...................................................................................................................... 77
Departing ............................................................................................................... 78
Diaspora ................................................................................................................. 79
The Old Woman .................................................................................................... 80
The Old Man ......................................................................................................... 80
Home ...................................................................................................................... 81
Care ......................................................................................................................... 81
Home Cooking ...................................................................................................... 82
The Fields ............................................................................................................... 83
Fleeting Language ................................................................................................. 84
Goats ....................................................................................................................... 85
Incomplete Language ............................................................................................ 85
We All Go Through It .......................................................................................... 86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before or After</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of Culture</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Sources</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Sources</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Consulted</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis will examine Melina Marchetta’s *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Saving Francesca* as teen novels that authentically depict what it means to grow up between two cultures. The two novels feature the protagonists Josephine Alibrandi and Francesca Spinelli, characters in their late teens who identify themselves as Italian-Australian. I am examining the novels from a Greek-Canadian point of view and relate to the characters as one who has grown up living between two cultures with an integrated understanding and appreciation of both Greek and Canadian cultures in my sense of self.

Origins of Interest

My interest in the representation of culture and identity in children’s literature began with my unsuccessful search for titles in children’s fiction featuring Greek-Canadian protagonists. Many multicultural texts for children and teens have been produced in Canada, but none that I have come across center on the lives of Greek-Canadian youth. The absence of a protagonist who shared my cultural background was surprising to me considering the way in which the Greek community is integrated into cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal.

Taking up the task of writing my own story is something towards which I aspire. It is, however, daunting and difficult because representing what it means to be a second generation Greek-Canadian is complex and varied among individuals. Even the term second generation is a bit confusing. In my case it means my parents immigrated to Canada and obtained citizenship, so that I was the first generation to be born in Canada, though a second generation Greek when it comes to considering my parents’ Canadian citizenship.
Being of a distinct ethnic background and Canadian born has caused some identity confusion in my life. The confusion occurs when trying to define myself as someone from somewhere. It often turns into a justification of who I am, what I know, or even what I am trying to be. Instead of preserving my Greek ancestral identity I could adopt an English name and blend in with everyone else. Some do opt for this solution and see it as practical. I could manage this easily having grown up in Canada my whole life. It would be much easier than explaining myself, but it wouldn’t be a true representation of who I am.

I often wonder whether people think that I may be using my ethnic background in order to stand out from everyone else. Unless they see all aspects of how I live, however, they will never know who I am and why I consider myself a Greek-Canadian in terms of cultural upbringing. To myself I obviously don’t say I’m Greek just to stand out in the crowd. Being Greek-Canadian is what I know and is a part of my way of life. As a child, standing out from the crowd was the last thing I wanted.

Before coming to Vancouver from Toronto in 2007, for my two-year stay at UBC completing the course work for the Master of Arts degree in Children’s Literature which is part of this thesis, I hadn’t fully realized how important and empowering cultural heritage can be when introducing or defining myself. I grew up in Toronto attending culturally diverse public schools and also graduated from multicultural York University with a BA degree in the Humanities. Most of the people I have known have lived between two cultures with a sense of normalcy. Living in a UBC graduate residence with students from all over the world I was often asked the question “where are you from?” when introducing myself. My name obviously doesn’t sound (Anglo) Canadian so I explained, “I’m from Toronto and come from a Greek background, my parents are from Greece.” Being second generation is interesting to
international students, especially those from Greece; our ways of life obviously differ as do our experiences of identity formation.

As a child I sometimes felt disadvantaged and insecure with my background, especially in attending an elementary school with many children of Anglo-Canadian backgrounds. In kindergarten I met my closest friend to this day, Cindy. Thinking about how our friendship began highlights the idea of positive cultural interaction which is an integral part of growing up in a multicultural community. Her family is West Indian, from Trinidad, and she is also second generation like myself, being born in Toronto. Our earliest memory is from junior kindergarten when we would search for “channa-butties” in the sand on the playground. It was a term she made up but I believed it to be a real word. She was searching for small smooth grey pebbles in the sand and I decided to help her. “Channa” was the term for a certain type of bean that her grandma would cook and the “butties” part came from her then infant twin siblings wearing baby booties at the time. She named the stones after the shapes of both those things. At four years old I thought that “channa-butties” was the actual name for the stones. To this day we still recall the significance of our playground adventures with humour and realize how culture inadvertently played a part in the formation of our lifelong friendship.

The middle and high schools I attended in Toronto had ethnically diverse populations. This is why I usually feel more comfortable in a room where everyone is from different places and has experienced being considered different from the mainstream (Anglo-Canadian) population. I don’t intentionally seek such friendships, but learning about how others relate to Canadian culture from within another culture is an important element of how I relate to people. Forming culturally diverse friendships is also something that many youth experience in the present day. I hope that the field of Children’s Literature, especially in Canadian fiction with
urban settings, expands to become more diverse and authentic in the representation of contemporary children with distinct ethnic identities in multicultural societies.

The focus of my research is to highlight the importance of books featuring distinctly ethnic protagonists (of the second cultural generation onwards) as works belonging in mainstream literature for young readers and not as stories that are categorized as multicultural books. The importance of what it means to grow up with a dual sense of cultural identity is a significant and normal part of my life experience. For youth, cultural traditions are usually learned at home and mainstream culture is typically learned at school and through media; both learned cultures impact identity when defining the self. Growing up in a place like Canada, mainstream (Canadian) culture is integrated into one’s sense of self, along with one’s ancestral heritage, and results in a sense of cultural hybridity.

As I am not a visible minority, I sometimes feel self-conscious at seeing myself as an outsider to the dominant culture. In the end a sense of cultural identity comes down to the implicit elements of life, experience, and identity, which are invisible at first glance when looking at me (and become visible in Chapter 6, the life-writing section of this thesis). I find that ethnicity beyond skin colour is often not seen and acknowledged as multicultural, especially in children’s fiction, as well as in many sources about multicultural literature (further in Literature Review).

I am choosing to pursue the study of what it means to grow up as a generational ethnically distinct youth in Anglo-centric societies because it is an important part of my integrated identity having grown up in multicultural Toronto. In my research I have chosen to look at Melina Marchetta’s first two Young Adult novels, Looking for Alibrandi and Saving Francesca, as authentic portrayals of what it means to grow up between two cultures. Although
her female protagonists are third generation Italian-Australians, their experience and articulation of a sense of hybrid cultural identity resonates with my own experience growing up as second generation Greek-Canadian. In her novels Marchetta depicts the experience of living with two cultures in a way that does not “other” the life so many youth grow up experiencing. In my Introduction I will also bring forth an example of the frustrations that occur when texts are culturally inaccurate, especially texts which portray a simplified view of Greek culture in Anglo-centric settings. Communicating an authentic notion of cultural identity is complex in character development, especially when it comes to considering the integration of two cultures into one’s everyday life, which Marchetta represents with a sense of expertise in her novels through her two teen protagonists thoughts on cultural identity.

**Rationale for Selection of Primary Texts**

I originally wanted to examine novels with Greek-Canadian protagonists for my thesis research but found that there was an absence of such characters during many searches, with help from children’s librarians, at the Lillian H. Smith branch of the Toronto Public Library. I examined Canadian texts with culturally distinct characters in past undergraduate and graduate course work but found that most characters I came across were historical and not contemporary reflections of youth and none were Greek-Canadian. Marchetta’s texts were contemporary and I found cultural similarities between Italian-Australian culture and Greek-Canadian culture that I could relate to and admired the humour and realism in Marchetta’s depictions of her young ethnically distinct characters. In deciding which novels I would examine for my thesis I chose *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Saving Francesca* because I wanted to describe why the novels are strong examples of contemporary cultural authentic teen protagonists that young adult readers could relate to.
While taking a course during my BA entitled ‘The Worlds of Childhood,’ taught by Carole Carpenter at York University, I encountered the text *Looking for Alibrandi* by Melina Marchetta. Up to that point I had not realized the similarities in identity development that exist between second and third generation ethnic youth in Australia and Canada. The story’s protagonist is a seventeen-year-old, third generation Italian-Australian girl who articulates her feelings of living between two cultures in an authentic way. I wholeheartedly related to the story because it mirrored many aspects from my own experience of growing up as a Greek-Canadian and I looked forward to reading Marchetta’s second novel, *Saving Francesca*. I connected with the two texts because they authentically represent the experience of growing up between two cultures. The titles of the works also do not signify multicultural literature as separate or as “other” from mainstream teen fiction. The idea of representing culture in fiction for young readers with a sense of normalcy is important to me because growing up between two cultures is something that many youth grow up experiencing. To separate literature with culturally distinct protagonists would “other” the experience.

Both of Marchetta’s protagonists are the first person narrators of her novels. First person narration gives the texts an authentic confessional tone and it is a voice which also appeals to teens. The first person narration relates to the life writing genre which is important and empowering for articulating an authentic life experience especially from a female’s point of view (Kadar 4). *Looking for Alibrandi* (1992) focuses on the experiences of Josephine Alibrandi (or Josie) as she reflects on the ups and downs of her last year of high school. Much of the text centers on her interactions with family, friends, and romantic interests, while she grapples with social acceptance regarding her cultural and family position, as she is being raised by a single mother and comes to meet her estranged father for the first time. The setting of *Saving
Francesca (2003) reflects how things have changed for ethnically distinct youth in Australia in an indirect way. There appears to be less resistance and less discrimination towards recent immigrant populations from school peers in this text, published eleven years after Marchetta’s first novel. Francesca is dealing with life in the eleventh grade as she comes to enter a formerly all-male Catholic school, St. Sebastian’s, that has just started to accept girls. Francesca is a strong female protagonist especially in coping with her mother’s depression. In the novel similar young adult themes of family, friends and relationships are explored through Francesca’s insightful and humorous point of view.

Inauthentic and Authentic Cultural Identity

Before exploring cultural authenticity in Marchetta’s teen novels, it is necessary to give an example of an inauthentic representation of cultural identity in teen fiction. Lena Kaligaris, a Greek-American protagonist in Ann Brashares’ The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants, is an example of inauthentic cultural identity in teen fiction. After describing how Lena is a representation of inauthentic cultural identity, Melina Marchetta’s Italian-Australian protagonists, Josephine Alibrandi and Francesca Spinelli, are examined as examples of culturally authentic characters. Marchetta’s characters appear as culturally authentic because they represent what it means to grow up between two cultures as a teen with an integrated and continually negotiated sense of cultural identity.

Inauthentic

Frustration with cultural inaccuracy is a major factor which influenced the selection of my topic and text. Inaccurate cultural details within a work of fiction result in inauthentic cultural depictions. Ann Brashares’ The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants is an example of a teen novel which shows that even when an author’s intentions are good, stories trying to describe
what it means to be of a distinct culture can often take on a superficial tone. Lena Kaligaris, one of four protagonists Brashares creates in her novel, is a Greek-American who often sees her culture as a burden and detriment to living an American life. The abandonment of her Greek heritage is described brazenly early on in the text as the narrator states: “Lena felt ashamed for not speaking Greek. According to her parents, Greek was her first language as a baby, but slowly she dropped it when she started school. Her parents never even bothered with Effie [her sister]. It was a whole different alphabet for God’s sake” (Brashares 43). Throughout the novel there is a strong disconnect between Lena and her Greek roots. The disconnection between Lena and her Greek identity may come from the inauthenticity of the protagonist. Being Greek is a cultural category the author may have chosen in order to make the text more culturally diverse. On her vacation in Greece, Lena does not significantly connect with her Greek heritage either. Her experience of the place is that of a foreigner.

In her novel, Brashares is perpetuating a stereotype of what it means to be Greek in many ways. Her character, being an American citizen, is completely out of touch with her heritage, and goes to Greece as a traveler. There has been significant debate in the past about whether or not an author, outside of a given culture, can write authentically about a culture depicted in a work of fiction for young readers (Short and Fox 11). Some authors are successful when writing about a culture other than their own and some are not (11). In Brashares’ case she is unsuccessful in writing about Greek life (especially for Greek readers) because her text is filled with many cultural inaccuracies of commonplace cultural signifiers.

A major inaccurate cultural detail which appears in The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants is Brashares’ misuse of the word grandpa/grandfather. Brashares uses the word ‘Bapi’ to denote grandfather. Which language she obtained the term from remains unclear to the Greek reader, as
'papou/παπου' is the term used for grandpa/grandfather. Bapi is a word which does not exist in the Greek language. Bapi is also not a proper given name or known nickname in Greek. Furthermore, Lena’s stereotypical love interest on the island of Santorini is a beautiful exoticized Greek boy named Kostos, which seems like a typographical error of the common name Kostas, but it appears as Kostos in all four books in *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series when referring to the character. Kostos is not a Greek name, but Kostas is. Although Lena’s name is typically the short form of the name Elena and her sister’s name Effie is typically short for Efthimia, this is never noted in any of the four novels. Lena’s name in the film is also pronounced with a long ‘e’ sound rather than short ‘e’ sound. The short ‘e’ sound is how it would be pronounced in Greek. Further inconsistencies exist with the above being some of the most obvious and frustrating examples for a Greek-Canadian reader like myself.

Human experience and an integrated sense of selfhood within the world are paramount in stories which wish to effectively describe what it means to grow up within a distinct cultural group. Rudine Sims Bishop explains: “A story that captures the specifics and peculiarities of a people’s experience also captures something of the human experience and thereby becomes “universal” ’ (Bishop 30). In Brashares’ case it is evident that she used guesswork to create Lena’s trip as she admits:

I love to travel and have taken a lot of trips, but have never actually been to either Baja or Greece. I did a lot of reading and imagining for those stories. They existed more in my imagination than any place else. I love islands. I love that Oia, the town where Lena’s grandparents lived, was stuck in time and had this geological drama in the background. (bookbrowse.com n.pag.)
In Bishop’s explanation of cultural authenticity, as it exists in children’s books, she explains that a “lack of ‘real experience’” inside of a culture often makes works written by an outsider to the culture inaccurate, ineffective, and stereotypical (Bishop 32). Brashares produces a stereotypical image of what it means to be Greek in her novel because she does not have first-hand experience of Greece and Greek culture.

In the ‘Introduction’ to Musings: An Anthology of Greek-Canadian Literature, Tess Fragoulis writes: “In general, readers are very familiar with and interested in the glories of ancient and classical Greece, or in the blue and white Greece popularized through travel and the tourist industry. . . . Unfortunately, authors are often struck by the same sights . . . delivering a static and often stereotypical Greece” (Fragoulis13). Brashares seems to perpetuate the stereotype with Lena’s travel experiences and admits further to this: “I based Lena’s story on the Greek myth of Artemis, the proud boy-hating goddess of the hunt who, when spotted by a suitor, turns the poor guy into a stag. I wanted my Lena to be less pleased with herself . . . and for her suitor to be more formidable” (bookbrowse.com n.pag.). Bishop further explains how stereotypes are at many times created, despite authors’ good intentions. She states that most writers’ narratives, written from outside of the culture they examine, are “superficially familiar” and not true to the lived experience (Bishop 32). Of Greek-Canadian representation Fragoulis writes:

As a writer of Greek descent, I’ve been continually frustrated by people’s lack of knowledge of Greek culture as it currently exists in both the country itself and its diaspora. (Fragoulis 13)

She further notes the often stereotypical Greece reflected in travel narratives and explains: “These revolve around the encounter with “the other” and how this reflects back on themselves
[travellers] and their own culture” (13). Brashares’ *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series is popular and well received for its positive depiction of female friendships. However, Greek readers, like me, are able to notice the inconsistencies and poorly researched simple details of Greek-American life.

**Authenticity**

The focus of my research is to highlight the ways in which *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Saving Francesca* by Melina Marchetta depict characters of distinct ethnic backgrounds in an authentic way. Most importantly they do so without having culture or multiculturalism as the main issues of the texts. In my analysis of the works, I will highlight how Marchetta has become progressively skilled at weaving cultural identity into her characters, who live in Australian society, where Anglo culture is the dominant culture to her protagonists’ Italian-Australian backgrounds. Her protagonists effectively and realistically depict Italian-Australian identity as it exists for youth who are a part of the third generation Italian diaspora in Australia. The generational expression of cultural identity in Marchetta’s teen characters is a shift from generic depictions of distinct cultural identity as an issue that causes protagonists to feel alienated from mainstream culture. The comparison of Marchetta’s two novels will show how the author has shifted to using more subtle depictions of cultural identity, which is evident when looking at her first novel, *Looking for Alibrandi*, published in 1992, and then her second novel *Saving Francesca*, published in 2003.

In *Looking for Alibrandi*, the novel’s protagonist, Josephine Alibrandi (Josie), is a third generation Italian-Australian who is seventeen years old and coming to terms with her cultural roots while also learning about people in her life who link her to her heritage. Culture is a more evident theme in Marchetta’s 1992 text when compared to her second novel *Saving Francesca*,
published in 2003. The protagonist of the latter, Francesca, is Italian-Australian but being of Italian heritage is not part of her coming of age as it is for Josie. Francesca displays her cultural background with subtlety. The subtlety is important when describing what it means to create culturally authentic characters growing up in postcolonial Anglo-centric society. In order to construct culturally authentic characters in fiction for children and teens, it is important to show how the characters integrate themselves into Australian society, while negotiating their cultural backgrounds into everyday life. The most prominent feature of culturally authentic texts is how the protagonists negotiate and make sense of identity between home and school.

To highlight why I have chosen to refer to an array of interdisciplinary resources for my analysis, I will begin by focusing on two instances in Marchetta’s texts where cultural identity and school are integrated into the protagonists’ daily lives. The two excerpts will also be used to highlight the differences in how culture is introduced and integrated into each character’s story.

In *Looking for Alibrandi* one of the first instances of culture is tied to school. In her narration Josie explains the cultural dynamics that exist within the Australian society she lives in:

> I ended up going to a school I didn’t like. I wanted to go to a school in the inner west where all my friends had gone. They were Italian and Greek . . . They were on my level. I related to them. They knew what it meant not to be allowed to do something. They knew what it meant to have a grandmother dressed in black for forty years. I looked like them. . . . We sounded alike as well. It felt good being with other confused beings. We were all caught up in the middle of two societies. (Marchetta *Looking 7*)

In contrast, in *Saving Francesca*, culture is not an overt theme of the novel but subtly included in descriptions of the character’s identity. Culture is not an issue or something to be negotiated by the seventeen-year-old protagonist, Francesca, it is part of her identity. In the novel culture is
part of the character’s identity and not part of her internal conflict as a young adult. The subtlety of how Francesca’s culture is woven and introduced into her identity by the author is admirable, relatable, and humorous. The reader gains a sense of Francesca’s cultural identity in her description of a boy at her school:

My grandmother knows William Trombal’s grandmother, which I think makes him half Italian. She claims that William Trombal’s grandmother stole her S biscuit recipe and she dislikes her with a passion although they pray together in the same rosary group each week. Not that William Trombal and I have ever acknowledged this connection.

(Marchetta, Saving 13)

The passages from each of the novels display cultural authenticity through the specificities of cultural life that function as a reflection of an Italian-Australian upbringing.

Research Questions

My thesis research demonstrates the importance of detailed authentic cultural representation in texts for young readers. My thesis will address the following research questions as they relate to the cultural authenticity represented in Marchetta’s two novels:

1. How do Melina Marchetta’s first two novels represent cultural authenticity in regards to the character development of her two protagonists?

2. What do these representations in Marchetta’s texts communicate when considering the hybrid nature of cultural identity?

Significance of Study

Cultural authenticity is important when creating stories about culturally distinct protagonists. My focus is not on the importance of multicultural literature but on the idea that multicultural protagonists need to be considered as part of mainstream literature and not part of a
multicultural lesson plan. My analysis will look at culture and identity as discussed in the
critical works of theorists and educators of children’s literature, while also taking into account a
cultural studies approach to describe cultural identity and cultural hybridity. In describing
authenticity as it relates to culturally distinct characters in fiction for young readers I am revising
and extending existing definitions of cultural authenticity to include cultural hybridity as a
recognizable form of cultural identity. In making hybrid cultural identity recognizable and
understandable I hope that ethnically distinct characters become a normalized part of literature
for young readers and that stereotypical representations are avoided by writers attempting to
convey culture in their characters’ identities. The terms cultural identity and cultural hybridity
will be defined through the sources outlined in the following Literature Review chapter.

In addition to my research on cultural authenticity, I have included a creative life-writing
section in the sixth chapter of this thesis. My research has influenced my own attempt at
constructing culturally authentic literature from a Greek-Canadian point of view. Marchetta
explains that her real Italian-Australian family life is greatly reflected in Looking for Alibrandi.
Her family and where she lived and grew up inspired the fictional people and places she created
in the novel. Her grandmother’s home was also used in the film adaptation of Looking for
Alibrandi (Penguin Australia). Similarly, I am interested in weaving my own life narrative into
my thesis for two reasons: one to echo the complex cultural representations in the novels, and
two, in the hope that my research into character development and cultural urban settings based
on Marchetta’s works will assist my narrative in the future. The narrative at this point is in its
early stages and exists as sketches of culture in my life and functions as a creative writing
chapter.
Overview of Thesis Chapters

The thesis chapters leading to the creative writing chapter are an examination of the elements which make Marchetta’s text culturally accurate and authentic in her depictions of present-day youth who live and form a sense of identity as part of the Italian diaspora that has settled in Australia over three generations. Chapter 2 is a Literature Review that begins by addressing multiculturalism as it relates to literature for young readers. The review then focuses on the significance of postcolonial theory and cultural studies when addressing cultural representation in fiction for young readers. Selected works from Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha bring forth the notion of cultural hybridity as an authentic form of representing cultural identity. The last part of the Literature Review looks at how cultural authenticity influences readers and aspiring writers. Chapter 3 of the thesis covers Methodology and Theoretical Approaches, where my research questions are re-established and the textual analysis chapters are outlined in terms of how they relate to the cultural theories presented within the Literature Review. Chapters 4 and 5 are an in-depth analysis of Marchetta’s construction of her culturally authentic protagonists with references to their sense of place, family and social life, and their respective sense of identity formation.

Chapter 6 is a Creative Writing Chapter that came about while I was considering a thesis topic in Dr. Theresa Rogers’ course “Research in the Teaching of Literature K-12” (taken in UBC’s Department of Language and Literacy Education, within this MA degree). In my final essay I was able to explore the significance of life narratives in fiction written by women. Many of the texts examined childhood as a time where identity is negotiated. The essay I completed in this course influenced my attempt at creative writing, and I was able to incorporate my cultural identity and background into the work. The life narrative in Chapter 6 reflects a shift between
my mother’s perspective on life and my own perspective. My mother has encouraged me to write her story because of her limited writing ability. The story that is the sixth chapter of this thesis is a reflection of my knowledge of and appreciation for authentic reflections of cultural identity in English literature for children and teens.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

My analysis of cultural authenticity in Melina Marchetta’s first two novels is an examination of what it means to grow up while integrating two cultures into one’s sense of identity. The integration of two cultures into characters’ sense of identity demonstrates cultural hybridity. When cultural hybridity is articulated with accuracy by an author, textual representations are more culturally authentic. My research emphasizes what it means to grow up within a multicultural community as a member of a diaspora that has settled in a country away from its country of origin. Until recently many scholarly works describing cultural authenticity have been for the most part an analysis of multicultural themed children’s books featuring protagonists who are either recent immigrants or visible minorities in Anglo society. In order to illustrate the importance of, and recent shift towards, understanding cultural authenticity in terms of cultural hybridity, I first examine critical texts which describe the traditional view of assessing cultural authenticity in multicultural texts for young readers. These texts will be examined in terms of how they categorize multicultural texts for young readers. Sources outlining cultural authenticity in terms of cultural hybridity will then be examined as most relevant to my analysis of Marchetta’s novels. Sources which describe why authenticity is a significant aspect of how readers come to relate to and understand the significance of culture in a text and how writers can also benefit from understanding cultural authenticity will conclude my Literature Review.

Traditional Views on Multiculturalism and Children’s Literature

Until recently, the importance of cultural representation in books for young readers was focused on readers accepting cultural differences of individuals within culturally homogenous societies rather than focusing on examining how culture within homogenous and multicultural society is depicted authentically. The notion of focusing on sameness rather than difference
between “multicultural” and “mainstream” individuals has been a common theme in educational texts for teachers planning curriculum when examining the importance of multiculturalism as a theme in books. Ron Jobe’s *Cultural Connections: Using Literature to Explore World Cultures with Children* is an example of this approach to assessing cultural authenticity within children’s literature. In his ‘Introduction,’ Jobe emphasizes that within the process of learning about our own culture and also about the culture of others it is beneficial to focus on the similarities between cultures rather than the differences in order to achieve cultural understanding (7). Jobe believes that students benefit from “having cultural literary experiences as part of their lives” because they “come to school with culture and are in the process of evolving their own cultural identity as they broaden their experience in school and the community” and “[a]ll of us get our initial sense of culture by looking at our own lives” (8).

Jobe explains that readers bring their own cultural experience to every text they read. When approaching a text, young readers are influenced by their own family backgrounds as well as the “pressures of mass culture” (11). Literature provides students with a means of expanding their cultural understanding, acceptance, and awareness. When teachers choose books, Jobe notes that “emphasis must always be on an accurate and respectful portrayal, quality literature, and good illustration” (11). He notes how students are bombarded with cultural impressions on a daily basis, which results in a conscious and unconscious reception in how they view people, issues, and situations around them (11). Jobe notes that literature “can make us realize that culture is not always exotic; more than likely it is shown in the everyday occurrences we all share” (11).

Assessing authenticity has been a topic of debate when it comes to considering portrayals of culture and multiculturalism in books for young readers. Jobe explains that in reviews it is
rare for critics of children’s books to “comment on the accuracy of either the written or artistic interpretation of a culture” (137). He further makes a point that “reviewers have the tendency to focus on literary aspects, those devoid of any cultural implication. This is done obviously in the belief that all books of quality must tell a good story. There is also reluctance to take on the authenticity question. Authentic in whose eyes? This is a major question of interpretation. Are members of the culture reviewing the books?” (137). Jobe refers to a statement made by Janet Lunn which explains generational differences when it comes to shifts that occur in establishing a sense of cultural identity within a country like Canada: “‘No country is ever settled just once. Each generation must settle it again in their imaginations’” (qtd. in Jobe 142). The difference between generations when it comes to cultural identity formation is what I hope my research comes to reflect. In Jobe’s conclusion to Cultural Connections, he writes with a sense of confidence that authenticity in texts depicting culture will make society tolerant and open minded when it comes to understanding cultural identity in literature:

   In books they [readers] can find the records of humanity’s achievements of the past and the tools for achieving its aspirations for the future. Let us give children the books they need today for a better world tomorrow. Books to promote friendship, peace and understanding: books that introduce people who have other ways of living; books that present a variety of ethnic groups and cultures in a positive and non-stereotyped manner; books that prepare children for living harmoniously in an interdependent world, books to tell them of their own ethnic heritage . . . Books that, while recognizing the value of cultural differences, yet emphasize many things shared by all humankind . . . Books that foster concern for the earth, the single small planet on which we all live together. (142)
Jobe’s approach in assessing multicultural texts for young readers has made way for more complex considerations of cultural authenticity in fiction for youth.

**The Limits of Multiculturalism**

Scholarship within children’s literature which takes into account culturally distinct protagonists of the second and third generation is limited in scope beyond consideration of the inclusion and acceptance of multiculturalism in books for young people. The term multiculturalism, as it relates to literature for young readers, can be defined as a focus on the recognition of cultural or ethnic groups as different while celebrating our differences through tolerance (Saldanha 130). A sense of how characters from generational ethnic backgrounds living in Anglo-centric settings integrate themselves within mainstream culture has for the most part been overlooked when considering multicultural works. Many critical and analytical texts on multicultural literature for children and young adults that are discussed further on in my Literature Review tend to classify ethnic peoples based on race rather than culture.

In the essay “White Picket Fences: At Home with Multicultural Children’s Literature in Canada,” Louise Saldanha discusses home and belonging in children’s literature while considering the idea that people of colour differ from mainstream culture in Canada. Her work does not take into account the idea that multiculturalism is about culture; instead she focuses on skin colour. She discusses how “children’s books by writers of colour enter into existing mainstream multicultural paradigms that are powerfully shaped by specific understandings of the place of non-whiteness” (131). Saldanha also goes on to describe how multicultural texts “offer varied responses to our experiences of estrangement inside Canada—that sense of being racially excluded and “away” in the public, national space where we should, as multiculturals, be feeling “at home” (132). The article focuses on how the experiences of people of colour are presented in
literature in a way that “make cultural and racial inequities appear not a part of Canada” so that they can easily “be paved into the tranquil cultural mosaic” that exists as multicultural policy in Canada (130-1). The essay, while useful, is limited in terms of explaining multiculturalism because the ideas presented by Saldanha see only those of colour as being a part of multiculturalism in society. Visible minorities and immigrants are described as the most relevant reference to the inclusion of multiculturalism within society in this source and in further sources to be discussed.

The classification of culture based on skin colour is problematic when considering that it limits the acknowledgement of the numerous immigrant groups settling in the English speaking world from the twentieth century onwards. A common cultural experience shared by immigrants in the twentieth century which is still prevalent today is a struggle with language and foreign cultural norms while finding a place and home within the English speaking world. Culture is more than skin colour; it is language, tradition, and practice rooted deep within individuals and communities. A rich and fluid sense of culture is an imperative element in the development of achieving a sense of identity.

Categorization and Language of Culture

In the chapter entitled “Literature and Ideology” from the third edition of *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature* (2003), Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, describe the “white view” as the norm and dominant view which narrates most books written for young people in the English language (Nodelman and Reimer 168). The “white view” that narrates a text is there to “ask African American or Native American readers to think like whites” (168). However, the term “white,” in my view, is troublesome since it categorizes all peoples with a fair complexion as part of dominant English speaking society. Also the “white view,” which was noted as
narrating most texts for young readers, in current society speaks not only to African American and Native American readers in prescribing a right way of being, but also speaks to people from diverse and varied cultural backgrounds who are living in an Anglo-centric society. This is why I prefer to use the term Anglo-centric society or Anglo society within my research instead of white society.

Another problematic term found in texts about multicultural literature is “European.” Nodelman and Reimer note that “most mainstream children’s literature in North America has been written by whites of European descent and assumes that being white and of European descent is a norm from which other kinds of people diverge” (170). Nodelman and Reimer’s “whites of European descent” differ dramatically from the groups of European immigrants (specifically Greeks and Italians in my research) and their subsequent generations making a home in the English-speaking world that I will be discussing in my analysis of my chosen primary texts.

Multiculturalism in literature for young people has also been assessed by scholars such as Mingshui Cai and Rudine Sims Bishop who in their essay “Multicultural Literature for Children: Towards a Clarification of Concept” stress the need for authentic representation of diverse characters in order to promote empathy and understanding in young readers. Cai and Bishop’s research focuses on visible minorities and how to represent these characters in a way which does not stereotype or misrepresent them. In the essay they explain that in multicultural literature when authors write from a parallel culture they display a “truthful reflection of reality” and have an “immediate relevance to social issues” (Cai and Bishop 68). The authentic narratives produced will then reach individuals from inside as well as from outside of the culture. Cai and Bishop believe strongly that “voices from the heart, once heard, can change other hearts” (68).
Their ideas relate to Marchetta’s works, but they do not explain authenticity to the extent of describing how a culturally authentic character is fully developed and realized for readers of all backgrounds regardless of skin colour.

The terms “white” and “Eurocentric” are also used when assessing cultural authenticity in Clare Bradford’s *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children’s Literature* in Chapter 3 entitled “White Imaginings.” Bradford writes that “it is white, Eurocentric cultures whose practices, perspectives, and narrative traditions dominate literary production and representational modes” (71). She uses postcolonial theory to address cultural authenticity when writing about Indigenous cultures in “former settler colonies” such as Canada, Australia and the United States (3). Although she is writing about Indigenous society, Bradford’s work relates to Marchetta’s texts in its explanation of how a deep level of cultural awareness is necessary when representing a culture within a text. Bradford explains that stereotyping is often the result of the “white” author’s undertaking the task of conveying a culture with authentic cultural knowledge that they do not fully possess (78). She further notes that when “white” authors represent the “‘in-between’” figure as a protagonist negotiating his/her identity between two cultures, one of the cultures is often abandoned by the work’s conclusion (86). Bradford finds that such simplistic negotiations of identity are inauthentic and they “discard the cultural practices and beliefs of the past and assume those of the majority culture (87). In order to address how authenticity is achieved in Marchetta’s novels the following sections will describe cultural identity and hybridity as it exists within mainstream (previous texts refer to it as “white”) culture. For Marchetta’s protagonists, living in between two cultures is something that is negotiated and changes over the time, space and the place in which the characters find themselves.
Understanding Cultural Identity

Marchetta’s two novels authentically represent the lives of youth who are descendants of recent immigrants. To illustrate Marchetta’s authenticity in her characters’ sense of self and place, I will use cultural theories from Stuart Hall to frame my research in a way which highlights what it means to live and define the self while living between cultures. Cultural authenticity in fiction can be achieved when characters display cultural hybridity. In my thesis, cultural authenticity means that character and place are represented accurately and the author possesses firsthand knowledge of what it means to be a part of the culture being described in the specific setting of the text. Cultural hybridity means that an individual (or the character in a work of fiction) is not defined by one particular culture but exists with a negotiated sense of self while incorporating ancestral heritage into a settler society. When cultural hybridity is displayed in a work of fiction, cultural authenticity is achieved.

In order to understand cultural identity and hybridity, it is important to understand what the term identity means. I will use theories of identity from Hall to illustrate why understanding that identity and culture are intertwined and a significant part of describing culturally distinctive characters. According to Hall, identification is constructed when common characteristics or origins are recognizable between persons, groups, or life ideals. Once these commonalities are acknowledged, a bond or solidarity is formed on the basis of similarities (Hall, “Introduction” 2). This is why as a Greek-Canadian I can understand and relate to Marchetta’s Italian-Australian characters; their general experience of cultural bonds and understanding is similar to my own. In contrast, Hall also notes that identification is not uniform or constant but conditional and fluid. It is “a construction, a process never completed-always ‘in process’. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be ‘won’ or ‘lost’, sustained or abandoned” (Hall, “Introduction” 2).
This is evident in the cultural identity of Marchetta’s characters, Josie and Francesca; they are tied to familial bonds, and culture is a part of their everyday lives, not something that can easily be pushed aside.

**Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism**

Marchetta’s *Looking for Alibrandi* takes place in the early 1990s and *Saving Francesca* takes place at the turn of the twenty-first century and both novels are set in contemporary Australia. The settings of both texts depict a postcolonial nation which has become increasingly multicultural over time. It is important to understand the meaning and significance of colonialism and postcolonialism in my research. My focus is on Anglo society’s dominance in postcolonized nations that have become multicultural over time. Marchetta’s two novels highlight cultural relations in Australia which I can relate to from my experience of multiculturalism in Canadian society. In Roderick McGillis’ “Introduction” to *Voices of the Other: Children’s Literature and the Postcolonial Context*, he defines colonialism as the act of one cultural group assuming a superior position over another cultural group and this act often relates to imperialism, British rule and colonization of Aboriginal societies. McGillis notes that colonialism also affects the mind-set of groups of people; colonizers see themselves as civilized and assume dominance, while colonized groups are treated as inferior and told to believe they are lesser (McGillis xxii). Although we live in postcolonized society in Canada and Australia, Anglo norms still dominate what is considered the norm in society.

McGillis defines postcolonialism, as it relates to literature, as writing that strives to resist colonialism and its dominance in literature. He explains that the postcolonial writer’s intent is to write about one’s sense of identity or culture in the emerging history of a colonized nation (xxiii). In my research postcolonialism signals what it means to define the self in a nation where
Anglo values and culture serve as the norm, and everything diverging from early British settler society is seen as different, other, not normal, or exotic. For McGillis, multiculturalism—as it relates to literature for youth—deals with portraying cultures other than dominant Anglo-European culture in a sensitive and accurate way. Multiculturalism as a focus in writing reflects the way in which other groups want to be acknowledged as different but also equal to dominant and other groups (xxv). In my research, I am emphasizing the need for normalizing multiculturalism rather than seeing such writing as a separate category from mainstream works about “white” youth.

**Cultural Identity and Diaspora**

Cultural hybridity as it exists in Marchetta’s works reflects the experience of living between two cultures as a member of a diasporic group of peoples. The main diasporic group in Marchetta’s work is Italians and how they have settled and formed a sense of cultural identity in Australia over generations to call themselves Italian-Australians. McGillis defines the term “diasporic writing” as writing from a place of exile, not in one’s country of birth, sometimes in a multicultural society, sometimes in an exiled place after one has been forced to leave their home. He also refers to a point from Victor J. Ramraj who refers to diasporic writing as writing that is associated with literature by minority communities throughout the world who have an ancestral home in common (cited in McGillis xxv). McGillis further explains that diasporic writing tackles issues of identity that arise when negotiating one’s sense of self in the diasporic home and one’s cultural roots in that setting. He writes that “diasporic writing does not set out to preserve cultural identity so much as it works to negotiate that identity” (McGillis xxvi).

In Hall’s “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” living between two cultural worlds results in cultural hybridity within an individual. This means that one is not fully defined by one culture or
the other but as a combination of the two (110). This experience is apparent in the excerpts from Marchetta’s novels as she comes to articulate the experience of incorporating cultural hybridity into her protagonists’ lives with truthfulness, realism, and normalcy. Cultural identity in postcolonial settings varies among individuals and changes over time as communities of peoples settle over generations in a new place. In Stuart Hall’s influential and often quoted article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” he states:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (110)

What remains universal across cultures, when relating to what it means to be a cultural hybrid, is the acknowledgement of the origins of one’s roots, traditions, and heritage, which have managed to immigrate along with individuals to a new place of dwelling.

**The Place of Culture**

Hall further notes how identity emerges when history, language, and culture are questioned and considered, not necessarily to figure out who we are and where we came from but to find “how we have been represented,” what we will or can become, and how we can represent ourselves in the present and for the future (“Introduction” 4). In a new setting, cultural identity changes and continues to alter as generations settle or move on to another place. A once stable identity in one’s country of origin shifts as one becomes part of a diaspora, retaining cultural roots while associating with new surroundings. Hall explains that “we need to situate the debates about identity within [all those] historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively ‘settled’ character of many populations and cultures, above
all in relation to the processes of globalization” which he argues are “coterminal with modernity and the processes of forced and ‘free’ migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called ‘post-colonial’ world” (“Introduction” 4). As immigration continues across continents, out of necessity or out of choice, new cultural identities are forming more frequently on a global level. Marchetta’s characters are one example of a type of generational Italian cultural identity which has resulted from the immigration of Italians (the protagonists’ grandparents) to Australia before and after the Second World War.

Seeking sameness, while adjusting to difference, explains the “ethnic enclaves” or cultural boroughs that exist within postcolonized nations. Ethnic enclaves are urban areas where cultural communities settle, thrive, and transform (Keung n.pag.). As a third generation Italian-Australian, Marchetta creates a familiar landscape in Australia of which Italian life is an integral part. In such places culturally distinct groups seek to find a sense of place while integrating their cultures into the new country they are to call home (Keung n.pag.). Even in maintaining a cultural sense of self, one’s identity is constantly changing and shifting. Hall would describe diasporic peoples’ sense of place as one of “instability,” “permanent unsettlement,” and including a “lack of any final resolution” (Hall, “Cultural” 114). As people of diasporic groups adjust and settle after generations in the “New World,” they change, but their country of origin changes as well. This divide in one’s notion of the self as part of a culture is permanently fractured. For Hall “we can’t literally go home again” (117). Hall reflects on this, noting that when the connection to one’s heritage is lost, one’s identity is also lost. In reconnecting and retaining cultural heritage, healing occurs and a strong sense of identity is restored (Hall “Cultural” 112).
Hall explains that identity can function as a means of creating power struggles within society. He notes how identities “are the result of a successful articulation or ‘chaining’ of the subject into the flow of discourse” (Hall “Introduction” 6). The idea of the power struggle applies to the dominance of Anglo-centric identity compared to recent immigrant identities or visible minorities. Recent immigrants and minorities are often seen as “other” to the dominant culture or stereotyped or generalized when it comes to literature for young people. Even when intentions are good, stories often take on a superficial tone and describe characters’ struggles as different from those in dominant Anglo-centric society. Often multicultural characters, for example, the Greek-American protagonist Lena Kaligaris in Ann Brashares’ *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* discussed previously, see their culture as a burden.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha states that in his work he attempts “to negotiate narratives where double-lives are led in the postcolonial world, with its journeys of migration and its dwellings of the diasporic” (213). His work further looks at “the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions, through which ‘newness comes into the world.’ ” (227). Bhabha establishes that postcolonial discourse serves to resist “holistic forms of social explanation,” and societies are made up of many parts and peoples which result in the creation of complex cultural and political perimeters (173). Cultural shifts in society become part of history, as language, landscape, migration, and diaspora become an accepted part of the past in order for new forms of culture to emerge (235). The “new forms of culture” will be the focus of my analysis of Marchetta’s texts. Marchetta’s protagonists display what it means to define one’s sense of self in and between two cultures as cultural hybrids (further detailed textual analysis in Chapters 4 and 5).
Defining Cultural Identity

In the essay “Culture’s In-Between” Homi K. Bhabha explains what it means to define the self and one’s sense of identity between cultures by first explaining that society’s definition of culture is unstable. Bhabha describes how a hybrid cultural identity forms, stating that “partial culture, is the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures—at once the impossibility of culture’s containedness and the boundary between” (Bhabha, “Culture’s” 54). “Partial culture” in this statement refers to the in-between state that one’s sense of identity is in when negotiating a sense of self and place between cultures. In order to understand partial culture and how it transforms into hybrid culture, the notion that national culture is fluid also needs to be addressed. Bhabha explains:

The peculiarity of cultures’ partial, even metonymic presence lies in articulating those social divisions and unequal developments that disturb the self-recognition of the national culture, its anointed horizons of territory and tradition. The discourse of minorities, spoken for and against the multicultural wars, proposes a social subject constituted through cultural hybridization, the overdetermination of communal or group differences, the articulation of baffling alikeness and banal divergence. (54)

Bhabha focuses on the notion of disrupting already existing culture in order to see that differences exist outside and within cultural groups. He explains that “rationalization of the life world means differentiation and condensation at once – a thickening of the floating web of intersubjective threads that simultaneously holds together the ever more sharply differentiated components of culture, society and person” (55). Defining cultural identity depends on background and experience more than already established social categorization of national or cultural identity.
Cultural hybridity is often difficult to understand or define because of the already established notion of culture that society adheres to in order to simplify and categorize the meaning of identity. Bhabha explains that:

liberal discourse attempts to normalize cultural difference, to turn the presumption of equal cultural respect into the recognition of *equal cultural worth*, it does not recognize the disjunctive, ‘borderline’ temporalities of partial, minority cultures . . . the recognition of difference is genuinely felt, but on terms that do not represent the historical genealogies, often postcolonial, that constitute the partial cultures of the minority. (56)

Cultural hybridity means that each individual develops a unique cultural identity within a given culture while incorporating two or more cultural backgrounds into the self. In the postcolonial world this means that a sense of identity is formed within more than one national history.

Cultural hybridity is often unrecognized and difficult to define. Bhabha explains this by stating:

Obviously the dismissal of partial cultures, the emphasis on large numbers and long periods, is out of time with the modes of recognition of minority or marginalized cultures. Basing the presumption on ‘whole societies over some considerable stretch of time’ introduces a temporal criterion of cultural worth that elides the disjunctive and displaced present through which minorization interrupts and interrogates the homogenous, horizontal claim of the democratic liberal society. But this notion of cultural time functions at other levels besides that of semantics or content . . . The partial minority culture emphasizes the internal differentiations, the ‘foreign bodies,’ in the midst of the nation – the interstices of its uneven and unequal development, which give the lie to its self-containedness. (57)
The identity flux that occurs when cultural hybridity is established is part of the reason why hybridity is not generally recognized by society as a valid form of identity. A hybrid cultural identity means instability, and its definition changes over time. All historical factors which resulted in immigration to a new home and the history of the new home take part in forming a sense of cultural hybridity.

Bhabha refers to an idea from Nicos Poulantzas to explain why society prefers homogenous descriptions of identity over hybrid descriptions. Bhabha explains that according to Poulantzas views: “the national state homogenizes differences by mastering social time ‘by means of a single, homogenous measure, which only reduces the multiple temporalities . . . by encoding distances between them’” (Poulantzas cited in Bhabha 57). Bhabha also notes that binaries are produced when identity is thought of as stable rather than unstable. To describe the binaries that exist when discussing cultural identity, he refers to ideas from Charles Taylor noting that society’s preference for homogenous descriptions of identity “produces a spatial binary between whole and partial societies, one as the principle of the other’s negotiation. The double inscription of the part-in-whole, or the minority position as the outside of the inside, is disavowed” (Taylor cited in Bhabha 57). Mikhail Bakhtin is quoted in order to describe how a hybrid sense of identity encompasses “two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic, consciousnesses, two epochs . . . that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance” (Bakhtin cited in Bhabha 58). Cultural hybridity displays the dual sense of self which defines the identity that individuals who live as part of generational diaspora possess within themselves.

Bhabha explains that he “developed the concept of hybridity to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity” in order to counter
hegemonic practices (58). He further describes how “the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation is equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an ‘interstitial’ agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism” (58). He goes on to describe how diasporic identities wish to be represented in society, explaining that “[h]ybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty” (Bhabha 58). In my research and the materials I am examining, this hybrid form of representation means that diasporic peoples share their stories and cultural experiences so they can be seen as an integral and inclusive part of society rather than a dominant part.

Constructing a realistic character who is part of a diasporic group of people is complex and difficult, which is why Marchetta’s works are a refreshing way of communicating what it means to grow up knowing and accepting two cultural ways of life. To generalize, cultural identity for the sake of diversity or multicultural representation will not suffice when it comes to readers of distinct ethnic backgrounds. In my view children’s literature is still developing in this respect. The vision of inclusion is difficult and according to Bhabha: “The fatality of thinking of ‘local’ cultures as uncontaminated or self-contained forces us to conceive of ‘global’ cultures which itself remains unimaginable” (54). Cultural identity is fluid and constantly changing, which makes it difficult to define. For Bhabha, when we accept the definition of cultural hybridity: “It makes it possible for us to confront that difficult borderline, the interstitial experience between what we take to be the image of the past and what is in fact involved in the passing of time and the passage of meaning” (60).
Connecting to Culture as Reader

In the article “Fictionalizing Acts: Reading and Making of Identity,” Dennis J. Sumara shares ideas which relate to Stuart Hall’s concept of identity formation as a continual process affected by roots and by experience. Sumara disagrees with the common view that “individuals house a core self” and believes instead in a poststructural view where identity is believed to be shaped by the environment the self is in and by experiences one has with the world (204). Sumara writes about a “relational” poststructural view of identity development and explains: “Identity is not some hard kernel that is embedded deeply inside of us, nor is it located in various bits and pieces of knowledge floating around outside of us. Identity exists in the remembered, the lived, and the projected relations of our daily experience” (Sumara 205). Identity for Sumara is not fixed within oneself but shifts and transforms with every new experience.

Sumara further explains that identity is formed in large part by “the roles that perception, interpretation, memory, and language play in the experiences of the human subject” (205). He further states that humans as a species are unique because we have the ability to “think about thinking” and to “interpret experiences” (205). Experiences shape who we come to be and how we come to interpret the world around us. For Sumara “[e]xperiences of identity, then, are learning experiences. What we know cannot be extricated from who we are” (205). He believes that reading helps to shape who we are and what we understand about the world and explains: “the identities we continue to shape are no less fictitious than the characters about whom we read. Reading, then, is an act of identity making” (205). The more authentic cultural experiences a reader is exposed to can help to expand what they know about different ways of life and accept different ways of being as normal.
Sumara refers to reading theories influenced by Wolfgang Iser and explains that “as readers identify with and interpret the experience of characters, they learn to reidentify and interpret themselves” (209). The notion of reading as contributing to readers’ sense of self and how they relate to and think about their place in the world is important in my research. It connects to why cultural authenticity is important in texts featuring characters of distinct cultural backgrounds. Inaccuracies when describing a particular culture can lead to stereotypical beliefs for readers of any age who may be exposed to inauthentic depictions of cultural identity.

In the ‘Introduction’ to the book *Children’s Literature as Communication: The ChiLPA Project*, the editor Roger D. Sell explains that when young readers of one culture read a text by a writer who is writing from within another culture, they have to read like the implied reader of the text. When they engage in reading as the implied reader, young people gain a sense of “imaginative empathy” which “can promote a fuller understanding of another culture and another way of life” (Sell 20). Sell emphasizes that the gained understanding of another’s way of life promotes peaceful existence within multicultural communities (20).

Sell describes the European-based research in *Children’s Literature as Communication* as having stemmed from “the so-called intercultural understanding movement” which came from a dominant trend which occurred in “language education theory from the late 1980’s onwards” (20). Before that time, approaches in pedagogy focused on structuralist and behaviouristic linguistics which focused on vocabulary and grammar rather than meaning, history, or context of a literary work (20). The intercultural understanding movement is described by Sell as relying on “a contrastive analysis of the learner culture and target culture side by side, which would enable the language teacher to take on the role of mediator between the two” (20). Sell is interested in highlighting the way in which the reader can be an active participant in making
meaning of the messages portrayed in a given text. In the past, he explains, literature was seen as a means of reinforcing dominant power structures in society. With participatory pedagogy, influenced by intercultural understanding, the reader can discuss a work and call into question its meanings and messages (20).

Sell resides and teaches in Finland and his work is based in the European educational system where the cultural make-up of most populations is not as diverse as it is in North America and Australia. He is influenced by “explicitly multicultural education, within Anglo-Saxon cultures with a long history of conspicuous minority groupings” (21). Sell further explains: “To visitors from say, Britain or the United States, Finland can seem “pure” or “white.” But one of the key points of multicultural education is that, in a world of rapidly increasing internalization, young people growing up in relatively homogenous social settings may call for special consideration” (21). Finland’s population is also described by Sell as becoming increasingly multicultural in the present day (21).

The importance of intercultural understanding is reflected in the way in which young people read with a sense of communication with the text. The empathy gained from the dialogue between text and reader can alter the way in which readers see their world and beyond their familiar surroundings (21). Sell’s work is useful in my analysis of the works of Melina Marchetta because it includes an article specifically about Looking for Alibrandi by Lilian Rönnqvist, an educator in Finland, who studies “the potentialities of young adult fiction as a means for cultural mediation in language education programmes” (xi). Her work highlights how the position of the reader outside of the minority culture Marchetta is writing about in Looking for Alibrandi affects how the text will be interpreted.
Rönnqvist’s analysis of *Looking for Alibrandi* takes place in the context of her reading-groups of 13 to 19 year olds who are a part of the Swedish language minority of Finland (21). She chose to discuss this text with her class because the work specifically reflects the experience of being an ethnic Italian minority in Australia. Rönnqvist notes the first reason she chose the text is because culture is reflected in the author’s inclusion of direct and indirect explanations about life as an Italian-Australian minority that many Australian readers may be unfamiliar with. The second reason she chose the text is because she believes that her students will be able to empathize with the novel’s main character when they compare their experiences as Swedish minorities in Finland (21). Rönnqvist’s work also highlights the way in which readers and listeners respond to a text which is not the same as the culture they know, and it is also not written in their native language. Inevitable cultural gaps exist for students reading the text, which is when Rönnqvist, as teacher, takes on the role of filling in the gaps as “cultural mediator” (21-2). She in turn also does not know everything there is to know about Italian-Australian life, which is where her own sense and use of imaginative empathy makes her a co-reader in discussions with her students, as they dissect the cultural signifiers they come across while reading Marchetta’s text (22). Sell, in describing Rönnqvist’s article in his “Introduction,” also notes that even with cultural mediation and imaginative empathy one must also be aware that culture is “not static and delimited, and no experience of it is ever more than a mere cross-section” (22).

In her research article, Rönnqvist explains that she uses fiction to help her students come to understand a culture they are unfamiliar with while gaining a deeper understanding that counters the superficial view of a culture reflected in most textbooks (315). She further explains her view of culture: “I see culture in a very broad perspective, as covering both the arts and
sciences, and people’s lifestyles, customs and attitudes” (315). Her analysis of the cultural signifiers found in Looking for Alibrandi is also influenced and distinguishable using Roland Posner’s three different cultural levels as outlined in his 1989 article “What Is Culture? Toward A Semiotic Explication of Anthropological Concepts” (cited in Rönqvist 316). Rönqvist finds his three different cultural levels useful in her reading of Marchetta’s work. Posner’s three cultural levels are outlined by Rönqvist as the social, the material, and the mental. The “social level” includes behaviours (such as rituals) and also institutions (such as churches) which can express culture in one’s way of life. The “material level” takes on the form of concrete objects and artifacts (examples include crosses and rosaries). The “mental level” includes the way in which the use of ideas and beliefs is governed. Posner then connects each level of culture to three levels of semiotics: “sign users” are “individuals within a society,” “texts” are the “material artifacts” invested with a coded and functional meaning, and “codes” are ideas and beliefs which follow conventions of use (cited in Rönqvist 315). Each level of semiotics corresponds respectively with the three outlined cultural levels. Rönqvist finds the interconnections between and among the three levels of culture and semiotics (Posner’s trichotomy) useful when considering and understanding the cultural representation found in Looking for Alibrandi (316). Posner’s trichotomy allows readers to understand the power and complexity of culture based on the meaning of its signifiers (316).

Rönqvist notes that explicit cultural information may still come across as difficult to decipher for readers outside of the culture even though Marchetta writes with a sense that her audience does not know everything about being Italian-Australian. Readers will come to fill in the gaps by making sense of the cultural cues when they understand the central meaning of the text (316). The process of filling in the cultural gaps corresponds to Iser’s process of reading and
understanding a text as an implied reader, which Rönqvist goes on to highlight through the work of Carol M. Archer in her 1986 article “Culture Bump and Beyond” (cited in Rönqvist 317). Archer explains how most readers process cultural bumps that they come to confront in texts. She explains that when readers’ expectations are confronted with something different, they pause and tend to think about what they do not understand but they will continue to read on (cite in Rönqvist 317).

Cultural details, when tactically included in a story, can highlight the way in which the protagonist as part of a culture is portrayed in a realistic way. Cultural details that all readers may not be able to relate to do not take away from the story but enhance the character and setting of a work like Marchetta’s *Looking for Alibrandi*. Rönqvist makes a point of noting that English is spoken throughout the world in countless countries as a first language, but that cultures and subcultures vary dramatically in each predominantly English speaking country (317). The expected cultural norms when reading texts from various English cultures will often need to be reassessed from one region to the next as depicted in texts (317).

According to Rönqvist, the Anglo-Australian majority of Marchetta’s text is in the position of the “other” since the story is told from Josie’s point of view. The implied reader includes both Australian minority and majority groups because it is apparent that Marchetta writes with a sense that both groups of readers would be reading the text. With the consideration that mainstream readers would be her audience, Marchetta writes using cultural details as a way to educate such an audience about the life of an Italian-Australian teen. Rönqvist notes how this benefits her English as a foreign language (EFL) readers in Finland since they can relate to more than one type of English speaking reader as they come to understand both majority and minority populations in Australia. Rönqvist explains that “Marchetta’s treatment of gender,
sexuality, personal identity, and life at school will probably interest any teenager anywhere in the world” (317). She chose *Looking for Alibrandi* for her class because unlike many EFL texts that focus on cultures in the US and the UK, Marchetta’s Australian perspective is a “welcome change” (317). Rönnqvist writes: “For adolescent Swedish-speaking Finns, Josephine’s dilemma, torn as she is between minority and mainstream, will have a special ring. It will be alien, but by no means beyond the reach of imaginative empathy” (317).

Rönnqvist’s article further analyzes specific cultural signifiers within *Looking for Alibrandi*, specifically school and education, friendship and dating, food, personal names, and place names, respectively, which help to build an authentic vision of Josephine Alibrandi’s world for readers outside and within the Italian-Australian culture (319-30). In my textual analysis chapters I will look at cultural signifiers within Marchetta’s two texts but will put more emphasis on characters’ sense of self and place and inner consciousness and dialogue. In Rönnqvist’s final thoughts on the significance of Marchetta’s *Looking for Alibrandi*, she reflects on what readers can gain from the text and explains that they can come to understand and also relate to a culture unlike their own. Rönnqvist refers to the idea put forth by Louise Rosenblatt that (in Rönnqvist’s words) “books are a means of getting outside the limited cultural groups into which the individual is born” (330).

**Assessing Cultural Authenticity as Readers**

Personal background greatly affects the interpretation of a literary text. Readers can learn about a different way of life and existence from a narrative, but cultural authenticity is often seen as difficult to assess in clear terms. Within my research, I have aimed to establish that when characters display cultural hybridity, cultural authenticity is achieved. Readers often apply their personal knowledge to how they relate to or interpret a text. Interpretation and ways in which
readers relate to or believe in a work’s depiction of authentic culture is often subjective even when considering cultural hybridity since assessing this level of identity depends on experience. A subjective point of view when assessing a work’s cultural authenticity is sometimes more valid than an objective standpoint. Subjectivity is important in my research and is reflected in my choice of topic and how I relate to Marchetta’s novels.

Assessing cultural authenticity comes from a personal standpoint in many academic works. Personal cultural background often plays a key part in what is considered culturally authentic about a work. Many articles on cultural authenticity are often voiced from a personal and subjective standpoint. A collection of differing viewpoints on cultural authenticity can be found in the collection of essays entitled *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children’s Literature* edited by Dana L. Fox and Kathy Short. Chapter 1, entitled “The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children’s Literature: Why the Debates Really Matter,” examines varying viewpoints on what cultural authenticity means. Many authors in Fox and Short’s collection of essays hold true to their beliefs that depictions of culture can only be authentic if the writer in question is of the same culture that they are writing about. Some of the work’s contributors find that as long as writers have researched, connected, and immersed themselves in the culture they have written about they can achieve cultural authenticity.

The debate on “the outsider/insider distinction” as it relates to cultural authenticity does still emerge in various assessments of texts (Fox and Short 11). In my research, inauthentic cultural representation is reflected in Brashares’ inaccurate representation of Greek-American culture and cultural authenticity is reflected in Marchetta’s accurate representation of Italian-Australian life. Brashares is an outsider to the culture she is writing about and Marchetta is an insider to the culture she is depicting; their positions are as writers a reflection of how accurate
their texts are. In Rudine Sims Bishop’s explanation of cultural authenticity she gives an example of the subjective assessment and states that “authenticity is the success with which a writer is able to reflect the cultural perspectives of the people whom he or she is writing about, and make readers from the inside group believe that he or she ‘knows what’s going on’” (9). Sometimes writers outside of a given culture can achieve accurate depictions of the culture which they are writing about. Authors can be successful when writing about a culture different than their own. This finding has led to the resolution to the debate on cultural authenticity, which is outlined in the works of educational theorists such as Bishop who write about the significance of cultural authenticity in books in the classroom. If readers sense that the author “knows what’s going on,” they also gain a sense of a work’s cultural authenticity (9).

A quote in Short and Fox’s chapter from Hazel Rochman is useful to the notion of assessing authenticity regardless of author’s background as she explains: “Authenticity matters, but there is no formula for how you acquire it. The only way to combat inaccuracy is with accuracy—not with pedigrees” (10). This is a positive way of looking at cultural authenticity; writers can write about culture from inside but also from outside the culture depicted. All that matters is how one connects with and knows the culture in question. My assessment of cultural authenticity as it relates to Marchetta’s novels comes from the sense of culture that I have gained from the novels which display cultural hybridity in their characters, which is similar to my own sense of cultural hybridity as part of a diaspora.

**Achieving Cultural Authenticity through Life Writing**

Life narratives, life writing, and autofiction are important genres in creating culturally authentic works. An author does not necessarily have to be from within a culture to make a work appear as true or believable, but when a writer is an insider to the culture depicted, it is less
likely that such work would be questioned as authentic. Part of what makes Melina Marchetta’s two first novels culturally authentic is that the people, places and culture are inspired by the world Marchetta knows and the world she grew up in. With *Looking for Alibrandi*, she did not intentionally set out to write a culturally authentic work but set out to write a good story. Writing from a personal standpoint and then altering details in order to create culturally authentic fiction is where my attempt at culturally authentic work of young adult fiction begins. The sketches in Chapter 6 are vignettes of cultural details in something that could turn over time into a work of fiction.

The early stages of my thesis research and creative writing were influenced by a final essay and life writing project I completed in a masters course, entitled “Research in the Teaching of Literature K-12,” in which I came across several articles discussing the importance of writing and reading life writing. In the article “Writing Back: Rereading Adolescent Girlhoods through Women’s Memoir” by Elizabeth Marshall and Theresa Rogers, it is explained that “memoir provides a unique mode for telling and invites readers to approach difficult issues from another vantage point,” which is valuable when considering why we read life narratives and even realism (Marshall and Rogers 17). The article focuses on works by women who write as a means of gaining control and understanding how life experiences shape our sense of self. The narratives explore the cultural and social construction of childhood. What children actually experience and how they make sense of the world when coming to terms with negative experiences inevitably effects their adulthood.

Making sense out of how negative and positive experiences shape cultural identity within a life narrative form became apparent and influential in my research and writing when considering the graphic novel *Perspepolis* by Marjane Satrapi within the course. The concept of
life as story is examined in Robert Root’s ‘Interview with Marjane Satrapi’. In Root’s interview the idea of how storytelling can be linked to life becomes clear as Satrapi discusses, that when we read or listen to fairy tales at a young age, we do not look for meaning but read to enjoy a story. Meaning-making comes later in life when most people begin to consider what life means to them and to others. In Root’s article, it becomes evident that individuals write autobiographies to make sense of the confusion that comes with life experience. We do not have to relate to another’s existence for it to make sense because it is a story, and as a story it is true. Satrapi’s narrative also calls into question social and cultural constructions of childhood, and like any life, it is not universally the same. There is no one exclusive definition of childhood or adulthood; normality does not exist. Life is different for everyone. In my research, life experience that is different from but also incorporates mainstream culture is what makes a work culturally authentic. Showing that there is no single way of being is also something that should be part of mainstream literature.

The article ‘Graphic Young Adult Novels: Deconstructing and Reinterpreting Persepolis From a Cultural Critical Perspective’ by Sean Connors explains how understanding can be achieved through multicultural life writing. Connors also discusses how multicultural texts can lead to students gaining an understanding of world views and experiences that differ from their own. He then problematizes the benefits with the negative outcome that may occur when students may come to “relegate the characters to the status of “Other” (183). It is often the case that when we read about anyone other than ourselves, we see them as “other”. We are ourselves and everyone else is the other. They are not us or like us, but we can learn from one another by sharing our experiences. Through reading and relating as part of a common humanity, we can all find significance in the everyday experiences of ourselves and of others. Marchetta’s characters
are different from my experience, but the cultural similarities and sense of hybridity are the reason I relate so well to Josie and Francesca.

*Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art* by Judith Barrington is an encouraging source for writers interested in the process and the form of writing a memoir. My life narrative is part memoir as I attempt to recount stories about life that my mother told me. My mother’s stories also remind me of how Marchetta’s Nona Katia tells Josie stories of how she adjusted to life in Australia as an Italian immigrant. Barrington’s work serves as a guide and includes comprehensive information to consider when taking on the writing of one’s own life or a family member’s life. Barrington explains what a memoir is and how the form has changed since it was once dominated by male writers. She explains that the memoir was originally described as something closer to an autobiography than the essay-like form it takes on presently. In the past, traditional memoirs also did not often explore one theme or aspect of life, like the memoirs of today. Barrington further describes how modern memoirs often take on a scrapbook form and function as a collection of life pieces preserved and recorded. She explains that the boundaries and definitions of the term memoir are still not clearly defined (19).

Barrington refers to the essayist form of memoir, like those of Charles Lamb and Montaigne, as close in form to the modern memoir of today. In these narratives the memoirist is telling the story and trying to understand what life experience means in current knowledge (20). Memoirs are also described as powerful tools that allow marginalized voices to be heard. Women, she adds, have appropriated the form as a means of empowerment. And social movements that have served to benefit the human rights and dignity of women and minorities have allowed many silenced individuals to have their voices heard and understood (12). For Barrington, memoir is not only a means of empowerment but also a way of understanding life.
She explains that the ways in which memories are shaped within a text are a means of conveying the truth to the reader (13).

Barrington’s work is organized with alternating sections explaining the memoir, its form, roots, and significance, and she also gives readers tips and tools for writing their own life story. She explains that “separating yourself as writer from yourself as protagonist will help give you the necessary perspective to craft the memoir as a story. It will also decrease the degree to which you feel exposed as others critique your work” (25). She further explains that in order to interest readers, an engaging conversational voice is often used. Another beneficial piece of advice from Barrington’s text, for the creative writing chapter of my thesis project, is the idea of not thinking about why someone else would care. Instead one should write about what one cares about and bring out what is important to the self (35).

The final source I considered before writing my narrative was the work Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice by Marlene Kadar. Within the work I focused on some of the ideas within two of Kadar’s essays: “Coming to Terms: Life Writing—from Genre to Critical Practice” and “Whose Life is it Anyway? Out of the Bathtub and into the Narrative.” In her work, life writing is an open term that refers to autobiographical fragments and other autobiographical texts which include autobiography, journals, memoirs, letters, testimonies, and metafiction (earlier terms included biography—which was often written as an objective form). In the first article, life writing “neither objectifies nor subjectifies the nature of a particular cultural truth” (Kadar 4). Within the work the idea of making an individual ordinary life significant is the most prominent theme.

Women’s writings are explained to have reclaimed the autobiographical form as they came to share stories and life experiences (5). Feminists validate and celebrate autobiography as
a literary form which once excluded their voices from the literary canon. Traditionally women’s voices were seen as ordinary rather than literary and were excluded from scholarly considerations (11-12). In exploring ordinary lives as a literary form, life writing departs from what was established as intellectual excellence in writing, to be valued as a new form. Depersonalization and abstraction were traditionally thought to be associated with “superior intellectual pursuits” (12). Kadar defines “life writing as a critical practice” which allows “(a) the reader to develop and foster his/her own self-consciousness in order to (b) humanize and make less abstract . . . the self-in-the-writing” (12).

Within Kadar’s second essay she explains that life writing includes fictional and non-fictional texts, but many consider the latter to be “more ‘true to life’ ” (152). Recent life narratives are said to disregard generic rules and often blend genres, create new genres, and disrupt “the once-respected ‘objective’ speaker or narrator” (152). They are also considered to be texts where new languages and blended languages can be expressed (something I use at times). Kadar goes on to explain that life writing was accepted with the influence that hermeneutics, reader-response theory, feminism, and psychoanalysis all had on changing the values of readers, critics, and the ethos of the postmodern writer (154-5).

Through the additional creative writing sources I have gained a solid foundation in and understanding of a form I wanted to explore further through my own writing. I found that writing a life narrative was an intimidating task, but after gaining a solid understanding of what I was attempting, the outcome seems to be a good start. I am not sure whether to call it a memoir or a life narrative and am uncertain as to whether it can be considered to be an autobiography. It is a collection of life sketches reflecting my Greek-Canadian life at this point.
I am choosing to write a life narrative so that I can make sense of my life experience and to possibly create a fictional, culturally authentic Greek-Canadian protagonist in the future. In writing my story, I have realized that it is not a story for children, but young adults may find it interesting. In it I have decided to use different narrative styles. Most of it is in third person and reads like a folk-tale, and some of it is in first person. It is easier to consider life when taking on the gaze of a third party especially when assessing memory.

Many concerns have arisen when considering the non-linear quality of the text. The narrative is fragmented and many gaps exist among its parts. The form I have taken emphasizes the folk-tale quality of the text, and the form may change as I attempt to weave the cultural sketches into a greater story. Overall the process has been enlightening and has functioned as means of making sense out of everyday life. This has been an encouraging opportunity to further explore a writing process I have attempted many times. Fiction can grow out of the sketches that make up the creative portion of this thesis, and over time it may take on the form of a full novel.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Theoretical Approach

I will address the two research questions posed in my Introduction in order to frame my analysis in the discussion of the significance of Melina Marchetta’s two teen novels *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Saving Francesca*, as culturally authentic works. In the textual analysis chapters of this thesis (Chapters 4 and 5) the two research questions are addressed by describing the significant depictions of cultural hybridity and authenticity in the novels. The two questions which are specifically addressed in the textual analysis chapters are:

1. How do Melina Marchetta’s first two novels represent cultural authenticity in regards to the character development of her two protagonists?

2. What do these representations in Marchetta’s texts communicate to readers when considering the hybrid nature of cultural identity?

Chapter 4 is a textual analysis of *Looking for Alibrandi* and Chapter 5 is a textual analysis of *Saving Francesca*. The two chapters will assess cultural identity, hybridity, and authenticity as they appear in the characters’ experiences in the two novels. My research in the previous Literature Review chapter contributes to my consideration of the novels in terms of authentic portrayals of youth growing up and forming a sense of identity between two cultures while living in contemporary Anglo-centric Australian society.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine the two protagonists’ sense of self and place within the societies they call home. The textual analyses also give consideration to and demonstrate an understanding of the meaning and importance of cultural authenticity in literature for young readers, particularly teens. Attention will also be given to the unique position of what it means to negotiate one’s identity as a descendent of recent immigrants in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century in multicultural Australian society.
Consideration will be given to how the protagonist’s narration, thoughts, and insights illustrate what it means to live between two cultures with a sense of fluidity. The dual sense of identity both protagonists display will be described using the term cultural hybridity in my analysis of the texts. The subjective description of characters in the development of each protagonist contributes to the realistic portrayal of generational culturally distinct youth, living in urban Anglo-centric society. Characters’ interactions with one another will also be analyzed in terms of culturally authentic dialogue and relationships. Josephine’s sense of negotiating cultural identity takes place in the late twentieth century (1992), while Francesca describes her cultural background in the early twenty-first century (2003) in an Australia that has become increasingly multicultural and has the appearance of being more tolerant toward diversity.

The theoretical framework to be used when analyzing the texts will draw from the idea of cultural hybridity, which is a result of being a part of a cultural diaspora as outlined in the works of cultural theorists Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha. Cultural hybridity is displayed in Marchetta’s protagonists, who are examples of what it means to have a dual sense of cultural identity, which forms when living between two cultures. The cultural hybridity displayed in Josie and Francesca’s sense of identity is the main factor making Marchetta’s works culturally authentic.

My analysis takes a cultural studies approach while also considering postcolonial theory in order to describe the Australian setting in which the narratives take place. Postcolonialism as outlined in my Literature Review will be applied to novels’ settings in terms of past cultural collisions which occurred in the English-speaking world as a result of the dissemination and dominance of Anglo-centric colonial society (McGillis xxvi). The contemporary Australia depicted in Marchetta’s works is multicultural but still dominated by Anglo norms. Further
cultural collisions are reflected in the multicultural populations which exist in Australia many decades post colonization. Immigrant populations in the present day are influenced by the society which developed in colonized nations, but many immigrants also adhere to the notion and potential of breaking away from the idea of Anglo-society as dominant (McGillis xxvi). The cultural bonds expressed between and among characters in Marchetta’s texts are evidence of both negative and positive cultural collisions which have occurred between cultures in Australian society. Further support for my argument, apart from cultural studies, will come from an interdisciplinary approach which includes texts from multicultural education and studies of cultural identity from the humanities and social sciences as outlined in my Literature Review. Each discipline is necessary when describing the complexity of portraying distinct cultural identity in an authentic way in English-language fiction for youth.

The two research questions posed will be outlined and addressed in Chapters 4 and 5. The textual analysis examines the authentic elements of culture within Marchetta’s *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Saving Francesca* which contribute to character development. The first research question posed will be examined in Chapters 4 and 5 in five ways which are listed as headings within each respective textual analysis chapter.

The first way in which culture will be addressed, in order to answer the first research question, is with an examination of how cultural authenticity relates to the protagonist’s Italian-Australian identity formation within the novel’s depictions of recent multicultural Australian society. Cultural signifiers will be used to analyze significant elements in the texts which include assessing the way in which cultural authenticity is reflected in language, art, heritage, customs, food, celebrations, traditions, religion, politics, education, values, moral, recreation, gender roles, and child rearing (Jobe 12). The components of culture to come across in excerpts
from the texts are a reflection of cultural authenticity which will be illustrated in descriptions of how the main characters interact with their surroundings and with the people who contribute to their identity formation.

The second way in which culture plays a role in cultural authenticity in character development is the examination of Josie and Francesca’s interactions within home and school. The third way is in the protagonists’ relationships with family, friends, classmates, and love interests. The relationships will be assessed while giving consideration to the way in which the female protagonists are represented in and against culture. The fourth sections of Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the family life experienced by the protagonists. Family history, such as the stories told to Josie by her grandmother, will be used to highlight how culture is weaved into the story in an authentic way. Francesca’s family life, especially her descriptions of how she and her brother are taken care of by extended family throughout her mother’s depression, is also discussed. The detailed complexity of the main characters’ interactions with classmates within the novels’ significant Australian setting, fits into Rudine Sims Bishop’s assessment of literature for young readers as being cultural authentic when “[a] story that captures the specifics and peculiarities of a people’s experience also captures something of the human experience, and thereby becomes “universal”’ (Bishop 30).

The fifth and final cultural element discussed, in order to answer my first research question, is the protagonist’s cultural position in society. The identity formation that occurs for the protagonists throughout the novels is described in terms of realistic resolution according to how an integrated sense of self is constructed by each novel’s conclusion. There are significant instances in the texts where the protagonists feel a part of Australian society and instances where they feel different from mainstream life because of cultural expectations placed upon them by
family (more so for Josie than for Francesca). The sense of being torn between two cultural value systems reflects how diasporic youth’s sense of living between two worlds is a way of forming a new sense of cultural identity different from the sense of previous generations. This new identity is constantly changing and reflects cultural hybridity as outlined by Hall (“Introduction” 2). Bhabha also sees the “in-between” stage as temporary and resulting in a new sense of cultural identity or hybridity (“Location” 227).

The second research question will be answered in the sixth and final sections of Chapters 4 and 5. The final section of the textual analysis chapters will focus on the significance of the ongoing cultural identity integration that Josie and Francesca reach by each novel’s conclusion. The significance of cultural identity integration is described by assessing how each respective protagonist feels about her cultural place in society and how she reflects on the world that has come to define her sense of identity.

Chapter 6 is my Creative Writing chapter which functions as a life-narrative and is a reflection of what cultural identity and authenticity mean in my life as a reader and a writer. The life-narrative is a reflection of the people, places, and experiences that have come to define my cultural sense of self. It also reflects my position as a reader relating to Marchetta’s cultural standpoint within her first two novels. The cultural standpoint relates to the cultural similarities I share with her protagonists as someone who grew up as part of a diaspora.

The conclusion of my thesis will bring together and summarize the significance of cultural authenticity in fiction for young readers. The conclusion displays my understanding of cultural hybridity as the key element of creating culturally authentic texts for children and teens. It will also highlight what cultural hybridity means in the present day and what it can lead to in the realm of literature for children and teens.
The title of Melina Marchetta’s 1992 debut novel, *Looking for Alibrandi*, does not signify that the story will overtly be about culture. The novel is authentic in its depictions of culture and also displays an unintentional normalization of culturally distinct characters in teen fiction. The title also does not denote multicultural settings as separate from the generic settings of mainstream fiction. Minghsu Cai and Rudine Sims note that “multicultural literature should include the literature of the dominant cultural group just as world literature should also include American literature” because they are both “the literary creation of humanity” (Cai and Bishop 60). The categorization of the novel as young adult or teen fiction rather than multicultural literature is one of the reasons that the work can be considered a strong example of cultural authenticity. The story appeals to all readers, while portraying the life of someone different from the mainstream population.

**Identity Formation and Character Development**

At first glance, the title *Looking for Alibrandi* suggests that the novel may be about a search for a person who may have become lost. After reading the novel the title proves to be related to a search for family and a search for self that is experienced by seventeen-year-old Josephine Alibrandi (known as Josie throughout the novel). The name Alibrandi is of significance to the story for its cultural meaning in Josie’s sense of identity. Much of the text revolves around Josie’s coming to terms with cultural strains placed on her life as an Italian-Australian teenager. She has an overbearing maternal Italian grandmother who sees her upbringing by a single mother (her daughter, Christina) as unconventional in terms of Italian
norms and traditions. The novel is focused on the typical life stresses involving family and friends that teens deal with in the western world during their final year of high school.

**Home and School**

The first example of cultural authenticity to be examined is Josie’s sense of self between the identity she has established between life at home and at school. Being from a single-parent home has resulted in Josie receiving a scholarship at a prestigious Australian Catholic school, St. Martha’s, which makes her feel inadequate, socially but not academically, in terms of the majority of the school’s population. Her narration expresses an insecure sense of place while at school because of the differences that exist between her financial and cultural position compared with the majority of her classmates’ social standing:

>[n]ot being able to go out a lot is one of my many problems. My biggest, though, is being stuck at a school dominated by rich people. Rich parents, rich grandparents. Mostly Anglo-Saxon Australians, who I can’t see having a problem in the world (Marchetta, “Looking” 6).

For Josie, classification according to wealth is also tied to culture. She explains further and describes other families of European descent in her school and how they are categorized in terms of work and wealth:

>Then there are the rich Europeans. They’re the ones who haven’t had a holiday for twenty years just so their children can go to expensive schools and get a proper education which they missed out on. These people might have money, but they’re grocers or builders, mainly labourers [...] I come under the ‘scholarship’ category, and when I say that, I would rather be the daughter of a labourer (6).
Here the term “European” denotes peoples of Mediterranean and Eastern European backgrounds who settled in Australia generations after the British colonization. The Italians who came to Australia created an Italian-Australian diaspora- a new life away from home in Italy. As an Italian-Australian, Josie feels that many of her wealthy classmates look down on her for being on a scholarship as well as for her illegitimacy (not having a father in her life), which is also looked upon with contempt by the Italian community.

She describes her sense of place at school within Australian society and also describes the school setting where she feels a secure sense of self with honesty, which gives readers insight into dominant and minority cultures in Australia in the early 1990s:

I ended up going to a school I didn’t like. I wanted to go to a school in the inner west where all my friends had gone. They were Italian and Greek [...] They were on my level. I related to them. They knew what it meant not to be allowed to do something. They knew what it meant to have a grandmother dressed in black for forty years. I looked like them [...] We sounded alike as well. It felt good being with other confused beings. We were all caught up in the middle of two societies. (7)

Josie finds comfort when she is around people who experience a similar sense of displacement. It is the same displacement she also carries in her life. Finding comfort in a similar or shared culture is a common sentiment shared by groups of diasporic peoples. Stuart Hall explains that a new place of settlement away from one’s originating home often results in “a narrative of displacement, that gives rise to certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to ‘lost origins’ ” (“Cultural” 120). In finding solace in relationships with others with a similar upbringing to her own, Josie as a protagonist realistically represents diasporic identity. It
is the friendships that she creates away from her comfort zone which allow her to gain a stronger sense of self and place within Australian society.

**Interactions with Friends, Classmates, and Love Interests**

Josie’s closest friends at St. Martha’s are a group of three girls with diverse personalities and cultural backgrounds. Sera is an attention-seeking Italian-Australian girl whom Josie describes as “brazen,” Anna is from a Croatian background and is quiet and nervous, and Lee is Anglo-Australian but something of an outcast. They bond because they don’t get along with “the snobs of St Martha’s” (Marchetta, “Looking” 21). Josie describes how and why they came together:

So I sat with Sera, who no one else would go near. Lee joined us so it wouldn’t seem as if she didn’t have friends and the three of us later rescued Anna. . . . We actually didn’t have our first conversation for a week. We just needed each other’s presence. (22)

Later in the text, Josie realizes that she and her friends are not outsiders but looked up to by other students. She realizes this after getting into trouble for skipping school during a walkathon. Her realization comes after being reprimanded with a talk about responsibility from Sister Louise, who makes her understand how influential she and her friends are:

Everyone loved Anna and everyone wanted to be Lee’s friend and although Sera got on everyone’s nerves she still managed to make people do the most incredible things and nobody ever called her a wog because she didn’t give a damn. And me? I was voted school captain (184).

In this instance of the text Josie realizes that social acceptance does not depend on where you come from but on who you are as a person. She comes to understand that although she and her friends are different from the dominant groups at school, everyone looks up to them and respects them for who they are.
Cultural prejudice is evident in the novel’s school setting through the actions and dialogue of various antagonists that Josie has to deal with while at school. The term ‘wog’ appears repeatedly throughout the text (as well as in the previous passage) and it takes on two meanings depending on who is using it and in what context. When Josie uses it to refer to herself it is to show that she differs from the mainstream. In contrast, conversations with various antagonists in the text display the harshness of the term:

Carly is the type of person who is constantly in the Sunday society papers . . . [she’s] already eighteen so she spends most of her evenings night-clubbing.

‘The night-club was the pits,’ I heard her say.
‘How come?’ Bettina Sanders asked.
‘They were all wogs. They seem to be everywhere,’ she snickered.
‘I beg your pardon, Carly?’ I asked, sick of her daily racist remarks. (81)

The term ‘wog’ in this passage is a reflection of racism and discrimination and causes Josie to lose her temper and hit Carly with her science text-book. When she calls her father, Michael Andretti, to school to get her out of legal trouble with Carly’s father, they discuss the term and why it angers her:

When an Italian or another person of European descent calls me a wog it’s done in good humour. When the word “wog” comes out of the mouth of an Australian it’s not done in good humour unless they’re a good friend. It makes me feel pathetic and it makes me remember that I live in a small-minded world and that makes me so furious. (88)

The politics of using the term ‘wog’ is evident in this passage as Josie’s dialogue displays the acceptable context in which the word can be used. This is useful for readers unfamiliar with the
word, but it should also be noted that the word is used in an Australian context, whereas in the UK the term is always derogatory and not used in casual conversation (dictionary.com n.pag). In Marchetta’s *Saving Francesca*, the term is worked into the text in a less overt way and takes place in casual conversation between culturally distinct youth (to be examined in Chapter 5).

Further racist remarks are illustrated in dialogue from Josie’s rival, Ivy Lloyd. The remarks are also part of the reason Josie feels like an unaccepted outsider at school:

‘How dare you call me a new Australian.’

‘You’re Italian aren’t you?’

‘I’m of Italian descent, thank you,’ I snapped . . .

She rolled her eyes and shook her head. ‘You know what I mean. You’re an ethnic.’

‘I’m not an ethnic,’ I spat out furiously. ‘I’m an Australian and my grandparents were Italian. They’re called Europeans, not ethnics. Ethnic is a word that people use to put us all in a category. And if you’d really like to know, Ivy, the difference between my ancestors and yours is that mine came out one hundred years after yours and mine didn’t have chains on their feet. They were free and yours weren’t.’ (165-6).

The dialogue here displays the anger and frustration Josie feels towards her position in society. Throughout the text Josie does not stand for racist remarks but in turn makes Anglo-Australians feel inferior when considering their own cultural position. Further dialogue which shows the way in which Josie feels about the irrationality of racism in Australia appears early on in Josie’s
relationship with Jacob Coote. The term “ethnic” is also seen as discriminatory in the following passage:

‘But then again I have never had to go out with an ethnic girl.’

‘Don’t you dare call me ethnic,’ I said, furious.

‘Well, what the hell are you? The other day you called me an Australian as if it was an insult. Now you’re not ethnic. You people should go back to your own country if you’re so confused . . .

‘Forget I said that.’

‘This is my country, I whispered. (123)

The passage displays a balanced look at the way in which cultural positions in society are viewed. Categorizing a person based on culture results in discrimination as exemplified by the harshness of tone in the passage. Josie and Jacob’s relationship in its early stages is difficult and full of arguments because she knows that her family would judge her critically if they knew she was dating an Anglo-Australian rather than an Italian-Australian.

**Family**

Josie’s grandmother, Nonna Katia, is her main link to her Italian heritage. Marchetta’s use of the term ‘Nonna’ is another way in which cultural authenticity is displayed. Similarly, aunts and uncles are referred to as ‘Zia’ and ‘Zio’ respectively and all characters have traditionally Italian given names. Josie is also referred to as Guiseppina, her traditional Italian name, in one instance during a family gathering (172). Family, names, traditions, and expectations are the things that tie Josie to her culture. The generational gap that exists between Josie’s beliefs and her grandmother’s is often the cause of anxiety in Josie’s life. Expectations and traditions are often the cause for arguments and distance in their relationship.
Josie’s visits to her grandmother’s home began after her grandfather’s death. She explains why in her narration: “My mother had been estranged from her family for years after my birth. It was only after my grandfather died that we were welcomed back into the fold” (35). Josie’s mother became pregnant as a teen and raised Josie as an unwed single mother, which further complicates Josie’s position in the Italian-Australian community and at school. Josie is encouraged to get along with her grandmother but expresses guilt about their relationship: “Sometimes I feel really sorry for her. I think that my birth must have cut her like a knife and I feel as if she’s never forgiven Mama. But she loves us, even if it is in a suffocating way, and that makes me feel very guilty” (35). Throughout the novel Josie is constantly torn between adhering to tradition and feeling trapped with the position culture puts her in.

The idea of different identity formation that results in future generations of Italians when settling in a diasporic home such as Australia is further exemplified in Josie’s relationship with her extended family. She often feels judged because of her untraditional upbringing and wishes to escape scrutiny:

They stifle me with ridiculous rules and regulations they have brought with them from Europe, but they haven’t changed with the times like the Europeans have. There’s always something that shouldn’t be said or done. There are always jobs I have to learn because all good Italian girls know how to do them and one day I’ll need to look after my chauvinistic husband. There’s always someone I have to respect” (40).

The diaspora that Hall explains relates to the old world expectations placed on Josie by her traditionally Italian family members. Holding on to traditions is a major concern of immigrants settling in a new country, but as they pass traditions down to the next generation, they overlook the fact that life changes in their country of origin. Hall would describe diasporic peoples’ sense
of place as one of “instability”, “permanent unsettlement,” and includes a “lack of any final resolution” (“Cultural” 114). As people of diasporic groups adjust and settle after generations in the “New World,” they change, but their country of origin changes as well. This divide in one’s notion of the self as part of a culture is permanently fractured. For Hall “we can’t literally go home again” (117). Josie’s integrated sense of identity can only be reached if her family and society move beyond binaries and traditions to realize that cultural identity changes and shifts when one lives between two cultural ways of life (Xie 2). Being part of a diaspora often leads Josie to feel frustrated with her cultural position. In her cultural position she has to be mindful of what both her Italian-Australian family and Anglo-Australians think of her.

Cultural authenticity comes across strongly through the specific detailed descriptions that are included in the stories Nonna Katia tells Josie. The stories reflect the hardships of making a home in Australia as an Italian in the 1930s. Her grandmother’s experiences also illustrate how Australian society has changed due to Italian immigration as she comes to describe how immigrants coped with the difficulties of building a home in a completely foreign land:

‘The Australians knew nuting about us. We were ignorant. They were ignorant. Jozzie, you wonder why some people my age cannot speak English well. It is because nobody would talk to them and worse still they did not want to talk to anyone. (Looking 78)

Nonna Katia’s description of life in the past and present appears truthful and balanced in illustrating the difficulties faced by early Italian immigrants in Australia. Her stories of loneliness in the Australian bush in a shack which was “one room and a dirt floor” in Ingham are believable, and readers become as empathetic as Josie in hearing about the struggles (78). Mingshui Cai notes that “cultural authenticity is the basic criterion for evaluating multicultural literature” which means that the “realities reflected in multicultural literature are the culturally
specific realities that ethnic groups experience (Cai 168). Nonna Katia’s stories appear throughout the novel and are an integral part to Josie’s understanding of her own and her family’s identities:

We lived in our own little world and as more relatives and friends from the same town came out to Australia, the bigger our Italian community became, to the point where we didn’t need to make friends with the Australians. (Looking 78)

Nonna’s stories are juxtaposed with Josie’s understanding of what life was like for Italian-Australians in her grandmother’s day in comparison with her own time: “I thought it was ironic that the same ignorance that was around back then is still here now” (79). Seeking sameness, while adjusting to difference, explains the cultural boroughs or ethnic enclaves that developed in Australia during Nonna Katia’s time. The Italians created their own communities to help one another and constructed a comfortable space within a foreign land. As a third generation Italian-Australian, Marchetta creates a familiar landscape in Australia of which Italian life is an integral part. Through Nonna Katia’s stories, the reader and Josie gain a sense of why peoples of the same culture settle in the same locations when they become part of a diaspora. In such places culturally distinct groups seek to find a sense of place while integrating their cultures into the new country they are to call home. Within ethnic enclaves, cultural groups settle, grow, and transform (Keung n.pag.). Even in maintaining a cultural sense of self, one’s identity is constantly changing and shifting, especially with subsequent generations. The shift of cultural integration can be seen in Josie and her mother’s lives as they deal with scrutiny from both Anglo-Australians and Italians and they come to develop their own sense of cultural identity.
**Cultural Position in Society**

Because Josie, as an Italian-Australian, is judged by both people within her culture and Anglo culture she often refers to one day being “emancipated” from judgement in the future (Marchetta, “Looking” 40). The emancipation is described early on in the text as Josie expresses this hope:

> I’ll run one day. Run for my life. To be free and think for myself. Not as an Australian and not as an Italian and not as an in-between. I’ll run to be emancipated. If my society will let me. (40)

The emancipation she dreams of is difficult to achieve, it means not being just Italian, or only Australian; it means being an accepted and new form of both cultures. The new form of the integration of both cultures is a reflection of cultural hybridity. In Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity the self and the other are seen as one in order to form a new negotiated sense of cultural identity (cited in Xie 2). For Josie, reaching the level of cultural integration that would result in cultural hybridity is difficult. The pressure of living between the two worlds is further expressed in her narration:

> The gossiping of the Italian community might not matter to some, but I belong to that community. Sometimes I feel that no matter how smart or how beautiful I could be they would still remember me for the wrong things. That’s why I want to be rich and influential. I want to flaunt my status in front of those people and say ‘See, look who I can become.’ Mama says that satisfaction isn’t what I should search for. Respect is (Marchetta *Looking* 138).

The dual sense of culture that Josie develops throughout the course of the novel is an example of how adolescence, as a stage in life, is where one gains an understanding of what it means to negotiate a sense of self and live with a sense of cultural hybridity.
Negotiating a sense of integrated cultural identity is difficult for Josie because she cannot abandon one culture in favour of the other. She lives in an Australia dominated by Anglo norms and has grown up Italian. Her family is an inescapable part of her life, which is evident in her narration: “like religion, culture is nailed into you so deep you can’t escape it. No matter how far you run” (175). The cultural authenticity of Josie’s search for self is a reflection of the notion of cultural hybridity as outlined by Homi Bhabha. In his work he attempts “to negotiate narratives where double-lives are led in the postcolonial world, with its journeys of migration and its dwellings of the diasporic” (“Location” 213). Josie’s frequent shifts in how she feels about how Australian and Italian-Australian societies view her and how she wants to view herself are a further reflection of how a new identity can be formed. The new identity formation reflects Bhabha’s view of “the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions, through which ‘newness comes into the world’” (227). The complexity of the way in which Marchetta communicates what it means to be a cultural hybrid in Anglo society results in the novel’s cultural authenticity.

**Significance of Cultural Identity Integration**

When comparing the passage discussed at the beginning of this chapter, which details Josie’s feelings about being Italian-Australian, to the final passage, which states how she feels about her cultural background, the reader notices a transition and growth in Josie’s perceptions:

I’ll run one day. Run for my life. To be free and think for myself. Not as an Australian and not as an Italian and not as an in-between. I’ll run to be emancipated. If my society will let me. *(Looking 40)*

In one of the final passages, she has reached a different level of integration. She is less worried about what her family or the rest of society thinks of her. There is a sense of confidence and
pride in her individuality. She no longer wants to run away from everyone who judges her sense of place:

If someone comes up and asks me what nationality I am, I’ll look at them and say that I’m an Australian with Italian blood flowing through my veins. I’ll say that with pride, because it’s pride that I feel. (259)

At seventeen years old Josie reaches a level of cultural identity integration that works as a resolution to Marchetta’s novel. Josie’s sense of cultural identity constantly shifts throughout the novel and by the work’s conclusion the reader is left with an understanding of how Josie’s sense of identity has formed for her by the age of seventeen. How her view of cultural identity will shift or change remains unknown to the reader. The cultural pride instilled in Josie’s character is subtly reflected in the fluidity of Francesca’s Italian-Australian character. For Saving Francesca, culture and identity are intertwined in a realistic multicultural setting. This in turn also reflects the different sense of identity that each subsequent generation of diasporic youth integrates within itself.
Chapter 5: Textual Analysis #2

*Saving Francesca* by Melina Marchetta

Melina Marchetta’s *Saving Francesca* is a culturally authentic text that is not overtly multicultural in its title or in its content. The 2003 novel is not as focused on the cultural position of the protagonist as compared to *Looking for Alibrandi*. Francesca is sixteen years old, adjusting to life at a new school, and is also trying to keep her family together as they deal with her mother’s depression. The Italian-Australian cultural references are subtly intertwined with the text, and culture is displayed as part of normal everyday life. Published in 2003, a generation after *Looking for Alibrandi*, *Saving Francesca* represents a contemporary vision of multiculturalism in Australian society.

**Identity Formation and Character Development**

*Saving Francesca* is a worthy example of how culture is normalized in the context of postcolonial and multicultural Australia. Francesca’s cultural identity is revealed perceptively; it is a more subtle part of the descriptions of her identity, rather than an issue throughout the novel. Her background is initially revealed in a humorous description of the golden boy at the all-boys Catholic school, St. Sebastian’s, which has just admitted thirty girls, including Francesca. At the outset of their relationship, she is indifferent to him and her only link to him is a feud between their grandmothers:

My grandmother knows William Trombal’s grandmother, which I think makes him half Italian. She claims that William Trombal’s grandmother stole her S biscuit recipe and she dislikes her with a passion although they pray together in the same rosary group each week. Not that William Trombal and I have ever acknowledged this connection.

(*Saving* 13)
The passage displays Francesca’s background as a cultural detail in a larger story about family and friendship. The main issue in *Saving Francesca* is her family having to cope with her mother’s long term depression. Much of the story revolves around how the issue of depression in their family affects their lives. Her mother’s illness alters Francesca’s life routine, which once depended on her mother’s guidance.

**Home and School**

At St. Sebastian’s, Francesca is separated from her overbearing but popular group of friends and unwittingly befriends a group of girls she thought were outcasts at her old school. St. Sebastian’s is a culturally diverse school, which is initially unsettling for Francesca who reflects:

> At Stella’s, we all came from the same area and I liked the closeness of it all. Here I don’t feel a sense of community. The city is too big and the school is like an island at the edge of it. An island full of kids from all over Sydney, rather than one suburb. Nothing binds it together; no one culture, no one social group. (35)

Despite her discomfort and feelings of displacement, she slowly pieces together a new life at St. Sebastian’s, one where she can be herself without worrying about what the popular friends whom she used to depend on for a sense of social acceptance at St. Stella’s will think of her. St. Sebastian’s serves as a new place for negotiating her identity. As she begins to interact with and appreciate the diverse people she sees on a daily basis, she gains a sense of place in her new world. Postcolonial formation of hybrid identities as outlined in Bhabha’s work relates to Francesca’s situation in gaining a sense of self and place at her initially uncomfortable new school. Bhabha establishes that postcolonial discourse serves to resist “holistic forms of social explanation” because societies are made up of many parts and peoples, which results in the creation of complex cultural and political perimeters (“Location” 173). In her new school,
Francesca feels out of her element but slowly befriends a diverse group of girls who unknowingly help her piece her life back together.

**Interactions with Friends, Classmates, and Love Interests**

The intentions of Francesca’s old group of friends from St. Stella’s are described early on in the text when she explains: “they wanted to rescue me from Siobhan and I relished being saved because it meant that people stopped tapping me on the shoulder to point out what I was doing wrong” (Marchetta Saving 3). She tries to blend into the background while stifling her outgoing personality and admits: “I might not be interested in being in the most popular group in the world, but I’m less interested in being an outcast” (13). Over the course of the novel she befriends her ex-friend Siobhan Sullivan, a girl who doesn’t care what others think of her, Justine Kalinsky, a shy accordion player, and Tara Finke, who is interested in promoting changes towards equality between the sexes at school. Through Tara’s somewhat forced political activism placed upon them, they become friends and bring a sense of unity to the school.

Marchetta creates a realistically diverse school setting in *Saving Francesca* and introduces its characters with honesty through humorous encounters in forming new friendships. In Francesca’s confused and depressed state of trying to deal with home and feeling out of her element at school, she meets a group of boys who welcome her with a sense that they are all part of diaspora:

After ten minutes, I’ve had enough and walk out of the toilets, across the courtyard am beckoned over by the group who sit against the wall. These guys are European and I know it’s time to do the cultural bonding thing. Sometimes they nod at me. A you-and-me-are-the-same nod. I wonder if they ever nod at William Trombal. (47)
The boys Francesca encounters in this passage are realistically constructed in terms of the cultural pride they display, which reflects how diasporic individuals feel a strong connection towards their country of origin:

You Italian?’ they ask.

I nod.

They pat the space next to them and I make myself comfortable.

‘Portuguese,’ I’m told by the guy who called me over. His name is Javier . . . and every time one of the teachers pronounces his name with a J in class there’s a booing sound . . . ‘She’s Italian,’ Javier tells one of the guys who joins them from the tuck shop . . . The others are Diego, Tiago and Travis, who they call a wannabe wog.

‘You shy Francesca?’ Javier asks me, later on.

I shake my head. ‘Not really.’ I’m just sad, I want to say. And I’m lonely. (47)

The term ‘wog’, as noted above, has shifted in the 2003 text to a term that culturally distinct youth have come to claim as their own. The term is originally derogatory, referring to peoples of non-Anglo-Australian backgrounds. In Looking for Alibrandi, the term is used by Anglo-Australians in an insulting manner towards Josie. When Josie uses the term in a conversation with her father the reader gains an understanding that the term can be used by distinctly ethnic individuals between themselves but not with Anglo-Australians. Within Saving Francesca, the term is used by culturally distinct youth among themselves in a way that highlights how they see sameness in each other by differing from mainstream Australians. Being considered different results in their cultural bonding and understanding even though they all come from different cultural backgrounds.
Further culturally significant shifts in language are displayed in, *Saving Francesca*, with Shaheen, a minor character, through whom cultural connections between Australian youth are most evident. Camaraderie develops between Francesca and Shaheen, who comes from a Lebanese background. He is in few of the text’s passages but displays an integration of self confidence as a result of Lebanese cultural pride and also displays a love for hip-hop culture. As a teen character, he is realistically constructed. In the following passage, his pride, humour, and honesty are displayed with Francesca in a conversation that occurs during biology class regarding a party they both attended on the weekend. The term ‘wog’ is also used with humour in their conversation:

‘By the way, is it true that you and Trombal pashed?’

‘He was drunk.’

‘You should go out with wogs.’

‘He is a wog.’

‘But not like us.’

‘Are you asking me out, Shaheen?’

‘Are you sick? As if you’re my type. You didn’t even know who Tupac was.’

I try not to look offended. ‘You could have let me down a lot more gently.’

He laughs. ‘You’re cool even though you’re not a Leb.’ (125-126)

The conversation depicted in the text is an authentic representation of how young people interject their cultural backgrounds into conversations with one another. When coming from different backgrounds, cultures can be compared and talked about in a light-hearted and joking way. Shaheen and Francesca understand one another in this passage; she is not offended by his use of the term ‘wog’ and does not take the comment about her not being Lebanese to heart. Details
such as these are important and display the author’s cultural knowledge of what it means to live in a multicultural society as a young person of a distinct cultural background. Cultural authenticity and hybridity are evident in Marchetta’s understanding of the politics of the language used between culturally distinct youth. The author also communicates the politics of language to readers who are both familiar and unfamiliar with the use of the term ‘wog’ in current Australian context.

**Family**

In *Saving Francesca*, readers gain a sense of Francesca’s paternal grandparents when she has to stay with them while her mother is suffering through depression. Her younger brother, Luca stays at their Zia Theresa’s place, and Francesca ends up with her grandparents. Cultural understanding is not a prominent theme within the work, but the small cultural details about Francesca’s everyday life are what make the work culturally authentic. The depiction of her grandparents is one that readers can relate to and also functions as a reflection of what Mingshui Cai refers to as “culturally specific realities” which contribute to a work’s cultural authenticity (168). The passage humorously describes everyday life as it exists for elderly Italian-Australians and is reflected on by sixteen year old Francesca:

> Nonna Anna and Nonno Salvo are television fanatics, especially the game shows . . . They have absolutely no idea what the questions asked are, but they are excited by the process and the coloured lights and the money symbols flashing up at different intervals. (Marchetta *Saving* 54)

The humorous introduction to her paternal grandparents’ home life is authentic and relatable to readers of the text. Her Nonna Anna’s controlling way is similar to that of Josie’s Nonna Katia in *Looking for Alibrandi*. Francesca reflects on this character trait and explains “My
grandmother’s disapproval of the way Mia runs the household is very vocal . . . ‘Tutto a posto,’ she says . . . Everything in its place. But my family is split into three, and no one is in their place” (55). The interjection of Italian language into the text at a poignant moment functions as a reflection of Francesca’s Italian heritage to the reader in an indirect way.

Tradition and family responsibility are also significant signs of culture for readers. Through examples of family responsibilities, readers come to gain a sense of expectations of manners placed on Italian youth by their elders:

Once a month, my nonna has the Rosary at her place. About twenty people, male, female, mostly over sixty, mostly Italian-speaking, invade the house, their voices rising above each other as if they’re arguing rather than just greeting. I’ve promised my nonna that I’ll make the coffee while they’re saying the Rosary. (83)

Francesca is expected to greet all the guests and take care of serving refreshments to them throughout the duration of the Rosary. Small actions and cultural details in the setting of the novel are another example of how the work can be considered as culturally authentic. Francesca is a young Italian-Australian who functions between two cultures with ease, and cultural identity is not an issue in the text. Culture comes across as identifiable in the work even though it is not an issue within the story. The inadvertent cultural hybridity displayed in Francesca also contributes to a form of cultural authenticity that can fit into mainstream fiction for teens.

**Cultural Position in Society**

Cultural position in *Saving Francesca* is typically linked to grandparents. Francesca’s cultural identity becomes most apparent and understandable while she is at her grandparents’ home or is speaking about her grandmother. Grandparents also make Will Trombal’s identity known. Francesca and Will do not get along in their first encounters at school and have to speak when
Will comes to pick up his grandmother from her nonna and nonno’s home. The awkward feeling they initially experience at starting a conversation with one another disappears once they begin talking about grandparents, the common cultural bond between them, which gradually leads to their romantic interest in one another.

‘It’s good of you to run around after your grandmother,’ I tell him.

He nods. He thinks it’s fantastic too.

‘I’m her favourite. Youngest grandson and all. You know how Italians are about all that stuff?’

The girls in my family have always been the favourites, so no I don’t, I’d like to say.

‘You don’t look Italian,’ I tell him.

‘Half.’

‘Which half?’

He thinks for a moment and I see a ghost of a smile appear on his face.

‘The pigheaded side.’

I thought you said you were only half Italian?’ (85)

The passage reveals family dynamics, cultural humour, and character development as Francesca begins to interact with Will outside of school. Marchetta’s knowledge of appropriate cultural humour is also evident within the passage and Will’s comment about being half Italian is understood as funny on a universal level. In Saving Francesca cultural hybridity in Marchetta’s protagonist comes across in a subtle way and has much to do with humorous details about family life.
Significance of Cultural Identity Integration

Cultural integration is never an issue in terms of ethnicity in *Saving Francesca*. The overall focus of the work is a reflection of Francesca’s search for comfort and stability as she copes with adjusting to a new school, while her mother is absent from her life and struggling with depression. A theme throughout the work is Francesca’s gaining an overall appreciation for individuality whereas she used to hide her outgoing personality. Her final reflection on a school without her overbearing friends results in the resolution of her identity:

I love this school. I love how uncomplicated it is and the fact that we come from almost two hundred suburbs so we have to work hard at finding something to hold us together. There’s not a common culture or social group. There’s a whole lot of individuality where it doesn’t matter that we’re not all going to be heart surgeons and it doesn’t matter whether you sing in a choir . . . or are victorious at basketball. I remember a poem we’re studying . . . About constants in a world of variables. That’s what this place is I guess. And it might be mundane, but I think I need the constant rather than the variable at the moment. (240)

The novel, *Saving Francesca*, celebrates what it means to be yourself without worrying about judgement from others. The work carries a positive message of accepting and acknowledging individuality. The small cultural details interspersed throughout the text which contribute to character development make the work culturally authentic.
Chapter 6: Creative Writing - Writing a Life

The following life-narrative is a reflection of the sense of cultural hybrid identity that I have developed while living between Greek and Canadian culture. Much of the narrative comes from piecing together vague stories my mother has told me in Greek. Many of the stories are told through my own fragmented understanding of the oftentimes sad and sometimes humorous life accounts I have been hearing throughout my life from my mother and other family members.

The narrative is also a reflection of my own experience as someone living between two cultures in home and school settings in Toronto and Vancouver and my experiences of family visits to Greece.

An Introduction to Identity

Vasso/Vasiliki/Vasoula/Vasilikoula/Βασσά/Βασιλική are all variations of the same name. I respond to any form that is called out to me, I write it out in two languages. My name is normal and known to Greeks but not to most non-Greeks. In school sometimes I’ve felt like I’ve never had a name, being constantly mispronounced on an ongoing basis, while the normal names just get ticked off on attendance lists. It’s one of the most common girl’s names in the Greek language. My name is not a normal girl’s name in English, it’s strange sounding. Someone once said it’s strange that it’s a girl’s name because it ends with an ‘O’.

While completing an undergraduate degree, in some classes my name was never pronounced properly at all. The idea that Vasso is the short form of Vasiliki is pretty much foreign to almost everyone who tries to utter the name. I know I can’t expect most non-Greeks to know this normal function of my name. My mother was going to name me after her grandmother instead of her mother. I would’ve been, Penelope but her sisters disagreed. Penelope would have been a lot easier to live with, but I don’t really care for the name.
At UBC, living in a graduate residence that focuses on internationalism proves to be enriching but not always comforting. Initial introductions put me in an entirely new position of negotiating who I am compared to those around me. Most students at St. John’s College are studying abroad but I am a born Greek-Canadian. For international students I could very well seem to be abroad just as they are. For those of Anglo North-American descent, my identity is not fully recognizable at first glance. I am white in appearance, with no apparent foreign accent, but I bear an unfamiliar name. Once a student from the US introduced himself as Ryan and asked where I was from. I responded: “I’m Greek, both parents are from Greece, and I was born and raised in Toronto”. His response was “Ah, Greek by way of Toronto”. I don’t know if I should feel offended by his response. Does being Greek-Canadian make me less Greek, not a real Greek, or someone who should just adapt to a Canadian way of life and forget where mom and dad came from? I learned Greek before English. It is what connects me to my mother. Speaking to her in English doesn’t feel right. It’s not only language that makes me Greek. Having a Greek identity is about culture and customs, attitudes and mannerisms, cuisine, and an overall way of life.

Being
I often think of the kind of life I would be leading if I had not been born in Toronto. In a way, I have a sense of what it would be like. Most of my mother’s immediate family lives in rural and urban parts of Greece. I have visited them a few times throughout my life. As much as I love being there, I feel that I am different than my cousins. I can understand where they are coming from and how they think, but they do not fully understand me. The existence I have lived is something that is integrated into me. It cannot be fully understood from the outside. A full understanding of the diaspora that I am a part of comes from experience.
What am I? Who am I? How do I answer these questions? In writing all of this I don’t want to sound clichéd or overly dramatic. I am trying to make sense of who I am and the person I have come to be. In writing sometimes I elaborate and fictionalize some of my life narrative because writing a life, my own, is a completely self conscious task. Making sense out of memory is difficult and in order to convey people and places I am relying heavily on feelings, memories, photographs, and artefacts of things and people I have known but do not fully remember.

My mother is the central figure in much of this narrative. At certain points she may appear naïve, but that is because she told me she was once that way. Now I see her as someone I need to guide but at a young age my mother appeared to me as an all-knowing powerful protector. She offered safety and security and her word was the truth. My entire life is indebted to my mother. The love and care she gave to me shaped my life and my existence. My mother begins the story, and she is what gives way to my voice and articulation of new identity formation.

**Departing**

She sat, waiting, not knowing whether or not she was in the right section of the airport, when a woman dressed in a blue and white flight attendant uniform approached her.

“Yiota Papaetthimiou?”

She looked up from where she was seated. Maybe she was in the right area. Not knowing English, she guessed she had chosen the right place and sat staring out the window thinking “is this England? It doesn’t look like anywhere. I’ll just wait until someone guides me to where I am supposed to go.”

She nodded to the woman.
“We have called your name three times over the announcements.”

“I didn’t hear it, sorry, can I still get on the plane to Canada, is it still here?”

“Yes, come on, I’ll take you in. You should have asked for help.”

“I don’t know English, everyone was moving quickly.”

She got onto the plane and listened to the emergency instructions in English, Greek, and French. An elderly Greek woman in the seat beside her crossed herself in the Orthodox way before the plane departed.

**Diaspora**

Another airport, another time zone, another place, looks the same. Canada? Toronto? Many Greeks have gone to Montreal. How is it different? Just keep following the mother and her children who were on the same plane.

Suitcases revolve, all looking the same. What if hers was lost? It had travelled such a long way. There it was, old and gray, given to her by one of her six sisters. Now I have to find the only one of them who lives here or whoever she has sent to get me.

She looked different from before. Five years had passed since she had seen her. She was married, and she had one child, all in Canada, where she would also try to build her own life.

Trees, flat gray land, and large expanses of plain green grass, as far as one can see. No mountains or sea. The sky seems further from the earth here.

The taxi the three of them sat in was passing over large multi-lane roads. They passed what was called the Don Valley.

They arrived in front of a white apartment building fifteen stories high. The street was lined with gray, brown, and white apartment buildings. Her brother-in-law told her that it was called Cosburn Avenue and that many Greeks lived in this neighbourhood.
For the next three years she took care of her sister’s two mischievous boys.

**The Old Woman**

How is Δημήτρη/Demetri the same as Jim? Greek people here are strange when it comes to choosing names. Why do they even bother to choose English names that sound strange and don’t mean anything in Greek? She is supposed to be Penny. How does that make sense?

Jim was a decent man to marry. He was the youngest of five with four older sisters and lived with his parents out of respect. Many dutiful Greek men stay near their parents. She would be back home now if they were not getting married.

The old woman and the old man lived on the first floor of the house. The old woman was distant yet felt the need to take Panagiota under her inept guidance. She spoke in a loud high voice and was full of neighbourhood gossip. Somehow she knew the goings on of everyone in the area, Greeks and non-Greeks. She was lively and in good health but often complained and moaned about being ill.

The old man was quiet and had survived a Greek Civil War. His wife had false teeth but his were intact and all his own. The old man had a need to collect things, anything practical that would be of use. After a few years the basement was filled with odds and ends, broken garden machinery, umbrellas, and endless supplies of cleaning products and toiletries. He was to take care of the old woman for as long as he lived.

**The Old Man**

Sometimes he tells stories about the way the city was when he first came.

Nowadays it’s hard to find work. I worked at three different jobs. In those days they didn’t ask if you had any education or spoke English when you wanted to come to Canada. All they asked was if you wanted to work. I worked at Dempster’s bread factory during the day,
then at night until four in the morning I would work in a restaurant on Danforth. I also worked at a market on Jarvis on weekends. All they had to do was show you how the job was done and that was it. I gave the job on Danforth to your uncle when he came over.

Sometimes his stories are difficult to follow. He speaks as though I would be able to follow a time before my own.

_Did you come alone at first? What year?

I came alone in 1966 and then brought the rest of the family over later that year.

_Where did you live? When did you buy this house?

We lived on Parliament at first, renting out the main floor of a house. There were three bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchen. Then we lived on Simpson Avenue with my brother. I bought this house after that.

**Home**

The red brick house was bought by the old man in the late 1960s. He had worked in Dempster’s bread factory until his retirement. There was one phone line and the old woman was constantly picking up the phone without needing to make a phone call. Panagiota’s sister, Maria, came for a visit from back home. Maria told her to cook in her own kitchen upstairs and to get her own phone line to make the place her home. Her life was her own. She shouldn’t be controlled by any one else. One night Panagiota came home from visiting her sister and went upstairs. This was also her home now and she wanted it to be a home for her family.

**Care**

Two little girls were playing in the room by the kitchen. Her babies had grown to be one and two years old. Both were born on the same day. One was named after the old woman, Eleftheria, and the younger was named after her own mother, Vasiliki. Effie and Vasso, names
meaning Freedom and Royal. The two girls were like night and day. They sat on the floor, Vasso with a doll in her arm and Effie with a colouring book. Effie wanted the doll and gave Vasso a hard push. Ωχί, οχί, καλό, καλό, her mother said, while stroking Vasso’s hair with Effie’s hand. She’s good, she’s nice, don’t hurt her. Vasso didn’t cry but gave her doll over to her sister. She knew she wanted to have it. What am I supposed to do with this one? She wants everything, and cries until she gets it. How is the other one so quiet and sleeps all the time? The old woman once told her this is the child of God. What about the one named after you, she is my baby too, and I love them both. You don’t bother to take care of them or want to, I have no help from you, do not judge what is mine. She wanted to say it all out loud but she remained cordial and respectful when it came to the old woman.

**Home Cooking**

At four years old Effie would run through the second floor of the house, closing all of the open room doors during thunderstorms. It was a peculiar task she felt she had to do when it got too loud. She would sit in the kitchen with Mama who would tell her not to be scared.

“Why does it go boom, boom, boom?” Effie asked.

“Because the clouds are letting the rain out,” said Mama.

“Oh, but it makes me scared.”

“It’s loud but it will stop soon.”

“Tell me a story,” Effie said eagerly.

“First I have to get your food ready. Go get Vasso please.”

Effie ran down the hall rapidly to the living room where Vasso was on the couch staring at Big Bird on the screen. She saw Effie and sat up excitedly.

“Look,” she held up a piece of paper and on it was the shakily printed word ‘LOOK’. 
“It says ‘look’ and I wrote it by myself,” Vasso said.

“Where did you learn it?”

“The singing chickens spelled it out for me with Big Bird.”

“You’re smart and you don’t go to school like me. Come on. Mama says it’s time to eat.”

“Oh, ok!” said Vasso.

The two ran to the kitchen.

“Mama! Tell us a story. The Three Little Pigs, please!”

“The one where the wolf runs to his mama at the end, and she has to put Vaseline on his burned bum-bum” said Effie.

Yiota sat at the table with her little ones, helping Vasso, who was scared of piercing her tongue with the fork. The children ate a dish of okra and potatoes cooked and simmered in tomato sauce with diced vegetables in it. Most mothers were surprised that their children liked hearty home cooked food. She began the story and the two children looked at her entranced.

“Once upon a time there were three little pig brothers and they loved each other very much …”

**The Fields**

My mother tells me that she came to Canada on her own at eighteen so that she wouldn’t have to work in the tobacco fields near her hometown. Waking hours before sunrise to start the long and laborious work day is something she wished to escape. The snakes coiled around the bases of the plants also frightened her. She was looking for a better life when deciding to come to Canada but all the while she wanted to live in Greece.
I remember the tobacco fields at four years old. I was with my sister and with my cousin, who lived in the village, both were five. We were often introduced as relatives from America, and to this, I would respond: “Not America, Canada it’s not the same place”. We would play all day in the summer heat, my sister collecting grasshoppers in a shoe-box and pulling the goats from their ropes. I would fill a big green basin with water creating my own little swimming pool and sit in it with a bathing suit on. The grown-ups would sit sorting the tobacco leaves after collecting them. They would load them into big ovens where their green colour would turn to a burnt brown. My uncle would roll the tobacco into cigarettes and smoke one after the next. As children we didn’t give thought to what the place was. We would be as happy as ever running around the dirt paths without fear knowing where we were was safe. Nothing was foreign to us. We were all family.

The adaptability of childhood is something that is lost in adulthood. Feeling out of place is inescapable with life and with experience. We once have an ability to adapt and make ourselves part of a place and then we lose it. There is no comfort or stability. Who am I really? Who could I be? Am I supposed to be someone else entirely?

**Fleeting Language**

In the second grade, Vasso brought her school books home. She loved reading English books but could not keep up with her Greek work. The Greek teacher had left a note on her reading that said that she needed improvement. She had never seen her mom so upset and angry so she ran to her room and hid.

How are her children supposed to know their language? What if they grew up to not speak or retain a word of it? What was she to do? She did not spend as much time with them
now that they were in school and she could tell that they spoke in Greek less often. It worried her but she had no control over the matter. She had no control over who they would become.

**Goats**

One day, when she was ten, Vasso decided to write a story about grandma for school. She went downstairs to find grandma sitting in the kitchen.

“Grandma can you tell me about when you were a little girl?”

Grandma began and ended with a tired look on her face.

In her notebook, later on, Vasso wrote:

*Grandma wanted to go to school but her mom and dad told her to watch the goats on the hills.*

*Grandma was scared being by herself with only the goats. She wanted to go to school but was not allowed to. Grandma can’t write or read now and says if her mom and dad let her go to school she could have learned how. She said that she liked wearing her hair in two long braids but the women cut it off when she had to get married. The women were mean and cruel to her because she had many little girls and only one boy. The women made grandma sad. Grandma is here now. Sometimes she is happy, sometimes she is sad and she always says she does not feel well.*

Vasso looked at the story wondering if she should let the teacher read it because it made her grandma sound weird, not like a normal happy grandma.

**Incomplete Language**

It would have been nice to get this homework out of the way when it was assigned but I always leave it to get done the night before. Saturday morning I have to get up and hand this in first thing. I write my name on the top right corner: Βασίω Τασσιόπουλος/Vasso Tassiopoulos.

Short essay question: write a brief family history. I know by this they mean where your parents
came from and if you’ve been back to Greece. I start writing but always with an insecure feeling. It would be easier to write in English. I could make this more interesting and describe things with ease. In Greek I get stuck with spelling difficulties and consult the dictionary for every other word. So many letters can make the long ‘e’ sound, there are also two ‘o’s. My cousins in Athens say that even people in Greece get confused with spelling but they may just be trying to make me feel better. My mother says that one of her uncles used to say “I know one ‘e’ and that’s the one I use”. Sometimes I resort to this philosophy in class especially during dictation.

We All Go Through It

“I think they have kids just so they’ll do everything for them.”

My cousin is right. She knows what it means to have to make phone calls, write letters, and fill out forms for parents. English is the problem with all these things. It usually starts at about ten years old.

“Call the cable company. Why is this bill so high? I don’t understand what they are talking about on the phone”.

_I know I understand but you don’t agree with what I tell you they say on the phone anyways._

“Run downstairs and answer the door for the phone repair people”.

_They won’t take me seriously, I’m just a kid. They want to talk to an adult._

“Fill out this form for my time-off from work.”

_My hand-writing looks like a kid’s._

“It looks nicer than mine, you write so nicely”.

_Sure, sure._
“Write a note for school and I will sign it”.

*I could write anything, but obviously I don’t, it wouldn’t be right.*

My dad apparently avoids all of this somehow. Decisions of any kind make him nervous. There is probably a reason for this reaction but I don’t think he would react well if I were to bring it up. If I make bad decisions on behalf of the family I guess I have to fix them. He probably thinks the same thing.

Other kids don’t have to do this stuff for their parents. At school Canadian kids don’t have to take care of all of those things, but a lot of my Chinese friends have the same problem. I guess we just have to argue with our siblings about who has to take care of what. Only children in such situations come off as the most independent. For someone who doesn’t like to talk too much this makes me anxious. I wish I was as sheltered as some of the Canadian kids in school, the ones whose parents only know English.

**School**

Days pass without any substantial learning. Nothing I don’t already know. So much that I have never known about myself. Days pass without ever feeling normal or good enough to get to where the privileged ‘Canadian’ kids are going, the sheltered ones who were put in gifted classes when we were growing up. I don’t want to be like them anymore. I’ll find something to do even if I’m not good enough to be considered “gifted”.

Friendships form with others who are as different as I am, but not in the same way. We’re not like the “normal” ones. Our friendship is comfort in knowing we don’t want to compete with one another. Expectations differ for all of us; expectations of who we are and where we’re heading. A familiar and dependable face is all we need to know. We are opposites
of each other and opposites of the mainstream way of being. We are who we grew up to be. Different yet the same; we all come from different backgrounds, but grew up in the same place knowing the same things.

**Grandmother**

Strange that I can be just like someone in appearance, in thoughts, and mannerisms, yet I’ve only seen her in a few brief instances in my childhood and once in adulthood.

My maternal grandmother lived in the same Greek village her whole life. She sometimes leaves the village to visit her children in Athens regularly. Health makes it difficult to endure flights to Canada.

*Giagia Koula, Vasiliki, Vasilikoula, Koula*—variations of the same name. I ended up Vasso, one of the many children on my mother’s side named after her.

**Before or After**

The stories have come to me one by one. My mother’s life before I existed remains unsorted like a box of snapshots that I have to put in chronological order, not sure exactly where each one goes. Some of the memories and stories exist as actual snapshots and I’m just trying to narrate. Every few years I’m told something I never knew before. Something I’ve never considered. I never knew that she worked in a factory that produces spools of yarn when she was fourteen and lived in Athens with her married sister. At times I wonder what else I don’t know. What was life like and why are people and things the way they are?

**Degrees of Culture**

I come from two different experiences of the same culture. My mother is where the roots of my cultural identity lie; my father’s side is fractured and diffused in culture, set in confusion
between unsettled worlds. Where I stand is a new beginning, a new sense of self, a confidence and openness to the world I was brought to live in.
Conclusion

Melina Marchetta’s *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Saving Francesca* are two novels that display what it means to live between two worlds with a sense of cultural hybridity in which the protagonists define themselves as Italian-Australian. The distinct cultural details and dialogue interspersed throughout the coming-of-age novels is what makes the works culturally authentic and believable. The novels are not stereotypical depictions of the cultural self as “other” within society because her protagonists are not the only characters of culturally distinctive backgrounds within the stories. All characters are realistically constructed individuals who contribute to the protagonists’ growth and understanding of their place within culture and within society.

Connecting to cultural identity within Melina Marchetta’s works is relevant when it comes to the way in which readers respond and interpret texts. Culturally authentic characters, like Josie and Francesca, display and reflect what it means to grow up as a generational cultural youth. In *Looking for Alibrandi*, culture is a prominent theme in Josie’s search for self and identity. Her realization that she does not have to abandon her Italian heritage in order to integrate into Australian society is a reflection of her position as a cultural hybrid. *Saving Francesca* displays culture as fluid and part of a normal way of identifying the self within society. Francesca never feels judged for being or considering herself an Italian-Australian. Being Italian-Australian is part of who she is and how she was raised. In specific instances (as outlined in Chapter 5) it is also part of how she relates to others, specifically schoolmates.

Viewing difference as normalized within English-speaking postcolonial worlds is a reflection of reality. Multiculturalism exists because it is an integral part of the way in which postcolonized nations have come to function in terms of the large populations of peoples of varied cultural background living together in one unified nation. Marchetta’s settings and
characters are specific in terms of culture and setting, yet the novels come to depict multiculturalism in the English-speaking world in a way that can be understood by young readers. As examined, young readers as far as Finland, in Rönnqvist’s study, can relate to and understand Italian-Australian life as depicted in Marchetta’s *Looking for Alibrandi*. Marchetta’s works have the potential to speak to readers internationally because they express coming of age poignantly but also humorously while also displaying cultural details in the characters’ everyday lives.

My research is not an attempt to look at the importance of multiculturalism but to exemplify how cultural authenticity can help to explore what multiculturalism means in literature for young readers. New understandings of cultural authenticity include cultural hybridity as portrayed within an author’s work. Cultural hybridity in Marchetta’s protagonists, Josie and Francesca, is evident in the way in which the characters negotiate living between two cultural ways of life. They do not define themselves as either Italian or Australian. They know they are both and they can only be considered as Italian-Australian in order to gain a sense of identity integration. The author’s background is integral to the cultural authenticity of both novels and the way in which they are relatable reflects the belief expressed by Mingshui Cai and Rudine Sims Bishop that “voices for the heart, once heard, can change other hearts” (Cai and Bishop 68). The author’s Italian-Australian background also supports the complex cultural details which help to define the hybrid identities of her young protagonists.

The multicultural settings of the works further highlight the importance of cultural differences as an integral part of multiculturalism rather than only considering visible differences as distinct when considering cultural depictions in literature. Marchetta’s novels help to establish a new sense of multiculturalism in literature for young readers. It is a sense of
multiculturalism that takes into consideration peoples of all backgrounds who are striving to make a better life for themselves and for their future generations away from cultural origins. Reading about someone growing up between two cultures, in a way in which does not “other” the cultural protagonist, can give generational ethnic youth a sense that stories about everyday life include their everyday lives. By normalizing the vision of cultural identity rather than seeing it as “other,” authors attempting to create realistically multicultural characters and settings can also realize the mistakes they are making when they unintentionally stereotype ethnic characters.

The way to give young people of all backgrounds a sense of belonging in a multicultural nation is to show them that they belong and are a part of society. Reiterating the past in historical depictions of culture is important in order to promote cultural tolerance, but it is not the only way to embrace culture. More contemporary representations can appeal to readers on a universal level and can also enter mainstream fiction where culture is not an issue but part of characters’ identity. It is important to show that we are tolerant by promoting talented writers who know what it means to live in multicultural society in the present. When an author writes with a sense of truth, readers can see their vision as true and accurate to what it means to negotiate one’s sense of self and identity in real life.

My appreciation for Marchetta’s works has also allowed me to understand the elements necessary for creating culturally authentic characters and culturally accurate depictions of life. My life-writing chapter was inspired by the notion of family as an integral part of transmitting culture into one’s sense of identity as it is reflected in Marchetta’s works. Negotiating a sense of self and identity between two worlds is complex but also normal for so many youth. Marchetta’s works display how the process of normalization has progressed when comparing her first novel
to her second work. Overall both novels contribute to positive reflections of culture for teens who are coming of age along with the characters.
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