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Mi:Wi 3027 by Glenn Shea

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The story of *Mi:Wi 3027* is inspired by the life of Roland Carter (Service No. 3027), the first Ngarrindjeri man to join the Australian Imperial Forces during World War I and his lifelong friendship with Leonhard Adam, a Jewish-German ethnologist. The two first met in an internment camp to which Carter (Lasarus Ratuere) had been assigned as a prisoner of war. This camp was known as known as '*Halbmondlager*' war camp or 'Half Moon Camp'. *Mi:Wi* is a Ngarrindjeri word translated as 'soul', the soul as fundamental to relations to country.

Essentially the play is an exploration of a friendship built around the notion of a liberated homeland, where freedom is paramount. Assigned as an ethnologist to this camp, Adam's (Renato Musolino) task was to learn about the culture and customs of the camp's ethnic prisoners, the majority of who were Muslims. They quickly became friends, and although separated after the war, maintained their friendship in the post-War period. In a somewhat uncanny turn of events Adam was later forced to flee his German homeland, in the 1930s, and worked in England at Cambridge University for a time.

It is perhaps interesting to note that the idea of heimlich or homeland, was quite a popular subject of discussion before and after the period of Carter's internment and is psychologised in Freud's studies on this area in his book '*Das Unheimliche*' (1919).

Julia Kristeva adopted the concept in her studies of Abjection which was a development of Freud and Lacan's theories on the subject of Heimlich/Unheimlich. She points out that according to Freud's understandings "foreignness, an uncanny one, creeps into the tranquillity of reason itself ... Henceforth, we know that we are foreigners to ourselves, and it is with the help of that sole support that we can attempt to live with others" (Kristeva, '*Strangers to Ourselves*', 1991: 170). This state of being, encapsulates a feeling of both being familiar and ill-at-ease that is said to confront a subject to unconscious, repressed impulses.

The uncanny feeling of being both strange and familiar was also brought to attention around the time by German philosopher Frederich Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* manuscript, in which he refers to nihilism as "the uncanniest of all guests". Nietzsche ascribes to this condition an affliction in which is apparent Enlightenment ideals that seemingly hold strong values also maintain characteristics that undermine themselves.

Against this intellectual background, Adam is later forced to flee his German homeland, first to Britain and then eventually, and paradoxically, to an Australian internment camp before

starting a new life in Melbourne. Like Carter, he is rendered ‘unheimlich’, and forced to confront the strength of his beliefs.

When Adam is himself confronted by Nazi persecution, he draws on the Ngarrindjeri creation story told by Carter to get him through. This is what gave strength to Carter in his incarceration, as he continually recited songs about country and often repeated the phrase, ‘Ngarrindjeri going forward’ in Ngarrindjeri language. These were very powerful moments in the play, and it appears that Carter, though physically removed from country, always holds it near in his Mi:Wi.

Mysteriously, the two friends never found an opportunity to meet again, except through Leonhard’s sister-in-law, who travelled to Raukkan in 1947. This visit allowed them a form of reconnection and a continued correspondence by mail until their deaths in the same year.

Unfortunately, many of the manuscripts of the internment interviews with Roland were apparently destroyed by the Germans and other notes at Leonhard’s house were also destroyed by a bomb attack on his house (Glenn Shea, pers. comm., (playwright)). These extra details might have brought a greater depth of understanding of Carter’s psychological state while in internment. But visual and sound effects in the final production will, undoubtedly, add depth of feeling where needed.

Despite these slight misgivings the reading of this play indicates its potential as a very strong, thought-provoking and compelling play and illuminates a long-neglected area of study. The play uncomfortably delves into the role of the anthropologist as an agent of the State, and the positioning as ‘informant’ of Carter. Yet it signals that in even in the most adverse circumstances there is always room for hope. Throughout, Carter’s defiance and strong conviction deftly turns the spotlight back on his interrogator.

Reviewed by Mike Harrison for *Global Media Post* www.globalmediapost.com