

**Concept of Proscription in Melina Marchetta's *Finnikin of the Rock***

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**Abstract**

*This research paper analyses the issues related to expatriates and their settlement experiences through the fantasy novel *Finnikin of the Rock* by an Italian descendant Australian writer Melina Marchetta. It brings to light the exilic experiences of search for identity, enslavement, agonizing abuses in the refugee camps and the loss of cultural heritage. The cruel attack of the impostor king on the people of Lumatere make them roam around the kingdom of Skuldenore as exiles and captives. The exiles are tormented emotionally and physically in the refugee camps and fever camps. On the other hand, the captives are enslaved to work in the dark coal mines of Sorel. Young girls are morally assaulted by the impostor king's guards in Lumatere. Finally, restoration of the land as Lumaterans by the natives takes place in Lumatere by the efforts of the queen Isaboe in the guise of Evanjaline with the help of Finnikin and others. The novel becomes a fantasy when Serononna, the matriarch of the Forest Dwellers, curses the people of Lumatere the five days of Unspeakable and splits the earth to swallow the trespassers of the curse. This paper is an attempt to explore the main parameters of the factors which affect the Australian aborigines.*

**Keywords:** Search for identity, Black Magic, Reunion, Restoration

An empirical study of aboriginal experiences in Australia is documented in the paper by dealing with the epic fantasy of ancient magic, exilic life, search for identity, and their unification with various other factors affecting aborigines. The paper analyses the changing way settlement has been understood in Australia over the last fifty years, and today's implications. It examines several issues related to settlement including the often contentious question of what exactly settlement is, and whether one can recognise and assess the successful settlement. The factors influencing settlement are explored, with the socio-

economic and cultural context in the host country being seen as having the greatest influence on the settlement experience.

The novel taken up for discussion *Finnikin of the Rock* discusses the long history of a nation namely Lumatere and its legendary figures such as Finnikin and Isaboe. Origin of fantasy dates back to the earliest stories that involve magic and terrible monsters believed to have existed in spoken forms before the advent of printed literature. Homer's *Odessey* with its magic, gods, heroes, adventures, and monsters puts forth the definition for fantasy. Among many successful fantasy writers, Melina Marchetta, the award-winning Australian young adult fiction writer adds one more feather to her crown with the publication of her novel *Finnikin of the Rock* which is one among the three other fantasy novels namely *Froi of the Exiles* and *Quintana of Charyn* of the Lumatere Chronicles.

*Finnikin of the Rock* revolves around the events of the five days of Unspeakable, a blood curse. Serononna, the matriarch of the Forest Dwellers, curses the people of Lumatere using her black magic, because of which the earth is split and many people, except those who run to the Valley of Tranquility and outside the kingdom, are swallowed by the earth. The impostor king who has slaughtered the King of Lumatere along with his wife and children, gets frightened and stops his cruel attack on the people but closes the main entrance to the kingdom. As a result, the people of Lumatere are made to roam around other kingdoms as slaves and exiles. Thus, Melina has made this novel a fantasy by using the dark magic through Serononna, as pointed out by the High Priestess of the Cloister of Lagrami in Sendecane, "It was indeed a very dark magic used by the matriarch of the Forest Dwellers" (10).

Due to the impostor king's attack and Seranonna's curse, the Lumaterans migrate as exiles and captives who take shelter in refugee camps without any hope. Naan explains that migration is, "the transplantation of old roots and a search to find new roots in change itself" (1). To a varying extent, exiles face changes in many aspects of their lives: with the change in physical environment, followed by changes in language, culture, socio-economic system as well as in their personal situations, their family lives and working lives. They are ill-treated and are not given any facility and choice for a better life. Linda Burnett says, "Refugees have little, if any, choice in their country of settlement and they often arrive after a period of suffering and trauma in their country of origin . . ." (26). Likewise, the exiles in *Finnikin of the Rock* endure intolerable difficulties and survive with a hope of re-entering their homeland in order to regain power and freedom. Just like animals, they are checked for the mark of phlux on their body and are not allowed to enter into many of the kingdoms in the land of Skuldenoreto avoid contagious diseases spread by them. When Sir Topher, Finnikin and

Evanjalin try to enter into the kingdom of Sorel in their exile journey, the soldiers check Evanjalin inhumanely for any sign of phlux as “one soldier forced her to her knees, checking behind her ears for any marks of the phlux, which the people of Sorel believed the exiles of Lumatere carried in their bodies and spread across the land” (62), which makes Finnikin furious but his exilic position numbs his senses and makes him a coward.

Lack of sanitation and medication in refugee camps eat the life of many Lumateran exiles. In Speranza Camp, the corpses are heaped in open pits. Finnikin senses, “Excrement lined the path to the next camp, and he could hardly breathe from the stench of vomit and shit and death and sickness”(106). Medication is totally denied to them and they are left to die inhumanely in the fever camps where the diseased exiles are kept and taken care of by the people who themselves look like dead people. Unfortunately, nobody gets cured in these camps and hence, those places can be called mortuary for the living people. The miserable condition is that many healthy people treat the diseased people in the fever camps with a desire to die. Finnikin says, “The priest-king has developed a death wish over the past ten years and spends much of his time in the fever camps” (54). Therefore, fever camps can be considered to be the suicidal spot for the exiles who have lost their hope in life.

Worst of all, the exiles suffer from identity crisis which remains one of the most important phenomenon that gives an individual non-recognition in the society. Here the author establishes the loss of identity of the exiles which leads to the destruction of everything including the history of existence. Paula M.L. Moya opines, “Our conceptions of who we are as social beings (our identities) influence. . .our understanding of how our society is structured and what our particular experiences in that society likely to be” (8). Here, the exiles Sir Topher, Finnikin and Evanjalin are denied even their basic identity and are undervalued as dogs and filthy creatures. When they enter into the kingdom of Charyn, the guards at the gate call them “Dogs” (37) and in Sorel when Finnikin goes in search of the missing Evanjalin, a Sorelian boy yells, “Of the filthy exiles” (105).The reader understands that “being” is remembered only through particular identities, and therefore identity is very important for one’s existence.

The process of constructing identity is dialectical: it can actively affect the day-to-day life of the natives. It is generally accepted that language learning, in the context of exilic settlement and cultural adaptation are inextricably interwoven. Michael Moorcock observes that, “many writers use archaic language for its sonority and to lend colour to a lifeless story”(35).In the novel language is considered as the best identity mark of any clan, but the exiles try hard to avoid using their mother tongue to escape from the preying eyes of the people of their settled countries. Sir Topher often advises Finnikin to use the language of their dwelling place which irritates him as he says, “I miss hearing our mother tongue” (64),

however Evanjalín insists on him to use their mother tongue: “. . . without our language, we have lost ourselves. Who are we without our words?” (65).

Not only the exiles but also the captives, who are trapped inside Lumatere during the unspeakable days, encounter difficulties in various forms. Slavery becomes the grievous outcome of the cruel attack as the young people of Lumatere are taken as slaves to work in the gold mines. Sir Topher says, “They would take the young people of the river to work as slaves in their lands” (41). The heart breaking truth is that the young children are forced to work in the mines during the day and locked up underground at night. Thus, they are not allowed to see the sunlight that leads to the death of many young slaves within three days of their imprisonment and finally their deaths go unnoticed and invalid. In addition to this, the trapped people lose their freedom of speech, therefore, “They had whispered words to survive” (341). They do not even express their love and anger loudly and all their experiences are hidden and suppressed. Young girls are taken away by the guards to be raped with the knowledge of their parents, and as a consequence the Lumaterans request Trevanion and others not to use their formal uniforms because even the sight of those uniforms remind them of their past and hurt them.

Reunion is simply an acceptance of cultural diversity which does not challenge the dominant culture. According to Morrissey, reunion is “the achievement of invisibility by the immigrants through their attainment of ‘normal’ Australian standards of living and their adoption of ‘normal’ Australian cultural practices” (25). This reflects the attitudes towards the exiles and their assimilation. Isaboe, the protagonist, in the guise of Evanjalín acts as a backbone in enacting the decision of reclaiming Lumatere. Just like the Biblical Deborah who leads the suffering Israelites under the leadership of Barak to fight against the forces of Jabin, the king of Canaan, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh” (Judg. 4.9), Evanjalín leads her people in search of their lost identity in Lumatere. She says, “We need to return to Lumatere. Our lifeblood is dying, and we need to set them free” (90).

When Finnikin is of the view that there is no use in going after a woman, the priest-king says, “Do not underestimate the girl” (121). Though Finnikin possesses the heroic qualities, he does not take any effort to go back to his mother country. On the other hand, he asks Lord August, a Lumateran who works in the Belegonian court, to request the Belegonian king for a piece of land for his people to settle down. Contrastingly, Lord August expresses his wish to go back to his own country leaving all the facilities available in Belegonia and work as a farmer in Lumatere. Likewise, Cibrian, an exile, does not accept Finnikin’s idea of

staying in Belegonia, “If we accept homeland, it will mean that Lumatere is lost to us for eternity” (46). These incidents prove that Finnikin in the beginning has desired to have a place somewhere for their settlement, but not going back to his own country Lumatere.

On the other hand, Evanjalín strongly resents Finnikin’s idea of staying in Belegonia and tries hard to pacify him saying, ‘ “We don’t want a second Lumatere. We want to go home. Take us home, Finnikin” ’ (109). She also encourages the discouraged priest-king to accompany them to their own homeland along with Captain Trevanion and Sir Topher and others. Her conscious and unconscious repetition of the words, “Take me home, Finnikin. I beg of you, take me home” (224), indicate her strong passion for reclaiming Lumatere. Equally, the Lumateran exiles, who are shattered throughout the kingdom of Skuldenore, have a strong vision of going back to their own country to be united with their kith and kin, “They are firm in their belief that if they stray too far from the other Lumaterans, they will be left behind” (207). Consequently, with the great efforts of Evanjalín and others, the Lumaterans join at the Valley of Tranquility and enter into their own country to establish their identity.

The exiles incorporate their children into the alien culture and effectively eradicate the cultural distinctiveness of collectivised exiles. The demand for cultural reunion proves not only impossible, but damaging. The effects of these policies included familial alienation and the general conflict. The exiles grieve the loss of family or friends and are anxious about those from whom they are separated. The torture and trauma experienced by the exiles end with the familial and other reunions. In *Finnikin of the Rock*, Finnikin gets separated from his father Captain Trevanion as a consequence of war and his father’s imprisonment. Though Finnikin lives away from his father for more than ten years, he preserves his father’s sword precious and longs to shout, “I want to go searching for my father” (68). Likewise, Finnikin’s father asks only one question “Is my boy safe?” (55), to whoever Lumateran he meets in his prison, which demonstrates the traumatic condition of both father and son. Finally, when they meet each other in the Sorel prison, the father feels so happy and says, “I prayed to see you one more time. It’s all I prayed for. Nothing more. And my prayers were answered” (98). Hence, their reunion casts away all their torturous experiences in life and brings forth happiness.

Like familial reunion, friendly reunion also shakes off the anguish of the exilic life. Finnikin often remembers his childhood friends Balthazar, Lucian and Isaboe, moreover, he follows Evanjalín only with a hope of meeting Balthazar. He says, “And that she made contact with the heir. With Balthazar” (80). When the real identity of Evanjalín is revealed, Finnikin gets ready to sacrifice even his life for her. He says, “Then I have nothing to give

but myself” (391). Hence, the happy reunion of the childhood friends Finnikin and the princess Isaboe with their own identity as Lumaterans takes place.

Above all, the reunion of the friends Captain Trevanion, Sir Topher, and the priest-king strengthens and succeeds the journey to reclaim Lumatere which results in the reunion of the exiles, who are called “our lost ones”(344), and the captives. This reunion is considered as a great festival and is celebrated with a variety of traditional food and music, “The courtyard on the northwest corner was set up with trestle tables, and palace staff placed huge wooden casks of wine alongside platters of roast peacocks, wood pigeons, and rabbits. . . In the corner by the rosebushes, minstrels played their tunes” (392). Moreover, as a precautionary measure to avoid war and cry in her realm, Isaboe goes to the extent of poisoning the impostor king and his men. She says, “We are taking revenge, while ensuring Lumatere is not bled dry” (366), which proves her strong passion to establish their identity without any fear of loss. Thus, Melina has crafted her Aurealis Award winning novel *Finnikin of the Rock* as an epic fantasy with war, loss, love and reunion. The author uses many anecdotes to give life to the past memories and dead people. Moreover, a number of hyperboles, ironies, metaphors and similes are utilised to modify this fantasy novel into a fantastic novel.

*Finnikin of the Rock* is set in the real world but elements of magic intrude upon it. The novel is not confined to the boundaries of the real world. It provides a fresh perspective on the real world. The author is able to convey complex ideas on a symbolic level that would be difficult to convey otherwise. The novel suggests universal truths through the use of magic and supernatural. The paper has sketched the main parameters of the factors which affect the Australian aborigines. Their experiences are crucially structured by the social context as well as the background of the individuals. The novel seems to be a contradiction to today’s settlement experience where English is centrally important and it is necessary to analyse the interaction of the factors as they are affected by contemporary circumstances, and to assess their current relative significance.

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