DISCOURSES OF MULTICULTURALISM AND CONTEMPORARY ASIAN-AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Using the range of discourses that have been used to represent the "Asian-Australian" in contemporary Australian Literature, my thesis examines how the continual severing, realignment and recombination of multicultural discourses have influenced Asian-Australian writings. In addition, I will undertake a critical analysis of the discursive processes by which objects and identities are formed or given meaning in contemporary Australian literature by writers of Asian ancestry.

The texts used in the thesis include, Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments (1994) and Solitude of Illusions (1996); Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies (1991) and Pleasures of Conquest (1996); Teo Hsu Ming's Love and Vertigo (2000); Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made (1994); Ang Chin Geok's Wind and Water (1997); Christopher Cyrill's The Ganges and its Tributaries (1993); and Chandani Lokuge's If the Moon Smiled (2000).

Incorporating a concise look at contemporary multiculturalism in Australia, the "Introduction" Chapter 1 also considers the emergence of Asian-Australian studies and literature as a different language, vocabulary and conceptual framework. The second chapter, "We Must Laugh at Ourselves or Die – Humour as Resistance" examines irony and satire as forms of resistance and literary subversion. The third chapter, "Looking

Different: Re-looking Difference" goes on to posit a re-thinking of Australia's and Asia's construction of identity and identification in an increasingly postmodern world. It focuses on the "particular historical conditions and the specific trajectories through which actual social subjects become incommensurably different and similar" (Ang "Migration" 4). The fourth chapter "The 'Australian Way' – the Only Way? Reading Difference and Multiculturalism in Suburbia / Australia" investigates the racial dynamics within that most 'Australian' of environments, suburbia.

The fifth chapter, "Tell Me What You Eat, and I Will Tell You What You Are – Food, Multiculturalism and Asian-Australian Identity" analyses the function and significance of food as metaphors, and food as a code expressing a "pattern of social relations". The sixth chapter, "Family – Feuds and Failings" looks at representations of the Asian-Australian family. The seventh and final chapter, "'Asian-Australian' - Walking the Tightrope" focuses on Asian-Australians of mixed descent in particular, because they are the physical and literal embodiment of hybridity. This chapter also discusses issues such as intermarriage, interracialism, racism and identity.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contain no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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"Looking Difference: Re-thinking Difference". Literature and Racial Ambiguity. Eds. Neil Brooks and Teresa Hubel. Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2002.

"Imperial Pretensions and The Pleasures of Conquest". The Politics of English as a World Language. New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies. Ed. Christian Mair. Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2003.

1 INTRODUCTION

> "*Are* there any Asian writers in Australia?" Bharat inquires.
> Barbara Whytebait, the Australian High Commissioner's wife replies: "Australia is the most multicultural country in the world. We have immigrants from more countries than the United States." (Gooneratne 29)

Interestingly, the character Barbara Whytebait in A Change of Skies does not actually answer the question of whether there are any Asian writers in Australia. Katherine England observes that "[g]iven geographical proximity and the fact that Asian immigration has been going on almost as long as the British, surprisingly few writers of Asian origin crop up in the annals of Australian literature". According to the Bureau of Immigration Research, non-Anglo/Celtic authors are underrepresented in Australia's cultural industry (cited in Lamont 11). Senator Nick Bolkus, the former Federal Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs believes that people from non-English speaking backgrounds are still "marginalised and compartmentalised" (Lamont 11). Drawing attention to the significant absence of non-Anglo/Celtic groups in the rubric of 'Australian' literature, Sneja Gunew asks the question: "If multiculturalism is for everyone, why do certain ethnic groups continue to dominate in the cultural sphere?" ("Denaturalising" 111) It must be noted that Gunew's article was written in 1990. Has this changed now that Australia has moved into the new millennium?

'Asian-Australian' is a category that exists within perpetually contentious boundaries. Despite their lengthy presence in Australia, writers of Asian ancestry have met only "mixed success" and are often overlooked (Lawrence). One of the earliest Asian-Australian authors was Mena Abdullah who collaborated with Ray Mathews to write The Time of the Peacock; it was published in 1965. Other early Asian-Australian writers included Don o'Kim with My Name is Tian in 1968; Chitra Fernando's Three Women in 1983 and Ernest McIntyre's Let's Give Them Curry in 1985. Asian-Australian literature aroused a flicker of interest back in 1982 when Brian

Castro's widely acclaimed Birds of Passage about a Chinese pioneer in Australia's heady gold-rush years was a joint winner of The Australian/Vogel Literary Award.[1]

Speaking of Australian attitudes to Asia, Brian Castro argues that uncertainty is "the substratum upon which a nation progresses or declines. Uncertainty is the immigrant, the traveller, the visionary" (cited in Daniel 8). Having experienced cultural displacements, Australians of Asian ancestry are, as Salman Rushdie says in Imaginary Homelands, compelled "to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties" (12). Thus, the work of Asian-Australian writers in particular has a powerful role in articulating this language of diaspora and the new economies of belonging in Australia. Serving as "agents of fragmentation and rupture", they are vital commentators and critics (Castro cited in Daniel 8).

According to Alison Broinowski, Asian-Australian fiction started to "fundamentally [change] the discourse" in the 1990s (*Yellow Lady* 225). She writes that for the first time, writers like Brian Castro sensed "a 'kind of schism' between himself and other Australians" (*Yellow Lady* 229). He was aware that "people [were] looking at [him and others like him] in a different way, and that [he didn't] really belong" (cited in Broinowski *Yellow Lady* 229). The increasing politicisation of multiculturalism in the 1980s compelled Castro and others like him to closely scrutinise their own difference and their relationship to/with Australia (Broinowski *Yellow Lady* 229). Thus, Asian-Australian literature in many instances not only foregrounds issues of difference, but also makes problematic the discourses of multiculturalism and their various applications.

Accompanying and marking this initiative is the evolution of Asian-Australian Studies. It has emerged as a dynamic and cross-disciplinary field and has gradually come into its own at the turn of this century. A "different language, vocabulary and conceptual framework" has arisen to create and explain "a new space not marked by 'lack', but rather positioned by the old binaries that it is rejecting" (Mawson). According to Tseen Khoo, Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert:

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[1]The book won The Australian/Vogel Award in 1982, and was published in 1983.

> [Asian-Australian Studies] interpolates Asians in Australian narratives and discourses, while drawing on contemporary Asian discourse and diasporic theory from a range of international spaces. This shift in focus and the creation of new disciplinary boundaries means that Asian-Australian individuals and communities are addressed not as fringe subjects but rather as complex cultural 'hinges', whose positioning within this nation is only part of a wider scope of 'belonging' through diasporic groupings. 'Asian-Australians'' growing awareness of their placement as both Australians and diasporic cultural citizens, not merely as supplemental to 'mainstream' Australia, strengthens the critical domain of Asian-Australian Studies. The concomitant growth in the area of Asian-Australian cultural production in recent years has produced a discernible momentum and critical mass to warrant the formation of Asian-Australian Studies as a vital and viable field of knowledge production. (1-2)

The steady interest in Asian-Australian studies can be seen in the expanding volume of critical and literary work generated in recent years. In 2000, two seminal texts, namely Alter/Asians. Asian-Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture (edited by Ien Ang, Sharon Chalmers, Lisa Law and Mandy Thomas) and Diaspora: Negotiating Asian Australia (edited by Tseen Khoo, Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert) were published. These collections of critical essays were the outcome of two ambitious and innovative Asian-Australian studies conferences - the Alter/Asians Conference (18-20 February 1999) and the Asian-Australian Identities Conference (27-29 November 1999). Examples of other critical works that emerged in 2000/1 are Bastard Moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing (edited by Wenche Ommundsen), Dragon Seed in the Antipodes: Chinese-Australian Autobiographies (by Shen Yuanfang) and Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diaspora. Negotiating Cultural Identity through Media (edited by Stuart Cunningham and John Sinclair).

A comprehensive and important website called *Banana Pages – Studying Asian-Australia* documents the rise of Asian-Australian Studies.[2] This site is a vital working resource, which

[2]The website can be found at <http://www.uq.edu.au/~ethkhoo/index.html>. The moderator is Dr. Tseen Khoo, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Queensland. She is notable for her work on Asian-Australian and Diaspora topics.

provides important information not only on Asian-Australian literature, but also on film, criticism and visual art. Its contents include a listing of Asian-Australian authors, critics and references, as well as links to other diasporic Asian sites. Another progressive development is the Asian-Australian electronic discussion list. It counts among its subscribers, members of the Asian-Australian community, academics, as well as an assortment of 'lay people' interested in Asian-Australian issues. Yet another encouraging sign is a postgraduate scholarship in Asian Identities offered by the Arts Faculty at the University of Queensland.

The widening scope of Asian-Australian studies is clearly reflected in the variety of dissertation topics in the last few years. An overview of these dissertations and works-in-progress show that they range from the Asian-Australian in Australian literature[3], to Asian-Australian women's literature[4], to the fiction of Brian Castro[5], to comparative studies between Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian texts[6], or the triangular relationship between Asian-Australia, Aboriginal and Anglo-Australia[7]. Other related thesis topics have a cultural studies emphasis, such as examinations of 'Asian exoticism' in film and popular culture.[8] There is also budding interest in Asian-Australian cinema and poetry.

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[3]See Catherine P. Bennett, "The Asian-Australian Migrant Experience in Australian Literature 1965-1995". PhD Dissertation, University of Western Australia, 1995.

[4]See for example Tseen Khoo, "So What Are You Still Angry About?: Asian-Australian Women Writers 1980-1995". MA Dissertation, University of Queensland, 1996.

[5]See for example Michael Deves, "Brian Castro's Fiction". PhD Dissertation, Flinders University, 1996.

[6]See for example Tseen Khoo, "Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Diasporic Literature". PhD Dissertation, University of Queensland, 1998.

[7]Peta Stephenson, Work-in-Progress, University of Melbourne.

[8]Sandra Lyne, Work-in-Progress, Adelaide University.

This dissertation argues that Australia requires a greater engagement with issues of "racialisation, alienation, dislocation and affirmation", particularly for people of Asian descent (Khoo "Banana Bending"). I contend that Asian-Australian literature aims for empowerment, with the appropriation of various strategies to represent Asian-Australians. Using the range of discourses that have been used to represent the "Asian-Australian" in contemporary Australian Literature, my dissertation examines specifically how the continual severing, realignment and recombination of multicultural discourses have influenced Asian-Australian writings. In addition, I will undertake a critical analysis of the discursive processes by which objects and identities are formed or given meaning in contemporary Australian literature by writers of Asian ancestry. Issues of cultural/racial difference stemming from multiculturalism have provided me with an impetus to challenge the traditional production of knowledge and seek new ways of articulating culture and identity.

The theoretical and disciplinary framework of my thesis incorporates the perspectives of prominent Asian-Australian critics (Tseen Khoo, Jacqueline Lo, Audrey Yue and Suvendrini Perera); postcolonial theory (Sneja Gunew, Stuart Hall, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffin and Helen Tiffin); cultural studies (Ien Ang, Jon Stratton, Ghassan Hage, Rey Chow); multicultural and race studies (Alison Broinowski, Ellie Vasta, Stephen Castles, Fazal Rivzi, Andrew Jakubowicz); as well as gender studies (bell hooks; Trinh Minh-Ha). For specific topics such as irony/humour (Chapter 2), I look at theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, Scott Cutler Shershow, Gilbert Highet and D. C. Muecke). In my chapter on suburbia (Chapter 4), I consider works by Lynn Richards, Graeme Davison, Sophie Watson and Alec McGillivary. On the topic of food and eating (Chapter 5), I examine works by Michael Symons, Ann Goldman, Samir Gandesha and Uma Narayan. On the topic of hybridity and intermarriage (Chapter 7), I use analyses by Nikos Papastergiasdis, Pninia Werbner, Allan and Carmen Luke.

In my thesis, I want to draw attention to how notions of the 'other' are rarely heard "except in the terms already assigned it by the hegemonic culture" (Gunew "PMT" 37). As Gunew asserts, "[t]he play of visibility and invisibility, silence and speech is a complex one in relation to the discursive legitimisation of power" ("PMT" 38). Therefore, I also necessarily consider the

important impulsion provided by influential Asian-American theorists, namely Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Maxine Hong Kingston and Saul-ling Cynthia Wong. Using this methodological agenda, I investigate how Asian-Australian writers seek to take responsibility for and control of their own discourses. Adopting a specific literary and textual focus, this project assumes the social importance of literature as a very useful site for exploring the shifting boundaries of racial and cultural identity. For Asian-Australians, literature emerges as a distinct public forum for the discussion of dilemmas associated with being different or being "mixed".

My thesis considers the various difficulties that have been associated with the state-sponsored multiculturalism. The Introduction points out that the idealistic notion of multiculturalism as unity-in-diversity is essentially problematic and articulates the difficulties in managing minority status. Exclusion from political power and cultural recognition has cultivated in Asian-Australian writers a canny sense for ambiguity, juxtaposition and irony. Hence in Chapter 2 ("We Must Laugh at Each Other or Die" – Humour as Resistance), I address how Asian-Australian writers wield irony and satire as tools to confront and challenge the multicultural order. Using Yasmine Gooneratne's The Pleasures of Conquest, Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments and Teo Hsu-Ming's Love and Vertigo, the chapter also examines the potential of irony and humour as modes for/of communication, conciliation and/or 'peaceful' revolution. By openly acknowledging shared human failings as a common denominator, irony and humour can help dispel animosity and bridge differences.

Chapter 3 continues the ideas about irony and aspects of human weakness started in Chapter 2. As Adib Khan says, "the insights we gain into ourselves often have a converging point of commonality. They have so much to do with a struggle to understand all the strangers lurking within us" (*Seasonal Adjustments* 269). This chapter focuses on the paradoxical observation that "human strengths and failures are global constants" (Khan *Seasonal Adjustments* 143), yet they are contradicted and challenged by precisely the same unwieldy cultural differences that are definitive for 'Asian-Australian' identities. In the chapter, Gooneratne (A Change of Skies) and Khan (Seasonal Adjustments) reveal the ironic undercurrents within racism. Racism is a human defect that transcends (inter)national and cultural boundaries. The chapter goes on to

demonstrate how multiculturalism has been unable to "do away with racism" (Ang *On Not Speaking* 14). This is because "as a concept [multiculturalism] depends on the fixing of mutually exclusive identities, and therefore also on the reproduction of potentially antagonistic, dominant and subordinate others" (Ang *On Not Speaking* 14). Perceptions of otherness as well as the accompanying assemblage of hegemonic relations are queried and evaluated.

Advancing the discussion of the politics of difference begun in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 delineates the Anglo-Australian "racial/spatial anxiety" by situating the debate in the most Australian of environments – suburbia (Ang *On Not Speaking* 126). Conceptualised as the microcosm of the Anglo nation, suburbia functions as the "transitional site", that is the "middle landscape of Australia, as well as the middle landscape of migration" (Yue "Asian Australian Cinema" 195). Suburbia emerges as a highly contested locale, since Australian multiculturalism emphasizes racial/ethnic groups sharing the same space. This tension is exacerbated when coupled with assumptions about Asian-Australians being 'not-here to stay' (Clifford cited in Ang *On Not Speaking* 13). The chapter uses A Change of Skies (Gooneratne), Seasonal Adjustments and Solitude of Illusions (Khan), plus Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made, to interrogate the tensions between ethnicity and the (im)possibilities of multicultural nationhood/citizenship. Asian citizens in Australia wrestle with the ignominy of being culturally and racially distinct, but yet in hegemonic terms they are rendered practically 'invisible' (Khoo "Bright White Suburbs").

Yet ironically, non-white others are most 'visible' and most welcome in the culinary/gastronomic realm. Chapter 5 (Food, Multiculturalism and Asian-Australian Identity) documents the role of cuisine in the formation of 'Nation' and national identity. The emphasis here is on the evolution and particular influence of 'Asian food' in Australia. Moreover, the chapter discusses Asian-Australian agency and resistance in the face of different manifestations of "food tourism", "food colonisation" and "culinary imperialism". I show how inclusion/exclusion is perpetuated through cuisine especially through the conferment of insider/outsider status, that is 'home' food or food for the 'foreigner'. As a code expressing a pattern of social interaction, food is also a powerful means of consolidating cultural identity and in-group relations. The ethnic feast and food sharing

are tropes that demonstrate an affirmation of identity, and are strong cultural reinforcers. Representations of 'ethnic' food and its significance are deliberated in Christopher Cyrill's The Ganges and its Tributaries, Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments and Solitude of Illusions, Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, Teo Hsu-Ming's Love and Vertigo and Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made.

While Asian-Australian interactions and the non-Asian 'others' in Chapter 5 often occur in an often communal and very public sphere (that of restaurants/cuisine), Chapter 6 (Asian-Australian Family) explores a very private and deeply personal one. This chapter considers Asian-Australians living together: representations of the diasporic Asian-Australian family. Linking local and global, here and there, past and present, the diasporic communities featured in the chapter have the potential to unsettle static and totalitarian conceptions of 'national culture' or 'national identity'. But in order to seize on that potential, diasporic peoples should make *the most* of their "complex and flexible positioning [...] between host countries and homelands" (Safran 95 cited in Ang "Migration" 11). This chapter examines whether this 'flexibility' of diaspora cultures is ironically the thing that makes negotiating inter-generational and gender relationships so much more complicated. 'Caught between two cultures', between the country of origin and the adopted country, between tradition and modernity, the fictional Asian-Australian families in Solitude of Illusions, Love and Vertigo, The World Waiting to be Made and If the Moon Smiled (by Chandani Lokuge) are compelled to make many difficult and often irreconcilable choices about values, ideologies and practices (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba cited by Luke and Luke "The Difference").

Chapter 7 ('Asian-Australian' – Walking the Tightrope) continues the examination of being Asian-Australians in an increasingly globalised world. It looks specifically at Asian-Australian families, in particular mixed-race families. As literal and physical embodiments of hybridity, mixed-race Asian-Australians are by definition boundary crossers and transgressors. Using Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made, Khan's Seasonal Adjustments, Cyrill's The Ganges and its Tributaries and Ang Chin Geok's Wind and Water, Chapter 7 investigates why hybridity is experienced as both menacing and invigorating. It argues that for the second-generation of

mixed-race Asian-Australians, the position of in-betweenness, of being both Asian and Australian, is "pregnant with potential for new world views" (Bakhtin 360, cited in Werbner "Introduction" 5). However, there is also a need to investigate the "paired discourses of happy-hyphenation and happy hybridisation" (Perera "Lost in the Translation" 124). Contemporary notions of hybridity have certainly attracted much attention and controversy. Jacqueline Lo says:

> To call attention to the commingling of the two terms emphasised by the use of the hyphen is to draw attention to a suppressed history of cross-cultural and cross-racial relations in [Australia and] the region. Robert Young reminds us that the trope of hybridity is based implicitly on the metaphor of heterosexuality. The Asian-Australian therefore draws attention to the suppressed history of cultural and biological miscegenation that is increasingly demanding recognition in the reconfiguring of the limits of the nation state. (155-56)

The dissertation concludes with a broad discussion about the emerging presence of Asian-Australian literature and its still ambivalent status. Issues about literary ghettoisation are considered specifically the prevalent labelling or pigeon-holing of Asian-Australian writers as 'migrant' or 'multicultural' writers' rather than Australian writers (Dessaix 22-23). According to Gunew, "[o]ne of the marks of a minority position is that it is always under pressure to define itself against an imagined, though invisible, 'universal' one" ("PMT" 37). Indeed, resisting the defining gaze (presumably Anglo and male) is an issue that demands attention.

The Conclusion also deliberates about whether the discourse of multiculturalism has shaped or contributed to the improved visibility of Asian-Australian writers. But the burgeoning interest in Asian-Australian literature does not necessarily translate to an increase in publishing opportunities for Asian-Australian writers. The present indeterminate place of Asian-Australian literature in the rubric of 'Aust Lit' is disconcerting. It is clear that Asian-Australian literature is a dynamic force that needs time to develop and evolve. Asian-Australian writers have a unique role as artists as well as ambassadors as they negotiate the nexus between Australian multiculturalism, post-colonialism and individual ethnic/cultural identities:

> The relationship between Australian literature and [Asian-Australian literature], then can be glimpsed not as the relationship between centre and margins or between local (ethnic) and universal – not as the centre relating everything to itself – but rather as a network of relationships, multiple, shifting relationships between different 'centres', different 'margins', different 'localities'. (Carter 8)

Ultimately, a judicious reading of Asian-Australian literature can only come from respect, understanding and sensitivity to the multifarious realities of being Asian in Australia.

The thesis looks at contemporary fiction published in the years between 1990-2000. This decade has seen a proliferation of Asian-Australian titles. The texts used in my thesis include Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies (1991) and The Pleasures of Conquest (1996); Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments (1994) and Solitude of Illusions (1996); Christopher Cyrill's The Ganges and its Tributaries (1993); Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made (1994); Ang Chin Geok's Wind and Water (1997); Teo Hsu-Ming's Love and Vertigo (2000); and Chandani Lokuge's If the Moon Smiled (2000). Each chapter of the dissertation employs a different configuration of texts.

It is not the intention of this thesis to look upon these chosen texts as representative of the ever-expanding category of Asian-Australian literature. The thesis does not attempt to show that these Asian-Australian texts emerge from or contribute to a "cohesive or united tradition" (S. Lim xvi). It must be noted that the interest in Asian-Australian literature, as Shirley Geok-lin Lim says, "brings both opportunities and a crisis of representation" (xxi). This thesis acknowledges that "any attempts at defining a canon of texts – that is, a list of the best or the most significant (which are not the same categories) works – face[s] internal debate as well as provisionality and temporality" (S. Lim xxi). It is therefore necessary to consider "the different literary formations of writers who now publish under the [Asian-Australian] rubric" (S. Lim xxi).

The choice of authors/texts was determined by a desire to consider a spectrum of diasporic identities and represent a diversity of cultural and racial sensibilities/sensitivities. For example, Gooneratne and Lokuge hail originally from Sri Lanka; Khan from Bangladesh; Cyrill is an Australian-born Anglo-Indian; Teo is Malaysian-Chinese by birth; and Ang and Lazaroo have Singaporean roots. In addition, I wished to include a range of perspectives, both male (Khan and Cyrill) as well as female (Gooneratne, Teo, Lazaroo, Ang and Lokuge). With most of their fiction straddling both in the 'motherland' (Asia) and the 'new' home (Australia), these writers articulate the "space of hybridity" or the ambiguous borderlands "between Asia and the West", that is the "increasingly globalized, postcolonial and multicultural world" inhabited by Asian-Australians (Ang *On Not Speaking* 2-3). In addition, I wished to include a range of perspectives, both male (Khan and Cyrill) and female (Gooneratne, Teo, Lazaroo, Ang and Lokuge), also that of more established (Gooneratne and Lazaroo) and younger/emerging writers (Teo and Cyrill). As Asian-Australians themselves, these writers cannot and do not claim to speak for all Asian-Australians, nor do they intend to encapsulate the 'Asian-Australian experience'. Instead, they elucidate the diverse issues and struggles that are encountered by those involuntarily positioned on the 'periphery'.

Imbued with the 'outsider's insight, these writers represent the 'outsiders' inside (Australia). The Asian-Australian texts in this thesis were chosen because all of them reverberate with an acute, penetrating and critical consciousness. In the best post-colonial tradition, these writers unabashedly politicise living and loving. They use irony to unmask the politics of interpersonal relations. Irony is employed as a mechanism to comprehend society; it is a "way of appearing to accommodate oneself to convention while standing apart – critical, distanced, in control, and perhaps not a little defensive" (Hutcheon 17).

In its creation of insiders and outsiders, irony "always asserts otherness and difference" (Hutcheon 19). It makes this affirmation in opposition to things such as perceived superiority and power, as well as enduring and established (or unexamined) values. By asking awkward questions about others and with a sharp edge of introspection and irony, these writers are able to explore representations of multicultural Australia, and confront the many contradictions and

incongruities that form the human existence. Various juxtapositions are used to interrogate the disparity between appearance and reality, optimism and pessimism, idealism and cynicism, the controversial and the mundane, antithetical postures and divergent philosophical attitudes. In the process, painful truths about Australia/Asia, Australians and Asians are uncovered.

Ironic, satirical or sardonic, the texts can be simultaneously hilarious and trenchant, subversive and poignant, full of pathos as well as glee. Gooneratne often employs serendipity and comic exaggeration in her two novels, while Khan oscillates between irony and biting sarcasm. Cyrill prefers ironic understatement. Teo's style can be regarded as playful yet hard-hitting, whereas Ang, Lokuge and Lazaroo reveal a stirring yet somewhat cynical edge in their respective works. Manifesting irony in various forms, the texts effectively highlight a number of important topics, such as multiculturalism, difference, institutional and personal racism, ethnicity, class, identity, gender roles and family relations.

This Introduction aims to provide an overview of Australian multiculturalism and the ways in which Asian-Australian literature and identity are intertwined and conceptualised. Positioned as minorities, identity for Asian-Australians has always been in a state of provisional and fragile construction, or, in Stuart Hall's terms, a place where "the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of a history, of a culture" (Hall "Minimal Selves" 45). At the start of this millennium, we see an interesting time for Australian identity politics, with questions of what it means to be Australian still highly pertinent. Run along racial lines, John Howard's 2001 'smear and sneer' re-election tactics are evidence of this. They once again revive the volatile immigration debate in Australia.

Howard's ongoing fear campaign is a clear suggestion of the xenophobia that still permeates the nation. The Government has deliberately manipulated public opinion through misleading and inflammatory rhetoric about the need for border protection and preventive/preemptive strategies against terrorism. Recent examples widely reported by the media include the Tampa confrontation, the so-called Pacific Solution, the tragic SIEV-X incident, as well as the 'children

overboard affair'. Predictably, such jingoistic policies have incited much hostility towards new arrivals/asylum seekers. By purposely confusing an already bewildered populace about "the issues of migration, race, terrorism, refugees and asylum seekers" to Australia, the Government has provoked an even greater paranoia about the 'other' (Glenn).[9] The events of September 11 in New York City, the gang rapes in Sydney's southwest, the Bali bombings and Australia's military involvement in Iraq have further engendered a mood of crisis.

Refugees from the Middle East (and/or South Asian) and Islamic peoples in Australia may now be the new targets of vilification. For groups such as Asian-Australians, it painfully recalls their tentative place in the Australian consciousness. Recurrent debates revolving around race and immigration brings to mind the near-hysteria about the possible 'Asianisation of Australia' and the perceived 'threat to the Australian way of life:

> Whether as high-achieving student or poor refugee, the figure of the Asian migrant focuses a number of anxieties deeply enmeshed in Australia's historical association with 'Asians'. These anxieties have generated contradictory, even paradoxical strategies for managing the presence of Asian-Australians, either by excising their contribution to 'dinkum' Aussie languages and narratives or by objectifying them into fearsome and ugly objects of permanent difference. Contemporary multicultural discourses are able to perpetuate, or to reproduce and recycle, these strategies of control and containment partly because they remain unquestioned and implicit. (Perera "Lost in the Translation"130)

Perspectives on difference until recently have been defined by those of the dominant group in Australian society: first the British colonial power, then the emerging 'Anglo-Australian'[10] ruling

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[9]Since late 2001 however, there is a subtle but fundamental shift in public attitudes towards asylum seekers: "Under the banner of *A Just Australia*, the widest range of religious, community, trade union, human rights and social organisations have combined with prominent and distinguished Australians, and around 8,500 active supporters. Numerous court rulings, professional bodies, United Nations agencies and other international commentators have expressed their clear condemnation of policies and practices in Australia" (Glenn). They are actively seeking change in the Government's treatment of asylum seekers/refugees and lobbying for policy reform.

[10]The term' Anglo-Australian' is problematic. There are of course important historical differences in terms of forms and patterns of racialisation between northern and southern European, Irish and German ethnic or national identities.

class. Asian migrants were represented and objectified in academic and policy debates, and had little or no opportunity to represent themselves. Are the discourses of multiculturalism, which are themselves emergent from this implicitly racist framework adequate to address the increasing complexity and ambiguity of belonging in/to the Australian nation? Indeed, multiculturalism has not resolved these long-standing racial tensions, but has, on the contrary, made them more intractable and complicated.

Numerous difficulties are associated with using the term "multiculturalism". The term "multiculturalism" has had and still has troubled histories and many meanings. In Australia's recent past, the very concept of the multicultural has been the target of renewed racism, xenophobia and charges by government of 'political correctness'. For some such as Geoffrey Blainey, Pauline Hanson and even the poet Les Murray, multiculturalism and ethnicity are regarded as a threat to the Anglo-Australian nation and culture. Others like Professor Andrew Jakubowicz assert that multiculturalism is problematic because it has failed to address the continuing structural inequalities associated with class, ethnic and gender differences. Yet there are others who believe that multiculturalism has undermined the potency of Australian national identity, as well as its extreme forms of nationalism and racism (Castles et al).

The idea of Australian multiculturalism developed from a racist past. The birth of the White Australia Policy came about with the adoption of the Immigration Restriction Bill in 1901. This bill prohibited the immigration of 'non-Europeans' or 'the coloured races' into Australia. Official attitudes towards migrants were that assimilation or adaptation. This policy was in tandem with the White Australia Policy (1880-1966). According to Jon Stratton and Ien Ang, the White Australia policy was, "in the first instance, a nationalist policy and reflect[ed] the new nation-state's search for a national identity in an European culture and a British-based racial homogeneity (which inevitably implies the exclusion of racial/cultural Others)" (141). Between 1964 and 1973, the policy of assimilation was modified to one of integration. The integration

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In my thesis, I have used 'Anglo-Australian' to refer to the Australians who are predominantly of British/Irish ancestry. Refer to Gabriel 5.

policy advocated a less monocultural outlook (Jupp *Immigration* 101). The term "multiculturalism" was first used in Canada in the 1950s. Drawing heavily on the Canadian model, Australia adopted multiculturalism as its official policy in 1972 under the Whitlam labour government (Jones 7; Ip et al 12).

As a discourse, multiculturalism can be broadly understood as "the recognition of co-existence of a plurality of cultures within the nation" (Stratton and Ang 124). The presence of ethnic communities in Australian society is regarded as valuable, and "special assistance" is warranted to remove the disadvantages suffered by all Australians, irrespective of their origins (Bolkus 453). The 1988 federal government report Towards a National Agenda, articulates this position. Asserting that "Australian parliamentary democracy disadvantaged migrants", the report also pointed out that "Australian political, legal and bureaucratic institutions" required "radical restructuring" (Kukathas 152). To ensure a truly multicultural presence in politics, it was necessary that multicultural policies revise existing social perspectives and overhaul the current allocation of economic resources (Kukathas 152).

The politics of naming is precarious. It is a way of distinguishing and defining, maybe even fixing limits where there are none. Jacques Delaruelle issues a warning to beware "'multiculturalism' as a strategy of enforced inclusion, complementary to the strategy of exclusion apparent in the use of the term 'ethnic'" (52-3). This is evident in the Australia Council's Arts for a Multicultural Australia document. This document outlines some of the essential strategies and governing criteria of multiculturalism (Blonski). Subject to a range of policy priorities, including the forging of links with the Asia-Pacific region via the established Asian-Pacific communities in Australia, multiculturalism also has the unfortunate effect of confining and predetermining ethnic and cultural identities.

Multiculturalism in Australia has been conceived as a framework for negotiations across/of differences. Within multicultural discourse are the prevailing questions: "who is in command of the discourse; who gives the authority to speak, what conditions are applied to the speaking, and

to whom has the right of speech been deferred – or from whom has it been seized" (Carroli 328)? David Carter asserts that:

> In terms of its relationship to multiculturalism, the important point is that nationalism can be made to speak from/as the centre or from/as a marginal position, and it has worked both ways within Australia. It can be projected in opposition to a dominant culture or as a dominant culture – as the enemy of monocultural ambitions or itself a form of monoculturalism. Again, it depends on who's talking, when and to whom. (4)

It appears that multicultural policy has not been differentiated from "the social reality of cultural diversity", therefore it is necessary to ask "whose multiculturalism is being articulated or advocated?" (Carroli 329)

Amidst the calls for a unified national culture are the pressures exerted by the expanding myriad of cultural identities. This uncertainty has triggered a search for "coherent narratives of the nation" (Gunew "Multicultural Multiplicities" 449). However, in the quest for a national culture, a series of exclusions is invariably generated. After all, as Carter says, "exclusion and assimilation are two sides of the one coin" (4). And according to Stratton and Ang, "[t]he construction of a new, Australian national imagined community was premised on an exclusionary racial/cultural particularism, a binary oppositioning that included some and excluded others" (144). Indeed as Ien Ang asserts, "being 'Asian' in 'multicultural Australia' means being positioned in the grey area of inclusion and exclusion, in the ambivalent space of 'almost the same [as us], but not quite', to use Homi Bhabha's phrase" (Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man" 86, cited in "Curse" 45).

Australian notions of Asia are informed by European constructs. Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities and Edward Said's Orientalism are two influential works that opened up a way through which to consider the construction of 'nationality' or 'otherness', and by implication the relations between them. Anderson's concept of the "National Imaginary" refers to "the means by which contemporary social orders are able to produce not merely images of themselves but

images of themselves against others" (Hamilton 16). Said's approach sees the Orient constituted through a set of discursive and hegemonic practices, which appropriate the Orient as 'the Other' (Hamilton 15). These seminal studies give rise to the notion of Asia as the Other against which the Australian Self is defined.

Asia is the mirror which reflects how Australians see themselves as a multicultural society.[11] Australians need to recognise that this is also related to their attempts at negotiating the existing/a new relationship with Asia. Yet, it is ironic that:

> The question of how Australia plugs in to Asia . . . is a topic that makes many Australians uneasy. It challenges their sense of who they are and where they belong. It exacerbates an identity crisis in a nation which once seemed so sure of itself but which . . . [now] sometimes seems most unsure of itself. (Jenkins 39)

Mirror site

Nancy Viviani believes this unease about Asia/Asians stems from a deep-seated concern that racial differences pose a threat to 'Australian values' and the white nation (7). There are real and overwhelming fears regarding the 'Asianisation' of Australian society.[12] Erroneous constructions of 'Asia' as a monolithic entity intensify the feelings of intimidation, because this creation equates to a monolithic threat to 'Australian identity' and survival (Stuart-Fox 96). Australia's "siege mentality" is a consequence of its tenuous self-definition and feelings of relative vulnerability (Yu 78).

How we think of multiculturalism is inseparable from the question of how we think of nationalism or "Australian culture". According to Stratton and Ang, it has become "orthodoxy" to articulate the advent of Australian multiculturalism as the result of "a failure of the earlier ethic

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[11]It is worth to note that Asia is just *one* of the sites against/with which Australia defines itself. Other sites include a debatable identification with the other 'Anglo' countries, namely Britain and the USA, as well as with Australia's colonial past.

[12]Besides being influenced by perceptions of Asia, Australian multiculturalism evolved from within a neo-nationalist framework which was dominated by U.S. ideas about minority and civil rights, feminism and affirmative action. It began as a response to 'first wave' European migrants before the Vietnam era 'Asianised' the debate.

of assimilation" (147). But it is vital to view multiculturalism in effect as a national effort to establish a new cultural framework for a re-delineation of Australian national identity: "Multiculturalism has been regarded as a response to a crisis of identity in a settler society, which, for a variety of reasons, could no longer sustain a national identity dependent on the myth of a British origin" (Stratton and Ang 149). Perpetually evolving, 'Australian identity' is subject to increasing interactions with Asia. In addition, Australia is influenced by the political, economical and social forces in Asia as well as by migratory movements from Asia.

Does multiculturalism and the quest for national identity have to be inherently conflicting? This depends on how national identity is defined. It must be noted that the ambiguity in official government rhetoric is extremely disturbing, and inherent in the very title of the pamphlet *Multiculturalism for All Australians*. If multiculturalism is for *all* Australians, why then is there "struggle over who invents or who mythologises the space we call Australia" (Gunew "Multiculturalism" 101)? Why is there such a conflict over meanings, with a seemingly dominant group (Anglo/Celtic) deciding what constitutes Australian culture? Is multiculturalism an attack on notions of national cultural unity or just on the British heritage and colonial inheritance (Stratton and Ang)?

The term "multicultural" often refers to groups that are defined oppositionally as non-Anglo rather than non-Western (Gunew "Multicultural Multiplicities" 448). Observers such as Chandran Kukathas believe that translating Australian national identity into multicultural terms misrepresents the diversity of identities within the society. Chris Creighton-Kelly asserts that "[b]ecause multiculturalism uses the rhetoric of inclusion, it cannot properly address the politics of exclusion" (4). Considering the fact that there are over one hundred very different cultural and linguistic groups in Australia, issues of differences demand specific attention and precise research (Gunew "Feminism" 15).[13] In post-colonial and so-called multicultural societies like Australia, markers of difference and otherness such as background, class, religion, ethnicity and colour may

[13]This figure most likely excludes indigenous languages (although Gunew does not indicate this in her paper).

seem simplistic. Yet they are still deliberately and widely applied as modes of distinguishing the Self from the Other.

Australian multiculturalism has been criticised for its alleged attempts to reshape Australian institutions to conform to some more determined perception of "what Australian society should look like" (Kukathas 157). But what *should* Australian society look like? Being defined against an immutable, so-called 'normality' is the bane of the minority subject. It is worth noting that the category of "race" has been largely overlooked in Australian discourses of multiculturalism. The European prerogative over non-Anglo ethnicity has significantly moulded the discourse (Stratton and Ang 156). Suvendrini Perera points out that: "The terms invoked in the 'race debate' suggest the imprecise and shifting ways in which groups are racialised in Australia, with 'migrant' functioning as a racialised term for 'not (quite) white, and whiteness as an attribute of power and dominance" ("Whiteness" 34).

The cultural status of Australians of Asian descent in multicultural Australia remains a precarious one. As Perera asks, "How long until we can say . . . Asians are part of us?" ("Lost in the Translation" 127). Addressing the issue of diaspora and nationalism, Ien Ang maintains that the "representation of Asia 'here' is inextricably linked to that of Asia 'there'" ("Introduction" xx). This makes the boundaries between 'Asia' and 'Australia' "porous" (Ang "Introduction" xx). It does not matter how long Asian-Australians have been 'Australian', they are still collectively racialised whenever there is an outburst of moral panic about Asian immigration (Stratton and Ang 155). According to Omi and Winant:

> Racialisation is an ideological process, a historically specific one. Racial ideology is constructed from pre-existing conceptual (or, if one prefers, 'discursive') elements and emerges from the struggles of competing political projects and ideas seeking to articulate similar elements differently. (64)

The pamphlet put out by the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs (ACPEA) entitled Multiculturalism for all Australians is notable on several points. The subtitle "Our Developing Nationhood", suggests that Australian national identity is itself still developing, "a consequence of the juxtapositioning of different cultures and ethnicities within the territory of the nation-state" (Stratton and Ang 148). In the pamphlet we are told:

> Multiculturalism is . . . much more than the provision of special services to minority ethnic groups. It is a way of looking at Australian society, and involves living together with an awareness of cultural diversity. We accept our differences and appreciate a variety of lifestyles rather than expect everyone to fit into a standardised pattern. Most of all, multiculturalism requires us to recognise that *we each can be 'a real Australian', without necessarily being 'a typical Australian'*. (17, italics my own emphasis)

What *does* it mean to be a "real" Australian? The question of whether multiculturalism still implicitly supports an idealisation of whiteness, and valourises this hegemonic ideology is a very important one. Australia's anti-racist stance as purported in public rhetoric and government policies is often dismissed as being only "skin-deep" (Castles and Vasta 4). The reality is that discriminatory practices continue to permeate every strata of Australian life. When these practices are maintained on the basis of inherent biological and social markers and further linked to discourses of ethnicity and race, they become particularly treacherous.

The ambivalent inclusions and exclusions of multiculturalism are disturbing. By focusing on difference, multiculturalism effectively keeps ethnics 'ethnic'; this in turn serves to retain the 'homogeneity' of what Ghassan Hage has dubbed the 'white nation' (Australia). Non-white, non-western elements are insidiously impeded from full civic belonging, despite the demand for the immigrant to 'integrate' and become 'Australian'. This contradictory charge might underlie the ambivalence of western politics and discourses in relation to immigration. On the one hand there is the sanctimonious demand for the immigrant to 'integrate' if not to assimilate, but on the other hand, there exists the disavowal of every possibility of 'integration' as well as an incessant insistence on the (residual) difference contained in multiculturalism.

Perhaps if Pauline Hanson[14], Geoffrey Blainey[15], John Howard and their respective supporters[16] could have their way, Australia would revert to the days of the 'White Australia Policy'. The controversial and volatile debates about Asian immigration are a demonstration of Australia's capricious consciousness of the Asian presence in Australia. According to David Walker and John Ingelson, the increasing scale of Asian migration to Australia was such that by 1980, about 40 percent of migrants hailed from Asia, whereas up to 1939 the majority of migrants had come from Great Britain and Ireland (320). This demographic shift "touched the most sensitive nerve of Australia, causing no small amount of fearful speculation in that notorious nationwide debate about Asian immigration initiated by Professor Geoffrey Blainey" (Yu 80).

Much of the current debate on immigration, including Asian immigration and that from the Middle East, is based on emotion rather than information. There are many unfortunate parallels between the present Howard Government's populist politics and Hansonism. They are both examples of 'paranoia politics'. In her maiden speech to Parliament 10 September 1996, Pauline Hanson, the Independent Member for Oxley, caused a huge uproar with her infamous statement that Australia was "in danger of being swamped by Asians" (Mellor 44). She called for a racially based immigration policy, a halt to immigration in the short term, and for the abolition of 'multiculturalism' in Australia. She insinuated that Asian migrants were undesirable as they "have their own culture and religion, form ghettos [with the accompanying suggestions of vice and violence] and do not assimilate" (cited in Mellor 44).

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[14]"The issue dominated media headlines throughout October [1997], but became less visible following the unanimous endorsement of a bipartisan parliamentary motion on 30 October, opposing racial discrimination and reaffirming support for a non-discriminatory immigration policy. However, in April 1997 Pauline Hanson regained her prominence in the media with the launch of her new political party, One Nation. The debate was covered by the media across Asia, prompting concern that it would affect tourism and student enrollments from Asia, as well as tarnish Australia's reputation overall". From Deborah J. McNamara and James E. Coughlan, eds. "Asians in Australia: An Introduction". Asians in Australia – Patterns of Migration and Settlement. Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia, 1997, p. 9.

[15]Refer to Geoffrey Blainey. "The Dilemma of Asian Immigration" *The Age*, 20 March 1984, in Blainey: Eye on Australia – Speeches and Essays of Geoffrey Blainey. Melbourne: Schwartz & Wilkinson, 1991, pp. 26-30.

[16]For details, see Jamie Mackie. "The Politics of Asian Immigration". Asians in Australia – Patterns of Migration and Settlement. Eds. James E. Coughlan and Deborah J. McNamara. Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia, 1997, pp. 29-31.

Hanson insisted vehemently that such 'un' or 'anti'-Australian behaviours were unacceptable. Howard uses this same ploy in the 'children overboard affair'. When asked to comment on the allegations that asylum seeks threw their children overboard in their bid to be admitted to Australia, the Prime Minister declared that: "I don't want in Australia people who would throw their own children into the sea – I don't" (A Just Australia). On 13 September 2001, the then Defense Minister, Peter Reith, insisted that it was imperative to: "manage people coming into your country. You've got to be able to control that otherwise it can be a pipeline for terrorists to come in and use your country as a staging post for terrorist activities". Reith may have repeatedly denied that this was not in any way related to "anyone's background, ethnic background, the Middle East or anything else", but the "implications were clear" (A Just Australia).

Hanson's and Howard's racialisation of Australian identity is problematic. This is because it specifically targets Asian Australians and Arab/Islamic-Australians (as well as indigenous Australians), the groups that are "least conducive, corporeally and culturally, to the process of assimilation, and therefore least likely to be re-cycled into Anglo-Australians" (Perera and Pugliese). In another analysis of "Whiteness and its Discontents", Perera has gone on to suggest that:

> [T]he rhetoric of Hansonism, the mobilisation of white Australian identity, of a seemingly liberal discourse of egalitarianism and sameness, is dependent on a series of repressions, unsaids and willed forgettings. In their stead, Hansonism invokes the success story of assimilation, in which 'we' all become the same, or at least potentially the same, substituting for painful, divisive stories of the past, inclusive narratives of a united national future.

Perera points out that Hansonism is powerful and dangerous. This is because while exploiting / tapping into the malcontent electorate, Hanson was at the same time exhorting a contemporary form of racist supremacy. Hanson's opinions once again vigourously reinforce the notion of Asian otherness, all in the name of "One Australia". This is painfully ironic, since she did seem to mean one Australia, that is one white Australia. John Howard is guilty of propagating

similarly divisive and insidious ideas in his handling of the 'queue jumpers' and 'illegal' boat people.

Pauline Hanson's comments generated a lot of tension and distress. They led to a deluge of public and media comment on related issues, much of it aired on talkback radio. The Australian government, and its leader John Howard in particular, were criticised widely in the quality media for not repudiating Hanson's views immediately following her speech, and also for not refuting her arguments with facts (Tingle 1; Jopson and Passey 8). In addition, it prompted many heated discussions as well as causing considerable concern to Australia's Asian neighbors (Baker 8). Ironically, it also had the effect of raising the profile of Asians in Australia and drawing attention to their unique position or some would say plight in Australian society. Howard's approach toward the refugees and the detention centres too has drawn flak to the very issues he is trying hard to downplay.

Bill O' Chee, former senator for Queensland, censured Hanson with an article in the <u>Far Eastern Economic Journal</u>. In his article, he asserts that "Asian-Australians constitute just 8 percent of the population and are highly unlikely to swamp the other 92 percent" (O'Chee 42). Asian-born migrants currently represent only 4 percent of the population, hardly a case of 'swamping' (Perera and Pugliese). O'Chee goes on to debunk Hanson's dubious charge of Asian criminal activity and failure to assimilate – Asian-Australians have "one of the lowest crime rates in the country, and are incredibly productive members of the community" (O'Chee 42). O'Chee's response however, inadvertently unearths yet another snag of multiculturalism, that is the discourse of tolerance.

The discourse of tolerance demonstrates that within the so-called 'egalitarianism' of Australia, lies an inherent hegemonic and tokenistic relationship. According to Ghassan Hage:

> Multicultural tolerance, like all tolerance, is not, then a good policy that happens to be limited in its scope. It is a strategy aimed at reproducing and disguising relationships of power in society, or

> being reproduced through that disguise. It is a form of symbolic violence in which a mode of domination is presented as a form of egalitarianism. (*White Nation* 87)

Touted by the Australian government as a societal 'carrot' of sorts in the multicultural nation, this often smugly patronising model of tolerance is certainly contentious. This discourse is a useful framework for analysing the politics and seemingly conditional nature of Asian-Australian citizenry.

During the assimilation phase, migrant cultures were seen as maladaptive and rejected by Anglo-Australians, but with the shift to multiculturalism they took on a different significance – they were celebrated. But within multiculturalism, migrant cultures have generally become defined in a static way to mean cultural and linguistic traditions. Migrant cultural identities are based on visible characteristics such as language, folk traditions and especially cuisine (Vasta "Multiculturalism and Ethnic Identity" 213). Its drawback, as Donald and Rattansi articulate, is that multicultural celebrations of diversity tend to "reproduce the 'sari, samosas and steel-bands syndrome'" (2). Although speaking about the British experience, Donald and Rattansi's analysis is equally relevant to Australia:

> That is, by focusing on the superficial manifestations of culture, multiculturalism failed to address the continuing hierarchies of power and legitimacy that still existed among these different centres of cultural authority. By exoticising them, it even colluded in their further disenfranchisement. Despite its apparent relativism, in practice it defined alternative centres of cultural authority primarily in terms of their difference from the norm of [Australian] culture, not in their uniqueness and their discontinuities. (Donald and Rattansi 2)

The valourising of diversity must take into account the issues of class and power relations embedded within the discourses of cosmo-multiculturalism and enrichment. Through visible cultural pluralism, cosmopolitanism fulfills the desire for Australia's entry into a "coveted cultural province" (K. Anderson 81). Kevin McDonald maintains that in the post-World War II era, "multiculturalism signalled the possibility of a break with the culture of fear, borders and conformity that had been central to the postwar experience. The . . . middle class embraced

multiculturalism because it was a culture of cosmopolitanism" (19). However, it becomes clear that civic approval of Others is contingent only upon satisfactory and pleasing versions of that difference.

Asian-Australians often find themselves validated only in their roles as "good little migrants", who in the words of Uyen Loewald's poem are counted upon to "prepare cheap, exotic food . . . sew costumes . . . write music, and dance to *our* tune / *Our* culture must not be dull" (118, italics my own emphasis).[17] The presence of the minority subject is thus "valued" in the discourse of multiculturalism for the "cultural enrichment" s/he provides, and it is exactly this role that positions him/her interminably in "the space of objectified otherness" (Ang "Curse" 40). This officious version of cultural plurality is again one of the many largely complacent, self-congratulatory and unproblematised accounts of multiculturalism.

My thesis situates Asian-Australians within the many scholarly deliberations about Australian multiculturalism. In particular, I seek to elucidate how contemporary "Asian-Australian" literature frames the debate about diasporic/post-colonial identities, hybridity and agency. As Ien Ang elegantly and eloquently puts it:

> The increasingly frequent reference to 'multiculturalism' and 'cultural diversity' is symptomatic of the quest for a new national culture suitable for globalizing times. In this, the task is to develop viable ways of 'living together' in which differences cannot be erased, only negotiated, and where notions of belonging no longer depend on an allegiance to a given 'common culture' (undergrided by racial sameness) but on the process of partial sharing of the country, a process that will necessarily imply give and take, mutual influencing, and ongoing cultural hybridization. As long as acceptance of such processual and open-ended nation-building in not forthcoming, 'Asian-Australia' will remain a contradiction in terms. (Ang *On Not Speaking* 125)

[17]"Our" here is understood to mean the dominant, that is white, Anglo-Australian culture.

2 "WE MUST LAUGH AT OURSELVES, OR DIE"[1] – HUMOUR AS RESISTANCE

Humour is a potent strategy of resistance and survival. It is inextricably connected to issues of hegemony and autonomy (N. Walker). In this chapter, I am interested in how humour, particularly humour in the ironic sense, is employed in contemporary Asian-Australian literature. Irony suggests a duplicity of meaning, in the sense that "*one and the same word*, in *one and the same sentence* means at *one and the same time* two different things, and so that one delights, semantically, in the one by the other" (Barthes 72 cited in Hutcheon 12). Highlighting literal and ironic meanings within the Asian-Australian texts, this chapter challenges the idea that meaning is "single, stable, decidable, complete, closed, innocent, or transparent" (Hutcheon 12). Wayne C. Booth comments that "irony is usually seen as something that undermines clarities, opens up vistas of chaos and liberates by destroying all dogma or destroys by revealing the inescapable canker of negation at the heart of every affirmation" (ix).[2]

George Lipsitz points out that as a result of being rendered impotent in the political and cultural spheres, ethnic minority cultures have cultivated "a sophisticated capacity for ambiguity, juxtaposition, and irony – all key qualities in the postmodern aesthetic" (159). They are compelled to embrace a "bifocality that reflects both the way they view themselves and the way that they are viewed by others" (Lipsitz 159):

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[1]Wilson Harris. This epigraph is taken from one of Gooneratne's chapters in A Change of Skies (115). Harris is parodying W. H. Auden's famous line, "We must love one another, or die". Chandani Lokuge points out that "this epigraph with all its ironic implications, contains Gooneratne's message to her readers: that, if we *do not* laugh at one another, we die" ("We Must Die" 34).

[2]As the prominent ironologist, D. C. Muecke, in Irony and the Ironic puts it: "The word 'irony' does not now mean only what it meant in earlier centuries, it does not mean in one country all it may mean in another, nor in the street what it may mean in the study, nor to one scholar what it may mean to another" (7).

> In a world that constantly undermines the importance and influence of traditions, ethnic minorities remain tied to their pasts as a way of explaining and arbitrating the problems of the present. Because their marginality involves the pain of exclusion, minority group culture speaks eloquently about the fissures and frictions of society. Because their experience demands bifocality, minority group culture reflects the decentred and fragmented nature of contemporary human experience. Because their history identified the source of their marginality, minority group cultures have a legitimacy and connection to the past that distinguishes them from more assimilated groups. Masters of irony in an ironic world, they often understand that their marginality makes them more appropriate spokespersons for society than mainstream groups unable to fathom or address the cause of their alienation. (Lipsitz 159)

For Asian-Australian literature, irony's extraordinary way of "saying two things at once, of pretending to speak a dominant 'language' while subverting it at the same time" becomes an important tool of post-colonial dimensions (Hutcheon vii). In permitting alternative meanings to be suggested, irony offers a glimpse at the other side of the (hi)story. It also allows for life's inanity to be objectively scrutinised (Glicksberg 4). After all, the human condition is inherently absurd. Many of our essential activities and some of our deepest emotions are ludicrous. In this chapter, I will seek to examine irony and satire as forms of resistance and literary subversion in Yasmine Gooneratne's second novel The Pleasures of Conquest, Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments and Teo Hsu-Ming's Love and Vertigo. I will also seek to study the cultural ramifications of imperialism in their fiction. In addition, I will question whether the novels offer any expectations or hopes of reconciliation.

In his review of The Pleasures of Conquest, Adib Khan notes that while the use of comedy by Third World émigré writers as an anti-imperialistic device is relatively new, it is certainly progressive ("Shadows" 358). Khan cites Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children as an example:

> [Midnight's Children] is noted for being a startling departure from the norm (the diasporic writer's protest in postcolonial literature frequently characterised by a sustained note of indignation, and the pain inflicted on the collective pysche of the Third World expressed by diluting realism with myth – as though that hurt were too unbearable to record with factual accuracy). By resorting to the comical epic, Rushdie was able to use outlandish humour to expose some of the unpalatable truths about India's past without undue offense to the more delicate sensibilities. Rushdie's impact on writers from the subcontinent and Sri Lanka has been to loosen the imagination and dissipate some hang-ups about the colonial heritage. ("Shadows" 359)

Khan has observed how Third World Literature has started to take itself less seriously and has "even learned to chuckle at the flaws in its own indigenous cultures" (359). For him, the growing popularity of comedy as a form of post-colonial commentary, and the geniality with which it is embraced suggests that "post-colonial writers are beginning to accept the conclusion of Saleem Sinai (from Midnight's Children): 'We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows of imperfection'. It is an imperfection that embraces all humanity: the coloniser and the colonised, the sahibs and the natives" (cited in "Shadows" 359).

Gooneratne, Khan and Teo continue the trend begun by Rushdie. Without detracting from their seriousness of purpose, The Pleasures of Conquest, Seasonal Adjustments and Love and Vertigo invoke laughter at those crucial moments when the principal characters are at their most vulnerable. Set mainly in "Amnesia", an idyllic, tropical island-nation between Australia and Asia (post-colonial Sri Lanka in disguise), the humour in Gooneratne's The Pleasures of Conquest is neither ponderous nor injurious. Gooneratne focuses on those immutable "shadows of imperfection", as she "fictionalises the human face of imperialism in its various forms" (Khan "Shadows" 359). These "shadows of imperfection" are echoed in Khan's Seasonal Adjustments, with a noticeably caustic agitation colouring his vivid vision of post-colonial Australia and Bangladesh. Teo's Love and Vertigo, also reveals the many human foibles, as well as the familiar and familial frustrations of her characters: "There is no sense of judgment or superiority [in her novel], just a bitter gall that so many well-intentioned people could fail so badly to give to each other the things they need" (Davie).

The fickleness of fortune, the uncertainties about life and about society in general are illuminated in The Pleasures of Conquest, Seasonal Adjustments and Love and Vertigo. Gooneratne's, Khan's and Teo's ironic commentaries are as Cicero famously states: "*imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis* (an imitation of life, a mirror of custom, an image of truth)".[3] They employ humour as a tool to comprehend society. The novels' subject matter, which is often drawn from daily life, indicates a keen interest in the affairs of the human community. This high level of involvement therefore necessitates a critical accuracy of observation. The characters are "both worse than us and exactly like us" (Shershow 12). This portrayal of people expresses both a cynical as well as an impartial view of human nature.

For Gooneratne, "irony isn't just a literary device . . . [it is] a means of keeping sane, of protecting the self against what is too obscene or horrible to contemplate squarely" (Giese 4). It thus helps to maintain emotional equilibrium in an unstable world. Khan and Teo use their cultures' various preoccupations to construct separate and multiple worlds. For them, humour is a way of dealing with the difficulties as well as the dramas of being different in multicultural Australia.

An important feature about irony is how authors and readers achieve it together. Sneja Gunew notes that "the mainstream is extraordinarily reluctant to recognise the existence of irony among the marginal; irony is apparently reserved for (and a mark of) a dominant or privileged group" (Gunew "PMT" 40). However in The Pleasures of Conquest, Seasonal Adjustments and Love and Vertigo the 'elitism' of irony' is reversed. In the novels, meanings that are unfamiliar or threatening to the dominant group are obscured. These meanings however can

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[3]The definition is preserved in Donatus, *De Comoedia* 5.1, in *Aeli Donati Commentum Terenti*, ed. Paulus Wessner. Leipzig: B. G. Teubneri, 1902, I:22. Cited in Shershow 12.

only be perceived by the appropriate reader, [or the knowing minority] who shares the experiences of post-colonialisation. In Asian-Australian literature, the percipients of irony always feel themselves to be members of a small, select, secret society headed by the author. This becomes a means of resistance and agency.

It is clear that the authors have a choice of how narrow they want to make their "comprehending readership" (Hutcheon 11). The ironists appeal to the 'comprehending' reader, one that is assumed to be sympathetic, appreciative and open to the versions/visions of the colonial and post-colonial as portrayed by Gooneratne, Khan and Teo. Irony has thus the effect of consolidating a sense of community among those readers with the inside knowledge necessary to decipher it. A space is gradually created for the Asian-Australian voice, that is an Asian-Australian reading of the world. As Sudesh Mishra eloquently puts it, "the transmission of irony assumes a common interpretative archive, a shared way of seeing and speaking, a discursive field within which political, ethical and cultural wars are meaningfully waged" (37).

Yasmine Gooneratne's professional interest in writers such as Jane Austen, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope and the English satirists of the 18th century also invariably influences her style. In The Pleasures of Conquest, language is seen as a mode of concealment much more so than one of revelation, which thus induces readers to read between the lines. Khan and Teo too use irony as the discoverer and explorer of incongruities. In Love and Vertigo and Seasonal Adjustments, irony becomes "a mode potentially capable of addressing [Asian/Australian] cultures from within, while simultaneously signalling a position of difference and even opposition" (Hutcheon 14). It is that recognition of "hidden sameness that makes the comic incongruity into an ironic one" (Hutcheon 22).

In her article about Yasmine Gooneratne in the Weekend Australian, Diana Giese says "[b]elonging gives permission to satirise" (4). Does it really? Or do Asian-Australian authors resort to the use of satire and irony *because of the lack of belonging*? I argue for the latter.

Khan, Gooneratne and Teo are still considered apart from the prevalent mainstream (white Australian) culture since they draw on non- Anglo-Celtic traditions and non-English vernacular. Canadian critic Arun Mukherjee has argued that 'migrant' writers (in this case Gooneratne, Khan and Teo) "may be said to possess that double vision which comes only with alienation from the dominant group" (85). It is this double vision that engenders a fertile and conducive environment for ironies.

The need to resist the dominant culture – however liberal or benevolent - is evident in the novels of Yasmine Gooneratne, Adib Khan and Teo Hsu-Ming. But since as Australians of Asian ancestry (racial minorities), they can neither fully assimilate nor can they be totally autonomous from the dominant culture. On that account, they are forced as George Lipsitz says into "complex and creative cultural negotiations" with and against that dominant force (159). Moreover, these negotiations involve an active confrontation with their own history and traditions. It is clear that Gooneratne, Khan and Teo feel the weight of cultural tradition, intensified by distance and time, by memory, by a sense of exile or perhaps simple nostalgia. For them, irony becomes a device for articulating both the influence of cultural tradition and the need to contest it.

The presence of irony in the Asian-Australian texts emphasises "the importance of the language-place disjunction in the construction of post-colonial realities" (Ashcroft et al 28). Conscious of this disjunction, Asian-Australian writers seek to produce "another version of history" (Gunew "Feminism" 22). In The Pleasures of Conquest, the protagonist Stella Mallinson, an American pulp-romance novelist and accidental imperialist, wishes literally to create her own version of history – Amnesia according to Stella Mallinson. Supremely enthusiastic about promoting Amnesia's literary culture, her efforts are ardently supported by the Amnesian Government. Named the Mallinson Project after its benevolent patron, Stella hand-picks nine of Amnesia's "stupendously talented (but sadly, yet unknown writers)" to contribute a chapter to a book, a "unique and wonderful piece of creative literary art" (27).

The book, to be entitled Nine Jewel Rice, would consist of Amnesian love stories translated into English.

In Nine Jewel Rice, the Mallinson Project seeks to showcase nine "specially selected ancient Amnesian sites, thus bringing their existence, their historical importance and their picturesque attributes to the attention of a hitherto uncaring world and opening them up to tourist development" (27). The "Mallinson Project" can be seen as "an act of imperialism, a misappropriation of Amnesian culture [which is] as transgressive as the physical invasion by the British" (Shaw 49). Gooneratne addresses issues of cultural and economic hegemony through Stella Mallinson. Mallinson and the other satirical characters in the novel "demonstrate a familiar pattern of fallibility, based on illusions of grandeur and ill-conceived notions of philanthropic responsibility" (Khan "Shadows" 359).

Self-interest and presumptuous virtuosity on both sides are ingeniously tackled in The Pleasures of Conquest. The illusion of Stella's altruistic magnanimity is cultivated and maintained by the Amnesian politicians. The Minister for Tourism and Immigration is quick to seize the obvious advantages offered by the Mallinson Project (both for the economy as well as for his career). In his opening speech at the launch of the Project, he praises Mrs Mallinson for her "social concern and her compassionate heart" (34). He goes on to say "it was Amnesia's good fortune that she had ranked herself with its *defenders against the forces of capitalist exploitation*" (34, italics my own emphasis). Stella basks in her role of sympathetic activist. In an interview with Topaz Magazine, she tells the reporter:

> 'You have some massively talented writers here . . . and no one in the States has ever heard of them. It's a shame. It's an international disgrace. Not your shame. Not your disgrace. Ours. Because it's due to the stranglehold the West has on the international book trade. Particularly, I have to admit it, the USA – ' here Stella laughed her light, tinkling laugh, and the reporter laughed with her. Either he was nervous, or he was aware of her soaring sales figures in America. 'Well, I said to myself what say little Stella does her bit to redress the balance, save an endangered species?' (26)

Her façade of humble deference is totally stripped away when the journalist innocently asks Stella where her book is to be published:

> What a question! Stella Mallinson looked at the reporter with barely disguised irritation. Where else but in the United States of America, where the mechanics of marketing and distributing books, like other manufactured goods, are better understood and more profitably practised than anywhere else in the civilised world? (28)

With spontaneous irreverence, Gooneratne brushes away illusions and rearranges perspectives. In the scrambling of familiar objects into incongruous juxtaposition, the real truth is revealed "through the mildly coloured cloud of dissimulation" (Highet 57). In Linda Hutcheon's words, irony's ability to express two meanings simultaneously "designates a literary mode in which the text creates an artistic vision only to destroy it by revealing its own process of arbitrary manipulation or construction" (9).

Central to the novel is The New Imperial Hotel. Thoroughly capitalising on "Amnesia's picturesque past", the hotel is an extravagant celebration of old colonial ambiance and everything "to flatter the occidental ego with imitations of Western superiority" (Gooneratne 245; Khan "Shadows" 360). According to Khan, it is "a monument to the exploitative excesses of history" ("Shadows" 359). Erected by an Amnesian king in 1592, the hotel later became emblematic of "Dutch mercenary success" (243). When the British conquered the Inner Kingdom in 1815, it was designated the British Resident's headquarters. It was subsequently returned to the Amnesian people when the Resident converted to Buddhism. Currently owned by a multinational chain, its name, the New Imperial, is distinctively appropriate as it symbolises the 'new' cultural imperialism thriving in Amnesia: "Located in the heart of the Inner Kingdom, the New Imperial Hotel is a focal point in East-West relations. Each phase of its history reflects an ironic reversal of what had come before" (Shaw 48-9). Observing this cycle, Khan says that "[b]y the end of the book it is virtually impossible to distinguish between the conqueror and the conquered. Who is really being exploited – East or West?" ("Shadows" 359)

"[B]ound on a mission of mercy" to Amnesia, Stella Mallinson, "international author" and "roving ambassador from the Free World" exemplifies the 'new' imperialism (11). Upon arrival at the New Imperial Hotel, Stella takes a sip of her "Planter's punch" and feels herself "the centre of a world that seemed to have been created expressly for her pleasure" (5; 12):

> The chair on which Stella was sitting had been so cunningly positioned on the tiled mosaic floor chart that she appeared from a distance to be floating on air, very much like the queen in Gerard van Ryckman's cartouche.
> The arrangement was a conceit deliberately designed to flatter. It was calculated to make the Western visitor . . . look like a pampered beauty in a Cecil B. de Mille film. (If she caught sight of her reflection in the huge mirror on the opposite wall, she was likely to feel it too.) Supported on her left hand by richly-dressed merchants, exotic animals, half-naked muscled slaves bearing tributes of ivory and pearls, on her right by two winged cherubs measuring distances with dividers while a third kneeling, spins a golden globe . . . (9)

The mosaic is a translation from "a mariner's chart commissioned in 1720 by the Dutch East India Company" (3). In it, Gerard van Ryckman the Elder had "captured the Orient and delivered it to the imagination of eighteenth-century Europe" (3-4). Its appeal still holds for the very present-century Stella Mallinson who wholly embraces the illusion. However, the observant critic would note that "many of [the map's] features appear to have altered in the process of translation" (245). For example, "the wild tusker" in van Ryckman's original map was tamed and turned into "a jumbo as well-fed and docile" as one you would find at the zoo (245).

The history in Gooneratne's novel is that of imperialism which is duly perpetuated throughout the ages. The author charts its uninterrupted course skillfully through links between Stella Mallinson, Sir John D'Esterey and Philip Destry. Nineteeth-century British Resident in Amnesia and later Chief translator to the British Crown, Sir John is introduced into the novel through the discovery of a series of letters by the academic Philip Destry. The irony lies in the

fact that Philip Destry's connection to John D'Esterey "is not a link of blood but by those mystical ties of common understanding which connect man with man across time and space, creating a kinship of the mind" (207). Indeed, the "parallels" between both D'Esterey and Destry are "irresistible" (137). The letters reveal the noble civil servant, John D'Esterey as a "master spy" whose treachery and betrayal of the Amnesian king embodies the colonial mentality. Philip Destry's character is similarly ruthless, predatory and opportunistic.

Totally deluded, Philip Destry envisages himself as a monarch in the "kingdom of the mind" (Shaw 49; Gooneratne 130). For him, "[t]he construction of an academic career was an enterprise, he reflected, 'not unlike the building of an empire'" (116). He smugly admits that "the women in his life" (lovers and research assistants) were "the brazen wheels that had kept the golden hands of [the Destry] Empire in motion" (116). As Narelle Shaw notes, "[e]xploitation of women is simply another guise of colonialist mentality" (49). Destry blatantly appropriates the research of his assistant, Leila Tan, as his own. Arrogantly dismissive of her contribution, Destry relegates Leila to a mere footnote in his publication (Shaw 49).

Gooneratne (like Teo whose style I will discuss shortly) writes in restrained terms, appearing almost nonchalant about the injustices of colonisation or the hypocrisy of men. It is as if this is expected and 'normal' behaviour. In her novel, Gooneratne advances the argument that history is undoubtedly written by the conquerors. What she does here is to undermine and puncture the grandiose pretensions of the imperial 'villains', to illustrate the true nature of villainy when transplanted in the post-colonial world.

Gooneratne's, Khan's and Teo's intention is to ridicule racism and folly and thus aid in diminishing it. As Dryden, in his preface "To the Reader" in Absalom and Achitophel (first part), comments, "[t]he true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction" (cited in Highet 241). Irony is not, of course necessarily comic: it becomes comic in these Asian-

Australian texts when its "very neutrality is exploited as a form of relief from humans' conventional response of outrage and involvement towards delusion and error" (Mudrick 3). As social life itself becomes more complex, we get "a comedy of manners, or of mannerisms", whose "realism" is correspondingly artificial (Shershow 15).

In Love and Vertigo, history is recounted according to Grace Tay, the young Asian-Australian narrator. She relates how the racial riots of May 1969 in Malaysia are "a watershed year in the life of [her] family. It is significant for the entry of Sonny Tay (Grace's elder brother) into the world and the start of Pandora's (Grace's mother) grim determination to escape from [Malaysia]" (Lim). A comic triviality, namely Jonah Tay's (Grace's father) and Beng Chee's durian escapade is set against the bloody backdrop of the 1969 riots.[4] The scene is highly powerful in its incongruity. Her characters Jonah and his dental practice partner, Beng Chee, "these two Chinese knights in an orange Fiat, ardent in their self-imposed quest for the holy grail of durian" are shown speeding towards Petaling Jaya where there were rumours of its availability (129):

> [O]bsessed by the thought of early durians . . . [they were] blissfully unaware. . . and ignorant of the fact that in Kuala Lumpur, UMNO youth members and other Malays from the rural *kampongs* had smashed, looted and burnt down Chinese shophouses and temples. Armed with their *parangs* and knives, invoking the will of Allah, they slaughtered and disembowelled hundreds of Chinese men, women and children. Later estimates would place the number of Chinese killed at around two thousand. (130)

Teo recounts the scene with studied detachment, which is highly disarming in its apparent composure. Teo treats life as material for comedy, devoid of sentiment or questions of

[4]Malaysia gained its independence in 1957. "Any hope that the Federation of Malaysia might be a multicultural society made up of three main ethnicities – Malay, Chinese and Indian – begin to disintegrate by the late 1960s. The fear of Chinese economic and political power had already been demonstrated on August 9, 1965, when Malaysia kicked Singapore and its Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, out of the Federation. Racial hatred against the immigrant Chinese population in Malaysia would once again be demonstrated on Friday, May 13, 1969" (Teo 130).

morality. She is interested in people, objects, events, only as they might be observed and recreated free of consequence.

Teo Hsu-Ming deploys comic incongruity to consummate effect in the events that follow Jonah and Beng Chee's return from Petaling Jaya. They come across a Malay durian seller on the way home. Their passion for the "mace-like fruit" makes them completely reckless (133). Beng Chee gets down to the business of bargaining. He is suspicious about why so many durians remain unsold and demands to know about the quality of the durians. The durian seller is clearly exasperated by all his questions:

> Both [Beng Chee and Jonah] gasped and jumped back in fear as the Malay whipped out his *parang* and slashed downwards with all his might. Sunlight glinted off the broad silver blade as it cleaved the rigid shell of a durian in two, exposing the crescent-shaped pods . . . The durian-seller dug out two pieces of durian and offered them to the men.
> 'Try,' he urged. 'Very sweet'. (134)

They haggle over the price but before the transaction could be completed, they hear "the distant sounds of marching and singing" (134). The Malay durian seller advises Jonah and Beng Chee to leave their car and run into the jungle to hide. A loud explosion is soon heard - the Fiat is set on fire by UMNO youths. The durian seller's cart is overturned with some cases of durians thrown into the burning car "to teach [the durian seller] a lesson for trying the sell durians to the Chinese" (136). After this harrowing episode, the durian seller impassively asks the men, "You still want some durians or what?" (136). Jonah and Beng Chee of course cannot resist the offer and end up purchasing all the remaining durians as well as the cart. Laden with durians, they wheel the cart down the road, finally making it back "to their neighbourhood in the early hours of the morning" (136).

Teo's deceptive casualness belies the trenchant critique. Her humour is subversive because her readers laugh at the ridiculousness of the whole 'durian' incident, while simultaneously cringing at the violence and ugly racism that accompanied it. The readers are witness to the

riotous carnage, the horrific "killing spree organised to a precise café colour scheme": "after *susu* [after milky-white Chinese] then *kopi* [the coffee-coloured Indians]" (Lim; Teo 130). She thus succeeds in drawing attention to the racist politics that have shaped Malaysia.

Similarly in Seasonal Adjustments, the critical issues raised by Adib Khan are important and refuse to remain discreet. Through his protagonist Iqbal Chaudhary, Khan reveals an alternative account of history. Khan/Iqbal finds incongruities "between overt and hidden, between professed and acted upon" (Mudrick 3). He perceives the many human failures that are progressively illuminated by irony. Iqbal reflects that "[w]hen [he] first arrived in Australia, [he] thought it an ideal sanctuary, prosperous and inexperienced in suffering. [He] knew nothing of the Aborigines then. [Australia] appeared to be a humane society, a just society – generous and friendly" (123). But, he comes to realise that "[b]ehind its ornate façade of wealth lay the weaknesses of any human society . . ." (123).

Iqbal reads a provocative newspaper article warning that several neighbouring countries will overtake Australia's living standards. He remarks with biting sarcasm that "it is the sort of speculation which causes communal consternation. What will they say behind the exclusive doors in Collins Street?" (32):

> *What? Singapore? South Korea? Asian countries? Surely not? What a preposterous idea! There is a rectifiable flaw somewhere in the evolutionary pattern. That is not how it was meant to be. It shall right itself.* Let us march with the all-conquering spirit of Europe. We carry the world's treasures of culture with us. How can we possibly allow them to catch up with us? (Khan 32).

For Khan, irony becomes a way to articulate doubts, insecurities and questionings. His irony also takes an audacious swipe at the archaic Anglo-Australian value system.

Adib Khan's literary strategy is clearly in line with Arun Mukherjee, who feels that 'ethnic' literature can purposefully goad the dominant and dominating culture towards a measure of self-awareness (95). In Seasonal Adjustments, Khan's protagonist, Iqbal attends a party in Melbourne at the family home of Michelle, his then girlfriend (and later wife). He is introduced to Michelle's older brother, Martin and Martin's wife, Judy. As usual, they question him about his origins. Iqbal tells them that he is from Bangladesh. Judy, she of the "toff English accent", says that they "'lived near a Bangali doctor in London. In fact there were quite a few people like [him] living in Putney . . . Too many for [her] liking'. The *coup de grace* is accompanied with an Arctic smile" (147). Smiling back at her "without managing the severity of her frostiness", Iqbal's retort is superb. He says, "'Just like there were too many Britishers in India not so long ago . . . We [meaning India] have more subtle ways of colonising countries'" (147). Khan counters racism head-on with a cutting but revealing reply.

Irony serves as an anti-imperialistic tool because of the subversive power that it places in the hands of victims and underdogs. By applying both the public knowledge invoked by the narrator and the private knowledge of life as a post-colonial subject in these Asian-Australian texts, the reader is enabled to come to just conclusions upon very subtle hints. In Love and Vertigo and in Seasonal Adjustments, Teo and Khan raise the example of colonial education to alert their readers to the contradictions and absurdities that make up the post-colonial experience. Indeed as Khan muses in his novel: "of all the harm colonisation has inflicted on the [colonies], none has been more damaging than the cultural havoc wrought by that hallowed and sacrosanct institution, the English medium school" (88).

In Teo Hsu-Ming's novel, Pandora's aunt, Madam Tan, insists that "English names and English education are the route to advancement and prosperity in postwar Singapore now that the British had returned" (34). Teo in her humourous way comments on the politics of naming. Madam Tan chose names for her nieces – Pandora, Lida, Daphne and Persephone - from "a Reader's Digest condensed book of Greek and Roman myths" (34). Such 'exotic',

foreign and flamboyant names are shown to be highly incongruous with the traditional Singaporean Chinese background of the family. It is evident that Madam Tan "had not understood the stories only recognised the names" (34). The name of the third Lim daughter, Persephone, or as the family pronounced it, "Percy-phone" is glaringly unbefitting. This is because "Percy-phone" in classical Greek mythology was supposedly the most beautiful woman on the earth being the daughter of Zeus and Demeter. However "Percy-phone" in Love and Vertigo was the dullest and least attractive of all the Lim girls.

The most ironic, however, must be the name of one of Teo's main characters - 'Pandora'. The etymology of the name means "all gifted", but Pandora, born during the grim Japanese Occupation of Singapore, is rejected outright by her mother for being a girl – "a rubbish child" (Hoffman, Teo 22). The author also alludes to the myth of 'Pandora's Box'. According to the myth, Pandora was given a box by the gods and was told not to open it under any circumstance: "Impelled by her natural curiosity, she opened the box, and all evil contained [in the box] escaped and spread over the earth. She hastened to close the lid, but the whole contents of the box had escaped, except for one thing which lay at the bottom, and that was Hope" (Hoffman). But for Pandora Tay (nee Lim) in the novel, nothing remains, not even hope. Throughout her life, all her expectations and aspirations eventuate in grievous disappointment.

Even as a young schoolgirl, "Pandora led a schizophrenic life. She was a dutiful Chinese daughter at home and an absurd lampoon of an English schoolgirl outside" (62). She was sent to an Anglican school for Chinese girls where they were "indoctrinated with stirring choruses of '*Land of Hope and Glory*'" (62, italics my own emphasis). But the calamitous events of the then recent World War Two expose how the British had offered neither hope nor glory when they were forced to surrender Singapore, a supposedly impenetrable bastion, to the Japanese invaders.

Another revealing and amusing incident is when Beng Chee and Jonah, who "nostalgic for the sing-alongs of their schooldays", carol exuberantly to Jonah's cassette of "the Best of the British Proms, Recorded Live at the Royal Albert Hall" (129). "'Rule Britannia! Britannia rules the waves' . . . '*Britons never, never shall be slaves*!'" (129, italics my own emphasis) The ironic implications are acute and astute, if the readers keep in mind the inglorious Fall of Singapore and the numerous British/Allied soldiers captured and interned as Prisoners of War. Teo proceeds to remind her readers that "whatever waves Britannia still ruled over, they were certainly not Malaysian ones. Not since *merdeka* - independence - in 1957, when the Malay sultan Tunku Abdul Rahman had presided over the Federation of Malaya's separation from the British Empire" (129-130).

In Seasonal Adjustments and Love and Vertigo, the figures of colonial (and religious) authority are satirised. Using meticulous observation and common sense, Teo and Khan effectively penetrate the lacquered surface of colonial societies. These writers show how enforced cultural sameness established by colonialism becomes ridiculous when it is mimicked by the colonised. In this case, mimicry "does not connote subservience but rather resistance: by showing the relationship between metropolitan and colonial cultures to be based on changing strategies of domination and coercion rather than on static comparisons of 'essential' attributes, mimicry may paradoxically destabilise even as it reinforces" (Huggan 644).

In Seasonal Adjustments, Khan comments on the "fundamentalist brand of Christianity" propagated at the school run by the Brothers of the Holy Cross (89). Behind "an imposing façade of academic excellence", the brothers were also committed to destroying all forms of "communist ideals" (89):

> Unabashedly the good American brothers extolled the virtues of the Yankee way of life bought by the mighty greenback and sustained by those exclusive American qualities of honesty, generousity, patriotism and an unswerving belief in *Ghaad*, that great benefactor and designer of the stars and stripes, known for his love for his favourite citizens. (Khan 89)

In Teo's Love and Vertigo, Pandora's Chinese principal Doris Liu, is also brilliantly caricatured. Described as "one of the successes of the colonising and Christianising missions organised by those formidably intrepid English spinsters who had come out to the colonies and found a purpose in their lives by leading the Girl Guides", Miss Liu is depicted as "an ardent imperialist" (62):

> [Doris Liu] did her best to transform [the Anglican Chinese girls' school] into St Clair's or Malory Towers, with herself as the wise, benevolent headmistress lending an understanding ear, meting out justice and instilling the proper 'tone' into the school . . . Each year she informed the Queen, via her assistant, of the various sporting and swimming carnivals, musical evenings and Shakespeare performances with which she tried to uplift the cultural tone of these colonial Chinese girls . . . The Queen received Christmas and Easter cards, and effusive wishes on her official birthday. In return, Miss Liu received each year an official Christmas card from Buckingham Palace and a brief, civilised letter written by the Queen's secretary. She read them out with quivering pride to the assembly of schoolgirls shuffling and wilting in the equatorial humidity. (63)

For Teo and Khan, the attitude towards the adopted culture is one of unabashed amusement, laughter and even that of wonder at the various idiosyncrasies and absurdities. All 'colonials' and immigrants are engaged in a perpetual struggle with artifice and falsehood (Mandel 265, cited in Hutcheon 40). These encounters produce literature that exists "at the interface of two cultures": it is "a form concerned to define itself, its voice, in the dialectic of self and other and the duplicities of self-creation, transformation and identities" (Mandel 274, cited in Hutcheon 40). As a trope of doubleness, "irony allows 'the other' to address the dominant culture from within that culture's own set of values and modes of understanding, without being co-opted by it and without sacrificing the right to dissent, contradict and resist" (Hutcheon 49).

In Khan's Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal openly admits that he and his childhood friends in post-colonial Bangladesh "prostituted [them]selves willingly to the glamour of a culture [they] did not fully understand" (90):

> Enthused and inspired by the men in white, we exercised our molars on Wrigley's gum, wore checked shirts and listened to Elvis, Ricky Nelson, Buddy Holly, Fabian and the other faceless multitude of rock 'n' roll croakers with greasy hair. We played softball and basketball, thought cricket was okay and openly scorned soccer as the poor man's game. Collectively we bought Camel and Lucky Strike since it was beneath our lofty status to smoke anything made locally. We revelled in American colloqualisms . . . For our imaginative sustenance we rummaged in the vast junkyard of cheap American paperbacks. Mike Hammer was the most admired tough guy in the business of exterminating the bungling commies. The softies went for Perry Mason and the colourless Della. The handful of deviants who were interested in Hemingway and Steinback were branded as spineless homos. (89)

These "American paperbacks" were instrumental in affirming the hegemony of pseudo-American colonialism. In her influential book Masks of Conquest, Gauri Viswanathan asserts that imperial literature (both American and British in this case) was intended "to manage negative perceptions of empire" (20). This was not only by "representing colonial rule as an educational mission", but also – and more insidiously – by circulating and popularising the human face of Anglo/American culture (20).

The controlling mechanisms of imperial textuality are clearly seen in Love and Vertigo. Pandora and her 'chums' try their best to "transform their Chinese beings into English souls" (64):

> To be English was to live in the world of Enid Blyton books where young middle-class children underwent all manner of predictable adventures, demonstrated their resourcefulness and constantly outwitted dimmer working-class adults. They told each other to 'buck up', exclaimed 'I say, how super!' in Singaporean accents and did their British best to be Bricks. They formed Secret Seven clubs, played at being the Famous Five, and talked about midnight feasts with ginger beer, potted meat, tinned sardines, *exotic tinned pineapple* [highly ironic

> since pineapple was certainly not at all 'exotic' in tropical Singapore!] and ham sandwiches. Then they went to the school canteen and bought lunches of spicy *laksa* or *mee goreng* and slurped them up with chopsticks and ceramic soup spoons. (64, italics my own emphasis)

At school, these "Singaporean schoolgirls" were "taught to play hockey", and "given elocution lessons which helped them to efface the local Singlish patois under a borrowed veneer of pseudo-BBC English" (62).

Both Pandora in Teo's novel and Iqbal in Khan's "abandoned the lore of [their respective Asian] childhood[s] for the lure of Anglo-Christian acceptance" (Teo 285). The authors use irony as one way of resisting and yet acknowledging the power of the dominant (Hutcheon 81). They creatively modify the language so as to "signal the 'foreignness' of both the user and his/her experience" (Hutcheon 81). Teo and Khan employ the idea of bifocality, that is they have an eye on two audiences with irony thus arising from this double vision. W. H. New has observed that the notion of irony, this sense of being divided between two worlds, is a recurrent idea throughout Commonwealth literature:

> Though dualities abound in the ironist's world, the stances s/he may take range from parody and innuendo through sarcasm and self-disparagement to absurdity and nihilism . . . At its best, the ironic stance provokes a serious deliberation into the problems that led to dualities in the first place. (New "Among Worlds" 3)

In the texts, "the challenge is to use the existing language, even if it is the voice of a dominant 'other' – and yet speak through it: to disrupt . . . the codes and forms of the dominant language in order to reclaim speech for itself" (New "Dreams of Speech" x).

In Teo's and Khan's novels, the cultural influences and repercussions of colonialism are enduring, undeniable and inevitable. With comic flair, the authors depict how it "enslaved [the] imagination like a powerful drug" (Khan 233). In Love and Vertigo, its influence was "enough to keep Pandora an ardent royalist, a Princess Diana watcher, a women's magazine

devourer on the side of God, the Queen and Bruce Ruxton till the day she died" (63). In Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal confesses that he "secretly admired British culture and its institutions" (233). His attempts to emulate the American way of life at school are an abysmal failure "in a tragicomic sort of way" (233). He later decides that he "did not wish to be like the Yanks" anyway (233). Iqbal reveals that "in [his] dreams of insufferable snobbery, [he] revered all things British – the BBC, test match specials, their literature, the universities, even the pinstriped suit, the umbrella and The Times" (233). Khan, Teo and Gooneratne overtly juxtapose the Asian and the Western spheres, the colonial and post-colonial realities and allow them to comment on each other.

The irony in The Pleasures of Conquest accommodates and extols the cultural logic of Amnesian society, while the terms of reference remain that of the dominant culture, that is Western/American. Here, "[c]ultural alterity is posited on the level of signifieds as they refute alterity-denying [and alterity-defying] colonial signifiers" (Mishra 42). In the novel, Stella Mallinson believes that "not only [is] laughter the best medicine, but also that the language of comedy is universal" (63). However, a particular writing session with her team of Amnesian collaborators of Nine Jewel Rice totally debunks this notion. Stella Mallinson's deliberate pains to retain the fundamental plot structure of the bourgeois novel in Nine Jewel Rice and her determined efforts to cater to the orthodox tastes of her American readers are satirised by Gooneratne.

As a 'warm-up exercise', Stella gets the group to write down an outline of a humourous real-life incident that had occurred in their lives or in the life of someone they knew. To Stella's utter bewilderment, most of these 'humourous' stories seem to her disturbingly dark, if not downright macabre. One of the stories was as follows:

> A man went to an information centre in the city. The grounds were jammed with ambulances and lorries that had come into the city from the airport, loaded with stretchers and plastic bags. It took a long time for the man to get to the head of a long queue, and when he did he told an official at the desk that he wanted to find the whereabouts of his son, who had disappeared

> during the last military offensive in the north. The official wrote down the vital statistics of the missing person. Name? Address? Body weight? Sixty-three kilos, said the inquirer. The official studied his list, and then looked at the pile of plastic bags. 'Sorry, brother, only ten-kilo bags left.' The inquirer hesitated. 'None of those can possibly contain the body of my son,' he said. The official became impatient. 'See here brother,' he said, 'you are keeping all these people waiting in the queue behind you. Why don't you just take a ten-kilo bag and go?' (61)

Everyone in the group smiled with perhaps the exception of Stella. She wonders about the truth of the various stories told by her collaborators. "[T]o her they seemed *unreal* inventions, almost surreal" (63, italics my own emphasis). Ironically, the grim anecdotes of war, hardship and death are an unfortunate and grotesque reflection of the real, Amnesian life in reality.

Despite her efforts, Stella struggles to discern the humour in the 'humourous' stories told to her: "One or two indeed, made her feel quite ill just thinking about them" (63). She wonders how and why her Amnesian colleagues "seemed quite untouched by the implications of their own concept of comedy" (63). The linguistic miscommunication in The Pleasures of Conquest, though comic, is black comedy, which exposes a rift in cultural experiences and an obvious disparity in expectations. Stella Mallinson simply could not comprehend nor appreciate the subversive humour of the Amnesians. Indeed, the comic rebellion in the novel permits us "to express emotions hidden even from ourselves, and which cloaks its serious messages in ridiculous yet appealing disguises" (Shershow 31).

Another story told to the team is about a British civil servant of the previous century who had spent his entire life working for the welfare of the people of the Province he ruled rather than being preoccupied with amassing a private fortune during his time in Amnesia. The team found the idea "extraordinarily funny. They thought it even more hilarious that part of the story which described how the official had died of malaria three weeks before he attained his only ambition, ordination as a Buddhist monk" (61). The team had trouble believing any part of this story despite the insistence of the author that it was all true. Stella asked the group

what was "improbable about a colonial officer working his guts out for his district? They did it all the time didn't they?" (61). Apparently they did not. She is told, "[o]nly in novels and on the cinema screen. In real life, they lived it up here, lined their pockets and went home" (61). This exchange between Stella and the Amnesians jars us/her out of complacency into a shocked realisation that many of the values we/she unquestioningly accept are false. Irony's shocking power is greatest when it is thus used to shatter complacent truisms and thoughtless optimism.

After the Amnesians' apparently 'abysmal' attempt at comedy, Stella begins "to wonder whether she might get better results for the Mallinson Project if her collaborators tried writing *something serious for a change*" (63). This is an ironic comment coming from an author of pulp romance fiction . . . Her irony of inversion compels the reader to convert apparent praise of Stella into subtle reproach. Gooneratne's disconcerting skill lies in drawing up her characters in complimentary terms but then converting the whole into censure. Like the "Amnesian habit of mind", Gooneratne's irony is "oblique rather than direct" (58). In Gooneratne's novels, the dialogue is exaggerated social comedy. If what is explicitly said is hilarious, then what can be implicitly read in the dialogue has an even more profound effect.

Like Gooneratne in her novel, Khan highlights how humour functions as a coping mechanism. It is a means of agency for people struggling with political unrest and corruption. In Seasonal Adjustments, Iftiqar and Zafar, Iqbal's his childhood friends tease him for having lost the "sharp edge of third–world humour" after he migrates from Bangladesh to Australia (276). Conversely, he thinks they are "flippant" and "sidetrack the seriousness of their situation with nonsensical banter and puerile humour" (276). Zafar composes a ditty about Iqbal's newly acquired 'Western' sensitivities:

> Bangali Babu *went for a long run,*
> *When he returned he was no fun.*
>
> Bangali Babu *has lost his old ways,*

He's now a foreigner, so he says.

Stuffy Bangali Babu *thinks we are nuts,*
But that's because he's lost his guts. (276)

Khan addresses the overlapping concerns about social and political change and the need to challenge or embrace them. As the author/Zafar asks, "[w]hat's life without its tests of survival? The ability to flaunt adversity and laugh at it is the ultimate measure of courage" (276).

Khan's observations in Seasonal Adjustments are vitriolic, as they are droll. Irony allows the presentation of different perspectives without taking sides (Susskind 39). Iqbal "listened with bemused incredulity" to his grandparents' nostalgia of the British Raj, their wistful craving for "the order and the imported discipline the British imposed on India when waves of political turbulence began to rock Pakistan" (233). He scorns their "conditioned servility", which he relates to a "serf's mentality, docilely accepting of a rank in the lower tiers of His Majesty's hierarchy. We were the natives meant to be ruled by a superior race" (233-234). However, Iqbal is even more critical of his generation who were "guilty of the worst kind of hypocrisy" (234). He says that:

> Publicly we were vociferous in our denouncement of British imperialism and its redundant offspring, the Commonwealth. At the same time there were those who hung around the British Council, filling in forms and appearing for interviews in the hope of a bursary or a scholarship – any form of financial assistance and a tertiary admission to enter the land of hope and glory they pretended to hate. (234)

By exaggerating the post-colonial hypocrisy and inconsistency, Khan exposes it to public view and degrades the perpetrators.

In Love and Vertigo, the narrator's father, Jonah Tay (also known as "the Patriarch"), is similarly hypocritical. The Tay family moves to Sydney in the late 1970s. Described as "the Chinese Bruce Ruxton", the Patriarch is portrayed as "a racist" who "enjoyed the benefits of multiculturalism in the 1980s but clung to a belief in assimilation" (180-181). With comic wit, Teo uncovers the Patriarch's intolerance, his flagrant double standards and the gross contradictions of his beliefs. Highly suspicious of all the ethnic groups in Australia, he rants bitterly about all their perceived faults and misdemeanours. But he is also utterly pleased with all that cultural diversity had to offer, such as the conveniences provided by the "local Chinese and Vietnamese grocery stores in [his suburb of] Burwood" (180).

For Gooneratne, the satirical narrative is not the end: it is the means. The Pleasures of Conquest can be read as an exposé of "moral stagnation" (Shaw 361). Gooneratne maximises the element of farce in her novel. This is clearly seen in how a "little mishap" could contribute to Stella Mallinson's dizzy ascent to become Amnesia's latest "national heroine" (33, 45). This is how it is described or rather interpreted by Topaz Magazine:

> *[Mrs Mallinson] was escorted into the hotel by His Excellency the President, and was handed a bottle of champagne by the USIS representative, Mr Robert Bolton, which she smashed with great eclat against the white marble replica of the crown (a symbol of our pre-Independence days) that dominates the New Imperial Hotel's banqueting hall.*
>
> *It was an original and forceful gesture, entirely unrehearsed and truly symbolic of the distinguished American author's deep sympathy for independent Amnesia's nationalist aspirations.* (33)

But it becomes apparent to the reader that "Stella knew nothing and cared less about independent Amnesia's nationalist aspirations. She had, as a matter of fact, aimed at the pedestal and missed" (33). This misrepresentation however works ultimately to her benefit. As a result of her "lucky miss", she is now warmly received and favoured by her detractors who had previously made "snide comments" about her "projected attacks on the Queen's English" (34). It is clear that Stella had no reason to "take a swipe at the crown. Why should she?" (34) We are told that Stella was rather fond of the British Royals: "Not only had she

been informed by the tabloids that both Princess Diana and Princess Margaret were fans of her novels, but she had even considered dedicating one of them to the Prince of Wales" (34).

In The Pleasures of Conquest, language is tied explicitly to the question of power. Through the use of humour, Gooneratne seeks to exert pressure on the prevailing ideology. Her criticism of people and society is subtle, it is a gentle "criticism made entertaining by humour and moving by irony and invective" (Feinberg 18). In the novel, "several voices of dissent" take issue with Stella Mallinson's plans for Nine Jewel Rice:

> 'Who, might one ask, is this Mrs Mallinson, that she should presume to teach local authors how to write about their own country?' asked one young fire-eater, an expert in one of Amnesia's indigenous languages.
> An academic from a local university expressed grave doubts about what he saw was a subtle form of neo-colonialism. 'In all seriousness', he said gloomily, 'I urge my country's literary community to remember the Trojan Horse'. (35)

The very potent and potentially contentious point about neo-colonialism is conveniently forgotten as other academics present at the session greedily seize upon the mention of 'horse' to demonstrate their knowledge and showcase their respective expertise. The whole discussion thus degenerates into a farcical and largely irrelevant discussion about whether horses were indigenous to Amnesia and how and when they arrived on the island.

The politics regarding the use of English versus that of the traditional Amnesian language is raised. Gooernatne hints at English as the tongue and tool of the modern imperialist. In the novel, an expert in local languages inquires "why this local project is being carried out in a foreign language, namely English, and not in our country's own noble and expressive tongue?" (36) Lou Randolph, Stella's very able publicist comes to her rescue with the deft reply that "the choice of English as the medium for the project had been based on purely practical and economic considerations" (36). Lou Randolph invariably draws attention to the fact that:

> Since most consumers of the finished product were likely to be Americans, and since not many Americans were known to be practiced readers of the local languages . . . the collaborators on the project had been informed quite early on that they would have to bear with, and work within, the limitations of English. (37)

He adds that "[t]his was, of course, a heroic sacrifice on their part . . . but they were willing to make it in the interests of their country" (37). The decision to write Nine Jewel Rice in English substantiates the "rule of consent" by American economic power and Amnesian acquiescence (Gandhi 145). Stella Mallinson, with her retinue of present-day colonisers, endeavours to disguise their material investments and economic interests by presenting the Mallinson Project as a humanist commitment to the literary advancement of the Amnesians and of undeniable commercial advantage to Amnesia. But it is clear that imperialism is essentially a parasitical relation. Gooneratne's irony here is transgressive rather than oppositional.

Both Teo Hsu-Ming and Adib Khan denounce hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness in established religion. The authors find the emphasis on difference and division in religion disquieting and senseless. They also view the struggle for dominance disturbing and absurd. Religion can be read as an instrument of colonisation and colonialism. As the religion of the coloniser, Christianity in particular is strongly connected with whiteness and therefore the dominance it confers. Concerned about the incongruities and discrepanices of power structures, Teo and Khan attempt subversion and resistance through representation. By distorting accepted (or unexamined) values and conventions, exaggeration makes them seem ludicrous.

"[A]ll [her] life [Grace] had to compete against men for [her] mother's attention" in Teo's Love and Vertigo, but when she "had to compete against God . . . that really topped it" (213). Pandora joins a Pentacostal Church in Surrey Hills and is "Born Again" (213). For her, being part of this church with its "clean, bright, Omo-white people" represents much longed for approval and recognition (216). Grace is incredulous that her mother who was "so afraid and

intimidated by the *ang mohs* [literally meaning red hair] all her life was actually mixing with *white* people" (216, italics my own emphasis). The narrator comes to equate Christianity with whiteness and in particular the acceptance it designates: "Who would have thought [Pandora would] find her place in Sydney in a mostly white Pentacostal church" (216).

In an effort to share in her mother's 'new' life, Grace goes along to the church despite her great skepticism. She is very shocked when she finds out that this church was "like no church [she'd] ever been to in [her] life" (216). "Where were the wooden pews, the altar, the stained glass windows, the organ, the hymns, the hushed awe, the *dignity* for Christ's sake?" she wonders to herself (216). Instead inside this "converted warehouse building", "a band played, coloured lights dazzled like a disco, backup singers bellowed, guitars wailed and drums thundered while Christian choruses flashed on an overhead screen" (216). The lively humour in Love and Vertigo is combined with a strong point of view. The comically incongruous and lurid image of the church hints at the artificiality that lies within. It also serves to vindicate Grace's creeping apprehension about this kind of religion and these "friendly Christ-loving Christians" (217).

In Love and Vertigo, Anglo-Australian insistence of difference in the church confirms the widespread practice of defining ethnicity as otherness.[5] Distinctions such as ethnicity, nationality, colour or even physical appearances are supposed unimportant and irrelevant in Christianity, yet Grace is still singled out because she looks different:

> 'Where do you come from?' This from a thirty-something woman with a yard of brunette hair and big 1980s two-for-the-price-of-one budget glasses.
>
> 'Burwood,' I said.

---

[5]It is interesting to note that "in the Christianised context the word 'ethnic' (sometimes spelled 'hethnic') recurred, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, in the sense of 'heathen'. Only in the mid-nineteenth century did the more familiar meaning of 'ethnic' as 'peculiar to a race or nation' reemerge". From Werner Sollors, "Who is Ethnic?". Post-Colonial Studies Reader. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 220.

> 'No, I mean where do you really come from? Originally?'
> 'Helsinki,' I said.
> 'Oh, really? How interesting. Is that in Japan?' (217)

Teo undermines the patronising superiority of the Anglo-Australian perpetrator and subverts the process of 'othering' by explicitly exposing her sheer ignorance. The author highlights how Anglo-Australians still position themselves at the centre, while ethnic/racial others such as Grace are regarded as objects to be to tolerated at the behest of the whites.

"Like Elizabeth Bennett" in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Grace is completely "mortified" when her mother hauls her up for a healing session, with the aim being to be "Slain in the Spirit" (220-221). In citing Jane Austen, Teo acknowledges one of literature's greatest ironists. The pastor, Rodney Philippe asks the "holy huddle":

> 'Do you want the gift of the Holy Spirit, brothers and sisters?'
> 'Take it, Grace', [her] mother whispered in [her] ear, as if it was a shopping bargain and the salesman has just thrown in a free packet of steak knives.
> 'Yeah, why not. Whatever'. (221)

Grace is under pressure to "manifest the Holy Spirit" since "[e]veryone else who had gone up to give their lives to God now lay comatose on the carpet or blabbling in teary voices" (222). Not wanting to disappoint her Mum and to appear "a fake" (which she is of course), she feigns a spiritual experience. "Don't be afraid, Grace", says Pastor Rodney Philippe as he "put his large, slightly sweaty palms" on her head and began to pray for her. She decides to "babble" rather than "fall back and risk concussion" (222). But what should she babble?

> And then, a lifetime of watching Saturday morning cartoons paid off in that urgent instant. Inspiration struck. [She] raised her hands stiffly in the 'YMCA' position and opened [her] mouth.
> 'Scoooooby-dooby-dooby-dooby-dooby-dooooo! Scooby-dooby-dooby-dooby-doo . . .'
> 'Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord!' Cried [her] mother. (222)

Humour is Teo's way of expressing suppressed aggression and disdain. The exposition of pretensions here is both literal and symbolic.

The pretensions of Rodney Phillips, the pastor of Pandora's church, are laid bare and his hypocrisy thoroughly derided. Another modern-day coloniser, Rodney willfully exploits Pandora for his own selfish sexual gratification. Abusing his power as spiritual leader and guide, he preys on Pandora's delicate vulnerability:

> Like so many Western men, [Rodney Phillips] was blinded by his own fantasies of Oriental women. Quiet, gentle, passive, femininity that transformed into voracious, insatiable sexuality in bed. Lady and whore in one. He stroked the soft, smooth-skin of her back, squeezed her small bird-like bones, kissed the passive oval of her face, and failed to feel the bitter passion and disappointed dreams that bubbled deep inside her; the rage she didn't know how to express, that she could only escape from by shutting down her consciousness and sinking into mind-numbing depression. (252)

Teo powerfully disrupts and undercuts the dominant, Orientalist discourses about Asian womanhood. As an Asian woman in Australia, Pandora is doubly marked as outsider: as female and as racial or ethnic 'other'. In the novel, Pandora is deliberately cast as the stereotypical victim. Depicted with aching pathos as the paragon of filial piety and marital subservience (first a "dutiful Chinese daughter and then a submissive Chinese wife") (244), her hopelessness is manifest in a loveless marriage and a desperate affair. The author problematises the ideal of Asian female, as well as challenging patriarchy and traditional Confucian ideology.

Teo takes issue with the conditioning of the Asian woman as "docile and subservient" epitomized by Pandora who "had always depended on someone else to rescue her . . . [who] had never learned to fight for anything she wanted, to take up arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them" (244). Pandora, the suffering antithesis of female agency, is

Teo's warning example. Conversely, Grace is the author's contemporary model of sardonic strength. Penelope Davie says that "Grace's response and growth is written with an astonishing control, her anger, alienation and need are never cloying or disgusting". "The double sense of alienation and powerlessness that accompanies female 'otherness'" leads Teo to irony as a tactic of resistance and subversion (Hutcheon 50).

The sense of poignant irony and private despondency in Pandora is tangible through the novel. Constrained and repressed by patriarchal society, irony emerges in Love and Vertigo as a mode of voicing protest. The politics of interpersonal relationships are unmasked and the hierarchies and polarisations inherent in the dichotomies (East/West, female/male, voice/silence, active/passive) are revealed. The besotted Rodney Philippe tells Pandora that she is "so quiet and serene and gentle" and that she makes him "feel so peaceful" (251). He is totally enthralled by her "tranquillity" and her "aura of calm" (252). But his observations, of course, could not be further from the truth. Pandora's rueful reply is even more devastating: "Yes, I'm practically inscrutable" (252). It brings to mind the heated response of Asian-American writer, Maxine Hong Kingston to her white critics, the dominant Anglo-Celtics, who dare "call their ignorance our inscrutability" (56).[6]

As Davie comments, Pandora's "leap into death is no more destructive than her leap into the black faith of love". Pandora's disillusionment is profound when she realises that the "gutless" pastor was never ever going to divorce his wife, Josie (257). Rodney Philippe repeatedly tells Pandora that he needs time to ease Josie into the idea. He says that he did not want to make *Josie* "lose her faith in God as well as in [him]", but what he did not recognise was that Pandora had already long lost hope in God and man (255). "[A]ll her life she had

[6]In her early essay "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers", Kingston rebukes the misappropriation of her book by white reviewers. She "defends her position by shifting her emphasis on her artistic individuality" and contends that "her work has many layers and should be read as such without being subjected to any singular vision or dimension of Asian America". See Yuan Shu. "Cultural Politics and Chinese-American Female Subjectivity: Re-thinking Kingston's Woman Warrior". MELUS 26.2 (2001): 199 (26). Online. Infotrac Web: Expanded Academic ASAP Plus. 16 Aug. 2002.

tossed up bright dreams to the gods, and always they came shattering back down" (252). Their clandestine meetings gradually became "no longer glamourous and decadent; they were sordid" (254).

With bitter resignation Pandora acknowledges that Rodney Philippe "wasn't evil, just human and weak" (255). This was worse than evil, because "[i]f he had been evil she could still have loved him and hung her hopes of escape on him" (255). Furthermore, she grows to despise "the pusillanimous morality he still paid lip-service to, and his inability to act" (255): "*When my love swears that he is made of truth, I do believe him though I know he lies*" (256). Appropriating the poetry of "false promises", Teo shatters the vision of "chivalric romance, Petrarchan fidelity [and] companionate love, the meeting and melding of two minds as well as two bodies" (99). In fact, it is these 'ideals', which destroy Pandora's marriage in later years.

Throughout Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments, we see an overt mockery of religious authority. In the novel, the young Iqbal already displays juvenile resistance against any sort of religious 'indoctrination'. His recounting of his after school lessons with the "dreaded, malodorous" *mullah* with "the Koran and waxed cane" is highly comic (93). Iqbal and his brother Hashim delighted in taunting the hapless *mullah*. A typical session would see the Pathan subjecting the boys to a series of questions:

> 'Who is the greatest person in history?'
> Our bemused looks and winks made the [*mullah*] sit up erectly.
> 'Who is the greatest person who has ever lived?'
> 'Jesus Christ!' we shout triumphantly . . .
> 'George Washington!'
> '*Ya Khuda*!' Repeatedly he slapped his forehead with the palm of his right hand. 'Forgive the failure of this humble sinner!' The aggression drained out of him as he buried his face in his hands and mumbled a prayer of repentance.

> Our answers were prearranged. They ranged from Buddha to Gandhi, Mozart to Paul Anka; virtually anyone except the Prophet. Without mercy, we hastened the termination of the lesson by farting or making rude noises. (94)

Khan's cynicism about religion is manifest in his robust and passionate prose. While on a visit back home to Bangladesh, Iqbal finds the religious rituals and *rites de passage* of his ancestral home alien and devoid of meaning. This sense of estrangement and negativity is further fuelled by his resentment against his Catholic in-laws, particularly his tense antagonism toward his bigoted father-in-law, Keith. Humour allows Khan to approach the topic of religion with comparative directness. Through Iqbal, the writer indulges in "moments of absurd imaginings" (203):

> [Iqbal envisages himself] as a United Nations referee appointed to supervise a battle between Christians and Muslims. It is an honest confrontation. There are no political or moral pretensions. It is an open display of bigotry, prejudice and ignorance in a conflict for global supremacy. There is one all-important rule. Instead of weapons, the hostility is to be conducted verbally with propaganda, hymns, sermons, *surahs*, *fatuas* and prayers.
> There are important issues at stake. Who has more power? Who can be more persuasive? Who can frighten more? Those without fervent belief in their cause may not participate. Rational thinking is forbidden. Compromises are not allowed. Inflammatory placards and banners are compulsory. (203)

It must be pointed out that in any battle, ideological or otherwise, the first casualty is often the truth. Khan questions the validity of different religious doctrines and dogmas. His stinging satire appropriates a kind of oxymoronic device - that of polite impropriety.

Some hopes and expectations of reconciliation do appear in the fiction of Gooneratne and Teo and less so in that of Khan. In The Pleasures of Conquest and Love and Vertigo, all the

protagonists[7] are viewed with detached irony. The characters in the books often occur "not as persons about whom one feels, but as figures in a comedy, whose audience may laugh at every exhibited incongruity of social behaviour without becoming involved or responsible" (Mudrick 3).

According to Linda Hutcheon, irony has at least two possible functions, constructive and deconstructive. Yasmine Gooneratne's irony tends to be of this first kind, the constructive kind of irony. For Hutcheon, constructive irony is distinct because:

> "[I]t works to assert differences as a positive and does so through doubled discourses. Instead of marginality, this irony's metaphor is perhaps liminality, a term used by anthropologist Victor Turner to refer to the open space 'whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise'. Irony opens up new space, literally between opposing meanings, where new things can happen. As poet Claire Harris puts it: 'Liminality, the space between two worlds, is a place of paradox'. (Turner 97; Harris 125, cited in Hutcheon 17)

An optimist and an idealist at heart, Gooneratne believes that folly and racism are universal and rectifiable human flaws. Goonernatne's humour seeks to persuade rather than denounce or condemn. She deliberately castigates a small number of absurd or detestable individuals as a general admonition to the majority. If she "intends to prick a little more deeply than is comfortable, it is merely hypodermic: the pain and swelling will generate antibodies. [She] writes in order to heal" (Highet 236-7).

The inevitable structure of the comic plot in The Pleasures of Conquest moves, as Scott Cutler Shershow has said "from misapprehension to understanding, from separation to reconciliation" (17). In Gooneratne's fiction, sensibility is still the index of virtue and the

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[7]In The Pleasures of Conquest, that voice is split between the protagonists of each section: the writer Stella Mallinson in the first quarter, the academic Philip Destry in the second, Angela Van Langenberg Forbes in the third and finally the Amnesian peasant Mallika in the last quarter.

motive of action. Although the satire contains several important points of criticism, its greatest efficacy lies in its firm assertion of moderation. For Gooneratne, comedy's "precarious logic" "can tolerate every kind of 'improbability'" (Sypher 219).

The convention of a happy ending in The Pleasures of Conquest clearly means that Gooneratne's comedy can never be entirely realistic. Our "sense of rational improbability" clashes violently with our "desperate need to live happily ever after in our fictional worlds", and Gooneratne's tale finds significance in the tension between these two differing expectations (Shershow 20). The happy ending of [her] novel magnifies the world with its "infinite sense of the possible", and diminishes it with its "ironic sense of the impossible" (Shershow 20). The people of Amnesia in her novel choose "to forget the past" (Gooneratne 245):

> It is better, they say, to seek areas of reconciliation and common agreement. Certainly, the imperial outrage, renewed every day in different forms, and relived in many different parts of the earth, is one which most people neither recognise their part in, nor remember. Most people prefer, as Amnesians do, to dwell in the present. (246)

It is important to highlight the significance of the past and memory. Memory can serve two vital or even seemingly conflicting functions: it is a necessary tool of resistance; it can be a passionate advocate for reconciliation as well.

Adib Khan is more misanthropic. He looks at life with a sharp eye and an even keener wit. His use of humour and irony is of the deconstructive kind. It is "a kind of critical ironic stance that works to distance, undermine, unmask, relativise, destabilise . . . that can at times border on the defensive, but that is always concerned with internally oppositional positions" (Hutcheon 17). Highet says that most satirists were either greatly "disillusioned early in life" and view the world as permanently unjust; or they are sanguine individuals who regard the rest of mankind as poor ridiculous "puppets" (237). Khan seems to be the former, while Teo Hsu-Ming seems more of the latter. We wonder if personal distress or condescending amusement

moves Khan. Khan's irony as deconstructive critique ranges in tone and motivation from lightly humourous to savagely sarcastic. Worchester says "when we dislike a writer's irony, we call it sarcasm" (78). In Seasonal Adjustments, Khan's sting is always potent. He contrives to generalise and justify his hostility and usually makes his readers share it.

Teo Hsu-Ming's humour is shrewd, with her blunt and cutting description of human foibles. Her comic fiction embodies both constructive as well as deconstructive features. Thy On, in a review of Love and Vertigo, comments that "[t]here are moments when this mini-series of tears and recrimination borders on hysterical melodrama, but a sly humour infects the pages and despite the clutter of fractured families, the prose is clean and unaffected". She displays a simple unillusioned acceptance of the world as it actually is. Davie asserts that "[d]espite the fact that the book deals with taboo areas there is no sense of titillation or voyeurism. Teo has written people that seem to express their anger in manifestly symbolic ways, without abandoning their own individual realities".

Teo and Khan manage to amplify both our fears and our hopes. They indulge our prejudices even as they make us uncomfortably conscious of their absurdity. In certain magic moments in Love and Vertigo and Seasonal Adjustments, ideology merges with utopia, and a genuine faith is extracted from humanity, along with a personal responsibility towards the future. In the last bit of her novel, Teo is candid as she muses, "[q]uestions still remain unanswered; there will never be a reconciliation with those we have lost. But maybe . . . this is all we can ever do: to make up to the living our debt to the dead" (287). Life/History is itself "a divine comedy" in which we see that all people are strikingly similar in manifest ways (Shershow 34).

Conclusion

As Walter Benjamin states (in regard to Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre): "there is no better starting point for thought than laughter; speaking more precisely, spasms of the diaphragm generally offer better chances for thought than spasms of the soul" (29, cited in Hutcheon 17-18). The vision of life as depicted in Yasmine Gooneratne's The Pleasures of Conquest, Teo Hsu-Ming's Love and Vertigo and Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments may be unfair but it is original and stimulating. The appeal of the texts lies in their literary merit: brilliance, wit and humour. In all its forms, the humour in these Asian-Australian novels continues to manifest the paradoxes of art and life.

Khan, Gooneratne and Teo deftly use humour and irony as a technique to subvert the ideology of the centre. It is a way of "writing back", of positing resistance against the 'canon' (Ashcroft et al). Often wielding irony as a form of double vision, they "implicitly challenge any claims to universalism or speech in the name of humanity" (Hutcheon 49). The writers of Love and Vertigo, Seasonal Adjustments and The Pleasures of Conquest seek to uncover stereotypes, confront colonial prejudices and challenge racist presumptions. For them, to speak from the margins, figuratively or literally, is in effect to decentre enthnocentrism. As Jim Hasenauer says "[i]n a pluralist society, in which contact with members of different ethnic, racial and cultural groups is inevitable, the use and analysis of humour offers important insights into intercultural relations" (351).

This chapter recognises that, in practice, "all communicational codes, especially language are ambiguous, double and even duplicitious" (Hutcheon 10). The use of irony by minority writers such as Gooneratne, Teo and Khan conveys an awareness of prior stereotyping. By deliberately juxtapositioning Western/Asian and colonial/post-colonial, the authors open the way for a lucid, continuous and consistent commentary on the other (Mudrick 39). As Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson maintain, imperialism can be challenged by a radical and dissenting anti-colonial counter-textuality:

> Just as fire can be fought with fire, textual control can be fought with textuality . . . The post-colonial is especially and pressingly concerned with the power that resides in discourse and textuality; its resistance, then, quite appropriately takes place in – and from – the domain of textuality, in (among other things) motivated acts of reading. (Tiffin and Lawson 10)

The authors express "an extravagant cynicism which finally exhausts and transforms itself, and while denying that this has even been the best of all possible worlds, seem confident that the comic spirit can point us in the direction of a better one" (Shershow 34).

3 LOOKING DIFFERENT: RE-LOOKING DIFFERENCE

In his novel Seasonal Adjustments, Adib Khan makes the observation that "human strengths and failures are global constants" (143). This can be interpreted as the homogenous humanity, which exists behind the trappings of cultural differences in Australia. These "global constants" however are contradicted and challenged by precisely the same unwieldy cultural differences that are definitive for "Asian-Australian" identities. This chapter will explore this paradox as portrayed in Khan's novel, as well as in Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies.

This paradox exists within "the multicultural complexity of Australia" (Khan 56). What does it mean for the current debate on the politics of difference when race, class, cultural background and religion not merely intersect but collide? It would be useful to re-think the idea of difference: to think of difference in relation to being similar. Difference is irrevocably dependent on similarity. We notice difference because there is similarity. Both A Change of Skies and Seasonal Adjustments feature a compelling juxtapositioning of Australia (the adopted country) and Asia (specifically Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the countries from which the novels' respective protagonists originate). In addition, there are several parallels drawn between the two. The process of othering is under scrutiny once again but within an altered paradigm.

This chapter will consider other ways at looking at binary oppositions and the 'East-West' dichotomy. The books critique the untenable nature of east-west dualism. Both novels take place over two continents – Asia and Australia. If there is a 'clash of civilisations', as Samuel Huntington would have it, then it must be seen first as the clash between an *imagined* West (Australia) and an *imagined* East.[1] Both 'West' and 'East' are imaginary entities constructed

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[1]The influential Harvard professor, Samuel Huntington, is widely known for his 1993 assessment that the post-Cold War world is being reconfigured along cultural and civilisational lines. In his scheme "Western" will continue to compete, for instance, with "Confucian" and "Islamic", and the latter two will compete with one another. Refer to Huntington's "The Clash of Civilisation?" in Foreign Affairs 72.3 (1993): 22-49.

through what Jon Stratton and Ien Ang call "a mutual symbolic mirroring, in a battle of overlapping, interested Self/Other misrepresentations" (179). In Gooneratne's and Khan's novels, "the construction of the colonial self is always caught up in identification with and against the Other, and this dependency on the positioning of the Other offers a space for subversion and transgression" (Bhabha "The Other Question" 18). While ironically bounded by their "prescribed otherness", Australia and Asia are represented as antagonistic entities and divided by inscribed dualisms (Chow "Chinese Modernity" xvi).

A post-colonial reading of Gooneratne's A Change of Skies and Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments addresses the West's continuing refusal to acknowledge the consequences of its own hegemony, and its continuing insistence on the non-Western world's cultural otherness. This hegemony however also extends to Australia. Australia is conceptualised as the Other in relation to the other 'western' nations in the Northern Hemisphere. Within the wider discussion about re-looking differences, I would therefore like to suggest an alternative paradigm: "I [Australia] am like you [Asia], I am different" (Yue 19).[2] This paradox posits a re-thinking of Australia's and Asia's construction of identity and identification in an increasingly postmodern world. The conception of Australia or Asia as culturally superior and dominant is interrogated and challenged.

The counter-discursive strategies in the novels demonstrate that difference is a contested concept. Getting to grips with the dynamics of difference, multiculturalism and identity means studying the ever-changing nexus of representation, discourse and power. By their inversion of representational and hegemonic 'norms', Gooneratne and Khan call into question the very idea of a definitive centre of cultural reference and authority. The precariousness in representing identity is a consequence of the dialectics of the global and local. In this chapter, I will also focus on "the particular historical conditions and the specific trajectories through

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[2]This is adapted from the title of Audrey Yue's article, "I Am Like You, I Am Different. Beyond Ethnicity, Becoming Asian-Australian". Artlink 13:1 (1993), p. 19.

which actual social subjects [in Seasonal Adjustments and A Change of Skies] become incommensurably different and similar" (Ang "Migration" 4).

A Change of Skies and Seasonal Adjustments undertake the deconstruction of the discourses that articulate 'difference' and set the context for a commentary about multiculturalism, Australia and Australians. Khan and Gooneratne consciously point out the commonalities within difference. The novels also establish the importance of recognising specificities, which is especially necessary in the midst of the postmodern and diasporic subjectivities. Important to the formation of 'identity' is the continuing and continuous operation of 'fixing' performed by the categories of race and ethnicity, as well as class, sexuality, gender, geography, colour, religion and value systems. Khan and Gooneratne also explore the limitations of oppositional constructions. A dualistic system of representations: national/ethnic; modern/traditional; metropolitan/colonial; Europe/Antipodes; north/south are examined in both novels, with the master-binary of 'Western'/Europe versus 'Eastern'/Asian/Australian dominating the discussion. These ideas illuminate the fascinating links and fissures in the formation of Asian-Australian identities.

"The question of Australia's place, whether on one side of the East-West schism or in the middle", is contingent on Australian conceptions of Asia (Broinowski *Yellow Lady* 7). Asia has always been viewed as an Other against which the Australian Self is defined. "Australian discourses about Asia" and Asians have been influenced by dominant European thought and idea(l)s (Rizvi "Asia" 23). In Australia, the widely accepted dictum that West is 'us' and East is 'them' perpetuates the "Far East Fallacy". This "Fallacy" is a manifestation of Australia's impression of the 'Far East' as monolithic, undifferentiated, more remote, alien and even further away than Europe (Broinowski *Yellow Lady* 25-26). This has given rise to "a kind of neo-Orientalist framework for Asia" (Broinowski *Yellow Lady* 25).

Significant in both novels is the untenable dualism between 'East' and 'West' that is outlined in Edward Said's seminal work Orientalism. Fazal Rizvi argues that:

> Said's point that Orientalist discourse assumes an homogenised Orient can be directed equally against his own constructions of the 'West'. What has been referred to, as the 'West' has never been a homogenised entity, except in a dialectical sense as that which is not the 'East'". ("Racism" 178)

Therefore is Australia part of the 'West'? It is clear that Australia cannot deny its geographical position and positioning within the global framework. Can Australians be truly regarded as 'Westerners' when they are geographically 'Southerners', that is inhabitants of the Southern Hemisphere? Perhaps it would be a misnomer to consider Australians 'Westerners' in the strictest sense. In A Change of Skies, Barry muses that the "application of the terms West and East is not strictly accurate, Australia – as its very name indicates – lying neither to the west nor to the east but obviously and indubitably to the south of nearly every country in the world" (Gooneratne 145). In fact, "Australians [are regarded by Americans and Europeans] as a species distinct from other Westerners" (226).

Australia's identity crisis emerges from the intricate role imposed on it, that is Australia's dual character of coloniser and colonised. On one hand, as a settler colony it has the privileged distinction of serving as an European outpost and a bastion of British 'culture and civility' in the Asia Pacific. "Australia [is seen] as the emblem of civilisation in a region of unenlightenment" (Khan 71). But on the other hand, Australia has been from its inception "[i]mbued with the medieval myth of the Antipodes . . . [it is] ingested with a self image of weirdness, loneliness, and absurdity, of being underfoot and beneath contempt, an immature satire of a Western society" (Broinowski *Yellow Lady* 16).

In Australia's search for identity, it becomes increasingly apparent that "loving England from a distance" is not enough (Gooneratne 108). Finding itself in a cultural quagmire, Australia needs to answer the question: "Where do you think you belong?" (Khan 9). There is a disconcerting ambivalence with how Australians see themselves. As Iqbal, Khan's candid protagonist observes:

> Australia now stands tottering on the brink of adulthood, enmeshed in the process of finding its soul and learning about the traumas of maturity . . . It is trapped in a cultural flux, reluctant to shed a nostalgic ancestral image in favour of an evolving mixture whose shape and ethos cannot be predicted. (114)

Are the politics of multiculturalism and anti-racism which accepts 'the West' as its boundaries adequate to address the complexity of dilemmas faced by Australians and in particular Asian-Australians? The "privileged homogeneity of the nation-state" can no longer be assumed (Tololyan 3-7, cited in Ang "On Not Speaking Chinese" 15). When ethnic groups in a multicultural country such as Australia begin to identify themselves in specific "diasporic terms", it provokes inquiry about "the state of intercultural [and interracial] relations" (Ang "On Not Speaking Chinese" 15).

"There is no single form of racism in Australia, but rather a range of racisms, which affects different groups in different contexts" (Castles and Vasta 5).[3] Racism has been an almost universal fact for centuries. Racism has left its imprint on institutions, social practices, intellectual discourses, popular ideas and national cultures. The irony is that the *unity of racism* as a process of social differentiation has played a central role in Western society since the beginnings of modernity and colonialism. Stuart Hall points out that racism, of course, functions by drawing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories. He asserts that:

> Its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalise the difference between belongingness and otherness. Along this frontier there emerges what Gayatri Spivak calls the 'epistemic violence' of the discourses of the Other – of imperialism, the colonised, orientalism, the exotic, the primitive, the anthropological and the folkloric. ("New Ethnicities" 255)

[3]In fact, the Australian nation created at Federation was itself defined in racial terms, that is the Immigration Restriction Bill of 1901 which established the policy of White Australia for the new Commonwealth. This policy placed boundaries between those of European heritage and the non-white 'Other'.

In the Australian context, this means understanding that the non-white minority have been subjected to "processes of racialisation, as a means of controlling them and subordinating them" (Castles and Vasta 5-6).

However, in A Change of Skies, Australia is also the Other. As part of the 'Rest', Australia shares in the "gaze that Europe turns on its Other" (Van Der Driesen 19). This view is curious, indifferent, sometimes amused and often derogatory. Despite Australia's presumed superiority in the region, it is identified (if identified at all) as but an isolated and insignificant outpost of Britain. In the global 'pecking order', it is relegated to a marginal and subordinate position. While on their visit to Sri-Lanka, Gooneratne's protagonists Barry and Jean[4] entertain a friend of Jean's mother, a young British lass named Polly Pomfret. Polly is employed at the British Council in Colombo. She confides excitedly that her next trip is to Australia. Yet in the very same breath, she comments that "Australia's the pits. Every one at the [British] Council [in Colombo] says so" (269). Here, Australia is looked upon with an undisguised contempt. Polly goes on to remark, "Oh, . . . everyone says Australia is absolutely the dark side of the *moon*" (270).

There is the inadvertent privileging of the centre, emphasising the 'metropolis' over the 'colony'. In another episode in Gooneratne's novel, John Dory, Barry's colleague at Southern Cross University, tells a biting, comic *noir* anecdote about an Australian academic whom he met at Oxford. This hapless academic "hadn't expected that being a 'colonial' would be, in itself, a mark against him" (108). The "innocent ocker" had allowed himself to be enrolled for 'a dingo degree', that is Oxford University's Bachelor of Letters degree which was "devised for Australian academics who want to go to Oxford, but can't cope with doctoral study. Dingo Degree equals Dumb friends from Down under" (109). As John Dory remarks, "[b]etween Oz and Oxbridge there is indeed a great gulf fixed" (109). This seemingly insurmountable

[4]In this thesis, I will use Bharat and Navaranjini's Australianised names, when they "changed their Asian image to an Australia one: "Bharat became Barry, Navaranjini changed to Jean" (Gooneratne 312).

difference which is depicted in a light-hearted and humourous way betrays a conscious condescension on the part of the British imperialist project. It resonates with a profoundly disturbing and unsettling awareness of British bigotry and racism.

In Seasonal Adjustments and A Change of Skies, the representation of racism is not an exclusively imperial (British) feature. Racism and prejudice are global constants that hold Australians and Asians alike in their suffocating embrace. In both novels, racist Asian characters are pitted against racist Australian characters. Both are racist due to their own "colonial hang-ups" (Rama 4). Victims of the cultural cringe, both the Asian and Australian characters are themselves perpetrators of the "racism learned from the British in [the] colonial days" (Gooneratne 119). They have yet to discard it totally. Their racism is a form of neocolonialism, which applies and imposes an artificial hierarchy of importance and values on others.

Constructions of racism that position 'others' as the "inferior species", are also simultaneously characterised by "an inexpressible envy and desire" (Hall "New Ethnicities" 255). In Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal is unsure if his criticism is "an outpouring of disillusionment or whether it is an uncharitable comment on a tired society rapidly running out of creative energy and searching for something to blame" (123). He critically observes that:

> We [Australia/Australians] look with envy at Singapore. South Korea makes us apprehensive. We are eager to spend more on the armed forces because of Indonesia's proximity. Japan scares us witless. We play down their success with prejudices. We console ourselves by exaggerating their mechanical existence, their lack of leisure and their suicide rate. We don't wish to be like them [or do we?]. We would rather continue to wallow in the established pleasures of our lives – the pub, the beach, the footy and the barbie. We'll be right, we mutter to ourselves even though the tone has been unconvincing of late. (123)

Australia's tense and ambivalent relationship with Asia is recognised. "[M]any of the hitherto stable political categories" are fundamentally displaced, since "it implies a process of identification and otherness, which is more complicated than had been hitherto imagined"

(Hall "New Ethnicities", 255). The whole notion of the 'Asianisation of Australia' is on all counts extremely problematic. It demands a brutally honest soul-searching and a rigourous examination of Australia's expectations for the future.

Eminent 'Asianist', Alison Broinowski, says in her paper "The No-Name Australians and the Missing Subaltern: Asian Australian Fiction", that:

> Recent fiction about Australia shows *us* as we may not realise how *others* choose to see us. Large lumpen, white, hypocritical and unsubtle if not downright thick, is how Australians often appear in these books, and racist with a multicultural figleaf. In Asian Australian fiction, *racism rules, but whose*?[5] (italics my own emphassis)

Broinowski's comments insidiously reproduce the damaging dichotomy of "us" versus "others". It also highlights the fact that representation can be interpreted as a powerful form of resistance on the part of the 'subjugated (Asian/Asian-Australian) other'. In Seasonal Adjustments and A Change of Skies, subversive representation is a means of challenging the centre. It is a subversion but not "of language alone, but of the entire system of cultural assumptions" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 48).

In Gooneratne's Sri Lanka and Khan's Bangladesh, Australia is regarded as the Other in a reification of the East/West, North/South divide – a self-perpetuating, self-legitimising system of representation. "Oz and the Aussie" are subject to an unfortunate stereotype: "a nation of uncouth drunks with the intellectual standards of a TV soap opera and the social standards of the football scrum" (134). Australia with the rebounding 'exotic' images of the Kangaroo and

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[5]It is interesting to note that Broinowski's comments verge on the defensive. She makes an obvious distinction between the "us" and the "others". Her reference to the "us" is assumed to mean white 'Anglo/Celtic Australians' and the 'them' or "others" assumed to be other non-whites. Broinowski's comments are also problematic since she seems to be insinuating that non-white "others" in Australia are not or cannot be really Australians. Where do Asian-Australians fit into this continuum? Otherness is reinforced and perpetuated. This is greatly ironic for someone whose highly acclaimed book The Yellow Lady – Australian Impressions of Asia sought to "provoke us into rethinking a lot [about] . . . attitudes to things Asian and alien, along with the reasons shaping our perceptions of them" (Jamie Mackie. Foreword. The Yellow Lady vii).

the Koala is seen as distant, strange and forbidden. In Seasonal Adjustments, when Iqbal returns to his ancestral village in Bangladesh, the villagers are curious about where he now lives: "The old fellows are perplexed. I speak English but do not live in England. How can that be?" (10)

The protagonists in both novels are perceived as having gone 'troppo' when they reveal their intentions to move to Australia. The deliberate usage of the expression 'gone troppo' here highlights an inversion of the usual Australian abhorrence regarding journeys to the 'East'. In A Change of Skies, Vera, Barry's sister in New York, is full of prejudiced and vigourous disdain when she hears about Barry's decision to accept the Visiting Professorship at the Southern Cross University in New South Wales. Vera finds it incomprehensible that Barry and Jean want to go to Australia. In her eyes, Australia is the equivalent of the American Midwest, that is the American version of the never-never land, remote and provincial. She proclaims that they "must be out of [their] minds"! (33) In Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal encounters a similar if not more violent reaction of "shock and outrage" upon telling his family his plans:

> *Australia? Don't be absurd!*
> *Be sensible! If you must leave, go to England.*
> *Or at least America.*
> *Australia? The boy must be mad!*
> *His crazy dreams will ruin him.* (233)

Otherness (Asian or Australian) is constructed by and from within a framework of socio-political and cultural discourses. The precarious relationship between Australians and Asians is complicated and further jeopardised by each side's fundamental self-righteousness. In Seasonal Adjustments, Keith, Iqbal's Anglo-Australian father-in-law, has an "inherent belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority" (163). Keith "attended one of those joyless and snobbish Melbourne private schools which desperately treats itself as hybrid of the British public school system, aping its customs, bigotry and its condescending view of the rest of the world" (163).

In A Change of Skies, Jean faced a barrage of anti-Australian sentiment when she told her friends of her impending move to Australia:

> 'Australians?' inquired Rohini [one of Jean's classmates with whom she was having lunch]. 'Raj and I saw plenty of Australians while we were living in London . . . Drunken, foul-mouthed, and crude'. (18)

Rohini goes on to remark with great disdain and indignation that Australians are "totally uncivilised". They tramp around Colombo dressed in their "frightful shorts and skimpy sundresses" having "[n]o idea how to dress or behave in someone else's capital city" (18).

A way of resisting and recreating limiting and limited binaries is created through the representation of affinity among and within subjects. In Seasonal Adjustments, Khan says, "Australians are learning about the commonality of the human flaws it shares with the rest of humanity" (114). Australia and Asia are conceptualised in an 'unusual' union: *"Australians are true Orientals at heart"* (Gooneratne 129). Jean in Gooneratne's A Change of Skies remarks with full conviction that "Australians are true Orientals, they feel so deeply, so intensely, that words aren't always adequate to express their emotions" (129). Contrary to the conventional perception of Australia as the antithesis of Asia, here Australia is equated with Asia. Australia is endowed or some would say encumbered with Orientalist constructions of the 'East'.

Gooneratne's Australia is derived from the Orientalist perception in which the East-West difference is constructed along gender lines – East or Asia as feminine and West or Australia as masculine. The Australia in A Change of Skies is equated with the 'Asian' side of this binary: Australia with a feminine soul and therefore emotional and intuitive, but also irrational and inarticulate. Indeed, feelings of antipathy, namely ardent racism and prejudice, are both irrational and inarticulate. They constitute just one of the global constants as Khan's protagonist, Iqbal, wryly notes that: "a Bengali can be just as indifferent, mean, egotistical, loving, creative, heroic, generous, humane, cruel and greedy as an Australian. It makes you

appreciate the homogenous blueprint of human life" (143). Human characteristics are universal and consistently common. 'Asian' values and 'Western' values are seen to conflict and contradict each other yet ironically speak of the same intrinsic "human" values.[6] All of Khan's and Goonerantne's characters, Western or Asian possess "human" values such as honesty, compassion, loyalty and a sense of justice; they are also all capable of racism, prejudice, cruelty and hate.

In Australia, the so-called 'clash of civilisations' hypothesis advocated by Professor Samuel Huntington was emphatically disputed. Among the detractors was the then Australian Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans. "In considering Australia's relations with the Asian region, the latter attributed far less significance to differences in culture and tended to stress the growing importance of what he saw as a globalisation of values" (Milner "Why We Should Not Swagger"). A Change of Skies and Seasonal Adjustments make it clear that globalisation is a salient and undeniable characteristic of the present. In the novels, new (trans)global cultures and identities are created by the diasporic processes of colonialism and migration. But does this globalisation of values imply a universalism of values? Does globalisation spawn a proliferation of difference or an effacement of difference? What does this mean in multicultural Australia?

"The politics of difference is always at the same time a politics of *value*" (Hawkins). Who is to judge and determine this value? Are there or can there be global norms? Is it economic and political power or is it colour that dictates a ranking of sorts? Is it possible to have difference in essence but equivalence in value, or is there an unambiguous hierarchical structure? What

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[6]'Asian' values and 'Western' values are conceptualised as diametrical oppositions. These paradigms invoke and thrive on stereotypes. Within the "Asian" values paradigm, the stress is on "community rather than the individual, the privileging of order and harmony over personal freedom and the refusal to compartmentalise religion away from other spheres of life". Other so-called 'typical' "Asian" qualities are thriftiness, industriousness, "a respect for political leadership, the belief that government and business need not necessarily be natural adversaries, as well as an emphasis on family loyalty". "Western" values on the other hand, give precedence to individualism and personal liberty, as well as making clear distinctions between state and industry. See Anthony Milner. "What's Happened to Asian Values?" <http://www.anu.edu.au/asianstudies/values.html>. 20 Mar. 2000.

are Australian and/or Asian values? Do these "values" actually mean cultural identity? If we take cultural values to mean cultural identity, then to suggest that they are mutually exclusive and a threat to each other is to take for granted two things. Firstly, that there *is* an 'Asian' cultural identity potentially able to overwhelm the 'Australian' one; and secondly that 'Asian identity' and 'Australian identity' are "formed, fixed and final" (Stuart-Fox 97). Australia and Asia are therefore similar in that they are but 'imagined communities' (B. Anderson). A deconstruction of the discourses that construct the concept of values lays bare the assumptions of dominance and worth – "the fallacy of cultural superiority" (Khan 33).

Martin Heiddegger's critique of the discourse of value perfectly brings out the less than egalitarian assumptions underlying it. He asserts that it is precisely through the determination of something as 'a value' that what is so valued is robbed of its worth. The assessment of what is regarded as a value is therefore "admitted only as an object of man's estimation" (266). Heiddegger goes on to say that "[e]very valuing, even when it values positively, is a subjectivising. It does not let things be. Rather, valuing lets things: be valid" (226). And according to Anthony Milner, "[m]any so-called 'Asian values' are equally Western values". Values, like cultures, are "contingent things; they are reconstructed, constructed or invented to serve the specific purposes of their inventors" ("What's Happening to Asian Values?").

In A Change of Skies, the Koyakos, Barry and Jean's compatriots, are obsessed with upholding Sri Lankan nationalism and maintaining Sri Lankan "moral values and traditions" (88). They are fanatical that their children, Palitha and Lassana, growing up in an "alien society", should not become "infected with Australian values" and "lose touch with the traditions of their forefathers" (88; 92). The Koyakos' anxiety about the possible loss of tradition betrays an ethnocentric attitude that sees any Australian influence as inferior and corrupting.

What is 'foreign' is presented rigidly as contaminated, threatening and dangerous. This expression of diaporic concerns is significant because, it is somewhat in line with Ien Ang's

assertion that "(self)ethnicisation . . . is in itself an intrinsic confirmation of minority status in white, western culture" ("On Not Speaking Chinese" 11). The resistance against the influence of "Australian values" is a determined attempt in the words of the influential Indian commentator, Partha Chatterjee, to "resurrect the virtues of the fragmentary, the local and the subjugated" (cited in Milner "Why We Should Not Swagger"). Traditions and beliefs are represented as "invaluable buffers" against the threat to identity inherent in the experience of cultural and geographical displacement in Australia (Bramston 20). The desire to maintain tradition is invariably subject to the vicissitudes of migrant life.

In Seasonal Adjustments, Keith with his parochial sense of "Australian nationalism", views all Asians as enemy aliens with potential to destroy (Eurocentric) cultural values. Iqbal's sarcastic diatribe is directed at his pompous father-in-law and his pro-establishment arrogance:

> Tradition! Tradition! Back to the basics. Loyalty to the crown. Honesty. Hard work. Christian morality. Let us not forget the pioneering spirit and those who built the nation. The digger's courage and the spirit of Gallipoli. We must revive this great country of ours! Meanwhile, we must keep foreigners out of the club. (32)

Keith's superciliousness is also acutely mocked. It is clear that Australia has a painful history of subjection to colonial/imperial power. That painful history is something Australians have in common with many Asian nations such as Malaysia, Singapore, India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines, yet a shared ethnic relationship with Britain appears to have often "obscured, and even romanticised, the pain" (Gooneratne "Postcolonial Papers" 3). Racism is the potent outcome of this cultural cringe. As Rizvi points out, in Australia, racism is manifest under the guise of "nationhood, patriotism and nationalism" ("Asia" 25). Such human failings are found not just in attitudes, but in the discourses that shape societal reality. It is "a fear fed by atavistic territoriality and an ignorance of the other" (Stuart-Fox 98).

In our present "thoroughly interdependent and volatile postmodern world", holding fast to traditions and "clinging to a primordial notion of ethnic identity" are ways for "displaced

peoples to find a secure sense of origin and belonging" (Ang "Not Speaking Chinese" 18). In Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal argues that "[t]radition has to do with a sense of belonging" (116). Unfortunately, however, such a 'solution' brings with it modern, colonial divide-and-rule politics. This results then in categorical 'ethnicity' which is posited to check and curb peoples.[7] As Iqbal's friend Iiftiqar in Bangladesh astutely comments:

> Tradition is . . . [a] concept that is not easy to understand. It can impute stagnation and exclude change. It may suggest fear and insecurity. The desire to cling to a past may be an admission of an inability to change, or it could indicate a wish to escape unhappiness by reverting to a world we once knew. It is so easy to evoke the past as a stable routine of familiar practices and call it tradition. (Khan 116-117)

It is paradoxical that contemporary conservatives (such as Khan's character Keith) who regard strong ties to Asia as a threat to Australia's European heritage, are ignorant of, or perhaps choose to remain oblivious to the fact that a century ago ties to Asia were just as important or maybe even more so (Mayer 113). They also fail to acknowledge that history has shown that those closer cultural ties have not in any way undermined European values (Mayer 113). In the present context, Peter Mayer asks if it is really a cultural threat or a political one that is feared? Is it really European traditions and values they are worried about – or is it "a contemporary variation on the old lament for the passing of Empire and a neo-Menzian desire . . . [to] resume the former attitude of respectful genuflection towards Europe?" (Mayer 113)

In A Change of Skies, racism masks itself behind tradition and long-standing social conventions. Gooneratne deliberately draws attention to the fact that racism has its roots in religious and colonial discourses. This becomes apparent through the ironic musings of her protagonist Jean: "My husband says that we Asians are racist about colour. Well, he couldn't be more wrong. Our people aren't racist about colour, they just honour a very ancient and

[7]See Dipesh Chakrabrarty. "Modernity and Ethnicity in India". Communal/Plural 1: Identity/Community/Change. Eds. Ghassan hage and Lesley Johnson. Nepean: U of Western Sydney P, 1993. 1-16.

holy tradition that has clear rules about what's beautiful and what's not" (119-120). Here, it is not ethnicity but colour, the so-called *visible difference* that is objectionable. Indeed, Gooneratne's novel illuminates how colour hierarchies in South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka are implicitly subjected to complex class and regional factors. These are the result of prejudices that are inherited and institutionalised.

The discourse of tolerance and acceptance in Gooneratne's and Khan's version of Australia is "only skin-deep", because patterns of discriminatory action/behaviour are continually vindicated by discourses of race and ethnicity (Castles and Vasta 4). Implicit within Australian multiculturalism is the hegemonically charged distinction between "the tolerating and the tolerated" (Ang "Curse" 40). This distinction is highly "pernicious", because it generally goes "unacknowledged and unrecognised" (Ang "Curse" 40):

> In other words, while raw and direct expressions of racism are no longer condoned, the attempt to eliminate such expressions by preaching tolerance paradoxically perpetuates the self-other divide, which is the epistemological basis of the very possibility for racism in the first place. (Ang "Curse" 40)

For Adib Khan in particular, the notion of tolerance is problematic, because for him to tolerate is "to accept and position the Other within specific limits or boundaries" (Hage "Locating" 30).

According to Ien Ang, the politics of diaspora functions as a deliberate strategy to keep "non-white, non-western elements" on the periphery, so as not to adulterate the white, western cultural centre ("On Not Speaking Chinese" 15). Chandani Lokuge points out that in <u>A Change of Skies</u>:

> Barry's sense of self when he leaves Sri Lanka is indeed that of an 'honourary white' and can be best explained through a 'doggy devotion to Britain' and the 'accumulated experience of a

> profoundly Anglicised family' (quoting Gooneratne 12). His problems with self-awareness begin when he realises that his prestigious ancestral heritage as symbolised by his name Bharat Mangala Davasinghe is unrecognised by white Australia. 'Look', he snaps at his wife, *'We're Asians. They're Australians. When Australians meet us, that's what they notice first. Difference'*. ("We Must Laugh" 23, italics my own emphasis)

Confronted by the trauma of being seen as "inferior in the gaze of the Other", Bharat withdraws "from his identity and his race in his total identification with the positivity of whiteness" (Bhabha "The Other Question" 76, cited in Lokuge 24). Jean tells the readers that her "husband's name Bharat, means 'India' in just about every Indian language there is"; he was so named also "to commemorate his grandfather's scholarship in Indian languages . . . " (124). For Jean, the relinquishing of the name of "Bharat" is totally unsettling, and it strikes her as an unfortunate form of family betrayal. In "[s]eeking ways to assimilate", this represents Bharat/Barry's and hence Navarajini/Jean's desperate attempt at being fair dinkum, true blue (or rather true white) Aussies (122).

Ien Ang observes that no matter how long Asian people have lived in the West, "they can only become westernised, never pure and simply 'western'" ("On Not Speaking Chinese" 15). She asserts that "imposing the identification with a fetishised and overly idealised 'Asianess'" brings about such an exclusion (15). This is again evident in Gooneratne's novel, through Barry and Jean's kindly neighbour, Maureen Trevally, who perpetually thinks of them "as exotics who [have] difficulty sending roots into alien ground" (87). Samir Gandesha maintains that what emerges is "a politics of incorporation" (14). It is "a reduction of what is different to the same, the reduction of the Other to the status of the 'other' as what is simply the antithesis of Western identity" (Gandesha 14).

In Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal is extremely irate that all the Australians he meets have a "prototype image" of him as "an Indian" (147). He notes that "[i]t is laundered and made acceptable in their own minds. Everything, from language to food, religion, and accent, has

been moulded into a composition to fit a uniform view about an Indian" (Khan 147-8). This is especially infuriating for Iqbal since he is from Bangladesh and not India! Iqbal vehemently declares that "[he] is fed up with being treated as an oddity, a stray from the forbidding darkness of the world up there. [He] is tired of misconceptions and assumptions, of being an object of curiosity!" (149) Here, Khan uses the "politics of diaspora" to demonstrate how his character is kept a permanent outsider, that is never regarded as Australian (or Australian enough), but always non-white and non-western.

How is otherness defined in a multicultural world? What are the qualifiers of difference? Are they "determined by background, wealth, religion or colour" (Khan 87)? Do these markers seem "medieval" in our modern world? This may seem so, yet ironically they are still widely used in contemporary society as a way of distinguishing the Self from the Other. Interestingly, the blatant visibility of these markers makes them simplistic. They are simplistic because it is often what is transparent or obscured that is of critical importance. These markers are also problematic in an increasingly complex multicultural world where identity is consistently mutable.

To use colour as a marker of difference is an intractable project. Gooneratne and Khan emphasise that differences, such as distinctions of colour, are always relational rather than inherent. Colour words such as 'black' or 'white' lack accuracy and specificity. But like a 'colour barcode' that automatically ascribes a value, an identity, a predetermined category or classification, these terms are used carelessly. In Khan's novel, what is deemed acceptable is subjective and culturally relative. In Bangladesh, white is not right. Iqbal suspects that his mother's hostility towards his estranged wife Michelle, "a white girl", "a foreigner" is "based on colour rather than religious differences" (162). He is aware that Michelle gets the same kind of messages from Keith, her father, for marrying a "*black man*" (238; 149).

Colour has an intangible worth attached to it. But as Linda Carroli observes, the concept of worth or "value is an item that is highly changeable, depending from where you are speaking"

(333). The assumptions made about the universality of the term are rejected; its currency in 'Western' societies is also inverted. As we see in A Change of Skies, Jean remarks that "Westerners and . . . Far Easterner really do look rather alike – so pale and . . . well sallow – a bit like the way raw shellfish look, before they are curried, and get some colour and taste into them" (119). To suggest that "Far Easterners" or "Ching-Chongs" could be lumped together in the same category as Europeans is boldly subversive. Gooneratne provokes the reader with this unusual and extraordinary paradigm, that is the notion that "Far Easterners" and Europeans look similar in terms of colour. She demonstrates how value judgments based on colour can only be arbitrary. After all, even within a single racial group there are already many distinctions.

In A Change of Skies, a distinction is made between the "*real* Asians" and the rest, set apart by race[8], caste and in particular colour. Oblivious to her own racism, Jean naïvely comments that "at home in Sri Lanka, and I suppose in India too, which is the centre, after all, of the *real* Asian world, we always called Far Eastern people 'Ching-Chongs'" (119). In her satirical and ironic comedy, Gooneratne's post-colonial and intra-cultural challenge to traditional hierarchies is acute and deliberate. By positioning Sri Lanka and India as the centre (rather than Britain as is usual), she makes an incisive commentary about how the discourse of authenticity and ancestral certainties is never fixed. The author highlights how contemporary post-colonial societies such as India and Sri Lanka as well as Australia have gradually begun to see Britain itself as just another point on the periphery.

Gooneratne and Khan challenge their readers by accentuating the diversity of 'Asian' culture, even within the 'East Asian' community in Australia. But as both A Change of Skies and Seasonal Adjustments show, the authenticity of what comprises the *real* Asia is contentious. The concept of 'Asia' is problematised along with the ensuing difficulty in defining the category 'Asian'. The diversity and 'vari-asians' (variations) amongst and within the Asian

[8]'Race' is conceptualised as "an unstable and 'decentred' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" (Omi and Winant 68).

region make it vital to deconstruct the monolithic concept of 'Asia', and to desegregate the group 'Asian'. Both are constructs created as generic categories. Deconstruction of these categories is necessary because they are highly inadequate in conveying the depth and diversity that comprise 'Asia' and 'Asian'. In Gooneratne's and Khan's 'Asia', Christianity and Islam are also important ingredients in the cultural mix. The divisive impact of colonialism – labour relations laws, styles of government and educational concepts must be considered as well. These have shaped the contrasting experience of British, Dutch, Portuguese or American colonial systems. Thus, writers such as Gooneratne and Khan play a critical role in educating their readers in making them mindful of cultural differences as well as the similarities.

In Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, Dr Iyer, one of Barry's Indian friends, comments: "All of us are one. What is this talk of war and cultural difference? India and Sri Lanka, Barry-ji . . . All one. What is the difference?" Barry and Jean are incensed by what they regard as a very insensitive comment to a very sensitive issue. They have to work very hard to restrain themselves from leaping up and shouting in unison: "Two thousand years of history! That's the difference!" (307). Barry and Jean are also particularly angry with Dr Iyer at this time because "an Indian peace-keeping force [had] occupied Jaffna at the Sri Lankan Government's invitation" (305). Barry vehemently believed that:

> India had absolutely no business sorting out the problems of her tiny neighbour, however corrupt or incompetent she might imagine that neighbour's politicians to be . . . When news broke out that India had actually financed the Tamil militants all along, trained them in camps in South India, and furnished them with weapons with which to fight their own people, Barry was furious. He [was convinced that Sri Lanka] had been cynically used by India as a pawn in its Big Power exercises. (305-06)

This episode is especially consequential because it is evident that historical specificities can never be ignored or overlooked.

In Seasonal Adjustments, the policeman that stops Iqbal for a traffic violation sneers: "'You darkies are all the same, aren't you?' 'No we are not', he replies. "'There's mahogany, walnut, teak, ebony. The variety is great'" (144). In place here is the imposed visual stereotype that all Asians 'look the same'. Such suggestions of a false homogeneity obscure important differences. The unity of often-disparate communities implied by the term 'Asian' does not exist, nor is there an 'Asianness'. Ironically, when Iqbal attends a backyard barbeque with Michelle, he finds "the faces" of the predominantly Anglo-Australian group "indistinguishable" (147). Annette Hamilton says that "Australia is virtually non-existent in [the 'real'] Asia. Just as all Asians are natives to Westerners, so all Westerners are virtually indistinguishable to the Asians who come into contact with them" (27).

Similarly in A Change of Skies, Barry is terribly agitated that "Australians can't make fine distinctions between one kind of Asian and another" (118). However, he is equally guilty when he makes an incriminating comment about the 'homogeneity' of Westerners: "What's the difference? . . . Americans, South Africans, Britons, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders – they are all the same, aren't they?" (Gooneratne 28). As Gunew comments, "[t]he use of universalist terms such as 'Asian' or 'Westerner' to designate a whole spectrum of widely differing groups is part of the oppression of these subjects" ("PMT" 42). While the 'Orient' and the 'Occident' may be configured as necessary constructions for discursive convenience, it becomes increasingly obvious that they are extremely misleading and indeterminate.

According to Hamilton, "in popular representations, many of them originating outside Australia, the Asian has been constructed as a non-individuated 'native'" (24). Western encounters with 'Asia' are especially vivid in film, and it is here that they have the potential to be most damaging. This is because these (mis)representations of Otherness are readily incorporated into the Australian imagination:

> From early Hollywood production on, it is apparent that any Asian native can substitute for any other. In the same way, locations for films set in Asian today are determined not by the

> actual text of the narrative, but by the film-production convenience . . . The clothing, speech and habitations of the Asian is interchangeable, as long as the essential 'atmosphere' is Asia can be presented . . . (Hamilton 24)

The 'interchangeable' atmosphere can be steamy jungles, scenic rice fields, languid rivers and equally placid peasants, or chaotic and congested cities full of swarming (and swarthy) crowds.

This ostensible 'ease of substitution' is depicted in Gooneratne's A Change of Skies when Barry and Jean take Ms Sandra Coquelle, a visitor, sightseeing in Kandy, Sri Lanka. As they near Mawanella, "a passing truck burst a tyre. Instantly the sky above [them is] filled with great wheeling circles, as the bats that roost in the old tree by the bridge, a familiar landmark in that district, rose terrified from the foliage" (20). Immediately enraptured by the sight, Ms Coquelle is reminded of that "famous shot" from "The Bridge on the River Kwai" (21). A huge fan of the film, the impressionable Ms Coquelle is genuinely surprised when she is told that the film was made in Sri Lanka. She says, "I thought they filmed it in Burma" (21).

Differences can become similarities and vice versa. Difference and similarity are arbitrary constructs - dependent on who defines this otherness and how otherness is constructed. In Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal states: "As for the rest of us, from the dark, unknown regions of the north, we are lumped together as Asians, recognisable by our absence of Christian principles which outweighs any discernible differences in ethnic characteristics" (86). The diverse "Asians" are paradoxically united in their struggle to be recognised as separate groups, bonded by their equivocal resistance against homogeneity. An appropriation of the term "Asians-Anonymous",[9] can be used to illustrate this point. The term "Asian-Anonymous" has a dual significance: the first can be taken to mean an indistinguishable Asian group, and the second to mean a diverse group/collective congregating for a common purpose.

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[9]This is from Michael Park's paper given at the *Asian-Australians Conference 1999*. In my appropriation of the term, I model its meaning on the concept of the Alcoholics Anonymous.

In Gooneratne's Sri Lanka, Australia has earned notoriety and the dubious reputation for being "afraid of the dark"; the White Australia Policy is regarded as the ultimate display of Australian racist doctrine (19). Before her departure for Australia, Jean is told by a concerned Sri Lankan friend, Charmaine, that "the WAP acts as a brake on the entrance of all Orientals to Australia" (19). Khan's and Gooneratne's novels ask if things have altered much in multicultural Australia? Gooneratne exposes Australian misconceptions about Asia in a humourous and ironical way. Khan's depiction of Australian arrogance and ignorance is equally insightful, but harsher and much more direct. He shows Australians to be still 'in the dark', that is ignorant and contentedly insular regarding the multicultural diversity surrounding them. This is, of course a racist stereotype.

In Seasonal Adjustments, when asked by his neighbours in Bangladesh if Muslims are hated in Australia, Iqbal sardonically states that "[m]ost Anglo-Saxons don't know enough about Islam" (Khan 76). But in reality, Iqbal is acutely conscious of the "racism and the misconceptions against Muslims" (139). Islam and Muslims are seen as menacing and treacherous. Iqbal is insulted, patronised and kept at a distance by Australians, including his own father in-law who regard him and Asians in general as "a bunch of untrustworthy ratbags extending [their] sinister shadows to blight the country [Keith] claims to be God's gift to Christians" (87). As a Muslim among Muslims, he is equally unwelcome because he is a Bangali, a people once at war with Pakistan.

It is clear that even in a seeming monolithic community, there is a sense of exclusiveness, a 'club' that bars entry to perceived others. Religion may be the means by which differences or hostilities are blurred or annihilated, but this is not so in this novel. Iqbal encounters discrimination on his first visit to the mosque in Preston, because of his 'undesirable' origins, that is being a non-Arab from Bangladesh. His eyes are open to the discrepancies in seemingly uniformity; the divisions within difference are overwhelming:

> The mosque was crowded. The men were disconcertingly different in speech and mannerism to what I had expected. Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, Egyptians, Iranians . . . who knew? . . . formed a middle-eastern fraternity to which I could not be admitted. It transformed my vague awareness of the irreconcilable diversities within the Islamic world into a living experience. (Khan 196-7)

Are religious values actually just man-made traditions that emerged out of long-seated historical antagonisms? Is it possible for religions to be seen as equal or only in terms of better or worse? Vying for dominance, the whole idea of ownership, possession and conquest of souls goes against the intrinsic concept of harmony and human fraternity. Khan's protagonist, Iqbal, coming from a devout Muslim family, reflects on this contradiction:

> As a child I was told to be broad-minded even if I was being poisoned by inbred prejudices. It was traditional to regard the Jews as our enemies even though I had never met one. Hindus were to be hated and Christians tolerated with suspicion. Tradition taught me that I was among the elite of the world. Why? What proof is there that Allah is superior to God? To Yahweh? To Bhagwan? (250)

Iqbal remarks with bitter irony that in multicultural Australia, "Jews, Hindus, Muslims – we are all nons. Outside the human race" (149). This religious plurality, distinguished as all being outside the European Christian religion, binds these diverse religions together.

"As a social institution, religion plays a major role in creating a just and benevolent society", Iqbal's awareness of the hypocrisy within both Catholicism and Islam however, serves to further reinforce his skepticism (Penman). He is intent on making Keith think about the contradiction between his "stated beliefs in the doctrines of a church which espouses compassion, equality and justice, and his bias against Asians" (Khan 86). Michelle, his ex-wife, is sardonically conscious of her Catholic family's tenuous tolerance. As she says: "What do you expect? . . . We are a conservative, white Catholic family. We go to mass on Sunday and pray for equality and universal brotherhood [sic]. As soon as the final Amen has been said and we have crossed ourselves, we unlock our prejudices and set them free" (149).

In Seasonal Adjustments, the concept of "universal brotherhood" and global unity is superseded by an insistent magnification of the differences that lie between the two 'infallible' religions which resound with "the faint echoes of an ancient feud" - the bloody clash between the cross and the crescent (Khan 86). The two religions are yet another binary paralleling the East (Islam) – West (Christianity) divide. Most religions aim to present a universalistic orientation appealing to values that transcend national, ethnic and racial boundaries. This however may seem like an idealist illusion and a utopian vision.

Religion is the site of an unresolved struggle for supremacy. It is also a source of tensions and open conflict. As Pierre Bourdieu points out the universal is never neutral and its defenders always have a certain interest in it (31). In Seasonal Adjustments, this alludes back to the medieval battlefield of differences that was the Crusades. Iqbal was sent to a Catholic school and also received religious instruction from a mullah after school. He recounts this past when religious affiliation was an affliction, full of "confusion, pain, guilt and rebellious anger" (88): "Caught between Catechism and Koranic lessons, [he] was like a young Everyman in a variation of a morality play. Instead of the good and bad angels fighting for [his] soul, the principal antagonists were the Brothers of the Holy Cross and the Peshawari *mullahs*" (89). For Iqbal, religious affiliation presents numerous challenges to his conceptions of himself as Australian.

This challenge extends to Iqbal's daughter Nadine, who is confronted with the "contradictory claims of Christianity and Islam". She is the subject of a protracted and embittered wrangle between Islam (Iqbal's family) and Catholicism (Michelle, his ex-wife's family). Nadine's respective sets of grandparents fervently assert that her all-encompassing adoption of their religion is vital and definitive for her sense of identity. Through Nadine, both parties seek to consolidate their ethnic loyalties and perpetuate their cultural traditions. Iqbal, however is firmly resistant and resentful of this religious imposition on his young daughter. He insists on

"her right to have a freedom to choose when she is capable of making a rational decision" (84).

Khan raises questions about cultural authority and individual agency. His character Iqbal states that his "claim on Nadine as a Muslim is no greater than Michelle's as a Catholic" (250). He vehemently asserts that Nadine's "most important identity is that of a human being" (250). He is convinced that the individual's affinity with the human family is more important that specific affinities. He says, "Nadine will be among a slowly growing minority which will learn how to combine traditions". By rejecting the institutional deadlock of religion, Iqbal and Nadine (so he hopes) are free to partake in the secular, self-definition of hybridity. However, it is not as easy as it seems.

Religious affiliation and individual identity are intrinsically interwoven. It is seen as a counter to feelings of alienation and marginality. Iqbal's father-in-law Keith states that for Nadine to reject her religious heritage is not an advantage, as it would relegate her to being "a fringe-dweller" (Khan 88). This triggers Iqbal's sensitivity about his uncertain place in the community. He is aware of the "tensions of being a child from a mixed marriage", and is anxious to shield Nadine from "experiencing ridicule and the pains of non-acceptance" (161). He is thus apprehensive about the "exacting and sometimes cruel demands of cultural dualism" (161). Hybridity and the challenges faced by mixed race children is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 of the thesis.

Identity is always "conjunctural", rather than "stable and unified" (Bahri and Vasudeva 14). It is a "dynamic process of inclusion, innovation, of selection and assimilation, that does not stop at some point" (Stuart-Fox 97). If indeed "every child is born into a tradition", the Asian-Australian children in A Change of Skies and Seasonal Adjustments are caught in the cultural and often contradictory cross-currents of societal pressures, parental expectations and individual desires. But for the Asian-Australian children in both novels, confining themselves to "narrowness of life within a single tradition" would be a major handicap (Khan 85). In

Gooneratne's and Khan's multicultural Australia, these young Asian-Australians are called upon to assist in the reconciliation of differences. They emerge as "a slowly growing minority which will learn how to combine traditions" (Khan 85).

The young "hyphenated Australian[s]" in A Change of Skies and Seasonal Adjustments are examples of the cosmopolitans who are products of hybridity and cultures with long imperial histories (Gooneratne 312). In the post-colonial present, "a rethinking of identity requires openness to new forms of global identity or citizenship" (Cvetkovich and Kellner 12). As Cathy Van Der Driesen says, "[w]ith the Australian birthright comes a hybridity of perception, an acquisition of an Australasian gaze" (21). For Asian-Australians, it is difference that defines them in multicultural Australia, the differences that make them highly visible, distinctive and gives them agency. Nonetheless, these same visible differences are rejected because they unequivocally distinguish Asian-Australians as the Other and therefore part of the teeming mass. But being regarded as part of this seemingly uniform multitude once again renders them invisible. This paradox raises questions for the whole concept of global citizenry.

What does this mean for all Australians? For the Asian characters in both novels, being "Asian in Australia is recognition that one cannot be Asians any longer" (Yue "I Am Like You" 21). Asians in Australia should be able to call themselves 'Australians' without the need for additional qualifiers. All Australians, of European or Asian descent, are a diasporic people with multiple consciousnesses and identities.[10] Australia is but an imagined community. The transnational nature of diaspora unsettles the notion of 'national culture' or 'national identity' and disrupts the "presumption of static roots in geography and history" (Ang "On Not Speaking Chinese" 16). Embracing hybridity within both 'tradition' and 'modernity' is a reality in Asian-Australian futures. "[P]ostmodern ethnicity can no longer be experienced as

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[10]"Diasporas are transnational, spatially and temporally sprawling sociocultural formations of people, creating imagined communities whose blurred and fluctuating boundaries are sustained by real and/or symbolic ties to some original 'homeland', that is Europe (most often Britain) or 'Asia'" (Ang "On Not Speaking Chinese" 5).

naturally based upon tradition and ancestry; rather it is experienced as a provisional and partial site of identity, which might be constantly (re)invented and (re)negogiated" (Ang "On Not Speaking Chinese" 18).

However, what all migrants do have in common generally is precisely the need to establish, in one way or another, and in more or less culturally effective ways "strange fusions" (Rushdie *Homelands* 124). As Salman Rushdie says:

> The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human beings: people who root themselves in ideas rather than in places, in memories as much as in material things; people have been obliged to define themselves – because they are so defined by others – by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. (*Homelands* 124-5)

The sanctioning of cultural diversity under the era of multiculturalism has made it possible to "express and explore in a public forum what was previously a private, hidden or suppressed interest and concern in an Asian-Australian heritage and identity" (Wilton 97).

What is universalism? How does it relate to difference? Does the universalist trope seek to resolve all issues of difference? Can differences be universal? Is there an inherent contradiction? Does it mean globalisation? The notion of universalism is problematic. Milner belives that "[t]he rhetoric of globalisation can be tantalising in its deceptiveness - always claiming an essential universalism, it only occasionally reveals more specific nationalist or cultural purposes" ("Why We Should Not Swagger"). Formulations of globalisation, tend to mask the interplay of power and culture. How does this idea of universalism relate to the ideas of nationalism and multiculturalism? Foong Ling Kong asserts that "[w]ithin Otherhood, specificities can be smoothly integrated and assimilated, especially in the name of forming a model of Australianness" (92). This though, is a contentious proposal.

There is a need to be aware of the dangers of universalism, which has been called the opposite of nationalism (yet another binary/dualism!). David Carter draws attention to:

> The argument about art, about individuals and society, about culture and tradition which seeks to resolve all issues of difference by translating them into the realm of universal values; the universalists speak from within a single, dominant (English) tradition. From this point they assume the right to claim that there are no questions of . . . black rights, only individual rights and . . . Australia art or migrant art, only good and bad art. (3)

Therefore there would not be "Asian" or "Western" values, but only good or bad values. Even then, these would be value judgments made within a particular ideological framework and dependent on the specific cultural and social context. In addition, it is ironic that the discussion about universalism and nationalism illuminates the binary oppositioning between the particular and universal.

Conclusion

Historically, Asia has been the backdrop of a coherent and culturally distinct 'other' against which a diverse and fragmented "Europe" could define itself. The production of the various versions of 'Australian' and 'Asian' difference is based on dominant Western discourse and understandings of 'other cultures'. When 'Australians' or 'Asians' began constructing 'Asian' and 'Australian/European' identities, it is likely that they did so partly on the basis of a genuine perception of cultural difference. In A Change of Skies and Seasonal Adjustments, the Other refers not only Asia, but to Australia as well. Gooneratne and Khan point out that "Australians have to recognise that their attempts to negotiate a new [and/or continue their existing] relationship with Asia are tied inextricably to the way they see themselves as a multicultural society" (Rizvi "Racism" 188).

Ideas in this chapter serve as a point of departure rather than arrival. In A Change of Skies and Seasonal Adjustments, the paradox of being similar because of difference is possible within the diversity of multicultural Australia. We are the same in different ways; we are also different in the same ways. Foong Ling Kong has suggested that "in moving away from an identity politics that establishes definitions and identities in opposition, perhaps one option is to amplify and make use of the affinity in representation that allows for multiple differences among and within subjects" (94).

The polarity of positions reflects the symbolic artificiality that constructs the 'East-West', binary and the 'Asian' (Eastern) values versus 'Australian' (Western) values. As Broinowski says, "the closer the contact Australians had with the countries closest to them, the less the division of humanity along East-West lines seemed to them to make sense" (198). The Self/Other dichotomy is in a sense, a fictional creation. The ambiguities that arise from this are significant for Asian-Australian identities. Multiple identities evident in the novels illustrate the transnational realities of migration and hybridity.

The post-colonial approach adopted by Yasmine Gooneratne and Adib Khan is significant because "it posits a speaking space for the Other, a genuinely radical concept of society as inevitably hybrid and multi-discursive" (Dale and Gilbert 47). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin assert that "all post-colonial societies realise their identity in *difference* rather than *essence* . . . [hence] identity both as a distancing from the centre and as a means of self-assertion comes into being" (167, italics my own emphasis). However, in Gooneratne's and Khan's novels, Australia is unique because in its history as a settler-colony and a diasporic community, all newcomers, Asians or European are migrants: "They can be perceived as fellow subjects of racism, creating commonalties, the attraction of outsiders to fellow outsiders" (Docker "Opening"). As Pnina Werbner articulates:

> Racism either subordinates by positing universal human differences, or differentiates by perceiving the commingling of two cultures as a 'natural' threat. Usually it does both. The hybridity of racism, we might say, consists in its capacity to merge incoherent and

heterogeneous effects and elementary forms into a singular hatred of the Other. ("Introduction" 10)

In an interrogation of "Orientalist discourse that up to now has 'spoken' for the Orient, [Seasonal Adjustments and A Change of Skies] represent the acquisition of a voice, which must inevitably diminish the alienness of the 'other'" (Van Der Driesen 27). Khan and Gooneratne achieve this by illuminating the parallels between both the Asian and the Australian characters in their novels. One prominent and powerful parallel is how these characters live on and between the borders as "post-colonials". Through their protagonists, the authors are able to perceptively expose and scrutinise existing colonial and neo-colonial mentalities.

Both Australia and Asia are uncovered as the subjects and objects of colonial scrutiny. It is a gaze that seeks to encode relations of political power and hierarchical relations of culture, tradition, colour and race. It is clear that tradition rooted in discourse shapes society and its attitudes, be they patronisingly tolerant, racist, fearful, contemptuous or discriminatory. Within this kind of politics are the sensitive issues of race, nationality, class, colour, creed and religion. Falsely homogenising these diverse and sometimes contradictory characteristics is therefore highly damaging and volatile. These issues must be confronted as forces that remain fundamental to the contemporary world.

"[Australia] is slowly teaching itself the difficult task of being humble" (Khan 115). Gunew remarks that if "Australians are really attempting to create something new then they must stop making England and English culture the sole reference point for defining their own difference" ("Feminism" 18). It is encouraging to note that an increasingly disapprobation of the East/West dichotomy within the Australian community, has prompted a heightened and sympathetic approach towards Asian societies (Milner and Johnson). Yet the irony lies in the fact that, just as Australia is developing competence and a viable relationship with the region,

the present Howard government decides to abandon pro-Asia policies and programmes, as seen in its cut in funding for the learning of Asian languages in Australian schools.

Australia's ambivalence about claiming either a European or Asian identity will determine its future: "The actual definitions being given to 'Asia' by non-Australian (this could be European or American) actors can influence Australian relations with, and shape Australian identity in contrast with, this 'Asia'" (Milner and Johnson). Cultural definitions of Australia will in turn shape the outcome of future encounters and negotiations with Asian and Asian-Australian communities. It is advantageous to think "in terms of the mutual illuminations offered by juxtaposing various texts and by reading for cultural difference in a non-binary manner" (Gunew "PMT" 45). In other words, discarding established self-other distinctions would go some way towards redressing the power differential that is inherent in constructions of putative others.

Australia, the nation of migrants and refugees, is "well known by many and no less understood" (Liberman 13). Gooneratne's novel, A Change of Skies, speaks optimistically for greater understanding born of the shared human experience. Khan's angst-ridden protagonist Iqbal in Seasonal Adjustments concludes with profound insight:

> You can never call anything your own. But out of this deprivation emerges an understanding of humanity unstifled by genetic barriers . . . my prejudices [are] trimmed to manageable proportions. You realise behind the trappings of cultural differences, human strengths and failures are a global constant. This is a very precious knowledge . . . It is this impossible mixture which binds humanity and I am a part of it. *No better or worse than anyone, but any equal.* An equal because I know I am a composite of all those contradictory characteristics which are far stronger than any racial or religious differences. (Khan 143)

Indeed, while his angst may be shared by many, it is still a struggle that must be borne individually. Being mindful of this, one can perhaps "find human, global, solidarity in the fact" (Liberman 13).

4 THE 'AUSTRALIAN WAY' – THE ONLY WAY? READING DIFFERENCE AND MULTICULTURALISM IN SUBURBIA / AUSTRALIA

Australia is "not only one of the most urbanised countries in the world, it is also one of the most suburbanised" (L. Johnson 1). But as a young and composite country, Australia has quickly developed insecurities about its national identity and place in the world. The current controversies surrounding Asianisation, immigration, multiculturalism and national identity should be located against a much older local tradition based on these anxieties.

> During the White Australia policy years, the very presence of Asians was considered a blemish on the ideal image of the white island continent, and as a nation Australia defined itself explicitly *away* from its regional Asian context, clinging desperately to its uneasy status as a far-flung outpost of Europe. (Ang "Introduction" xiii)

With the ominous return of John Howard in the 2001 elections, it is apparent that a majority of Australians feel that "their prosperity is hard-won and fragile", and do not want outsiders to share in the wealth (Toibin 17). With the proliferating number of desperate and dispossessed refugees arriving on Australian shores, the deep-seated anxieties about the violability of the nation's borders in the Asian region are once again in the spotlight.

Xenophobia is deeply rooted in Australia's social structure and national discourse. What happens when the Asian threat - "dark steamy people and the yellow peril" (Lazaroo 78) is perceived closer to home, coming from within the nation that is in its own 'backyard'? The growth of ethnic enclaves in Australia and the continued existence of traditional festivals, foods and other customs are regarded by some critics of multiculturalism as threatening and ever likely to erode the revered Anglo-Australian way of life.

In recent times, however, Ien Ang has commented that Asians have been constructed as Australia's "pet people": useful for tourism and commerce but not entirely satisfactory as citizens or neighbours ("Curse" 37). In this chapter, I will investigate the racial dynamics within that most 'Australian' of environments, suburbia, as represented in various Asian-Australian texts. I will look primarily at Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments and Solitude of Illusions, Simone Lazaroo's World Waiting to be Made, as well as Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies. In all these Asian-Australian texts, suburbia is reinvented for each generation, as part of a constantly evolving landscape.

Johnson has said that "[t]hrough immigration, the global and the local are brought together and connected in the Australian suburb" (L. Johnson 7). Donald Horne, in The Lucky Country, describes Australia as "the first suburban nation" (16). I argue that the Australian suburb can to some extent be seen as a microcosm of the nation. For Chris McAuliffe, suburbia stands for "the national character or the 'Australian way of life'" (13). It is a potent site in which a range of ideologies, both political and racial (or racist?), can be articulated. The meanings of suburbia are "produced in the interplay of lived experience (what people do) and symbolic exchange (what people are seen to be doing and how they want to appear)" (McAulifee 14). John Hartley has also suggested that "suburbanality" is the "condition of stability, visibility and competence to which we ['Australians'] aspire" (cited in Yue "Asian-Australian Cinema" 195). For Hugh Stretton, suburbia in the 1970s was identified with all that is good about the (white) 'Australian way of life'. Some of these views, however, need to be examined and problematised.

Australia is proud of its multicultural character but there is an underside to this image. While the term 'suburbia' gradually began to exemplify 'the Australian way of life' in the late 1960s and early 1970s, problems of difference have become more ambiguous and obvious in the years since (Rowse, cited in Hage "At Home" 17). Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese assert that racism must be viewed as "constitutive and central to the construction of a white and Anglo-centric Australian national identity". This racism operates within specific spatial boundaries. Too many Asians in Asia do not concern Anglo-Australians; but they do worry

about too many Asians in their neighbourhood, in their city, in their 'nation' (Dolby). This is also known as "the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) syndrome" (Watson and McGillivrary 169). As Ghassan Hage asserts, "one cannot define and act on others as undesirable in just any national space. Such a space has to be perceived as one's [Anglo-Australian] own national space" (cited in Dolby). The discourse of home is invoked, because it conveys an affiliation to the nation rather than a mere objective definition of it. These not only suggests "an image of a nation that is one's own, but also of a self that occupies a privileged position vis-à-vis the nation, a privileged mode of occupying it" (Dolby).

In this chapter, I will examine the construction of Suburbia as the heartland of white Australia as well as the idealisation and ideology of homogenous whiteness. The ideology of "white interests" has, in John Gabriel's words, "been built around and harnessed to ideas of economic security, prosperity, ontological security, and a sense of local and/or national belonging" (97). Those at the centre (presumably the Anglo-Australians) have the most "cultural capital", while racial/ethnic 'others' are distributed towards the periphery. Does the Asian-Australian presence in predominantly white suburbs suggest tacit membership of the Australian mainstream? Is this movement into 'hallowed' WASP territory read as a threat to the sanctity of 'white space'? I will examine the politics of citizenry and show how Khan's, Lazaroo's and Gooneratne's novels depict the migrant as the transitional figure that must be remodelled as an ideal Australian subject through the reproduction of the great Australian Dream. As Audrey Yue points out:

> The suburb stands in as a site/test for the migrant to pass (as in master) in order to take up cultural citizenship; in other words, in order for the migrant to pass as Australian, s/he has to be transformed into an ideal subject marked by stability, acceptance and visibility. The suburb in a sense then becomes a prosthesis – an aid, or a frontier – that signifies the aspiration to become part of Middle Australia: it connotes a cultural value that signifies Middle Australian ethnicity as ideal citizentry. ("Asian Australian Cinema" 195)

For 'Asian' people, the category of race still remains a symbolic marker of uncompromising difference. In this chapter, I will consider the western Sydney suburb of Cabramatta as an example. Populated largely by Asian migrants, Cabramatta raises questions about cultural difference and class distinctions. Its 'colourful' reputation inspires fear and fires the imagination of the media and the public. In addition, I will undertake a critique of multiculturalism and the discourse of tolerance within this context of local/national (white) space. I will also consider Asian-Australian agency and representations of resistance to white hegemony in Khan's, Lazaroo's and Gooneratne's novels.

For Asian-Australian migrants, the move to suburbia is often a sign of upward mobility and an attempt to establish roots in an alien surrounding. The aspiration towards a 'home of one's own' has merged into migrant narratives of success, a shining symbol of success to family and friends in their country of origin. For the Sharifs in Khan's Solitude of Illusions, "their lives [in Australia] were dominated by a search for an elusive future shimmering with a promise of a tranquil prosperity" (138). But suburban life is not at all simple. "Behind [Javed Sharif's] finely developed instinct for a comfortable survival lay a tenaciously held belief that a permanent foreigner in a foreign land could not depend on others in time of financial crisis" (45).

Khan's protagonist Iqbal in his first novel Seasonal Adjustments is aware that the Australia he "once knew was too good to be true. It was a huge dream full of sharply defined rainbows and realisable wishes for those who cared to pursue them. The transition to an imperfect reality is painfully difficult" (32). For Mr Dias, the narrator's father in Lazaroo's novel, Australia was bursting with promise: "the land of opportunity and wide open spaces! The world waiting to be made" (16). But as he and the family later find out, many disguises and alterations are required before they can partake in the great Australian dream.

Each of the texts is set in a different period in Australia's immigration history. The characters in Gooneratne's A Change of Skies begin their Australian life in "1964 when the White

Australia Policy is still in place" (34). In Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made, the unnamed narrator and her family arrive in Australia from Singapore "in 1966 only a couple of years after the Assimilation Section of the Australian Immigration Department had become the Integration Section" (25). Khan's Seasonal Adjustments and Solitude of Illusions however are set in contemporary multicultural Australia. Do attitudes towards migrants necessarily improve with the change from the overtly racist White Australia Policy to Integration and then finally to the present cultural plurality of Multiculturalism?

In A Change of Skies, Barry and Jean Mundy (Bharat and Navarajini) have an inauspicious start. On their way from the airport on their first day in Sydney, they encounter a hostile message, "ASIANS OUT", splashed out in white paint on a brick wall (69). Jean realises with a shock that "the welcoming smile on the face of that little girl in the poster [which said 'Come to Sunny Australia'] . . . had been for someone else. Whoever it was that she had held her flowers out to so invitingly, it could not have been for me" (69). Similarly, in The World Waiting to be Made, the unnamed narrator and her family have their first acrid taste of racism in Australia when "ASIANS GO HOME appeared in yellow paint on the pale green concrete bus shelter across the road from [their] house" (27).

What is "home" for Asian-Australians? For Asian-Australians, the notion and experience of "home" in suburbia/Australia is constantly challenged. It yields issues of dislocation, displacement and exile. As Catherine Wiley and Fiona Barnes say, "[t]he concept of home, much like the concept of identity, is a fertile site of contradictions demanding constant renegotiation and reconstruction" (xv). The texts in this chapter examine the everyday experience of migrant life in Australian suburbs, in its political and social effects as well as its cultural (im)possibilities. Khan, Gooneratne and Lazaroo take a hard and honest look at the unfolding of Australian modernity and the complexities of the Australian psyche. They also illuminate how identity politics and the politics of location are inextricably linked.

Australian suburbia is a contested space, a site in which ethnicity promotes a play between cultures and emphasises "a revelation of cultural artifice" within the seemingly egalitarian casualness of Australian suburban life (Fischer). In my chosen Asian-Australian texts, suburbia is also often a site of conformity, repression or authority. Thus, the Asian-Australian individual or group is/are on various occasions "'inside' or 'outside' of the circle of white" (Dolby). Whiteness is often the *normative ideal* against which others are compared or (de)valued (Gabriel 5). Does belonging therefore demand 'acting white', that is conforming to the 'standards' established by the white majority?[1]

Marilyn Frye has coined the term "whiteliness" to distinguish the constructed from the physical aspect of whiteness (cited in Gabriel 15). Whiteness thus refers to some physical state, whiteliness to the ideology of white domination (Gabriel 15).[2] In this chapter, I will also explore the issue of class and examine the inclination to read whiteness as a form of nationalistic advantage. Aware of the dangers in totalising Whiteness as an 'essentialist' and undifferentiated category however, I acknowledge the class differences within the supposed egalitarian and predominantly White Australia/suburbia. I am particularly interested in the connections between Australian cosmopolitanism (the middle to upper-middle class stratum of Australian society) and the corresponding attitudes towards multiculturalism, since the characters in the novels mostly inhabit this sphere.

Anglo Australian dominance is embedded within contemporary Australian multiculturalism (Vasta 48). Moreover, this dominance is replicated by the ideologies of tolerance and cultural pluralism. For Jon Stratton in Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis, multiculturalism is clearly problematic because it obscures the issues regarding race, privileges Anglo-Australian

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[1]Normative whiteness implicitly racialises values, aesthetics and forms of inclusion and exclusion. It has become more visibly racialised through campaigns, such as those concerning the English language, immigration and multiculturalism. See Gabriel 5.

[2]According to Gabriel, the advantage of Frye's distinction is that it makes it easier to talk about racialised whiteness in non-essential terms, whilst at the same time acknowledging the existence of colour differences.

culture and is conjectured around the notion of distinct and separate cultures (cited in Dolby). Mirjana Lozanovksa sees the term 'migrant' itself as "a construction which perpetuated both a homogenisation and a negative marginal identity" (196). Australian multiculturalism has created a "symbolic space in which racial difference can be turned into ethnic/cultural difference" (Stratton and Ang 155). But in its focus on culture or ethnicity, multiculturalism disregards the marginalisation or alienation of those groups that are racially and ethnically distinct.

The 'Immigration Debate', which surfaced again around the time of the Australian Bicentennial, constructed all 'Asians', whether they were visitors, investors, boat people, students, immigrants or fourth-generation Asian-Australians as insidious foes, capable of corrupting Australian (Eurocentric) cultural values. Advocating 'cultural diversity' Australia's multicultural policy eclipses both unequal power relations and the challenge to a homogenous national culture (Gunew "PMT" and "Against Multiculturalism"). In their texts, Gooneratne, Lazaroo and Khan ask if Australian tolerance and egalitarianism is merely a myth? What does all this say about difference and Australian identity?

The increasing racialisation of the term 'Australianness' demands attention. The concept of 'race' (and the social meaning ascribed to it) acts as an intrinsic factor in the positioning of assorted racialised or racially 'marked' minority groups. Australian multiculturalism has the tendency to collapse race into the more flexible concept of ethnicity.[3] In White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society, Ghassan Hage argues that 'Australianness' is an aspiration; it is something attainable and can be realised through the accumulation of "national capital" such as language, accent, the use of vernacular or colloquial terminology, dress, length of residency (53-4).

[3]"According to the poetics of ethnicity developed by US anthropologist Michael Fischer, ethnicity is predicated not on coherence but on the plural and the fragmentary, taking for granted the often contradictory components that comprise identity for the material subject caught up in a specific history. Thus ethnicity searches continuously for voices and not for a definitive stance. It seeks mutual illuminations in reading juxtaposed dialogic texts or utterances, which swerve away from the binary structures that, have traditionally been the model on which the ground of 'culture' is established" (Gunew "PMT" 39-40).

Would having a house in the suburbs also qualify as having amassed enough "national capital"? After all, is it not and has it not been "the Australian way to own a home on a plot of its own, so that the homeless immigrant [can be] magically transformed into a man of property" (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 27)? As Khan's protagonist Iqbal in Seasonal Adjustments says, "Like a *good* Australian I have been seduced by the common dream of a brick-veneer house on a quarter of an acre of land" (122, italics my own emphasis). If migrants arriving in a new nation can accumulate nationality by assimilating, can Asian-Australian migrants fit into a new suburb by being like everybody else? Does the suburban 'home of one's own' represent a space in which different patterns of everyday life can be pursued in private, away from scrutiny and judgment?

Kim Dovey comments that the model home is "the mirror in which a suburban subject is constructed, which at once reflects and reproduces the Great Australian Dream" (128). In World Waiting to be Made, the unnamed narrator's father, Mr Dias, is intent on looking for *the* house, a "bricks and mortar charm" that will render him acceptable in Australia (65): "He'd spent his initial years of hardship in the new country trying to ascertain what style of home was most Australian, so that when he built his own home it would guard against [their] classification of Alien" (63). For Mr Dias, "the egalitarian ethic still retains its vigour"; he is all too aware that "looking for something too different or too much 'better' can be interpreted as perverse, snobbish or 'un-Australian'" (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 32). Mr Dias exemplifies what John Fiske, Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner observe in Myths of Oz:

> [The] consistent attempt to mobilise upward aspirations in many Australians is not only a movement towards the establishment of a particular middle-class taste . . . for the suburban home, it is also a movement away from the varied ethnic origins of Australian society towards an *Anglo-centric homogeneity.* (35)

Mr Dias rejects all houses with any form of 'wog' connotation: the "Italian house" with its front exterior wall and verandah "tiled as if they were a bathroom"; the credenza in the kitchen of another house is dismissed as a "Georgian house, not an Australian one" (65).

Mr Dias can barely contain his excitement when he thinks he has found that elusive "Australian house" in the classified section of the newspaper (65). He reads out the "advertisement that rang with magic for him":

> True Blue Romeo, where art thou? Open plan living for Australians who love living in the land of wide open spaces. Feature walls, balcony, bar, minstrels' gallery. Sliding doors, patio, pergola. Sumptuous drapes. *For true blue Aussies with a taste for international sophistication*, this one includes at no extra cost a bidet. (66, italics my own emphasis)

For him, the last phrase was probably the most alluring and crucial one in the advertisement. "[W]eary and wisened by being picked on in the playground" (because she is different), the narrator's twin sister cynically asks, "So, will this house make us real Australians?" (66) It is a loaded question that her father has no answer for. Indeed, this question is not easily answered at all.

New arrivals to Australia are welcome as long as they conform to, and continue to play by the rules established by the essentially white majority. This conformity does not only apply to the styles and external façades of their suburban homes. It compels new arrivals to internalise the "ideology of fundamental community" which "creates an image of society in which gratuitous differences are represented as dangerous" (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 32). In Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal notes that he is somewhat accepted because: "[i]t is a community that [he] do[es] not threaten" (122). In Solitude of Illusions, Khalid Sharif, an elderly visitor to Australia from Calcutta, wryly comments that through his own experiences he has learnt that "pariahs are unsettling for any community. They bring with them too many strange ideas" (122). For Lazaroo's Eurasian characters, their colourful and coloured foreignness are too profound and obvious for any sort of immediate acceptance in Australia.

Any local or national belonging implies established resident and outsider. The migrant who is newly arrived in the new suburb or Australia can never belong nor experience belonging in the same way. The extent to which new arrivals can accumulate 'Australianness' is dependent upon and directly related to the cultural codes that they are able and willing to adopt. What are these cultural codes? In A Solitude of Illusions, Khalid's son, Javed, with "the migrant's obsession with self-preservation", reluctantly adjusts himself to Australia's/suburbia's "cautious formality towards anyone or anything marked different from what was tacitly accepted to be the Australian norm" (45). As a young girl growing up in Perth, Lazaroo's unnamed narrator in The World Waiting to be Made is tormented by "the shame of being different" (81). She thus becomes "an expert in the ways of disguise, in blending in with the Australian kids" (50).

Is blending in the key concern for non-Anglo newcomers? Are differences obscured or exaggerated in suburbia? Is the suburban ideology that extols uniformity and egalitarianism implicitly racist? Differences may be played down, but they cannot be rendered invisible. They are still indisputable markers of division. For Asian Australians, the very act of repression, of denying difference and 'acting white' "guarantees their parallel existence as the underside of successful assimilation" (Perera "Whiteness"). This serves as an acknowledgment of the constructed nature of Australian whiteness. Inclusion into the multicultural neighbourhood/nation is never guaranteed, even for those who are well versed in the cultural codes and practices of suburbia, that is 'westernised non-Anglos'. This is because admission still hinges on the colour of one's skin. The "double bind of assimilation which says to its subjects, 'Be just like me', and again in the same breath, 'You can never be just like me' illuminates the distinction of visible difference, that is observable racial difference" (Perera "Whiteness").

It is necessary to identify the values of the suburban community, the Aussie 'cultural codes' or rather the codes 'to be like us'. One suburban code held in high regard is respectability and

order. In Solitude of Illusions, the narrator says that "an outward show of restraint was a mark of *civilised* behaviour" (33). He jabs slyly at the self-righteous, stiff upper lip suburb in which his character, Javed, lives:

> It was the kind of suburb in which people went to absurd lengths to maintain the façade of domestic equilibrium. Couples argued in low voices and; in the case of more serious rows, made certain that doors and windows were tightly shut . . . in this *predominantly Christian community*. (Khan 32-33, italics my own emphasis)

The protagonists in Solitude of Illusions and Seasonal Adjustments are Muslim, which means 'they' can never 'be like us'. In Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal lives in Ballarat which he calls "a very Christian city" that "encourages propriety, self-restraint and tolerance" (121). Khan draws attention to the simplistic but nevertheless deep-seated ideological dichotomy at play: the notion of being "civilised" which invariably equates with Christianity, and being un-civilised which is often paralleled to other 'pagan' religions. The comments of John Button are certainly revealing. In a Sunday Age article, he remarks that, "Ballarat is an Anglo-Celtic city. Bob Menzies ('British to the bootstraps') and Arthur Calwell ('two wongs don't make a white') would be comfortable here" (Button 4).[4] Despite Australia's multicultural posturing, it is clear that any sort of racial, cultural or religious difference will continue to preoccupy and plague Australian suburbia/nation.

The suburban cultural code of obsessive order and propriety extends to the front yard. Representing a range "of meanings for the public, for society", the front garden was

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[4]Button goes on to observe that, "[t]he most striking thing about Ballarat streets is the absence of Asian faces, black faces, brown faces . . .", not one "foreign face" was to be found (4). Tongue-in-cheek, he suggests that the Asians in Ballarat/Australia are perhaps "hidden away in some rural gulag equivalent of Nauru" (4). Here, Button is clearly alluding to Prime Minister John Howard's controversial 'Pacific Solution' and appalling racist agenda. Most of the desperate boat people at the heart of the Tampa crisis were of Middle East and/or South-Asian origin. This article was the second installment of a five-part election series on the mood of the nation. One of the issues that dominated the 2001 Federal Election, was of course, that of the government's handling of the Tampa crisis and the refugee 'problem'.

"determined by canons of middle-class decency and taste" (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 49). As Geoffrey Bolton observes:

> [The front garden was] the conventional but deeply important means of self-expression for most Australian suburban dwellers . . . This was the private environment in which many dedicated their weekends to the care and maintenance of lawns and flower beds which still followed *English* canons of taste. . . neatly manicured patches . . . and above all, roses were cherished and lavishly watered. (130, italics my own emphasis)

Thus, Australia is aptly described as "Britain's farthest suburb" (Davison 102). In his 2002 Australia Day speech, writer and paleontologist, Tim Flannery, said that the Australian preference for European-style lawns, trees and flowers "indicates that we are still at heart, uncomfortable in our own land" (Sunday Forum 12). The colonial influence and mentality in Australia/suburbia is unmistakable and undeniable. The indigenous landscape is subdued and manipulated in the same way that migrants are expected to be conform to the established order.

The narrator in World Waiting to be Made is candid and sardonically accurate when she states "our lawns, our heritage" (179). This observation comes about as the narrator finishes her teaching training and is posted to a school in the Kimberleys. Even there in outback Western Australia, there is a "small and resolute smattering of suburbia" (177). Flying from Derby, she looks out of the plane, and sees the "particularly remarkable" lawns: "squares of bright green . . . improbably lush against the powdery orange earth and the more muted, almost grey-green of the natural vegetation. They were largely uninterrupted by shrubs or trees, and ended abruptly at the front gate of each yard" (177). In this harsh and remote place, the teachers are exhaustively exhorted to look after their lawns. After all it was the "responsibility [of each resident of this government workers' settlement] to uphold civilisation against the wild yonder" (177).

In their novels, Lazaroo, Khan and Gooneratne uncover the deep-seated suburban fears about spiritual degeneration and a lack of 'culture' residing in the Australian psyche. The writers also draw attention to a distinct class-consciousness present in suburbia. Accompanying the discourse of 'civilisation', is the conviction of white and western superiority. In Khan's Solitude of Illusions, "the elusive and forbidding" Mrs Angela Barrett is exceedingly proud of what she perceives to be "the essential features of her imperial heritage", that is "propriety, correctness and decorum", not to mention unabashed racist attitudes (28)! She "did not care for people of Indian descent despite the fact that she herself was born in the subcontinent" (18). Mrs Barrett haughtily proclaims that, "*[a] well-kept garden is a reflection of a civilised soul*" and is convinced that "*[i]n that respect,* most *Indians are inadequate*" (Khan 33). Angela is later pleased that the Sharifs "finally tid[y] up their backyard". She believed that "[i]t was essential for the neighbourhood to maintain its orderly appearance" (33). It is clear that ethnic origin becomes an issue whenever Anglo-Australians feel that the status of the suburb/nation or the quality of family/national life is at stake.

In Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, Bharat and Navaranjini Mangala-Davasinha (who later change their names to Barry and Jean Mundy) are similarly subject to the hegemony of "whiteliness". They feel the pressure to conform to the standards of their garden-proud neighbours. A particularly unnerving episode for them, is when their Anglo-Australian neighbour, Bruce Trevally casually drops by and proceeds to 'inspect' their garden: "'Dear, oh dear,' [Bruce] said when he saw the state of [their] rose bushes. 'Greenfly, too. Oh, my.'" (84). This and the Trevally's much cherished garden consisting of "[p]erfect blossoms, a lawn as smooth as green velvet [and] not a weed in sight" made the Mundys "acutely conscious of the ragged state of [their] own lawn, bald in some areas, shaggy in others" (84, 85). On the surface, it seems that the Anglo suburban concern is one of aesthetics, but it is in fact about the migrant 'risk' to whiteness and the local/national culture.

The oppressive dictum of whiteliness is also conspicuous in Lazaroo's World Waiting to be Made. In the novel, when the unnamed narrator and her family move into their new house, they bring with them the chickens and rooster from their previous residence:

> Unfortunately for the rooster, his crowing sounded off alarms for the neighbours. There was a deputation to [their] house by the neighbourhood men in their knitshirts and walk shorts. 'There are no chooks in this suburb', said one of the neighbours. 'We all built our homes here for the improved living standards'. (72)

The family in the novel eventually manages to give the chickens to "someone who lived in the adjoining State Housing Commission suburb. But no one would take the fiery-eyed [and very aggressive] rooster with shiny blue-black tail feathers" (72). As Fiske, Hodge and Turner say, the chook pen is considered dirty and 'uncivilised' – "the side of nature deemed impossible to acculturate and thus a subject of control" (50). In addition, it is regarded as "residual evidence of lower-class position and aspirations and is thus eschewed by upwardly mobile families" (50). The narrator's father is intensely aware of the consternation caused by the rooster. He stoically announces, "We must kill the rooster . . . it's better than being on bad terms with the neighbours" (72).

The Asians in Khan's, Gooneratne's and Lazaroo's Australia strive to comply with the cultural code of community and suburban rules so as not to be seen as 'un-Australian'. Negotiating these codes are doubly treacherous for the 'coloured migrant'. Being 'un-Australian' means being obtrusively different and therefore unacceptable:

> In the current climate, the term 'un-Australian' has come to be used in an increasingly ethnicised and racialised manner . . . The unstated racial qualifiers in the use of 'un-Australian' in speeches and policy documents, refer to ethnic minority cultural practices that stand in dissonance to Anglo-centric norms and values. Thus being described as 'un-Australian' condemns particular forms of behaviour and belief. [It is] a usage that resonates with the rhetoric of 'us' and 'them'. (Perera and Pugliese)

As 'representative' of their 'race/kind', Asian Australians are under pressure to be model citizens and to uphold the 'model minority' stereotype.[5] After all, the suburban garden is seen to reflect the values of those who own it.

The Asian Australians in the novels however are able to effectively subvert this implicit policing by white people. They do not lack agency; they are active in etching out a place for themselves. For Khalid Sharif in Solitude of Illusions, the tidying up of the garden was not out of deference to Angela Barrett. For him, the garden offered a distraction from the grim reality of growing old:

> [He] spen[t] a significant proportion of his time rejuvenating the badly neglected garden . . . Within a few weeks [he] had managed to create a symmetrical harmony in the yard . . . His preoccupation with gardening stemmed from a feeling of power over the degenerative process of aging. There was vitality and hope in nature's cyclic rhythm of life. (17)

In A Change of Skies, "an imaginative sleight of hand superimposes the landscape of the original home onto the Australian landscape" (Van Der Driesen 25). Jean succeeds in transcending the seeming banality of the Anglo-centric Australian garden and derives great pleasure from the familiar Sri Lankan flora that she finds in Australia. Wherever she looks, she sees plants and trees she has known all her life:

> There is a frangipani tree growing beside the garage that comes into full bloom each December, with white and gold flowers, exactly like the trees by [her] verandah in Jaffna, and they have the same scent, too. And there are beds of blue hydrangeas on either side of the front door, and a white jasmine creeper on the fence. (Gooneratne 171)

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[5]'Model Minority' is a description often used to refer to Asian communities in Western nations because of their stereotypically non-confrontational attitudes and quiet success in business. It also becomes a restrictive ascription when applied by the communities to themselves.

According to Fiske, Hodge and Turner, "[w]here the front garden gestured towards Europe, the backyard was Australian. Where the front garden was public in its display, renouncing private uses, the backyard was private and useful, seeming to deny the whole idea of public display" (48). In her letter to her mother, Gooneratne's protagonist Jean in A Change of Skies observes that the "real lives of Australians", or rather their private lives it seemed, are "lived out of sight behind tall fences at the back of the house" (172). In Khan's Solitude of Illusions, Khalid Sharif found the formidable back fence most unattractive. The fence was entirely "straddled with the additional barrier of latticed trellises, threaded and knotted with passion fruit vines" (18). Between two trellises, there was a little gap, "an unexpected opening created more by accident than design. And beyond the fence was another country, ruled by . . . Mrs Angela Barrett" (18). Shanaz, Khalid Sharif's daughter-in-law, was hesitant to talk about Mrs Barrett, other than cautioning him against letting his curiousity stray across the fence.

In both A Change of Skies and Solitude of Illusions, the front garden with its emphasis on conformity, order and authority is posed against the backyard, which is imagined as a place of privacy, conjugality and increased liberty. In her letter, Jean goes on to relate to her mother, the incident in which the backyard fence is blown down in a storm. It was a while before it could be fixed. In this time, their neighbours Bruce and Maureen Trevally seldom went out into their backyard if Barry and Jean were in theirs. According to Jean, it was an embarrassing and uncomfortable period, but fortunately short-lived. Once the new fence was erected, cordiality and normalcy was restored.

In both Khan's and Gooneratne's texts, the notion of privacy appears to be more of an issue for the Trevallys and Mrs Angela Barrett. This suggests the presence of an inherent stereotype and binary: Anglo-Australians (Westerners) are individualistic and value privacy more, whereas Asians are more communal and community-minded and somehow value it less. The white nation/suburb seems content to subscribe to and perpetuate this myth. Could this therefore be a simplistic validation for white interference and intervention?

There is "a deeply contradictory series of myths and ethics" (and attitude towards ethnics), specifically those manifest in "the levelling principle of egalitarianism" and 'tall poppy' elitism (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 29). In other words, there exists an incompatibility between the ideology of fundamental community and privacy. Is privacy a privilege? Does this privilege extend to migrants? The Asian-Australians in the novels are steadily subjected to the ever solicitous surveillance by their Anglo-Australian neighbours. The Anglo-Australian insistence on common values – 'the Australian way of life' - the mindfulness of perceived 'ethnic' or cultural differences and even so-called harmless curiousity are all surreptitious tactics aimed at exaggerating Asian-Australian otherness. Racism in suburbia does not express itself only "in the overt practices of exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination, but also in the covert taken-for-granted generalisations about particular minorities and in the discursive constructions of the Other" (Rizvi "Racism" 181).

Maureen Trevally in A Change of Skies admits to being a bit of a "stickybeak" (99). She is immensely "curious to see how [Barry and Jean] were settling in", especially after she gets out a library book which says "Sri Lanker's a carpet culture . . . Not a chair culture like *us*" (99, italics my own emphasis). Angela Barrett in Solitude of Illusions takes out her late husband's binoculars and furtively watches Khalid Sharif when he is in the backyard "as if she was a *shikari* who has sighted a prized prey" (41). Of course, the Dias family's desire to fit in(to) Australia in The World Waiting to be Made is further exacerbated by the tyrannical White Australia policy, a policy which operated on overt assumptions that to be acceptable, migrants must assimilate.

Despite the difficulty of negotiating the underlying 'backyard code', the 'big burn off' episode in Lazaroo's novel depicts Asian Australian agency in a most interesting way. Mr Dias, the narrator's father, proves himself to be more 'Australian' than the Australians in his fervent adoption of the Aussie 'cultural code' of burning off: "in the world waiting to be made, fathers burned-off all over our neighbourhood . . . But none burnt off as devotedly as [the narrator's father]" (56). Conscious of the Australian obsession about keeping home and garden neat, "[the narrator's father would start] his burn-offs in the disused old laundry copper that sat

behind the toolshed. He burnt off household rubbish, garden clippings and old newspapers" (56). Mr Dias' conscientious action definitely had a practical side to it. But as the narrator says:

> There was something more to it than that. Dad's burn-offs occurred more often and more spectacularly than anyone else's. It seemed . . . [that] he was flaunting or inflaming things other than what we could see with our eyes, especially as our British next-door neighbour was the chief of the local fire brigade whom he nicknamed the twitty Britty, or just Twitty for short. (57)

By appropriating the very Aussie practice of burning off, Mr Dias is able to assert his autonomy and prerogative as an individual house-owner. Burning off becomes a strategy of resistance and also a practical and "approved outlet for [Mr Dias'] frustrations" (56).

The narrator's father resents Twitty's constant superintendence as "Twitty always hovered indignantly on his side of the fence at the first whiff of smoke from [their] side" (57). On his part, the narrator's father reckoned "Twitty – the fire chief – used up too much water on his rosebushes" (57). The ensuing clash of wills and heated exchange between Twitty and Mr Dias is comical but simmering with tension. As the narrator relates with candour:

> The flames crept along the clumps of wild oats and banksia leaves at the rear of the block towards the chicken wire fence that separated it from Twitty's, who was getting even redder and redder in the face on his side of the fence . . . Dad stayed leaning on his rake, deliberately nonchalant it seemed, as some of the flames actually dipped their fingers into Twitty's garden.
> 'No need to turn on the hose. Silly to waste water', Dad said deliberately, loudly, clearly . . .
> Suddenly, unheralded, a loud and furious ejaculation of water from Twitty's wide-nozzled hose hit Dad on the knee. Dad countered with a flurry of sparks from under his rake.
> 'Don't waste water, lah!' Dad spat scornfully at Twitty.
> 'Don't play with fire then!' countered Twitty. They stood and glared at one another. They would report one another to their own respective authorities, they would. (57)

To the narrator, it seemed that this defiant display wasn't simply "a matter of a plumber asserting his supremacy against a fireman" (58). Mr Dias' audacious behaviour "represented a spontaneous combusting of long suppressed, smouldering resentment of the British colonial bosses who'd run his family's lives in Singapore throughout his childhood" (58).

The outdoor living area is possibly the most "ritualised of spaces" in Australian homes and "dominated by codes of behaviour" (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 41). In the ideology of suburbia, the quintessential backyard bash is the barbeque. In Myths of Oz, Fiske, Hodge and Turner draw our attention to "the ritual of the Bar BQ [which] is as formal and culture-created as a high church mass, yet its appeal is its apparent informality and naturalness" (43). In Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal attends a typical Aussie barbecue with his then-fiancee:

> The cacophony of backyard chatter can be heard from the street . . . I am greeted by the crackling noise of burning fat and the sizzle of sausages, chops and steaks. [The guests] stand in small groups, drink in hand, enjoying the facetious banter of camaraderie. Smoke rises from behind the tiled roof. Part of a libation to the god of indulgence. (Khan 145-6)

In recent years, the backyard barbie has certainly "undergone a revolution": "We've come a long way from throwing that shrimp on the barbie haven't we?" (Rogers "Barbeques" 16). This transformation can be largely attributed to Australia's reception of multiculturalism: "A barbie no longer means a lump of steak or a lamp chop peeled free from its styrofoam tray and thrown on tepid coals" (Rogers "Barbeques" 16). The updated "barbie repertoire" is considerably influenced by the tastes of 'Asia' – "such wonderful things too" – like delectable Malaysian satays, "*teppanyaki* garlic chicken with soy rice, miso and grilled eggplant, Thai coriander chicken fillets, chilli and pepper squid", or "spiced Indian-style lamb kebabs" (Rogers "Barbeques" 16-17).

Sheridan Rogers, in her article for The Age's Sunday Age Magazine, is exultant about "such exotic fare" ("Barbeques" 16). Recipes for Oriental marinade, Salt and Pepper Spice,

Moroccan blend, Caribbean fish marinade from Allan Campion's and Michele Curtis' new barbecue cookbook Sizzle have also been reproduced in The Age's Good Weekend Magazine (Skelley and Bragge 12). It appears that ethnic flavours are very fashionable and have found favour with the mainstream. Multiculturalism is interpreted by savvy Anglo-Australians as a sort of cosmopolitan lifestyle choice. Diversity it seems is pleasing and permissible, but only if it enhances solidly Australian staples and is perceived to be unthreatening to the Australian nation/culture.

Certain elements of Asian style have slowly found their way into the Australian home as well. It is therefore highly ironic in Khan's Solitude of Illusions when Angela Barrett contends that the "problem of having non-European foreigners living in one's midst" is that "[t]hey d[o] not place enough value on the aesthetic dimension of living" (33). The novel's irony is accentuated considering the surging popularity of Chinoiserie in Australian homes. Lifestyle magazines such as the classy *Conde Nast* publications, Vogue Entertainment and Vogue Living reflect this trend. Its May 1999 (Australia) issue can be seen as predominantly 'Asian-focused' (cited in O. Khoo 205). But this 'Asian influence' or rather aspects of Asian 'exotica' is restricted to mere ornamentation in the still essentially Anglo-Australian home. These 'accessories' may range from the Chinese bamboo in the garden, to the Thai silk runners or Kashmiri rug in the house, to the Indonesian rattan chairs on the patio, or better still one of those "snazzy . . . six-sided Teppanyaki style non-stick grill plates" that add interest to the good old Aussie barbeque (Rogers "Barbeques" 16).

Apparently, the Australian reputation for openness and friendliness is linked with the outdoors as the natural location for social interaction. This in turn links with "the kind of existence mythologised in the swagman, the itinerant bush worker, or the archetypal Australian brewing tea over a campfire" (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 44). Tseen Khoo argues that "[t]hese traditional images [which] disavow and disallow Asian faces and bodies in national semiotic representations are part of the circular discourse that points out the marginality of racially Othered groups by making those who 'don't fit in' not fit in" ("Bright White Suburbs" 1). The national mythical iconography is alien to Asian newcomers and thus further consolidates their

status of outsiders. For non-Anglo-Australians, such as Iqbal, the sense of aloneness is painfully real:

> I stop among the red bottle-brushes and brace myself for the bland smiles and wary inquisitive eyes – the guarded expressions of polite welcome reserved for ethnic strangers . . . I can see the drinks table. I'll grab a beer first. That will establish my familiarity with the priorities of the backyard bash . . . I feel chastened and a trifle ridiculous sitting here by myself, holding a can of beer, surrounded by decaying pears. The high-pitched sound of a slightly inebriated conversation makes me feel the sadness of isolation. They are oblivious of my presence . . . I have melted into the shadows of a fear they vaguely perceive and vigorously suppress. (Khan 145, 150)

Despite his isolation at this clannish gathering, Iqbal discovers "the powers of invisibility". He "can listen and watch with impunity" (150). He thus takes on the coveted role of observer and critic.

In A Change of Skies, Gooneratne makes an allusion to Geoffrey Blainey, the right-wing historian who, in the early 1980s vigourously campaigned against the entry of Vietnamese migrants into Australia. This is done through her protagonist, Jean, who tells of a Ronald Blackstone, a sociology professor from the University of Woop-Woop:

> [This Ronald Blackstone] started all [their] problems when he nicknamed a Sydney suburb 'Vietnamatta' because it was full, so he said, of Asians'. 'Asians', he said on radio, 'pollute the air with the fumes of roasting meat. And we Australians,' he added, 'must be alert to the dangers involved for our society if we allow Asians in who cannot assimilate and accept our customs'. (Gooneratne 121)

This is a highly ironic statement since "roasting meat" is what Australians (whatever their colour) do at barbeques! The opportunity for vindication arises when Jean meets the infamous racist, Professor Blackstone, at a party. In the spectacular showdown, Jean tells Blackstone to his face:

> You, a so-called sociologist who should know that *real* Asians [she means South Asians, many of whom are Muslim or Hindu vegetarians like herself] would die before they touched charred pig meat, *you*, polluting the air with meat fumes from your filthy, smelly barbie in your weed-ridden backyard . . . (128)

Through humour, Gooneratne clearly shows that the prejudice against Asian migrants is unfounded and often based on ignorance and misconceptions. An underlying 'psychosis' about the prospect of 'invading hordes' exacerbates this fear of the other.

It is evident that migrants become a problem if they are too many or too visible (Richards 80). As Iqbal in Khan's <u>Seasonal Adjustments</u> says, he feels "safe in the streets [of Ballarat]", because he knows "that at any given time [he] normally form[s] *a minority of one*" (121). A common phrase in Australia/suburbia is "'migrants don't bother me' or 'don't worry me' (like bush flies, so long as they area not too numerous or aggressive)" (Richards 73). Real estate values of suburbs are often pegged on the racial composition of the neighbourhood. This reflects the unequivocal belief that 'too many migrants' in any one suburb make it an inferior area. Real and visible distinctions create hierarchies of desirable addresses in suburbia/Australia. Khan in <u>Solitude of Illusions</u>, draws attention to his character Javed and his family who settle nervously and self-consciously in suburbia:

> [It was] a quiet, upper middle-class neighbourhood buoyed by hefty bank loans and purring with the sounds of new Falcons and the odd Volvo. The rows of brick-veneer houses were inhabited mostly by dual-income couples with the resources to maintain the extra car, employ cleaning ladies and once-a-week gardener, and educate their children in private schools. (33)

Diane Powell points out that ghettoes do not exist in discourses about Australian cities. Australian suburban 'ghettos' are less clearly defined, geographically and culturally, than those in other parts of the world. Yet most Australian cities have areas which are segregated along class, economic, cultural and ethnic lines (Powell xvi). Why are there never any reference to 'white ghettos', only black or ethnic ones? White space is seen as powerful as well as considered positive and desirable, whereas black or 'coloured' space is negative and

even menacing. Ethnic ghettos are a perceived "threat to property values, personal security and neighbourhood amenity" (Watson and McGillivary 169). Although these so-called 'ethnic' ghettos are consigned to the nation's periphery, there are still active fears surrounding the possible contamination of the Anglo-Australian body/nation.

According to Pauline Hanson, Asian migrants are undesirable because they have the 'un-Australian' tendency "to form *ghettos* and do not assimilate" (cited in Woodford 3). When Pauline Hanson visited Ulverstone in Tasmania and "listed the suburbs of Australia – Cabramatta, Surfers Paradise, Richmond etc. – where 'we' now feel [like] foreigners in *our* own country', the people of this very white town gave her all their attention" (Marr 7). Hanson's racist lamentation points again to the current racialisation of the term 'Australian'. Ironically as Ellie Vasta points out, although Anglo-Australians wanted migrants to assimilate, they did much to prevent it. Through institutional and informal racism of various kinds, migrants were effectively excluded and marginalised. "The racist practices of assimilation policy reinforced non-assimilation and thus constituted the 'problem' migrant to be addressed by multiculturalism" (Vasta "Multiculturalism" 210). According to Dai Le, a Vietnamese-Australian journalist, ghettos emerge because "[w]hen people are not accepted for who they are, they are forced to seek solace in their own kind. That's when people form those ghettoes that the media love to report" (15).

Cabramatta, in Sydney's outer west in particular demands closer analysis. It is an example of how Asian-Australians are positioned within Australian culture. Because it is 'home' to a large Asian migrant community, Cabramatta is singled out as a volatile area. This very visibly Asian suburb has already been termed (by Pauline Hanson and others) a "suburb apart" from the body of the (white) nation:

> It is a suburb in which television cameras have been installed at key points in the suburb's main streets and shopping mall in order to monitor its already criminalised (mostly Asian-Australian) subjects, who are now under twenty-four hour surveillance, and are placed under

> official threat of 'deportation', even if they are permanent Australian residents. (Perera and Pugliese)

Racism contributes an additional dimension to moral panics over youth, particularly when it draws on Australia's historical anti-Asian attitudes. The media with their sensational headlines and adversarial styles of reporting exacerbate the increasing public alarm:

> The xenophobia of the 'Asian threat' formed within the nation (the Asian countries north of Australia) has now been internalised . . . As the inside/outside racialised dichotomy of the nation becomes more problematic, the anxieties over questions of race have become more hystericised. (Perera and Pugliese)

Cabramatta has generated much attention and interest for its dual image: the incongruous development from notorious, violent gangland to multicultural amusement park. Diane Powell cites Annette Hamilton's influential treatise concerning Asia in the Australian imaginary as relevant to emerging discourses about Sydney's western suburbs.[6] As a culturally constructed image of 'Otherness' in contemporary Australia, Cabramatta engenders contradictory and ambivalent attitudes of "fear and desire" or 'lure and dangers': "The lure is *difference within the familiar*; exotic people and food, and multicultural others, side by side with the dangers of class and social differences, alleged street crime, Chinese triads, gang warfare and youth violence – but all within the boundaries of Australia, of Sydney" (Powell 134). Cabramatta became an official tourist area in 1991, but its target audience is Australian, not visitors from overseas. It has been recently touted as an exciting and unusual destination for the adventurous domestic tourist. But this "gastronomic tourism" as it has been called is problematic (Zelinsky 51).

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[6]Annette Hamilton argues that the dominant social order has an ambivalent attitude of fear and fascination towards its 'others', and the need to maintain distinctions within the nation is greatest when national identity is threatened from the outside by the increasing globalisation of culture. From "Fear and Desire. Aborigines, Asians and National Imaginary". Australian Cultural History – Australian Perceptions of Asia 9 (1990): 14-35.

"Forget Hong Kong. Go to the Orient in our own backyards" proclaims the headline in the Sydney Morning Herald's Good Living Magazine (Constance 1). According to Diane Powell, a "commodified image of Asia in Australia is overtaking 'the real'" (135). Sydneysiders are encouraged by the Sydney Morning Herald's supplements, Good Living or Good Weekend to venture out to Cabramatta to soak up the alien atmosphere, to experience being in a foreign country: "A visit to this out-west suburb is like a day trip to Hong Kong – and its food experiences are almost as varied" (Constance 1). In his article, "At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, Ethnic Food and Migrant Home-building" Hage has dubbed this taste for gastronomical difference "culinary cosmo-multiculturalism" ("At Home" 123). Critical of cosmo-multiculturalism, Hage asserts that culinary cosmo-multiculturalism "ultimately aims to provide the eater with something like an international touristic adventure" ("At Home" 123).

According to Hage, cosmo-multiculturalists are people that have amassed a distinct kind of 'classiness', enough of what is called "cosmopolitan capital" ("At Home" 137). This subject is very likely to be Anglo, but can be anyone who sees him or herself as "appreciators of otherness" (137). Cosmo-multiculturalists desire "an ethnic otherness available to them as something that is not readily available to them" ("At Home" 141). Furthermore, Hage argues that:

> While [cosmo-multiculturalism] continues to perceive ethnic cultures as a mere object aimed at enriching the central 'cosmo-multicultural subject', it aims to construct this ethnic object as if it existed outside the relation of power which constitutes it as an object . . . the mystification of the relation of power that makes the ethnic ultimately available is necessary to maintain the illusion of daring and discovery. (141)

Ien Ang points out the in the multicultural era: "racially and ethnically marked people are now othered through an ambivalent and apparently contradictory process of inclusion by virtue of othering" ("Curse" 36). Cabramatta is reduced to a carnivalesque spectacle reserved for Anglo-Australian amusement and entertainment, with its rich offerings of sights and tastes.

Circulating here is the discourse of cultural 'enrichment'. This discourse is closely linked to "multiculturalism's emphasis on the recognition of the *value* of the various cultures present in Australia and the value of the interaction between them" (Hage "At Home" 31).

For Hage, the discourse of enrichment operates by establishing a break between valuing negatively and valuing positively. He cites Martin Heidegger who argues that the appraisal of something as a value is acclaimed only as an object of man's estimation. Every valuing, positive or negative, is a subjectivising. Valuing thus renders Cabramatta and hence Asian-Australians as valid. More significantly, this discourse "assigns to migrant cultures a different *mode of existence*" to Anglo culture" ("At Home" 32): "While Anglo-Celtic culture merely and unquestionably exists, migrant cultures exist for the latter. Their value, or the viability of their preservation as far as Anglo-Celtic Australians are concerned, lies in their function as enriching cultures" (Hage "At Home" 32). It is in this sense that the discourse of enrichment contributes to the precarious positioning of Asian-Australians within the Australian national and local space.

New images of Australian 'orientals' are increasingly constructed alongside the commodified images of food and shopping. Representations of Cabramatta abound with contradiction: ethnic difference is the big draw, but it is also played down: "The shared space of 'multicultural' interaction is marked by invisible but recognisable spatial and ethnic/racial boundaries" (Perera "Whiteness"). The press' eagerness to highlight the 'Australianisation' of the Asians in Cabramatta is problematic. It can be interpreted as an attempt to 'Aussify' these 'orientals', to make them seem congenial, accessible and certainly less intimidating (less foreign?). Newspaper articles vigourously quote various Vietnamese-Australians who avow that "[w]e should join the mainstream[7] . . . we want to integrate fully . . . We don't like this country, we love it . . . Australia is our home now. I would join the army to defend Australia. We will celebrate Australia Day at a party tonight" (Sheridan 5). Such ebullient confidence

[7]According to James Jupp, the mainstream is an ubiquitous code for white and "effectively defined as contrasted to 'special interests' such as organised feminists, gay liberationalists, 'greens' or 'ethnics'" ("An Anxious Nation" 1).

about the superiority of the 'Australian way' is constructed as an affirmation of 'whiteness'. The label 'migrant' functions as "a racialised term for 'not' (quite) white" (Perera "Whiteness" 2). And since whiteness is posited as the normative ideal against which the other/migrant is judged, the necessity to conform becomes apparent. What Asian-Australians seek it seems is the social position, privileges and especially the acceptance which is inextricably associated with whiteness.

Australian multiculturalism has been credited with paving the way for the contribution of non-Anglo cultures to the development of a more general Australian culture. Associated with the discourse of cultural value/usage is the discourse of tolerance. In Australia, notions of both cultural pluralism and the tolerant society are fused together in the policy of multiculturalism. For Anglo-Australians, having *an* Asian neighbour (rather than neighbour*s*) it seems makes them self-congratulatory for their tolerance. The impression that residents in Australian suburbia are closely-knit, is just that, an impression. As Iqbal in Seasonal Adjustments frankly states, his Anglo-neighbours "unlike the free-roaming koalas, are politely amiable *from a distance*" (122, emphasis added). Their interactions are limited to "wav[ing] to each other and occasionally discuss[ing] the state of the backyard vegie . . . er, vegetable . . . patch, the fickleness of Ballarat's weather and the rising cost of living when [they] meet at the local supermarket or the petrol station" (122).

According to Audrey Yue, "[t]heorisation on suburbia in Australia, the US and Britain have characterised the suburb as the borderland between the city and the country (Yue "Asian-Australian Cinema" 195). Moreover, "it is an interstitial place that reflects 'the contradictory aesthetic and moral value of residents torn between rural and urban life'" (Cross 109, cited in Yue "Asian-Australian Cinema" 195). In much the same way, the Asian-Australian subject in suburbia inhabits the borderland of white tolerance and ambivalence. Iqbal's observation in Seasonal Adjustments that Ballarat's stoical acceptance of "anything foreign, as long as it is not too outrageous" further illustrates this curious ambivalence present in white Australia (Khan 121). But this ambivalence exists only if the foreigners are few in number, passive

and/or are reckoned to be adhering to the status quo and cultural codes. In Khan's other novel, A Solitude of Illusions, he writes:

> [What Javed p]erceived to be a mild form of muted hostility to his presence, in a vicinity dominated by Anglo-Saxon descendants, was to a large extent, a lack of understanding about the way most suburban lives operated in Melbourne . . . [In his] affluent suburb . . . [the] residents were not particularly curious about ways of life other than their own. They had acquired and achieved most of what they hankered after within the parameters of their own insularity. There wasn't much point in seeking the unknown beyond their established experiences. (45)

Kevin MacDonald points out that "[t]he . . . middle-classes embraced multiculturalism because it was a culture of cosmopolitanism" (19). Through visible cultural pluralism, cosmopolitanism therefore fulfills the desire for Australia's entry into a "coveted cultural province" (B. Anderson 81). Cosmopolitanism often implies possession of a certain classsed (privileged) 'worldliness' which includes mobility, opportunities for travel, exposure to and interest in other cultures. Bruce Robbins writes:

> Beyond the adjectival sense of 'belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants", the word cosmopolitan immediately evokes the image of a privileged person: someone who can claim to be a 'citizen of the world' by virtue of independent means, high-tech taste, and globe-trotting mobility. (171)

Cosmopolitanism also suggests a greater 'tolerance' towards migrants and multiculturalism. In White Nation, Hage refers to this group of 'privileged' Anglo-Australians as "the "Good White Nationalists" (78). Nadine Dolby, in a review of the book points out that these 'Good White Nationalists' also indulge in the fantasy of white domination: "White multiculturalists despite their 'good intentions' still position themselves at the centre of the nation: ethnic/racial 'others' become objects to be moved, tolerated or exhibited at the behest of whites" (Dolby). Implicit power is therefore assumed within the tolerated/tolerater equation.

Hage asserts that "[t]olerance is an active practice of positioning the Other – the tolerated – in social space" ("Locating" 28). In the first place, all tolerance inevitably involves an approval of the presence of the Other in a social space – suburbia – within which we have a power to grant or deny:

> The tolerated Others are by definition present within our 'sphere of influence'. They are a part of our 'world' (society, nation, neighbourhood) but only insofar as we accept them. That is, the tolerated Others are never just present, they are positioned. Their belonging to the environment in which they come to exist is always a precarious one, for they never exist, they are *allowed* to exist. (Hage "Locating" 28, emphasis added)

Perera and Pugliese further maintain that this power inherent in the notion of tolerance "patronises the minoritised subject deemed worthy of tolerance". To speak of tolerance is already to assume a position of dominance where "one can choose to extend an always circumscribed and delimited amount of having to-put-up-with the different, the foreign, or the alien" (Perera and Pugliese).

The notion of tolerance is additionally problematic because it implies that one day someone's tolerance will run out. This is because "to tolerate someone is to put up with them for only a limited time" (Le 15). The conditional nature of tolerance means it can be retracted at will. In addition, the avocation of tolerance is "not about making the powerful powerless, it is about inviting them not to exercise their power" (Hage 25). He highlights the way these notions of tolerance are clearly applicable to those in a position of dominance when he asks – "Why would anyone bother asking someone who has no power to be intolerant to be tolerant" (*White Nation* 88)? To Hage, the very idea "that a newly arrived migrant is tolerant of White Australians is clearly ridiculous" (*White Nation* 88).

In Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis, Jon Stratton finds the discourse of tolerance contentious precisely because it revolves around a conviction about fundamental difference, that is the seemingly unassimilable category of 'Asians'. The casting of all non-Anglo

migrant groups as 'guests' preserves the dominance of whiteness, since implicit in the host-guest relationship is the hosts' prerogative to retract the invitation anytime they like. Non-Anglo migrants continue to be regarded as perpetual "visitors, sojourners, eternal strangers and aliens" in white suburbia/Australia (Perera).

A gratifying and potent subversion of the tolerator/tolerated equation however can be seen in Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made. By exposing the condescension of the Anglo-Australian perpetrator, the minority subject, namely the narrator's mother Mrs Dias, attains a measure of ascendant potency. This specific incident occurs when the narrator and her family visit the Perth Royal Show. At one of the pavilions:

> An official comments, 'I must say what a model family you are. A model family, yes,' she beamed. For one moment, [the narrator feels] the promise of acceptance, but other meanings were rapidly revealed to [her] by the fixity of the official's smile. What her comment meant to [her], was that [her family was] foreign enough to be noticed, and acquiescent enough to have comment passed on [them].
> Horror.
> Then [her] mother said something to the woman official that sounded strange the minute it was spoken.
> 'Thank you for trying', she said with an exhausted half-smile.
> The official had no official answer for that. She looked abashed. (92)

In Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, Edwina, Barry and Jean's only child finds herself in the circle of white, in this case, at Bruce and Maureen Trevally's annual suburban Christmas party. Edwina or Veena[8] as she calls herself, confesses that she would "never miss one of their Christmas parties" (316). Here, we see a delightful reversal of the tolerator/tolerated equation; Asian-Australian resistance and agency at its best. Edwina's friends at uni "go into shock

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[8]"Veena" the name that Edwina gives herself can be seen as her attempt to be perhaps more casual/modern, but it can also be read as an assertion of her racial heritage. This is because the *Veena* is the name of a very Indian classical stringed instrument. The irony is profound as can be seen later in this paragraph.

horror mode in a major way when they find out about [her] Christmases with Auntie Maureen and Uncle Bruce at number thirty-two" (316). Veena is "the only one there, ever, who's under sixty-five". When her mates ask, "But what ever do you do there Veena?" She shrugs it off casually replying, "Oh, nothing much . . . I act dutiful and resigned. I just help Uncle Bruce get the drinks . . . and hand plates around for Auntie Maureen" (316). At the party, the elderly guests often question Veena/Edwina about the origin of her name. They think she is named after famous English aristocrats.[9] With wry humour, she observes that "[r]eruns of The Jewel in the Crown on TV have given most of them a touch of the nostalgias" (317). It is very obvious that Edwina views the "Golden Oldies" as somewhat eccentric, very quaint and rather amusing (316).

Likewise at the backyard barbie in Khan's Seasonal Adjustments, Iqbal's otherness is of interest to the white people present. When Aunty Louise chirps, "Indians are such gentle people", Iqbal swiftly retorts, "Are they? I wouldn't know. I am not an Indian. I am from Bangladesh" (148). Questions to him range from his attendance at church to his belief in Christ. Iqbal's "stubborn streak" finally makes him resolved to break "the cast", and rectify misconceptions (of which there are many). He is determined to confront Anglo-Australian ignorance to "[h]ound it! Punch a hole through it" (148). Iqbal admits that "[i]nstead of making them (Anglo-Australians) feel safe and superior with the blandness of a mythical oriental passivity and an inscrutable smile, [he had] scowled, refuted, contradicted and corrected" (148). Iqbal is clearly contemptuous of their vacuous and implicitly racist comments despite their cosmopolitan pretensions.

There have been recent calls to "allow the term 'multicultural Australia' gradually to be replaced by a 'tolerant Australia'" (Hirst 15). John Howard says the he "believes that Australia is a tolerant nation" (cited in Savva 2). Indeed, it would be unsurprising if Mr Howard's definition of 'tolerance' is concurrent with Pier Paolo Pasolini's assertion that "tolerance is a more refined form of condemnation" (21-22). Discourses of tolerance and diversity constitute a major tenet of multiculturalism, but the notion of tolerance is extremely

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[9]She asserts that "Edwina's a *family* name" (317). Her great-grandfather's name was Edward.

problematic. It is necessary to interrogate the rhetoric of tolerance that has characterised much of the 'race debate'. Avowals of tolerance scarcely conceal the often vicious and inequitable power relations that "masquerade under the code of the 'civil'" (Perera and Pugliese). According to Perera and Pugliese, the "civil protocol of tolerance needs to be underpinned, in the first instance, both by laws guaranteeing non-discriminatory rights and by those very equity programmes now being systematically dismantled by the incumbent Liberal government".

Critics take issue with multiculturalism because "the very existence of a policy advocating tolerance implies the continuing existence of the power to be intolerant" (Hage "Locating" 21). The social relevance of a discourse of tolerance indicates the enduring vigour of dominant and subjugated cultural/political formations. Hage proposes that "multicultural tolerance should be understood as a mode of spatial management of cultural difference while reproducing the structuring of this difference around a dominant culture" ("Locating" 19). Ien Ang concedes that the status of othering has shifted. Instead of providing a solution to strained race relations, multiculturalism has added a greater complexity to them.

The striking illustration on the cover of <u>A Change of Skies</u> characterises Gooneratne's response to the intricacy of multiculturalism and the pressures of suburban conformity. Displaying elements of hybridity, the book cover illustration provides "a literal double-take" (Rama). In R. P. Rama's "A Conversation with Yasmine Gooneratne", the author reveals an attraction to "the styles and themes of Indian miniature painting, especially the art of the Kangra Valley" (8). She says that she had sent "one such picture to [her] literary editor at Pan Macmillan" (9). It depicted "a maharaja and his queen entertaining guests in a summer palace beside a lotus lake" (9). The editor had the splendid idea of making that card the basis for the design on the book cover.

Bill Wood, an Australian artist, was entrusted with the task of producing the cover illustration. He retained the traditional elements of the original picture, and its delicate colours, so that it

looks like an Indian miniature painting at first glance. But it is "only when one takes a second look that one realises it's an Australian backyard barbecue, the maharaja's lake of lotuses having been transformed into a swimming pool" (Rama 9). The successful synthesis of Asian and Australian ideas, familiar suburban themes and famous national landmarks such as the Sydney Habour Bridge and the Opera House proffer hopes for a new Australia. In her novel, Gooneratne re-creates her own version of the Great Australian Dream. It is a dream with a happy ending; it is one that allows the migrant to find not just a house, but a home.

Conclusion

Richard White points out in Inventing Australia that the concept of an Australian way of life was used to discriminate against migrants: "Since it was never really defined and often was simply a formula for expressing a general prejudice against outsiders and a distaste for non-conformity, all migrants could be criticised for failing to adopt 'the Australian Way of Life'" (160). Ursula Krechel comments that "[m]ulticulturalism is at best a euphemism, silencing the great adjustment problems imposed on the foreigner" (6). In multiculturalism, ethnicity is linked to plurality as well as hierarchy. In its commitment to ethnic diversity, this pluralist approach ostensibly recognises the equal validity of all cultures. However, this obscures the fact that Anglo-Australian culture enjoys a position of unchallenged preeminence in Australian society. In Australia/suburbia, the Asian-Australian citizen "still struggles against being racially and culturally distinct, yet continuing to be hegemonically 'invisible' and mostly inaudible" (T. Khoo "Bright White Suburbs" 7). National/local belonging remains a conditional and contradictory status for Asian-Australians.

The racialisation of the 'Australian' subject emphasises the centrality of race and ethnicity in the construction of the nation-state, and which can be seen in the microcosm of the suburb. As Chris Healy writes, suburbia has functioned as an imagined space "on to which a vast array of fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions and yearnings have been projected and displaced" (xiii). Suburbia here also functions as a transitional site, "the middle landscape of Australia, as well as the middle landscape of migration" (Yue "Asian Australian Cinema" 195). By playing on

the iconicity and indeed the ethnicity of the site, Khan's, Gooneratne's and Lazaroo's novels evoke a community that is homogenous, conservative and narrow. They highlight "suburban ethnicity as a prosthetic technology for cultural citizenship, and in doing so, [expose] the values constituting the ideal Australian subject" (Yue "Asian-Australian Cinema" 196).

Khan, Gooneratne and Lazaroo have contributed to a new and tangible understanding of 'Australian' suburbia. By issuing a direct challenge to the idea(l)s and assumptions handed down by the parent culture, these writers have in their own way subverted authority as well as usurped positions of implicit power. Their work examines the tensions between literary production, ethnicity and the (im)possibilities of a multicultural nation/suburb. Despite taking place in resistant or discriminatory environments (Australia/suburbia), Asian-Australian agency is clearly evident. The novels, Solitude of Illusions, Seasonal Adjustments, A Change of Skies and The World Waiting to be Made have interrogated and thrown open concepts of race, Whiteness, Whiteliness, tolerance and belonging. As Dai Le says, "[u]nless all of us look at each other as Australians, and treat each other as human beings we will always fear the unknown" (15).

5 THE SWEET AND SOUR – FOOD, MULTICULTURALISM AND ASIAN-AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY

> "All stories [are] coloured by their ingredients, as loaves of bread are coloured by corn, wheat and eggs". (Cyrill 69)

Scholars from Claude Levi-Strauss to Claude Fischler have shown that "the domain of food is not only that of appetite, of desire, of pleasure, but [is] also the reflection of a society's structure and world vision" (Dvorak). For Jennifer K. Ruark, food can be regarded as "a symbol of power, an aesthetic display, a community ritual, as well as an expression of ideology or identity". Food is also an ethnic sign. Pierre L van der Berghe points out that:

> Cuisine is the symbolic expression of human sociality, first in the intimate domestic sphere, and by extension with the larger group that share a specific culinary complex: the inventory of food items, the repertoire of recipes, and the rituals of commensalism. Along with language, the food complex thus becomes a basic badge of ethnicity. (392)

Linda Brown and Kay Mussell have also observed that foodways frequently serve as a factor in the identification of sub-cultural groups. The traditional dishes and ingredients of 'others' reveal a convenient system to categorise ethnic and regional character:

> Foodways [are seen to bind] individuals together, to define the limits of the group's outreach and identity, distinguish in-group from out-group, serve as a medium for inter-group communications, celebrate cultural cohesion and provide a context for performance of group rituals. (Brown and Mussell 5)

Pierre van den Berghe says, "[t]o paraphrase Marx, it is only through a process of alienation that ethnic food itself becomes ethnic food" (393). In other words, the boundaries of the familiar only become known through contact with the unknown. It takes a 'them' to define an 'us'. Samir Gandesha draws attention to the association of various South (East) Asian

communities in the West with spicy food – chillies and curries - and adds that this has become "something of a cliché in the media and a stereotype in society at large" (12). In Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made, when the Anglo-Australian custom officer at Perth airport discovers the "[t]amarind paste, lanquas, galingul", the narrator's father had tucked away "at the bottom of the red and black lacquered wedding basket", he hollers "to his mate working at the other desk, 'Looks like we might be having curry for dinner, Jim'". Jim looked at the narrator's father's "dark-skinned face and replies, 'Sure as hell's not yellow enough for chop suey, Dave'" (25). In the most extreme form, stereotypes are expressed as racial epithets. Indians (and other East Asians) are called "curry-heads", while the Chinese are dubbed "rice-balls" (Gandesha 12).

For Asian-Australians, food metaphors such as 'bananas' or 'coconuts' are particularly relevant. 'Bananas' usually refer to Asians of Chinese origin: they are yellow on the outside, white on the inside. 'Coconuts' on the other hand, would refer to individuals of Indian or South Asian origin: white on the inside, brown on the outside. These metaphors imply the "embedded invisibility of whiteness" (T. Khoo "Fetishing Flesh"). The tropical flavours of 'bananas and coconuts', additionally suggest Australia's cultural diversity and draw attention to its proximity to the East / Asia. They also raise many vital questions. Do these food metaphors point to the commodification and consumption of Asian Otherness? Has this 'imaginary ethnicity', as bell hooks says, become "a spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture"? ("Eating the Other" 181)

As Jean Mundy in Yasmine Gooneratne's novel A Change of Skies notes, "there was a time when the Aussie diet consisted entirely of steak, pies and peas, but things are certainly very different now" (208). The question is how different and what the implications of this change are? The usefulness of food metaphors can be extended to contemplate Australia's complex political realities. Which metaphors would best describe multiculturalism in Australia? Can it be described as a melting pot (like its American cousin) or a salad bowl? Or perhaps Australian multiculturalism can be best described as a 'stir-fry', "where ingredients, though combined, still retain their distinctiveness" (Narayan 188). Or perhaps it can be thought of as

a '*masala*', "those various combinations of assorted spices, each with its own subtle contribution to seasoning the curry of national life" (Narayan 188). According to Samir Gandesha, the metaphor of *masala* itself – is an inextricable relation between "'subcontinent' and 'subcondiment'" (14). He asserts that the connection between the Occident and the Orient other can be comprehensible only by ascertaining "the metaphor and meaning of spice" (14).

Employing the metaphor of *masala* requires an examination of its multiple, often suppressed meanings. Gandesha says that just as actual spices themselves must be cooked in order for their aroma to be released and savoured, so, too, must "their literary double agent be decoded, deciphered" (14):

> For there is specificity to the metaphor of *masala* in which is stored an entire phantasmagoria of the Orient. In this register, the Orient is other – what is exotic, sensual, sensuous, feminine, pagan, despotic, infidel and because of this potentially dangerous or 'unsavoury'. In a word, what the West cannot 'swallow'. (14)

Thinking about food (metaphors) facilitates an understanding of self, as well as the complex understandings of Asian-Australian relationships with social Others.

In this paper, I will analyse the function and importance of food as metaphor, and food as a code expressing a "pattern of social relations" (Douglas 61). I am interested in the ways in which 'Asian' food is located within Australian multiculturalism and across cultural boundaries. As Gandesha queries, "to what extent despite apparently representing difference does the metaphor of food actually foster assimilation?" (12). I intend to question how people link what they eat to their personal, social and political identities, and how they use what they eat to distinguish themselves from others within and outside specific social groups. Moreover, I will consider the issues of class and power relations within the discourses of enrichment and cosmo-multiculturalism.

In addition to addressing the role 'cuisine' plays in the formation of 'Nation' and 'national identity', I will also explore the notion of Asian-Australian agency and resistance in the face of various forms of "gastronomic tourism", "food colonisation" and "culinary imperialism" (Zelinsky 51; Heldke cited by Narayan 178). Keeping within the broad multicultural framework, I consider all kinds of 'Asian' cuisine, but will focus particularly on Indian and Chinese food. I will look at the significance and representations of food in several contemporary Asian-Australian texts. These texts include Christopher Cyrill's The Ganges and its Tributaries, Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made, Teo Hsu-Ming's Love and Vertigo, Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, as well as Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments and Solitude of Illusions.

Australia's professed multicultural tastes began in the 1970s and are reflected in an Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook from that era.[1] A section entitled "International Cookery" highlights cuisines from several different countries. One of these countries is "India", which has recipes for "beef *vindaloo*" (128)[2] and "chicken *tandoori*". The other is "Indonesia" featuring recipes for "*sate kambing*" (130), "*sambal goreng udang*" and "*telur balado*" (131). Listed under "China", the Chinese recipes in the book, however, are disconcertingly 'inauthentic' if not flagrantly Anglicized – "prawn omelets" [sic] and "chicken and almonds" (124). Perhaps, this should be unsurprising since Chinese food has been "available [in Australia] from the Year Dot, well, from the Gold Rush days" (Gooneratne 208).

Interestingly, there are a number of Asian recipes not listed under the "International Cookery section " (a grand total of thirty-four interspersed through the book). They include Indonesian prawn puffs, easy *sukiyaki*, Indian curry salad, as well as the reassuring stalwarts of sweet and

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[1]The edition used in this thesis was published in 1977 (with Ellen Sinclair as editor); the first edition was published in 1970.

[2]Numbers indicate page numbers.

sour pork, black bean sauce and chicken *chow mein*. All these examples do suggest that these dishes are perhaps familiar enough to be considered 'Australian'!

In a Sydney Morning Herald's article entitled "The Great Australian Bite", Jane Cadzow remarks that "[n]owhere is multiculturalism more evident than in our kitchens and restaurants, where cuisines from around the world vie for our tastebuds" (92). Cadzow wryly observes the proliferation of Thai restaurants in Australia. According to the writer, "they have sprung up in every second suburb, catering to our apparently insatiable appetite for *tod man pla* and *gaeng kiow waan gai*" (92). Chinese restaurants of course have "translated themselves into the suburban landscape" for as long as anyone cares to remember (Zananiri 23). In another Sydney Morning Herald article, Robin Ingram discusses an incursion of the culinary kind; she calls it "The Great Sushi Invasion of Australia" (1). She reports that:

> In the suburban heartlands of roast dinners and Kentucky Fried Chicken [which is itself an American import], Sydneysiders are now queuing at the local Sushi House to graze on morsels of raw fish pressed into cold rice and vinegar . . . a concept unimaginable to the generation before this. (1)

In a review of The Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide, The Age Good Food Guide, The Advertiser Good Food Guide and The SBS Guide to Ethnic Eating (Sydney and Melbourne), Geoffrey Dutton says this: "It is really marvellous that a nation's food habits should have been transformed in a mere 40 or so years. The proof of the pudding of multicultural Australia is in these five books. Eat your heart out Geoffrey Blainey" (10).

Reading all these glowing accolades, it is easy to be self-congratulatory about the supposed triumph of contemporary Australian multiculturalism. Perceived as the most congenial way to traverse boundaries with its 'shareable' character, celebrating ethnic food as multiculturalism, and multiculturalism as food is certainly tempting and just too convenient. An uncritical adoption of this notion, however, would be highly simplistic and misleading. Eating ethnic food conveys a "need for differentiation", and it is "a process of creating shared symbols of diversity" (Lu and Fine 548-9). Food and the act of eating have become increasingly

politicised and necessarily so. The critic, Yau Ching says, "we Asians become the food we . . . eat; the image of a racialised food reinforces the stereotypes of the Asian Body, smooth and soothing" (33).

The notion that multiculturalism in Australia is like food that is "smooth and soothing" is clearly problematic. As Sneja Gunew articulates:

> In Australia one of the few unthreatening ways to speak of multiculturalism is in relations to food, in other words, that all these migrants have improved the diversity of the national cuisine. The usual ways in which this diversity is acceptably celebrated is through a multicultural food festival. ("Feminism" 16)

Gunew points out that notion of "multiculturalism as food", is often seen as "the most benign version of accommodating cultural difference in various national contexts" ("Multicultural Translations"). Uma Narayan, however, argues for a more positive view of food in multicultural contexts. She contends that:

> There are [already] far too many 'unacceptable faces of multiculturalism' in many countries that portray immigrants as draining national resources, as taking away jobs from nationals, as straining the welfare system, as contributing to crime, poverty and the pollution of that national cultural fabric. In such contexts, 'acceptable faces' of multiculturalism, however limited, are not without purpose. (184)

Asian-Australian author Yasmine Gooneratne is clearly concerned with an interactive culinary multiculturalism based on the relationships between different cultural subjects in A Change of Skies. But Chandani Lokuge points out that it is ironic how Gooneratne submits to and celebrates ethnic food in Australia as "the acceptable face of multiculturalism". Lokuge says the author does this "by making her heroine, [Jean Mundy] a culinary expert in Sydney" ("We Must Laugh" 32). Jean is described as "a talented newcomer to the world of Australian cuisine" (292). This is still "preferable at least to the complete lack of acquaintance that

permits the different foods of 'Others' to appear simply as marks of their 'strangeness' and 'otherness'" (Narayan 180).

The real difficulty of multicultural encounters as Ghassan Hage sees it is the potent "mix of racism and tolerance", and the ensuing hegemonic relationship ("At Home" 114). In A Change of Skies, Jean becomes a household name when she writes a best-selling cookery book. There is a clipping about her in the Queensland Courier. She is described as "Queensland's Asian Sensation" and ranked up there with other "Asian culinary greats" namely "Charmaine Solomon and Carol Selvarajah" (292). The writer's decision to locate Jean Mundy in Queensland is interesting and perhaps ironic, since Queensland is often seen as redneck territory, and associated with Pauline Hanson and her racist One Nation Party. It is almost as if Gooneratne is suggesting that the "fastest [and maybe only] way to a racist's heart might be through his [or her] stomach"! (Wong 56)

In the Queensland Courier feature, Jean is additionally consigned to the tokenistic brigade of authorities on Asian cuisine, who are more often than not female. In doing this, Gooneratne plays up to the stereotype of Asian women as 'domestic goddesses' who are whizzes in the kitchen, and who can be safely consulted on 'innocuous' topics such as food. Yet, on the other hand, the author may be demonstrating how the control of food has been a historically key source of power for women. This depiction of Jean therefore allows her a measure of female and Asian-Australian agency. The Queensland Courier article in Gooneratne's novel goes on to commend Jean for having "already done much to educate Aussie attitudes to Asia and Asian food" (292). This sort of praise though, strongly submits to the discourse of enrichment.

Mostly positioned outside the Australian multicultural community, migrants are, as Chilla Bulbeck asserts, only admitted at particular junctures for the 'cultural enrichment' that they can provide white Australia (273). While multiculturalism dictates that all people have a right to 'their own cultures', the realm of culture is often restricted to food, language and dress

(Bulbeck 273). In Seasonal Adjustments, the Bangladeshi-Australian protagonist Iqbal, sardonically memorises "the recipes for *pork vindaloo* and beef korma" in readiness for the inevitable and ignominious inquiries from Anglo-Australians at any and every gathering or dinner party (145, words in italics my own emphasis). This is ironic, not only because Iqbal as a Bangali-Muslim abstains from pork, but because *vindaloo* is actually of Goan origin.

In the discourse of multiculturalism, minority subjects are clearly valued for the 'cultural' wealth they bring, but as Ien Ang points out, it is "precisely this function that keeps [them] positioned in the space of objectified otherness" ("The Curse" 40). Hage defines the discourse of enrichment in the following way:

> In the discourse of enrichment, multiculturalism is seen as a transcendence of a past where (white) Australians could not appreciate the value of the ethnic cultural forms that surrounded them and perceived them negatively. Multiculturalism on the other hand represented a new era where ethnic cultures are not only not perceived negatively but are actually valued. Embracing such ethnic cultures was seen as 'enriching'. Despite the positive 'anti-racist' nature of this discourse, it is deeply Anglo-centric in positioning Anglo-subjects in the role of the appreciators enriched by what are constructed as ethnic objects with no *raison d'être* other than to enrich the Anglo-subject. ("At Home" 136)[3]

Shun Lu and Alan Gary Fine point out that ethnicity is often contrived as "a marketing tool", which services an entrepreneurial system (535). Jean Mundy in A Change of Skies observes, that as "waves of immigrants from all over the world [arrive in Australia] . . . restaurants have been started up everywhere that serve many different kinds of food" (208). Jean and her husband, Barry are seen to possess such entrepreneurial skills as well:

> [They] own and run the newest and most exotic dining experience to tempt the Aussie palate: BABA-G (where Jean cooks yummy vegetarian take-aways, Asian style) and BABA-Q, where

[3]See also Ghassan Hage. "'Locating Multiculturalism' Other: A Critique of Practical Tolerance". New Formations 24 (1996): 19-34.

> Barry presides over the finest barbecued seafood in the state . . . If you are seeking pearls of the Orient, look no further. Barry and Jean Mundy are part of the new wave of migrants who are bringing to Australia the unique skills and cultural riches of Asia. (293)

Jean's apparent success thus resides in her ability to move "smooth and soothingly" into the immigrant mainstream. As Valli Rao wryly notes, "it *had* to be a restaurant or a spice shop" for Jean (44, italics my own emphasis). Questions that arise include concerns about the degree to which ethnic culture is used for economic benefit and survival, and how much of it is a product of ethnic agency? How much of it is appropriation or has become appropriated for mainstream enrichment/entertainment? Here, Asian-Australians such as Barry and Jean once again find themselves invariably the objects of the Anglo gaze, the "touristic (voyeuristic) gaze" (Lu and Fine 539).

In her fiction, Gooneratne attempts to replicate Susan Kalcik's observation that "on a symbolic level, eating foods across groups suggests the crossing or even the breaking down social boundaries" (50). Nonetheless, it can only be an idealised or romanticised vision for/of multiculturalism. Asian-Australians, it seems, are valued only when they serve the interests of the dominant group. As Cynthia Sau-ling Wong says:

> [G]iven the current state of race relations in [Australia], the symbolic meaning of inclusiveness cannot in reality operate in ethnic restaurants that cater to an outgoing clientele. What appears to be hospitable acceptance of the outsider is really the ethnic's appeal for acceptance by the mainstream customer, who has the power to decide what is agreeably authentic and what is unthinkably outlandish. (57)

Asian-Australians (restaurateurs) therefore make their living on "the knife-edge between novelty and familiarity, risk and comfort" (Wong 58).

Now that multiculturalism is the current buzzword, "catholicity of taste, whether culinary or cultural, still has an edge of exploitation to it" (Wong 58). Ethnicity is 'realised' through

commercial type transactions: food, festivals and restaurants (also music, art and fashion). Roger Abrahams states that:

> We have become equal-opportunity eaters, especially in situations where we can sample unaccustomed foods while standing and walking around, as at a *festival*. This appears, in historical perspective, to be an extension of a capitalist approach to life in which exploitation of subordinated peoples is not only expressed in terms of labour but also in appropriating their cultural styles, including their ways of cooking and eating. (23)

In the Australian context, Hage has dubbed this phenomena "cosmo-multiculturalism". Akin to cosmopolitan consumption occurring globally, cosmo-multiculturalism largely involves "the market of foreign flavours, rather than the market of 'foreigners'" (Hage "At Home" 120).

Cosmo-multiculturalism emerges from the concept of cosmopolitanism, which is thought of colloquially as an interest in other cultures. When the protagonist in The Ganges and its Tributaries was "thirteen years old, he imagined that he could understand the customs and history of any race by eating its national dishes" (62). Cosmo-multiculturalists too prefer to indulge in such imaginings. Thus, according to Hage, "cosmo-multiculturalism is a discourse which positions 'ethnic feeders' simply as passive feeding functions in a field where migrant subjects have been erased and where the central subject is a classy and more often than not an 'Anglo' cosmopolitan eating subject" ("At Home" 118). This brings to mind Barbadian-Canadian writer, Austin Clark's befitting comment that "the four sweetest things in the world [are]: love, sweet food, power and Privilege" (59).

Cosmo-multiculturalism differs from the multiculturalism of enrichment in the ways it conceives of the 'ethnic object'. Culinary cosmo-multiculturalism incorporates individuals with diverse capacities for gastronomical appreciation and variance. This in turn is related to the extent to which such individuals have accumulated "*cosmo-multicultural capital*" – indicators of economic and class positions (Hage "At Home" 124):

> Cosmo-multiculturalism reconstructs therefore, the same logic of appreciation present in the multiculturalism of enrichment, but does so along different lines . . . [I]ts central subject, the 'appreciator' is no longer just Anglo (white) but mainly a cosmopolitan person, that is, someone who has accumulated that specific kind of 'classiness' [Hage calls] 'cosmopolitan capital'. Such a subject likely to be Anglo but can also be anyone who has enough 'class' to become an appreciator of otherness. (Hage "At Home" 136-7)

The Sri Lankan born Mundys in Gooneratne's A Change of Skies give the impression of people who do possess such 'capital'. As Jean says: "When we first arrived, Lebanese and Turkish food was all the rage, but now one's regarded as a bit of a stick-in-the-mud if one isn't an expert in ordering meals from a Vietnamese, Korean, Thai or Japanese menu. And Chinese too . . . " (208).

For Hage, possessing cosmopolitan capital permits "a sublimated approach to otherness where people can and know how to rise above a too-materialist functionality" (Hage "At Home" 129). "It is an experience specific to those who are cultured enough to know how to eat more than 'just' to satisfy their hunger and their taste buds. It is a form of detachment of the palate similar to the detachment of the gaze analysed by Bourdieu" (Hage "At Home" 129). In A Change of Skies, Barry and Jean's Australian-born daughter, Edwina or Veena as she likes to be called, remarks that her Australian friends are "enthusiastic gourmets, patrons and connoisseurs of the Thai and Lebanese takeaway places around uni. *They* are veterans of family Christmas, who would trade a turkey dinner any day for a Kashmiri *pilau*" (316). Edwina's comment about her friends depicts the new generation of cosmo-multiculturalists who exercise an almost blasé familiarity with ethnic cuisine.

Cosmo-multiculturalists like Edwina's Australian friends enjoy otherness. As cosmo-multicultural subjects, they regard "ethnicity largely as an object of consumption" (Hage "At Home" 99). Sneja Gunew is concerned about the "easy leap: from the food of the other to the

symbolic consumption of the body of the other" ("Multicultural Translations"). Samir Gandesha asserts that:

> For at the very moment of its representation (as food), difference is prepared and served as something to be consumed, ingested, incorporated, which is to say, taken into the body politic. That this is the case shouldn't come as a surprise. For it was, after all, the desire for spices that fed the Western imperial machine. The 'spice trade' with its deep roots in antiquity was the primary impetus of a very modern form of colonialism". (13)

Australian cosmo-multiculturalists have eagerly embraced Chinoiserie chic and and especially Asian cuisine. The growing prominence of the Asia-Pacific region has spawned a Western and global fascination with the "Asian exotic", specifically Asian cultural products (O. Khoo 200). Jane Cadzow blatantly admits that Australians are all now "curry puff connoisseurs" (92). In Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, Edwina recalls how at Auntie Maureen's (a close family friend) annual, suburban Christmas party, Maureen liked to add "something 'a tiny bit *exotic*' to the array of lamingtons and melting moments and hand-made chockies on her party table" (316). They would get together to "make a toned-down version of what Uncle Bruce (Maureen's husband) insists on calling 'Curried Pups'" [this is an amusing reference to curry puffs] (316). This example clearly illustrates how the Asian 'exotic' is seen as a whimsical embellishment, a novel contribution to the steady and safe Australian staples of "lamingtons and melting moments". It cannot be anything too spicy or Maureen's "old dears would simply go through the roof" (315). This could be taken to mean not just their taste buds but perhaps their sense of what is deemed acceptable.

The problem lies in the fact that the "systematic exoticisation" of the 'other' is the prerogative of the dominant culture (Hawthorne 264). To label anything/anyone 'exotic' is to confer and relegate it/them to a position of the eternal other, and the perpetual alien. An article in Vogue Entertaining and Living (May 1999) states that, "[i]n the last two decades, *yum cha* has grown from being a quaint, exotic curiousity to a passionate national past-time . . . It's a world of its own, with its own culture and its own rules . . . of great smells, sounds and tastes" (Durack 40,

cited in O. Khoo 205). The article also states that *yum cha* has brought "Asian exoticism into Australia at a national level while maintaining it as separate and different" (205). Vogue, is of course clearly targeted at readers of a certain (middle-class) socio-economic status, those with perceived 'cosmo-multicultural capital'. The notion of exotification is related to that of cultural voyeurism. Cultural voyeurism "relies on a belief in 'objective knowledge' (that there is an object, an other to objectify) and on a belief in 'universal experience'" (Hawthorne 266). But as Susan Hawthorn conscientiously points out, the supposedly 'universal' experience is "measured 'objectively' against the very subjective experience of (mostly) white men" (66).

Culinary cosmo-multiculturalism involves the production and consumption of food coupled with a desire to partake in the abundance offered by cultures of otherness. Yet, there is an apparent incongruity facing cosmo-multiculturalists, that is a contradiction between fear and the tantalizing appeal. Although relishing the experience of Asian otherness, an accompanying apprehension is inevitable. According to Sau-ling Cynthia Wong: "[Asian] exoticism is felt as more intense: more fascinating but also potentially more evil. The sense of lurking danger about Asian cuisines can be titillating to mainstream [Australian] patrons: it can heighten their enjoyment, which has to be wrested from initial skepticism if not outright revulsion" (57).

Most mainstream patrons look upon 'Asian' dining as a "cultural excursion", which indulges "their sense of cultural superiority" (Wong 57). Wilbur Zelinsky calls this "gastronomic tourism" (51). According to Lisa Heldke, this gastronomic or food tourism is a type of food colonialism, which appropriates a subjugated other (cited in Narayan 178).

To the cosmo-multiculturalist, the presentation of ethnic cuisine is important. An 'exotic' setting is much preferred. Visits to 'exotic' food destinations, such as the various Australian Chinatowns, and 'ethnic enclaves' for example, Richmond (in Melbourne) or Cabramatta (in Sydney) becomes a quest for authenticity. In "Staged Authenticity", Dean MacCannell asserts that many 'tourists' (here presumed to be predominantly Anglo-Australians) are roused by an

appetite to experience the "li[ves] of [the] natives as it is *really lived*" (cited in Lu and Fine 539). But it is clear that is there is again an inherent contradiction in this Anglo hunger for true cultural intimacy. Asian food that is too 'Aussified' risks disappointing the Anglo customer, because it is regarded as no longer exemplifying a distinctive ethnic tradition. And if the food is totally assimilated into the Australian food pattern, Anglo clients will not bother to seek it out because it is no longer considered representative of the exotic other. Ultimately, what is being solicited is "a self-validating 'ethnic experience', a mark of [Anglo-Australian] tolerance and sophistication" (Lu and Fine 547).

Indeed, these cosmo-multiculturalists are vainly pursuing the 'ideal ethnic experience'. Is it possible therefore to have an experience of the "ethnic" other without being transformed or challenged by this cross-cultural encounter? The difficulty with cosmo-multiculturalism is that it indicates a "superficial sort of intellectual curiousity" (Narayan 181). It is paradoxical how this can "serve to add another element to 'food colonialism' – where eating ethnic foods [can] further contribute to Westerners' prestige and sophistication because their eating [is] improved by a few sprinkles of spicy information about the 'cultural context' of the ethnic food eaten" (Narayan 181). Indeed, as Narayan asserts, "an interest in 'Other cultures' has been [and is] tied to complex imperialist agendas" (181).

In Lazaroo's <u>The World Waiting to be Made</u>, the narrator takes on a part-time job after school as a waitress at a Chinese restaurant in Perth. 'Suitably attired' in a "red satin tunic top embroidered with gold medallions", she attends to a table of raucous and derisive Anglo-Australian diners who deliberately order "[s]weet and sour porn, prawn fuckers, flied lice" (100). In Khan's <u>Solitude of Illusions</u>, the impassive response of the waiter in an Indian restaurant "reflected the cool indifference with which he had learned to deal with those diners who hid their fear of spicy food behind aggressive questions and unflattering remarks" (231). As members of the 'dominant' or 'mainstream' group, the diners in Lazaroo's and Khan's novels personify the legacy of Australia's history, that is a highly contemptuous or 'culturally imperialist' attitudes towards others. Historian Michael Symons, in his book <u>One Continuous Picnic: A History of Eating in Australia</u>, points out that despite its long historical presence in

Australia, Chinese food for example was "gracelessly snubbed" until the Chinese population had "fallen to a 'safe' low" (224).

Ghassan Hage points out that a "safe low" is not an objective thing as Michael Symons implies. He says that, "[p]eople's conception of what is a safe low depends on their own sense of empowerment, which is clearly class-related" (142). Samir Gandesha gives a British/Indian food example by citing Martin Amis' London Fields. Amis observed that:

> [M]embers of the white working class in Britain are not just drawn to Indian takeaways because vindaloo goes well with lager, but rather they can walk into an Indian restaurant and unlike most anywhere else in an extremely hierarchical and deferential society actually feel superior to those serving them . . . they can experience – literally 'taste' – colonial relations of power. (cited in Gandesha 14)

The smug sense of superiority with regard to ethnic food is equally relevant in the Australian context.

The position occupied by Asians in Australian society is revealed in a comment by an authority on Chinese food, Elizabeth Chong. Chong commented that "[p]eople will pay $100 each for a French meal and yet grizzle if they pay $50 for a Chinese meal which will probably cost more in ingredients and require at least equal expertise" (cited in Symons *One Continuous Picnic* 124). It is clear that Chinese cuisine is not considered refined, or at least not as refined as the French. Asian thus becomes synonymous with 'cheap'. For example, in The Age Cheap Eats Guide 2001, the proportion of Asian restaurants listed compared to other types of cuisine is overwhelming (Wood). The guide even provides information about various cuisines under the heading: "at a glance". The cuisines featured are almost all Asian – Thai, Korean, Japanese, Malaysian, Vietnamese, and Indian, with two exceptions, namely Middle Eastern food and Greek food. Heldke argues that:

> The low prices 'ethnic' food commands, as well as the low tips, are often regarded as justified by those who eat these foods. This in turn is connected to a devaluing of what such 'ethnic

food' is worth, in contrast to the high prices and tips consumers pay for 'culturally elevated' food such as French cuisine. (cited in Narayan 180)

In this chapter, I would also like to propose curry/chilli pow(d)er as a trope sybolising the blurring and breaching of boundaries. It stands for Asian-Australian resistance and agency, as well as representing a form of cultural maintenance. As Elias Cannetti says, "[e]verything which is eaten is the food of power" (cited in Hage "At Home" 99). 'Asian' food is often analogous with spicy food – chillies and curries. It involves "reducing the differences between the many South (East) Asian cultures to a particular cuisine, which is then perceived as the simple, exotic antithesis of Western cooking" (Gandesha 12).

Narayan says that we can use 'curry' as "an attempt to talk about identities engendered by the colonial experience" (163). Curry exists of course in powder form, and can be found in even the most unpretentious of supermarkets and grocery shops all around Australia. But Narayan says a search through an Indian kitchen will not yield any bottles or packets labelled curry powder. What Indians buy or make are often called '*masalas*', different mixtures of ground spices – "a combination of turmeric, coriander, chili powder, cardamon, cumin, mustard seed, cloves, fenugreek", which are used to season a variety of dishes (Gandesha 12). In Christopher Cyrill's The Ganges and its Tributaries, Mr Josephs, the father of the protagonist, renounces all dependence on commercial products and insists that there be no shortcuts in making good curry:

> 'How many cloves?' [Christopher] asked.
> 'Three cloves, cinnamon, four cardamons and a thumbnail of chilli powder. And use my garam masala, not the packet one.'
> 'What's in it?'
> 'No, men, you'll have to make your *own* garam masala'. (67, italics my own emphasis)

Geeta Kothari says her mother "never referred to anything on [their] table as 'curry' or 'curried'". For her family, curry is "a dish created for guests, outsiders, a food for people who

eat in restaurants". The word "curry" is defined by The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as "a preparation of meat, fish, fruit or vegetables, cooked with bruised spices and tumeric, and used as a relish with rice" (475). Narayan points out that the English term was derived from the Tamil word *kari* (164). So, as she observes:

> [W]hen the British incorporated curry into British cuisine, they were incorporating the Other onto the self, but on the self's terms. They were incorporating not Indian food, but their own 'inventions' of curry powder, a pattern not too different from the way in which India itself was ingested into the Empire – for India as a modern, political entity was 'fabricated' through the intervention of British rule, which replaced the masala of the Moghul empire and various kingdoms and princely states with the unitary signified 'India', much as British curry powder replaced local masalas. So, for the British, eating India was in a sense eating India. (164)

As a "fabricated" entity, British curry powder thus became a "fixed and familiar product" as Indian as Patak's Indian chutney, which is of course, manufactured in the United Kingdom (Narayan 164). The British introduced curry powder to all her colonies, including Australia. The greatest irony of course, was how it was introduced back to its land of origin but as an altered or mongrelised product.

Curry is identified with India, and identified as Indian. Rites of preparing, cooking and consuming food play an essential part in the affirmation of Indian identity as a 'race'. Food thus serves as an index of the imaginary 'heritage' passed on, an alimentary sign of 'Indianness' (or 'Chineseness'). The diasporic Indians in Cyrill's The Ganges and its Tributaries, embrace curry as a marker of their identity. Through it, they are also able to acknowledge their own (post-)colonial status. It is at once an assertion of individuality, as well as an emblem of familial/national pride and unity. As Cyrill's protagonist, Christopher Josephs, says:

> I could identify who had cooked each meal at family parties or weddings by the colour of the curries, from the whitish chicken korma of Aunt Dorothy to the orange and green-flecked prawn curry of Uncle Reggie. The curries my father made were dark brown, except for his beef vindaloo, which was crimson. I avoided the beige lamb curry of my mother because she

> used extra chilli powder. My mother stirred canned tomatoes into her dal whereas Uncle Paul insisted on fresh tomatoes. My father coated his fingers with butter when he tossed parathas over an open flame, whereas Aunt Eve preferred ghee and tongs. My father and I marinated tandoori chicken for six hours, following the recipe of Nana Josephs, whereas my mother and Nana Baptiste marinated the chicken for four hours. My father halved boiled eggs before adding them to the curry, whereas my mother added them whole. (8-9)

Variations of curry are found in countries, which were once part of India - Bangladesh and Pakistan. Places touched by the Indian Diaspora or former British colonies, for example Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius, Uganda and Kenya - all feature curry as part of the national diet. Curry in those countries was further adapted and evolved. Sheridan Rogers, in an article in The Age Sunday Life Magazine, reproduces "Carol Selva Rajah's Quick Malaysian Curry" ("Curry" 16). Curry it seems has come to be the generic word for any sort of Asian food in gravy form. According to Rogers "curry means gravy. Simple as that. It doesn't mean hot or even spicy. It just means gravy though not the sort of gravy you serve with the Sunday roast" ("Curry" 16).

Rogers' rather simplistic assessment of curry is disconcerting. Her reductionist pronouncement commits a grave injustice to the complexity of Asian cuisine. The 'gravies' found in Indonesia or Indo-China therefore may have also been erroneously dubbed 'curry' for the lack of another suitable English word. In the Australian Women Weekly Cookbook, there are at least fourteen different recipes for 'curry'. These include Curried Pea Soup (18), Mulligatawny Soup (19), Cold Curry Soup (20), Malaysian Egg Curry (28), Indian Egg Curry (28), Indian Curried Fish (42), Curried Prawns (46), Tangy Sweet Curry (56), Kofta Curry (56), Sweet Curry (63), Hot Curry (64), Burmese Chicken Curry (82), Assamese Chicken Curry (84) and Indian Curry Salad (114).

In Australia, 'curry powder' is certainly a recognised condiment. Curry powder and other spices now come in little packets or jars, from companies such as McCormicks, Masters Food

and John West. They are regarded as essential items on any spice rack. In Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, Jean notes with interest that "every little corner shop and supermarket in Sydney now offer[s] a range of neatly packaged curry stuffs (coriander, cummin, chilli, tumeric, and every spice you can think of, powdered or whole, all Sri Lankan produce, by the way, distributed by an agent in Victoria)" (176). It suggests the successful assimilation of ethnic food and ethnic people into the mainstream. In contrast, the protagonist, Christopher in The Ganges and its Tributaries, remembers his visits to "the Indian shop in Dandenong . . . [which] was owned by a man from Chandernagore named Mr Hirwani and staffed by his three daughters" (7). Instead of packaged curry powder, the shop had the ingredients for *masalas* and other Indian dishes. Christopher "would step over the lentils, saffron strands and fenugreek, which had spilled from brown sacks and tin bowls onto the linoleum floor. [He] would see rows of chilli-and-egg pickle, cans of ghee, and bottles of tamarind chutney" (7). A Western invention, 'curry powder' differs considerably from what is really used in Indian kitchens. It is thus devoid of the sense of privileged intimacy and authenticity.

Looking at the shelves of Asian shops in Australian Chinatowns, as well as supermarkets such as Coles, most commercial 'Indian' products, have Indian sounding names; two examples are Tilda, and Sharwoods, but both are in fact imported from the UK. For the Australian gourmet cosmo-multiculturalists, there is what can be called the 'famous names' selection:

> Women such as Meena Pathak in the UK and Madhur Jaffrey in the US have developed a variety of different prepared pastes and simmer sauces that only require the addition of a few ingredients to make a meal. In Australia, Charmaine Solomon has also developed a range of flavoursome prepared curry products that include Sri Lankan and Korma curry pastes. (Rogers "Curry" 16)

With help in jar form, even the most incapable of mortals can be transformed into gourmet cooks. These brands can be found in the more up-market department stores, David Jones and Myer, as well as gourmet delis. These items have revolutionised the way Australians eat at home.

The range from Charmaine Solomon does not feature Indian food exclusively. There is food from across Asia, ranging from Thai green curry to Malaysian *rendang*. The Indian items include *korma* curry paste, *tandoori/tikka* marinade, Kashmiri marinade and butter chicken. Another home-grown brand, that is made in Australia is called Garnisha (a take on an Indian name, Gandesha and perhaps the English term 'garnish'). *Garnisha* boasts Kashmiri Indian style curry paste, tandoori curry paste, *masala* mid green curry paste, *vindaloo* Indian style curry paste, Bombay *masala* indian style curry paste and various pickles and chutneys. The most interesting item found was the Noosa *masala*. This makes sense upon reading the label; it indicates that Garnisha comes from Noosa! While 'curry' may be happily incorporated into the Australian diet, it appears that for many people, 'ethnic' food is still all the same, foreign flavours that are cheaply available.

The perceived homogeneity of Asian/ethnic cuisine is problematic, and the failure to distinguish regional differences is disconcerting. A question in the column "Ask the Chef" of The Age's Sunday Life Magazine (28 Jan 2001) reflected this malaise: "Why are the menus always so mind-numbingly similar in Indian restaurants?" The following answer was provided:

> It's a good question, considering that there are 17 states in India, and each (according to Madhur Jaffrey) has its own unique cuisine, one differing as much from the next as, say French food differs from Italian. The caste system adds its own complexities, as does vegetarianism. Yet in 'Indian' restaurants in Australia the range is invariably limited to *vindaloos*, *tikkas* and the like. Why? Part of the blame would have to lie with unimaginative restauranteurs, but it would also be fair to say the typical menu is a compilation album of greatest hits: tandoor cookery, for example, is native to the Punjab but gained popularity through India (and the world) thanks to entrepreneurial Punjabi restaurateurs; vindaloo is an export of Goa. (25)

The Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook says that in "such a vast country like India, with varying climatic and agricultural conditions, it is natural to expect a great variation in curries"

(128). The curries in the north are mild, like those of Pakistan. The curries increase in hotness as one proceeds southwards.

Uma Narayan says the 'Indian food' served at restaurants in the West is seen as a "narrow and standardised subsection of the wide range of dishes and cuisines present in Indian communities" (175). It becomes problematic when it is regarded as "emblematic and representative 'authentic Indian food' for Western consumers" (Narayan 175). Similarly, the myriad of differences within Chinese (for example between Cantonese, Szechuan or Shanghainese or Malaysian Chinese) food goes 'undetected'.[4] It was discomfiting for the critic, Yau Ching to learn that in the West: "Chinese food is Asian food and Asian food is ethnic food, spicy food, fast food, cheap food. Suddenly, all Chinese cuisines become one and 'Asianised" (29). What is worse still is that all Asian food is sometimes seen as homogeneous – whether Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Sri Lankan or Indian, ethnic food is therefore just foreign food!

Like most immigrants, ethnic cuisine in Western contexts has needed to assimilate and adapt to the dominant society. In Khan's second novel, Solitude of Illusions, Javed Sharif, a migrant from Calcutta takes his family and his father, Khalid Sharif, newly arrived from India, to an Indian restaurant in Melbourne. Called "SHAHENSHAH", this restaurant is described as "one of those indistinctive Indian restaurants which offered a cuisine not quite compatible with the grandeur of its name" (229):

> On the outside the restaurant was like an ageing, gaudily made-up whore, desperate to attract attention with a splash of white and neon lights on the wide, full-length window. An enlarged copy of the menu was stuck with blu-tack and displayed on the glass pane under one of the neon lights. On offer was a variety of meat and fish dishes, mostly cooked in a tandoor by a chef reputedly from a deluxe hotel in New Delhi. Neither the name of the chef nor that of the hotel was mentioned in the handwritten blurb in the A3 papers. (229-230)

[4]See The Australian Women's Weekly Cookbook 124.

Within the "dim and dreary" interior, Javed gets down to the business of ordering. He decides that they would "try the vegetable *samosas* and *pakoras* first", then the "tandoori platter with *naan*, rice and *raitah*", as well as "some *alluh bhaji*" (231). His father, however is totally unimpressed, and is instead rather annoyed: "'*Samosas*? '*Pakoras*'? Khalid Sharif snorted in disbelief. 'Are we here for afternoon tea or dinner?'" (231).

Later in the meal, Khalid Sharif's incredulity is further compounded by the appearance of the appetizers in the form of *pappadams* in a bread basket:

> 'What's this?' Khalid Sharif asked suspiciously, leaning forward and peering into the basket.
> '*Pappadams*, sir', the waiter replied . . .
> 'Why have you brought us *pappars*?' The old man turned to the waiter, eyeing him over the rim of his glasses which had slipped halfway down his nose.
> 'It's all right', Javed intervened, waving the young man away. 'My father is not used to entrees in Indian food'. (231)

Then the tandoori platter "with a variety of meat coated with spices, yogurt and food colouring, arrived with soft-peaked *naans*, glistening with melted *ghee*, saffron rice and a generous serving of curried potatoes" (232). Khalid Sharif "stabbed a cube of meat with his fork. He examined the succulent piece of chicken burnt at the edges. 'No saffron!' he exclaimed. 'They have used food colouring!'" (232). Javed has to rationalise to his father that "[g]enuine saffron is impossibly expensive" (232). Indeed the whole experience can be summed up by Javed who articulates that "this is the way Indian food is served in restaurants here" (231). The pseudo-Indian food that is served at the Indian restaurant in Khan's Melbourne, is in a sense a hybrid food.

The food in the West, which is identified distinctively 'Chinese', would be menu items like chop suey or sweet and sour cooking. While Cosmo-multiculturalists may oppose what is perceived as the 'westernisation' of ethnic food, this 'Westernisation' or modification can

however, be regarded as a means of agency. In Banquet – Ten Courses to Harmony, Annette Shun Wah and Greg Aitkin point out that "*jarp sui*, from which 'chop suey' is derived, quite literally means a variety of chopped up bits and pieces, and there are links to an authentic dish using offal" (45). It seems that some American-Chinese restaurants were serving this authentic dish long before the visit of envoy Li to America. Capitalising on the "blaze of publicity which surrounded the Chinese official's visit", "canny Chinese restaurants" were able to promote their business, by "advertising that chop suey as envoy Li's favourite dish" (45). This introduction of chop suey to America saw the proliferation of Chinese restaurants. It is therefore not surprising that Chinese-Australian cooks enthusiastically adopted the dish from their American counterparts.

Another example is Australia's favourite sweet and sour pork, or *gum loo yuk* in Cantonese. Wah and Aitkin draw attention to the fact that as this classic 'Chinese' dish also has authentic roots. It is said to date back to the *Qing* dynasty (46). Ghassan Hage concludes that "sweet and sour cooking might well be a culinary aberration, but it also embodies the Chinese people's usage of their cultural creations to embody forms of dialogue, negotiations and interactions with other cultures" ("At Home" 143-44). Proof of Chinese-Australian success in this area is cited in Wah and Aitkin's book Banquet. They quote the owners of the Canton Restaurant in Perth saying:

> The irony is [that] the Canton's regulars loved the food so much that they preferred it to more authentic cooking. They go to Hong Kong for a holiday and they come back and say, 'You know, you still serve the best Chinese food we've ever had. We didn't like the stuff we got in Hong Kong'. (Wah and Aitkin 52)

Authenticity, like tradition, is mutable and contingent. By combining tradition, adaptation and innovation, continuity of an ethnic food tradition is possible. It allows the ethnic group to maintain a distinctive place in the public arena. In order to gain culinary acceptance in Australia, 'Asian' restaurateurs aim "to make the unfamiliar seem sufficiently comfortable, thus making the exotic qualities of the food pleasurable" (Lu and Fine 541). Hence, without

negating the nexus of 'Australian' core values and traditions, Asian-Australians can use food as a way to link their Australian selves to their Asian heritage. This is an example Asian-Australian agency at work.

Initially developed by the diasporic Chinese restaurateurs to "cater to what they thought white people wanted to eat", chop suey and sweet and sour cooking have enjoyed a renaissance among young Chinese-Americans (Karnow). They have been proudly reclaimed and celebrated as uniquely epitomising the transformation from 'Chinese' to Chinese-American (and equally relevant to Chinese-Australian/Canadian). This is because chop suey and sweet and sour cooking affirm Chinese-American identity "with an accent on the American" (Karnow). Yau Ching cites a group of young Chinese-American Canadian women who say that:

> We know that on the one hand it's [food like chop suey and egg rolls are] white people's representation of us in a kind of food form, but on the other hand it's been made by Chinese people. We get the last laughs. When we take it into our own hands, it means something different. (30)

"White people's perception of Chinese food" is therefore sharply distinguished as different from 'genuine' Chinese food that is eaten at home.

In Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made, the narrator says that at the restaurant at which she worked, "the cooks' own meal was the only one where the *real* Chinese food was served" (101, italics my own emphasis):

> One large bowl of pickled vegetable and chicken feet soup that the cooks, the boss and Jenny [the boss' wife] all dipped their spoons into; sometimes pouring it over their small bowl of steamed rice, sometimes conveying it straight to their mouths, but always with absolute efficiency. (101)

This home-style food however, is sardonically referred to as "Asian wog" food (100). It is in direct contrast with the food that is served in the restaurant to the Anglo-Australian diners. For the Singapore-born Eurasian narrator, the notion of eating "chicken feet" is somewhat repugnant, as with the Asian habit of sharing soup from a common bowl. For her, Asian food and etiquette carries with it "the whiff of undesirability" (95). This 'foreignness' within her is something she strongly wishes to suppress.

In The World Waiting to be Made, a dichotomy of 'us and them', as well as of between the authentic and the inauthentic are established. These dichotomies are a means of reversed othering, in which 'white' or Anglo-Australians are served contrived creations, as they are perceived to be unworthy of the 'real thing'. This dichotomy is extended to the food the waitresses got:

> Waitresses at the restaurant got a free meal. The Australian waitresses chose their meal from the same menu that the restaurant-goers did, a curried number three, a chow mein number twenty-seven. When [the narrator] went into the kitchen before it was [her] turn to eat one night, the boss and his wife questioned [her]: 'Where you from?'
> 'Singapore' [she replies].
> 'You eat with us' [they tell her]. (100)

Here again, a sharp distinction is made between the "Australian waitresses" (presumably Anglo-Australian) and the Singapore-born narrator, whom the Chinese owners perceive as 'one of their own'. The Chinese cooks and proprietors in the novel decide that though the narrator was "not Chinese", she however, being 'Asian' could "understand [their] food" (100). According to Hage, this kind of "home food" provides "a clear intimation of familiarity in that people know what to do with it, how to cook it, how to present it and how to eat it, thus promoting a multitude of homely practices" (Hage "At Home" 109).

Lu and Fine assert that since all cultural traditions are constructions, highlighting their authenticity is therefore a "rhetorical strategy" (549). In recent times, presenting ethnicity has

"increasingly fallen under the rubric of 'impression management'" (549). The important thing is that Asian-Australians are empowered to adopt miscellaneous ethnic images for themselves and use it/them to "create a meaningful and situated public self" (549):

> An individual's ethnicity is a strategic resource that at certain times and places can simultaneously generate a sense of 'otherness' and 'in-group cohension' without disclaiming ties to the core values and traditions of the polity that proclaims one as ['Australian']. Displaying ethnicity links both identity types of 'hyphenated' [Australians] here: [Asian and Australian]. (Lu and Fine 549)

Immigrants gain agency and self-sufficiency by selling their own invented ethnic cuisines to the dominant group. It is therefore fascinating that the iconic Chiko Roll and the Dim Sim, supposedly distinctive Aussie foods, can claim Chinese origins. They are unique symbols of hybridity and represent Asian-Australian agency. Wah and Aitkin in Banquet talk about how the dim sims that many Australians know "mutated" from "little steamed dumplings . . . literally meaning to 'touch the heart' . . . into the deep-fried dim sim, something more likely to give you a heart attack!" (53). The Chiko Roll is similarly described by Cherry Ripe as "a spring roll adapted to Australian taste" (7). According to Wah and Aitkin, "[m]any Chinese restaurants made these snacks, sometimes supplying them to fish and chip shops or employing hawkers to sell outside cinemas and sports grounds. Soon, even people who have never visited a Chinese restaurant became familiar with dim sims and chicken rolls as they were with meat pies and sausage rolls" (53). These items became "household names" as a result of "the vision of a good businessman", Mr Chen Wing Young, "father of television cook and author Elizabeth Chong" (53).

Mr Chen recognised the potential of these snack foods and developed a version that was large enough to satisfy the Western appetites, and strong enough to withstand freezing, re-heating and transportation:

> His factory, set up in 1941, employing pastry cooks from China, each handling four frying pans simultaneously, to make the casings. Women were employed to wrap the dumplings and rolls, and soon he was mass-marketing them to supermarkets, fish and chip stores and fast food diners and caravans. Before long, he was able to commission a German engineer to make a machine to do the work and the Aussie Dim Sim and the Chicken Chop Suey Roll had arrived. (Wah and Aitkin 52)

Mutations of these sorts are signs of the migrant's ability to adapt. Faced with a shortage of authentic ingredients, early cooks instead used local substitutes to make something closely resembling the original. Also being shrewd businessmen, they realised that they would need to cater to Western tastes. Wah and Aitkin point out that, early Chinese restaurants all served Western meals as well as westernised versions of Chinese dishes (46).

Cherry Ripe in Goodbye Culinary Cringe and Michael Symons in The Shared Table – Ideas for Australian Cuisine have both noted the immense popularity of Asian cuisine over recent years. They have also commented on the 'Asianisation of the Australian Palate' (Ripe 7). They attribute this phenomenon to the culinary contributions made by migrants of Asian origin to Australian national life, namely the introduction of 'exotic' food to the wider community. This can be seen in Gooneratne's A Change of Skies. Barry and Jean are told by a fellow Sri Lankan immigrant, Mrs Koyako, that "the curry leaf plants and all the other green leaves and vegetables she uses in her cooking were first brought over by people from Galle and Matara, who came to Queensland and settled on Thursday Island a century ago" (178). Chinese and Vietnamese market gardeners have ushered in many new types of vegetables such *bok choy, kangkong* and *choy sum*, not to mention different kinds of Asian fruit. The use of previously unfamiliar and 'exotic' Asian seasonings such as lemongrass, candlenut, star anise, coconut milk, *nouc mam* (Vietnamese fish sauce), *mirin* (Japanese rice wine) have all gained popularity.

Fusion cuisine, also called Pacific Rim cuisine, can certainly be ascribed to the Asian Diaspora. Ripe's assertion about the 'Asianisation of the Australian Palate' is based on three

observations. Firstly, she notes that there has been a proliferation of Asian, particularly Thai, restaurants over the last decade (as mentioned in an earlier part of this chapter). Secondly, many Asian dishes have been incorporated into the menus of European restaurants. It is not uncommon to see curry laksa or Thai green curry, alongside 'pub grub' staples such as fish and chips on the menus of even the most modest suburban pubs. Ripe's third and most interesting observation is regarding the degree to which Asian flavours, ingredients and techniques have contributed to the evolution of new dishes in Western or European restaurants, brasseries and bistros. Ironically, "the incorporation of Asian techniques and Western ingredients in European-style restaurants" first started in "the bastion of Anglo-Saxonity" - Adelaide in the 1970s (Ripe 13). At that time, Adelaide was the only state capital in Australia that did not have a Chinatown, but perhaps this development was precipitated precisely because of a lack of one. Chong Liew, a Malaysian born Chinese can be credited for this development. He arrived in Adelaide in 1973 and gradually made his mark at Nediz Tu and Mandarin Duck. Chong Liew is now the Executive Chef at The Grange Restaurant in the Adelaide Hilton (Wah and Aitkin 188).

An example of 'East Meets West' gastronomy can be seen at the very posh Langton's Restaurant and Wine Bar in Melbourne. The menu features dishes such as "roasted ocean trout, seared local calamari, Chinese broccoli and sauce *aigre doux*" (Hindle "Still the One" 17). The equally 'swish' Jacques Reymond in Melbourne lists on its *carte du jour*: "saddle of kangaroo with a light curry sauce with crispy sweetbreads and chilli beans", also "*Pekin* [sic] duck breast with three different polentas of dried fruit and nuts and a broken juice" (Hindle "I'm Alright Jacques" 21).

Celebrity chef Neil Perry, co-owner of the famed Rockpool and Wockpool restaurants in Sydney, is proud to be entirely partial to Asian influences. For him, "[i]t's is not just using Asian ingredients, but also having an understanding of Asian tastes, flavours, techniques – believing in it. Then bringing that philosophy back into Western cooking" (Wah and Aitkin 182). The appeal of fusion cuisine, however, is double-edged. On one hand, the merits of its Asian components are lauded and many splendid 'interpretations' or 'adaptations' have

emerged. On the other hand, questions arise regarding when and whether these culinary innovations are actually appropriations. Is this culinary metamorphosis really then just another form of usurpation?

Desiring to "educate" Australians on Asian cuisine, Jean Mundy in A Change of Skies devises a best-selling cookbook interestingly entitled Something Rich and Strange. The book is a supposedly "wholesome synthesis of East and West" (294):

> Every recipe in her book reflects, Jean says, the many-layered, transforming immigrant experience that is now an integral part of Australian life. Exotic ingredients drawn from many parts of the world blend with the best of wholesome, healthy Aussie tucker to create unforgettable dishes that tickle the taste buds – and get those grey cells up and running too. (293)

The title of the book is in itself highly ironic. This is because it serves to emphasize an inherently disturbing dichotomy. The "exotic ingredients", presumably Asian, are characterised as something *strange*, foreign, or abnormal, while "Aussie tucker", that is Anglo-Australian foodstuff, is "wholesome, healthy", and *normal*. This can be seen in an example from Jean's cookbook, the "scrumptious Lemon Coconut Surprise which combines the cream of Sri Lankan coconuts with the tangy tartness of luscious Aussie citrus" (294). The reason why this dish would be acceptable and even popular is because it is as threatening as a teacake. Perhaps, the 'exotification' of the cookbook/cuisine is deliberate and indeed a clever marketing strategy of sorts. Its hybrid nature literally becomes its strongest selling point.

It is clear that hybridization brings about heterogeneity, discontinuity and an enduring revolution of forms. Widely acclaimed as the 'father of East Meets West' cuisine, Cheong Liew acknowledges his colonial past as his inspiration. He points out that food fusion originated in colonial countries like Malaya, since the local food was often (necessarily) adapted for European palates. Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made addresses the colonial origins in the hybrid cuisine of the Christao Eurasians in Malacca. Lazaroo says that

Eurasian food/cuisine was invented by "Infinitely Great Grandmother" who essentially took "a little from the kitchens of two different cultures to make something new . . . ingredients from Portugal were bound with ingredients from Malacca" (48). Infinitely Great Grandmother "gave the Portuguese a market for goods from home, so that their ships travelled laden both ways. She introduced the Malaccans to ingredients the Portuguese used. They were inexpensive, commonplace ingredients, like vinegar and semolina, but they combined well" (48). Infinitely Great Grandmother's recipes were in fact, recipes for survival.

This "new cuisine" enabled the hybrid Christao Eurasians to interact with the other ethnic groups in Malacca, namely the Chinese and the Malays, as well as to incorporate aspects of the coloniser's (Portuguese) culture:

> Infinitely Great Grandmother had practised as far as possible this seemingly effortless approach to evolution. A new cuisine was invented, a new culture was born, the gene pool was extended; whereas people more entrenched in tradition would have kept things running, recipes the same, genes repeating, as they had for generations before. (Lazaroo 48-9)

Hybrid cultures in particular are especially susceptible to external change, and nowhere is this more evident than with regard to cuisine. Features of 'alien' foods are gradually absorbed into the culinary preparations and foodways. The continuation and vitality of the Christao culinary system depended on its versatility and adaptability:

> Even in today's Christao households, variations of Infinitely Great Grandmother's culinary inventions salve talked-out tongues and hungry bellies. Even today when it's difficult to find a place for oneself in the community, as it can be for a minority group like the Christao Eurasians, food invented by the fugitive Grandmother always makes a home of wherever they happen to be. And this food has been an efficacious propitiation to give host communities to consume, to stop them from consuming Eurasian fugitives. (49)

Food is undoubtedly linked to overall social hierarchies and power relations. The impact of colonialism is manifest not only in terms of political infrastructure and education; it is also

evident in terms of 'culinary imperialism'. However, subversion can be seen in Cyrill's The Ganges and her Tributuaries. The protagonist, Christopher, recalls how:

> Every year during the Easter week, my grandfather and I would . . . roll the dough into little balls, then imprint them with the prongs of a fork, or slice an arc across their surface with the edge of a spoon, or zigzag a knife around the circumference. At family gatherings I would eat only the spoon-sliced cul-culs, which my grandfather called Queen's Bums. (9)

This irreverence is implicitly tied to anti-colonial resistance. This is seen again later in the novel, when Christopher's father proudly tells him that: "Your nana was a great cook, out of soup bones and fennel she used to feed us all. All the English wanted her to cook for them. 'I cook only for my sons', she used to say" (68). Asian agency emerges as a steely resoluteness, a dynamic resourcefulness and a certain irrepressible confidence. Mr Josephs also reminisces fondly about his time at boarding school when his mother, Nana Josephs, used to send him "fruit cakes and barfi" (68). All his school masters "would come and eat them. But that cake was good for barter. Balls, rubber bands, string, all [he] used to get for a few pieces of cake" (68).

The colonial influence and experience has invariably and inevitably left its mark on the food of its colonies. In A Change of Skies, the protagonist Jean recounts a hilarious food-related episode in her native Sri Lanka. She had wanted to invite some of her university friends to dinner and told the family's cook, Mutthiah, about her plans. Mutthiah had worked for a British tea planter up-country and came to Jean's family at the time when the British planters left Sri Lanka (around the 1950s):

> Muttiah had been introduced to Western cuisine by an army colonel's wife, who had taught him (in addition the inevitable *cutlis* and *minchi* and *bistek*) how to make beautiful bread and several different kinds of desserts and pastries. (He'd also picked up some wonderful barrack room language from the colonel!) . . . [H]e had an exercise book in which he had written in Tamil at his employer's dictation, the names of all the dishes which had been the stand-bys of the two households, and were now his specialties, together with full directions for making them. (201)

The dinner and dessert that Mutthiah had prepared for Jean's guests was delicious. Jean told her guests about Mutthiah's exercise book. She said that he was so proud of that he would not let anyone see it. When Mutthiah heard this comment, he went back to kitchen and got it out. He then handed the book to one of the guests. When asked what the artfully arranged dessert in the crystal bowl was called, Mutthiah replied, "Page ten, sir . . . Fucking Fruit Salad" (201). Of course, the cook had no idea what he was saying, "having taken it verbatim from a British army officer!" (202)

Food is the basis of cultural identity and generates understanding when shared. William Boelhower identifies the importance of the ethnic feast as a privileged trope in ethnic writing. He asserts that, "there are few moments like the ethnic feasts where ethnic identity can be so positively affirmed and socially reinforced" (Boelhower 113, cited in Gunew "Multicultural Translations"). The Ganges and its Tributaries is redolent with descriptions of numerous family gatherings:

> During the lunches at Alexandra Street, bowls of red and green chillies, jars of lemon pickle and mango pickle, and bottles of chilli sauce would be spread across the table with the curries, rice and chicken. Up until my grandfather died in 1986, all my uncles and aunts would gather for lunch at Alexander Street every Sunday, after mass at St. Mary's. My grandparents had seven sons and six daughters, and all the wives, husbands and children would sit around the two kitchen tables with tin dishes of coconut rice, tandoori chicken, and beef vindaloo laid out before them. My grandfather would close his eyes and recite from memory a passage from the New Testament – the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, or raising Lazarus to life – while the babies cried and the tin lids rattled on the dishes on the stove. (99)

Food carries "a collectivised identity" when it is "represented symbolically as part of the cultural traits of an ethnic community" (Martini and Wong).

According to Sneja Gunew, "[w]hen ethnicity is represented as a lived everyday experience, a kind of barrier is set up to appropriation (and full identification)" ("Multicultural

Translations"). In his book, Cyrill resists appropriation through his non-usage of italics when referring to specific ethnic foods. In contesting cultural appropriation, Anna Goldman argues that:

> Emphasising the labour involved in the reproduction of cultural practices . . . does work (at least on the textual level) against the politics of assimilation by insisting on a historically grounded sense of cultural specificity and by maintaining an ethnic difference that in turn provides the self with authority to speak. (179)

Food provides a definite focus for "practices of communality, especially in collective eating either in private or in public spaces" (Hage "At Home" 109). It is an "especially appropriate target of ethnic revival, because of its potency as a cultural reinforcer" (van der Berghe 393). Christopher's uncles in The Ganges and its Tributaries eat in the traditional way by "separating a portion of curry and rice with their fingers, scooping the food into a cupped hand and then levering the food into their mouths with their thumbs" (9). Christopher says, "[he] knew that [they] relatives always used spoons and forks when they ate at home, but they all ate with their hands at Indian restaurants and parties" (9). This highlights how communal eating strengthens ethnic allegiances. It also acts as a visible and overt demonstration of Indian ethnicity.

Food is a mode of cultural affirmation, and features prominently in occasions such as weddings. These events are vital opportunities for culinary displays of ethnicity. Another family party mentioned in the book is the marriage of Christopher's Aunt Eve to Uncle John:

> Three of my uncles carried a large rectangular table out to the dancefloor and covered it with eight round tablecloths. My aunts brought twelve cloth-covered tin dishes of beef, egg, lamb and chicken curries; platters of samosas, kebabs and tandoori chicken; trays of sliced roast pork and lamb, and placed them on the table. My mother laid out bowls of dal, lentil fritters and rotis alongside dishes of coconut rice and kahooli. My grandmother carried in an esky filled with chutneys, pickles and yoghurts, and placed it at the end of the table. (169)

In The World Waiting to be Made, the narrator's father, Mr Dias remarries, and "his new wife" is called Dawn (209). The food at the wedding was provided by "a nearby Asian restaurant" (208). The event, however, is a painful event for the narrator and her twin:

> Noodles like ribbons were piled high on plates. Fish in spicy coconut sauce were wrapped in silver parcels. Golden twists of batter encased delicately shredded morsels . . . for [her] sister and [her]self it was the familiar food of [their] childhood. Food cooked at home by mother and father together – she chopping, he pounding spices in the granite toomba-toomba. Food that had once tasted to [them] of the happy appetite of [their] father and mother for each other, and for [them] children . . . [Her father's and Dawn's] mutual friends toasted them as the rest of the first course came out, steaming and filling the air with its joyous aroma. But [the narrator and her sister] had little appetite. (208-209)

Food sharing is the medium for creating and maintaining social relations both within and beyond the household. In Lazaroo's novel, the narrator's father and Dawn share "an exotic experience with their new mutual friends" at their wedding feast (209). In Cyrill's text, Christopher's Anglo-Australian girlfriend, Susanna, is invited to Aunt Eve's wedding. In general, inviting someone from an out-group to partake in an ethnic gathering, can be equated to "asking a guest to enjoy grandma's home cooking from treasured family recipes" (Wong 58).

The desire to keep specific family recipes secret can be seen as a form of initiation and/or a form of resistance. The objective is to preserve culture and ensure perpetuity. In The Ganges and its Tributaries, Mr Josephs takes his son, Christopher into his confidence and "listed the ingredients of his garam masala for [him]. He strictly forbade [Christopher from] revealing the ingredients to anyone but [his] children" (71). Anna Goldman asserts that "reproducing a recipe, like retelling a story, may be at once cultural practice and autobiographical assertion" (172). For the narrator in The World Waiting to be Made, her parents' different cooking style reflected their different personalities, their different approaches to life and methods of child-rearing. Her mother's curries were "mild, unroaring attempts to imitate Dad's hot and angry tigers pacing restlessly in their pots" (28). The narrator remarks that:

> [Her father] slung his spices into the pot at a run and by the handful, clanging the utensils like gongs against the hissing vapours of the oil to hurry things along, but leaving an awful lot in his haste to happenstance. The same way he brought us up. We were careful not to get under his feet. When [her Anglo-Australian mother] cooked Eurasian food she measured everything as if every recipe was new to her. She kept the heat low and stirred for hours, inclining her pale half-moon profile as patiently as if she was watching the tide, an occasional expression of mild surprise lighting her large blue eyes. It was as if she felt an overbearing responsibility to get the recipe right for us all, but couldn't quite. The way she cooked she might have been atoning for something. The same way she brought us up, trying harder than Dad to give us a sense of what being Eurasian might mean. (28)

In Teo Hsu-Ming's Love and Vertigo, we see food as a carrier of social memory. Through food, attempts are made to reclaim a forgotten history/corporeality. After her mother's suicide in Singapore, the protagonist Grace embarks on a painful journey to unearth and understand the life her mother rejected in favour of death. The quest is bound up with recovering the food her mother craved. For Grace, searching for these lost tastes becomes a compulsion to rediscover Chinese food. She seeks out what Chinese-Canadian writer, Fred Wah, calls the "absence that gnaws at sensation and memory" (67):

> I think of the one and only time, when I was fourteen, Sonny and I had been forced to come to Singapore with Mum. To pay respects to the relatives, she said. She brought us to visit the relatives and they took us to the Rasa Singapura hawker centre so that we could have *satay*, Hainanese chicken rice, Singapore Hokkien noodles, *tah mee, laksa, gado gado, rojak.* This is my mother's comfort food. She wanted to share it with me, but I complained about the noise, the smells, the disgusting charnel-house of the table where the previous diners had spat out pork ribs and spewed chewed chicken bones all over the surface. (2)

Like Wah's character in Diamond Grill, who ponders about "[h]ow taste remembers life" (74), Grace wonders "how is it that my dead mother's tastebuds now coat my tongue and nudge my cravings" (272). She finds herself at the hawker centre in Singapore:

> [W]ander[ing] from stall to stall, debating between a bowl of fish porridge, *nasi lemak* or a couple of spicy, smelly, vermilllion-coloured *otak otak* wrapped and roasted in banana leaves. When my mother was alive she used to crave such things for breakfast. Spooning soggy Weetbix into my mouth or scraping Vegemite onto my toast, I exaggerate my incredulity that anyone could eat anything so pungent and spicy that early in the morning. (272)

Grace's preferred all-Australian staples of "Weetbix" and "Vegemite" are vividly contrasted with the exotic savoury fare of Pandora's Singapore. The very different food preferences of daughter and mother here are indicative of the cultural chasm between them. Grace's partiality to Western type foods distinguishes her as a 'banana' (yellow on the outside, white on the inside). Gradually, she comes to terms with her Asian self. This is seen in her final acceptance or even desire for her mother's food. She thus crosses the bridge of the hyphen to become not just Australian, but Asian-Australian.

In Love and Vertigo, The Ganges and its Tributaries, and The World Waiting to be Made, the varying propensity for piquant food reflects the shifting tastes and dispositions of the young Asian-Australians. In Cyrill's novel, Christopher Josephs' inability to stomach spicy food is treated sympathetically. His intolerance for hot food is plainly accepted and recognised as a sign of his being 'Australian' or Australian-born. It is not regarded in any way as a weakness or a flaw. Christopher says that whenever his mother cooked, "she would fry a steak or bake a chicken for [him] because her curries were too hot for [his] taste. She called the meals she made for [him] dry dinners. She would marinate the meat in masala or tandoori mix and then sprinkle chilli powder over the meat" (98). Christopher was always concerned about the food being "too hot" for Jude, his blond, green-eyed Australian friend, as well as for Susanna when they ate at his house. He observed that:

> Whenever Jude, ate with [the Josephs'] family, he would punctuate each bite of steak or chicken with three or four sips of water, whereas Vismara and Manjay, [Christopher's Indian-born cousins] would chew red chillies with roast beef and sprinkle coriander and chilli powder on roast potatoes. (99)

In Teo's novel, the ability to eat spicy food or tolerance for chilli, becomes a test that signifies authentic 'Asianness'. Sonny (Grace's brother) is cruelly taunted by his Singaporean relatives because he cannot eat chillies:

> One night in Singapore, we went to the hawker centre with Auntie Percy–phone, Uncle Winston, Auntie Shufen and their children. We crowded around tiny tables piled with *char kway teow*, steamed fish with ginger and shallots, chicken and beef satay with peanut sauce, *gado gado* and *pohpiah*. Little dishes of sliced chillies drenches in soy sauce dotted the table. Chopsticks clicked and people chattered and slapped at mosquitoes.
> 'What's the matter with you, Sonny?' Uncle Winston demanded. 'How come you don't take chilli? You're not a real man unless you can eat the hottest chillies, you know. My father used to pick up those tiny chilli *puddies* – the hottest chillies you can find on the earth – and he ate them like sweet cakes. Here, have some'. He spooned a generous amount of chilli into Sonny's bowl of noodles. Sonny picked up his chopsticks and ate. His eyes oozed tears and his nose dribbled. His larynx and tongue were on fire. Desperately, he sucked up coconut juice through a straw, then fished out the ice cubes to roll them around his burning mouth. Uncle Winston and the rest of the cousins roared with laughter . . . 'What a sissy! Can't eat chillies. We'll have to make a real man of you before you go to Australia, huh, Sonny? Huh? What will your father say, you sissy boy, you'. (146)

The failure to eat chillies infuses Sonny with an overwhelming sense of inadequacy. This humiliating and symbolic emasculation compounds his feelings of cultural disorientation. It makes him all the more determined to assert his 'Australian' identity. Sonny outrightly rejects anything remotely spicy, including the beef *rendang* that his mother, Pandora, lovingly prepares for him:

> Sonny hung his head and did his best to eat it, spooning *rendang* into his mouth until it not only looked like shit, it tasted like it too. Where [his mother had] got the idea that he liked beef *rendang* was completely beyond him. He had never liked spicy food and at his age, his idea of a good meal was an all-you-can-eat buffet at some American-style steakhouse. (196)

For Asian-Australians, their attempts to fit it and find acceptance are highly poignant; their "strange food" somehow betraying their earnest efforts at being 'Australian' (Lazaroo 30). The narrator's rejection of 'Asian' food in The World Waiting to be Made parallels the loathing of her Asian self. As a six-year old, she announces her dislike of curry to her parents, much to their utter dismay. "[She] shook her head without apology at [her] father's curries smelling of lanquas and tamarind paste smuggled in by friends from Singapore on package tours to Australia" (29-30). In a heroic bid to "counter the seeping away of Asia from [her] skin", the narrator's mother tries to convey to her daughter the power of hybridity. Her mother tells her that: "You are Eurasian. Eurasian women know how to wear sarongs as well as dresses, chop and curry pigs' intestines as well as make teacakes" (31). These valiant words, however, are lost on the narrator. She is convinced that they were just "hybrids too exotic for comfort" (94). The narrator becomes increasingly frustrated and enraged by her twin "who wouldn't even drink Choc Milk" (108). For the narrator, this was a sign of foreignness personified; her twin's lactose-intolerance was damning evidence of the dreaded 'Asianness' lurking inside.

School lunches are another minefield for the Asian-Australian children in Lazaroo's and Teo's texts. In The World Waiting to be Made, the narrator recalls how at high school, all the 'wog kids' would sit together because no else would have them. Most of them hid some of their "unacceptable pasts . . . in their lunchboxes" (98). In Love and Vertigo, Pandora made ham sandwiches for Grace when she started school in Sydney, but later ordered them from the tuckshop. Grace absolutely detested those sandwiches and remembers "[w]hen Sonny and [she] went to school in Malaysia [they] always came home in time for lunch. One of the servants would cook [them] egg noodles with a fried egg and slices of sweet barbecued pork" (161). She also recalls learning to "read with Ladybird storybooks about Peter and Jane . . . Daddy and Mummy, Peter and Jane, and Pat the Dog go on a picnic", and in a glorious post-colonial aside, she adds that: "[t]hey probably eat ham sandwiches. I simply hated ham" (161).

The Tays' family picnic at Katoomba in the Blue Mountains was another disconcerting episode. They were "an incongruous sight in the park; [they] didn't fit into the picture" (149). When Grace thinks of family picnics, she hears "the hiss of sizzling oil and the clang of the metal wok in the kitchen as Mum cooked rice vermicelli with pork, egg and vegetables" (147). From the car in the parking area, Grace observes the "other families picknicking in the park" (149). She could smell the "barbecuing meat and the hiss of fat sizzling on hot coals", white "[p]eople were lying in the sun, munching on sandwiches, drinking Coke or beer or cups of wine from Coolabah casks" (149). The Tay family, however, preferred the shade:

> The Esky was opened, the ice-cream containers full of noodles removed. Paper plates were unpacked and dealt out like cards. Schweppes lemonade was poured into cups – what a novelty fizzy lemonade was to us back then – chopsticks paired up and handed round, and Mum started heaping noodles onto the plates. There we sat, cross-legged, solemnly shovelling noodles into our mouths with chopsticks, sucking and slurping up the longer strands. They dripped from our lips like a tangle of worms. (149)

Later that afternoon, after a long bushwalk and "the exotic experience of [their] first Devonshire tea", the Tay family drive back to Sydney with everyone, particularly the Patriarch (Mr Tay) in "a buoyant mood" (151).

In the Chinese families of these texts, love or affection between parent and child can only be expressed silently through food and special dishes. This also extends to the love between husband and wife. For the narrator in The World Waiting to be Made, food they ate at home "brought [her sister and her] forgiveness for [their] day's transgressions against the unity of the family" (209). In Love and Vertigo, Grace notes that "[i]mmigration brought with it the novelty of shared family meals" (148). Desirous to please her ever querulous husband, Teo's character Pandora would take out "her recipe books and [make] all the Malaysian food that the Patriarch liked but couldn't get in Sydney" (185):

> [She would search] desperately for the necessary ingredients – hot chillies, kaffir lime leaves, green peppercorns – that she needed to cook dinner that night; a dinner which would allow her

> and the Patriarch to pretend for a meal span that they were back home in Singaopore. *Nasi lemak. Laksa. Beef rendang.* (169)

Pandora often had a snack ready for Grace and Sonny when they came home from school: "dumplings, red bean buns, gooey Nonya cakes coloured a lurid slime green and dusted with desiccated coconut" (185).

Maternal concern for Sonny was apparent as Pandora would fervently urge him to "[e]at some more" (196). After each evening meal, Pandora would also ply the children, particularly Sonny with offers of various fruit: "'What fruit do you want?' she [would demand] . . . bringing to the table a plastic tray of custard apples, bananas, California Sunkist oranges, Batlow apples, Japanese nashi pears, flushed persimmons and waxy sultanas" (196-7). For Grace's birthday, Pandora would cook her "a special birthday meal" – "roast chicken with potatoes, pumpkin and green beans" because it was her favourite food (203). Interestingly, Grace's favourite meal is very typical and traditional British fare! For Pandora, "love was expressed through the provision of clean clothes and fresh fruit, and the supervision of regular bowel movements" (198).

The generation that endured the last World War (Mr Dias, the Patriarch and Pandora) were constantly in awe of the immense bounty of their adopted country. They recall the great deprivation as a result of war and invariably equate food with prosperity and contentment. They never cease to remind their Asian-Australian offspring about how lucky they are to be living in Australia. In <u>The World Waiting to be Made</u>, the narrator's father, Mr Dias, remembers how his family "ate shoe leather and sweet potatoes; rice once a month if [they] were lucky. A kilo of rice had to last a family of six for a whole week" (36). The Patriarch in <u>Love and Vertigo</u>, recollects that "in [his] day most people only had meat once a week unless they were very rich. And it was mostly gristle and tendon" (196). Pandora often told her children that "when she was growing up in Singapore after the war, she'd had to share one apple with all her siblings. She never got over the marvel of having a whole piece of fruit to herself" (197). But even after death, Pandora remained hungry and "displaced" (285). Upon

her tragic suicide, she "becomes a Hungry Ghost, one of the spirits of the restless dead who rampage the earth seeking to satisfy their ravenous appetites. They are outsiders, searching hopelessly for food, fulfillment, acceptance, peace . . ." (285).

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how "a nation's diet maps colonialism and migration, trade and exploration, cultural exchange and boundary marking" (Bell and Valentine 169). In Australia, cooking, eating and living are also inextricably linked to an endless enactment of family and community relationships. As Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik assert in their introduction to Food and Culture. A Reader, "food is life, and life can be studied through food" (1). This chapter looked at the ways in which food is connected to issues of multiculturalism, identity, social place and cultural/national belonging in Australia. Thinking about food therefore offers lessons about the cultural identities and commodities that enter into Australian heterogeneous society. Food as multiculturalism and/or multiculturalism as food - the sweet and sour - highlights the many inherent complex and contradictory cultural meanings within multicultural discourse.

Ghassan Hage highlights the need to focus on how "the production and consumption of ethnic food becomes the locus of practices with which migrants try to make themselves at home in Australia" ("At Home" 101). Ethnic food is an excellent paradigm of ethnicity. Ethnicity is made real through cultural transactions such as restaurants, cookery books, and ethnic feasts. As a mode of cultural affirmation, ethnic food is and most certainly continues to be intrinsic to Asian-Australians' own sense of being Asian as well as Australian. In the Asian-Australian texts, we see how Asian-Australians repossess their (displaced) subjectivity through food; how they build their sense of self through food amidst, despite and because of the physical, emotional and intellectual constraints they have experienced in a 'hostile' environment.

The presence of people of Asian origin in contemporary multicultural Australia redefines not only what it means to be Indian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Malaysian/Singapore-Chinese, Chinese, Eurasian or Australian. The encounters with 'mainstream' and 'ethnic' cuisines invite and encourage incorporation and adaptation even as cultural distinctiveness is maintained. Each and every deliberation of multiculturalism should take into account the dynamics between "mainstream citizens and ethnic Others", as well as that between the various minority 'ethnic' groups' (Narayan 162). Indeed, "much as they may, at times willingly, signify a 'somewhere else', ethnic food as well as members of ethnic communities in the West also need to be seen as integral parts of the Western contexts they inhabit" (Narayan 183).

6 THE ASIAN-AUSTRALIAN FAMILY FEUDS AND FAILINGS

"Immigration forced us in on ourselves and moulded us into a family – fractious and often bitterly absurd, but a family nevertheless". (Teo Hsu-Ming 143)

Specific characteristics, qualities or attitudes are perceived to set Asian-Australian families apart from the Anglo mainstream. These perceived characteristics are built into the construction of 'Asian-Australian'. They include being "racially labelled as Asian by the dominant society, growing up in an Asian home, and adhering to Asian values [with] an emphasis on family, education, hard work and respect for elders" (Kibria 523). In this chapter, I examine representations of the Asian-Australian family in various Asian-Australian texts, namely Teo Hsu-Ming's Love and Vertigo, Chandani Lokuge's If the Moon Smiled, Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies and Adib Khan's Solitude of Illusions. Some basic beliefs and values are shared by all the Asian groups in the novels: Sri Lankan in Lokuge's and Gooneratne's novels, Bangladeshi in Khan's work, as well as Chinese-Singaporean/Malaysian in Teo's texts. In other words, this chapter recognises the shared personal experiences and orientations of Asian-origin persons.

In the Asian-Australian texts, the Asian parents approach child-rearing with the notion of 'Asian values' firmly entrenched in their mind. Interwoven into all the Asian-Australian texts are the tenuous but taut "threads of duty and control" (Thuy On). Common themes running through the novels are the unravelling of sexual and familial love, "parental strictures, filial (dis)obedience, patriarchal totalitarianism [and] female subservience" (Thuy On). In the course of examining these issues in my chapter, I will pay particular attention to marital and intergenerational relationships, education and parental expectations. Moreover, I will consider the classic migrant bind of being caught between two cultures and the gendered nature of cultural conflict in Asian-Australian families. As Lata Mani notes, there is "no rupture in patriarchal power with migration, merely its reconfiguration" (33).

In Chandani Lokuge's If the Moon Smiled, conceptions of patriarchy are dominant. The central character, Manthri's "transfer from [her] father's house into [her] husband's" is an experience for which she is totally unprepared (39). Her arranged marriage to the cold and misogynistic Mahendra is a sharp departure from her idyllic and insulated childhood. Their conjugality is doomed to failure on the wedding night itself. Conditioned by his rigid and simplistic upbringing, Mahendra is convinced that his bride is not a virgin because "the crushed white sheet bears no stain" (35). Frightened and disgusted by her display of lust, he begins to suspect the "wantonness about her anguished cry, her intense gestures . . . She seemed a woman of endless wiles" (34). This evidence (or lack of it) damns Manthri in his eyes permanently. It results in an indifferent and loveless marriage for life. The way Mahendra treats his wife and later his daughter is indicative of his general disregard of "all women with their inferior birth, their child-bearing" (33).

Similarly in Love and Vertigo, Teo Hsu-Ming permits an insight into the insidious impact of patriarchy on the characters' lives. Pandora's and Jonah's marital mismatch descends progressively into disillusionment and discord. Rejected and neglected by her family because she was a girl, Pandora Lim finds temporal tenderness and deliverance in the form of Jonah Tay, a "thin, earnest Chinese [dental student] in black Buddy Holly glasses" (100): "His real attraction in her eyes, was that he took her out of the crowded, noisy tenement where they were constantly breathing each other's stale air and invading each other's space" (101). Lacking contact with his own family, Jonah "basked in his acceptance of hers" (106). He was "entranced by Pandora's rowdy family mistaking the volume of noise for the depth of familial affection" (106). Despite their shared Chinese ethnicity, the Tay family and Lim family could not be more different. As Thuy On says, the young and idealistic couple is seduced by the "mirage of love". Although privately doubtful about her engagement to Jonah, Pandora seals her fate by marrying him nevertheless.

Ironically for Pandora, the 'escape' Jonah promises becomes another form of slavery. Their marriage flounders, not only because of unfulfilled hopes, but also because of Jonah's "domineering [and] smothering mother" (Thuy On). Madam Tay's invasive and oppressive presence inflicts an indelible toll on the young couple: "Pandora discovered that by accepting Jonah's proposal, she had also married his mother. Madam Tay fell easily into the time-honoured Chinese tradition of bullying her daughter-in-law" (Teo 115). Elizabeth Croll suggests that:

> It was as if, having been trapped all their lives, women turned around and with the authority of the mother-in-law expressed their new security and compensated for their own suffering and impotence as an outsider by repeating the same process of domination they had themselves suffered. (27)

Confucian discourse "as an ideological mechanism of subordination" is implicit through Teo's novel (Croll 12). This discourse and ideology is highly influential in determining a woman's position in the Chinese family. Relinquished by her own family, Pandora becomes the 'property' of the Tay family.

Madam Tay persists in treating Pandora as the unwelcome outsider. As the new daughter-in-law, however, Pandora is constrained by obligations to her husband's family; unquestioned loyalty and unfailing filial piety was expected of her. She remembers sadly what her mother had told her before she was to be married: "'Be a good wife to Jonah and always obey your mother-in-law. Then we will never have any reason to be ashamed of you'. The one piece of advice passed on from mother to daughter in a lifetime together" (116). Living with her in-laws as was customary, the "unbearable proximity" meant that Pandora's suffering at the hands of Madam Tay intensified dramatically (115):

> Pandora lost her time, her space, her privacy and her boundaries. She wanted intimacy with Jonah, for she still believed that she loved him. But she wanted support from him against the subtle slights of his mother, the barbed insults that he couldn't or didn't want to see. And when that was not forthcoming, she wanted space to collect herself to remember who she was. But personal boundaries were unheard of in that household where lives, personalities, tempers,

> needs and desires crisscrossed the bodily envelopes of individuals and blurred their solidity. Daughter-in-law kneaded, pounded and tenderised mother-in-law's back and rubbed liniment into it. Mother-in-law patted the stomach of daughter-in-law to see if the latter was pregnant. Hands touched, skins rubbed, bodies invaded personal spaces and overlapped individual lives. (120)

The seething antagonism between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law results in tragedy. Instead of sympathetic concern when Pandora has a miscarriage, Madam Tay is livid because the baby is a girl. She demands of Jonah: "That wife of yours! What use is she if she can't even give you a healthy son? I curse that smelly cunt she's brought into my house" (125). Pandora's value it seems lies only her reproductive capacity. There is the overwhelming pressure for her to 'justify her existence'. Producing an heir for the Tay clan should have earned Pandora undeniable status in her husband's family as the mother of one of its descendants (Wolfe 124-125). Unfortunately, this status is always denied to her, even after the birth of her son, Sonny.

Fearing for her sanity, Pandora finally insists that they move out of Madam Tay's house "to go far away" (126). The irony is that at that time, Pandora and Jonah do not realise how far away they will ultimately go. Their first home together is in a small village in Malaysia, and then compelled by the events of 1965, they eventually migrate to Sydney Australia. As Penelope Davie observes:

> After years of abuse and ridiculous expectations from both their families, Jonah and Pandora somehow expect to escape together, only to find that they cannot, either physically or philosophically. Malaysia was not far enough from Singapore, and neither is Sydney. Distance just adds to the burden of guilt and regret . . .

Jonah, would "never quell his resentment at the fact that [Pandora] made him choose between his mother and herself" (126). This resentment would continue to simmer over the years and would finally undermine their marriage.

Migration only "exacerbated" the "sullen resentment and flaring irritation" Jonah and Pandora had felt towards each other in Malaysia (Teo 155). Their initial excitement and happiness at being in Sydney is short-lived. Confronted with unanticipated difficulties in establishing his dental practice, Jonah vents his frustration on his wife. He blames her for forcing him to migrate. Arising out of his humiliation at the hardship of making ends meet and the negativity associated with feelings of relative impotence, Jonah becomes increasingly cantankerous and malignant:

> [Pandora] wanted to get a job to help with the family's finances, but this he would not allow. He could support the family, he claimed angrily. She should just do her part and be a good and obedient wife and look after *her* unruly kids ([they] were her children by then, not his). Little things about her began to annoy him and in his unrelenting quest to make her into the kind of wife that he wanted, he forgot the woman with whom he had fallen in love . . . Their grudges bubbled like magma just underneath the surface of their lives. (155-156)

Jonah's and Mahendra's facile hesitations and dismissive generalities constituting their reading of their wives' conflicts efface the "'invisible' hand of patriarchy" (Mani "Gender" 34). Manthri's and Pandora's anguish and depression, which result in seriously deteriorating mental states, appear to be rebuffed by their husbands. In Manthri's case, it is contemptuously dismissed as "self-generated confusion and psychosis" until she finally suffers a breakdown and is institutionalised (Mani 34). Pandora's increasing incoherence "annoyed [her husband] as much as it worried him, and as usual he showed his concern in a hot blast of scolding" (277). To Jonah, "there were no good or bad husbands, only good or bad wives, obedient or disobedient wives" (190).

Similarly for Shanaz and Javed in Khan's Solitude of Illusions, their "mutual dissatisfactions" are intensified by the migration from India to Melbourne (73). The pressures of being foreign, it seems, extend into the familial sphere. Emotionally fatigued, their marriage gradually deteriorates into "one of utilitarian convenience" and meanders into "the wilderness of

consumer living" (49). It becomes glaringly obvious that the only satisfaction they derive is "from acquisitions and monetary hoarding under the comforting pretext that the family's security [is] ensured" (49). Their faltering relationship is overshadowed by:

> [Their] mutual anxiety to establish the children in a life without struggle – education in reputable schools . . . an array of expensive cultural activities and a variety of holidays, all packaged in the implicit belief that the primary duty in life [is] to cushion one's children from any form of deprivation. They [have] to be imbued with a sense of worthiness that [will] negate the disadvantages of being the children of coloured migrants. (Khan 49)

The couple continue to "maintain an empty shell without any serious consideration of its demolition" (49). Tacitly Javed and Shanaz drift even farther apart and are only tenuously held together by their children. Wanting to sustain "the illusion" of being "reasonably contented", they continue their mechanical existence as a family (49-50).

Education is a top priority for Asian-Australian parents in the novels, many having left their home country for the sake of their children's education. In If the Moon Smiled Mahendra moves the family from Sri Lanka to Adelaide because "Australia is a land of opportunity" (Lokuge 44). As a very ambitious father, he wants "more for [his] son", but interestingly fails to mention his daughter at all (44). Like many of his fellow migrants, he is concerned about how "[e]ducation has gone to the dogs in Sri Lanka. There is no discipline. Schools and universities are closed most of the time" due to the civil war (56). Being of Chinese ethnicity, the Tay children in Love and Vertigo are disadvantaged in Malaysia because of the discriminatory educational policies, which favour the *Bumiputra* (the indigenous Malays). In Malaysia, admission quotas for the universities are based on race.

One of the colourful caricatures in Gooneratne's A Change of Skies is a Sri Lankan immigrant, Mr Koyako, who is so fixated on the home country that he even keeps registers on how well Sri Lankan children do at school. He considers it his sacred "duty to do everything to encourage the young people of the community to achieve their potential and to this end he

keeps his records up to date with minute care" (93). In a large notebook, he painstakingly lists down the "names and academic records of all the Sri Lankan children he knows who are in his own children's age group" (92):

> There are credit and debit columns for each child, with straight A's and class or subject prizes noted in the credit column, while in the debit column Mr K. writes down information on matters that are likely to give grave cause for concern to their parents and to the community as a whole. (92)

Gooneratne challenges the practice of using children's academic accomplishments as a means to judge a family's credibility and worth. She queries the stereotyping of Asian-Australians as the 'model minority', that is Asian-Australian children as conscientious bookworms who value study above everything else, and who believe that "footy is for losers" (Strong 3). Employing humour, the author also ridicules the sometimes ludicrous ambitions and obsessive competitiveness of Asian parents. The Koyakos are exposed as reactionary, hypocritical and opportunistic. While exhibiting distress about the corrupting impact of the "alien society" and shamelessly insinuating that Australia and Australians are somehow morally inferior, they are nevertheless very happy to send their children to Australian schools and take full advantage of the Australian education system (Gooneratne 93).

The world-view of the Asian-Australian parents informs their mindset, particularly on matters regarding education. Coming from the ruthless competition of the Asian educational system, the parents are unequivocally conditioned by their experiences. In "a rare moment of confidence", the Patriarch / Jonah in Love and Vertigo tells his children about his boyhood in Malaysia. He relates how he had to come straight home from school and sit in the living room doing his homework under his mother's watchful eye:

> He was not allowed to play with or talk to his siblings. Each morning, his mother woke him up at five-thirty so that he could read ahead for the day and surprise his teachers with his advanced knowledge. If he couldn't wake up immediately, she fetched the cane and savagely beat him out of bed . . . (Teo 89)

Jonah acknowledges that it is only in retrospect that he appreciates how his mother had "meant it for the best" (89). His mother "wanted [her children] to excel in life, to be prosperous . . . Yes, she beat [them] often and hard. You may call it child abuse, but she did it out of love" (89).

Stern discipline was meted out under the justification that it was done "out of love" (89). This method of control is also based on the traditional hierarchical relationship between Asian children and their parents. In Teo's novel, it is certainly telling that Jonah is dubbed "the Patriarch". He was so named because towards all, Jonah displayed firmly, "the conviction that his was the right way, the only way" (111). Grace, his daughter and the main protagonist, recalls how dinner at home was constantly "broken by the Patriarch's barked out interrogatives: 'Twelve times three? Seven times eight? Nine times eleven?'" (169). If Grace did not "return enough correct answers between mouthfuls", he would take [her] into the kitchen after dinner and make her recite the multiplication table timed by the microwave set on high for one minute. And if she could not finish reciting "before the microwave dinged, [she] would be bludgeoned by a frown and his cutting remarks" (170). The whole process would then be repeated once more. She is told that her father was "doing it for [her] own good because [she] was getting chances in Sydney that neither he nor [her] mum had had in Singapore or Malaysia" (170).

Parental and societal expectations weigh heavily on young Asian-Australians. For them, it seems that "[i]mmigration is an act of sacrifice on the part of [their] parents that [they] can never atone for" (Teo 196). This burden of expectations is especially pronounced in the area of education. A high level of achievement at school is a virtually 'given' expectation of all Asian parents. This "martyr complex" as Grace in Love and Vertigo calls it, involves the 'Asian parent guilt trip' in which family honour and sacrifice are upheld as weapons of discipline (6). Grace aptly articulates how Asian-Australians children are held to ransom by their parents: "Sacrifices [are] made, unasked for, and lifelong obligations [are] imposed. To us children, immigration was an irredeemable debt, but one of which we were grovellingly

grateful at the time. And still are, I suppose" (143). When the children misbehave in Love and Vertigo, they suffer their father's perpetual tirade: "Do you think I sacrificed everything and came here to Australia to put up with this kind of behaviour from my kids? . . . " (206). Similarly in Lokuge's If the Moon Smiled, Mahendra constantly reminds his children that, "'I've sacrificed my whole life for you – my career, my country . . . only for you to have a good education. Go on now, go and study. You must not neglect your work even for a moment" (73).

In If the Moon Smiled and in Love and Vertigo, a 'good' education is very rigidly defined. It is equated with getting into medical school and becoming a doctor. Teo shows in her novel how Madam Tay had longed to state nonchalantly to her neighbours: "My son the doctor" (85). She had "choked on disappointment and spewed bitterness when Jonah failed to get sufficient marks to enrol in medicine and had to settle for dentistry instead" (85). In Lokuge's text, when asked by visitors about what he plans to at the university, "Devake's thin body stoops with the weight of the question" (72). His father, Mahendra "replies in his stead" that, "He's going to do medicine" (72):

> Devake smiles and stammers. He knows . . . that he will never get into medical school. Even some of [their family] friends know. And they snigger a bit and ask: 'He will have to get a very high score, no? Devake, you'll have to try very hard.'
> 'Oh, no problems,' replies Mahendra for him. 'He will be fine. Won't you, Devake?' Won't you, Devake? Won't you, Devake? (72)

Jean Bacon observes that in claiming that the 'reputation of the family' is dependent on the children becoming 'successful doctors', the connection between education and status is carefully framed. It is drawn on "the narrow definition: children should be doctors or engineers (as opposed to be simply being successful in their chosen careers) to bolster the reputation of the family" (Bacon 65).

Education in the Asian-Australian texts is best understood in terms of the superiority/inferiority anxiety. The notion is that being the best is the only worthy outcome. The connection is between being the best and superiority: "if you are the best, you must be superior to all others" (Bacon 65). When Devake fails three out of the five subjects in "the prelude to the Matric", Mahendra makes an appointment with his teachers:

> They look disturbed when he reminds them that Devake had to get perfect scores for most subjects. There are other courses besides medicine, they advise him. Perhaps Devake would be more suited to some other course? . . . What about a degree in music, or the hospitality industry? (85)

Coming home in "a black mood" Mahendra rages to his wife: "Do these Australians think migrants are only fit to cook or fiddle in their hotels?" (85). For the first-generation Asian-Australian immigrant, it seems that acceptance, if not respect can only be secured by educational success and consequent professional and financial status. Always uncertain about their place in Australia, such attainment would be proof of their worthiness in the new country and therefore exonerate their presence.

Asian-Australian children's scholastic success is vital because it reflects on the parents. The children's success equates with parental accomplishment and family prestige. In <u>If the Moon Smiled</u>, however, tragedy strikes in the form of Devake, who "qualif[ies] for nothing. Nothing at all. He will have to sit the Matric again" (87). In a family where mediocrity is not tolerated, Devake's abysmal performance in his exams is therefore tantamount to the worst kind of betrayal. Devake's academic failure causes feelings of inadequacy and incompetence in both parties. Expressing 'concern' over the family's plight, a family friend inadvertently reinforces the catastrophic sense of "shame and disappointment" (100). Manthri ruefully relates this incident:

> 'Your mother told me that [Devake] is going through a very bad time,' [the friend] informs me. 'He failed his exam, no? So unusual. Generally, our children do so well abroad . . . What can you do without an education these days? It is so important that they do well in this foreign country [Australia], isn't it. I mean, isn't that why we live here? What went wrong?' She

> looks at me closely, as if she knew I was responsible . . . He is a failure, in her eyes and in mine. I am a failure in everyone's eyes. (100)

Furious and frustrated by his son's failure, Mahendra's treatment of his wife further disintegrates: "He regards [her] with contempt. Everything is [her] fault" (99).

Mahendra's determined aspirations for his son become almost farcical in their inflexibility. He absolutely refuses to consider any other possibilities at all: "Music? What music? What future with music, ah? Play in a band? Do you want the whole world to laugh at us?" (73). For Mahendra, there was only option open to Devake – his son was "going to be a doctor" whatever the cost (73). Manthri tries to persuade Devake to return to school to sit for his Matriculation exam again: "He would have to change his subjects, but Mahendra insists that he continues with science studies. What could one do with an Arts degree? he mocks. That is suitable only for drop-outs" (101). Unable to live up to his father's unrealistic image of an ideal son Devake ultimately cracks under pressure. A brutal authoritarian, Mahendra stubbornly repudiates his children's individuality and limitations, not to mention the possibility of granting them any form of autonomy.

Filled with ominous dread, Nelum knows that "all Mahendra's energies are now concentrated on her" (99). In Lokuge's novel, Devake does not recognise the intense irony in his words when he laments that Nelum is the "lucky" one who is "breezing through med school" (84). His sister is actually the unlucky one, because she has the misfortune to be born "a girl" (84). Although Nelum is obviously academically gifted, scoring "Ds and HDs, even in [her] sixth year", with an extremely promising future in medicine, she "realises that her freedom must end with her degree" (84). Her brother's embittered comments have a poignant resonance - Nelum will "be married off to some Sri Lankan square" and is "not going to need a career" (84). Her father's "utter, blind adherence to an inherited code" is his greatest flaw and his intransigence ruins his family (Halpe).

The first-generation characters in the Asian-Australian texts may think globally, but their loyalties are often "anchored in translocal social networks and cultural diasporas rather than the global ecumene" (Werbner "Introduction" 12). Despite their contemporary circumstances in Australia, the women of Indian / Sri Lankan ancestry in Khan's, Lokuge's and Gooneratne's novels are nevertheless subjected to an extremely parochial code. This code strongly discourages dating and self-arranged marriages. As Lata Mani argues:

> [Q]uestions of tradition and modernity have, since the nineteenth century, have debated on the literal and figurative bodies of women. It thus comes as no surprise that the burden of negotiating the new world is borne disproportionately by women, whose behaviour and desires, real or imagined, become [sic] the litmus test for the South Asian community's anxieties or sense of well-being. For instance, the fear of dating that consumes many South Asian families is primarily a fear of women dating ... it is women who are called on to preserve the ways of the old country. (35)

In Solitude of Illusions, Javed Sharif's "vehement opposition" to his Asian-Australian daughter "Zareen's request to go to the movies with an Italian boy" sparks "a verbal storm" with his wife Shanaz (73): "Zareen tearfully railed against her father's "obsolete notions of propriety" (73). Determined to discourage furtive meetings between Zareen and Aldo, Shanaz shrewdly proposes that "the shy young Italian" be invited to the house to work with Zareen on a history project (148). When Javed again objects to this suggestion, "Shanaz's patience crumbled. 'For God's sake, get rid of your subcontinental hang-ups!' she snapped. 'Listening to you outside this house, you would immediately think of you as a liberal, tolerant man. Talk of double standards!'" (149). As a modern woman, Shanaz herself struggles against the patriarchal constructions of 'our culture and values' imposed by her community. Recognising the futility in ranting against an immutable belief system, she tries instead to help her daughter negotiate this difficult path and in the process moderate its influence.

For the Indian or South Asian diasporic communities, these subcontinental "double standards" are perhaps seen as vital to 'cultural authenticity and preservation', even as other norms and practices yield to adaptation and change. While Indian / Sri Lankan immigrants have

'assimilated' into Australian culture in various ways, "the retention of 'Indian [/ Sri Lankan] cultural identity' has often been grounded in an insistence upon arranged marriages to other Indians [/ Sri Lankan], especially on the part of the daughters" (Narayan 175). These women are still counted upon to "safeguard the 'cultural distinctiveness'" of their communities in Australia (Narayan 177).

Migrants to Australia, the staunchly nationalist Sri Lankan family, the Koyakos in A Change of Skies are still determined to find a husband for their daughter Lassana. Her parents are in a hurry to do this "before she is seventeen and develops ideas of her own on the subject" (97): "They would prefer a [Sri Lankan] doctor as their son-in-law, but tea-planters or engineers have certainly not been ruled out as possibilities" (97). The Koyakos' inordinate insularity and zealous preoccupation about cultural distinctiveness is linked to the notion of a "gendered ethnic centre" (Breger and Hill 15).

> [It revolves around] ingroup ideologies of ethnic femininity and their linked stereotypes based on women's domestic reproductive roles. These define women in terms of highly emotional symbolic roles associated with the essence of family, childhood, love, such as the 'mothers of our people'. (Breger and Hill 15)

Mr and Mrs Koyako are also vehemently convinced that Lassana is vulnerable, especially since they live "in a country such as this [Australia] in which young people seem to enjoy a dangerous degree of freedom in their relations with one another" (Gooneratne 97). Assuming a supercilious sense of moral superiority, they employ ideologies, which differentiate between the 'us' and 'them' (Burton cited in Breger and Hill 15). These ideologies suggest that 'our women', that is diasporic Sri Lankan maidens such as their daughter, are decent and 'wholesome', while Australian girls are not necessarily so; and that 'our women' are highly susceptible to the macho promiscuity of Australian men. Gooneratne however ridicules such circumscribed behaviour, which in the Koyakos' case borders on paranoia. Inappropriate in multicultural Australia, the Koyakos are therefore unceremoniously dispatched back to Sri Lanka.

Mahendra, in If the Moon Smiled, draws strict boundaries, which become buttresses against what he perceives to be dangerous incursions and deliberate, transgressive hybridity. His daughter's relationship with an Anglo-Australian classmate is a cause of great agitation for him. Mahendra rebukes his wife, Manthri saying, "'How can you even consider the idea of Nelum having anything to do with an Australian? She's going to marry a Sinhalese. You know that. We've known that all along. So the sooner she gets all this nonsense out of her head, the better it is for all of us'" (Lokuge 113). This strengthens his resolve "to arrange a marriage for her as soon as possible" (114). He insists that it must be done "before she gets out of control" (99). Parental authority around the issues of marriage reveals the omnipotent power of patriarchy that exists in Asian (immigrant) communities. The demand for cultural conformity also shows how gender plays a prominent role, "in distinguishing between behaviour that constitutes acceptable forms of 'assimilation' into the dominant culture, and that which constitutes a 'failure to preserve one's cultural identity'" (Narayan 175).

In the Asian-Australian texts, marriage is hardly about idyllic and romantic love; it is instead depicted as a complex arrangement fraught with difficulties. For the Asian-Australian women in the novels, marriage is a family obligation. It is a "familiar vice clamping shut" around them (Teo 102). Teo shows how in Chinese families, the institution of marriage reifies the Confucian ideology of male dominance. As Elizabeth Croll points out, a daughter is often regarded as undesirable, because she is 'born facing out' (23). According to Sherman Cochran, C. K. Hsieh and Janis Cochran, since a woman marries 'out' of her family of origin and as an outsider 'into' her husband's family, she is thus considered a "'commodity' on which money had been lost" (3; Smith 326). Blatantly uninterested in his fourth daughter, Pandora's shopkeeper father barely raises an eyebrow, when she is married off to Jonah: "Do what you like. It's nothing to do with me", he tells her (Teo 102). Pandora is utterly dismayed by the father's callous nonchalance. She muses bitterly: "Yes, Papa. Thank you, Papa. Thank you for caring for me so little, for thinking of me so little, that what I want and what I do is a matter of complete indifference to you as long as you're not inconvenienced by any responsibility for me" (102-103).

Teo Hsu-Ming depicts marriage as no better than a commercial transaction between the two families involved. Madam Tay in Love and Vertigo had also intended to arrange a marriage for Jonah. She had negotiated for a "number of wealthy, cultured, beautiful Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese girls [to be] brought to the North Bridge Road house [where the Tays lived] and displayed *like heifers* . . ." (106, italics my own emphasis). It is ironic, that as a woman herself, Madam Tay has no obvious qualms about perpetuating this demeaning practice in which women are regarded as mere chattels, good and "goods for exchange or display" (K. Johnson 16).

The novel If the Moon Smiled offers a scathing commentary about how a woman is forced to marry for position, rather than for love. But more accurately, it shows how she is used merely as a pawn to boost her family's social standing and reputation. While the Chinese shopkeeper in Teo's novel is plainly unconcerned, Mahendra, in If the Moon Smiled, on the other hand, is overly zealous to get his daughter married off. Nelum is regarded as a prized commodity put on the marriage market to be sold to the highest bidder. The poor girl is totally aghast when she inadvertently comes across the advertisement posted by her parents in the Sri Lankan newspapers:

> *Govigama Buddhist parents permanently resident in Australia seek a doctor, engineer or lawyer, willing to reside overseas, for their only daughter, medical student, 5 ft 4 in. height, fair-complexioned, beautiful. Substantial dowry with a house in Australia. Please send horoscope and details of caste, religion etc. to . . .* (117)

For the hapless Nelum, "[t]hings had been set in motion, irrevocably" (117). The traditional system of arranged marriage is a tool of social oppression and systematic subjugation. It is a manifest measure to deny women any autonomy.

A 'victim' herself of an arranged and loveless marriage, Manthri is awkwardly ambivalent about her daughter's plight. Sonal Nerurkar points out that "[c]ompletely lacking a sense of self, [Manthri] allows her life choices to be dictated by others. It is only when she sees this pattern being repeated with the lives of her children that she begins to feel a certain degree of discomfort". When Nelum finally accedes to her father's wishes to marry, it was "the moment that [Manthri had] longed for, that [she had] dreaded" (Lokuge 167). In her heart, she wishes she could say to her daughter: "[F]orget Dad, forget cusom, live your life Nelum, the way you would. Go, go. Go, create your own destiny. I couldn't, but you can, my daughter, because you are strong enough" (171). Yet despite her deep reservations, Manthri enjoins her devastated daughter to accept her fate: "'There's nothing to be done, Nelum', she says in Sinhalese. 'We're born with our destinies written on our palms'" (117).

Preferring to suppress her fretful conscience, Manthri opts for passive acquiescence instead. Unable to discern its true meaning, Manthri's pursuit of detachment can also be seen as cowardice. She fools herself into thinking that it absolves her of any accountability towards her children, especially when they most need her intervention. Her avowed 'neutrality' is delusional. It translates into a determined refusal to take responsibility for her own life and to face the consequences of her (non) actions on her loved ones. This adamant apathy on her part invariably causes the grievous breakdown of her family. As Chandra Chari observes, "[w]hat seems on the surface to be a character in love with life, loving and giving, unravels – as the novel evolves – into an inward gazing, narcissistic woman".

Equally egoistic and deluded, Mahendra is smugly satisfied with the arrangement which would see his daughter settling down sensibly "to being a wife and mother" (Lokuge 167). Moreover, with "a gloating sense of achievement", he proceeds to plan out the next six or seven years of the newly wedded couple's life for them:

> They will go to England where Nelum's husband will take his postgraduate studies, and then they will return to Australia . . . Nelum's dowry will see them through her husband's

> postgraduate years. And what of her? She will have children, of course. So, she will give it all up – her career, her dreams of specialising in surgery, all of it . . . (167)

Nelum consents to marry a "high-caste, high-class science lecturer from Ratnapura" only to abscond a day before the wedding, resolving never to return (167). She finally takes "life into her two hands" (174). Her desperate assertion of autonomy is interpreted as overt rebellion, and aligned with a total negation or rejection of 'Sri Lankanness'. This 'shocking' noncompliance with 'tradition' shakes her family to the core.

In <u>If the Moon Smiled</u> the incongruity between Manthri and Mahendra as staunch believers in the Buddhist tenets of detachment and acceptance, and their hopeless incapability of practising them is highly ironic. Here, it is also worth noting that this aspect of Chandani's novel unconsciously or consciously echoes that found in <u>A Change of Skies</u>. The invocation "[s]ubject to decay are all component things" in Lokuge's text recalls Gooneratne's "*[s]abbe samkhara anicca*" or "[s]ubject to change are all component things" (Lokuge 172; Gooneratne 239). This notion of change and acceptance, "the Buddhist truth upon which all life for ever turns", is tragically lost on Manthri and Mahendra (Gooneratne 239). Ashley Halpe articulates the "horrifying inadequacy of both husband and wife to cope with the challenges of the new way of life".

Conversely, the second-generation of Asian-Australians embody "impermanence". Manthri sees it "most starkly in the actions of [her] daughter" (182). This impermanence is the new reality that Manthri shuns. Commenting on her novel, Chandani Lokuge says that:

> While there is often strain between migrant parents and children from any cultural background, the source of the divide in the case of Manthri and her son Devake and daughter Nelum is very specific. What happens to this family was that the mother came from a very conservative Sri Lankan Buddhist background, and she could not change . . .When the children changed, she wasn't able to compromise at all. There are some families who do quite well – what's common is the trauma of the process of adjusting in the end, some are successful, some lose it. (cited in "Sunday Observer" review)

As this review of the book in The Sunday Observer indicates, "there is no doubt that Manthri and her unbending husband are among the losers". In the wake of Devake's academic calamity and Nelum's spectacular desertion, Manthri wonders, "Is it shame that we all feel? Mahendra's anger overrides all else. It is frightening, yes, and tragic, to see" (211). In If the Moon Smiled, the gross inadequacy of Manthri and Mahendra in particular, to accept, forgive and move on, leaves "their son devastated and permanently damaged, their daughter a will-driven achiever, timetabling her visits to Mahendra in his isolation and Manthri in her psychiatric hospital . . . " (Halpe).

In Love and Vertigo, Teo demonstrates how change and inter-generational differences are forces that Jonah and Pandora struggle with as well. Much to the Patriarch's perpetual chagrin, his Australian-raised children are "not the filial, obedient, slipper-fetching children" that he expects (234). His sense of propriety is based on his own deeply ingrained conception of hierarchical social order, where the father is the unequivocal decision-maker and head of the family. When the Patriarch compares Sonny and Grace's attitude towards him with "his own respect towards his parents, he [is] simply bewildered" (234). His dogged resistance regarding the mutable parent-child dynamics in Australia therefore can only guarantee him acute disappointment and bitterness in the end.

The Patriarch's morose dissatisfactions stem from his petulance at having to be in Australia at all. It was Pandora who had so desperately wanted to migrate to Australia, while Jonah had wanted to stay behind. The irony is that now that "they were here, she wanted to be somewhere else" (172). Averse to leaving Malaysia and his mother, Jonah had "tried his best and was even heroic in that attempt, for the very act of immigration had terrified a man afraid of change" (10):

> To have crossed the boundary of the familiar into the foreign had been no easy feat for this reluctant Chinese Odysseus . . . Migration had exhausted him; after his initial euphoria, he made no attempt to root himself into his new country, content instead to burrow and hide

> himself in the home he was certain he would share with his wife long after the kids were gone. (10)

This certainty, however, is tragically violated by Pandora's suicide in Singapore. Of all the arduous adaptations the Tay family had to make, this change is the most poignant and piteous of them all.

Striving to adapt in Australia, Asian-Australian children experience "intense acculturative and intergenerational conflicts" (Rumbaut). Their outlook and attitudes often diverge significantly from their parents. As Nelum, the young protagonist in If the Moon Smiled, exhorts her parents, "You brought us to Australia. We're not Sri Lankans any more" (119). Intergenerational disagreements centre on the seemingly antithetical values and attitudes of the second-generation Asian-Australians as compared to the traditional Asian view of their parents. "Mahendra would say that this was the result if mixing with a culture that cared nothing for one's parents" (111). In the texts, what is decidedly missing from the relationships between the Asian-Australian children and their parents is a true sense of openness, understanding, mutual respect and consideration.

Like Nelum and Devake in Lokuge's If the Moon Smiled, Grace and Sonny in Teo's Love and Vertigo are caught between parental desire for conformity and the cultural norms of their adopted Australian homeland. These young Asian-Australians are challenged by a series of oppositional dichotomies, that is immigrant versus Australian, custom versus contemporary times, community versus the individual. As Grace points out, all the things they had wished for, "all the desires" would have been "interpreted as ingratitude" by their parents (193). Occupying the marginal and 'in-between' position of the second generation, the children of immigrants are inevitably "cultural conflict-bound" (Puar 23). Penelope Davie notes that the children, Grace and Sonny, "deal with the situation with a mixture of denial and emotional blackmail, until Sonny leaves for good to start his own family, and Grace seems to give up". Powerless against the "furnace roar and the searing gusts of the Patriarch's anger" or the

profound guilt induced by their mother playing the 'victim', the Tay children seek "refuge in resentful silence and [build] walls of unspoken hate" (Teo 196).

Chandani Lokuge shows how "patriarchal ambitions [brutally collide] with the individualist challenges of the adopted society" (Chari). Sonal Nerurkur remarks that : "Devake and Nelum raised in a different milieu, know they have choices. And [they] are willing to risk the disappointment they cause their parents. In Devake's case, his will is self-destructive. But Nelum is a survivor, she shines". She declares to her mother, "There are things I want to do with my life. Different from what you have done with yours. I want to specialise in surgery . . . I want a career" (119). It can be argued that Nelum's sheer ambition and headstrong nature motivate her more than any real sense of proto-feminist resistance. Grace in Love and Vertigo on the other hand, is left to reassemble the pieces of their shattered lives after her mother's death. She ends up staying at home in Sydney to tend to her bereaved and regretful father. As Grace muses sadly, "the blood of generations of dutiful daughters flows in my veins too" (282)

The highly gender-differentiated relationships depicted in the Asian-Australian texts require closer examination. The preference for males is unequivocal. This anachronistic contrivance creates great stress on the family. The considerable influence of Mahendra's fundamentalist mother on her son is apparent in If the Moon Smiled: "The smell of mother's milk had not left his lips when he married [Manthri] – he was that innocent . . . That is how [his mother] had brought up [her] son" (125). This, of course, suggests the reasons behind Mahendra's uncompromising self-righteousness. Similarly for the "first-born and most beloved son" Jonah in Love and Vertigo, he is the "alpha and omega of [his mother's] life; the beginning and the end" (93; 115). As a boy in Malaysia:

> Jonah's privileged position as the first son was further strengthened by the prestige of his academic achievements. Madam Tay, lavishing her love and cloying attention on him when she wasn't beating him in order to keep him humble and filial, segregated him from his other siblings. As in many other families, the children had grown up sharing one big bed, but Jonah

> was untangled from the kicking, struggling limbs of his siblings and given a bed of his own when he excelled at school. For Jonah was reserved the best room in the large house, furnished with a huge antique bed and carved rosewood desk and chair . . . At meal times, after Mr Tay had eaten, Madam Tay heaped into Jonah's rice bowl the choicest, juiciest morsels of suckling pig, braised duck, fried fish, barbecued pork, stir-fried liver and roast chicken . . . His brothers would then devour whatever pieces of meat remained, while his sisters were left with the gristle, bones and untouched dishes of stir-fried vegetables. (90)

The traditional and grossly inequitable value system in which female children are considered of less value than male children continues to dominate the lives of the characters even after they migrate to Australia. Oppressed by the dicta of patriarchy, it is highly ironical that it is the wife and mother figures, namely Pandora in Love and Vertigo and Manthri in If the Moon Smiled, who continue to perpetuate and even reinforce these notions. Having internalised such value systems, Manthri believes perhaps ruefully that, "How else can a woman be fulfilled in marriage but with a son who would continue his father's name?" (Lokuge 60) Later Nelum remembers her grandmother saying, "We all expected a boy . . . Everyone was disappointed when Nelum was born. The firstborn should always be a boy" (117). Teo's character Pandora was delighted by the birth of a son, and he would henceforth always hold "first place" in her life (13).

Both Pandora and Manthri have a son and daughter each, but it is clear that the sons are the favoured ones. Looking at a family photograph, it seemed to Nelum that "her mother had had no hand in creating her . . . It was always to be Devake, with her mother. That was nothing new. She had known this from the time she could understand anything at all" (117). Chandra Chari notes that in If the Moon Smiled: "Conditioned by her Buddhist upbringing into a mock-surrender mode while rebelling inwards at all times, Manthri, at the same time, adds her own endorsement of patriarchy in her blatant disregard for her daughter's desires and ambitions and in besotted adoration of her only son".

Familiar with abandonment, Grace in Love and Vertigo sadly admits that her mother had been ignoring her for most of her life: "I had been born in [Pandora's] distraction. She pushed me out of her body in a fit of absent-mindedness, her attention already engaged elsewhere" (173). Grace is painfully aware of how her mother and Sonny were "enclosed in a circle that excluded [her]" (189). It was pitiful the way Pandora "craved Sonny's forgiveness and friendship" (199). She would spend whole afternoons "cooking his favourite dish for dinner, only to be unspeakably hurt when he refused seconds" (196). Grace's excruciating childhood is spent scrambling against her brother (and father) for her mother's attention.

According to Grace, the Tays as a family, "were doomed to the humiliation of begging pathetically for love and attention from the one member who refused it to [them]" (199). Through Grace, Teo depicts the futility of this bizarre "merry-go-round of love" (191). Pandora wanted Sonny's love, Sonny wanted the Patriarch's, the Patriarch wanted his wife's, and Grace wanted her mother's. The absurdity of it is, as Grace says that they spend their lives "chasing love . . . and never catching up, never looking behind to see who might be offering it until it was too late" (199).

Unsurprisingly, the preference for the sons has the unfortunate effect of alienating the Asian-Australian daughters. Chandani Lokuge and Teo Hsu-Ming illustrate various incarnations of this estrangement. Grace's relationship with her brother Sonny in Love and Vertigo is based on "[p]ique and misunderstanding" accumulated over the years and which then became simply "a matter of habit" (199). In her adolescent years, however, Grace was frantic in her efforts to be close to Sonny. This is because he represented the only form of access she had to her mother. When Nelum finally heads back to Sri Lanka to see her mother after a year's absence in If the Moon Smiled, she wonders:

> How is it that Mum does not even ask what happened to me in the last year? Does she know that I returned to Australia? Doesn't she want to know? All she remembers is how I ran away from my wedding, disgracing them all. My happiness is not important to her. She will not understand. (184)

Manthri has the power to salvage the situation, but instead she repudiates Nelum's unspoken appeal for some sign of maternal assurance. She confirms Nelum's fears and commits the supreme error of inquiring only about Devake. Her daughter's chilly response tells Manthri more than she wants to know: "[Nelum] still holds me responsible. Free [Devake], she demands of me. Let him go" (185).

Manthri's obsessive devotion to her son is comparable to Madam Tay's (Jonah's mother) in its terrifying and inordinate intensity. Her blind glorification of Devake is all consuming. It invariably creates great friction between the siblings. In a feeble effort to rationalise her actions, she reveals her naiveté (or delusion) when she tells her daughter that "[y]our brother is weak and helpless, unlike you . . . [He is] nervous and weak. He cries and talks to me. He needs money . . . His eyes are glazed almost all the time now, and he smells strange and sweet" (222). Manthri's delirious incapacity to recognise the real truth of why Nelum "destest[s]" her brother is profoundly dismal.

Lokuge provokes the reader with potent questions. Why is Manthri, an otherwise caring mother, completely unable to demonstrate her true feelings of love and tenderness for her only daughter? Is it Manthri's lack of confidence or her fears of rejection? Is it her low self-esteem? Is it her pride? Is it her feelings of regret or guilt? Or is it a combination of all of these? Manthri muses sadly:

> Nelum kisses me unexpectedly. I do not move away. I do not enfold her in my arms. I have waited so long for her to reach me. Is there regret? No. No. Had I not sought refuge in detachment? Now, suddenly, this desire to cling . . . She shrugs my hand away. The gesture is familiar, like the searing bruise that always accompanies it. (187)

Manthri wonders if her daughter's brusque behaviour towards her is Nelum's "final victory" over her (188). However, Nelum's resentment and hostility towards her mother is perhaps understandable. Accustomed to the inconstancy of her mother's affection and attention,

Nelum builds a wall around herself as protection: "The child tries to climb onto the mother's lap but her brother is already in it. She runs away hiding hurt-filled eyes. She returns less and less" (115). Nelum defensive response becomes reflexive: "I [Manthri] kiss her. I put my arms around her. Surprised, she bends to hide her face in my hair. And then, as suddenly, she draws away into herself. She will not fall into the trap of my tenderness, pride, sadness . . ." (198).

Exasperated and anguished by her mother's abandonment, Nelum realizes that she has to fend for herself and reclaim her rightful place in the world. She finds self-definition in her profession as "the surgeon" (199). Proudly announcing to her mother that, "I've got a [scholarship] . . . I'm going to England . . . I'm going to specialise in surgery in the UK", it is obvious that she has "created her [own] world. All by herself" (198-199). Furthermore, it is clear that she needs "no one's blessings" (199). Her mother's apparent betrayal pushes Nelum to emotional and financial independence. But spurned by the one whose approval and encouragement she so desperately seeks, all her successes are hollow.

Mahendra "hates [the] achievements for which [Nelum] had renounced his ambitions for her" (211). Chandani Lokuge explores how characters such as Mahendra bring with them to Australia these gendered practices inherent in their Asian origins, culture and way of life 'back home'. The father and daughter relationship of Mahrenda and Nelum is even more complex because he "hates Nelum for not being his son" (211):

> In his own way, he loved Nelum. With a curious, detached kind of pride. He often wished she was his son . . . She was like a boy in her ambition, in her determination to achieve, he would say, watching her stride across the earth. She made the sacrifice worthwhile . . . Because of her, he could raise his head in an alien land. But, because she was his daughter, he decided to marry her off. And now he spurns her. Bringing her up has been a waste of energy, he says harshly, like cutting twigs to fence the river. (173)

The irony is that Nelum resembles her father in more ways than they really care to see or admit to themselves.

The father-son relationship in Love and Vertigo is extremely unusual, if not downright abnormal. From the very start, the Patriarch was "incurably jealous" and resentful of his own son (13). Threatened by "the little Great One", Jonah "immediately shoved Augustus back into his proper filial place by calling him Sonny" (13):

> Everyone assumed that, like most Chinese fathers, the Patriarch would have been ecstatic that his child was a son. But the Patriarch didn't like other males. He had grown up in a household where he had always been the centre of all female attention. He was the first-born son and heir, until he was sent to an exclusive Anglican boys' school in Singapore, he had no conception that he might not be the sun around which other worlds revolved . . . Even when he met and courted his wife, he rapidly became the favourite male in her household. (13)

This Alpha Male position was one that Jonah was unwilling to relinquish, and the thought of any form of competition was "an intolerable situation" (13): "Though he claimed to hate it, Jonah had spent too long being the centre of Madam Tay's attention and devotion" (111). He would therefore "demand the same from his wife" (111).

Jonah's hostility toward his son was certainly anomalous: "How such an Oedipal situation could have arisen in a Chinese household [will] always [remain] a puzzle. For a man who venerated his Chinese culture, this rejection of his first-born son was distressingly un-Chinese" (13). With characteristic wit and her "darkly comic vision of life", Teo shows how the Patriarch's inane conduct subverts any hope for normal parent-child relations (Nowra):

> In corrupting Augustus to Sonny, the Patriarch had either demonstrated great prescience or a characteristic determination to predestine his first-born to a life of ridiculous banality. There were to be no great surgical skills nor sporting prowess, no gifted musical abilities nor even the comfort of middle-class mediocrity for Augustus. (13-14)

The rift between generations widens with the presence of grandparents who visit from the home country. Arriving in Sydney for a long visit, Madam Tay's presence has a divisive effect on the already fragile Tay family. The relationship between the Madam Tay, her daughter-in-law, Pandora and her grandchildren in Love and Vertigo becomes plainly belligerent. Exploiting her status and prerogative as the older relative, Madam Tay's "domineering, fault-finding" behaviour had simply to be accepted by all (208). As Grace says, "[i]mpotence fed our petty acts of spite" (205). From playful subversion, these develop into a full-on "vindictive campaign" (Teo 209). Initially, Sonny would just make fun of his grandmother and her ill-fitting dentures, often doing this behind her back, "especially when she'd been scolding [his] Mum for being extravagant, lazy, a bad wife or a hopeless daughter-in-law" (205):

> [He would mimic Madam Tay], in an elaborate Marcel Marceau routine in which he groped the surfaces of the coffee tables and benchtops blindly, sighing a long drawn out '*Aieee-yah*'. Then he'd pretend to find the dentures and polish them in the hollow of his armpit. He grimaced hideously, contorting his mouth into weird shapes that resembled Munch's *Scream* as he carefully inserted the invisible dentures and mumbled them into place. (205)

Although Pandora would admonish Sonny for being "so naughty", and would tell him that he "shouldn't show such disrespect to [his] grandmother", she could not help laughing herself (205). She was secretly "gratified that her son took her side when her own husband would not" (205). Of course, Madam Tay found out soon enough and would "waddle off furiously to tell the Patriarch" (205). Totally outraged by their insolence, their father ranted: "'Come on, *lah*! What do you think you're doing? . . . I'm fed up with you all. You deserve two tight slaps'. And that's what Sonny got, and [Grace] got the same because [she'd] laughed at Sonny's performance" (206). In addition to this physical punishment, Sonny was "grounded for two weeks and had his pocket money suspended for that period" (206). This of course just fuelled Sonny's resentment against his father and his hatred of his grandmother. Madam Tay had come to Australia "determined to love [Sonny] because he was the only son of her eldest son", but this favour was to be quickly lost (202).

The acrimony continues to escalate with the children engaging in "acts of retribution", despite the punishment meted out "fast and thick" by their father (207). Their grandmother's vicious tactic of playing one family member against another creates irreparable damage. In their own way, the Tay children are staging protest against Madam Tay who they consider a malcontent and evil tyrant. Their "malevolent spite" towards Madam Tay, nonetheless, becomes "a knee-jerk reaction" (207). As Grace recalls:

> If [Madam Tay] grumbled to the Patriarch about us, then suddenly, mysteriously, her dentures disappeared and were found hours later half ground into the dirt of the tomato patch. We captured huntsman spiders and released them into her room. The hot water system in our house was unreliable so when she took a shower, we ran into the kitchen and laundry and turned on the hot water taps at full blast so that she would suddenly be flooded with cold water. She complained to the Patriarch about all these things but she couldn't prove that we had actually done anything, and even he began to think that she might be a bit paranoid. (207)

Embodying the traditional and old world ways, the grandparents often appear as anachronistic oddities to their diasporic grandchildren. In Solitude of Illusions, Khalid Sharif visits Javed, his son, in Melbourne, and discovers that "a lack of commonality made it impossible to establish even a fundamental line of communication" with his Australian-born grandchildren (Khan 76):

> Their interests were outside his experiences, and the cultural ethos which nourished their personalities were beyond his emotional grasp. They were friendly and considerate enough in a polite and distant kind of way. It had been drummed into them that behaviour towards a grandparent in an Indian family could not be too casual. Familiarity could be misinterpreted as rudeness. (76)

Before his father's arrival, Javed tries hard to communicate to his sons about "those conventions which characterised respect for older relatives" (76). This however, "merely had

the effect of distancing the boys from their grandfather from the moment they greeted him at the airport" (76). The boys' bafflement about "what *tahzeeb* exactly entailed, and their inability to understand the distinguishing subtleties of good and bad manners, made them reticent and cautious" (76). Needless to say, they were thoroughly confused about the tongue-lashing they had received from their mother after they had "teased Khalid Sharif about the direction he faced during prayers. Good-humoured fun, they deduced, was totally unacceptable" (76).

Conclusion

The families in Chandani Lokuge's If the Moon Smiled, Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies, Adib Khan's Solitude of Illusions and Teo Hsu-Ming's Love and Vertigo are fractured, flawed and fallible. Valourised as meritorious and commendable, the 'Asian' values that control their lives back 'home' are nevertheless subject to rigorous reappraisal. It is clear that all people are ethnically located and their ethnic identities are crucial to their subjective perception(s) of who they are. The experiences and outlook of the Asian-Australian parents in his or her culture of origin undoubtedly shape the overall tone for their families in Australia. However, while sympathising with the parents' difficult task in raising children in an unfamiliar environment, the writers acknowledge that there is a need for greater tolerance and understanding, as well as the acceptance of the altered environment and circumstances.

Within the South-Asian and Southeast Asian families depicted in the novels is "a hierarchical social order featuring a series of superior and subordinate individuals" (Mathews). But this hierarchy proves to be difficult to negotiate in Australia, where it often seems that a different set of rules apply. For all the Asian-Australian families, life in the new country throws up numerous challenges for both the parents and the children. The challenges include the thorny issues of parental expectations versus freedom of choice and individual autonomy, which in turn are related to concerns about education, dating and marriage. The Asian parents are strict in the rules of conduct they lay down for children.

For the first-generation Asian-Australian immigrant, education is a critical, if not the only means of social and upward mobility, hence the sometimes undue demands on the children to achieve success. Similarly, marriage raises questions about values and expectations, not to mention gender issues. It is undoubtedly a potent site of delicate cultural cooperation or violent clash. As Nelum in If the Moon Smiled bitterly observes, marriages may start off "dressed up in pearly white sequins . . . [but end] up stripped to the bone" (Lokuge 116). For women still made responsible for the discourse of upholding tradition, familial expectations are even more oppressive.

The gendered nature of familial relations is explicit. Female stoicism, oppression and the limited tactical positions conferred upon the women within the patriarchal economy are familiar tropes. Pandora in Love and Vertigo and Manthri If the Moon Smiled both struggle against their respective husbands, "only to succumb to the inevitability of disillusionment and defeat" (Teo 25). Pandora's daughter Grace is candid as she contemplates her mother's life and her lineage. Hers "was a family conceived in violence" and "raised in sullen resentment and unspoken grief" (25). Among all the female characters, Nelum in Lokuge's novel emerges as the most resilient. But her victory is paid for in festering bitterness and self-imposed emotional exile. The preference for the sons over the daughters depicted in If the Moon Smiled and Love and Vertigo is extremely disconcerting. This is because it is a jarring revelation of the unjust and sexist ideologies that have determined and condoned such practices.

However, it appears that the constructions of the Asian-Australian men in the texts are trite.[1] One construction of them as patriarchal and tyrannical – "the bred-in-the-bone chauvinism of

[1] While there have been quite a lot of academic works looking at representations of Asian-Australian women, there far fewer regarding Asian(-Australian) masculinities. For some related examples, see Tseen Khoo's chapter "Angry Yellow Men: Asian Masculinities". PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1998; Allan Luke, "Representing and Reconstructing Asian Masculinities: This is not a Movie Review". Social Alternatives 16.3 (1997): 32-34; King–Kok Cheung, "Of Men and Men. Reconstructing Chinese American Masculinity". Other

these Oriental men" – is associated most notably with the first-generation Asia-born characters: Mahendra in If the Moon Smiled, Jonah Tay in Love and Vertigo, and to a less extent Javed Sharif in Solitude of Illusions (Teo 248). The alternative construction of Asian-Australian males, as weak, ineffectual or mediocre is no better. It is associated with the second-generation Asian-Australian youths: Devake in Lokuge's novel who is described as "a weed of a son who bludges off" his mother; and the hapless Sonny in Teo's who was "cursed from birth" (Lokuge 220; Teo 20). Needless to say, both constructions of Asian-Australian masculinities are highly unfavourable.

Are these just stereotypes or a scathing and frightening reflection of reality? It is certainly interesting to note J. Lim's comments in a review of Love and Vertigo for the Chinese Australian Forum of New South Wales. She writes that she winced at the Teo's "blunt and cutting descriptions", particularly of the Patriarch. Lim says, "Ouch, that was a touch too close to the bone – I am sure I have met a few incarnations of the Patriarch in Sydney". There are also probably some Mahendras and Javeds too, and maybe a few Devakes and Sonnys as well.

The perception of Asian men as emasculated thus reflects the inextricability between gender and race. Asian-Australian women writers, in this case, Chandani Lokuge and Teo Hsu-Ming should perhaps, as King-Kok Cheung suggests, "continue to expose and combat Asian sexism, but they should also guard against internalising and reproducing racial stereotypes, thereby reinforcing the deep-seated biases of the [Western] reading . . . public" (176). As an Asian-Australian male writer, Adib Khan[2] is in a difficult position, with the complex task of negotiating the intricate web of gender and racial agendas.

Sisterhoods. Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Colour. Ed. Sandra Kumanmoto Stanley. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1998, 173-199.

[2]In this category, I would include the other Asian-Australian male writer I have used in other chapters of my thesis - Christopher Cyrill, the author of The Ganges and its Tributaries.

Through the mediations of the various characters, we "perceive and ponder the multiplying hurts and dubieties that seem the inescapable result of transplantation" (Halpe). The novels are therefore rich repositories of life experiences, good, bad and ugly. The authors offer accounts of human foibles, of men, women and children. Ironies and contradictions abound in the stories of Lokuge, Teo, Gooneratne and Khan. They tell of families full of honourable intentions and eager hopes, who despite this, are infinitely disjointed by the cultural and generational divide.

7 'ASIAN-AUSTRALIAN' – WALKING THE TIGHTROPE HYBRIDITY, INTER-MARRIAGE, IDENTITY

To paraphrase Wing Tek Lum: "I am not Asian in Australia, nor an Australian of Asian ancestry . . . I consider myself Asian-Australian. The hyphen is like the tightrope I walk . . . I draw from both cultures and yet I am part of neither" (cited in Newman 15).[1] However, for Asian-Australians, particularly those of mixed ancestry[2], hybridity offers the opportunity to belong to both or all[3] of those spheres. Stuart Hall points out that the migrant experience is characterised by "a process of unsettling, recombination, hybridisation and the 'cut-and-mix' which takes its cue not only from local politics, but also from the global movement of post-colonial ideas and aspirations" (cited in Rizvi "Racism" 180). Hybridity arises as a central idea in the emergent "area of cross-cultural, intercultural, transcultural encounters between 'Asia' and 'Australia'" (Ang "Introduction" xviii). According to Ien Ang:

> Hybridity is a heavily contested term . . . [which] stresses mixture, cultural interchange and mutual cross-fertilisation . . . [It is] also a process of disruption, disarticulation, critical interrogation: intercultural contact with the intermingling of different cultural groups, traditions and forms [which] always involves the destabilisation and contestation of prevailing cultural purities, essentialisms and chauvinisms. ("Introduction" xix)

In Australia, race, immigration and multiculturalism are volatile topics which are subject to constant scrutiny. Allan and Carmen Luke have pointed out that "the spectre of interrace" is often contrived as part of a "vocal political backlash against Asian immigration, multicultural and indigenous rights" ("Theorising"). Such moral panics result in a demonisation of the

[1]Wing Tek Lum is a contemporary Asian-American poet.

[2]Also referred to as "Eurasians" in this chapter.

[3]In some cases, the mixture of ancestry can include more than two cultures.

'Other' and obscures underlying social contradictions (Werbner "Essentialising" 211). Furthermore, they prey on the public's consternation about the "breakdown of social life itself, the coming of chaos, [and] the onset of anarchy" (Hall "New Ethnicities" 322-2). It is significant that the official abrogation of the White Australia Policy in 1972 was galvanised by a "benchmark legal case" revolving around "an interethnic marriage between an Anglo-Australian woman and a Filipino man" (Luke and Luke "Theorising").

In November 1996, the mayor of Port Lincoln in South Australia was alleged to have referred to intermarried partners and their children, specifically Asian-Australian families, as "mongrels" (Luke and Luke "Theorising"). Reported internationally, these comments provoked howls of protest from many. The Prime Minister John Howard and his coalition government on their part attracted much criticism for their indifferent stance and total lack of censure. As Luke and Luke point out:

> Within polycultural states, we can see the complexity and polysemy of the debate over hybridity at work when the aforementioned Australian mayor and Salman Rushdie both can deploy the term 'mongrel' with quite contrary connotations and political intents. What is striking about all public debates over race is their continued reliance on the historical terminologies and discourses of scientific racism and colonialism, albeit sometimes in mutated, mimicked and deliberately reappropriated forms. ("Theorising")

Interracial marriages are important to/in the study of Australian multiculturalism because they are the site at which 'Asianness' and 'Australianness' may be relinquished or reconfigured. The figures speak for themselves. According to demographers, Janet Penny and Siew-Ean Khoo, some 16 percent (600,000) of 3.7 million Australian couples in 1991 were formed by intermarriage between an overseas-born person and an Australian-born person (31). Charles Price estimates that by the year 2000, 40 percent of all Australian marriages will be mixed interethnic, interracial or intercultural (6-9). According to Luke and Carington, "[i]nterracialism is not a single or simple 'clash' of cultures or race ideologies but is the emblematic moment and site of 'third space' otherness". The interracial family formation

therefore "embodies diasporic hybridity, insider-outsider, and the politics of othering at the level of the subject, not abstracted community or 'culture'" (Luke and Carington).

This chapter will deal specifically with representations of 'dangerous mixings' and markers of hybridity. I examine the significant issues surrounding mixed-race relations, interracial marriages[4] and miscegenation, as well as the subsequent responses to them, both positive and negative. In addition, I will look at the experiences of mixed-race Asian-Australian children. As the physical and literal embodiment of hybridity, their experiences with racism are especially poignant and indicative. I examine how these forms of hybridity are delineated in Asian-Australian texts, namely Simone Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made, Ang Chin Geok's Wind and Water, Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments and Christopher Cyrill's The Ganges and its Tributaries.

In this chapter, I consider how contemporary cultural hybridity "manages to be both transgressive and normal, and why it is experienced as dangerous, difficult or revitalising despite its quotidian normalcy" (Werbner Introduction 4). Why do borders, boundaries and pure 'identities' remain so critical in modern 'multicultural' Australia? I question whether the encounter with the Other presupposes a replaying of old identities or the invention of new ones. This chapter will also explore the inextricable connection between race and gender and how they continue to be implicated in the formation of Asian-Australian cultural identities.

If purity and exclusivity are primary determinants in the conception of identity, then hybridity is a threat to the fullness of selfhood. In The Ganges and its Tributaries and Seasonal Adjustments, cultural hybridity, as epitomised by mixed marriages, becomes "a reflexive moral battleground between cultural purists and cultural innovators" (Werbner Introduction 12). These responses are conspicuously divided along generational lines. The "cultural purists" tend to be of the older generation. They believe that 'tradition' is immutable and should always continue; if changes occur they are to be mourned. "Cultural innovators" on

the other hand, recognise hybridity's potential for inclusivity. For them, a hybrid society creates a new social order through synthesis and the combination of differences.

In the diasporic Indian community of Cyrill's The Ganges and its Tributaries, hybridity evoke different responses. The protagonist, Christopher, recalls that when he was thirteen years old, his Indian-born maternal grandfather was already talking of arranging a marriage for him. Although a migrant to Australia, Christopher's grandfather still perceived mixed relations as potential hazard to the sense of moral integrity and a likely source of conflict.

> 'Not long now', my grandfather said. 'You'll have to take him back [to India] to find a wife.'
> 'At least ten years, Uncle', my father said . . . 'But there's plenty of good girls here [in Australia] too' . . .
> 'The longer you wait,' my grandfather said, 'the more chances he'll marry some Aussie girl. Just how many boyfriends they have before they are married'.
> 'Well, he was born here, Uncle, naturally his taste is different, I can't ask for dowry and all. Plenty of time, anyway. The main thing is that the blood is good'. (100)

Racial crossing by way of outmarriage is regarded as a threat to the purity of family lineage. The irony is that Christopher's bloodline is already mixed. He was an Anglo-Indian who had "inherited [his] blue eyes from [his] paternal grandfather" (Cyrill 40).

Johnson and Warren assert that "[t]hough the nuptials are between two individuals, mixed marriages are the object of attention in every society because of their symbolic meaning" (1). Thus in Australia and elsewhere, marriage is seldom about mere individuals, but often involves an (un)equal relationship between groups – families, social classes, ethnic groups and cultural groups. Furthermore, Augustin Barbara contends that "[m]arriage to a foreigner always upsets the existing equilibrium in a family" (23). Mary Sissons and Meena Krishnan point out that cross-cultural marriages "confront more than incipient ethnocentrism in both societies, challenging the very notion of what constitutes a 'proper' marriage" (172-3).

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[44]Mixed marriages here are taken to mean any marriage across ethnic or racial lines.

In Adib Khan's Seasonal Adjustments, marriage in Iqbal's conservative Bangladeshi family was "a family obligation" (238). Its main objective was to ensure the continuation of the family name and upholding the family "*izzat*" (239). His father's disapproval and bitterness about his marriage to Michelle, "a white girl", a "foreigner" and a "Christian" is obvious (238). Iqbal is thus seen as "dithering unnecessarily about ending a marriage which was never destined to last" (238). The irony is that "Michelle gets the same kind of message from Keith, her father" (238). Confronted with the numerous and "insidious prejudices that had attacked [their] marriage", their break-up seemed inevitable (66).

Iqbal concludes that his now ex-wife must have been finally "worn down" by the constant remonstrance of her family and friends to "a state of meek surrender" (66). In his head, he can almost hear the smug voices of their detractors: "It's a shame it happened. But we tried to tell you, love. It couldn't work. He is . . . he is different. It doesn't matter how long he's been here or how educated he is. He doesn't think like we do. Our ways are different" (66-67). Yet despite his marital woes, Iqbal displays impressive judicious insight. Defiantly, he maintains that:

> Broadening my outlook was not a mistake. Experiencing cultural diversity and learning from it, discarding superstition and removing ignorance . . . they were not mistakes. Marrying Michelle was not a mistake! How can anything that has brought me happiness and made me think be a mistake? (237)

However, Iqbal does concede that it is not easy "to accommodate people like [him] - bumbling agents of change who spread themselves across the globe and unwittingly seek to impose their hybrid perceptions on closeted cultures" (217).

Do "visions" of the 'exotic' foreigner "seduce or repel" (Breger and Hill 1)? The protagonists in the novels of Adib Khan, Christopher Cyrill, Simone Lazaroo and Ang Chin Geok cope

differently with the lived experiences of a mixed marriage. While Cyrill and Khan unequivocally embrace mixed unions as something liberating and progressive, Lazaroo and Ang are more ambivalent and apprehensive. For the latter, marrying out is largely associated with feelings of cultural dispossession and alienation. These divergent views can be attributed to the gendered nature of these experiences. Gender appears as a crucial factor in the shaping of attitudes and opinions, not to mention its effect on family relations and identifications. The gender dimension is linked to dominant and cultural assumptions, and also to expectations about women and woman's place in society/the home. As the other 'Other', these women face the additional conflicts between racist and sexist oppression, as well as between nationalist, class and feminist agendas.

In their various studies on interracial marriages, Allan and Carmen Luke have commented on the visibility of mixed-race families in historically and predominantly white Anglo-European Australia, and the consequences for society.[5] Like Iqbal and Michelle in Seasonal Adjustments, the female protagonists in Lazaroo's The World Waiting to be Made and Ang's Wind and Water see race as the principle marker of their difference. It is a trigger for an assortment of overt and furtive racisms from family, community and friends. Race markers also serve to highlight class distinctions. Race can "determine enhanced or diminished status (marrying up or down in the eyes of the community and family)", along with oblige or inhibit acceptability (Luke and Carington).

Mixed marriages are often treated with suspicion precisely because "they call into question the boundaries between Self and Other" (Breger and Hill 9). One of the main protagonists in Wind and Water is a Singaporean-Chinese woman named Ong Peng An. She meets Chris Hamilton, an *angmo* from Australia whom she eventually marries. After they are married, she moves back to Australia with her new husband. It is a rude awakening for the young woman.

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[5]See works used in this chapter and listed in works cited.

The contempt of white people although not new to her, is shocking because it is even perpetrated within the intimate circle of so-called 'family. She recounts:

> I had not anticipated the strength of the disapproval I would face from my husband's family . . . I found myself within a community of people whose feelings towards me were very different from my family's love and desire for my happiness. Nothing in my Singaporean upbringing had prepared me for this solid wall of antipathy, of contempt and hostility on the part of my in-laws . . . The influence my husband's family had over him was as powerful as any feudal Chinese household: I had walked into an English family who were practising Dickensian notions of marriage in twentieth-century Australia; at least those were the standards they enforced on me. (Ang 221)

The Hamiltons' notions of superiority were premised on Peng An's undesirable alterity, and their staunch belief in the merit of Anglo exclusivity and purity. Their conception of her apparent difference justifies their power to judge and exclude. It also exonerates their negative valuing of her worth as wife to their son/brother and as a member of their family. This comes as a nasty shock to Peng An, because "[i]n Singapore, though [her] family was not rich, [she] had been a member of the elite Hokkien community, the wealthiest and most powerful group in Singapore society" (221). She is therefore incredulous and indignant that in her husband's family's house she was "barely tolerated", and regarded only as "a second-class citizen with no rights" (221).

The animosity encountered by the 'minority' partner is not restricted to just the Anglo-side: "Whiteness is unmarked and unremarkable in dominant white societies" like Australia, "yet [it] becomes marked as different, as other, in non-white environments and locations", such as the Singapore setting in Lazaroo's novel (Luke and Luke "Theorising"). In The World Waiting to be Made, the narrator's Anglo-Australian mother tells her daughters about "an Australian woman who married into a Singaporean family" (146). The Australian woman in her mother's story was called "First-wife-to-be" and the Singaporean man "Mr Annunciato" (146). Her mother gave the characters in her story "new names", because it "made it easier for

her to tell a story that was very close to home" (146). This story was of course, her mother's own – it paralleled her mother's ill-fated marriage to the Eurasian Mr Dias of Singapore.

In her mother's story, Australian First-wife-to-be meets Mr Annunciato while they were both students in Melbourne. Pregnant with his child, she arrives in Singapore to marry him. From the very start, however, she is subjected to the derision of his Singaporean family. On the morning of the wedding, she awakes to find a pretty brass bell, the size of a teacup, hanging from her bedroom door. She is also startled to see Mr Annunciato's oldest sister hovering nearby totally dressed in black:

> 'It's a wedding day custom', Mr Annunciato's oldest sister said, and then gestured towards the bell on the door, 'and you'll need this. To put blood on the sheets tonight.' The sister laid a dead pullet at First-wife-to-be's feet . . . First-wife-to-be didn't know whether the sister had given her a gift or an insult. (150)

With her husband's family preferring to signal their disapproval in surreptitious ways, the rejection is indirect and insidious. The sister's oblique gesture is couched in terms of an implicit moralising judgement of the Australian 'First-wife-to-be'. This subtle and tacit chastisement is also indicative of the gendered nature ascribed to the indiscretion. The ignominy of being "soiled goods" is bestowed on First-wife-to-be, because she had not waited till she got "the ring on [her] finger first" (Lazaroo 103, 147). She is regarded as "white trash" and "bad blood" by her husband's relatives (129, 225).

For racially marked subjects such as 'First-wife-to-be', becoming the other takes place within culture-specific racialising practices. Mundane everyday activities work to juxtapose her difference, both physical as well as cultural ones:

> Every morning her huge bloomers flapped on the washing line next to the neat dancing of Mr Annunciato's sisters' panties. And her long hair blocked the drains and took up much more space in the air around her than the impeccably bobbed and lacquered hair of Mr Annunciato's sisters. (Lazaroo 150)

First-wife-to-be's perceived lack of feminine delicacy is a matter of scorn: "She was resigned to the humiliation of being a huge tub of a woman amongst a fine-boned delicate family" (151). Underlying the vitriolic hostility of her in-laws was the sheer ignorance of the hapless young Australian pertaining to the local cultural practices. Unfamiliar with the dipper bathing procedure in Singapore for example, she pulls on a shower cap and tries to "step into the earthenware shanghai jar full of cold water" (150-1).

Similarly in Wind and Water, it was only later that Peng Ann realised "how ignorant and unprepared she was for marriage" (219). Having no prior knowledge about her Australian in-laws (having never met them until she married), and being even less aware of the ensuing issues, the failure of her marriage was clearly imminent:

> [Her] experience at a girls-only school and a few years working in a British firm were limited preparations for the huge decision [she] was making: to marry a man who knew nothing about [her] culture and take [herself] to a country of which [she] knew nothing. [She] had no firsthand knowledge of marriage as it existed in Western society. (210)

Filled with regret, she "struggled in confusion and resentment to hold together the fragments of a marriage which should never have been made" (219).

In The World Waiting to be Made, "First-wife-to-be" felt as if she was entering "a long dark tunnel on her wedding day" (151). This is because her romantic fantasies of marrying into "a happy, uncomplicated Asian family" were based on untenable stereotypes (151). But "what she had in fact married into was a family enmeshed in the religions and institutions of colonial rule" (151). She "became terribly afraid of offending, due to the confusion about custom and sensibility" in her husband's Eurasian family (151). Sadly for First-wife-to-be, she always remained "a foreigner" to her husband and "he kept her a foreigner, whether they were in his country [Singapore] or hers [Australia]" (265-267).

Rosemary Breger and Rosanna Hill point out that the definition of membership is always "relational and situational; in other words, who is an insider can be defined only against who is an outsider" (8). In exercising their power by naming and treating the new Australian bride (First-wife-to-be) as the Other, the 'Annunciatos' are ironically perpetuating the long-standing discriminatory practices that they themselves have been subjected to. It is as if this Eurasian family has decided to exact a form of revenge as retaliation for their chronicled status as outsiders.

The power to name the Other, as Allan and Carmen Luke put it, is "usually attributed to the hegemonic centre of unracialised and unmarked 'whiteness' of dominant Western culture" ("Theorising"). In Ang's Wind and Water, the racism encountered by Peng An while living in North Queensland with her young family is a result of the prevalent and "unchallenged view" in Australia of the time that "a chink was lucky to be allowed into the lucky country" (222). It was unequivocal in that part of the country that "you were a white Australian or you were nothing" (276). Considering Queensland's history, the racist opposition Peng An encountered is unsurprising. After all, Queensland was "the last Australian state to abandon exclusionist policies in the early 1980s and the last state to legislate multicultural policies in the late 1980s" (Luke and Luke "Interracial" 736).[6]

The distrust and contempt accorded to individuals in mixed-race relationships can also be seen in Lazaroo's novel. After her marriage breaks up, the narrator's Anglo-Australian mother takes her daughters to a church in Perth seeking friendship and acceptance. But instead they find sharp hostility and stinging condemnation. They had "hoped that the answers to some of their questions would be revealed, but at the end of the sermon only the low murmurs of opinion exchanged by the faithful in the congregation rang in their ears" (143):

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[6]Queensland is generally "considered the most conservative state in Australia and only recently emerged from three uninterrupted decades of National Party right-wing governments that actively opposed civil liberties legislation, indigenous entitlements, immigration, and affirmative action policies for women and minorities (Luke and Luke "Theorising").

- Perhaps she made him do it
- He was *a bit darker than civilised*, of course
- It puts a burden on the taxpayers . . . (italics my own emphasis, 143)

The racism in place here is representative of "the epistemological practices that rely on the construction of recognition and attribution of represented difference" (Luke and Luke "Interracial" 731). Identifications of skin colour and physical features are typically equated in the public imaginary as part of a 'readable' code of difference. "[B]ound by their own ethnocentrism", the dominant society deems mixed couples as somehow 'unnatural' and "deviant" (Johnson and Warren 7).

The narrator's mother encounters immense social persecution for marrying into 'colour'. Society "reconstructs her 'whiteness' orientalising her identity in view of her interracial relationship" (Ryan). Accompanying the coerced relinquishment of her 'whiteness' was the "reevaluation of her moral value" as a decent woman, a good mother and respectable wife (Ryan). Even at the supermarket, the "low murmurs of opinion continue behind the toiletries aisle, where people felt sure their words were cushioned by so many soft and perfumed spells":

- They were both fringe elements. What can you expect?
- Perhaps he didn't really love her.
- It's a wife's duty to always make herself available.
- It could have been a heat of the moment thing.
- It was when all those children came. Like rabbits.
- Mixed marriages never work.
- It takes two to tango.
- She let herself go. (Lazaroo 143)

Her 'whiteness' is socially and political constructed, as a "signifier of community" (Wobbe). Having strayed beyond her perceived role, she is regarded "not just a threat to womanhood, but to society as a whole" (Ryan). The narrator's mother's decision to marry an outsider,

especially those constructed negatively, is analogous to betrayal. In the minds of her critics, the resulting hybrid children are moral markers of contamination, failure, or regression.

Marriage outside the group carries with it the danger of impurity or contamination, as personified by the 'mixed race' child. As Nikos Papastergiadis articulates:

> Hybridity evokes narratives of origin and encounter. Whenever the process of identity formation is premised on an exclusive boundary between 'us' and 'them', the hybrid, born out of the transgression of this boundary, figures as a form of danger, loss and degeneration. (259)

Whether it highlights physiological or cultural difference, hybridity serves primarily "as a metaphor for the negative consequences of racial encounters, or a set of mercurial metaphors" (Papastergiadis 258).

In The World Waiting to be Made the notion of 'race' emerges as the imposition of a historically or socially constructed identity, that is being named as other by others. The Christao Eurasians in Lazaroo's story are the descendants of the "muddy-skinned speakers of many languages, found only in Malacca! From the union of Portugal's slow runners and Malaya's easy lays" (129):

> [T]he Malays called them geragok, the name of a shrimp Malaccans use to make a pungent paste with, or cempur, the name of a salad made up of sundry leftovers. The Chinese called them chap cheng, meaning 'mixed up' and carrying connotations of craziness. The Portuguese called them mestico, the name of a Portuguese coin of some paltry denomination, as if these people could be easily bought. The British randomly used any or all of these insults against them and also called them in-betweens, as if they didn't really belong anywhere. (40)

As products of hybridity, Eurasians carry with them historical association of colonial and white supremacist ideologies. Through myths, norms and diffuse world-views, the social organisation, skewed and racist as it is, is portrayed as a 'natural' order. The Eurasians are

consistently categorised as a distinct and undesirable social group – a caste or a minority. Thus, Eurasian (as well as Asian-Australian) identity are not "essences" but "positionings", resulting from "the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall "Cultural Identity" 394-5, cited in Luke and Luke "Interracial" 732).

The events in the last section of Wind and Water are recounted by Lettie, Peng An's young mixed-race Asian-Australian daughter. Lettie is perturbed by her mother's seemingly nonchalant and contradictory racist attitudes. She recalls how she is told that "to this day" in her mother's birth-place in Singapore, "they still call Eurasians *grago*, the same word they use for the krill the Portuguese fishermen in Melaka collected in nets and made into the foul-smelling briny sauce called *chincharo*. '*Gragos* stink', [her] mother explained" (287). This example of 'interpersonal' racism in Singapore points to the way in which the taken-for granted practices of social interaction are based on embedded historical patterns of domination and subordination. Lettie concedes that her mother's family, the Ongs, "like most Chinese, are terribly racist; they believe themselves superior to everyone else" (288). The irony is that the Ongs "never dreamed that one of their girls would one day have Eurasian children; it was a bit of a blow" (288).

A closer investigation about the creation of differences uncovers the reasons behind the disquieting apprehension generated by cultural hybrids. This is particularly the case when there is "a renewed circulation of equivalences, or an exaggerated outburst of hostility towards the 'intimate enemy'" (Papastergiadis 267). As Johnson and Warren point out, Asian-Australian children of mixed parentage permanently obliterate the boundaries between groups; their "very existence challenges the system" (10). In other words, mixed-race children "underscore the arbitrary, substancelessness of socially contrived 'groups'" (Johnson and Warren 10). Hence, it is the trepidation they invoke which incites such opposition against and antagonism towards them.

Cross-cultural marriages produce consequences for their progeny, with racism being one of the most unpleasant outcomes. Racism here is "a mode of 'exclusion' based on socially constructed markers of biological and cultural difference" (Vasta "Dialectics" 49). According to Omi and Winant: "Racialising practices occur when individuals identify and position people of visible racial difference as different in face-to-face interactions" (cited in Luke and Luke "The Difference" 50). For the mixed-race Asian-Australian children in Ang's and Lazaroo's texts, school is the site where they encounter "the deliberate naming of difference and/or the assertion of symbolic or physical violence" (Luke and Luke "The Difference" 50). For these children, "Australia was a land full of calls to which [they] dared not respond" (Lazaroo 31-32).

In Wind and Water, Lettie and her brother Sam were "most often menaced by the Maltese and Greek kids, who had been tormented when they had been new but now ganged up with white Australian kids to pursue [them]" (285). Lettie recollects that:

> [She] had no option but to pretend that the racist bullying to which [she] was subjected was harmless, and that everyone got ragged at some time or another. [She] did not like being Coco Pops or Blackhead, but could not afford to take offence because it would surely encourage [her] tormentors to step it up. (299)

The children in Lazaroo's novel also "continued bleeding from undiluted manifestations of the White Australia Policy in the playground long after official government moves had been made to water it down" (31). As the narrator relates:

> Collecting cicadas in my used brown paper lunch bag one recess time at school, I heard the jeer: 'Chocolate girl! Yah-hah!'
> I turned to see my twin sister's front tooth fly from her mouth and land on the bitumen, spattered with her blood . . . I ran to my sister . . . 'You are lucky, you are paler than me', she sobbed.

> As children we were frightened by the name-calling in the playground of the new country. We kept our heads down when we were forced outside the classroom during recess, never sure which greeting would turn into a taunt. (Lazaroo 31)

Asian-Australian children of mixed descent are painfully conscious of their own physical and cultural alterity. As the narrator in The World Waiting to be Made says "[t]he lessons [she] remember best from high school were lessons which taught [her] the shame of being different" (75).

It is at also school that the differences between a/the 'coloured' parent and 'real Australians' become glaring obvious too. Lazaroo's protagonist is so ashamed of her "dark-skinned father" that she goes to the extent of pretending to be adopted (51). In Wind and Water, Lettie confesses that she "came to dread her [mother's] visits to school and all the attention they attracted" (285). This was partly due to that fact that her mother was different: "She looked different, and she talked different. Worse, she seemed to get people's back up by acting as if she was better than they. She made a big thing out of it" (285). Her mother, Peng An, simply refused to accept that "in Australia, she was a slope-head, a chink, a slant-eye, second class or less" (284):

> Hair-triggered about the disadvantages her mixed-race children might suffer in Queensland society, she presumed every bush a bear, and she was ever ready to sally forth, right all wrongs. Black hair flying, black eyes afire, she would charge into the little backwoods schools we attended, armed with a stout stick and her righteous indignation, to demand, coerce if need be, justice and satisfaction. At the age of four or five, [Lettie] was glad to have [her] own in-house heroic avenger. Later, a mother whose tactics mimicked the US cavalry at Wounded Knee became horribly embarrassing, especially as [she] realised [she] had to be like other Australian children. Safety lay in being inconspicuous. (284)

The mothers in Lazaroo's and Ang's texts are forced to acknowledge the keen racism encountered by their children. Distressed but not defeated, they devise various strategies to

help their children cope with the undeserved harassment. According to the daughter Lettie in Wind and Water:

> [Her mother, Peng An] seemed uncertain about how best to handle instances of racism; she vacillated between paroxysms of indignation that her little children were being bullied, and resignation. 'It's best to laugh things off it you can,' she would say. 'Learn not to mind. Other children get teased too . . .' (Ang 299)

The narrator's mother in The World Waiting to be Made "understood that to alleviate the effects upon [them] of dire insults, loss of birthplace and fighting between her and Dad, a special magic unbound by time and place was required" (Lazaroo 49). When people called the children names in Australia – "slope, coon, chocolate face" – she would stroke their hair and tell them "floating stories" to help them "believe in bright futures" (40).

Eurasian children are regarded with a mixture of fear and fascination. Admired for their unusual good looks, they are also looked upon with a degree of suspicion. Christopher's blue eyes in Cyrill's novel hint at his enigmatic mixed ancestry. Interestingly, his Anglo-Australian girlfriend, Susanna calls him her "blue cabalist", which suggests a past shrouded in mystery and concealment (57). His maternal grandfather is somewhat less subtle and insists that "nothing comes of having blue eyes like rivers, anyways" (101). Much to her annoyance, Iqbal's mixed-race Asian-Australian daughter Nadine in Seasonal Adjustments attracts lots of attention wherever she goes. Her "grey eyes and lighter complexion" provoke much curiosity and delight (Khan 38).

In Wind and Water, Lettie's brother Sam fits the description (and perhaps stereotype) of the exotic, handsome other:

> He had the most marvellous skin which tanned beautifully, and a cheeky, flashing smile which showed off his perfect white teeth. Girls thought he was sweet, older girls, especially, who cooed in a sickening way over his dimples, his big brown eyes and silky dark hair which fell in a thick fringe over his eyes. He was a tempting target for the school bullies. (285)

"[T]all and bony, dark-haired, green-eyed" with "an olive complex, a bit of Sophia Loren around the cheekbones and lips", the narrator in The World Waiting to be Made is often appraised with interest, particularly by men (85). She is told that she is "beautiful" by a young surfer who emphatically added that she "must be a mix, the best-looking people are a mix of nations" (160). Like her father in her 'Asianess', she seemed "so detached and partially revealed, enticingly undiscovered" (134). Deep down however, she often wants to shout out that she is "*not that kind of Asian*" (120). Instead, she is resigned to "feed people's misconceptions of Asia. [She] was whatever people wanted [her] to be" (120).

With the development of second and third generation migrants of so-called mixed parentage emerges the notion of hyphenation. For Nasser Hussein, "[h]yphens are radically ambivalent signifiers, for they simultaneously connect and set apart; they simultaneously represent both distance and connection, belonging and non-belong" (10). Trinh T. Minh-Ha on the other hand, believes that the hyphen designates a fusion between two or more identities and worlds. Her argument that "the challenge of the hyphenated reality lies in the hyphen itself" is relevant to Asian-Australian identity (157). Becoming Asian-Australian occupies a space of in-betweeness. Being a hyphenated Australian, that is Asian-Australian, is to be in a unique position. Trinh asserts that:

> [T]he becoming Asian-[Australian] affirms itself at once as a transient and constant state; one is born over and over again as hyphen rather than as fixed entity, thereby refusing to settle down in one (tubicolous) world or another. The hyphenated condition certainly does not limit itself to a duality between two cultural heritages. (159)

For Asian-Australians, however, learning to live with a multiple sense of self is not easy. The act of recovering their "mosaic" identities is also fraught with difficulty (Fischer). Pnina Werbner draws attention to an apparent paradox in which "heightened autonomy [and] the imperative to choose, can lead to uncertainty, fear of change and a sense of loss" (Introduction 9). As the narrator in The World Waiting to be Made says, coming down "to the hard ground

of [her] Australian life" is difficult (49). "Eurasian sounded impressive, but what could it mean for [her and others], to be Eurasian in Australia" (49). Uncle Linus, whom she visits in Malacca, recognises her strife and comfortingly tells her that:

> It takes a long time to become . . . Australian. And it takes a long time to relinquish being Eurasian. You have left the in-between people of Singapore and Malacca, and now you are . . . in-between being Eurasian and Australian. This is difficult for you. (258)

She wonders, "Am I like her [her mother]? Or am I like him [her father]? Am I Asian or am I Aussie? Will I get left? Or will I leave" (145).

In the novels of Lazaroo and Ang, being "children of broken families" compounds the cultural confusion and ambiguous loyalties faced by the Asian-Australians (297-8). Lettie divulges in Wind and Water that both her brother Sam and herself were greatly "unsettled" by their parents' divorce and by their "toing and froing between them and their different cultures" (298). In The World Waiting to be Made, the narrator acknowledges that her mother had "joined two worlds together" when she married Mr Dias and had the children. When he left her, she tried to keep their two worlds connected by continuing to tell them "floating stories tied tenuously to Dad's and her pasts" (146).

Remorseful for having already "wrecked [his daughter's] emotional security" due to his marital break down, Iqbal in Seasonal Adjustments is determined to help his daughter "establish her cultural roots" in Australia where she was born (161). He wishes to help Nadine negotiate the struggle "between the emotional claims of irreconcilable worlds" (161). He is fully aware that:

> In some ways [he is] destined to become a stranger to [his] daughter. She is likely to carry [his] name into adulthood. But it will be a name without any instinctive grasp of the pride of the Chaudharies. It would be unfair to demand that understanding from her. [He] can affect her perceptions of her self and her world. [He] can even sharpen her sensibilities. But [he]

> cannot program the way she feels. [He is] not empowered to alter the cultural pulse of her life that is tuned to a different rhythm. (Khan 161)

Nikos Papastergiadis comments that "[t]he interaction between two cultures proceeds with the illusion of transferable forms and transparent knowledge, but leads increasingly into resistant, opaque and dissonant exchanges" (279). It is in this tension that Homi Bhabha's "third space" is conceived. The third space opens up a conceptual space that transcends "epistemological dualisms of insider-outsider or 'us' and 'them representations" (Luke and Luke "Theoretising"). As a potent site of hybridity, it illuminates ambivalence to help transform, reclaim and subvert identity from among multiple and socially established constructions of Otherness. These constructs "intertwine with community, family, or nation narratives that index 'home', 'race', 'origin' and 'culture'" (Luke and Luke "Theoretising"). According to Bhahba:

> The importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge . . . the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together traces of certain other meanings and discourses . . . The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (cited in Chow "Third Space: Interview" 215)

Prevalent assessments of the hybrid are always situated "in relation to the value of purity, along axes of inclusion and exclusion" (Papastergiadis 259). If the boundary is marked positively – stimulating exchange and inclusion – then the hybrid can derive vitality and vigour. In Ang's novel, Australian society is depicted as gradually changing. Lettie is appreciative of that fact that it was "becoming very different from the one [their] mother experienced when she first left her tiny island to come this vastly larger one" (287). By the time she and her brother Sam had enrolled at Griffith University in Brisbane, "race relations had become more relaxed, almost a non-issue for people of Asian and part-Asian parentage"

(287). Their mother was greatly pleased that they were "gradually developing a young multicultural coterie among whom being Asian, or not Asian, did not matter" (287).

For Robert Holton, "[h]ybridisation is based on intercultural exchange, tending perhaps to a kind of global deterritorialisation or cosmopolitianism" (204). Maturity, education and travel help the young Asian-Australians in Ang's, Khan's and Lazaroo's novels perceive that identity is constructed through a negotiation of difference. They gradually begin to understand that "the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of failure" (Papastergiadis 258). As Lettie in Wind and Water contends:

> Only when I left home and was travelling through Asia and Europe could I admit to any diffidence on my part about the Asian side of my genetic inheritance. I began to see that how I perceived the world and my place in it was more important than how my chromosomes were arranged and which country had supplied them. Gradually the last vestiges of my cultural ambivalence fell off me like scabs from healed wounds. (299)

The narrator in The World Waiting to be Made travels to Singapore "ostensibly to look for [her] beginnings, but to look for her beginnings was also to look for the beginning of the chasm between [her] parents" (Lazaroo 215). Her physical journey parallels the start of a far deeper and more personal one.

It is clear that Eurasian identity is not merely an accumulation, fusion or synthesis of various components but exists as a nucleus of different energies. Even the hesitant and apprehensive narrator in Lazaroo's text is slowly "ready to struggle and embrace" as she "began to find [her] way" (272). Upon reflection, Lettie in Wind and Water reveals that:

> When I consider my Australian birth and upbringing, my mother's Han Chinese culture and family in Singapore, my father's Church-of-England English heritage, and my stepfather's Jewish Hungarian ancestry, I feel I am at the confluence of powerful ethnic currents, drawn into the vortex of a developing Australian consciousness, being whirled about and emulsified. Some of my mixed-race friends feel it is not so much an emulsion as an attempt to force an

> amalgam from the mercurial flux of our Aboriginal, European and Asian ancestries; even as we try, the mixture slips, slides and metamorphoses. (275)

Audrey Maxwell notes that mixed children's choices of identity are mutable, subject to the variations in the personal and socio-political milieu in which each of them live (209).

In the process of embracing a new reality, "the mixing of blood shifts from being a stain or a stigma to an aesthetically pleasing and virile combination" (Papastergiadis 261). This attitude is articulated by Christopher's father in The Ganges and its Tributaries. He tells his son that:

> I once wanted you to marry an Indian girl, but now I want you to mix your genes. You are an Anglo-Indian born in Australia. You are like a Trinity. Marry, mix . . . One day soon there will be only one race . . . Drift, you must mix. Simone [a cousin] married a Pakistani; her children, your godson, they are everything, all, they cannot hate without hating themselves. Only the desperate can hate their own race, the despicable. Manjay [another cousin] is seeing that Greek girl, your nana's third husband was Jewish. (146)

Deborah Stone declares that to be Asian [or in this case part-Asian] in Australia is "to have choices that can change not only your children but also what we call Australian" (2). The present application of hybridity may be driven by the "perverse pleasure" of taking a negative expression and converting it into a positive attribute: "to wear with pride a name they were given in scorn" (Rushdie "Satanic Verses" 93, cited in Papastergiadis 258).

As a hybridised people, Asian-Australians especially those of mixed descent, possess the capacity "to challenge the taken-for-granteds of a local cultural order, and thus to recover from a critical cultural self-reflexivity" (Werbner "Introduction" 2). Their ability to juxtapose and amalgamate cultures, "languages and signifying practices from different and normally separated domains", empowers them to brave the "official, puritanical public order" (Werbner "Introduction" 2). Inhabiting this volatile borderland not only permits multiple discourses of race/ ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality to function, but this position is also a political and social site of resistance: "The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, implosion and

explosion, and of putting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage" (Anzaldua 107).

In Australia, Asian-Australians have "had to make [their] own way in [their] own way (Ang 287). Hybridity gives them the space in which to construct their own subjectivity and solidarity. The comments of the wise Uncle Linus in Lazaroo's novel are relevant to all Asian-Australians of mixed ancestry: "Each must lead his or her own life. Do not worry so much about the pain of your past Australian life, or about the country of your forebears. In aloneness and in the other people you now share your life with, find your world waiting to be made" (Lazaroo 268). "Bi- or multi-culturality need not necessarily be an encumbrance" for children of mixed marriages (or their parents) "unless they are forced to choose" between one cultural side or the other (Berger and Hill 23-4).

It is essential to keep in mind that these new configurations of hybridity emanate from a "historical terrain riven with relationships of unequal power" (Lo, Khoo and Gilbert 5). Uncritical celebrations of what has been termed "happy-hybridity" and "happy-hyphenation" run the risks of masking structural inequalities and preserving the status quo (Perera "Lost in the Translation" 124). While notions of hybridity create opportunities for fresh ways of thinking and political/cultural possibilities, it is important at the same time, to acknowledge the problematic category of Asian-Australian. This category is "a contradictory site of cultural struggle for membership in the wider society" (Ang "Introduction" xvi).

The Asian-Australian texts in this chapter can definitely be read as post-colonial texts. They endeavour to disrupt the dominant categorising the other. "The language of hybridity becomes a means for critique and resistance to the monological language of authority" (Papastergiadis 267). As Diana Brydon comments:

> The post-colonial imagination depends on the mixing of cultures. Its interest lies in the characters who embody that process in their lives. Colonial fiction in Canada and Australia

> stressed the tragedy of the mixed blood, a person who belonged nowhere because of the shared imperial and native horror of 'impure' race. But post-colonial fiction *re-evaluates* that stigma, seeing it as the unjustified product of an ethnocentricity that post-colonial experience of multiculturalism has outgrown. (19, italics my own emphasis)

Acknowledging their duality, hyphenated or hybrid circumstances in Australia, Asian-Australian writers seek to challenge hegemonic Western meta-narratives. Recognising the power of hybridity through their work, Asian-Australian writers claim "the right to articulate, to name/misname/rename/unname" Asian-Australian experiences (Kumamoto Stanley 6).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at cultural hybridity as manifest in intermarriages and the resulting generation of 'hybrids', that is mixed-race Asian-Australians. Epitomising transformed racial/cultural identities, gendered practices and reconfigured power relations, interracial families are a "focal site for the construction of . . . 'new ethnicities'" (Luke and Luke "Interracial" 748). But the opposition and racism encountered by mixed-race Asian-Australians is particularly revealing and meaningful. It reflects and exposes society's inherent distrust of interracial relations and miscegenation.

When two cultures come together, a disconcerting incompatibility of expectations is predictable (Breger and Hill 20). Yet as Johnson and Warren have observed:

> It is paradoxical in one sense, that most western societies have such great anxiety about mixed marriages, since such marriages should be expected in multicultural, multiracial, egalitarian democracies [such as Australia]. Indeed, social values should encourage these marriages since they are one measure of the society's progress towards fulfilling its ideals. That strong interdictions on such marriages remain in these societies underscores the fact that sophisticated techniques of social control and social superiority are in operation. (7)

In the novels of Simone Lazaroo, Ang Chin Geok, Adib Khan and Christopher Cyrill, Asian-Australians of mixed race are conceived (literally) as "lubricants in the clashes of culture" (Papastergiadis 261). Their mixed heritage fosters an ability to empathise, understand and relate to others. These Asian-Australian texts serve as critical agents of change in the way they represent and arbitrate difference - cultural, racial and gender in contemporary multicultural Australia. Hopefully, they can also help negotiate and "secure a future free of xenophobia" (Papastergiadis 261). The World Waiting to be Made, Wind and Water, Seasonal Adjustments and The Ganges and its Tributaries can all be read as post-colonial texts. By always seeking to disrupt conventional categorisations of the other, these texts effectively challenge the dominant order.

8 CONCLUSION

The encouragement and management of cultural diversity has proven to be highly problematic. Multiculturalism is recognised as a discourse that stimulates and promotes changes in thinking and action, with both positive and negative outcomes. Needless to say, theoretical implications of formations or demarcations of 'difference' additionally complicate the issue. Ambiguities and contradictions are rife in the multicultural debate, as can be seen in the recent domestic backlash against multiculturalism. Pauline Hanson, the ongoing refugee debate, John Howard's racist re-election campaign (which unabashedly exploited the nation's anxieties in the tense post-September 11 climate), the Bali bombings of October 2002, Sydney's gang rape trials and the war in Iraq have all issued multiple challenges to the ever-evolving notion of multiculturalism. All these have enormous repercussions on the emerging discourses of Asian-Australian cultural politics as well.

The Government's deliberate and racist manipulation of public perceptions regarding the issues of arrivals on Australia shores, as well as the Opposition's general apathy has come under increasing public scrutiny. A broad coalition of concerned Australians and others have condemned the Government's punitive approach towards refugees/asylum seekers. In a speech at the launch of the 2003 *A Just Australia* Campaign, the National Director, Howard Glenn says:

> The concept of border protection, a difficult one for an island continent, has been created in response to the attempts of a small number of desperate people fleeing terror regimes and making it as far as Australia. The unreality of the situation is being taken further now, with the tabloid media talking of the need to 'plug the holes in the fence'. As our troops set sail for the Gulf, we are a nation struggling to deal with our insecurity. What are the true threats we have to address? . . . There is a lot of unfinished business that we have to deal with as a nation . . . We believe Australia is deeply divide by the actions of our government.

Indeed, the recurrence and exploitation of racial tensions in partisan political debate compel all Australians to ponder the notion of 'difference' and what it means to be 'Australian'.

The impossibility of multiculturalism in Australia as a fixed policy practice stems from the "intrinsically sited, negotiated hybrid and yet morally committed nature of 'culture' and ethnicity" (Werbner "Introduction" 22-23): "In reality there are and can be no fixed cultures in modern nation-states; only political imaginaries of pure or impure cultural horizons" (Werbner "Introduction" 22-23). Identity is mutable and not monolithic. As Ramesh Thakur puts it, "[m]ulticulturalism is a fluid set of identities for the individual as well as for the nation" (132). According to Martin Stuart Fox, it is "a dynamic process of inclusion and innovation, of selection and assimilation, that does not suddenly stop at some point" (97). He rightly points out the fact that:

> 'Australian identity' is what we make it, as a community over time. Our borrowings will be of what fits into this process of national self-definition at each present stage of development, and which, once integrated, will constitute part of that self-definition. The process is one of enrichment, as is all cultural growth. (97)

Indeed, it would be contrary to speak of a unified Australian culture. Instead, Australian culture should be perceived as "a collective of cultural and national specificities, each trailing a history and a practice" (Gunew "Framing Marginalities" 151). National identity can be at best conceived as an "invention" (Kukathas 157) or an "imagined community" (B. Anderson). In our postmodern context, uncertainty about the identity of the 'us' arises because "many identities are possible" (Lyotard 60). And this offers Asian-Australians a measure of confidence and reassurance.

Situated within the methodological nexus between Asian-Australian studies, cultural studies, post-colonialism, gender studies, multicultural and race studies, this thesis adopted a literary focus to advance research into Asia-Australian concerns. I argued that for Asian-Australians, the multicultural debate is inextricably tied to questions of national belonging and identity.

Multiculturalism is controversial precisely because of its real and perceived (in)compatibility with national unity (Stratton and Ang 124). There are problems with the idealist notion of multiculturalism as "unity-in-diversity". Australian national identity is based on the European idea of a homogenous national culture. A marked contradiction becomes evident because if multiculturality is enshrined as a recognised essence of Australian national identity, then cultural homogeneity of the nation is impossible:

> The nation can assume symbolic force precisely in so far as it is represented as a unity; yet national identity is always ultimately impossible precisely because it can only be represented as such through a suppression and repression, symbolic or otherwise, of difference. (Stratton and Ang 124)

In this thesis, I raised questions about the extent to which Australian multiculturalism is "able [or unable] to account for the complex presence of 'Asians' in its reconsiderations of Australian national identities" (Perera "Lost in the Translation" 129). As Audrey Yue asserts "[b]ecoming Asian-Australian is a continually evolving contemporaneity of not just crossing the territorial boundaries of one or the other, but of confronting them in their controversies" ("I Am Like You" 21). My thesis examined how despite multiculturalism and calls for cultural diversity, racism ironically permeates every aspect of Asian-Australian life. In their bid to translate the 'Asian experience' onto subjective experience, my thesis showed how Asian-Australian writers use literature as a means of agency. Such a position engaged with contemporary identity politics and offered a somewhat constrained but necessarily real empowerment for its participants. My project considered the social and intellectual space of "the in-between", of living between 'Asia' and 'West' (Ang *On Not Speaking*).

While the increased presence of Asian-Australian writers at Writers' Festivals and other such events, not to mention the greater recognition of Asian-Australian writers through literary prizes and awards is good, there always lurks a spectre of tokenism. The suggestion of tokenism was made when Teo Hsu-Ming won the 1999 Vogel Prize for her novel Love and Vertigo. Alison Broinowski cites Teo as "a sign of the times". The only other Asian-

Australian Vogel prize-winner was Brian Castro's Birds of Passage in 1982. Broinowski remarked that:

> The numbers of non-hyphenated Australians who feel confident to write about contemporary Asia have shrunk. It's as though they can no longer compete with today's new, diasporic, Asian-Australian novelists (usually women) for grants, publishers, media attention, and invitations to writers' festivals. ("The No-Name Australians")

There appears to be a marked bitterness and resentment on her part. At the Asian-Australian Identities Conference at ANU in 1999, she disclosed to the audience that her son was a fledging playwright and had difficulty in securing a grant. Are Asian-Australians now scapegoats for unlucky Anglo artists? Do visible differences translate once again into being a more visible target? To quote Vine Deloria, "[t]he white (wo)man must learn to stop viewing history as a plot against [her/]himself" (cited in Leser 25).

This notion of visibility demands attention. An ethnic name seems more visible and perhaps even fashionable. But while it is empowering, it also a more attractive target for the critics who tend to make many cultural assumptions. According to Alison Broinowski:

> Few 'ordinary' Australians seem able to match these new novelists' mastery of Asian languages and English, their access to family history, *mythopoeia* and the *supernatural*, their dual familiarity with multi-ethnic Asian societies, and their experiences of migration to multicultural Australia. ("The No-Name Australians", italics my own emphasis)

Surprisingly, as literature that breaks the canon, Asian-Australian fiction is neither unacceptable, nor isolated. It seems that it is precisely its foreignness and Otherness that is intriguing. The irony however is that the perceived exotic content of Asian-Australian fiction only serves to reinforce its otherness. As Anthony Kwame Appiah states, "writers of colour . . . are at risk of being treated as 'otherness' machines, with the manufacture of alterity as [their] principal role" (cited in Stasiulus 54).

Do Asian-Australian writers thrive on being different, or offering something different? Can the growing popularity of these writers be attributed to genuine interest as Australians become more informed and aware as a result of increased exposure to 'Asia? Or is this due to greater promotion by publishers/publishing houses who recognise the marketability of such 'exotica'? Yasmine Gooneratne's comments are a vital starting point in any contemplation of this matter:

> Contemporary Asian[-Australian] literature demands of Western readers that they look beneath the surface of an apparently 'exotic' Asian world to grasp certain indigenous contextual realities which are altogether different from the popular stereotypes that have been imposed upon them by a long train of Western mis-'readings' of Asia's social contexts. The experience of immigrant writers (and this applies by no means exclusively to South Asians) is, that the price of publication in the Western worlds in which they have settled often takes the form of a hidden 'tax' upon their work of simplification and exoticisation. ("Eating" 228)

When awarded the 1999 Vogel Prize, Teo Hsu-Ming was quick to defend herself against the accusations that her book was yet another 'migrant novel'. She was well aware that her detractors were likely to dismiss her as another Asian woman writing about family history and a return to her roots. Teo's concern illustrates the kind of marginalisation Asian-Australian writers (and artists) have long encountered (Lawrence). Is the Asian-Australian writer and Asian-Australian writing forever doomed to the categories of 'migrant writer' and 'migrant writing'? Literary ghettoisation is still very much an issue for Asian-Australian writers. They are plagued by the "burden of authenticity", that is to endure the possibility of "having all their texts read only in terms of the authentic migrant experience" (Gunew "Feminism" 23).

Adib Khan believes that "[l]iterature does not have to be authenticated with empirical certainties. The measure of its worth is to be judged by the quality of thoughts and emotions breathed into it" ("Writing Homeland" 25). It is inevitable that all immigrant writers, whatever their background, will be influenced by their culture of origin, as well as inspired by the images and ideas of their homeland. This 'tribal' knowledge and cultural heritage are as much a part of them as the 'immigrant experience'. Committed to a future as Australians, they exemplify the vast potential that diversity and migration brings.

Sneja Gunew raises a potent question: "How do we recognise 'ethnic writing' and are we in fact saying that currently traditional Australian writing is not ethnic?" ("Letter" 4) Ethnicity or culture is undeniably a determinant in all writing just as gender and class are determinants. The impasse with the term 'multicultural writer' is its invariable affiliation with 'migrant writer' and 'ethnic writer'. Unfortunately these terms often imply that they are the 'other', that is sidelined from the mainstream. (Gunew "Feminism" 12). According to George Papaellinas, the trouble with literature is that the Australian "mainstream" is still passively considered to be homogenously white, middle-class and Anglo: "This sun is orbited, it seems, by a satellite system of equally homogenous mini-nationalisms or 'ethnicities'. These populate the margins . . . not-as-good yet but getting there" (cited in Stephens 41).

George Papaellinas wants an end to what he calls the "paternalistic liberalism which seeks to piously accommodate the work of writers from a non-English speaking background". He objects to the use of the word 'multiculturalism', at least in regard to literature: "What's wrong with Australian?" he asks (Stephens 41). For David Carter, there is no unambiguous way to describe ethnic writing, migrant writing, 'multicultural writing' or 'writing in multicultural Australia'. He maintains that "the ambiguity or duplicity of all these formulations is a mark of the role each adjective plays in public, political discourse" (4). This also signifies the ambiguous borders, which elucidate migrant/Asian-Australian writing in relation to Australian literature: "Instability in language illuminates political difference. It is therefore unsurprising if we reflect on what has been at stake amongst competing definitions of Australian writing or a national literature" (Carter 4).

Current influential conceptions of "Aust. Lit" need to be challenged. Asian-Australian writing should not be regarded as merely additions, but rather as works that compel a rigorous re-thinking of 'Australian literature' in general. Habitual racism and ingrained insularity are the reasons for fatalistic perspectives that prove difficult and resistant to change. Gooneratne wryly notes that "in lists of 'favourite Australian novels' recently complied by numerous

Australian critics and readers on an Australian Literature discussion network, not one book by an Asian-Australian author received a place" ("Asian Culture"). Can it be presumed that such authors are as yet too new on the Australian literary scene to have gained a following? Is it possible that they are not yet considered 'Australian'? Can Asian-Australian literature therefore ever come into its own? Does it have a future?

As with all things, Asian-Australian literature needs time to develop as the field continues to evolve and gather strength. Gooneratne is optimistic and asserts that:

> It seems likely that as the English writing of Australians of non-English speaking backgrounds moves from the margins of Australian literature into its mainstream, we shall meet with increasing numbers of fictional characters, male and female, who will move with naturalness and ease between the various cultures of Australia, native and immigrant, ritual and urban. What a plus it would be for Australian writing generally if the emergence of such hybrids were to gradually create a reading public educated and informed to a level that would enable the average reader to experience fully the pleasure of Australian texts in which the creative imagination plays simultaneously across, between and through several cultures. (Gooneratne "Constructing" 15)

A sound, substantial and reliable appraisal of multicultural/Asian-Australian literature would benefit from "considerable expertise in various national literary cultures, complemented by a thorough knowledge of world literature" (Jurgensen 31). According to Susan Hawthorne, respect here is the crux of the matter. It is with respect that people should be reading Asian-Australian literature (as well as other 'marginal' or marginalised works). What is required is "respect for the writers and for the integrity of the cultures from which they are writing" (Hawthorne 266). The dominant culture needs to be more discerning and to consider seriously the "realities of others" (Hawthorne 266). Hawthorne suggests that this could be augmented "if publishers were to set out deliberately to produce factual writings about non-dominant cultures to complement the fictional accounts" (266).

By their very literary presence, these Asian-Australian writers have irrevocably changed the literary landscape. The objective of this thesis is therefore not only to incite an inquisition of literary and social space for the Asian-Australian writer, but also to stress that the institutionalisation of these literatures is imperative for establishing the multicultural writer on national and global scales. As Rey Chow asserts, it is insufficient to "reinvent subjectivity" because it still leaves "the politics of the image . . . bypassed and . . . untouched" ("Writing Diaspora" 29). Tseen Khoo contends that "[u]ltimately, it is the taking over of meaning production and the associated production tools that will allow discernible changes in social policy and political formations" for minoritised subjects ("Bright White Suburbs" 1). A study of increasing Asian-Australian literary production will enable us to determine whether they are merely 'adding to' or "add[ing] up to national narratives" (A. Johnson "Autobiography" 87).

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