



Multiculturalism, Globalisation and Worldliness: Origin and Destination of the Text

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“Everywhere is so made up of everywhere else.” (Iyer 11)

“The only thing worth globalizing is dissent.” (Arundhati Roy, qtd
in Barsamian)

I leave my shoes at the shoemaker’s for repair. As I give my name the cheery chap remarks, “That’s different!” Welcome to Queensland. I’ve lived in this state since 1993 and *every* time I have to give my name in a shop or office, or to someone trying to get friendly on the beach, the person I give it to feels called upon to remark *Different!* or *What nationality is that?* or *Unusual, does that mean something?* This happened all through the years I grew up in Australia, and when I’d been grown up a while. Then Sydney became cosmopolitan, and I’d forgotten:

[h]ow some of us and our sisters got their names changed to real-australian (i.e. English) names that could be said. Who we know who had to change to a real-australian (English) name to get ahead and has one name at work and with real-australian friends and one for the family. The shortened, anglicised version some of our parents changed to. And now some people are changing back or digging up names from foreign great-uncles to change to [. . .] None of this matters any more [. . .] (Baranay, *The Saddest Pleasure* 23–24)

When I began to visit the USA I noticed that no one made a remark about my name, not once.

“What is the Australian identity?”

“How would I be treated if I went to Australia? I mean, is Australia racist?”

“Does Australia really look like it does on television, like on *Neighbours*?”

“Do Australian writers take a post-colonial subject matter?”

“What is the situation of Aborigines?”

December 2000. These are some of the questions I am asked while in India to talk about multiculturalism in Australian writing. I am a representative of Australia in a more formal sense than the usual visitor/tourist/traveller who represents their country. To say Australia is my country is not something I take for granted.

I have been invited by the English Department at the University of Madras to spend two months with them, and talk about Australian multiculturalism. A six-month course in Australian literature as a component of the Master of Arts was created by one of their own graduates, Eugenie Pinto. I had been sitting at my computer one day in early 1999, working out a way to return to India and further my research into Indian English writing, the foreigner's experience and representation of India and the background to a novel I was writing, called *Neem Dreams*, when I heard Eugenie being interviewed on the ABC. She was on a research trip in Australia and I wrote to her at once. “Why this course?” I ask her in Madras.¹ Australia had begun to look to Asia rather than the West, she tells me, and Asia had better look back. As an undergraduate she had read Australian literature—*Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Douglas Stewart's *Ned Kelly*, A.D. Hope, Judith Wright. “The use of the English language was like the language of we Anglo-Indians,” she explains, speaking of her passion for Australian literature. “I was surprised to find that down under people speak the same kind of earthy, racy lingo.”

I give talks at universities and colleges, in Madras, and also in Delhi. I begin by writing up these dates:

60,000 years ago

1788

1950

1967

1988

I'll return to the other dates. Firstly: 1950. Australian history began in 1950. This is what I realized when I first travelled abroad as an adult, in the mid-1970s: I began to realize that I had unconsciously counted earlier Australian history as not *my* history, not *our* history; thus perpetuating a sense of a personal identity in odd relationship with the country of my nationality:

We were on the way to recreating the past. *They* worship an English queen and sing English songs. *Their* history is English governors and convicts who drank rum and sang horrible songs. There were explorers and kangaroos. Aborigines stood on one leg and were shot. We never see what this has to do with us and fail to learn about it. That is their history. Our history is the secret stories our parents tell us and the many things they never speak of. We came from somewhere else and something owed to us was taken away. (Baranay, *The Saddest Pleasure* 21)

These days in a cosmopolitan city conversational curiosity about the origins of each other's names, all kinds of names, is commonly expressed. Friends in Sydney and Melbourne today tell stories quite different to my Queensland one of these endless remarks on "difference." I had been writing about 1950s Australia where non-Anglo names were the only ones that were "different." "What kind of name is that?" was a question that was sometimes phrased as: "What nationality are you?" When I was growing up we did not know how to say "I am an Australian, but my origins/ancestry [. . .]." The fact of multiculturalism and the discourse on multiculturalism in Australia has changed all that (although *nationality*, *ethnicity*, *culture*, *race* and *origins* remain terms used with imprecision in the wider discourse.)

OR HAVE THINGS CHANGED? HOW MUCH?

Then we are thirty or thirty-five and we meet for lunch near the television station where we all work or have worked. Multicultural Television. Double-You-Oh-Gee Tee Vee.

[. . .] It was a new decade and there was going to be a new Australia and multicultural T.V. [. . .] They made jokes like, it's now the able-bodied heterosexual white anglo-male who's discriminated against [. . .] (Baranay, *The Saddest Pleasure* 22)

There was no joking by the infamous One Nation leader Pauline Hanson when in 1996 she declared that "the most downtrodden person in this country is the white Anglo-Saxon male" (Hage 182).

Hanson may have departed but this sentiment has not.

When I was a child my mother's brother visited us several times. The immigrations after World War Two had taken him to the USA. I liked hearing about the cousins I'd never met. They represented a plausible alternative life. They were Ameri-

can, he told us, they thought of themselves as American, their Americanness was not in question. But here, we are not Australian, I would tell him. Already an intriguing difference. Somewhere along the line I found a theoretical reason: the USA had had its War of Independence; Australia remained part of England. Unsaid: a country that had created its independence created a new, inclusive identity.

Mosaic or melting pot? This became a key question in the growing debates on multiculturalism. In the USA the “pot” meant that all the ingredients are changed by each other and blended in the resultant all-American stew. In Australia they weren’t that keen on the melting pot. The *main* ingredients would break down and become indistinguishable from the new ingredients. Besides, assimilation policies of the past were being regretted. We went for the mosaic.

It turned out to be a mosaic with a dominant colour.

Look, you only have to turn on your TV set [. . .] and have a look at the most popular Australian soap operas overseas: *Home and Away* and *Neighbours*. Look at the representative view of Australia we are giving to people in England and Europe, and other associated countries. It’s one of a predominantly blonde, surfy, blue-eyed, Anglo-Saxon background community. (Nick Giannopoulos, qtd in Bertone et al, 66)

In these days of cable television and free trade in India, the same programs are being watched there as well. Everyone knew *Neighbours* in Madras and elsewhere.

The report quoted here (Bertone et al.) looks at the representation of Australian artists (writers, actors, etc.) and characters of non-English-speaking background (NESB) in film, theatre and television in Australia, and finds that:

NESB artists are under represented in all three sectors [. . .] NESB artists are numerically under represented relative to their proportions within the general Australian workforce and population [. . .] NESB artists are largely restricted to minor, tokenistic or stereotype roles [. . .] the failure to present positive and accurate images of NESB people in the arts, or to explore issues relevant to them, sends a powerful message of exclusion to the NESB communities. (Bertone et al. viii, ix, x)

Theatre, film, and especially television, arguably provide the dominant reflection of our larger culture’s idea of itself. I have seen nothing to suggest it is any different in the world of publishing; if the Australian publishing and critical establishment were exhibited as representative of Australia we’d see the same illusion of an Anglo nation.

This of course is not this establishment's idea of itself, for diversity and valuing the contributions of migrants are its credo and shibboleth. But, as Ghassan Hage argues in *White Nation*:

The White multicultural "we" which appreciates diversity seems continuous with the old Australian "we" that did not appreciate it. Diversity simply does not affect the nature of the White "we." It remains extrinsic to it. [. . .] [If we really were] diverse there would be nothing to "appreciate" and "value" other than ourselves. This is the difficult imaginary domain of the multicultural Real. (140)

A recent French immigrant to Australia, a Doctor of Philosophy from the Sorbonne, who is researching in the politics of recognition, comparing the two countries, says this:

[B]eyond the racism and narrow-mindedness of average French people, beyond the immense narcissism of Parisian intellectual circles, it is also true that popular French culture has adopted many influences from its migrant populations, that French "high" culture has always looked elsewhere for new aesthetic and philosophical experiences, and that there is a general availability of foreign cultural products in France. By comparison, I find the dominant culture in Australia closed to any significant influence from its migrant populations or from non-English-speaking cultures. If someone is not of the prevailing Anglo-Saxon culture, the chance that their achievements and their contributions to Australian society will be recognised is very low. [. . .] It seems the influence of migrants on the traditional "Aussie" culture has been purely confined to "ethnic cuisine." Moreover, there are few traces of non-British and non-American influences in Australian popular culture, in social practices or in Australian English. (Deranty 191)

This kind of thing is said in private conversations but does not accord with the dominant Anglo intellectual community's idea of itself. Ghassan Hage calls this community "White multiculturalists" and says "[. . .] they have posited their multiculturalism as clearly urbane, anti-racist, cosmopolitan and non-Anglocentric" (Hage 182).

They would object to Deranty's views by saying, "But Australia was aware of international cuisine decades before France was" and, "But we are so enriched by migrant cultures." But as Hage says:

the discourse of enrichment still positions [the White Australian] at the centre of the Australian cultural map [. . .] [and] conjures the images of a multicultural fair where the various stalls of neatly positioned migrant cultures are exhibited and where the real Australians, bearers of the White nation [. . .] walk around and enrich themselves. (118)

Look at who speaks for us. Look at a recent (2002) report about an international writing mentorship scheme in which six Australian writers were nominated to be mentored by African-American novelist and Nobel laureate Toni Morrison. Morrison had expressed interest in having a female protégé from a Third World country. The Australian writers were nominated by critic Peter Craven, in turn nominated by Peter Carey. Not one Aboriginal writer was included nor one with a Third-World-sounding name (see Wyndham; also Wyndham and Overington).

It is in the world of these conversations and silences that I write. My work must acknowledge its own *worldliness*; worldliness in Edward Said's meaning of "*the circumstantial reality of its creation* [emphasis added]" (Said 35). Increasingly my writing seems to derive from the intention, and the position, that writing is produced for something formed *in the writing*. That is, writing is not, or not only, a *recording* of thoughts and ideas, but a process of *producing* them.

It is as both novelist and critical writer that I return to India with the intention of using the experience to reflect on, and develop, current and future work in both forms, or hybrids.

I think it's fair to say that most people in India wouldn't give Australia a second thought, and vice versa. But I am in India talking with people who study Australia, meet Australians, and do give Australia a second thought. Perhaps they are "looking back," as Eugenie Pinto suggests, at a country that has begun, notably under Paul Keating's prime ministership (1991–1996), to re-define its place in the world and its relations with its region. (During this period "Look to Asia" became a kind of slogan in political culture, as one of Keating's principal aims was to more fundamentally align Australia with the countries of the Asia-Pacific).

I can think of no nation on earth more multicultural than India, and although its predominant fact is a huge population and Australia's predominant fact is a small population, the students discuss our similarities. Both nations had a British rule in the past, both are concerned with the re-telling of history, both have an obsession with national identity, both have tribal peoples calling for justice. Both have asserted their own distinctive use of an authentic non-British English language.

In my novel *Neem Dreams*, one of the available positions on the use of English in India is represented by a character called Meenakshi:

Yes our life is about back to India, and reclaiming tradition, and no not all foreign influence is bad—we know our history, how swiftly the foreign becomes the traditional—and yes we say let's be proud of being Indian and no we don't want to ban the English language, the English in English language is not the English of people from England. The world speaks English, we've spoken English all our lives, English is an Indian language and here in the South Hindi is no less foreign. Yes, we can eat and enjoy both Indian food and foreign food [. . .] (Baranay 14)

And later Meenakshi at university in the USA, with her group of friends:

They speak a mongrel language together, taking accents and vocabularies from each other and from television, theory or classical poetry, mixing and mutating them, speaking an English in which The English are an unremembered historical stain. (Baranay 126)

In 1936 H.L. Mencken published an essay arguing that:

Because of the fact that the American form of English is now spoken by three times as many persons as all the British forms taken together, and by at least twenty times as many as the standard Southern English, and because, no less, of the greater resilience it shows, and the greater capacity for grammatical and lexical growth, and the far greater tendency to accommodate itself to the linguistic needs and limitations of foreigners—because of all this it seems to me very likely that it will determine the final form of the language. (Mencken 289)

Well, he got that partly right. The language has no “final form,” of course, until it is no longer used; and today it's more commonly recognised that there is no *one* final form but several “Englishes.” But it is true, as Mencken predicted, that American English has been increasingly influential wherever English is spoken. In both Australia and India many public commentators routinely deplore the Americanization of English; in India the very fact of Indian English is contested. In India the matter is compounded by endless debates on the best language for education and in just how many languages education should take place. But the point is that in both these former colonies there is a two-camps situation: in one, the influence of American forms is embraced or accepted, in the other it is not.

In Australia the resistance to the Americanization of Australian English relies on the identification of British English as authoritative; that and the usages rec-

ognised as distinctively “Australian” (“g’day,” “mate,” etc.) that have been adopted, sometimes self-righteously, by urban professionals as part of the fashion for assertive nationalism. An Anglo fifty-something friend decides she now shuns the common email greeting *hi* because it is “American,” and will substitute *g’day*. She would have shunned *g’day* in the earlier decades of her life as “common”: a greeting associated with lower class or rural people.

I say *hi*. I say *guys* not *blokes*. So do many Indians. (Actually, *blokes* is a jokey word for some men—stereotype Aussies—and some people are guys—the ones you feel friendly to.) I don’t object to American spelling. (I don’t object to British spelling. My spell-check now recognizes globalisation with z or s.) My version of Australian English is unresistant to the adoption of non-British influences, even American ones. The options seem to be either to insist our language not change at all or insist on British and British-derived authority. I also rejoice in an Australian accent, and in Australianisms such as the words “*wog*,” “*sook*,” or “*wouser*,” which I have to teach my computer’s spell check to recognise, and of which Mencken remarked:

It is a pity that America has not borrowed the Australian invention *wouser* [. . .] In the United States fully 99 percent of all the world’s *wousers* rage and roar, and yet we have no simple word to designate them. (292)

I’m all for a cosmopolitan Australian English, full of variations, a mongrel English and a happily mongrel nation.

This is reflected in *Neem Dreams*. The novel employs various Englishes in the characters’ speech. Meenakshi went to an “English medium” high school in India and embraces the “mongrel” English of her student days in New York. Andy is middle-class English, Jade an urban Australian whose speech is inflected by her own time in New York, and Pandora, also an Australian, was brought up in the country and, although from a half-Greek family, speaks a more unembellished standard Australian. Jolly is an Indian teenager in a rural area with scant but enthusiastic English. Dinesh’s English has not been much employed outside of his rural south Indian region but is a matter of necessity and pride. The author of them all needs confidence in her good ear.

There has always been contention over the use of English in India:

By the 1920s, English had become the language of political discourse, intranational administration, and law, and it was associated with liberal thinking. These roles, and such an attitude toward English, maintained its power over local languages even after the colonial period ended [. . .]

English does have one clear advantage, attitudinally and linguisti-

cally: it has acquired a neutrality in a linguistic context where native languages, dialects, and styles sometimes have acquired undesirable connotations [. . .]

The power of neutralisation is associated with English in two ways. First, English provides—with or without “mixing”—an additional code that has referential meaning but no cultural overtones or connotations. [. . .] English neutralises discourse in terms of “identity,” providing another identity. [. . .] Second, such use of English develops code-mixed varieties of languages. Lexicalisation from English is particularly preferred in the contexts of kinship, taboo times, science and technology, or in discussing sex organs and death. (Kachru 321, 322, 323)

My own experience bears this out. Indian friends confirm that they prefer to speak English in social situations, while travelling within India, and even *en famille*, for the reasons Kachru offers. Young students and urbanites adopt current new usages (“I’m like” for “I said”; “you guys” for “you people”; “awesome” for “very good” etc) with as much naturalness as their Australian counterparts.

Readers of literary fiction in English will be aware of the ascendancy of the Indian novel. Salmon Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Arundhati Roy are read all over the English-speaking world and in many non-Indian language translations. Their relative merits, their particular appeal, the reasons for their success, the fact that of these three only Roy resides in India, whether they are as well thought of in India as abroad, the many other English-language Indian novelists, and what makes a writer “Indian”—are issues that give ample inspiration for numerous essays, theses and debates. New novels by new writers keep it current. In an essay about three new “Indian” novels, Kai Friese argues that:

Indians writing in English have had to face the double standard of occidental tastes and local authenticity. Their task has been complicated by one of the perverse consequences of colonialism: While English-reading (and certainly English-writing) Indians acquire—perforce—a relatively high degree of familiarity with the cultural idiom of Western literature, Western readers have by and large retained a privileged ignorance of the East [. . .] [T]here have been few signs that authors from the subcontinent can make it without trading heavily on exotic or esoteric images of India. (n.p.)

Therefore, Friese contends, novels such as Manil Suri’s international success *The Death of Vishnu* belong to a type he calls *Hinduistic Realism*; a type of novel with an eye on international consumption, and thus tending to suffer from:

An excess of 'authentic' detail [. . .] This is India by numbers. Hinduism 101. [. . .] All three books are peppered with set pieces on spicy food, master-servant dynamics and redeeming vignettes on the possibility of romance in an arranged marriage. Reincarnation. Mighty Avatars, Spicy Food, Servants, Arranged Marriage. Sound familiar? (n.p.)

The English language is employed both to communicate widely and to underline differences and specificities of locale and culture. There is a tension between homogenisation and distinctiveness. If globalisation is the dominant phenomenon of our time, this points to one of its paradoxes.

The supposed "neutrality" of English is contested by the currently dominant *hindutva* movement that wishes to cleanse India of foreign influence. The character of Dinesh in *Neem Dreams* illustrates the ambivalence and inner conflict that comes with this position: the rhetoric of the politics he espouses deplores English, the Realpolitik of his business employs it, the dynamics of prestige and status demand fluency in English.

Both the diegetic world of *Neem Dreams* and the world the novel enters are pluralistic, multi-vocal, a mongrel babble. This implies the kind of *worldliness* Edward Said speaks of when he points to "a number of examples of writers whose text seems self-consciously to incorporate the explicit circumstances of its concretely imagined, and even described, situation" (40).

There are, however, intensely Australian moments when the world is no such thing. The representation of Australia at the Olympics (Multicultural Australia not so much represented as *presented by* White Australia [Hage 149]); the widespread praise for an "Australian" issue of *Granta* that included not one single wog or Indigenous writer (Jack), the failure of the republic referendum. The Demidenko affair: besides the complex issues that raises, including that of author-function, what is pertinent here is that the fake, peasant costume-wearing, assumed ethnicity-parading, anti-Semitic "wog" voice was the wog voice chosen to represent the inclusion of wog voices into approved literature by the Anglo establishment, as represented by the judges of the Miles Franklin award, the country's top literary prize. The judges of the award had, just the previous year, declared Frank Moorhouse's novel *Grand Days*—the story of a young Australian woman working in Geneva in the early days of the League of Nations—ineligible because its content was "not Australian enough" (Bennie n.p.). And more recently we have David Malouf telling us that everything of value in Australia derives from British origin (Malouf), by simply ignoring the fact of many Australians of non-British origin, Australians who never did think of Britain as home.

The problematisation of inclusion is foreign territory here. Outside the mainstream, we notice.

Milan Kundera describes the situation of small nations in Europe and one can recognise a similar dynamic at work in Australia. For one thing:

in the big family that is a small country, the artist is bound in simple ways by multiple cords [. . .] What handicaps their art is that everything and everyone (critics, historians, compatriots as well as foreigners) hooks the art onto the great national family portrait photo and will not let it get away. (193)

Similarly, Australian works of art are required to display a recognisable “Australianness” and chosen to represent Australia on this basis.

Australian literature, Ozlit, has *dealt with* the (now rarely raised) question of multiculturalism, which was at its most fashionable around 1980. “Look,” says Ozlit, pointing to a supply of migrant narratives and indigenous writing, “there it is, it’s not an issue any more, now shut up.” This new country, that old country, your traditions, your community, living between two cultures, fine, great, that is your subject matter, we recognise that story, we know our place in that story. Inclusion is invariably demonstrated by writers whose subject matter is ethnicity.

How is a writer to know her place in this context? What is her novel’s place in this world? A text’s *worldliness*, Edward Said says, is *a more complicated matter than the private process of reading*: “Whether a text is preserved or put aside for a period, whether it is on a library shelf or not, whether it is considered dangerous or not: these matters have to do with a text’s being in the world” (35).

Such matters are essentially unpredictable. But as my new works are being prepared to enter the world, the writer looks at this world not only as origin but destination.

What’s happened is that the multicultural in Ozlit has been given its own territory, its own separate colour in the mosaic. When *the mosaic not the melting pot* became the slogan it was the 1980s and multiculturalism was the intellectual, sociological and social-engineering fashion (a theology rather than a demographic fact). Then I declined the advice: “Write about your family, go find your roots, write about the old country with communism coming to an end and your life in the new country.”

But what I did think, still do, is that what the Anglos once might delicately refer to as “your background”—the black bread and salami childhood—does give you a different slant on the world, a different accent in your thoughts, a different kind of narrative you’ve identified with. Different, that is, to your regular Anglo cultural authority, who has got enough to be careful to be correct about without quite ever seeing how Anglos are in a position to universalise their own accents and identifications.

Multiculturalism in Australian writing has become a useful term to identify

migrant narratives and the explorations of identity related to that. It's as if Australian writing is divided into the multicultural and the mainstream. (Perhaps Aboriginal writing has its own separate category in this taxonomy.) And the mainstream is the place for voices, sensibilities, experiences, sympathies that the mainstream recognises, identifies with.

A report published by the Australia Council states:

There can be little doubt that the public consensus on the benefit of multiculturalism that reached its height at the end of the 1980s has been shattered [. . .] [T]he conservative end of town has never been really comfortable with the idea that the Anglo-cultural hegemony in Australia should be eroded. (Bertone et al. 67)

Under the Howard government, people are exercised by many more issues, more urgent, not least Aboriginal issues, and more recently refugee issues; neither of these is unrelated to this argument. The continued idealizing of an imaginary past, mono-cultural Australia and the continued exoticization or ignoring of non-Anglo voices has not gone unnoticed in the margins.

It's not all that terrible. If you've got enough money for a movie and a beer, even the Queen of England can't see a better movie or drink a better beer. We have good conversations in the margins. We even forget we're marginal.

I say some of this in my talks in India in 2000–2001, also during a four-month Asialink Residency in 2002. It is easily understood in India. This too is a country very much concerned with its history and how its history has been told, who owns history.

India has multiplicities of culture, ethnicity, language, religion, and that's before you try and work out caste and class and their relation. There have been enormous successes in this: migratory movements and mixed marriages resulting in content and stability. The tolerance of difference in India is so deep and widespread and natural that it is an effort to bring it to conscious attention. But this is not always noticed by the outsider's gaze upon India, with the domination of the daily news of communal violence, caste wars, ethnic tensions.

These tensions, and the ways they are manipulated for political purposes, are part of the material of *Neem Dreams*. As an Australian author including this phenomenon in a novel set in India, I might have been looking for a way to understand it in my own country and in the world, to expose it, to register my own refusal to ignore or endorse it. Setting a novel elsewhere gives a writer the possibility of the necessary perspective that enables the creation of fictive truth.

Those other dates I drew to the attention of the Indian students: 60,000 years is the estimate of the time Indigenous people have lived in the land now called Australia: now recognised as the world's oldest living culture. *Shouldn't Austral-*

ians be proud of that? more people are saying. 1788 is the date of the arrival of the First Fleet from England, the start of the European colony. In 1967, not until then, the Commonwealth of Australia, formed in 1901, gave the vote to its Indigenous people, for the first time recognising them as citizens of their own land. In 1988 the Bicentennial was held, and from that date on no Australian could be ignorant of the fact that 1788 is considered the time of invasion, the start of a genocide, and is as much lamented as celebrated. In Australia, as in India, we have been talking a lot about how history has been written, by whom, in whose interests.

In the cities of Madras, Delhi and Pune I observe the increase in the use of English, and the increase of Western-style (international? transcultural?) clothes, restaurants, and shops. Homeware and gift shops, too, are full of Western-style goods, including the kinds of products made to be gifts.

“Authentic” Indian goods are found in “craft fairs,” “craft shops” and “village industries” stores: a delineation that points to the paradox of authenticity in the age of postmodern travel. That is, the folksy implements and decorations the outsider considers truly Indian are no longer the natural everyday objects of most households, which now employ plastic buckets and other mass-produced utensils and Western-style clothing (usually made in China). And it is their re-positioning as goods desired by middle-class shoppers—that keeps these craft industries viable. As architect Rem Koolhaas has remarked:

The “Western” [. . .] is no longer our exclusive domain [. . .] It is a self-administered process that we do not have the right to deny—in the name of various sentimentalities—to those “others” who have long since made it their own. (qtd in Iyer 144)

The people I have lengthy English-language conversations with speak other languages in other contexts, and wear jeans and Western-style dresses, or saris, *salwaar kameez* or *kurta* with equal ease. It was women here who inspired my character of Meenakshi who feels as “authentic” in her rural home as using a mongrel language in New York City.

The fundamentalist Hindu political parties’ slogan is “modernisation without Westernisation” but no one can tell me the difference.

At Madras University the students performed Louis Nowra’s play *Radiance*, about three Aboriginal sisters, and, out of all the Australian playscripts I brought, seized upon *Box the Pony*, Leah Purcell’s play about her own Aboriginal family, for their next production, and then they asked for more Aboriginal plays. Indigenous literature,² I found, is the area of Australian writing of greatest interest for Indian readers. In private correspondence one of the students wrote to me:

As Indians, indigenous literature appeals a lot because even we were affected as European colonies. We lost some of our rituals and practices because of them. They forced Indians to convert as far as religion is concerned. In a way indigenous literature depicts the experience of Indians. It happens so that many of the Indians try to imitate the whites in order to maintain a status and some resisted its influence. This is also seen in Aboriginal literature.

In my class itself student show interest on Aboriginal literature and migrant experience rather than White Australian literature.

We chose plays like *Radiance* and *Box the Pony* because India is dominated by patriarchal ideas. Women are given only secondary preference and they are taken for granted which is one to [*sic*] the themes of both the plays. It creates an awareness about feminism and the impact of these plays are simply great. (Revathi)

The ease with which southern Indian students chose Australian indigenous literature as a preferred area of study is linked to one of the positive aspects of globalisation: the way communities transcend geographic boundaries. Work is being done by several scholars comparing India's Dalit literature with our Indigenous writing, and this relationship might prove to be one of the most significant cross-fertilisations between our two countries.

In Madras I met indigenous writer Alf Taylor who told me the people there reminded him of his relatives back in Western Australia. He later wrote "I was completely overwhelmed by the knowledge and understanding of the Aboriginal people of Australia by the Indian people at the University of Madras" (Taylor 79).

One slant on the issue is provided by the concept of the "circulatory energies" of globalisation, energies that:

reflect the transcultural nature of imperial discourse, a fact which confirms, ironically, that globalisation *must* be more than a simple extension of geographical imperialism since imperialism itself is so very multifaceted and circulatory. Globalisation is the radical *transformation* of imperialism, continually reconstituted, and interesting precisely because it stems from no obvious imperial centre. (Ashcroft 213)

My own continuing engagement with India cannot be reduced to any idea of the imperious Western gaze upon the colonised Other, as I hope all that precedes this remark has demonstrated. *Neem Dreams*, rejected by many Australian publishers and agents, has now had its first publication in India, its overwhelmingly positive reception acknowledging the novel's identification with its Indian themes.

Not only do Indian writers “write back” to the Empire but India inscribes itself on the writers that submit to it.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The city is now officially called Chennai since the recent Tamilisation of place names, but is still generally referred to as Madras.
- 2 The term *indigenous literature* is commonly used for literature by indigenous—that is, Australian and Torres Strait Islander—writers in Australia. And, incidentally, I had to explain in India that “Aboriginal” is not a derogatory term in Australia, as it is there.

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