

Ties to the Homeland: Second Generation Transnationalism, Edited by Helen Lee

This book first published 2008 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2008 by Helen Lee and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-84718-589-4, ISBN (13): 9781847185891

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables and Images.....	vii
Preface.....	viii
Helen Lee	
Chapter One.....	1
Second Generation Transnationalism	
Helen Lee	
Chapter Two.....	33
Imagined Futures: Irish-Australian Migrants and their Children	
Raelene Wilding	
Chapter Three.....	53
Transnationalism and Identity among Second Generation	
Greek-Australians	
Dimitra Giorgas	
Chapter Four.....	72
Transnational Flows and Generational Disjunctures: Conceptions	
of "Homeland" among Melbourne Greek Cypriots	
Ann-Maree Dawson	
Chapter Five.....	92
Intergenerational and Transnational Factors in the Evolution of <i>Rebetika</i>	
Music-making among the Greek-Australian Community in Melbourne	
Kipps Horn	
Chapter Six.....	104
Second Generation Migrant Expression in Australian Hip Hop	
Tony Mitchell	

Chapter Seven.....	126
Challenging “the Problem” between Two Nations: The Second Generation in the Iranian Diaspora Cameron McAuliffe	
Chapter Eight.....	151
Issues of Belonging: Exploring Arab-Australian Transnational Identities Heba Batainah	
Chapter Nine.....	168
Attracting Attention or Affirming Identity? Pan-Pacific Unity among Pacific Islanders in Brisbane Max Quanchi	
Chapter Ten.....	181
“I Didn’t Eat the Baby, the Dingo Ate the Baby”: Transnational South Asians in Australia Devleena Ghosh	
Contributors .....	197

## LIST OF TABLES AND IMAGES

### Tables

3-1 Importance of being Greek or Australian in describing identity among second generation Greeks (number persons).....	62
3-2 Visits to Greece and dual citizenship among second generation Greeks (number persons).....	63
3-3 Importance placed on community participation, ties to Greece and dual citizenship to Greek identity among second generation Greeks (number persons) .....	65
5-1 Informants according to generation within family, time span of performance activity and decade of migration to, or birth in, Melbourne .	95

### Images

7-1 “(He) is from Brunei. (He’s) Afghan, and (he) is Pakistani. Yeah, so all random, yeah” .....	143
---	-----

- history in transnational perspective*, ed. Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, 125–36. Canberra: ANU E Press.
- Hempenstall, Peter. 2007. Overcoming separate histories; historians as ideas traders in a trans-Tasman world. *History Australia* 4 (1): 041–0416.
- Iriye, Akira. n.d. “Trans-Pacific relations in Transnational History” (preliminary draft), 5. [www.sal.tohoku.ac.jp/~kirihara/public\\_html/cgi-bin/shibusawa/Akira\\_Iriye.pdf](http://www.sal.tohoku.ac.jp/~kirihara/public_html/cgi-bin/shibusawa/Akira_Iriye.pdf) (accessed September 8, 2006).
- McDaniel, Caleb. n.d. “Transnational political history,” comment on “History News Network” Blog site at [hnn.us/blogs/entries/23578.html](http://hnn.us/blogs/entries/23578.html) (accessed August 29, 2006).
- McGerr, Michael. 1996. The price of the new transnational history. *American Historical Review* 96 (4): 1056–67.
- Moore, Clive. 1977. Decolonising the history of Australia's South Sea Islanders. In *Emerging from empire; decolonisation in the Pacific*, ed. Donald Denoon, 194–203. Canberra, RSPacS, ANU.
- Morton, Helen. 1998. Creating their own culture. Diasporic Tongans, *The Contemporary Pacific* 10 (1): 1–30.
- Quanchi, Max. 1998a. Lobbying, ethnicity and marginal voices; the Australian South Sea Islanders call for recognition. *The History Teacher* 36 (1): 31–41.
- . 1998b. Australia's South Sea Islanders; a call for recognition, *Journal of the Pacific Society* 21 (3–4): 3–19.
- Spickard, Paul. 2002. Introduction, Pacific Diaspora? In *Pacific Diaspora; Island peoples in the United States and across the Pacific*, ed. Paul Spickard, Joanne Rondilla and Debbie Hippolite Wright, 14–15. Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press.
- Thelen, David, ed. 1999. The nation and beyond. Transnational perspectives on United States history. A special issue of *The Journal of American History* 86 (3).
- . 1992. Of audiences, borderlands and comparisons; towards the internationalism of American history. *The Journal of American History*, 79 (2): 432–62.
- Tyrrell, Ian. 1996. Ian Tyrrell responds; AHR Forum, *American Historical Review* 96 (4): 1068–72.

## CHAPTER TEN

### “I DIDN’T EAT THE BABY, THE DINGO ATE THE BABY”: TRANSNATIONAL SOUTH ASIANS IN AUSTRALIA

DEVLEENA GHOSH

#### Introduction: India@oz

Diaspora was originally a word that referred to the dispersal of Jewish people from Palestine throughout the globe. It now includes any transnational population that is separated from their original homeland, living in a different place but maintaining connections with the homeland (Sheffer 1986). Though the concept of diaspora has been crucial to the building of national narratives, local alliances and globalised geopolitics, it is still a controversial and sometimes overdetermined idea. It is assumed that immigrants who relocate permanently and subsequently settle within minority communities derived from their country of origin acquire a collective identity and special preferential social relationships. This foregrounding of race and ethnicity in the categorisation of diasporic groups is as problematic as other definitions that focus on mass movements caused by religious and ethnic persecution. Such categorizations underplayed the complex web of social, economic and cultural reasons behind forced and voluntary movements with the consequence that the notion of diaspora is dominated by the subtexts of loss, alienation and nostalgia rather than the discourses of hope, mobility and adventure. These subtexts lead to other conclusions about immigrants including their capabilities for integration or assimilation into host communities (Sackmann, Peters and Faist 2003, 2).

In recent years, there have been various studies exploring the multifarious links between immigrants and their country of origin, describing, *inter alia*, the construction of immigrant identities that transcend national barriers (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton-Blanc

1994; Glick Schiller & Fouron 1998), the participation of immigrant communities in the life and economies of their homeland (Goldring 1998; Landolt, Autler and Baires 1999; Levitt 1998; Roberts, Frank and Lozano-Ascencio 1999; Smith 1998) and how these activities contribute to developmental changes in the country of origin (Faist 2000; Portes 1996). These studies have attempted more flexible and open-ended definitions (Clifford 1994, Safran 1991; Sheffer 1986), which have some crucial issues in common. For example, the narratives of the “scattering” are accompanied by the stories of a motherland, lack of “belonging” in the adoptive country, as well as the “longing” for return. Rather than assuming that migrant communities are derivative of the communities from which they originated, recent studies have posited home as a fluid concept and multi-layered site, impossible to locate in one place, complicated by the connections between adoptive and original home. Such scholarship has highlighted corporeality, affect, experience and imagination in the making of diasporas, noting that homes are created by and through the migrant imaginary in diasporic “double-time” and the context of hybridity and liminality (Axel 2002; Chambers 1994). Thus diasporas are no longer seen as divorced from location and place; rather they are created within the borderlands of spatiality, identity and migrancy. Such studies have adopted an inherently comparative approach, examining the impact and reasons for migration at both the point of departure *and* that of arrival, highlighting the complex linkages, networks, and actors in the phenomena of migration.

As Hofmeyr points out, the key claim of such transnational approaches are their central concern with movements, flows, and circulation, not simply as a theme or motif but as an analytic set of methods that defines the endeavour itself. Thus, a concern with transnationalism would imply the understanding that historical processes are not only made in different places but are constructed in the movement between places, sites, and regions (Hofmeyr *et al* 2006, 5). In the same article, Wendy Kozol notes that circular migration, kin networks, and communications technologies have reconfigured the concept of the border as a stable marker of national identity, exploring the complex and ambiguous identifications that diasporic communities have with ideals of “citizenship” and of “home” (2006, 6–7). The concept of transnationalism has also been usefully deployed to highlight the processes by which “immigrants forge and sustain multi-standard social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch 1994, 4). The definition can extend to include other diasporic communities of the same origin and developments in information and communication technology mean that migrant

communities can strengthen their links across the world via, for example, television sub-channels such as Lashkara (Punjabi), Gurjari (Gujarati) and Bangla (Bengali) to name just a few. Other ways in which these transnational networks are maintained are through cultural events such as musical and theatrical performances and religious festivals.

This article deploys such concepts in an attempt to unpack the ways in which the translocation of migrancy subverts the site of homeland for young South Asians<sup>1</sup> in Sydney by interrogating the continuities between place and identity. It maps the movements and processes through which spatiality is inscribed, both corporeally and affectively, mirroring the formation and re-formation of allegiance and identity. As Peter Van der Veer points out, identity is not stable or unchanging but contingent and contextual. According to him, these ambiguities derive from displacement, disjuncture and diaspora and the contradictions between the notion of discrete territoriality in the discourse of nationalism and the transgressive fact of migration (1995, Introduction). The discussion here is based on interviews conducted with young South Asian men and women over a period of five years and in the course of two performance projects. It focuses on the key transformations in the notions of identity and citizenship that flowed from the processes of migration and their role in shaping national narratives in Australia. Both these projects, *Suburban Masala: From Mumbai to Marrickville*, which was in 2002 and *India@oz.sangam* in 2003, involved over twenty-five young people of South Asian descent and performed to sellout houses in Sydney. According to a review (RealTime Arts n.d.) *India@oz* had:

a tremendous sense of pride, fun and celebration, embodied as it was in the spectacle and melodrama of Bollywood, that miracle of the hybrid arts, and focused on being young and Indian-Australian....The younger women gather in a song of defiance, one of their number on sax, the bodies say pop, the gesturing hands say traditional Indian dance.

Besides dance, rap, installations and story-telling, the project also included little dramas—parents struggling to understand sons who only speak hip hop; a “This is Your Wife” parody, “putting the ‘arranged’ back into the arranged marriage”; a father with two PhDs and no job in Australia; the complexities of sending money “home” to India; the trials of a newly married couple. Another reviewer in the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote:

The Indian lads did their rhymes in Aussie accents, the dancing mixed classical Indian with contemporary breaking, and some of the best text

pieces dealt with generational differences. One of the lessons of this show was the way cultural intermingling can result in new forms and genres that are unexpected and are often more than the sum of their component influences (Dunne, 2003)

The fluidity of a "South Asian" identity for the participants in these projects is illustrated by the fact that their families originated from the global gamut of the South Asian diaspora: not only from India but also from Fiji, Malaysia, South Africa, Dubai, Singapore and Bangladesh. For them, the reality and the imaginative projections of home, like a palimpsest, were inscribed with layer upon layer of personal, national, social and cultural issues that had to be constantly renegotiated with their historical and national selves. The way they "constructed" home shaped the imagining of their history.<sup>2</sup>

Studies of transnationalism in the context of immigrants usually neatly set up the topics of engagement: memory, nostalgia, and cultural loss, associating them so organically with immigrants, attaching them so fatefully to their daily discernments, that, as Yao Souchou says, writing about the "nostalgic immigrants" becomes "enchanting" because their experience corresponds closely with the sense of loss and irresolvable contradiction in the conditions of modernity (Yao 2004). Since national belonging is not singular, exclusionary or a function of direct or unmediated experience, it is crucial to unpick the factors that inform everyday life and disrupt the concept of "Indian-ness" through ordinary narratives of dislocation and renewal. My own writing position implicates me in this undertaking for I belong to the South Asian Indian community in Sydney and its discourses and experiences construct at least part of my subjectivity.

Immigrants from South Asia are now in the top ten categories of immigrants in Australia. In Sydney, various little subcontinental patches are marked out in Eastlakes (Bangladeshi), Liverpool (Fiji Indian), Harris Park (Indian) and so on. The various clones of the first North Indian Diner, with sobriquets such as North Indian Aroma, North Indian Flavour, Indian Home Diner run by Bangladeshis or Pakistanis as well as spice and video shops are now familiar sights in various Sydney suburbs. Less visible in the media or academic literature are the children of these immigrants and their more "high-status" compatriots who work in technology, finance, health, education and other professions. These children, born to first generation South Asian migrants in Australia were raised without Indian friends, Bharatanatyam dance classes, Karnatic music recitals, Hindu temple societies or Hindi films and precisely because of this upbringing, they are acutely conscious of the relationship between diasporas, ethnicity

and the nation-state. This second-generation youth has created a new popular culture, based on dance parties and music mixes, a club culture which is both part of Sydney and of transnational South Asian public culture. Like the term *desi* in the USA, they use "curry" as one of the terms to identify collectively young people of sub-continental descent.

### This is your wife: love and marriage

The first day of Christmas my true love sent to me

A totally insufficient dowry

The second day of Christmas my true love sent to me

Two nosy in-laws and a totally insufficient dowry

—Boymongoose, *12 Days of Christmas*, <http://www.boymongoose.com/>

Second generation South Asian youth culture in Australia is a terrain where notions of authenticity, legitimacy, tradition and culture are being hotly contested because they convey specific messages to those perceived as "like" themselves as well as to "others". What constitutes the "authentic" ethnic subject and subcultural codes of belonging and exclusion are constructed in different and parallel social spaces, through different tropes: home, university, Indian, Australian, migrant, curry. These debates draw on transnational imaginings of "India" and also work within local contexts of nationalism and race, class, gender hierarchies.

The impact that expectations of first generation migrants have of their children has been extensively documented in scholarly work and fiction. The well-known film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1994) presents a situation where an Indian tourist from Bombay points out that ideals of behaviour being promulgated by the Indian community in Britain were outdated in modern India. However, multimedia work such as Boymongoose's *12 Days of Christmas* (2008) display the creation of new spaces and cultural forms on the edges of the mass market to contest both local and traditional notions of identity at the same time as they engage with the complex challenge of reconciling their parents' cultural narratives with own experiences and realities. Boymongoose is the lead singer of an Indian boy band who, according to his website "specialises in comedic remakes of all the classic Christmas Carols ... [and] ... takes aim at Insufficient Dowries, Internet Dating, Bollywood Hunks, Corrupt Child Sports Stars and Angels with amazing I.T. skills" (Boymongoose 2008). The layered irony of the Boymongoose creation has a self-deprecating satire that both "owns" and pokes fun at Australian and South Asian icons. For example, the tenth day of Christmas brings a serene white bearded sage promoting "ten-minute

*yoga*” who exhorts his audience to “think the lotus, feel the lotus, drive the lotus” and speeds off in a flash car. Similarly, the eighth day of Christmas offers eight Bollywood films with the Brylcreamed hero dancing around a tree singing, “I didn’t eat the baby, the dingo ate the baby.”<sup>3</sup> However, the very tropes used, the traditional family, work and migration motifs of dowry, in-laws, telemarketers, Seven-Eleven workers coupled with the more familiar stereotypes of Bollywood, ball-tampering cricket teams and Hare Krishnas show that most second generation youth are still influenced by their parents and retain the supposedly “Asian values” of respect for age and authority and filial piety. In spite of this, the first generation migrants that I interviewed believed that intergenerational tensions and cultural schisms were increased by migration because it created a decline in the power and authority of family elders. Young people, on the other hand, felt that they had to negotiate between several worlds and world-views to create a space of autonomy for themselves.

This space of autonomy is also a way to negotiate a variety of popular cultures where the temporal dialectics between “tradition” and “modernity” within the context of contemporaneity reveal the dual spectres of the loss of “culture” and “tradition” as well as the contamination of the present. The latter spectre is most apparent in attempts by parents to control the social lives, behaviour and appearance of their children. Dating and marriage are one of the major sources for overt and covert disagreement as recorded in the “Ask Sarina” column of Hot Ashes.

Hot Ashes is a website that specifically targets itself at “South Asian youth” or “Australian Desi Youth Online”; it contains message forums, news of upcoming events such as cultural nights and religious festivals, Bollywood gossip and beauty hints (Nand n.d.a). A survey of the message forum on Hot Ashes shows a surprising range of issues discussed including ways to reconcile family, tradition, culture and love, especially relationships between people of different races or religions, in the context of conservative families and the posters’ own beliefs and adherences to their cultural and religious norms. One question posed on an agony aunt column called “Ask Sarina” (Nand n.d.b) says:

Being an indian girl and all, my parents seem to have an issue with me going out at night. Im almost 19 now and its hard to even approach them if i wanted to go clubbing or stay up till after 11...I want to sit down and talk to them about letting me out more often, but i know i will be attacked with lectures about how our family name will be ruin and how unsafe the world is. i know i am a responsible girl and i listen to basically everything they have to say, its just that this issue i need them to be more flexible with. I

dont know what to do, attending uni and all its hard when you have to constantly reject offers to go out because you are not allowed to  
In reply, Sarina didn’t suggest confrontation with the parents or even a “free and frank” discussion. Her answer emphasises the need to negotiate these relationships carefully with regard for the complexities inherent in living in several different worlds.

This is a really difficult issue, because you are probably seeing many of your friends of the same age going out and not having to worry about begging to go out or missing out because they’re not allowed to.

It is likely that your parents are looking out for your best interests, and although they see that it angers and hurts you now, them knowing this will not make them change their minds as they are only looking into the future.

I can simply suggest some little pointers that may relieve some of this strictness. For example, get them to know some of your friends so that they feel comfortable with them and may allow you out with them. When you do go to parties try and tell them a little bit about them (even if this means picking out the nicest bits) so that they feel involved.

Never start a sentence with “can” as that will raise them to an instant “No.” Instead tell them about an event, and later say that you are thinking about attending. This takes away you being a little girl “asking” and makes it more of a negotiation.

It’s great that you respect them and absorb their teachings, make sure you tell them this, and remind them often that they have taught you well. They want to feel in control, and you may have to make them feel that they are even when they may not be (I know, sounds a bit twisted but may work).

Other questions involve choices between lover and family, how to reconcile different religious beliefs (“Do you think a relationship can work between a muslim guy n a hindu girl? Neither sets of parents approve, and i feel like well if we can’t have a future whats the point in getting into a relationship?”) and how to discover one’s Indian-ness.

Like so many other folk of indian descent, I am also born and bred in Aus. However, I feel that I might be unusual in that I only discovered my heritage (and started to learn Hindi) at the ripe old age of 21. Prior to this, I was actually quite embarassed about my indian origins, to the point that I would run away from pretty indian girls who made advances towards me (silly I know). Ever since however, I have developed an intense love for being indian and consider myself blessed for being so. But now the tables have turned. I am ONLY ATTRACTED TO INDIAN WOMEN, but can’t look them in the eye anymore or smile because they are so stunning

compared to any other women. ... Is this karma? Am I now just paying the price for my earlier foolishness? Please help me Sarina.

Some of the more plaintive pleas are from Anglo –Australians dating South Asians and not “fitting in”.

I'm a white aussie chick dating a very good looking, very sweet, very popular desi guy. Thing is, I've been getting a very cold reception from his Indian friends. I try to fit in whenever I hang out with the Indian gang, and I'm respectful of the culture...I even go to bhangra dance parties sometimes! But I get the feeling I'm just not accepted. Can you give me some advice on how to fit in? Will I ever be able to fit in? Or do you think the cultural gap is too wide?

Sarina's answer shows the paradoxes and nuances of cross-cultural relationships, not providing easy solutions and pointing to the long-term compromises that will be inevitable.

Unfortunately you will continue to feel some sort of culture gap between yourself and the Indian community, and in that way it can be quite hypocritical. If you don't try to fit in, people with think you are not appreciative of the culture and disrespectful, but if you try too hard then people start to think you are trying to be something you are not. The most important thing is that your boyfriend sees that you make an effort and that he is happy with you being who you are. If the relationship is strong years down the track when the two of you are out of the student crowd, you will find that most people will be much more mature and see you for who you are rather than an outsider of the “gang.” Most likely, his female friends feel you have invaded and “taken one of theirs!”

Most of these young people were both subtle and practical on the question of marriage. The majority felt that “it was ok to meet a guy/girl through your parents but it is important to know the person you are marrying” with one of the interlocutors offering the questionable statistic that Indians have the lowest divorce rate in the world. The general consensus was that “arranged marriages were not as bad as they sound” and that parents, by and large, realised that communication and compatibility were important (Focus Group 10/10/05).

**We gotta create stuff, art, theatre, music, tv, cos worrying  
bout ur homeland is lame...**

What should we do and what should we try?

Caught between two cultures which one do we deny?  
Elders, they think we forgot our homeland  
But they dont understand its on two lands we stand ...  
Kingdom versus kingdom and nation versus nation  
Time will define the reconciliation  
Coz old man be scared of what young man creating  
(Causin) separation, depravation, dehumanisation  
The South Asian population's quickly changing  
New way, new life and new generation  
—Curry Puffs, India@oz.sangam

Second generation South Asian youth is a prickly area as first generation migrants often find the use of clothing, dialect and musical bricolage, adopted by their children confronting, even though the meanings attached to these are largely redefined. For example, the selective adoption of bits of sound from Bollywood and Indian music to mix with hip-hop and rap create markers of ethnicity and material status in a multiethnic, capitalist society. Paradoxically, this re-interpretation of South Asian musical and dance tradition through the rituals of Western popular culture deals with the demands of both their parents and the society in which they live to perform some “authentic” ethnic identity in a world in which representation is one of the most contested resources.

These young people were conscious that their parents tried to fill what they considered a cultural, religious and traditional vacuum by encouraging their attendance at numerous community events. The most popular festivals are religious ones such as Diwali and Holi celebrations. In 2000, almost 10,000 people, mainly Hindus from all over New South Wales, flocked to the suburb of Liverpool for Divali. Special roadside stalls, selling clothes, jewellery, food and so on were set up and shops displayed the oil lamps that are traditionally lit to drive away evil. There are now at least three Durga Puja ceremonies in Sydney and worshippers reported that, in 2007, two such events ran out of food because there were so many attendees.

The first nightclub in the city, catering specially for the needs of the Indians, was located on Liverpool's Northumberland Street. Other such clubs also opened and some shut rapidly, amongst them Ghungroo in Leichardt, Ashique in Ashfield and Purple Haze in Newtown. All these clubs targeted the Indian diaspora and Hindi music, *bhangra* or Bollywood, was the main attraction. In August of 2002, Bar Broadway celebrated ten years of Masala Mix on 2SER-FM by holding a “Bend it like Bhangra” evening. It was advertised as “Bent bhangra. Bollywood breaks. Raag fusion” and featured DJs Akaash and Sam with live dance



and percussion performances by Phuse, Avijeet and Tandaur. It was hugely successful.

There are also community events such as the annual Mohammed Rafi (a Bollywood singer) night and other cultural shows. Indian student associations in the universities in the Sydney area also hold cultural nights and performances which are so popular that the participants have to audition for the opportunity to perform on those nights and there are long queues for entry. Many of the performances are strongly influenced by Bollywood movies, especially in the dance and music. In fact, Hindi movies provide a vital link to culture, tradition, language and histories.

Thus the sites of being for young South Asians in Sydney are the public spaces of the urban landscape where young people both perform and practice forms of social, economic and political action, but always in relation to some notion of normative "Indian" behaviour. The different experiences of domestic tension of young people suggest that this growing demographic cohort, young hybridised cosmopolitan Indians are transnational cultural brokers who increasingly define new spaces in the performing arts but also in food, music and dance cultures, further unravelling both cultural boundaries and also their unrealised ambitions and desires. Corporeality is at the generative core of this meaning-making, extending the materialist trajectory of what people do in domestic space into the more intimate waters of subjectivity, embodiment and culture. These intimate experiences of broad social and economic practices contain much of the most compelling and memorable moments of social life and their affect generates much of the immediate meaning and connection with broader socialities since these young people do not construct themselves in either/or categories, either in relation to a nativist longing for a homeland past, or in a global representational economy of the new capitalist culture of modernity as embodied in the urban cosmopolitan youth.

One of the participants in the project, a medical student who moonlighted as a DJ passionately argued against the idea that Australia by default was seen as a white country.

Australia is a white place and some ethnics are okay as long as they work hard, act like us and don't make too much noise ... we have as much right to this place as any white. The only people who have any real claim are the Aborigines. The rest of us are all just boat people. The colour of your skin should matter as much as the colour of your boat in determining who is Aussie and who is not (Interview, July 2002).

He went on to say that this situation would only change:

But we gotta do stuff... we gotta create stuff, art, theatre, music, tv, get stuff out to the public. We gotta represent, make people aware of all the different worlds and types of people in Sydney and Oz. cos worrying about your homeland is lame. You just create some romanticised version of the truth and there's only so much you can do anyway cos you are so far away

This conversation highlights the fundamental predicament of postcolonial and immigrant existence; that subjectivity and time are not givens, neither ossified in tradition nor solely political projects. The past and present bleed into each other and, for the young second generation migrant, these osmoses are the sites of creative and innovative production, a rich hybrid suite of performances that walk the tightrope in between the various cultures they inhabit. Such projects provide a different way of dealing with tradition or the homeland, the past that, according to Merleau-Ponty, they can "feel behind [them] as an incontestable acquisition" (1986, 418). For these young people, this past is not a different country, nor is it available to logic; it is experienced corporeally and affectively. This bodily and emotional experience of pastness and tradition enables young migrants to deploy these understandings in their everyday life and to plan for tomorrow. If the past of the immigrant leads a half-life, like seeds in the winter ground awaiting the right weather to spring into life (Guha 1998, 159), then this magical revivification is experienced not only on visits to the homeland but also whenever immigrants from the same background have social dealings with one another (Ram 2000, 273).

In the last decades there have been several such performances and projects, not only *Suburban Masala* and *India@oz* but also amateur films like *Under the Table* and *The Pooja*<sup>4</sup>. *The Pooja* was made in 2005 by two young women from Sri Lanka and it gently satirised both the ephemera of certain kinds of youth culture and parental preoccupations with status and money. The film affectionately stereotypes the bossy, status-obsessed yet pragmatic South Asian mother, the passive, accommodating father and the daughter, who has a life of her own which is negotiated by ostensibly adhering to her mother's expectations. The film makes hilarious juxtapositions between the education-obsessed mother's comparison of her nephew, young Raj "who is only interested in study" with her own daughter Jothi and Raj's own obsession with hair products and his appearance ("Yeah, baby, I'm the bomb"). A consistent and haunting figure in these projects is the single young woman or man as anomaly, as threat and as object of uneasy reflections about the nature of cultural boundaries.



Such projects occupy spaces that do not encompass a territorial or bounded sense of cultural difference but rather a refusal of those terms. My interlocutors do not talk about clashes of culture but a kind of "intercultural" experience, not simply just "in-between" but something entirely new. The conceptual geometry of their position is one of a roving culture, not bumping up against boundaries but living out the very interstices they represent, actively creating meaning. Young South Asian participate in multiple ways in different forms of negotiation, between memory and forgetting, Indianness and Australianness, between notions of tradition and cultural change, love, sex and romance, the associations and intermeshings of family, community and the collective with the individual and the ongoing mediations and meditation on silence and speaking.

### Conclusion: a curry Australia

In current literature, the construction and negotiation of cultural memory as part of migrant identity has become so normalised as the key to the immigrant experience that it is almost unquestioned. Memory is more than a floating signifier; rather it is constructed, renovated and subjectively negotiated; it is unreliable in the recollection of past events and in their current renovations. Thus memory is always elusive, like that moment before sleep, when the quotidian is receding into dreams, neither the past nor the present. The rich textured ephemeral quality of memory means that, in daily life, it is always being negotiated with the present.

The predominance of cultural loss and memory in literature on migrants tends to elide other equally essential and engaging immigrant experience: cultural gain and the everyday necessity to make a living. How does an immigrant "live" and make their choices of being in their fragmented and uncertain environments? Immigrants too want to go to Disneyland, make money from investment properties, buy the latest video phone or plasma TV; the "nostalgic immigrant" so beloved of modernist sensibility often gives little sense of the "material processes"—power, work relations, race and gender prejudice—that are a part of daily life. The deferral of a bounded identity by young South Asians is not the equivalent to a zero sum game. It may indicate an informed choice, not between current home and ancestral land but of both spaces, India and Australia, as imaginatively real and desirable.<sup>5</sup>

Nikos Papastergiadis has suggested that the place of belonging can no longer be purely geographic (a notion of place) or historical (a sense of connection) because it is "cross-cut by a variety of global forces" (1998, 1). If identities are fluid, unfixed and changing, it is perhaps appropriate

that young people of Indian descent can function across various arenas, appropriating the accoutrements of different identities as they need them, be they Indian, Fijian, Mauritian, Australian, underpinned by the irony of hybrid terms such as "curry", "fob" or "abcd". The identities articulated from these processes are complex structures, related as much through their differences as through their similarities. There is no authentic shape to their configuration but a series of adaptations, changes, and borrowing; they are political alliances with an ability to join some disparate elements and discard others. As James Clifford eloquently argues, the constructions of these identities comprise continuing shifting and protean struggles "hooking and unhooking particular elements" since crucial political and cultural positions are not firmly rooted but constantly contested and contingent (2001, 481).

The counterpolitics and interventions taking place around young South Asians, their narratives and their everyday lives form the basis around which new cultural spaces are framed. These cultural spaces radically transfigure the concept "Australian", subverting and shaping the way in which a "mainstream" Australian youth identity is constructed in the public sphere. For this generation of young South Asians, identity is a process that is continually shaped by their current experiences, interactions and practices with other communities in Australian society and constantly disrupts the concept of any authentic "Australian-ness". Such interventions, the liminal spaces, blurred boundaries and radical re-enchantments of both the past and the present reveal the always contingent, contested nature of subjectivity, not one that is floating aimlessly in a postmodern moment. Rather, it is grounded in the contemporary subjectivity of these young citizens, a thousand plateaus, subjectivities felt and experienced through the body, through historical landscapes, through domestic spaces, and through performance as well as through the much more difficult realm of the imaginary, of the impact of ideals and the weight of history.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> By "South Asian" I mean people who identify as being from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, whether they migrated from the South Asian region proper or from other countries such as Fiji, Mauritius, Malaysia, Singapore, Africa or the Middle East. Sometimes I use "Indian" as an unsatisfactory adjective where "South Asian" sounds too awkward.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Das Gupta 1997.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to the famous Azaria Chamberlain case in Australia where a woman claimed that a dingo (wild dog) had taken her baby. She was found guilty of murder but the conviction was later overturned.

<sup>4</sup> *Under the Table* was directed by Samia Hossain in 2004 and released on a DVD. *The Pooja* was produced with the help of Information and Cultural Exchange at Fairfield, Sydney and directed and produced by Shaminie Chandrahasan and Pavitra Goonetilleke.

<sup>5</sup> Yao Souchou, personal letter 2004

## References

- Axel, Brian. 2002. *The nation's tortured body*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Basch, Linda, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc. 1994. *Nations unbound: transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states*. Pennsylvania: Gordon and Breach.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1990. *Nation and narration*. London: Routledge.
- Chambers, Iain. 1994. *Migrancy, culture, identity*. London: Routledge.
- Bhaji on the Beach*. 1994. Motion picture. Producer Nadine Marsh-Edwards. London: Channel Four Films.
- Boymongoose. 2008. Boymongoose Media <http://www.boymongoose.com> (accessed February 28, 2008).
- Clifford, James. 1994. Diasporas, *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (3): 202-38.
- . 2001. Indigenous articulations. *The Contemporary Pacific* 13 (2): 467-490.
- Dunne, S. 2003. Hip-hopping rip-rapping we can all enjoy. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 6.
- Das Gupta, Monisha. 1997. What is Indian about you? A gendered, transnational approach to ethnicity, *Gender & Society* 11 (5): 572-596.
- Faist, Thomas. 2000. Transnationalization in international migration: implications for the study of citizenship and culture. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23 (2): 189-222.
- Glick Schiller, Nina and Georges Fouron. 2001. *Georges woke up laughing: long-distance nationalism and the search for home*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Goldring, Luin. 1998. The power of status in transnational social fields. In *Transnationalism from below*, eds. Michael Smith and Luis Guarnizo, 165-240. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Translated by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers.
- Guha, Ranajit. 1998. The migrant's time. *Postcolonial Studies* 1 (2): 155-160
- Hofmeyr, Isabel, C.A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed. 2006. AHR conversation: on transnational history. *American Historical Review* 111 (5): 1441-1464.
- Landolt, Patricia, Lilian Autler, and Sonia Baires. 1999. From Hermano Lejano to Hermano Mayor: the dialectics of Salvadoran transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (2): 290-315.
- Levitt, Peggy. 1998. Social remittances: migration driven local-level forms of cultural diffusion. *International Migration Review* 32 (4): 926-948.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1986 [1962]. *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Nand, Anoushka. N.d.a. Hot Ashes. [www.hotashes.com.au/](http://www.hotashes.com.au/) (accessed March 28, 2008).
- Nand, Anoushka. N.d.b. Hot Ashes: Ask Serina. <http://hotashes.com.au/index.php?c=php/viewSarina&cat=5&page=1> (accessed 28 March 2008)
- <http://hotashes.com.au/index.php?c=php/viewSarina&cat=8&page=1> Accessed 28 March 2008
- Papastergiadis, Nikos. 1998. *Dialogues in the diasporas: essays and conversations on cultural identity*. London: Rivers Oram Press.
- Portes Alejandro. 1997. Immigration theory for a new century: some problems and opportunities. *International Migration Review* 31 (4): 799-825
- Ram, Kalpana. 2000. Dancing the past into life: the Rasa, Nrta and Raga of immigrant existence. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 11 (3): 261-273.
- RealTime Arts. N.d. Online magazine. <http://www.realttimearts.net/> (accessed June 5, 2004).
- Roberts, Bryan, Reanne Frank and Fernando Lozano- Ascencio. 1999. Transnational migrant communities and Mexican migration to the U.S. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22:238-266.
- Sackmann, Rosemarie, Bernhard Peters, and Thomas Faist, eds. 2003. *Identity and integration: migrants in Western Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Safran, William. 1991. Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora* 1 (1): 83-93.
- Sheffer, Gabriel, ed. 1986. *Modern diasporas in international politics*. London: Croom Helm.

- 
- Shuval, Judith. 2000. Diaspora migration: definitional ambiguities and a theoretical paradigm. *International Migration* 38 (5): 41-57.
- Smith, Michael and Luis Guarnizo, eds. 1998. *Transnationalism from below*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- van der Veer, Peter, ed. 1995. *Nation and migration: the politics of space in the South Asian diaspora*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Heba Batainah** is currently teaching politics at the University of Canberra, where she is also a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Business and Government. Her thesis focuses on the experience of Arab and Muslim-Australian citizens in a time where attitudes toward non-citizen "others" inform attitudes toward citizen "others", and examines how these attitudes impact upon different identities and political structures. Heba holds degrees in management and business administration and was awarded first class honours in politics for an ethnographic study of the lived experience of young, second generation Arab-Australians.

**Ann-Maree Dawson** is currently completing her PhD dissertation at La Trobe University in Anthropology. Her research looks at the lives of Greek Cypriots, particularly women, from the village of Deryneia, on the east coast of south Cyprus and Cypriots who live in Melbourne, Australia, but have connections with Deryneia. Her work explores how Cypriot women negotiate their cultural practices in different locations.

**Devleena Ghosh** teaches in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Technology, Sydney. She is the co-author of *Colonialism and modernity* and the editor of the forthcoming books *Water, borders and sovereignty in Asia and Oceania* (with Goodall & Donald, Routledge, 2008) and *Women in Asia: Shadowlines* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008).

**Dimitria Giorgas** is a Visiting Fellow in the School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, and Lecturer in Sociology in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. Her list of publications includes a well-cited governmental report on second generation Australians. Her research and teaching interests are on migration and settlement issues, ethnicity, social capital, and in social inequality, with a particular focus on second generation Australians.