

Australian-South Asian Migration: Changing concepts of Citizenship

Our original panel collapsed and I first heard this news when I was en route to the UK from NZ, visiting my mother and sister in Australia, Since this panel is about citizenship and I thought it was ironic- in light of dual citizenship status that many of have these days including myself (for I consider myself as a transnational), I should be between my two citizenships zones of NZ and the UK. However I managed to borrow my mother and sisters library cards and visit the Kingscliffe and Mrwillumbar libraries to find some relevant books....

Outline project. The partnership for this panel goes back to a European network associated with a Marie Curie EU funded Initial Training Network on diaspora, home and belonging, called Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging (CoHAB) which ran from 2012-15 and involved 6 academic partners mostly based in Europe (Munster where Klaus Stierstorfer is based was the lead, and Northampton where I teach, was very much the junior partner) . Following on from that networks a new interdisciplinary project (among different partners) has been planned , and this has partly been the inspiration for this panel' s topic on Citizenship, Literature and Law. The other part of the panel is the focus on the Asian diaspora in Australia which has been inspired by Chandani Lokuge's new South Asian Diaspora Research Network at Monash University of which Mridula, Klaus and I are core members. Chandani and I have coedited a special issue of *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* on Asian Australian Writing, which is in part an output from the previous EASA Conference held in 2014 in Prato in Italy.

Today in a climate of massive increases in migration, a refugee crisis in Europe, and constant threat from deterritorialised terrorist networks like El Quaida and ISIS, the state is reconfiguring citizenship around issues of sovereignty, control of borders and mobility of peoples. IN such circumstances the powers of the state remain supreme, as it enact regulation to enforce/protect national security, and the obligations of citizenship still demand recognition of being bounded in terms of geography and in understandings of community and identity. We have seen the consequence os such fears and of zenophobia in the last six months with Brexit and the US Presidential election results. In the Western world, largely, there is increased securitization of migration and restrictions on mobility, rights to movement are being reconfigured, especially in relation to non-citizen migrants and there is differential access to rights (Acc to Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel (eds), *Citizenship, migrant activism and the politics of movement*). So citizenship – according to Nyers, is a focal point in debates about borders, migration and sovereignty, as Global migration has led to stricter rules on conferring citizenship such as citizenship tests and legal innovation in revoking citizenship (Nyers 5). In Australia the increased border militarised border controls since c 2001 reflects the hard line (on the part of both political p[arties) on refugees and boat people, who are kept in detention indefinitely—the off shore detention camps of Nauru, Manus (in PNG) and on Christmas Island. The image of Australia (according to Heather Johnson in her article ‘Moments of Solidarity: Migrant activism and (non) citizens at global borders’), is of one of the most heavily regulated defended, restricted border regimes in the world (with 62 visa categories). Exclusionary state enacted legislation -- detention is a universal policy, the policy of interception and offshore encampment known as the ‘Pacific Solution,

(116) and since 2014 'Sovereign Borders' -- has been strongly contested from within Australia by dissident citizens who engage in practices that refer to supra national frameworks (RIGHTS OF REFUGEES) concerned with the right of personhood or Human Rights. As Johnson says the subject of asylum seekers requires Australian citizens to engage with the most difficult ethical issues of self and other. (PAGE)

This brings me to the other major change in conceptualising citizenship identified by theorists and researchers of citizenship studies (Saskia Sassen, including, Deborah Yasser (on indigenous movements in *Latin America and the Rise of indigenous movements*), and Anne McNevin on *Contestign Citizenship – and irregular migrants*; Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel on *Citizenship and migrant Activism*.) - that is the move away from the state centred distribution paradigm of citizenship that casts subjects as consumers in a territorialised political system, towards a focus on the practice of citizenship. Subjects/ Citizens in this new framework are actors who articulate projects, make claims, mobilise identities and appeal to loyalties (and as Emma Cox, whom Helga mentioned yesterday and Heather Johnson this include migrant political activism, and performances of citizenship, as non citizens) . In other words there is turn to actor- oriented, transnational, transglobal and rights based approaches- with an emphasis on practices and identities.

Such practices of citizenship were initially facilitated by the universalised discourses promulgated by international agencies in the post WWII era, such as the UN and UNESCO -- while the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which replaced the national citizenship of rights --allowed for Rights of Citizenship to be practiced without national status. For Sociologist Yasmine Soysal, prime example is that of Pakistani school children who demand a greater commitment to religious teaching in British state schools ,who mobilise around a Muslim identity but do not

appeal either to their religion or their new nationality, but to the European Court of Human Rights for legitimation.

In Australia the moral and ethical frameworks of Human Rights awareness and humanitarian campaigning, underpin the contesting citizen practices and activism- on government legislation / stance concerning refugees in detention (particularly the children of detainees who are particularly vulnerable) , Gillian Whitlock locates such practices in educational settings and maps scenes of reading in Australian primary and secondary schools as a focus for a new pedagogy on ‘the child in detention’ in the Subject English—one that concerned with Human Rights activism, campaigns for social justice and the rights of the child.[Examples of texts are Anh Doh *The Happiest Refugee* (DATE) , Shaun Tran’ s picture book *The Lost Thing* (2000) and his graphic novel, *The Arrival* (2006)- etc works- while guidelines for teachers are *A Last Resort?* (2004) and *Forgotten Children*, the reports from the Australian Human Rights Commission National Enquiry into Children in Immigration Detention [HREOC] which argue that the emotional and psychological well being of parents impacts on that on the child- and makes numerous recommendation such as that children should not be separated from their parents, need access to education, should have a high standard of health and living conditions etc. (.)Also a memorial project based on lake Burley Griffith in Canberra for children who drowned on the tragic sinking of Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels IV and X in the course of evolving the ‘Pacific Solution’ in 2001, a project of letter writing between Australian children and detainees in Nauru, and engagement with refugee stories, later published as *Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories by Young Writers 8-21* 9n 2004.) Of a similar cultural import, though geared more to adults, is the anthology *A Country Too Far: Writings on Asylum Seekers*, ed Rosie Scott and Thomas Keneally, published as a form of advocacy on behalf of and an act

of solidarity with refugees— which Helga talked about yesterday-- consisting of stories about detention and the experience of illegal immigration since the founding of Australia, As Rosie Scott says in her introduction in a reminder of the myth of Australian origins, 'Experiences of seeking asylum... terrible journeys of an escape from death to an imagined paradise are part of our mind set and deeply embedded in our culture'. Members of collectivities like the Refugee Action Coalition, and of networks of citizen activism, include religious organisations and national and transnational NGOs such as Amnesty and the Refugee Council, all contribute a participatory politics that allow the rights of citizenship to be recast into a transglobal sphere, distanced from those more legal constructions/ definitions monitored by the nation state.

Such practices of citizenship - in the changing Australian contexts—such as teaching school children how to be active citizens, through acts of recognition and a compassionate response, suggest that an ethics of responsibility to the other is being developed , based on a recognition of difference under conditions of tolerance and mutual respect, I shall discuss this with reference to two Asian Australian novels, Hsu Ming Teo's *Behind the Moon* and Michelle de Kretser's, *Questions of Travel*. The first was published in 1995 before the new militarised border security measures were installed in 2001, but I suggest that aspects of these new concepts of citizenship can be read retrospectively into its ending

Behind the Moon, concludes with a dramatic scene of two young people making vows at the hospital bed of a third: he is the second generation migrant, Australian born-Chinese Singaporean, Jason, who is gay (one of the most derided stereotypes the Asian gay) and has been beaten up, and laid unconscious by white queer bashers. Those at his bedside are the first generation migrant, the multi ethnic

Vietnamese, Tien Ho, and a white Australian Nigel Gibson, or Gibbo; and at this moment of crisis where Jason's life hangs in the balance, the three vow to stay together through their ties of affection and loyalty. **sense of intimacy and belonging.** This collectivity of three is born out of their shared sense of 'difference' of being what they call themselves 'multi cultural rejects' when they were at school together, , but is also based on long term ties of love and affection as well as their experiences of racial discrimination and in particular the abuse and violation of Jason. For the white Australian, Gibbo, 'difference' takes the form of disidentifying from his white middle class background and a wish to become more Chinese, whereas for Tien it is her mongrel roots,- being part Vietnamese and part Black American-- and her unknown father who she searches for in the USA, **and then a failed marriage to a Chinese?.** The asexual liaison of Tien, Jason and Gibbo undermines/challenges the heterosexual norms associated with the white anglo majority and even that minority norm of gay love and marriage, but the self protecting rationale is made clear.: 'When they are together they are no longer living on the fraying fringes of a difficult and hostile world. When they are together [...] they are at the stable centre of the universe and life is simply as it should be' (363)'.

The alternative politics of location and belonging within 'the difficult and hostile world ' that the Australian nation represents, can be read as part of Teo's critique in the novel of masculinised frames of belonging which in the dominant anglo-celtic literary tradition have been mythologised as central to Australian nationhood and civic pride. This challenge to core Australian values is focused on the relation between nigel Gibbon/ Gibbo and his father Bob— a Vietnam veteran whose service to his country represents a paragon of civic aspiration - but this male macho culture tradition of military valour and sacrifice, traceable to the Gallipoli myth (also intertextually

redeployed in Brian Castro's 1983 novel *Birds of Passage* which Helga talked about yesterday) come to seem questionable in light of his son's refusal to accept it, and his elected affinity with Asianness. Bob increasingly shows himself confused and threatened by Asian presence, and out of touch with the younger generation, suggesting that the liaison between Gibbo, Tien and Jason represents at one level a youthful rebellion-- for example, Jason's opposition to his conformist assimilationist parents, and Tien's negativity towards her mother and Vietnamese relatives- And the fact youth subculture, and its symbols of music, dance, cuisine provide them with alternative means of identify to their parent and their ethno- cultural backgrounds.

Yet at the same time this tentative union is located within the nation state, and hints at citizenship and belonging, for as their school teacher Miss Yip has said: 'we are all Australian now' . This suggestion t of greater inclusiveness, through a practice of acknowledging difference and differentiation carries with it a perception that there will be no place for them without trouble, that there will always be tensions between such a community with the mainstream . Nevertheless a union; whereby their difference of gender, and ethnicity (Asian and white anglo) are levelled into a community of equals, shows 'the deep horizontal comradeship' that Benedict Anderson says is essential to the national imaginary. It also suggests a form of collective empowerment due to a sense of ethical responsibility towards each other. Tien, for example, cannot forgive herself for not being at Justin's side when the violation occurs- she was in America looking for her unknown father-- and vows not to let this happen again, Gibbo regrets that he lost affection for his friend, The universals that the novel invokes are those of affection love and loyalty, while the new mutual respect it involves might be seen as an example of cultural citizenship (Debra

Dudek), a recognition of difference and responsibility for each other in the multicultural space

In Michele de Kretser's novel *Questions of Travel*, is the story of the asylum seeker, of mixed Burgher/Sinhalese parentage, Ravi Mendes, who takes the unheard of step of refusing citizenship when this is granted, as Chandani said yesterday in her talk, and instead chose to return to his home in war-torn Sri Lanka, despite the risk to his life this poses. Such a decision forces reconsideration of the relationship between hospitality in the host country, the long drawn out process of gaining asylum in Australia, and the trauma suffered by the individual who is forced to flee and then gain citizenship in the host society. For Ravi such a disjuncture is heightened by the reasons for becoming refugee. In the midst of the conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the LTTE and the JVP, in Sri Lanka, his wife who works for an NGO and child are brutally murdered because she speaks out (??)-- he manages to escape to Australia on a tourist visa and then claiming he cannot return for fear of his life, he applies for asylum status. The pain and suffering of the estranged refugee magnified in his case because of this overwhelming tragedy but his IT training allows him to re-enter the local sphere he has left by and reconnect through cyberspace. He gets into touch with an IT ex colleague, from the university in Sri Lanka, who provides a website of memorialisation, and conducts an online funeral /burial service for his wife and child. In this way he enters into a transnational, long distance participation in the familiar rites of his mixed Christian-Buddhist religion (not possible in Australia).. At the same time, and possibly because of his travel in cyberspace, he is unable to connect with the Australians around him: although he is shown acts of kindness and toleration (QUOTE) in Australia his melancholy makes him resistant: "Ravi realised that she was kind and that his need to get away from her was acute' (248) he remains isolated in

his grief, a stranger. Nor does the multicultural community of Sydney provide any pathway to a greater belonging— when he meets a group of Ethiopians, he harbours desires for one of the women then realises it was a delusion, subsequently drawing closer to his mother and sisters in Sri Lanka through letters and email. Yet outwardly his life improves and he is eventually offered job as an IT consultant for a global travel agency- so achieving a vocational status similar to his life had he remained in Sri Lanka. What is interesting (and unnoticed) in this complex psychological portrait, is the efforts made by ordinary Australian citizens who work with refugees and even those who don't, to make allowances for him and to help him (fruitless though they are)—pointing to a public ethics of responsibility: and the breaking down of the frames of difference between citizen and non-citizen in a fluid exchange [whereas in Teo's novel *Behind the Moon* where there are more overt acts of racial harassment and discrimination, and awkward moments of racial discrimination, associated with Bob Gibson, Nigel's father]. Ravi's agonised decision is also a reminder that although citizen advocacy is often vital for the needs of the non-citizen to be understood and met, this cannot overcome the pervasive sense of alienation.

Ravi thought it likely that when Abebe, Hana and Tarik lived in a house, he would still only be a visitor, hovering. Look at Desmond Patternot [his burgher relative in Sydney], he had spent two thirds of his life and still lived in another country. Ravi could see himself ending up like that, his knowledge of Australia as formal as a string of recited [railway] stations.

On the public level, Ravi's decision not to accept citizenship status, reinforces the gap that Agamben defines between the concept of the citizen legally prescribed and the human: that is the break between the concept of the human and the citizen which is re-enacted in the sphere of the diaspora and is unable to be disguised by the language of universalism that articulates the ideal of political citizenship (legal equality, liberty etc). For Agamben this makes the refugee the limit concept that radically calls

into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state and put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis'. de Kretser exposes the discrepancies between the legality of state citizenship ,-- permission to reside, and the failures of hospitality, however well meaning, for this is a human relation not accounted for in public sphere of entry permits, visas, citizenship status

CONCLUDE: My concluding remarks on citizenship in its relations to literature and the law take their bearing from the idea of 'diasporic citizenship' urged by Lily Cho, who focus on the relations between citizenship and the state in considering the practice of citizenship as being involved in building, maintaining and teaching a literary tradition/ canon. For Cho, speaking of the place of Asian Canadian writing within the wider Canadian literary tradition 'national literary studies understood as a process, provides a kind of literary citizenship as a form of cultural civic participation and cultural civic legitimation in the social imaginary'. Cho is not convinced that citizenship works effectively for diaspora communities, for the nation engenders differential forms of citizenship which are not really accounted for. The amnesia about the past exclusion of Asian communities in Canada from the national narrative, which in the past allowed for the fiction of legal equality to be maintained, is to her analogous with the historical dislocation inherent in Canadian literature with its division between minority and majority literatures. These arguments may have some relevance to Asian Australian literary and cultural production, which as Wenche Ommundsen said recently, did not emerge as a category of writing until the 1990s, although the presence of such writing dates back to the 1920s (with autobiographical writings in English by Asian migrants) , Mridula Chakraborty alludes to Cho's arguments when she comments that such minority writing far from being a minority form , might revitalize

the entire field of Australian literature, which may be as Ommundsen implies helping it become increasingly transnational but with distinct Asian inflections (JASAL 12.2)

I suggest that these two novels— with their transnational and global-dimensions, indicate some realignment between mainstream and minority literature, in that practice a form of ‘diasporic citizenship’ by examining those difficult social political spaces where there is a clash between citizenship and the diaspora, and they interpret issues such as asylum seeking, legal equality, the generational and gender clash, the white anglo myth of Australianness, from the Asian migrant perspective. Finally in showing moments of solidarity between white Australians and Asians, and between migrants and citizens, they seem to point to new forms of agency and political action within the wider national sphere.