RE-READING MIGRANT WRITING: FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO HYBRIDITY

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to demonstrate the potential of a 'cross-cultural' perspective in understanding migrant/exilic writing. The differences between the novels of Antigone Kefala and Yasmine Gooneratne can be used to illustrate alternative possibilities in a Centre/Margin approach to migrant and exilic writing inherent in multiculturalism and postmodernism. While Kefala conservatively wishes to privilege the margin, Gooneratne dissolves its boundary in search of a cross-cultural imagination.

Writing as a migrant in a new country is an act of translation. Kefala, for example, sees herself as translating her foreignness to an unknown world; Gooneratne's creative hybridity on the other hand, becomes a two way translation between a new world and a new self

Hybridity, a characteristic of postcolonial discourse, is a more suggestive paradigm than those provided by the binarisms and universalisms of multiculturalism and postmodernism. *The Island*, though often framed as postmodern, in fact offers a traditional modernist individual who only at this stage, learning to recognise its 'otherness' in opposition to mainstream society. *A Change of Skies* turns towards a postcolonial interpretation of the subject focussing on its plurality and hybridity, suggesting the danger of a monolithic way of reading

This mode of plurality can also be applied to the question of migrant identity, to generate alternative models of understanding the 'in-betweeness' of the migrant/exile, that involve recognition of hybridity and difference at the same time as they recognise the commonality of migrant experience. Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* is especially suggestive of these possibilities.

Introduction

Writing about migration is nothing new for the history of literature. In the last few years however, it could be noticed there has been increased attention paid to the subject of migrant writing. The visible minorities in countries like Australia, Canada, the United States and France started to enunciate the politics of migrant discourse and to speak for themselves, signifying a shift in the sensibilities and outlooks of both artists and critics. An interest in the problems and struggles of migrants has quickly found its place on both the literary critical and political agenda. Migrant writers themselves, however, often argue that the current interest in difference, and in the position of those on the margin, is nothing more than an intellectual version of control exemplified by the official, fashionable policy of promoting 'multiculturalism'.

This thesis is inspired by the change in an approach to the theme of migration in two novels important for migrant writing published in Australia. One of them is Antigone Kefala's *The Island* (1984) and the second is Yasmine Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* (1991). They both, in a sense, are representative of a particular time in writing as well as different critical approaches to the issue of migration. Furthermore, their differences echo theoretical discussion around this literature, highlighting in particular assumptions about cultural authenticity and cultural difference. They both use and challenge the theme of migration. At the same time, however, they significantly differ from each other, signalling a trajectory of the theme of

exile, home, and identity, as well as the relativism and ambiguity around the concept of 'migrant discourse'.

Despite these differences however, the surprising conclusion suggested by both of them is the same. We start to understand that migration does not mean a simple movement from one country to another, and then learning language, local rules and customs. The novels show that migration always involves a long and painful process of the changing and transforming of a *self*, an unexpected shift for the subjects from a mainstream to a margin of social life, and a never ending act of translation, in both linguistic and cultural terms.

The Island displays a characteristic construction of marginality. This poetic story of a young Greek girl who tries to find her place within a hostile English speaking society, draws heavily on a concept of 'home', both in linguistic and cultural terms. It describes a complex process of adaptation to the 'new': a place, a language, people, and the self. The protagonist and the narrator of the novel, Melina, who fled with her family from Europe, and who is now a student of literature, constantly negotiates her 'migrant position'; she does it however, rather in her dreams than reality, as though this stance is too unbearable to record with actual accuracy. Though she mainly talks of her first romantic and sexual encounter with a young man, she seems to be more preoccupied with the inner world of "memories, dreams and emotions" than with the outer world.[1] Melina's struggle therefore, represents the writer's attempt to deal with the experience of migration, psychological exile, and a re-creation of the self. She feels a

[1] Brett, J., 'The Process of Becoming' , in *Meanjin*, 1985, p. 127

strong sense of not belonging and mental austerity, not being able to make any stable relationship either with her Greek compatriots or with her Australian peers. All this is consistent with, and reinforced by the style of the novel - a heavily interiorised, first person reflective monologue, very much like a long poem.

Kefala consciously builds her character as a *foreigner,* and it does not only describe her relations with other social groups, but slowly becomes the character's way of experiencing the world. For Melina 'being a foreigner' can refer "both to a social process and a psychological stance"[2]. The reality she lives in, presented always in a form of the first person "dream thinking", is in opposition to the imagined Australian image accepted by the mainstream of the readers.[3] Yet, though Melina tries to build her new identity around the old culture and old tradition, the 'old' is only a myth and legend; in reality it exists only in her mind. Her world becomes a value *of itself,* some kind of closed world that stands *between 'the old' and 'the new'.*

Such a position is crucial for Kefala's understanding of migration. She offers a vision of people who always stand apart and do not belong anywhere. In her view this separateness gives them a strange and unexpected privilege and knowledge, far beyond a common comprehension:

> in order to understand history, one needed a type of vision which only people placed at the crossroads could provide. That is, people who lived between cultures, who were forced to live double lives, belonging to no group, and these he called 'the people in between'. This vision, he maintained, was necessary to the alchemy of cultural understanding. [4]

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[2] ibid. p. 126
[3] ibid., p. 129
[4] Kefala, A. *The Island,* 1984 p. 12

Kefala argues that the position of being 'in-between', a characteristic sense of self difference, means that migrants have to look for a source of creativity and self expression in a new language and to locate themselves within the cultural margin. *The Island* then, confirms the connection often made between "life-as-a journey" and the specifics of the migrant experience and migrant marginality. [5]

It seems however, that Kefala ignores the most difficult aspect of constituting the migrant self - the act of adapting a new, symbolic language, the language of migration. The psychological uneasiness of her character is mainly a consequence of the fact, that Melina, in her attempt to create a new 'history' of her life, does not learn to recognise either a false harmony of the imagined national narratives or their power. Though she is eager to construct her life in a form different than her Greek family, she is not able to do it until she accepts the painful necessity to change and transform the 'self'. She tries to explain herself to a new society, not understanding that first she has *to translate a new situation to her old self.*

Gooneratne's *A Change of Skies* looks at the process of migration from perspectives different to those of Kefala. While *The Island* is a modernist, almost schizophrenic record of a suppressed individual, *A Change of Skies* presents migrant characters free from a sense of personal loss and grief. Though still confused and negotiating their new position, they are able to accept all the above mentioned aspects of migration as inevitable elements of the process itself, and brings them together into a creative contact. It is a "literary" and self conscious novel, written by an

[5] see for example, McCooey, D., *Artful Histories - Modern Australian Autobiography,* 1996, p. 109

academic interested not only in postmodern experiences, but also in the contemporary cultural debate. Told in a multiple voices, and playing with the concept of place and time, *A Change of Skies* offers a new and comic, almost picaresque view of the experience of migration.[6] Still written from the migrant position, without discrediting the seriousness of purpose, the book is also able to make the reader laugh, even at the crucial moments, when the principal characters are the most vulnerable.

This novel does not have Kefala's anger and feeling of rejection. It describes with humour and sensitivity the experiences of two main characters: Bharat, a Sri Lankan academic and his charming wife, Navaranjini (called by her family and friends "Baba"). They come from Asia to New South Wales where Bharat has secured a job as a linguistics professor in the mythical Southern Cross University. Their decision is affected by an innocent desire for a temporary exile from their family. Their ethnic conflict was to come later, playing only a part in the couple's decision never to return permanently to Sri Lanka. Central to the novel therefore, is not the specific ethnicity, but the process of transforming and changing. The protagonists could be in fact from anywhere else, for this witty novels does not record the traumas of a war-torn Sri Lanka, but the stages by which Bharat and Navaranjini decide to adapt themselves to the new life. They realise that migration means first of all an experience of being 'other' within the mainstream society. The symbolic 'changing skies' perfectly describes not only the widely explored 'migrant experience' - people's capacity to change - but also a country's capacity to change.

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[6] Mendis, R., *Displacement in Between-Worlds: Yasmine Gooneratne's A Change of Skies*, 1992, p. 3

Gooneratne points out that for her characters migration is almost a family tradition. She cleverly incorporates into the novel Bharat's grandfather Edward's journal describing his nineteenth century voyage to Australia. Edward's voice becomes a significant for the structure of the novel, as his statements in fact describe the old, 'traditional' wisdom of manhood. The aim of his travel was to prove that he "who crosses the ocean may change the skies above him, but not the colour of his soul".[7] Gooneratne, however, challenges this position; and tracing her characters' adaptation to the new life she analyses the process of constituting the self within the framework of contemporary theories. She shows on the example of her characters is how the global heterogeneity of lived experience breaks down rigid boundaries of binary concepts. In this way Gooneratne's novel is not only a witty tale of a culture clash, an outrageous satire of Australian society and its culture, but also an ironic description of migrant identity itself.

A Change of Skies, like *The Island*, refers to the concepts of home and travel, but in a less sombre mode. Gooneratne easily accepts the symbolism of the concepts, focussing more on the social mechanisms and structures than the mysteries of inner lives of her characters. She ironically describes their social interrelationships, their humoristic reactions and conclusions. Bharat and Navaranjini change their names, language, way of dressing, and behaviour. Seemingly they became popular members of the academic community, however what they interpret as a mutual understanding, in fact is some kind of fascination with their exotic otherness on the part of the locals. The couple then, gradually realise they are just like

[7] Gooneratne, Y., *A Change of Skies,* 1991, p. 167

the mynah bird, returning symbol of travelling migrants, living always 'in-between'.

Since the novel focuses on the changes of name, language, and behaviour that migrants often feel called upon to make in order to conform to the expectation of a dominant culture, Gooneratne signals the potential danger of these changes and its destructive effect on migrants' personality. Baba/Jean and Bharat/Barry, though cushioned by the fact that they are part of an academic community, discover this when they realise they cannot change their names and language without total confusion of identity. They both turn out to be subject to changes out of their control, exposed to the psychological tragedy of migration. Gooneratne suggests that not only does the despair of such forced migrants as Melina's families assume a terrible poignancy, but this also applies to the exile of creative artists who find their creative impulses paralysed by exile in Australian. Thus, the ironic beginning of the book, that seems to be a critique of Australian cultural emptiness and immaturity, in the end turns out to be a critique of overhasty and superficial verdicts. The book proves that confusion is always a consequence of the seemingly harmless desire to see the world with new eyes, and that nothing is able to change the fact that the only way to restore a lost balance in a life of exile is to accept its "in-betweeness".

A useful point (and it seems it is one of the most important ones) made in the book is that of the relativity of the concept of truth and values. Gooneratne emphasises the idea that since facts are inevitably exaggerated, distorted, mythicised and altered by time, the process of interpreting and writing the truth is always a subjective one, defined by time, conditions, and

individual experience. The constant transformation of Gooneratne's characters proves the falsity of the concept of universalism. Her characters are shaped by a mixture of influences; Baba, initially a typical oriental lady, slowly grows as she faces the unexpected events and demands which are part of the experience of migration. She faces them however, in her own way, seemingly naively, but with far more success than her initially confident husband. Notwithstanding this, confused and undermined in a sense of coherent self, both of them desire to 'translate' themselves into a new language. Ironically describing the unsuccessful attempts of her characters to imitate their Australian acquaintances, Gooneratne suggests that in the state of desire for self-determination, like postcolonial subjects, the migrants in a new society are thrown into mimicry and ambivalence, and for them choices of language, phrases and tradition are a choice of identity. Baba's hilarious engagement with the Anglo-Australian language that leads to marvellously comic misunderstandings and failure in communicating illustrates the writer's argument about the confrontation of cultures and its inevitable exilic, hybrid results.

Barry and Jean's trip to Australia, then their attempt to return to Sri Lanka, and their failure to find themselves in their country of origin, portray a sense of psychological alienation from both countries. It perfectly defines exile as a state and as a being. It represents a lack of alternatives, nostalgic departure, the humiliation of the exit, but it also represents dream and travel perceived as an alternative reality, almost the acceptance of a further marginalisation. Like Kefala, Gooneratne seems to assume that it can be not only the vision of the migrant, but also the vision of other people as well.[8]

[8] Simoeas da Silva, T., "Half-Home: A Reading of Sneja Gunew's *Framing Marginality*, 1995, p. 80

Unlike Kefala, however, she accepts this perpetual travel as the quintessence of migration, a difficult but necessary aspect of global changes.

Reading the above, novels it becomes obvious that there cannot be any single or universal model of interpreting either migrant experience or migrant writing. There is however unpredictable hybridity, and there is clearly extensive interaction between current debates and cultural theories. It seems therefore, that the literary mode of migration is not a fixed stance. It requires a constant re-reading and re-viewing, from different cross-cultural perspectives. Such an approach to this writing enables an understanding how the ideas and theories change not only our way of perceiving, but also the writers' sensibility and writing position.

Chapter One, examines and questions the concepts of binary Centre/Margin opposition, considering the issue of subjectivity, a tendency for romancing the margin, and mechanisms for controlling the margin. It shows different writers' attitudes towards the problem. Both Kefala and Gooneratne tend to see migration as a determinant of modernity, but it is also where they part company. Kefala, for example, stands for the privilege of the Margin. She uses the dominant critical construction of 'migrant writer' for defining her writing position.[9] On the other hand, for Gooneratne the boundary between margin and centre is not so clear, she goes further, beyond the limits of existing orthodoxies into realms of cross-cultural

[9] In her interview with Angelika Fremd (1984) Kefala discusses the issue, saying that once "you are made to feel that you are writing from a different sort of perspective and that you have to put these issues into your writing" she really does it. She means that "to a certain extend in that we (migrant writers) dealing with certain topics or have certain attitudes to language or have a certain approach to issues" are not the same as "locals", the mainstream, they are strangers, an intellectual margin., pp. 12-13, p. 15-16

imagination. She questions the usefulness of the whole idea of Centre and Margin, suggesting that the most dangerous side of marginalisation as a speaking position today is its centralisation and transformation into another fashionable mode of writing.[10]

Chapter Two describes how the language in which a work is written (and, consequently, is lived), affects and determines the writer's national identity and thus the culture to which s/he belongs. It considers traditional notions of translation, and its meaning for the migrant writers, comparing the role of a migrant to that of a translator. The chapter presents translation as a form of exile, a moment away from the original centre wherever the act of translation is taking place, a very specific act of creation that is filled with real and imaginary events. It finally shows migration as a linguistic experience, an unusual cross-cultural translation of basic human situations, and a translation of a variety of human attitudes towards the old and new worlds, as well as a translation of different selves.

Chapter Three analyses and explores the assumptions of postmodern and postcolonial theories, their way of reading migrant writing and categorising it. The relationship/difference between postmodern and postcolonial migrant subject can be positioned in the spatiality of location and the meaning of migrant identity to these two theories. It could be argued, therefore, that such an interpretation of migration identifies a fundamental ambivalence, and that it places the analysis within a psychoanalytical rather than a political framework. It seems however, that since a discussion of the migrant position, and the migrant writer

[10] Muecke, S., 'Marginality, Writing, Education', in *Meridian*, 1990, p.179

particularly, involves the issues of marginality and exile, the awareness of cultural politics becomes crucial. Though multicultural critics always highlighted the political practices of Anglo-Australian hegemony and domination, their critique was often weakened by the widely accepted postmodern concept of "culture of difference" and discourses of representation.[11] Only recently, as postcolonial theory has been applied to 'migrant studies' has a new approach been noticed. It challenges postmodern assumptions about cultural purity and the authenticity of migrants' literary texts. The chapter focuses therefore, on Gooneratne's attempt to reject the postmodern concept of ambivalence, suggesting that the strength of migrant writing may well lie in its hybridised view of the modern world.[12] It then, suggests a reading migrant writing from a cross-cultural perspective, using its framework and comparative methodologies.

Chapter Four explores the idea of migrant identity. Migrant writers in the past always drew heavily on the concept of identity. However, the manner in which it is understood in the age of global migration, as well as an apparent diminishing gap between the mainstream and marginal, present challenging problems. Notions of 'I' and 'others' become negotiable, and traditional assumptions of space bestowing cultural identities become questionable. Multicultural rhetoric, perceives migration as a result of the postmodern era and its global displacements and uprootedness. It particularly emphasises the contemporary articulation of migrant identity and its relation to the concept of place and home. The whole discussion

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[11] West, C., 'The New Cultural Politics of Difference', in *The Cultural Studies - Reader,* 1993, p. 203

[12] Gooneratne, Y., 'Why I Write', in *Into the Nineties - Postcolonial Women's Writing*, ed. Rutherford et al., 1994 - Gooneratne , very conscious of constructing the 'other' in culture, is not so much affected by it. She seems to accept her position as the writer writing between several literary traditions, enjoying it and using more as a source of intellectual pleasure than a political tool., p. 167

around the issue however, focuses today on imagined identity, close to Adorno's linguistic concept of 'truly home', that helps to establish some kind of postmodern position of 'in-betweeness'. This concept enables the migrant writers to provide a secure identity and intellectual 'home' in writing.[13] It seems however that the constant interest of migrant writers in the issue of identity and intellectual homelessness proves that this seemingly privileged position of exile writers is neither secure, nor comfortable. Gooneratne's attitude towards the concept of home and identity differs from Kefala's point of view. While for Kefala a place and home have very physical meaning, for Gooneratne the idea of 'home' becomes a symbol of the past, a mythical vision that one carries through all its life building on it its identity. Both Kefala and Gooneratne demonstrate in their texts a psychological anxiety rising from a question of 'homelessness'. Gooneratne however, offers a new, 'hybrid' perception of culture, challenging and questioning a fixed, monolithic approach to national culture, identity, and language.[14] For her a sense of exile affects the process of self re-creation. She signals the worries of the characters, who despite their role and social position always finally ask themselves: who am I, where do I come from, how can I write myself as 'I' and 'other' at the same time.

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13 Norris, C., *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: critical theory and the ends of philosophy,* 1990, pp. 274 - 275, Norris describes Adorno's concept of 'home' that now, though fragile and vulnerable, is truly available only within language structures in writing.

14 Roy, A., 'Postcoloniality and the Politics of Identity in the Diaspora: Figuring "Home", Locating Histories', 1995, p. 101

Chapter 1

Writing Exile - from the Margin to the Mainstream

There has been, in the past, an understandable tendency among migrant writers *who write about migration* to be over-serious about their experience of displacement and dispossession. They produced dense narratives of high seriousness, illustrating in this way the psychological devastation of, and celebrating the tragedy of, migrant experience. Kefala's *The Island* is a typical example of such literature, that was an essential first step in the artistic perception of writers dealing with their own migration, especially in Australia, as well in their justification of the migrant imperative and their place within a new society. It represents the diasporic writer's voice of protest, characterised by a sustained note of indignation, and representing the pain inflicted on the collective psyche of the migrant community.

Such a position is an inevitable attribute of each migrant community that perceives its role as marginal within a social structure. The lived experience of migrants significantly contributes to understanding the position of social and cultural marginality, or as it is sometimes called, exile. It is a condition which migrants have shared in common with other oppressed groups. Today, the social position of migrants still cannot be really incorporated into a cultural centre, however, neither can it be excluded from it.

It seems that, in an obvious way, it provides a locatable target for systems of oppression and social domination. The term 'marginality' by itself, signals the existence of 'mainstream' culture and 'mainstream' literature. Marginality is a condition constructed by the positioned relation to a privileged centre, an 'othering' directed by the mainstream authority that immediately creates some kind of hierarchy and a classification.[15] At the same time however, writing from a marginal position may become a site for the positive production of strategies and resources for both survival and struggle. Therefore, all intellectual margins, all exiles, can be located between two extremes: one is a tendency towards 'non-existence', the other a positive movement towards self-production, critical resistance and transformative struggle. The negotiation between those two seems to be the most valued aspect of migrant literature that constantly tries to build, on the basis of this contradiction, its strength and distinctiveness.

Many migrant writers, therefore, defend their marginal position. To do it they often oppose that interpretation of the multicultural approach to literature that denies the existence of the margin within Australian cultural life.[16] Paradoxically, the multicultural critical strategies of the eighties, simultaneously denied the concept of migrant cultural margin and romanced it.[17] Such an attitude towards the concept of marginality is not new, it in fact belongs to the European literary tradition. Since Romanticism, with its vision of a lonely and isolated artist, the idea of the "romantic margin" has been created. It could be even argued that modern and postmodern avant-

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15 Jurgensen, M., 'Towards a People's Literature', 1988, p. xiv

16 Walwicz, A., 'Look at me, Ma - I'm going to be a marginal writer!' 1996, pp. 58-59; Couani, A., 'Writing from a non- Anglo perspectve', 1992, p. 98)

17 see for example, Gunew, S., 'Migrant Women Writers - Who's on Whose Margin?', in *Meanjin*, 1983

garde concepts of margin are nothing more than an exploration and transgression of the way of perceiving the artist. In a romantic-modernist discourse, the artist appears to be someone who sees and feels, sometimes even understands, more than others. He/she has however, to pay for that knowledge, has to accept his/her difference, and sometimes even rejection by the mainstream.

Such a position offers the writers from the margin the privilege of criticising the mainstream, to take the place of a critical voice of the 'truth'. Therefore, in many cases (works of Walwicz and Kefala can serve here as the perfect examples), migrant writers tend to locate themselves and their literary characters in a psychological margin. In this way, accepting the idea of multicultural ideology as an acceptance of cultural diversity and a recognition of the right of diverse cultures to co-exist, they also reserve for themselves the right to challenge the accepted values of the majority of the population and its only formal diversity.[18]

Surprisingly, Sneja Gunew, the most prominent theorist among multicultural literary critics, strongly opposed such a classification of migrant writers as marginal, arguing that writing by migrants is an inseparable part of Australian culture and that their creativity contributes to its literature.[19] Seemingly, Gunew's main point about the marginality of migrant writing was the fiction of the idea that Centre/Margin ideology can be seen as mirror opposites. She undermines this position and diminishes the difference between 'marginal' and 'mainstream', arguing that the there is

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18 Duncan, G., 'Multiculturalism and Democracy', 1995, pp. 183-184

19 see Senna Gunew (1983, 1984, 1988), as well as Piotr Skrzynecki (1985), Lolo Houbein (1984)

no difference between literary works written by the migrant and the mainstream, and that the term "minority literature" is created by the "critical apparatus" in order to distinguish it from Anglo-Celtic culture:

> Ethnic minority literatures is a useful phrase because it implies that there is always majority literature, and thus draws attention to the question of ethnicity in all literature...it acts as a reminder of what we have learnt from various recent emancipatory struggles, namely the primary need to deconstruct the hegemonic centre."[20]

On the other hand, it seems that Gunew ignores the fact that minority writing is different and that its strength consists of that difference. Nevertheless, such a 'centralised' margin seems to become a typical postmodern combination. It signalises a significant shift in the Centre/Margin issue that slowly becomes a commonly accepted rhetoric. It is even often argued, for example by Stuart Hall, that:

> The slow contradictory movement from 'nationalism' to 'ethnicity' as a source of identities is part of a new politics. It is also part of the 'decline of the west' - that immense processes of historical relativisation which is just beginning to make the British, at least, feel just marginally 'marginal'.[21]

Though Hall focuses on the British situation, it seems that the same mechanism can be applied to Australia and its literature. Through denying the marginality of migrant writing, the process of centralisation of the margins occurs. There is a clear shift in a rhetoric and speaking position of a marginalised subject. It is no longer Melina's cry "I was alone as always. Alone in this dark night, in this dark valley. Empty."[22] Neither is it any longer a narrative of dispossession that demands justice for people already placed as defeated. A new meaning given to the concept of margin allows

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20 Gunew, S., Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies, 1994, p. 12

21 Hall, S., 'Minimal Selves', (Hall, 1987, p. 46)Hall often argues that the fact of denying the marginality may mean a refusal of acceptance of difference.

22 Kefala, A., *The Island*, 1984, p. 57

the migrant writers to offer a original version of artistic sensibility and cultural values. It is not surprising then, that these writers often identify themselves with the literary avant-garde, preferring new experimental techniques of writing to widely accepted realism. Partly it certainly is an attempt to defend their marginal literary and intellectual position, partly it just suits the purely literary purposes. This shift in approaching migrant marginality requires a new type of narrative, close to Gooneratne's concept of the intellectual "out-and-out sovereignty" of migrant subjects.[23] Such a position already suggests subjectivity and a desire to be 'other'. It also neglects the idea of objective universality and place the truth within the margin.

The Island then, telling the story of an artist who finds herself within a foreign culture, represents all those who facing the 'unknown' experience a strange feeling of ambiguity of a sudden loss of belonging:

> And I felt in their eyes an immense pity, a pity for myself, as if there on top of the waves I was burning out in a last effervescence of sound, burnt by a gift that I possessed that could not save me now, a gift that was my doom, that divided me from them, but which was useless.[24]

Kefala describes an artist who, finding herself in a society that values neither her cultural heritage nor her artistic sophistication, puts herself into its margin. Her character feels that her gift of creative expression is something useless; it is something that will continue to 'divide' her from 'them'. As a writer Kefala locates herself always "very much outside the framework" and suggests that each debate about migrant writing "automatically draws lines of division between what is Australian and what

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23 Muecke, S., 'Marginality, Writing, Education', 1990, p. 179
24 Kefala, A., *The Island*, 1984, p. 78

is "us", so they (non Anglo-Celtic writers) are constantly being pushed to the other side of the fence".[25]

Thus, her character's sense of European heritage makes her uncomfortable within a new environment. To the last page of the novel she has to look for a refuge in her dreaming images that are better descriptive of her state of mind than they are of reality: "...the tree spread its branches, dry and cracked like frozen fingers. There it stood, vulnerable and young, glass tears hanging from its arms..."[26] Kefala's sense of isolation is evident, and this isolation - the fundamental disjunction between the old and the new - is contained in all her writing. In fact it is very typical for migrant writing of the eighties. Her writing signalised a clear departure of the subject of migration and cultural alienation from the documentary tendency among those who wrote before her, towards the poetic vision of the romantic intellectual exile.

For Kefala then, the migrants become psychological exiles, strange figures from outside, perpetual travellers - arriving, departing, and waiting, often in a state half-way between waking and dreaming. Their marginalisation seems to be inseparably and inevitably a part of their "selves", something that hurts, but slowly becomes a valuable position, enabling them to see and understand what the "mainstream people" ignore. Gooneratne, however, offers a slightly different point of view on the issue. She suggests not only that the writing of Australians of non-English speaking background moves from the margins of Australian literature into

25 Fremd, A., 'Interview with Antigone Kefala', 1984, p. 12
26 Kefala, A., *The Island*, 1984, p. 85

its mainstream, but that these writers should increase the number of fictional characters who are able to move with naturalness and ease between various cultures of Australia, native and migrants.[27] Her characters, therefore, though they also experience a sense of not belonging, accept that state as an obvious element of migration: "...in moving away so light-heartedly...I had unwittingly shut invisible gates behind us for ever. Our future now lay elsewhere ...we are exiles."[28] Gooneratne tries to explore the meaning of migration and exile more in terms of psychological exile than physical journey. She sees exile from the native, homogeneous culture, as the first step towards freeing oneself from preconceived ideas and inhibitions, of opening oneself to a change and new growth which leads to personal fulfilment.

'Exile' as a term, like marginalisation, has a history of its own; it is a word charged with power to disturb.[29] According to this interpretation, exile may take different forms, physical or mental, and may be forced or voluntary. Furthermore, its impact may be deadening or enlivening to the artistic imagination. Exile can be a gift but it also may lead to despair. It is almost always associated with displacement, dispossession, and identity crisis. Yet as many argue, being an exile is a common twentieth century condition. Stuart Hall's claim that we are "all, in some way, recently migrated" begins a discussion of how a recognition of the cultural force of a sense of exile affects contemporary migrant writing.[30] Though there are historical events which lie behind the sense of exile explored by Antigone

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27 Goonerante, Y., *Constructing the Characters of Women in 'A Change of Skies'*, 1992, p. 59
28 Gooneratne, Y, *A Change of Skies,* 1992, p. 271
29 Bennett, B., 'Introduction' in *A Sense of Exile*, Bennet, 1988, p. 2
30 Hall, S., 'Minimal Selves', 1987, p. 44

Kefala in *The Island* and Yasmine Gooneratne in *A Change of Skies,* it seems that the mental or intellectual elements of exile are more important.

Peter Berger argued in 1974 that the most significant element of the sense of exile is a deepening condition of 'homelessness'. He claimed that an experience of a member of a postmodern society equally suffers from "the correlate of the migratory character of his experience of society and of self" and it "has been what might be called a metaphysical loss of 'home'".[31] Hence, the project of migrant writing - writing from exile is to make the self somehow at home in the foreign land and culture. Re-creation of home and self seems to be however only partially possible, as a place is no longer the clear support of migrant identity. Both concepts became imagined desires, where their physical and real travels transform into a daydream about lost self and a better future, a new and unknown alternative reality.

Migrant writers have appropriated from a sense of exile the ideas of homelessness and diaspora, as these best describe the condition of migrant displacement. Said suggests that exile functions as a term defining a condition of modern literature as it is "caught in a mode of alienation and obsessively invokes a 'transcendental homelessness' ".[32] Thus, the literature of those 'in-between' particularly mediates between the spatial pole of history and the temporal pole of postmodernity. In one way, it may seem that some kind of textualizing of exile into a postmodern (or postcolonial) condition represents a typical experience for migrants of nostalgia for 'old' and 'home'. It may even seem that an attempt to locate the migrant subject

31 Berger, P. et al., *The Homeless Mind: Modernisation and Consciousness*, 1974, p. 77
32 Rajan, G., & R., Mohanram, 'Introduction' in *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts - Theory and Criticism,* 1995, p. 4

within a mainstream means nothing more than an uncomfortable exposition of the diasporic voice and diasporic identity, a mock version of the collective, national position. Therefore, it would suggest that any collective 'migrant identity' signalises the need of individuals to exist within a national, common image, and the vision of people 'in-between' is not only illusory, but also painfully self-deluding. Therefore, diaspora for them becomes a substitute for national narrative, where an author as an exilic subject refuses to belong to the mainstream.

Kefala's treatment of this problem comes closer to Said's concept of exile. It examines the subject of "home" by linking it with the concept of modernist "exile", and then juxtaposes its cultural ethos with the conditions exemplified by the contemporary "impersonal setting" of "the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration".[33] Gooneratne's novel, on the other hand, describes exile as common to the desire of all human beings to know and understand the "truth" about themselves, even if it is only the imagined one. After many years of living as exiles, Bharat and Baba find out that their travel, their difficult decision to leave their country, was nothing more than a timeless attempt to know themselves,

> Such a discovery can be discomforting, even terrifying. It can come as a flash of insight or, as in my case, it can take many years...Did he need to travel to a foreign land in order to discover this truth? It is a the theme of a hundred treatises, the subject of a thousands sermons...I too could have discovered this fundamental truth without so much as moving from my house in Colombo.[34]

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[33] ibid., p.4
[34] Gooneratne, Y., *A Change of Skies,* 1991, p. 285

Therefore, *A Change of Skies* shifts from the concept of national diaspora and tries to cross cultural borders. Gooneratne ironically describes Sri Lankan diasporic leaders deconstructing the assumptions of home and home culture. Instead, she offers a new type of migrant character that could be described as the "specular intellectual", using Abdul JanMohamed's term.[35] What he means by the term is a subject that feels familiar with two cultures, but it is both unwilling and unable to identify with them. In *A Change of Skies* Bharat, after returning from Colombo, knows there is no way to return to the 'pre-migration' reality. However, he also realises he will never belong to the mainstream Australian society. He accepts his role as an exile, deciding to work as an ESL teacher. He knows that his migrant experience changed his perspective and his sense of belonging. Though exile to some extent limits his creativity, it also offers him other, new possibilities. This however is not his free choice, but a necessity. He realises that 'in-betweeness' is not his privilege, but the only space within which he is able to act. Gooneratne in her novel presents the awareness of the inevitable pain and the tragedy of migration, that even chosen migration finally always becomes an intellectual exile. Hence, the decisive problem for exilic writers is to restore and protect their individuality and difference, and to state how it affects their language and writing position.

35 compare with the other JanMohamed's concept of "syncretic intellectual", see: Rajan, G, & R., Mohanram, 'Introduction' in *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts - Theory and Criticism,* 1995, p. 5

Chapter 2

Writing and Living in Translation

The crucial aspect of each culture is its language. For migrant writers then, the necessity to preserve their own language becomes a signifier of psychological resistance against the dominance of homogeneous culture; on the other hand the need to be heard forces them to write in English. A new language however, as Ashcroft and his colleagues argue, turns to be a "medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established".[36] For many migrant writers, writing in English creates an additional complication for their inner life. The very fact that they describe the feeling of alienation in the language of the 'other' culture deepens the multiplied modalities of their unstable selves. They use English as a tool for translation, not only of a strange reality to a more familiar one, but first of all for a translation *of a new self to the old.*

This position provides a new perspective for Kefala's concept of "people in between". It locates a migrant in the situation of a translator, not only in a linguistic, but also in a cultural sense. Bharat in *A Change of Skies,* writing an imagined *Guide for Asian Migrants to Australia* concludes: "...it would, I realised, become my duty to explain and interpret one culture to

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[36] Ashroft, B., et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, 1991, p. 7

another, the West to the East".[37] In fact the whole book is a kind of translation, from one culture to another, from one theory to another, finally from one human being to another. The translation of Bharat's grandfather's journal is symbolic not only for the characters' lives, but for the migrants' role in cultures. A series of 'translations' that constitute the pages of the novel present translations of cultures, human behaviour, identities, and the stories become committed "to the idea of the blessed inevitability of change".[38] Both, *A Change of Skies* and *The Island* in a sense translate one world to another, a margin to a mainstream.[39] The novels deal with the migrants that try to find their place within a new culture, a culture that they do not accept and do not understand. That misunderstanding however is mutual, and in order to maintain their place within a new society the characters live in a state of constant translation.

The two recent decades have been the witnesses of a new way of thinking about translating. Many academics started to question whether a translated text is 'a translation, an imitation, a version, a paraphrase'[40] or 'the substance of dreams, enigmatic and fragmentary fantasies'[41] of its own. Whatever is their position, they agree that production of a good translation requires not only the translation of the chain of words, but it is also a translation of the whole culture, identity and ideology. It is more a "translational practice" than a mere "replacement" of one language by

37 Gooneratne, Y., *A Change of Skies,* 1991, p. 145
38 Williams, H., 'Migrants in Wonderland', 1992, p. 36
39 That such books effect a translation of cultures is suggested by the fact that the imagined addressee of each book belongs to the mainstream
40 Lefevere, A., 'Introduction: Comparative Literature and Translation', 1995, p. 8
41 Grigorescu Pana, I., 'Translation into English as a Second Life', 1989, p. 689

another. Lefevere even argues that the process has to involve some kind of "rewriting" a spirit of one culture, to make it comprehensive to the other.[42]

As the great majority of migrant writers in Australia write in English, the theory of translation seems to be relevant to Australian migrant literature. Though the linguistic surface of the language in Kefala's case is seemingly not very important, and in the case of Gooneratne is not an issue at all, both of the writers carry with them the whole body of different cultural traditions and literary values that allow them to choose their "linguistic" position. Both of them grew up within at least two languages, within a broadly understood "world" of literary culture.[43] Thanks to this, as writers, they are both able to recognise how the heterogenous Australian culture acts against ethnic minorities. 'Ethnic', which etymological derives from an idea of sameness paradoxically comes to mean an 'other' as a product of the assertion that "A is an X because he is not a Y". This makes 'ethnic' writers adopt political and cultural (thus also linguistic) writing strategies enabling them to negotiate their position within a new world.[44] For them, English carries not only different words, that can replace the words of a structure of the old language, but also deeper, psychological changes. Therefore, for them, translation starts within themselves, "inside" their lives simultaneously translating *new* into the *old* and vice versa. Since however, translation is not a mere replacement of words, nor is it simply a translation of cultures, but a process whereby a new value and meaning can

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42 Lefevere, A., 'Introduction: Comparative Literature and Translation', 1995, p.10

43 Fremd, A., ' Interview with Antigone Kefala', 1984, p. 10; Rama, R.P., 'A Conversation with Yasmine Gooneratne', 1994, pp. 5

44 Sollors, W., 'Ethnicity', 1990, p. 288, Sollors also pints out the paradox of contemporary meaning of the word 'ethnicity', explaining, that what in original means 'the same' in the language of multiculturalism is understood as 'other'.

be created, "becoming,...a hybrid object... It is a hybridity, too, which is form-giving, lending meaning to the bewildering array of cultural translations which migrants must make".[45]

For Melina in *The Island* for example, new words did not bring any meaning. She could not communicate using the method of 'replacing the words':

> I spoke. I could see from his face that he had not the faintest idea what I was saying, the meaning stopped somewhere mid-air between us, he incredulous that he will ever understand me, I incredulous that he will ever understand me...I could see in his whole attitude the immense surprise at being confronted, here in his own room, at the University, by something as foreign as myself.[46]

To protect her difference she has to create her own world made of a hybrid version of the two worlds she has to live in. Her imagination and dreams become her own, private translation of the reality. Baba and Bharat in *A Change of Skies* though more 'at home' within the English language, also realise that living outside the cultural meaning of a language can sharpen a feeling of rejection and being the 'other'. They try however, to cross the boundaries of cultural differences. After the first period of attempts to "translate" everything literally, they learn not only of the real meaning of the life in other languages/cultures, but also negotiate their role as translators. These characters reverse the traditional role of the migrant subject in Australian literature. Their aim is not only to adapt in a new society, but also to deconstruct their selves, their language into a hybrid form that would allow simultaneous description of the 'old' of their lives and a new experience.

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45 Boehmer, E., *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature - Migrant Metaphors*, 1995, p. 234
46 Kefala, A., *The Island*, 1984, p. 45

For many migrant writers, then, writing in English means more than the struggle with linguistic structure. It is also a struggle with a new structure of self, the structure that constructs their "otherness". Therefore, the process of writing in the other language is first of all a translation of the culture, but also of a new self It is a very specific translation that occurs within the person's psyche simultaneously in two directions. Writing is a way of explaining feelings, one's own tradition and one's position to the new society. It is however also, through the process of emotional disclosure, the explanation of 'the new' *to* the self This act exposes the fiction of fixed identity bounded by the limits of language. Baba/Jean proves to her husband that the attempt to simply translate culture is never fully possible, however it is possible to gain something more from this process. She often suggests there is no possibility of replacing one language by the other without suffering and experiencing the strange feeling of mental dislocation. She claims that the result of such translation is always connected with a loss and deconstruction of the whole world, what Grigorescu defines as translation from a former life that demonstrates the vulnerability of humans bonds.[47]

Thus, to consider the question of "translation" for Australian migrant writing becomes its crucial aspect. The process itself describes a crossing of certain boundaries, becomes a destination and thematic centre. It not only represents some kind of 'colonial' or 'oriental' fascination of 'a strange', but also expresses a postcolonial rejection of central authority and the postmodern possibility of cross-cultural understanding. Therefore, even

47 Grigorescu Pana, I., 'Translation into English as a Second Life', 1989, p. 689

though it is often an extremely difficult process, migrant writing becomes "translational practice" that creates also those bonds through which one can live simultaneously in two worlds. Translation of culture and of self act like any literary process for the writers who write about migration, first of all bringing out the relation between reality and imagination. Both Kefala and Gooneratne show that for their characters imagination is no longer a threat to the understanding of their lives - the words become parts of their selves. Language cannot be any longer the only representative of reality, because the invented construction of psychological insights transforms the picture of real life more than any language. The language of characters and writers as well, is filled with real and imaginary events. Thanks to this the language is able to describe not only the homelessness of identity and a desired sense of continuity of history, but also a lost feeling of belonging to the old: to an old nation, culture, language. It even seems that as long as the writer chooses or needs to translate, he/she will not accept the language as his/her own. That stance, though often uneasy, may also provide "displaced" writers with the joy of "a liberty that others may well envy".[48]

Translation of thoughts may be a privilege not possible for those who never were forced to live beyond their language; but translation may also mean, like migration, a life oriented elsewhere, a life in exile. Migrant writers write in a foreign language about cultural exile, that very specific exile that unconsciously begins and transgresses in their minds before actual arrival. Writing in translation is then not only a process of negotiating the self and a chance of a second life, but also a moment of silence and uncertainty. Translation of culture therefore, is a cruel but necessary lesson

48 Gooneratne, Y., *A Change of Skies*, 1991, p. 281

for the writers and their readers. It is a lesson of tolerance and self-knowledge:

> It is not simply that we become more knowledgeable about new society, although that is certainly part of what we learn. It is something more, something that goes deeper than the mind alone can reach, an awareness that everything around us is caught up in a process of profound and inexorable change, and that we are not only changing with it, but being perpetually remade' [rewritten?] [49]

Writing in translation then, often gives the necessary distance not only to the world around us, but also to the self. For those who write in a second language, translation of words is not the most important thing. The most significant, difficult and complex challenge, is the attempt to translate 'the truth' of the imagined self and the imagined version of one's own culture. 'Imagined', because exile itself transforms reality. This process is a kind of game of dreams (the ending in *The Island)* that constructs the real life of an outsider. This kind of writing is a challenge to the existing literary genres, is an alternative to the writer's questioned autonomy. Thus it is not only an option of the second life, but also a hope of greater freedom, it is "the invisibility...(that) can bestow on us a freedom we may not enjoyed 'at home"', wherever that home is.[50]

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[49] Gooneratne, Y., *A Change of Skies,* 1991, p. 284-285
[50] ibid, p. 281

Chapter 3

'Framing Migration'

This unexpected freedom of migrants in writing away from home was often ignored by both the migrant writers and their critics. The whole dispute around migrant culture has for a long time been dominated by the politics of multiculturalism. This approach to the issue of migrant writing and its meaning has caused further misunderstanding. In Australia, the concept of migrant community and migrant identity developed through several stages, which always corresponded to stages both of national and multicultural consciousness, and stages of the project of asserting distinguishable migrant identity. Initially "migrant studies" was the area of interest of sociologists, political economists, anthropologists and demographers. Many of them were influenced by Marxist ideology and its concerns with class division, inequality, and Foucault's formulation of the concepts of truth and power.[51] Even the whole body of first migrant literary works followed that pattern, focusing on difficulties with the adaptation, exploitation and unequal power relations.[52] This writing not only reported the migrant customs and languages, but first of all inevitably privileged the old cultures, emphasised the concept of lost home and the old fixed self over the new and unpredictable, in this way creating a single and centred migrant image.[53]

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[51] Docker, J., 'Rethinking Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism in the Fin De Siecle', 1995, p. 413

[52] For example, see: *The Strength of Tradition*, ed by R.F. Holt, 1985, *Joseph's Coat,* ed by P. Skrzynecki, 1985

[53] Docker, J., 'Rethinking Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism in the Fin De Siecle', 1995, p. 415

By the 1980s however, the multicultural literary studies, inspired by Sneja Gunew, started to be recognised. Gunew stressed the importance of a textual approach to migrant writing. In a series of articles she introduced a literary multicultural discourse and "the analysis of cultural difference" as a basis for the interpretation and valuation of that writing.[54] With time, some others joined her in the field, and people like Kateryna O. Longley, Efi Hatzimanolis, Piotr Skrzynecki, Manfred Jurgensen and Lolo Houbein became well known among literary multicultural practitioners, all of them strongly arguing in the name of Australian multicultural literature.

Surprisingly, despite their pioneering role in challenging Anglo-Celtic Australian homogeneity, they unfortunately often tended to generalise migrant literary production, focussing on its European heritage. Docker points out that what in the early 1980s was an invaluable contribution in recognising the way in which the dominant Australian culture practised exclusions of migrant writing, by the middle 1990s there emerged as "exclusionary, an orthodoxy...producing 'the migrant' as ever marginal, a modernist nomad".[55] Gunew however, has continued developing her position. In her latest book *Framing Marginality* (1994) she still concentrates on European writing. She focuses on such writers as Rosa Cappiello, Ania Walwicz, Anna Couani, and Antigone Kefala, and a widely treated 'migrant subject' introduced by them - a foreign outsider and a critical intellectual. This character is always characterised by intellectual alienation and fragmentation, strongly located within a 'foreign' or what is

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54 Gunew, S., *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies,* 1994, p. 13
55 Docker, J., 'Rethinking Postcolonialism and Multiculturalism in the Fin De Siecle', 1995, p. 424

now more often called 'ethnic' cultural tradition. Telling its story, such a character, challenged Australian literary and cultural narratives, deconstructing a newly built national image. Within this discourse, migrant novels and migrant characters could not be simply added to the body of Australian literature.[56] Migrant writers therefore, were pushed to the margin, and there they started to construct their migrant identities.

Gunew and others seem to adore such a position, often connecting it with the European 'high culture'. Though it does not seem to be Gunew's purpose, by limiting her area of research only to the above mentioned group of writers, she makes her position particularly vulnerable for critical attack. Even though Gunew recently has confirmed the mistakes that have been made in ignoring the fact that there are other marginal groups other than the Europeans, she tries to defend herself in a very peculiar way, saying that when she started to write about migrant literature "Asia was not a case".[57]

For Gunew, the European origin of the literary margin leads to its postmodern interpretation. It is not accidental that migrant characters are often presented in a strange state of surrealistic day-dreaming, on the edge of reality that they accept somehow beyond their consciousness. Kefala, for example emphasises the idea that there can be no definitive version of migrant reality, since facts are inevitably exaggerated, distorted, mythicised

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[56] ibid., p. 414

[57] Rajan, G., & R., Mohanram, 'Postcolonialism/Multiculturalism - Australia 1993: An Interview with Sneja Gunew', 1995, p. 209-213; p. 212 - that statement undermines and questions the credibility of Gunew's position. It seems that her interest in the 'migrant case' was rather a way of locating herself within Australian literary criticism than presenting her real political engagement. Furthermore, by totalising the whole body of non-European writers by the term 'Asia' it seems that Gunew focuses mainly on production of the first wave of migrants ignoring not only the vastly changed composition of ethnic minorities in Australia, but also dividing that community between 'Europe' and 'Asia', creating another version of 'others'.

and altered in their perception of life and themselves. Focusing on such aspects of migrant writing, Gunew, started to interpret it in terms of postmodern literary theory.[58] She, arguing that "minorities seem always to have been within the condition of postmodernism; the fight for a provisional and strategically conceived identity is a necessary part of minorities", she assumes not only the postmodern classification of migrant writing, but also its special role and position engaged,

> with postmodernist debates, though they do not work from the same position, or in the same way, as mainstream postmodernist critics. For those positioned as minorities, identity has always been in a state of provisional and fragile construction, or, in Stuart Hall's terms, a place where the 'unspeakable stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of a history, of a culture'.[59]

This approach emerged mainly from an awareness of the position of the decentred subject and its identity. As this theme slowly started to dominate migrant writing, its postmodern interpretation became almost taken for granted. It even happened that through those works, critics discovered the meaning of postmodern theory.[60]

Gunew perceives both marginality and multiculturalism as inseparable parts of the postmodern condition, that focus on "decentred subjects and...the non-or self-referentiality of language".[61] Such an interpretation however may be sometimes misleading. Initially many migrant writers willingly accepted the classification of their writing as postmodern.[62] Today however, some of them have started to notice what

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[58] see for example, Gunew, S., 'PostModern Tensions', 1990

[59] ibid., p. 22

[60] Docherty, T., 'Introduction' in *Postmodernism - A Reader*, 1993, p. 16

[61] Gunew, S., *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*, 1994, p.22

[62] Digby, J., 'The Politics of Experience', 1992, p. 823 -in this interview with Ania Walwicz she describes migrant mode of writing as a postmodern, "completely different in tone, ...(in) area of involvement", abstract and experimental

has become a postmodern system of exclusion, and they reject its refusal to "turn the Other into the Same", turning to, and looking for inspiration within a broadly understood postcolonial theory.[63] *A Change of Skies*, for example, locates migrant discourse within postcolonial concepts. Gooneratne argues that the "politics" of migration and the creation of migrant identity involves various kinds of experiences understood in terms of postcolonial ideology. It includes slavery, suppression, representation of difference, resistance, and a migration itself. Though none of these aspects is "essentially" postcolonial, together they seem to form the "complex fabric of the field".[64]

Ashcroft and his colleagues point out that the idea of postcolonial literary theory itself emerged from "the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing".[65] What Gooneratne suggests in *A Change of Skies* is that the same mechanism can also be applied to the process of migration and its literature. She undermines the European concept of universalism, not however rejecting all its aspects. Though writing about migrant experience and the knowledge they gained,

> It is not simply that we become more knowledgeable about new society, although that is certainly part of what we learn. It is something more, something that goes deeper than the mind alone can reach, an awareness that everything around us is caught up in a process of profound and inexorable change, and that we are not only changing with it, but being perpetually remade.[66]

While Gooneratne points to timeless humanitarism, she simultaneously questions postmodern assumptions about the universal features of language,

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63 During, S., 'Postmodernism or Post-colonialism today?', 1993, p. 449,
64 Ashroft et al., *The Pos-tcolonial Studies - a reader,* 1995, pp. 2-4
65 Ashroft et. al., *The Empire Writes Back,* 1989, p. 11
66 Gooneratne, Y., *A Change of Skies*, 1991, pp. 284-285

value systems, and self consciousness, and the tendency of postmodernism to argue in the name of the sovereignty of the 'other'.[67]

This apparent confusion between a postmodern and a postcolonial concept of otherness seems to be the main point of Gooneratne's book. This confusion is partly caused by the fact that the main postcolonial concept, of the Centre/Margin binaries of imperial discourse, is very similar to the postmodern idea of the deconstruction of the centralised and logocentric master narratives of European culture. Furthermore, while theoretical texts tend to sustain a formal postmodern/postcolonial division, creative texts often freely draw on both of the theories.[68] The main difference however lies within the attempt in postcolonial theory to 'free' its subject and to allow it to create its hybrid identity out of the notion of being the 'other', without the institutional approval of political multiculturalism.

Thus, in *A Change of Skies* Gooneratne introduces a new, hybrid voice to Australian literature of migration. She argues that migration as a determinant of modernity is a natural and constructive force of our epoch. Her characters represent desire for change, so characteristic of our times. Her novel, seemingly so culturally bounded is about leaving and arriving, about adventure and nostalgia, about preservation and metamorphosis, about the people who do not need to learn to accept migration itself, but have to learn to accept their new role, a role of the 'other'. By resorting to satiric conventions Gooneratne is able to discuss her position in an unusual

67 Hassan, I., 'Toward a Concept of Postmodernism, 1993, p. 152. Hassan argues that postmodern 'otherness' means first of all "coming out of silence, celebrating of difference, and participation of the minorities in a mainstream culture".

68 During, S., 'Postmodernism or Post-colonialism today?, 1993, p. 449 During argues that postmodernity in fact denies the other, by refusing "to turn the Other into the Same"

way. With humour, without exaggeration or melodrama, she exposes some of the most difficult aspects of the 'migrant experience' and 'translates' some of the most scabrous issues, like racism, social prejudice, and cultural misunderstanding into something more tolerable and sensitive. The book proves that to express this dramatic experience irony may be as equally powerful tool as poetic disclosure. This is a comparatively recent but very necessary development among migrant writers who seek to explore the ramifications of migrant discourse in fiction. The novel's characters demonstrate a familiar pattern of cultural misunderstanding based on illusions of a sense of superiority of culture or tradition. It is a first novel about migration that describes the moment of confrontation of two cultures from both sides, weakening their Centre/Margin binarism.

Such a positioned theme of migration is in absolute opposition to the official Australian multiculturalism, which instead of giving a voice to the 'difference' as the name of the policy might suggest, imposes "on minority cultures a stable identity"[69]. The current interest in difference in Australia, and in the position of those on the margins, is an interest encouraged by the official policy of diverse Australia in order to promote the economical and political interests of the state. However, while this 'ethnic attraction' may be useful in putting marginal cultures and interests onto the political agenda, it can, and often does, serve to recolonise ethnic and marginalised groups. Though *A Change of Skies* seemingly speaks for Asian migrants, in fact the very same mechanism considers other ethnic minorities in Australia, who see here "a set of discursive practices,... colonialist ideologies, and its

69 Ommundsen, W., 'Writing as Migration: Brian Castro, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity', 1995, p. 160

contemporary forms and subjectificatory legacies".[70] It seems that now even Sneja Gunew accepts that position, slowly changing her attitudes towards the recent changes in Australian population and culture. She agrees that multiculturalism, instead of including other cultures on equal terms into the Australian mainstream, operates mainly in "relation to the state and cultural policy", offering multiculturalism as an Australian equivalent of Third World postcolonialism.[71]

Thus, this new approach towards migrant writing that grounds on a basis of postcolonial theory changes not only the mood of writing but also the ways of its reading. Nowadays, when reading works by migrants it is difficult to ignore the fact that difference always exists between the particular literary theories used for interpreting changes in the meanings of books. Reading *The Island* we deal with a postmodern individual who barely starts to recognise its 'otherness' in the binary opposition us/them; on the other hand reading *A Change of Skies,* the reader has to be conscious of the author's postcolonial position. Gooneratne, however, stresses the danger of a monolithic reading technique. She points out how difference can be appropriated by the dominant culture, and marginal culture can be commodified and classified with a total ignorance of the natural plurality of peoples, interests and contexts. It is no coincidence that in order to become a part of a new society Baba writes an exotic cooking book, nor that she compares good literature to good cuisine. She builds her new life not on her version of Australian style but on her understanding of an Australian

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70 Tiffin, H., 'Introduction' in *Past the last Post*, 1990, p.vii

71 Rajan & Mohanram, 'Postcolonialism/Multiculturalism - Australia 1993: An Interview with Sneja Gunew', 1995, p. 207

version of a migrant - she does not mimic the West, but its imagined version of the East.

A Change of Skies represents a significant shift in migrant writing from individualism based on presumptions of separation of cultures to the more complex, hybrid version of interrelation of different cultures and values. Postcolonial theory, introduced to Australian migrant writing by Gooneratne, proceeds from a consideration of the nature of diasporic communities and the types of hybridisation their various cultures have produced. She notes the strange collusion between narrative mode, history and often mimetic reality. Furthermore, comparing the migrant experience of Bharat and Baba with that of their grandfather Edward, Gooneratne replaces a temporal reality with a spatial plurality. In this way she discusses the complication of time meeting space in literary theory, showing the obvious contradiction in the creation of a migrant self. She presents a uniquely distinct perception of an exile that is closer to postcolonial theory than to a postmodern interpretation,

> Postmodern notions of meaning as arbitrary, or identity as provisional, are hardly relevant to the lives of...[the] marginalised ethnic...for whom self-determination remains a political imperative. For them, the signifiers of home, self, past, far from representing instances of discursive contingency, stand for live and pressing issues.[72]

Therefore, it might be said that the main clash in *A Change of Skies* lies not between the 'old' and the 'new', but between the 'pure' and the 'hybrid'. Such an interpretation of reality however, puts migrant literature outside the mainstream of literary critique; it not only confirms, but also partly creates

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72 Boehmer, E., *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature - Migrant Metaphors,* 1995, p. 248

its marginality, that very specific feature of migrant writing that is not its weakness but strength and inseparable attribute.

However, to find the strength of their writing migrant writers have to re-negotiate their role as migrants. They have to transmute time into space, to struggle their present out of the past, to learn to accept their difference and cross-culturality as an obvious point in human history. This task is neither easy, nor painless. Though Said, like Kefala, argues that migration "is a privileged status if it is one's choice, but it is apocalyptic if it is enforced" Gooneratne questions that point of view.[73] She argues that even *chosen* migration causes a deep psychological confusion that may limit the writers' creativity. Therefore, writing from an exilic position - dealing with its marginality, desiring for social, cultural, and linguistics self-determination - affects not only the mood of writing, but also the whole way of perceiving life.

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[73] Rajan, G., & R., Mohanram, 'Locating Postcoloniality', in *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts,* 1995, p. 5

Chapter 4

Reworking Migrant Identity: Hybridity and Cross-Culturalism

The migrant subject has to reconstruct its identity in order to negotiate its new position. Migrant writing of the eighties paid a lot of attention to the issue, and the question of migrant identity has been also recently vigorously debated among cultural and literary critics interested in multiculturalism.[74] It seems that the essential elements of migrant identity is a sense of dislocation, discontinuity, and fragmentation of the self. The 'self', according to this approach, becomes a subject that through the search for the real/lost self expresses the ambivalence of the concept itself. The basis for such an understood concept of 'self is the poststructural idea that old identities which stabilised the social and geographic world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new, uncertain identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject.[75]

Melina from *The Island* is a typical example of such constructed migrant character. She is dramatically alienated and lost self, that faces a fragmented and decentred world. Kefala describes her through the dreams and visions that create a new world for her displaced character. This act of creation is not an easy task, it becomes almost a "field of struggle" that involves a political discourse and counter discourse.[75] It also presupposes becoming a new person, a painful necessity to change and to transform.

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[74] Gunew, S., 'PostModern Tensions', 1990, Gunew, S., & K., Longley, *Striking Chords,* 1992, Carter, E., et al, *Space & Space,* 1993

[75] Ashcroft, B., et al., *The Empire Writes Back,* 1991, p.169

Melina yet, is not able to accept such a radical necessity to change. She desperately tries to build her identity on a basis of her old culture and history, on the old places. Her attempts however, are fated to fail, as the places she dreams about exist only in her imagination. As Carter and her colleagues argue, for many migrants, displaced and exiled from their homelands, *place* has lost its power to provide straight-forward support for their identity.[76]

In spite of that however, it appears that many exilic writers, conscious of contradictory identities existing within them and their literary characters, still try to restore emotional stability, creating a stable and coherent identity. They often try to invoke old elements of the grand historical narratives rejected by postmodernism, which continue "to resonate throughout the imagination of displaced communities".[76] The recollections have for them taken on a special significance because they represent the only set of discursive understanding which can be appropriated and fixed. Making history of their own stories permits them to make sense of uncertainties of the present, to form their transformed identities.[77] In many migrant texts, this is achieved by means of a 're-writing' of canonical stories. Kefala signals this method by bringing back a memory of the ancient Greek myths, that allow Melina to restore the greatness of her nation. Even Gooneratne apparently extends the process by re-writing religious myths of Asia. She however, seems to move from the relation of representation of the old, to the representation of the self.[78] For her therefore, legends and myths do not mean the places, but represent an invented sense of an imagined, linguistic

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[76] Boehmer, E., *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature - Migrant Metaphors,* 1995, p. 232
[77] Brewster, A., *Literary Formations - Post-colonialism, nationalism, globalism,* 1995, p. 4
[78] Hall, S., 'New Ethnicities', 1995, p. 224

'home' of words. Baba/Jane re-telling her Australian born daughter *The Tale of the Invisible Prince* creates the assumption of lost authority, a control of the language, a desired illusion of sovereignty. Furthermore, it makes her proud of her 'otherness'.

The construction of a comforting story, a "narrative of the self" is then a necessary element of a new identity that provides a desired psychological security.[79] Though they do so from different positions, both *The Island* and *A Change of Skies* describe the act of recreating self through the process of invoking a past, the characters' relations with history and the culture of their origin. The characters in each book manage to protect themselves thanks to these parts of their personalities that exist within the boundaries of historical and cultural narratives. Melina looks critically at those who forgot their cultural heritage, who allowed themselves to become just "migrants", without a past and tradition:

> They all ran against this disintegrating background, the light ashen, held together by fear. People who lost their dignity, their warmth, who did not struggle against fate as the ancients had done, facing it directly.[80]

Gooneratne presents similar attitudes describing those who rejected their roots as "people cut off from the mainstream of national life,...[who] stagnate like the waters of a lagoon separated from the sea..."[81] They both agree that people, in order to be themselves, to feel secure, have to have something to share, a common narrative of history and legends.

The same narrative however, may serve also as a binary division of self/other. Such a division is an essential feature of migrant identity. It is

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79 Hall, S., 'The Question of Cultural Identity', 1992, p. 277
80 Kefala, A., *The Island*, 1984, p. 79
81 Gooneratne, Y., *A Change of Skies*, 1991, p. 279

argued that the construction of a new self is a subject of relation to the other. According to Kobena Mercer, difference comes to be understood as essential,

> when it [identity] is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty..."[82]

In other words, in the very moment when exiles become 'others' in somebody's eyes they start to distinguish their own 'self. Elizabeth Grosz describes that process saying that, "the other is prior to any identity, even to the distinction between subject and object".[83] Her statement suggests that, rethinking the self/other problem requires paying attention to the ways in which the logic of the subject is made fundamentally unstable in daily life, by those discourses which have, traditionally, been regarded as describing the mythological 'other'. Migrant characters therefore, have to "prepare" their images to be able to negotiate their position within the new society. They see perfectly that what constructs their identity is in fact the way the society perceives them. Their "otherness" is created by the mainstream of society, in the same way as the West created the East, if we use Said's concept of Orientalism.[84]

Two worlds therefore, that of Anglo-Australians and that of migrants recognise themselves first of all through differences. It is a common practise in migrant writing to construct the characters in opposition to the Anglo-

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82 Hall, S, ' A Question of Cultural Identity", 1992, p. 277
83 Grosz, E., 'Judaism and Exile: The Ethics of Othrness', 1993, p. 65
84 Said, E., *Orientalism,* 1978, p. 3-6

Australians. Bharat in *A Change of Skies* starts to re-create his new identity in the very moment he starts to be conscious of his difference:[85]

> Before we came to Australia, I'd no idea he *had* an image, apart from his reflection in the bedroom mirror or his shadow on the grass. But now it seemed he'd acquired one, and with it he'd acquired problems: problems connected, as far as I could make out, with the various aspects in which, he felt, he appeared to the Australians around us.[86]

Gooneratne refuses Said's sense of the dominant culture as exotising the 'other' locating it in a distant place, turning the 'other' into a mainstream's fantasy. She plays with the concept, describing it as a process of recollecting the past and the everyday necessity of being in the world. Using Ganguly's words she suggests that "otherness is to be found precisely where you're sitting".[87] Thus, in *A Change of Skies* the negotiation of migrant identity is traced in the daily lives of the characters. Daily life for them, however, is inseparably linked with the past, that serves as the active ideological terrain on which migrant writers and their characters represent themselves. For them, all references to official narratives about canonisation and a historical memory are always "tangled up with personal memories and private recollections of past experience".[88]

Gooneratne, therefore, tries to destroy the fetishized image of the migrant created by the mainstream tradition. Describing the attempts of her characters to change their images, their names and even their language, she locates her position closer to Homi Bhabha's argument that oppressed

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85 Melina in *The Island* tries to build her new sense of belonging and constructing self as someone "living at home among strangers" (Kefala, 1973, p. 8); Bharat realises with confusion that the first thing people notice in him is his difference. (Gooneratne, 1992, p. 118))

86 Gooneratne, Y., *A Change of Skies,* 1992, p. 118

87 Ganguly, K., 'Migrant Identities: Personal Memory and the Construction of Selfhood', 1992, p.28

88 ibid, p. 30

identity often tends to be a hybrid mocking of official authority.[89] In Gooneratne's case her characters, though they have come through the stage of mimetic adaptation, do not represent merely a passively positioned other, but manifest a certain degree of subjectivity. Baba/Jean successfully constructs her new self as a fashionable author of exotic cooking books, and does it on the basis of Anglo-Australian expectation, mimicking not only the West, but also an imagined Western version of the 'other'. Goonerante suggests that it is a cultural difference that challenges our perspective of identity and identity of culture. The ambivalence of its meaning destroys the "mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is continuously revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code".[90]

Thus, migrant identity is articulated in multiple modalities - the moment of experience, the mode of writing or representation, and the theoretical modality of the 'other'. Migrant subjects claim that their experience of exile, the sense of being always apart, always somewhere else, make them different, make them 'other'. This 'otherness' however may be seen as dangerous and unwelcomed by the mainstream society. While it welcomes its colourful exotic flavour, the idea of its hybridity "exists as a challenge to notions of singular national identity".[91] Living in the multicultural society, forces migrant subjects to define themselves by an ethnicity that emerged as a "new social category, as significant as that of

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89 Bhabha, H., *The Location of Culture,* 1994, p. 87 Bahabha uses here both poststructural and postcolonial theory and his own exilic experience to describe homelessness of diaspora, focussing on particular oppositions of diasporic positions: citizen/exile, inside/outside, etc.

90 Bhabha, H., 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences', 1995, p. 208 - though Bhabha writes mainly about postcolonial societies, he mentions also diasporic communities, arguing, that most of them have concerned themselves with hybridised nature of the culture of diaspora as a strength rather than weakness.

91 Ommundsen, W., 'Writing as Migration: Brian Castro, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity', 1995, p. 161

class".[92] To do it, they often use a method of inventing narrative fables. They give them the power to survive in circumstances that temporarily undermine the feeling of security.[93] They need to recreate their personal worlds, their narratives through the process of negotiation of their cultural and historical 'old' selves and the 'new', lived and written in a different language and different culture.

92 Brewster, A., *Literary Formations - Post-colonialism, nationalism, globalism,* 1995, p. 80

93 Lyotard, L.F., 'Abandonding the Metanarratives of Modernity', 1984, Lyotard argues that all grand narratives produced so called 'fables' in order to create a meaning of history

Conclusion

By creating the possibility of a critical re-reading of migrant writings, cross-cultural theories offer us the chance to reconsider our 'reading positions' towards the recent literature of migration. This review of multiculturalism, marginality, and its linguistic implications allows us, once again, to pose the question of our own identities, that of individuals born of and into the hybrid mixture of the different languages which have partially fused to produce a cultural identity experienced as a series of collisions. This identity can be understood as an unstable product of 'being a margin', which involves re-grouping, re-defmition and transforming of accepted models, according to the subjects' expectations and their critical adaptation into a dominant cultural framework.

This active participation in an act of creation from a margin, emphasises a creativity based on traditions of the vantage point of the margin, and the ability to transform from the margin. Though it may be argued that migrant identity is no more than a product of the mythical rhetoric of postcolonial strategies of decentralisation and re-adaptation, the margin in fact always was able to make its own mark on a dominant culture, and to recreate it in different contexts, presenting it as a subverted and transformed reality. Furthermore, marginal and migrant writers speaking passionately of their "in-betweeness" as of a new kind of literary aesthetics, offer new, hybrid cultural and intellectual insights of the mainstream. The experience of cultural translation not only stimulates invention, but may also give a valuable perspective to the condition of culture in general. To

the extent that postmodernism gave migrant intellectuals a model that seemed to offer a universal explanation for fragmentation, they enthusiastically embrace it. On the other hand, they do not distance themselves from history, but wish to affirm a connection, a commitment to uniting the fragmentary experience of exile, linking the new and old cultures, and, above all, resisting and trying to go past the tendency of postmodern discourse to perpetuate the exotic or to "turn the other into the same" as During puts it.[94]

The migrant condition therefore, becomes the product of a tirelessly inventive creativity, drawing both on the culture of birth and the country of adoption. Inseparable from "migrant experience" is the feeling of dislocation, which cannot any longer be perceived as an impoverishment but as an expansion of cultural and intellectual experience, offering a new angle to Australian literature: a regenerative, challenging, cross-cultural possibility. We have to consider the fact that even the suffering and cultural conflict associated with the process of migration may ultimately be intellectually valuable and enriching.

The category of 'migrant writing' draws attention to the painful but also regenerative experience of straddling worlds. Migrant writing grows on cultural differences and exploits double perspective and vision. The colour of the other - than - Anglo world, usually taken as characteristic of cosmopolitan narrative in migrant writing, becomes a part of a more visionary Australia. Thus, migrant writing slowly but inevitably shifts from the margin towards mainstream literature, and signals that contemporary

[94] During, S., 'Postmodernism or Post-colonialism today?', 1993, p. 449

cultural transfer is no longer one-way. Writers such as Yasmine Gooneratne (in her case with the established authority that comes from a position within an English Department), voluntarily decide to write from the marginal position of 'ethnic'. Their books become a kind of translation from one culture into another, from the exiles and subjects of cultural suppression.

Theoretical discussions of migrant writing have been happily located in postmodernism, but the gaps left by this theory (lack of historical tradition, the ambivalence of the concept of universalism, and finally its unexpected mechanism of exclusion) caused many migrant writers, particularly those with other than European backgrounds to try to construct a new theoretical framework for their works, often using postcolonial theory as a starting point for their discussion. The politics of postcolonialism however, seems often to be too political and too specific to the historical moment. Therefore, as migrant writers create a hybrid way of perceiving the world, they might be seen to need their own hybrid theoretical framework, somewhere beyond discredited multiculturalism, that may be thought of as *cross-culturalism.*

It seems then, that though the theoretical discussion around the issue of migrant writing still lasts, the writers themselves have already perfectly managed to blend both of the concepts of postmodernism and postcolonialism. The characters in *The Island* and in *A Change of Skies* come to terms with themselves as migrants and recognise their differences, simultaneously invoking some kind of universal experience of their condition of exile. In their determination to identify themselves, migrant subjects emerge as something distinguishable from both the postmodern and

postcolonial, though located within their own frameworks. The specific hybridity of those subjects, the continual deferral of authenticity, is for them a great source of creative strength.

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