Asian-Australian Writers: Bridging the Gap

Amelberga Vita Astuti

Monash University
Clayton Campus, Wellington Road, Clayton, Victoria 3800, Australia
Email: amelberga.vita@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper examines interviews with, essays and literary products by Australian migrant women writers who migrated from their original countries in Southeast Asia. It investigates the writers' in-betweenness in Australia, whose cultural, social and political rules are different. Drawing from Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity and diaspora (1990) and Jacques Derrida's idea of conditional hospitality (2000b), this paper elaborates the migrant writers' role in bridging the gap of Eastern and Western cultures through their literary work. The analysis shows that their cultural identity is transformed to narrow the gap and this transformative process is portrayed in their work.

Keywords: Asia, Australia, cultural gap, transformation, writers

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas tentang wawancara (dengan), tulisan, dan karya sastra oleh para penulis wanita migran di Australia yang berasal dari negara-negara di Asia Tenggara. Tulisan ini meneliti kehidupan para penulis ketika tinggal di Australia, yang memiliki perbedaan budaya, sosial dan politik dengan negara asli mereka. Menggunakan gagasan cultural identity and diaspora dari Stuart Hall dan conditional hospitality dari Jaques Derrida, artikel ini mengungkap peran penting penulis migran dalam menjembatani perbedaan antara budaya timur dan barat. Analisis artikel menunjukkan bahwa identitas budaya mereka berubah untuk memperkecil jarak perbedaan dan proses perubahan ini terwujud dalam tulisan mereka.

Kata Kunci: Asia, Australia, jarak budaya, penulis, perubahan

Moving to a different country gives an individual the experiences of adjustment and adaptation to a new place. This is mostly challenging when the migrant moves to a particularly different culture from his/her original country, in which the experiences refer to challenges of "cultural identity" (Hall, 1990). For example, Western people move to Eastern countries, and vice versa. These two groups of people have cultural differences because they live in different geographic places which influence the inhabitants to construct their own language, values, ideas and customs. When people live in another culture, these differences often create gaps between their own original culture and the host's. The gaps may generate the migrants' frustration or negotiation (Valdes, 1986, p. vii). They may even encounter problems and conflicts with the host society when they fail to adapt and to reach an understanding of each other.

Gaps exist when there is an unfilled space in an object or between to objects. In this paper, the cultural gap becomes the focus. Valdes states, "When a person

who has been nurtured by one culture is placed in juxtaposition with another, his [or her] reaction may be anger, frustration, fright, curiosity, entrancement, repulsion, confusion" (1986, p. vii). Thus, the cultural gap is constructed when the unfilled space of awareness of oneself as a cultural being is not available. According to Valdes, people must gain acceptance that they are "products of their own cultures" in order to reach a greater willingness to put aside their native cultural ties (1986, p. vii). These acceptance and willingness become the bridge to the cultural gap in entering into another culture.

This paper focuses on examining particular Asian-Australian women writers' work and interviews. The analysis looks at the experiences of Asian-Australian women writers who migrated from Southeast-Asian countries and how these experiences are able to bridge the gaps between Asian and Australian cultures. Their experiences of cultural gap relate to their identities as a woman and as an individual instilled by Eastern (Asian) culture. An identity of an Asian woman itself has its own complexity as these women are defined in a patriarchal society as "hyperfeminine: passive, weak, quiet, excessively submissive, slavishly dutiful, sexually exotic" (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 36). Meanwhile, they enter into Australian society where white femininity, such as "assertiveness, self-possession, confidence, and independence", is recognised, experienced and learned (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 42). These differences among Asian and Australian women are being contested when the Asian women interact with wider Australian society, i.e. Australian men.

In assessing the writers' published work and interview, I employ Stuart Hall's notion of *cultural identity* (1990) and Jacques Derrida's idea of *conditional hospitality* (2000b). Here, both Hall and Derrida propose notions, which relate to migration experiences and challenges of becoming migrants. In his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990), Hall analyses the (Afro-) Caribbean identities, which include his own to construct the idea of cultural identity. He concludes that the Caribbean identity is diaspora identity in the way that this identity is a mixture of the African, European and American identity. Derrida discusses the term of 'conditional hospitality' in his book, *Of Hospitality* (2000b). His term relates to how migrants are received by the host society in various ways. Cultural differences play a big role in this issue of hospitality.

Hall's context of cultural identity is applicable to the analysis of migrants' writing. Migrant writers often deal with questions of cultural identity when living between the 'old' culture and the 'new'. In his essay, Hall discusses the notion of identity that can be contested in the context of cultural negotiations. Such interactions between two cultures are constantly altering, and Hall argues that the notion of cultural identity "is never complete, always in process" (Hall, 1990, p. 222). In this way, cultural identity is in flux between the past, the present and the future. It is able to transcend "place, time, history and culture"

and it undergoes "constant transformation" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). In this paper, the writers' understanding of their cultural identity enables them to create a platform, which connects between their 'old' and 'new' culture.

Both definitions of cultural identity by Hall are applicable in the analysis of the writers' migrant identities as represented in their essays, work and interviews. He defines cultural identity as a state of "being" as well as of "becoming" (p. 225). The first offers a sense of unity and commonality in "being", an "oneness underlying all the other, more superficial differences" (Hall, 1990, p. 223). This sense of 'being' relates to an innate selfhood, as subjectivity that lies beneath more obvious ethnic differences. The second definition defines identity as discontinuous points of identification or a process of identification, which shows the discontinuity in an individual's identity formation as a process of "becoming". In this regard, Hall remarks that there is no discussion of "any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute […] 'uniqueness'" (p. 225). This dynamic of a constant tension between 'being' and 'becoming' relates to my argument that the writers' changing identities in their migration contexts allow them to connect the two different worlds.

Hall proposes these terms of identity in relation to migrants' interactions with homelands and host lands. His perspective on identity also relates to my examination of how individuals are "positioned by and position themselves within, the narratives of the past" which refers to homelands (p. 225). When the interactions between the migrants and their new societies occur, they are aware of similarities and differences between each place they encounter. This awareness is one of the predominant themes in the migrants' journeys, either when moving to a new place or returning to their old home.

In examining encounters in migration contexts, I use Jacques Derrida's notion of "conditional hospitality" which throws light on the always-ambivalent relationship between migrants and their host society (Derrida, 2000b, p. 25). He addresses an explicit example that the 'host' is "he who receives, who is master in his house, in his house-hold, in his state, in his nation, in his city, in his town, who remains master in his house – who defines the conditions of hospitality or welcome; where consequently there can be no unconditional welcome, no unconditional passage through the door" (Derrida, 2000a, p. 4). As Derrida suggests, the 'other' is "the welcomed guest" who is a stranger/foreigner treated as a friend by the 'self/host' who continues to hold "the law of his [or her] household, the law of a place" (2000a, p. 4). The 'guest', or migrant, becomes the 'other' because s/he is continually viewed as "a stranger" and "a foreigner" by the 'host' who "owns" the dominant culture (Derrida, 2000b, p. 21). Here the point of being a host is 'to be hospitable', having the power to host, keeping the guests under control to conform to his conditions.

In the context of migration, the conditions are in relations to the host's act of limitation and exclusion of particular groups or ethnicities of migrants as 'guests' or 'foreigners'. Hospitality generates the construction of a relationship between 'guest' and 'host' as 'self' and other'. This relationship normally includes interactions between the 'self' and the 'other'. He also suggests the impossibility of unconditional hospitality, referring, instead, to 'hospitality', the innate hostility and possessiveness of the 'host' even in the act of welcoming a guest (Derrida, 2000a). Derrida's notion of "hospitality" refers to "an interruption of the self" that generates a tension because when welcoming the 'guest/visitor' who enters one's house, the 'host' who owns the place is interrupted (Derrida, 1999, p. 51). Thus in Derrida's hospitality, there is a sense of 'conditional' welcoming in which the host becomes 'inhospitable' when he limits the boundaries for the guests through his power to control and judge them.

METHODOLOGY

This paper aims at offering a new assessment of the interviews, the essay and prose works of this group of writers beyond the superficial exoticism as indicated by publishers and reviewers. As the central preoccupation of this study is the writers' in-betweenness of Asian and Australian cultures, this paper concentrates on specific texts which discuss the writers' construction of connections between the 'home country' and Australia.

In this paper, this group of Asian-Australian women writers is selected based on the proximity of their country origin to Australia to show the contrasts, which exist, only within these close places. These writers are Singaporean-born Lillian Ng and Simone Lazaroo; Indonesian-born Dewi Anggraeni; and Malaysian-born Hsu-Ming Teo. These four writers are chosen because most of their literary works were inspired from their own migration experiences, particularly in relation to cultural issues. Not only novels, poems or short stories, most of them also write essays concerning their struggle in living between two contrasting cultures. Thus, in this paper, I use their articles, novels and both published and original open-ended interviews with the writers that I conducted during 2012 and 2013. For this research, I was able to conduct interviews with Dewi Anggraeni, Lillian Ng and Hsu-Ming Teo. However, I also include other literary scholars' relevant interviews with them, and particularly with Simone Lazaroo who was not available for my interview because of her academic commitments.

Women participants are chosen because as women with Asian backgrounds, these four writers are concerned with the particular experiences of minority migrants with similar backgrounds to them in their negotiation with the Australian culture. They often use the contrast between their own original Asian cultural practices and those that they and their migrant characters encounter in Australia. These Australian writers of Asian descent narrate

the specificities of women migrants' urban experiences in significant ways in terms of their own particular perspectives on place, gender and identity. It is important to note that a number of these writers identify themselves as feminists or as having feminist concerns, as stated in the interviews conducted with them.

FINDING

Given that the personal lives of the authors is taken into consideration in relation to their role in bridging the cultural gaps, the following section provides more biographical details on each of the authors. It is interesting to note Brian Castro's remark on the nature of Asian writers in Australia: "I have never been able to live off my writing alone" (cited in Yu, 2001, p. 81). Similarly, this study shows that the four women writers addressed in this paper do not consider writing to be their main profession. They have other regularly-paid occupations: Lillian Ng is an obstetrician and gynaecologist; Dewi Anggraeni is a journalist as well as an academic researcher and non-fiction writer; Simone Lazaroo is an academic and teaches Creative Writing at Murdoch University; and Hsu-Ming Teo is a historian at Macquarie University. This could be seen as evidence that as writers, their position is in the minority.

These women writers can be divided into two generations, based on the period of their migration to Australia. The first generation consists of those who moved to Australia as adults in their late twenties, that is, Lillian Ng and Dewi Anggraeni. The

"1.5 generation", as coined by Ruben G. Rumbaut in 1976, to denote those foreign-born youth who migrate before the age of 12 (Rumbaut & Rumbaut, 2005), consists of writers who migrated to Australia in their childhood, represented here by Simone Lazaroo and Hsu-Ming Teo. Although these women writers differ significantly in their origins, their works have some common features. The most obvious of these is that they are not translated works as they are all written in English and have been published in Australia. While these authors have had different experiences of Australian society, their writings have been similar in conception, being about migrants' situations in relation to cultural gaps; conflicts between traditional families and modern society; and bitter observations of stereotypes and presuppositions about Asian and Australian cultures. In terms of their representations of the place, each of the writers similarly addresses the discursive binary images of Australia as a place of freedom and constraint. In particular, the images are constructed as a result of the contrasts between their Asian cultural background and the Australian host culture.

Lillian Ng

Lillian Ng, who was born in the 1940s, has experienced multiple migrations since her childhood. She was born in Singapore and grew up in Hong Kong before migrating to the United Kingdom. She moved to Australia with her young daughter in 1972 after practising gynaecology and

obstetrics in London for eight years. She has only written three novels – the first two discussed in this paper; the third is *The Chinese Kung-Fu Bushranger* (2011); and one biography, *The Life of Cheong Wing* (2005). Her first novel, *Silver Sister* (1994), won the Australian Human Rights Awards for Literature and Other Writing Fiction Award in 1995, as a result of its detailed description of Australia's response to taking in refugees for political reasons. Ng's second novel, *Swallowing Clouds* (1997), provides a very different text as it generated controversy due to its overt sexuality, which was related in particular to her own identity as an Asian woman writer. It has on its front cover the following teaser: 'an elegant and erotic tale of a most unusual love affair', and in order to be accepted for sale in bookshops in Singapore the word "erotic" had to be omitted.

Dewi Anggraeni

Dewi Anggraeni was born in Indonesia in 1945, moved to Australia in 1970 and now resides in Melbourne with her Australian husband. As a novelist and a journalist, she has published four English-language novels, two collections of short stories, and three non-fiction books. Married to an Australian, Anggraeni seems to have an ongoing concern with intermarriage, which reflects her own experiences, in her novels. This recurs in *The Root of All Evil* (1987), *Parallel Forces* (1988), *Journeys through Shadows* (1998), *Snake* (2003) and in some of the novellas in *Stories of Indian Pacific* (1992b) and *Neighbourhood Tales: A Bilingual Collection* (2001). The

writing of *Journeys through Shadows* was supported by a research grant given by Arts Victoria. Her critical thoughts on Indonesian issues related to women are elaborated in her non-fiction publications, in which she is particularly concerned with Indonesian politics, female domestic workers and Indonesian-Chinese women, for example in *Who Did This to Bali?* (2003), *Dreamseekers: Indonesian Women as Domestic Workers in Asia* (2006) and *Breaking the Stereotypes: Chinese Indonesian Women Tell Their Stories* (2010). Her latest non-fiction book published in Indonesian language is *Tragedi Mei 1998 dan Lahirnya Komnas Perempuan* (*1998 May Tragedy and the Birth of National Commission on Violence against Women*) (2014) exploring the social and political issues behind the raping and killing of nearly hundreds of Chinese-Indonesian women in political riots in May 1998 and the establishment of Indonesia's National Commission on Violence against Women**.** She has a Chinese heritage but in my interview with her, she explained that she rarely discusses Chinese experiences in her fictional works for she claims to practise Javanese values in her life. Her distance with Chinese culture is also caused by the political situation in Indonesia, which prohibited any sort of Chinese cultural and religious practices (including the use of Chinese names) during Suharto's presidency of the 1960s through 1990s.

Simone Lazaroo

Simone Lazaroo, who was born in 1961, is an award-winning writer and an academic. She moved from Singapore to

Australia with her family at the age of three and she may, therefore, have integrated into Australian culture more easily in some ways at an individual level. However, some of her works express concern about the complications of Eurasian migrant women's identities in Australia. Her first novel *The World Waiting to be Made* (1994), about a young Eurasian girl who migrates from Singapore to Australia with her family, won the T.A.G. Hungerford Award and the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Fiction. The theme of the life of a migrant Eurasian woman is reiterated in Lazaroo's second novel *The Australian Fiancé* (2000), winner of the Western Australian Premier's Book Award for Fiction. In 2006, she published *The Travel Writer, which* in its first unpublished manuscript draft, entitled *The True Body*, won an international award – the David T.K. Wong Fellowship. The novel itself was long-listed for another international award – the 2008 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Her fourth novel is *Sustenance, which* was first published in 2010 and was short-listed in the 2011 Barbara Jefferis Award. Her forthcoming publication in 2014 is a novella entitled *Lost River: Four Albums* (Austlit, 2014)

Hsu-Ming Teo

Born in 1970, novelist and academic historian Hsu-Ming Teo migrated to Australia with her family from Malaysia when she was seven years old. So far, she has written two novels. The context of Asian migration and its consequences

is central to Hsu-Ming Teo's first novel, *Love and Vertigo* (2000), which won *The Australian*/Vogel Literary Award in 1999 and for which she received critical acclaim by being awarded the Sydney Morning Herald Best Young Novelist of the Year in 2001. This novel, which has been translated into German, Italian, Chinese and Thai, was short-listed for both the inaugural Tasmania Pacific Region Literary Prize and the Dobbie Award for women's fiction. It addresses issues of displacement and belonging experienced by the narrator's mother who eventually commits suicide. A similar theme of family history is reiterated in Teo's second novel, *Behind the Moon* (2005), which centres on three teenagers from different backgrounds. This second novel was short-listed in the 2006 New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards – Community Relations Commission Award. She has also published a book of literary criticism entitled *Desert Passions* (2012).

These writers do not limit themselves to write about themes of Asian-Australian relations. Therefore, the followings are their selected works, which address issues of migration undertaken by Asian women who migrate to Australia. Ng has written three novels and one biography but only her first two novels which address a Chinese woman's journeys to Australia. Ng's first novel *Silver Sister* (1994) explores the journey from tradition to modernity, undertaken by a Cantonese-Chinese domestic servant, Ah Silver. Set in a time period from the 1920s to the early 1990s, the novel narrates the central character's

multiple migrations from a village to a major city of Canton in China, to Hong Kong, then to Singapore and finally to Sydney. The narrative of Ng's second novel *Swallowing Clouds* (1997) is set between the 1980s and the 1990s and is about the plight of a Chinese student, Syn, who goes to Sydney to learn English against the background of the Tiananmen Square protests.

From six of Dewi Anggraeni's fictional works, two of her novels, *The Root of All Evil* (1987) and *Parallel Forces* (1988), and one of her novellas, *Uncertain Step* (1992c), tell of connections between Indonesian and Australian cultures. *The Root of All Evil*, set in 1980s Jakarta, thematizes the complicated return experience of an Indonesian-Australian writer, Komala, who visits Jakarta from Melbourne after a long absence for nine years. By contrast, *Parallel Forces* is set between the 1960s and the 1980s through which it depicts and examines the hybrid identity of a young Eurasian, Amyrta, who migrates with her family from Singapore to Indonesia and then to Melbourne. *Uncertain Step*, set in the 1980s, focuses on Anggraeni's portrayal of intercultural relationships in this novella, between Aryani who moves from Bandung to Adelaide, and an Australian man.

From the work of the "1.5 generation writers", Simone Lazaroo and Hsu-Ming Teo, two of each of their novels discuss Singaporean and Australian societies. Lazaroo's *The World Waiting to be Made* (1994) presents the light of the complexities of hybridity experienced by a young Eurasian narrator who moves from Singapore to Perth in the 1970s. Lazaroo's *The Australian Fiancé* (2000), similarly to Anggraeni's *Uncertain Step*, depicts intercultural relationships. In Lazaroo's novel, set in the 1950s, the Eurasian narrator leaves Singapore to live with her Australian fiancé in Broome, Australia.

In the narrative, set between the 1950s to the 1980s, Teo explores the idea of home and return from Sydney to Singapore in her first novel *Love and Vertigo* (2000) in a different way from Anggraeni's *The Root of All Evil*, as Teo uses two protagonists of different generations, Grace and her mother Pandora. Teo has only written two novels, in which the second one *Behind the Moon* (2005) portrays the sexual identity transformation of a young Australian-born gay, Justin, with Singaporean heritage.

DISCUSSION

These Asian-Australian writers become the connection between their two cultures when they are aware of their cultural identity transformation. In her essay, "Journey to My Cultural Home", Anggraeni states: "Psychologically, I am becoming increasingly bicultural in Australia" (2002, p. 195). She is aware of her transformation as a result of her migration from Indonesia to Australia. She remarks: "After the phase of feeling Indonesian in Australia and Australian in Indonesia, I have now entered a subsequent phase of feeling Indonesian and Australian in respective countries, which is more at peace with myself" (Anggraeni, 2002, p.

195). Thus, transformation happens when an individual realises that s/he has choices and is willing to change according to those choices. Anggraeni chooses to retain her Indonesian identity while she is embracing her Australianness. She reflects on her transformation in this way: "Unconsciously I actually moved further into Australian mores. Curiously, as I widened my cultural space, I also rediscovered my Indonesian psyche" (p. 191). She has now become a "bicultural" individual, and this bicultural theme is strongly reflected in her migrant fiction. The other writers whose work is discussed in this paper, that is, Lillian Ng, Simone Lazaroo and Hsu-Ming Teo, similarly represent, as Hall suggests, their migrant characters' cultural identities as operating within the journey of transformation. The stories are undoubtedly influenced by their own experiences in migration contexts.

This transformation is evident in these writers' decision to use English as the language for their novels, a decision that implies establishing both a bridge between their original culture and language and the new Australian culture and a bridge between Asian-Australians' stories and Australian readers. Ashcroft contends that "post-colonial writing hinges on the act of engagement which takes the dominant language and uses it to express the most deeply felt issues of post-colonial social experience" (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 5). In this sense, these writers' use of English is able to empower them to articulate their views and concerns.

The followings are the writers' statements regarding their roles of bridging the gap, as represented in their essays and novels. For example, according to Anggraeni, her novel *The Root of All Evil* (1987) helps Australian readers "understand the Indonesian community in Australia" (Anggraeni, 1992a, p. 188). Lazaroo shares her concern about Western readers who were "misinformed" by British writers about the Eurasian culture of postcolonial Singapore (cited in Giffard-Foret, 2008, p. 1), something she is seeking to redress in her novels. Teo specializes in Asian-Australian fiction to give Australian readers "another take on [Australian] society" (cited in Broinowski, 2009, p. 195). The relationship between the writers and their English-speaking readers "becomes dialogic when the master-tongue is appropriated" (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 107). As bilingual writers who choose to use English in their publications, these novels thus represent the writers' own cultural transformations and adaptation to the dominant culture.

As noted earlier, this paper examines works, essays and interviews of Lillian Ng, Dewi Anggraeni, Simone Lazaroo and Hsu-Ming Teo. In their writings, these Asian-Australian women writers specifically share the intersections between two different cultures. From the interviews, the writers also stated the existence of contrasting ideas of culture, gender and nationalism within the migrants' experiences in Asian and Australian contexts. As shown in their texts, the writers' own hyphenated identities

of two cultures allow them to be conscious of the complexities of intersecting cultures and of stereotypical notions that are inherent in both Asia and Australia.

The distinctiveness of their textual explorations lies in their different deployments of generations of migrants, migration time periods, place settings and cultural backgrounds that create different types of gap connections. While the first generation of Asian-Australian women writers predominantly discuss experiences of exile and return to a homeland, the 1.5 generation writers tend to include young characters' migrant experiences of Australian society. These writers demonstrate that the places in Asia and Australia are geographically, socially and culturally different so that the contrasts engender a process of transformation for migrants, particularly in the encounters between migrants' Self and Other/Host. Thus, through the lens of place, identity and gender, this paper argues that Asian-Australian women's writing provides a space of understanding in the form of connections whereby 'Self' is changed in cross-cultural encounters with 'Others'.

Asian-Australian women writers have made significant contributions to the relationship between Asia and Australia, and the idea of multiculturalism as a whole. Their texts include diverse and in-depth explorations of Asian and Australian relations in political, social, cultural, economic and religious representations in literary discourse. The existence of the genre of Asian-Australian writing is

particularly important when one considers former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's "Foreword" in the 2012 White Paper on *Australian in the Asian Century*. She specifically asserts the importance for Australians of developing an understanding and active engagement with Asia's rise: as she states, "It calls on all of us to play our part in becoming a more Asia-literate and Asia-capable nation" (Gillard, 2012, p. iii). In this matter, it is axiomatic that Australia should celebrate its multiculturalism, especially the contribution of its Asian-Australian women writers. Gillard further remarks that the Asian region has undergone a "transformation" (p. ii). Here I show that these Asian-born writers not only represent diverse examples of identity transformations but also how the authors themselves have experienced changes in their engagement with literary production.

However, the interviews with this group of writers and their published essays on their lives of post-migration show that their works often remain marginalised in contrast with that of Anglo-Australian writers. This relates to Derrida's notion of conditional hospitality that Australian society continues to regards themselves as the dominant part, which plays a big role in Australia. These selected writers are concerned that migrant women's writings remain outside the mainstream of literary production in Australia. Anggraeni states "the tendency nowadays is still to label non-Anglo-Celtic writers as 'ethnic' and their writing as "fringe literature" (1992a, p. 190). To put it more generally, for Brian

Castro, a Spanish-Portuguese-English-Chinese-Australian writer, Australia is not the place for Asian writers in general as they are not "main cultural player[s] in the region" (cited in Yu, 2001, p. 79). In addition, Shirley Tucker remarks that "the 'field' of Asian-Australian women's writing is relatively small", and that of Southeast-Asian Australian women's writing even smaller (Tucker, 2001, p. 125). Thus, this group of writers is aware of their position and is concerned with the development of this genre.

Evidence of this marginalisation is indicated through the challenges these writers have experienced in publishing their work. This circumstance, Anggraeni believes, is due to the nature of most Australians who are "conservative readers" who prefer to read and publish 'real' (Anglo) Australians' stories, rather than the unfamiliar experiences of migrants (1992a, p. 188). Exclusion from the mainstream is also indicated in the common term used for these migrant writings, which is "the marginal/minority writings" whereby their writings are characterised as "offering the authority and authenticity of the marginal experience" (Gunew, 1994, p. 53). In addition to a general marginalisation, Asian-Australian women writers and their work are often further confined to being interpreted in association with the supposed nature of Asian women that is, as both exotic and docile.

Those stereotypical qualities are challenged by the writers in this study, particularly as revealed in their objection to the process of publishing their work. In her essay "*Irritations*", Anggraeni emphasises that Australian publishers avoid publishing these marginalised writers' books because of "the perceived financial risk" (1992a, p. 188). The writers' use of foreign words is considered to be the cause of unsuccessful book sales. For example, in relation to Anggraeni's use of 'foreign' names and words in her novel, one reviewer commented, "People put [the book] down at the second foreign word" (1992a, p. 188). For Anggraeni, reducing her use of non-English words means "reducing cultural differences", of which Australian publishers and reviewers must be aware: these cultures are part of the "angles" in Australian society (1992a, p. 189). After being rejected three times by "mainstream publishers" (Anggraeni, 2013), Anggraeni has been publishing her fictional and non-fictional work with an independent-specialist publishing house, Indra Publishing, which focuses on "fiction and non-fiction books which reflect the cultural diversity of Australia" (Indrabooks, 2014). Indeed, Anggraeni shows that migrant writers need to work harder than their Anglo-Australian counterparts in acquiring the level of accepted distinctiveness to capture 'national' readers.

Simone Lazaroo, in her essay "Not Just Another Migrant Story", points out her avoidance of referring to herself as an Asian-Australian writer because the term lends itself to the idea of categorisation of her literary work as minoritarian. Lazaroo, most of whose novels involve moves

from Asian to Australian cities, has stated that her intention in writing the novels is to change Australian readers' impression of Eurasian culture. However, as she migrated to Australia in 1964 at the age of three, the term 'Asian-Australian' could be seen as an "insubstantial identification" on her part (Lazaroo, 2008, p. 1). For Lazaroo, while this term reduces diverse cultures and customs to "one apparently homogenous grouping", it is also closely connected with "the issues of marketing" which categorises a particular fiction into, as Gunew suggested, "just yet another example of 'ethnic minority' or 'migrant' writing" and one that ignores its significant contribution to other issues (2008, p. 1). The categorisations used in the marketing appear in the use of the word 'exotic' in reviews and on book jackets of Asian-Australian fiction. According to Lazaroo, this is intended to emphasise "a book's foreignness or exoticness" as "a deliberate marketing strategy" (2008, p. 2). Lazaroo contends that migrant writers' narrative explorations of universal themes deserve to be acknowledged.

From my interviews with most of the writers, this paper is able also to consider the ways these four writers engage in the field of Australian literature in relation to their marginalised position, and their offering of support to the idea of a multicultural Australia as well as creating the understanding between Asian and Australian cultures. As her two characters in *Silver Sister* and *Swallowing Clouds*, Ah Silver and Syn, hold onto their Chinese

"old-value upbringing" and continue to manifest it in a foreign land, Ng expects that "such 'frills' [of Oriental stories] would be of interest to Western readers and the young generation of Chinese, brought up in the West" (Ng, 2013). Anggraeni shares similar ideas to Ng in terms of the intention of her writing. Since most of her main characters are women, she states that she writes to "open up the world of [Indonesian] women" (Anggraeni, 2012). She is also concerned that Australians who learn about Indonesia from the media might get an inaccurate picture of the country because opinions formed from this reports are "often unfair and based on inadequate knowledge" (Anggraeni, 1986, p. 69).

Likewise, apart from learning more about her Eurasian origin through her writing, Lazaroo intends to promote her work for "reaching a so-called Western, Australian mainstream audience". In particular, she believes that "people [are] misinformed about Eurasian culture" (cited in Giffard-Foret, 2008, p. 1). Teo considers that "fiction reveals a deeper culture than politics" and she suggests that writers like her are able to "present Australians with an alternative story located within a larger international story about the struggle for human rights, for instance" (cited in Broinowski, 2009, p. 195). These writers' statements show that through their writing, they are able to enrich Australian multiculturalism and provide readers with increased cultural knowledge and, perhaps, understanding of Asia.

One of the bridging-the-gap

mechanisms proposed by these writers is their elaboration of the idea of hyphenated identity in their works. This is based on one of Stuart Hall's notions of how to view "cultural identity" (1990). The notion recognises "the ruptures and discontinuities" of one culture's uniqueness, and identity which undergoes "constant transformation" (1990, p. 225). Hall suggests that this sense of cultural identity belongs to "the future as much as to the past", in which this double identity is closely associated with the idea of hyphenated selves experienced by young migrants (p. 225). Here, the term "hyphenated selves" refers to migrants' negotiation of their many identities by hyphenating their ethnic identity with their host country, in the way that they link culture and place together (Lionnet, 2005, p. 206).

Anggraeni's second novel *Parallel Forces* (1988) and Lazaroo's first novel *The World Waiting to be Made* (1994) use the complexity of having hyphenated identity. Their characters negotiate and embody their multi-hyphenated identities, in private and public spaces, between their country of origin and the host country. In their novels, both Anggraeni and Lazaroo foreground the complexity of the cultural "ruptures" as represented by their multi-hyphenated main characters. These writers' main characters were born in Asia as Eurasians in multicultural families that have resulted from their parents' intercultural marriages. Along with their family, each of these young characters moves from Singapore to Australia.

Anggraeni and Lazaroo present in their novel that the experiences of having hyphenated identity construct the ideas of exclusion and out of place. The characters' hyphenated identity generates gaps inside their inner self. How they finally come to terms with the complexity serves as the writers' perception of bridging the gap.

In Anggraeni's *Parallel Forces,* Amyrta is told as an Indonesian-French-Australian woman. This culture clash is illustrated when the Amyrta meets her new Australian friends at a party held by her boyfriend's company. This incident illustrates the ways in which cultural minorities are often made to feel excluded through the imposition of stereotypes by the dominant group which may use these "as tools of oppression" (Uchida, 1998, p. 170). Amyrta's conversation with an Anglo-Australian, Maureen, shows how stereotypes are used to exclude migrants from a sense of belonging. For example, when Maureen hears Amyrta's mother's name, Claudine Dubois, she comments, "That sounds French. Do they use French names in the Philippines?" (Anggraeni, 1988, p. 102). Maureen immediately assumes that Amyrta is, through her mother's identity, a Filipina, rather than French-Indonesian, categorising her as a "mail-order bride", a social issue in Australia that was prominent in the 1980s, the time when Parallel *Forces* is set (Robinson, 1996). She jumps to this conclusion when she sees an Asian-looking woman with an Australian man.

Anggraeni portrays the conversation between Maureen and Amyrta as a

challenge for Amyrta who has to deal with the dominant culture's exclusion, despite her tireless explanation of her transformed self to her Australian friends. Amyrta understands Maureen's repeated inquiries about her hyphenated identity as a threat to her Australianness as Maureen has been subtly expressing her "incredulity" at her background (Anggraeni, 1988, p. 102). After Amyrta tells Maureen that her mother is French, not a Filipina, Maureen's doubting response leads her to ask yet another question, "You mean you're French?" (Anggraeni, 1988, p. 102). At this moment, Amyrta is gradually aware she is being excluded, as "something else" (Anggraeni, 1988, p. 102).

Lazaroo's award-winning novel, *The World Waiting to Be Made*, explores a Eurasian girl's attempts to be accepted as part of Australian urban society in Western Australia. This narrator, only identified by her family name, Dias, was born in Singapore, with an Anglo-Australian mother and a Portuguese-Malaccan father. Lazaroo suggests the complexities of having a hyphenated identity for the narrator through the discourse of social inclusion and exclusion in Australia. Having migrated to Perth at a young age, the narrator is confused in identifying her migrant's 'self', caught between her old Eurasian culture and her new transcultural family. Her engagement with Australian urban life also influences the process of her self-identification as she starts attending school and making friends with Australian neighbours. Through these two worlds,

between Eurasian and Australian cultures, the narrator undergoes a complicated process of transformation within her hyphenated identity. The narrative continues to show the difficulties of cultural adaptation and how hard it is for migrants to be accepted as "good Australians" (Pung, 2009, p. 2).

The complexities of hyphenated identities, which are seen as gaps, include experiences of inclusion and exclusion, showing Derrida's notion of "conditional hospitality". Anggraeni and Lazaroo present the Australian city and urban social life as providing a space for their characters that enables them to embrace the new cultures they have come into contact with, though hyphenated identity marks them as always different. These writers note that the individuals' willingness to transform serves as a bridge to the gaps created by their hyphenated identity.

Hsu-Ming Teo and Lillian Ng offer a different perspective of a cultural gap experienced by Asian-Australians in their novels. Teo's *Behind the Moon* (2005) focusses on the cultural and social challenges facing the main character, Justin, in coming to terms with his homosexuality. Sydney's sexual geography affects Justin's sexual identity transformation and his own Singaporean family's practices of surveillance influence how he comes to terms with the double exclusion of his gay Asianness.

The fear of contamination in terms of sexuality is delineated in the depiction of Annabelle's censoring of Justin's television watching. As his mother,

Annabelle considers that an exposure to 'adult themes' could contaminate Justin's sexual purity. When there is a sex scene on television, she covers his eyes with her hand and says, "Dirty things going on" (Teo, 2005, p. 7). The television snippet of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras emphasises Justin's parents' opinions of homosexuality, as his mother screams in horror, "*Ai-yoh*, look at all those *hum sup lohs*!" and chases Justin away from the television (Teo, 2005, p. 7). It is significant that she uses a Cantonese term here, one that is disclosed in the text, as it expresses her deeply held traditional cultural values. Thus, when Justin becomes aware of his own sexuality, he suffers from "regrets" for his own identity as it is in opposition to these conservative norms and is considered "unclean" by his family and friends (Teo, 2005, p. 8). Justin's conservative parents manipulate the way he sees himself and his sexual identity, playing on his feelings of guilt and contamination so that he is even more confused about his sexuality.

Justin continues to be pursued by this double marginalisation and discrimination, as an Asian-Australian gay. Teo shows the verbal racial abuse escalating to become physical abuse towards the end of the novel. Ironically, the bashing releases Justin from his own attachments to his confining cultural and sexual identities, and even encourages in him an assertion of agency. Teo highlights the irony of the incident as, during the beating, Justin is liberated from this marked identity in an assertion of his individuality, when he replies, instead of

the men's imposed phrase, the words, "I am me" (Teo, 2005, p. 333). He is aware of the liberation, as he recounts: "He no longer needed the external markers of identity, the first thing people saw or learned about him and judged him by. He was not reducible to his ethnicity or his sexuality or his occupation or geographical location or even to his family" (Teo, 2005, p. 334). In light of this, Justin emancipates himself from his own cultural and sexual confinement based on the outward markers of both his ethnic and sexual identity.

The idea of confinement within particular gendered and cultural, sexual identities is also explored in Ng's *Swallowing Clouds* (1997). Here, Sydney becomes a site for Syn's transformation into a sexually independent Chinese woman despite her initial confinement in the city. Through Syn's narrative in Sydney, Ng suggests that this Chinese woman migrant moves from one set of constraints to another in the context of Chinese culture. Metaphors of confinement and control are shown to operate both in Beijing and in the traditional transplanted Chinese cultural communities in Sydney.

Syn is a Chinese student who is stranded in Sydney because of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Due to the loss of her official identity, she becomes the mistress of a Chinese-Australian butcher, Zhu Zhiyee. Before her departure to Australia, a soothsayer tells her that she is a reincarnation of the drowned (adulterous) woman and that her next role in the mortal world is to wreak revenge on men because

83

she was the one who was punished and the man was free. The prophecy's idea of a victimised woman and her revenge is reiterated in Syn's relationship with Zhu. Syn's revenge is fulfilled as she succeeds in taking his money and gaining her own financial and sexual independence.

In these two novels, both Asian cultures (Singaporean and Chinese) are depicted as imposing strict control over sexuality, a control that is either loosened or maintained in the new culture. The city, in this case, Sydney, becomes a metaphor for the assertion of transformed sexual identities. In this way, Justin has the courage to assert his individual sexual and cultural identity despite the pressure from both his inherited Singaporean culture and the new "host" culture; and Syn eventually attains a measure of independence from the confining sexual roles of concubine and adulterer that follow her from China to Sydney.

CONCLUSION

Asian-Australian women writers' interviews, essays and novels show their role of bridging the gap between Asian and Australian cultures. Despite their frustration in adapting to a new culture, which predominantly accepts them conditionally, they are able to connect the differences and distinctiveness of contrasting societies. They show that the gaps continue to be present but there are many ways of making it closer, such as voicing their experiences through literary publication and having the willingness to transform their cultural identities.

REFERENCES

Anggraeni, D. (1986). Indonesia seen through two Australian novels. *Indonesian Studies, 3*(2), 69-73.

----------, D. (1988). *Parallel forces*. Briar Hill, Australia: Indra Publishing.

----------, D. (1992a). Irritations. In K. O. Longley & S. Gunew (Eds.), *Striking chords: Multicultural literary interpretations* (pp. 187-190). North Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

----------, D. (1992b). *Stories of Indian Pacific*. Eltham North, Australia: Indra Publishing.

----------, D. (1992c). Uncertain Step. In D. Anggraeni (Ed.), *Stories of Indian Pacific* (pp. 99-181). Eltham North, Australia: Indra Publishing.

----------, D. (2002). Journey to my cultural home. In S. Holzknecht, M. J. Bourke & A. Bartlett (Eds.), *Weaving a double cloth: Stories of Asia-Pacific women in Australia* (pp. 185-197). Canberra, Australia: Pandanus Books.

----------, D. (2012). *Amelberga Astuti's interview with Dewi Anggraeni [5 January 2012]*. Unpublished article.

----------, D. (2013). *Amelberga Astuti's interview with Dewi Anggraeni [7, 8 and 26 May 2013]*. Unpublished article.

Ashcroft, B. (2001). *Post-colonial transformation*. London, UK: Routledge.

Austlit. (2014). < http://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/7039375>

Broinowski, A. (2009). An interview with Dr. Hsu-Ming Teo. *Antipodes, 23*(2), 190-195.

Derrida, J. (1999). *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* (P.-A. Brault & M. Naas, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

----------, J. (2000a). Hospitality. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities, 5*(3), 3-18.

----------, J. (2000b). *Of hospitality* (A. Dufourmantelle, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Giffard-Foret, P. (2008). *Interview with Simone*

Lazaroo. <http://peril.com.au/back-editions/edition05/interview-with-simone-lazaroo/>

Gillard, J. (2012). *Foreword on white paper on Australia in the Asian century*. Australia: Australian Government.

Gunew, S. (1994). *Framing marginality: Multicultural literary studies*. Carlton, Australia: Melbourne University Press.

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity : Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222-237). London, UK: Lawrence & Wishart.

Lazaroo, S. (1994). *The world waiting to be made*. South Fremantle, Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

----------, S. (2008). Not just another migrant stories. *Australian Humanities Review, November* (45). <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-November-2008/lazaroo.html>

Ng, L. (1994). *Silver sister*. Port Melbourne, Australia: Mandarin Australia.

----------. (1997). *Swallowing clouds*. Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books.

----------. (2013). *Amelberga Astuti's interview with Lillian Ng [4 March 2013]*. Unpublished article.

Pung, A. (2009). *Original introduction to growing up Asian in Australia*. <http://alicepung.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/original-guaia-introduction.pdf>

Pyke, K. D., & Johnson, D. L. (2003). Asian American women and racderrialized femininities: "Doing" gender across cultural worlds. *Gender & Society*, *17*(1), 33-53.

Robinson, K. (1996). Of mail-order brides and "Boys' own" tales: Representations of Asian-Australian marriages. *Feminist Review, 52*, 53-68.

Rumbaut, R. D., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2005). Self and circumstance: Journeys and visions of exile. In P. I. Rose (Ed.), *The dispossessed: An anatomy of exile* (pp. 331-356). Massachusetts, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Teo, H. (2005). *Behind the moon*. New York, NY: Soho Press.

Tucker, S. (2001). Beyond belief: Representation and revolt in Lillian Ng's Swallowing clouds. In W. Ommundsen (Ed.), *Bastard moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian writing* (pp. 125-144). Kingsbury, Australia: Otherland Literary Journal.

Uchida, A. (1998). The orientalization of Asian women in America. *Women's Studies International Forum, 21*(2), 161-174.

Valdes, J. M. (Ed.). (1986). *Culture bound: Bridging the cultural gap in language teaching.* Capetown: Cambridge University Press.

Yu, O. (2001). An interview with Brian Castro. In W. Ommundsen (Ed.), *Bastard moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian writing* (pp. 73-82). Kingsbury, Australia: Otherland Literary Journal.