

## **Introduction**

### **“Australia-South Asia: Contestations and Remonstrances”**

Maryam Mirza, Marie Herbillon and Valérie-Anne Belleflamme

Perhaps the most iconic figure that has come to epitomise the earliest interactions between colonial Australia and South Asia is that of the male “Afghan” cameleer. However, the catch-all term “Afghan” (or “Ghan”) is a partial misnomer since the cameleers who started making their way to Australia from the mid-1860s onwards were, in addition to Afghan, from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, including Punjabi, Balochi, Kashmiri and Sindhi. Many of these men came from areas that straddle present-day north India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and, therefore, at least some of them were “from British India and were British subjects, originating from east of the Durant line that separated British India from Afghanistan” (Ganter 487). Designating this diverse group of camel-drivers collectively as “Afghans,” rather than recognizing their status as British subjects where applicable, was not merely a case of sloppy record-keeping, but was also politically expedient since, as Regina Ganter points out, it “served the purpose of classifying them as Alien or ‘Asiatics’ under various restrictive laws curtailing their rights to own property, land, or engage in independent business” (487). This variety of immigration reached its height in the 1880s and the political climate during the 1890s became increasingly hostile towards immigrants from Asia. Though the Chinese “bore the brunt” (Jones 11) of the growing anti-Asian sentiment which culminated in the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 (or the White Australia policy), the cameleers too were inevitably affected by it and, of course, by “the invention of the modern engine” which diminished their “utility” significantly (Abdalla 39).

The “Afghan” camel-drivers’ chequered stay in the country is but one example of the kind of strains and anxieties that have informed encounters between South Asia and Australia. The impetus for this JEASA Special Issue came on the heels of the three-day “Australia-South Asia: Contestations and Remonstrances” conference which we co-organised with Professor Marc Delrez and which was held at the University of Liège in January 2017, under the auspices of the European Association for Studies of Australia and the University’s Centre for Teaching and Research in Postcolonial Studies (Centre d’Enseignement et de Recherche en Études Postcoloniales/CEREP). Like the conference, this Special Issue aims to shed light on the multifaceted ties between Australia and South (East) Asia from the nineteenth century to modern times, focusing primarily, though not solely, on the discontents and challenges characterizing the relationship between the two regions.

Taken together, the essays that form part of this Special Issue cover an array of disciplines, including contributions by Geoffrey V. Davis and Thamir Rashid Shayyal Az-Zubaidy, which grapple with literary texts, while John Zubrzycki’s essay, charting the experiences of Indian show people in Australia, draws on the field of cultural history, and Robyn Andrews’s article, situated within the field of cultural anthropology, features interviews with Anglo-Indians in New Zealand and India. This Issue is striking also for its chronological scope, ranging from Ralph Crane and Jane Stafford’s opening essay, which is concerned with “Anglo-India and Australasia in the century from 1820-1920,” to an exploration of

“radioactive racism” in contemporary India and Australia by Paul Giffard-Foret in the Issue’s final essay.

In “Place, Object, Text: Anglo-India in Australasia,” **Ralph Crane** and **Jane Stafford** trace the imperial ties that have bound Anglo-India (strictly defined as the British community living in India during the Raj) to Australasia from the early nineteenth century onwards and that remain inscribed on the geographical and cultural landscapes of twenty-first-century Australasia. To illustrate these historical connections (which resulted in Anglo-Indian settlers’ attempts to recreate India in their new Australasian home), the authors first focus on place names, which are clearly indicative of “colonial networks that operated between British India and Australasia” as well as on the imprint left by Anglo-India on the architecture and physical spaces (such as gardens and graveyards) of Australia and New Zealand. They then chart the circulation of material objects stemming from Anglo-India and displayed in the current collections of various Australasian museums and other cultural institutions, with a view to unveiling some of the narratives these artefacts convey about the colonial history of mobilities between Anglo-India and Australasia. Finally, they investigate several literary texts (including short fiction, memoir and travel writing) that have contributed to recording, depicting and shaping the relationships between these two areas.

**John Zubrzycki**’s essay, entitled “Jugglers and the Colonial Encounter: The Experience of Indian Show People in Nineteenth-Century Australia,” engages with the predicament of Indian performers who migrated from India to Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century and whose Australian experience constitutes a little known aspect of their host country’s cultural history. In particular, the author examines two groups of itinerant Indian entertainers and their respective trajectories, which mirror their difficult interactions with the local communities, as well as the latter’s varying degrees of racial prejudice. While the way in which the trial of the Indian brothers Mahomet Cassim and Mahomet Abdallah (two jugglers who—despite unconvincing evidence—were found guilty of another Indian migrant’s murder in the early 1860s) was conducted was contested by the press and New South Wales parliament, which ran “counter to the standard narrative of colonial encounters” at that time, the plight of a troupe of Indian show people was met with less sympathy in the late 1880s. In a society that was increasingly prosperous but also more hostile towards Indians, who were perceived as a threat to Anglo businesses and white women, these exploited workers’ public protests ultimately helped to reform Australia’s laws governing the emigration of “spectacular” performers, thereby transcending their own supposed powerlessness.

In “‘Wars Don’t End When the Fighting is Over’: Adib Khan’s *Homecoming* and the Australian Literature of the Vietnam War,” **Geoffrey V. Davis**, after briefly addressing Australia’s involvement in major conflicts, with a particular focus on the Vietnam War, and locating Khan’s novel within representative Australian literary works of the Vietnam War, explores Bangladeshi-Australian writer Adib Khan’s alternative approach to Australia’s contentious implication in the Vietnam War, as encapsulated in his novel *Homecoming* (2003). The narrative delves into the Vietnam War’s traumatic abyss and portrays its psychological impact on its veteran protagonist Martin. Davis’s observation that Martin largely owes his healing process to the Vietnamese community in Australia eventually leads him to argue that Khan’s novel not only brings to light the Australia-Vietnam post-war relationship but also offers a new, Asian-Australian perspective on the representation of war and its aftermath in Australian war literature. In addition to being a novel of memory, Davis further contends, Khan’s narrative can also be considered “an anti-war novel in the

Australian tradition, a work which offers a very clear condemnation of war, of the brutalization and descent into barbarism that it entails.”

Taking its cue from and critically engaging with Spivak’s condemnation of the double marginalisation of female subalterns, **Thamir Az-Zubaidy**’s essay entitled “The Retrieval of Women’s Voices, Resistance and Empowerment in Anna Yen’s *Chinese Take Away*” investigates the role of the performing diasporic Asian female body as transaction between the giver (the performer) and the receiver (the audience) in playwright and performer Anna Yen’s autobiographical play *Chinese Take Away* (2000). Az-Zubaidy views Yen’s merging of the polycharacterisation technique with the play’s monodramatic nature in one female performing body (Yen herself) as a means of resistance to and contestation of the fixed and sexualised identity conferred on Asian women. In performing her foremothers’ diasporic experiences alone on stage, Yen brings together the spatial and the temporal and, in so doing, not only enacts her foremothers’ transgenerational trauma of enslavement and rape but also creates a space where these oppressed Asian women’s voices can be retrieved. Drawing on Bhabha’s notion of the “Third Space,” Az-Zubaidy further illustrates how, in addition to its corporeal dramatisation of matrilineal spaces, Yen’s monodrama, which journeys between China, Hong Kong and Australia, stages cultural hybridisation and, in this manner, both destabilises and criticises the White Australia policy.

Starting from the premise that New Zealand could be regarded as a stepping stone for Anglo-Indians wishing to migrate to Australia, **Robyn Andrews** argues in her essay suggestively entitled “New Zealand: A Stepping Stone for Anglo-Indians Destined for Australia?” that, while this premise may hold true for some diasporic Anglo-Indians, most of them consider New Zealand as their final destination. The impetus for her essay was triggered by an unexpected observation, namely that a relatively high number of Anglo-Indians seemed to be quite familiar with New Zealand’s immigration policy. One of the reasons for this familiarity, she found out, was that New Zealand’s immigration policy was based on a points system “which made it relatively easy for Anglo-Indians to migrate, as long as they fell into the specified age range and held a three-year bachelor’s degree.” English language proficiency provided Anglo-Indians, whose mother tongue is English, with another reason to choose New Zealand. Her essay therefore seeks to explore the reasons why and circumstances under which, since Indian Independence in 1947, Anglo-Indians have been migrating to anglophone Commonwealth countries, and New Zealand more particularly, by drawing on interviews with both India-residing Anglo-Indians and New Zealand-diasporic Anglo-Indians.

**Paul Giffard-Foret**’s hard-hitting contribution “India Radiating, Australia Disposing? Nuclear Waste and Indigenous Resistance,” the closing essay of the Special Issue, is informed in part by the author’s own experience of growing up in Le Havre, not far from La Hague which is “home to one of the biggest nuclear fuel reprocessing plants in the world.” Taking as its starting point a recent proposal by the South Australian government to set up an international nuclear waste repository on the ancestral lands of the Aboriginal peoples, this essay brings to the fore India’s potential stake in Australia’s “import-based industry” and focuses on the alarming consequences for indigenous communities of the nuclear fuel cycle in uranium-rich Australia as well as in energy-hungry India. As Giffard-Foret points out, “most of the nuclear-related activities across the world take place on indigenous lands”; his essay not only unpacks the racist politics underpinning the decisions made by the nuclear industry (in which state authorities of the two countries are complicit), but also underscores the mounting antinuclear resistance by indigenous “radiated bodies” in both Australia and India.

As co-editors of this Special Issue, we are excited about its contribution to the still-nascent scholarship in the area of Australian-South Asian studies and will be closely following further developments in the field. We would like to conclude by extending our gratitude to the contributing authors for their engaging and thought-provoking articles and to the JEASA General Editor Martina Horakova for her unstinting support over the preceding months. We would also like to thank Adela Branna from Masaryk University, Czech Republic, for her help with the copyediting and, last but not least, the peer-reviewers for their constructive and timely feedback.

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**Maryam Mirza** is a Humboldt Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Bonn. She previously held a BeIPD-COFUND Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Liège and a Charles Wallace Pakistan Trust Visiting Fellowship at Newcastle University. She is the author of a monograph entitled *Intimate Class Acts: Friendship and Desire in Indian and Pakistani Women's Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2016), and her articles have appeared in journals such as *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *South Asian Diaspora* and *Gender, Place & Culture*.

**Email:** mmirza@uni-bonn.de

**Marie Herbillon** lectures in the English Department of the University of Liège. A member of CEREP, she has completed a PhD entitled "Beyond the Line: Murray Bail's Spatial Poetics" and published articles in journals such as *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* and *Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian/New Zealand Literature*. Her current research project addresses the themes of history and migration in J.M. Coetzee's late fiction.

**Email:** marie.herbillon@uliege.be

**Valérie-Anne Belleflamme** is a graduate teaching assistant currently working on a doctoral dissertation on temporality and the craft of fiction in Gail Jones's literary oeuvre at the University of Liège, Belgium. Her research interests are in postcolonial studies and Australian literature, as well as in narratology and phenomenology. Her articles have been published in journals such as the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* and *English Text Construction*. She is also a member of CEREP.

**Email:** valerie-anne.belleflamme@uliege.be