

A L A L S

Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

Newsletter

2003

Nation and Imagination: The Changing Commonwealth 13th Triennial Conference 2004

At the legendary stroke of the midnight hour in 1947, not only was Saleem Sinai born but so were two nations, one old and one new. The latter half of the twentieth century saw an explosion in the number of territories and countries attaining the state of the nation through decolonisation (and over fifty of them went on to join a voluntary but still hegemonic Commonwealth of nations in a continuing historical alignment which was at least literally speaking postcolonial). There are more nations now than perhaps ever before in modern history but never has the nation been in such discursive disrepute. All facts seem to be for it; all theory is against it.

It may be argued that nations are sturdy and enduring entities because they are born not only in collective imagination but even more in common material aspiration, and very often as acts of contradistinctive resistance to other contesting or conquering nations. Having once been realized, the very idea of the nation thus contains an element of self-preserving vigilance and even belligerence. Nations are perhaps not just narrated into existence as fictive allegories; they are often forged in the smithy of blood, sweat and tears. People are readier to lay down their lives for their nation than for any other cause bar (in some societies) religion. Even when the conflict is in play, as in international team sport, a degree of chauvinism is aroused verging on the fanatical. No sacrifice at the altar seems too great in the cause of the nation. (As James Bond said with a wink at the height of the Cold War when about to sleep with the enemy in the shape of a shapely blonde, "Anything for the Queen and Country!")

It is precisely such blind passion and sense of unexamined duty ("Theirs not to reason why") that makes one suspect the nation to be something negative and reactionary. One may recall, however, that the nation was not thought to be so reprehensible when the older, more powerful Western nations were expanding into empires. At the heart of this diachronic and discriminatory view lies a historical contradiction: what was the white man's meat is now seen as the black man's poison.

In an ideal world there would perhaps be no nations. Differing ideologies in modern history have

projected a vision of either an egalitarian international brotherhood or at least a liberal, peaceful, harmonious United Nations. But what we have got instead, especially after 9/11, is a Supernation, overflowing all norms of the nation itself and overriding all claims of whichever other nation it chooses to turn its scorching gaze on. And it has now for its major adversary the "terrorists" who act as extra-territorial spearheads of nations powerless to fight back conventionally as nations.

In other ways too, the nation now is under siege from both within and without. It is fragmented and subverted from within by the various sub-nations: the First Nations, the Dalits, the Aborigines, women (often the majority of the population of a nation but politically blatantly under-privileged), queer minorities, and secessionist ethnicities. From without, the spread of globalization as underwritten by the IMF and the World Bank, the penetration of the Multinationals (with Coca-Cola, effectively a non-product, claiming to sell in more countries than are members of the UN) and the seamless www, all look set to erase without a battle not only national boundaries but even any vestigial shadow lines. An elite anglophone "diaspora" now writes and represents the left-behind vernacular nation, while subaltern "immigrants" still wander miserably between their two unreconciled worlds. Perhaps in reaction, a kind of cultural nationalism has become the last-ditch stand or even the last refuge of those still located in their culture, as well as of those others re-located in body but with a still nostalgic and unreconstituted soul.

"India a nation!" — Forster had exclaimed in sympathetic but apolitical exasperation on the last page of *A Passage to India*: how could a seminal civilization, he wondered, be reduced to an upstart political category? We invite you to debate, on Indian ground, the idea, history and politics of the nation at the 13th Triennial Conference of ACLALS to be held in Hyderabad from 4 to 9 August 2004.

(See pages 4-5 for the "Call for Papers" and other details of the Conference.)

Harish Trivedi
(trivedih@vsnl.com)

Reports from ACLALS Branches

Canadian ACLALS

Our year (2002-2003) ended in a very successful conference at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia in May 2003 with a very good attendance, and a full slate of papers, panels and speakers. This year we offered a special event: one of the three major interdisciplinary international Congress Colloquia, organized by CACLALS, jointly with the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE) and two Education Societies. The colloquium, on the theme of "Conflict and Cooperation: Wealth and Creativity" chaired by Diana Brydon (University of Western Ontario), addressed how the humanities and social sciences are approaching interrelated issues of inequality of resource distribution and colonial and postcolonial cultural complexities. It explored the role of imaginative writing, research, scholarship, and technology in expressing and ameliorating pain, and enabling humane conditions through effective global communication. The speakers of the colloquium were John Willinsky, FRSC (University of British Columbia) who spoke with conviction of postcolonial responsibilities of scholarly work; Helen Tiffin (Queensland) who gave a paper on the complex relationships between racism, speciesism, and colonial and post-colonial environmental degradation; and George Elliott Clarke who spoke about the Caribbean/African-Canadian Short Fiction of H. Nigel Thomas and Althea Prince. A well-attended reception was followed by a lively and dramatic reading by George Elliott Clarke, and a book launch of *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature* ed. by Laura Moss (WLUP 2003).

Among other interesting events of this year's congress was the popular Aboriginal Roundtable, on the theme "Oral Traditions and Literary Institutions". Among guests from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland Mi'kmaq communities who participated was Chief Misel Joe who reminded us that the courses at universities are still taught mostly by non-Native professors and that First Nations people yet have a distance to navigate to reclaim their voice and stories. A beautiful rendition of a Mi'kmaq song and chant by Catherine Martin ended the session. We send our best wishes to the First Nations University of Canada which holds its grand opening on June 21st, 2003. As Jo-Ann Episkenew, Academic Dean of the (former) Saskatchewan Indian Federated College says, "These are exciting times."

A Graduate Student panel and a session on "The Politics of Reconciliation", and a CACLALS thirtieth anniversary presentation by Wendy Robbins: "Firing the Canon and other accomplishments: CACLALS at 30", with recollections also by long-time member Shamsul Islam, ended this memorable conference. The revival of the informal dinner was a great way to connect with one another, despite a rainstorm, (it was

Halifax in May, after all). Next year's conference will be held at The University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, on May 28-30th 2004. The CFP and Program will be at www.kwantlen.ca/CACLALS.

Right at the beginning of our year, we had an offer from the University of British Columbia to set up a fully online refereed journal for postcolonial studies. It has been an exciting and challenging task to set up this journal with John Willinsky whose open journal systems provided free software and ongoing technical assistance. The journal is on the web at <http://pkp.ubc.ca/pocol>, with an international editorial team and a board of reputable postcolonial scholars who have lent their support. We are seeking submissions for our inaugural issue and encourage you to submit your articles, book reviews, poetry and short stories, and/or sign on as reviewers or readers. This journal is the first online postcolonial journal coming out of Canada but its reach is global and our intent is to give open access to scholars whose work is difficult to access and who don't have easy access to western scholarship. We hope you will support us in this important effort.

Warm wishes from Vancouver, Canada,

Ranjini Mendis
 Chair, CACLALS
 (ranjini.mendis@kwantlen.ca)

European ACLALS

The new executive committee took over after the Copenhagen Triennial conference in spring 2002. It consists of Geoffrey V. Davis, University of Aachen (Chair); Marc Delrez, University of Liège (Secretary); and Bénédicte Ledent, University of Liège (Treasurer).

The Triennial 'Bodies and Voices' conference in Copenhagen (21-27 March 2002) organised by Bruce Clunies-Ross and his collaborators turned out to be a marvellous success despite certain odds. As is now all but common knowledge, only a few weeks before the conference was due to start a grant made by the 'Danish Centre for Cultural Co-operation with the Developing Countries' was blocked by the right-wing government which had just taken office in Denmark, so that plans to bring writers from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Pacific were suddenly jeopardized. The participation of Australian writers in the conference also had to be curtailed for lack of financial support. However, although the list of readings had to be substantially reduced, there were still many notable events included in the programme, and the participants had a most enjoyable and profitable time.

The conference was dedicated to the memory of Anna Rutherford, our founder, whose life of devotion to the post-colonial cause was poignantly evoked by Hena Maes-Jelinek, a former President of EACLALS, during the opening ceremony. A series of 'Anna Rutherford lectures' was also opened – a new tradition

which was inaugurated by Prof. Helen Tiffin (University of Queensland) and which will be carried on in the future.

The new team has arranged for EACLALS members to receive the magazine *Wasafiri* at a special reduced rate through the organisation, in the same way as we have for years been offering special subscriptions to *Kunapipi* and to the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. *Wasafiri*, which is edited by Susheila Nasta, should not really need any introduction to ACLALS members. Published in Britain, it is a handsomely produced magazine of creative writing, literary criticism, and of essays on film, art and cultural events. It also includes articles on teaching post-colonial writing. It has gone from strength to strength and now comes out three times a year. The deal we have arranged means that members will receive the magazine at a discount of 17.5%.

Delivery of *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* to our members under this system has been subject to some delay. This is due to the fact that the ownership of *JCL* has twice changed hands recently. We expect that normal delivery will be resumed at regular intervals.

It has now been agreed that the next EACLALS Triennial Conference will take place at the University of Malta from 21–26 March 2005, i.e., just before Easter. This should be an ideal time as Malta's best art treasures, which are kept in the churches, are traditionally brought out in preparation for the greatest liturgical event of the year in the week before Easter. This will include the 'vari' (groups of statues on large platforms representing the crucifixion), which will be exhibited in some of the villages during that week. The final day will be an excursion to Gozo. In view of the location the organizers intend to include a North African focus with both academic and artistic input. Writers as Hoda Barakat, Tony Hanania, Albert Memmi, Ahdaf Soueif as well as the Booker-shortlisted Maltese fiction writer, Trezza Azzopardi, will be invited. The provisional theme is "Sharing Places". Further details in our next newsletter.

The committee will be implementing a system of book donations for universities in Eastern Europe this year. Anyone with spare copies of publications is invited to pass them on to us; we will be happy to pass them on. EACLALS has recently brought out two newsletters (Dec 2002 and July 2003).

In the period after the Copenhagen conference we have experienced something of a reduction in membership numbers. This seems usual in the period between triennials, but we intend nevertheless to counter this by initiating a recruitment drive in the run-up to the Hyderabad and Malta conferences, both of which should prove very attractive venues.

Geoffrey V Davis
Chair, EACLALS
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Indian ACLALS

Iaclals had a very fruitful year (2002-2003) in many ways. Its membership went up from 380 to nearly 450 and several young scholars including research scholars joined the Association. The association brought out two newsletters during the period under consideration. These newsletters disseminate information about recent developments in postcolonial studies and help in promoting networking among scholars working in this field. Younger scholars are actively contributing to the newsletter and the Executive is particularly happy with this development.

Iaclals held its annual conference from 23 to 25 January 2003 at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. This year's theme was "Postcolonial Literatures: Politics, Poetics and Praxis." The Conference was well attended despite the cold wave and inhospitable weather. Around forty participants from various parts of India including the North Eastern regions attended the conference braving the Delhi winter.

Githa Hariharan, well-known Indian English novelist, delivered the keynote address. Each year Iaclals chooses one region of the Commonwealth for special attention at the annual conference. This year's focus was on Canadian Literature and around ten papers were presented on different aspects of Canadian literature. These sessions demonstrated growing popularity of Canadian studies in India.

As always, the Iaclals conference attracted participation from scholars abroad as well. Twelve scholars from different parts of the world—USA, UK, Germany, Canada and Australia attended the conference adding to the international dimension of this meet. Increasingly, sessions on teaching and pedagogy are gaining special attention at these conferences. Several urgent issues regarding teaching of postcolonial literatures have come in for discussion and new approaches and methodologies are suggested and deliberated upon.

The Iaclals website has been playing an important role in dissemination of information to members. The Iaclals Discussion group has been active in promoting dialogue among scholars on current debates on Postcolonial theory and praxis. One of the most exciting debates was on Globalization and its impact on postcolonial societies. These online discussions on issues of common interest concerning postcolonial literatures and situations have proved to be worthwhile critical exercises.

Members of Iaclals are gearing up to organize the forthcoming international conference of the ACLALS in August 2004. Expectations are rising high and there is excitement all around. Committees have been formed and groundwork has started. Looking forward to a reunion with all our friend across the globe at the 2004 conference.

C Vijayasree
Secretary, IACLALS
(vijaya_chaganti@yahoo.com)

A LALS

Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

Call for Papers

13th Triennial Conference 2004

Theme "Nation and Imagination: the Changing Commonwealth"

Dates 4–9 August 2004

Venue Hotel Taj Residency, Hyderabad, India

'Nation' is a political and cartographical entity, but it is also an imaginative construct. Today, as the process of globalization is redefining all identities—economic, cultural and national—we need to examine the impact of these changes on creative imagination and cultural production. We invite you to debate the idea, history and politics of the nation under any of the rubrics suggested below, or indeed from any other relevant perspective.

- | The Nation in History: the Nation Now
- | Nations and Empires
- | Nation as Narration and as Allegory
- | Nations and Sub-nations
- | Gender and Nation: Queer Nation
- | Nation and Immigration/Diaspora
- | Nation and Culture
- | Nations at Play: Sport and the Nation
- | Languages and Nations
- | The Commonwealth, or Visions of an Inter-nation

Abstracts of about 200 words for proposed papers of 20-minutes duration each, and of about 400 words for three-paper panels (with the names of the panelists), may be submitted, together with a 50-word bio-note including institutional address and contact email, by 30 November 2003, either to aclals@aclals.org or to Professor C Vijayasree, Secretary, ACLALS at 12-5-86/1 Vijayapuri, South Lallaguda, Secunderabad 500 017, India.

Participation in the Conference is open only to members of ACLALS. To become a member, contact the relevant regional chapter of ACLALS.

Deadlines

Abstracts should reach by: 30 Nov 2003

You will hear from us by: 31 Dec 2003

Deadline for Registration: 31 Mar 2004

Deadline for Late Registration: 30 Jun 2004

Registration

Registration Fee: Upto 31 Mar 04: US \$ 200

(Late Registration) From 1 Apr 04 to 30 Jun 04: US \$ 250

NO REGISTRATION AFTER 30 JUN 04.

Registration Fee includes Conference Kit, Lunch, Tea/Coffee.

Accommodation

Participants are expected to make their own arrangements for stay during the Conference. However, the Taj Group of Hotels is offering a special room tariff for the conference participants in Taj Residency (the Conference venue), and two other hotels close to the Conference venue — Taj Krishna and Taj Banjara.

Taj Residency (Conference Venue) & Taj Banjara	INR		USD	
	Single	Double	Single	Double
Standard Room	2,800	3,300	75	90
Residency Room	3,300	3,800	100	120
Executive Suite	7,000	7,000	160	160
Deluxe Suite	9,000	9,000	200	200

Taj Krishna	INR		USD	
	Single	Double	Single	Double
Corporate	4,000	5,000	100	120
Superior	4,500	5,500	110	130
Luxury	5,200	6,200	140	160
Taj Club	6,500	7,700	175	200
Executive Suite	8,000	8,000	200	200
Deluxe Suite	10,000	10,000	240	240
Luxury	15,000	15,000	360	360
Presidential	25,000	25,000	600	600

- | These rates are inclusive of buffet breakfast, and are exclusive of applicable taxes
- | Currently (Aug 2003) applicable taxes are 5% Luxury Tax
- | INR rates will be applicable for Indian nationals, and foreigners with valid work permits
- | USD rates will be applicable for foreigners and Non-Resident Indians
- | For room reservations at all three hotels contact Mr Nayeem Desai (nayeem.desai@tajhotels.com).
Tel: +91-40-55664242. Fax: +91-40-55664848
- | Visit Taj Hotels on the internet at www.tajhotels.com/cities/hyderabad.html

Speakers in the 2004 Conference will include

Sylvia Albutrazzi (University of Bologna, Italy)	Feroza Jussawalla (University of Texas)
Jean Arasanayagam (Writer, Sri Lanka)	Girish Karnad (Writer, India)
Homi Bhabha (Harvard University)	Siti Rohaini Kassim (University of Malayasia, Kuala Lumpur)
Elleke Boehmer (University of Nottingham at Trent, UK)	Chandani Lokuge (Monash University, Australia)
Timothy Brenen (University of Minnesota)	Suniti Namjoshi (Writer, Canada)
Victor Chang (University of West Indies)	Ashis Nandy (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi)
Shirley Chew (University of Leeds)	Susheila Nasta (Open University, UK)
Austin Clarke (Commonwealth Writers Prize winner, Canada)	Ben Okri (Booker Prize winning writer, Nigeria)
Mahesh Dattani (Playwright, India)	Vikram Seth (Commonwealth Writers Prize winner, India)
Geoffrey Davis (University of Aachen, Germany)	Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Columbia University)
Margaret Daymond (University of Natal, South Africa)	Gerhard Stolz (University of Tuebingen, Germany)
Shashi Deshpande (Writer, India)	Subramani (University of South Pacific, Fiji)
Yasmine Gooneratne (Writer, Macquarie University, Sydney)	Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan (Oxford University)
	Helen Tiffin (University of Queensland, Australia)

Join the Conference E-Group

Anyone can subscribe to the group by sending an email to aclals-subscribe@yahoo.com. The email address you send it from will be your subscription address, ie, all messages will come to that email address. A message sent to aclals@yahoo.com will automatically get copied to all subscribers to the group. Only subscribers can post messages to the group (this is a first-level protection against spam). To unsubscribe, send a message to aclals-unsubscribe@yahoo.com. Problems? Contact the List owner at aclals-owner@yahoo.com.

Your messages are archived at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/aclals/>.

For Conference updates visit the ACLALS website: www.aclals.org

Malaysian ACLALS

MACLALS held a one day Literature workshop on 8 March 2003 with the theme "Texts and Contexts: Teaching Literature in English in Malaysian Schools". It was initially organised for a select 50 teachers from schools within the Klang valley. However, due to overwhelming requests we've had to increase the number and eventually catered to 100 participants. From responses in the post-workshop questionnaire, we can say that it was a great success because many of the participants expressed the wish for a follow-up workshop, focussing on other important areas of teaching literature, as well as texts.

The next Southeast Asian Review of English (SARE) will be published in a month's time. Articles for this issue are being reviewed by members of our advisory board.

Talk (3 Jun) by Bharati Murkherjee "Multicultural America: An American Writer's Perspective".

Siti Rohaini Kassim
Chair, MAACLALS
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Sri Lankan ACLALS

SLACLALS had a very successful Biennial conference on the theme "Interactions in South Asian Literature" in January 2003. The keynote address was given by Professor Chelva Kanaganayakam of the University of Toronto.

A symposium on "Issues in Translation" is planned for October along with a book launch session including the launch of Carl Muller's new novel.

The association's journal, *Phoenix* will appear in November this year.

Ashley Halpé
Chair, SLACLALS
(ashleyhalpe@hotmail.com)

South Pacific ACLALS

Subramani has been given an award by the government of India for his novel *Dauka Puraan* and for his contribution to Hindi literature and language. He travelled to Suriname where the 7th World Hindi Conference was held to receive the award. Over 300 Hindi writers and scholars attended the conference in Paramaribo from all over the world.

Subramani is a writer in English from Fiji. He is the author of well-known works like *South Pacific Literature*, *The Fantasy Eaters*, and *Altering Imagination*. *Dauka Puraan* is the first novel he has written in the local Hindi language. The novel is receiving a lot of international attention.

The Pacific Writing Forum, where SPACLALS is situated, has just put out its newsletter PWF Network which publishes information on SPACLALS, Pacific literature, and publications. A new publication put out

by the PWF is a monograph on Pacific epistemologies. Later in the year it will be publishing a collection of poetry and artwork by Francis Koya.

Subramani
Chair, SPACLALS
(subra@usp.ac.fj)

Kunapipi 2003

As ACLALS members are soon to discover, *Kunapipi*, the international journal of postcolonial writing, is about to bring out a special issue to mark, very appropriately, the work and career of Professor Shirley Chew. Shirley, who is well-known to many members, retires in June 2003 as Professor of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Literatures in the School of English, University of Leeds, UK. Like the late Anna Rutherford, *Kunapipi*'s longstanding inspirational editor, Shirley has dedicated her academic career to the teaching, research and promotion of literatures in English from Commonwealth countries. In 2001 she also launched an important new journal, *Moving Worlds: A Journal of Transcultural Writings* of which she is General Editor.

The special issue of *Kunapipi*, which foregrounds the important cross-over between creative and critical practices which has been so central to Shirley's work, will also reconfirm for many members the new (since 2000) location of the journal at the University of Wollongong, Australia, homeland of Anna Rutherford. *Kunapipi*'s general editor is now Anne Collett. The special issue has been edited by present and former colleagues of Shirley's working along with Anne: John McLeod and Catherine Batt at Leeds, and Elleke Boehmer at Nottingham Trent University. Both John and Elleke have individually edited previous special issues, while Shirley herself acted as editor for two years in the late 1990s when the journal was temporarily housed at the University of Leeds.

As a tribute to Shirley's remarkable, often demanding, yet always generous attention to both the politics and the aesthetics of the literatures in English, a rich diversity of essays, memoirs, and poems was specially commissioned from her colleagues, former students, co-editors, collaborators, and many friends for the issue. The collection includes: a new poem by Romesh Gunesekeera 'Second Reading' celebrating the 'illuminated page'; Meenakshi Mukherjee's recollections of her time as a young lecturer in New Delhi (which resonate intriguingly with Shirley's own in the very different cultural context of Leeds); and Ranjana Sidhanta Ash's discussion of the politics of translating Indian women's writings into English. Stuart Murray reads Australian Tim Winton, and Lynnette Hunter Canadian Frank Davey, and Elleke Boehmer's sketch explores the uncomfortable 'chromatics of white identity' in apartheid South Africa. Githa Hariharan soberly investigates V. S. Naipaul's political responsibilities along the trajectories of the Indian and Caribbean diasporas while a Caribbean theme is also central to the essay

by David Richards on Walcott and painting, and David Fairer's re-reading of James Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane*.

Preferential annual rates of subscription to *Kunapipi* are tied to ACLALS membership, and at present stand at AUD\$50 (including airmail postage). All paid-up members who are also subscribers to *Kunapipi* should receive their copies of the special issue for Shirley in the course of July-August. Should you wish to subscribe, payment should be sent by cheque, payable to Kunapipi Publishing, to Dr. Anne Collett, Editor *Kunapipi*, English Studies, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW, 2522, Australia. If sending payment in currency other than AUD\$ please include the equivalent of an additional AUD\$10 to cover bank charges. For further details about subscription and contribution to *Kunapipi* see the website www.kunapipi.com or email acollett@uow.edu.au.

Elleke Boehmer
(elleke.boehmer@ntu.ac.uk)

Book Review

Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the Commonwealth. Ed. Bruce Bennett et al. Canberra: ACLALS, 2003.

ACLALS triennial conferences have traditionally served as important forums for giving new directions to commonwealth/postcolonial as well as English studies. It has also been customary to publish selected papers presented at the conference in book form. Books that came out of ACLALS conferences too served as important reference texts and some of them also marked vital moments of transition in the evolution of the discipline of commonwealth/postcolonial studies. For instance, the proceedings of the 8th ACLALS conference at Kent, which marked the Silver Jubilee of the Association, were published under the title *From Commonwealth to Postcolonial* edited by Anna Rutherford. This volume announces in clear and unambiguous terms "We have come a long way since that first meeting in Leeds (which marked the birth of ACLALS)", and marks a major transition in the directions of commonwealth studies. *Resistance and Reconciliation* is yet another ACLALS anthology keeping to the ACLALS ideals of raising pertinent questions about the whole business of postcolonial writing and readings, and bringing the entire field of postcolonial studies under a rigorous periodic review.

The present anthology emerges from the 12th triennial conference of ACLALS held in Canberra in 2001 and is edited by the Australian team of ACLALS executive—Bruce Bennett, Susan Cowan, Jacqueline Lo, Satendra Nandan and Jen Webb. The conference theme—"Resistance and Reconciliation: Writing in the Commonwealth" is retained for the title, and in many ways it is an apt title for a volume of critical essays on postcolonial literatures coming from Australia. The title unmistakably hints at the concerted effort being made in Australia to achieve an interracial unity, and redress the wrongs done to the aborigine community.

It also provides a suitable paradigm for a critical analysis of various modes of resistance and reconciliation at work in different parts of the world. There are twenty-seven essays in this book covering a range of texts and contexts. The book's primary focus, in the words of Bruce Bennett, is "on writing as an act of resistance and also as a possible agent of reconciliation." Most of the essays keep to this frame of reference even as they deal with widely different cultural and literary contexts, and this gives the volume a coherence and unity, which rather rare in a conference publication.

The essays in the anthology focus on, and examine with a critical rigour, some of the most pertinent issues bothering writers and scholars in the academies world over today: position of 'postcolonial' in the context of 'global' (Stephen Slemon), the function and value of an education in the humanities (JM Coetzee), the role of religion in contemporary cultural formations (Anna Johnston and Dorothy Lane), the future of nation state (Goodwin and Ashcroft) etc.

Understandably, a large number of essays in the volume address the predicament of the marginalized, be it Australian aborigines (Kay Schaffer, Santosh Sareen), or Native Americans (Sylvia Klenert, Stella Barthelet), or diasporic communities (Makarand Paranjape, Rajender Chetty) and examine patterns of resistance and reconciliation operating in these different contexts. The overarching concerns emerging here are quite clear: What happens to the national when the global takes over? What happens to the marginal in the grand homogenizing discourse of the nation? The second question has been under debate for a couple of decades but it acquires a new dimension in the context of recent developments in the political scenario. How do we develop a new world order where all segments—major or minor—find their rightful place and share in the resources of the world?

JM Coetzee's story/essay merits a special mention for two reasons: firstly it makes us rethink the purpose and parameters of humanities in modern universities and, secondly, it demonstrates that fiction can be a fit vehicle for analyzing complex pedagogic and theoretical issues. A much needed relief for scholars ambushed in highly complicated discourse of pocoliticism!

Resistance and Reconciliation is comprehensive and fairly representative in reflecting the complex patterns of domination and resistance in different parts of the world. It is thought-provoking, rich in information, and yet highly readable.

C Vijayasree

[For copies contact Dr J L Webb (Jennifer.Webb@canberra.edu.au)]

The World as India

A piece by Susan Sontag with the above intriguing title was published in *Times Literary Supplement* on June 13, 2003. The controversy that followed may be of interest to the members of ACLALS who are all users

of the English language even when it is not the only language they use.

Sontag's essay is "an edited version of the St. Jerome Lecture given at the Queen Elizabeth Hall". It is mainly about literary translation, and she makes pronouncements to which hardly any one can take exception, e.g., "Translation is the circulatory system of the world's literatures", or "Literary translation ... mirrors and duplicates the role of literature itself, which is to extend our sympathies ... to deepen the awareness ... that other people, people different from us, really do exist." But her concurrent theme is the celebration of the hegemony of the English language in the world today. She finds it "interesting" that the triumphant march of English should make "many lesser languages" disappear. She says in passing—without any apparent regret "I suspect that fewer works of foreign literature, specially from the languages felt to be less important, are being translated into English than, say, twenty or thirty years ago. But many more books written in English are being translated into foreign languages."

Her use of India as a metaphor and her citing of the unfortunate example of "Call Centres" to underscore how Indians are reaping the benefit of knowing English has evoked a sharp response from Harish Trivedi (Delhi University). In his letter which was published in *TLS* of June 27, 2003, he first corrects Sontag's irresponsible and erroneous statement that Hindi could not be the national language of India because Muslims opposed it, and then goes on to expose the exploitative aspects of these "Call Centres" in India Sontag is so happy about. Young men and women who work for American companies in these "Call Centres" are forced to take on an American accent, and American names and identities. All for a fraction of the money that would be paid to their counterparts in America. "What has such a brutally exploitative economic arrangement to do with literary translation, one may wonder" Trivedi says. On the larger historical question of how English has gone on from being merely the language of British Isles to becoming a global language, Trivedi is surprised that Sontag can only remember two causes: it was adopted in the 1920s as the international language of civil aviation, and then it became the language of computers. "She entirely neglects to mention that the biggest hegemonic factor responsible for its global spread was the British Empire. But if Sontag is blithely unconscious of the current neocolonialism of America,

one can hardly expect her to be mindful of the past colonialism of Britain."

On September 7, one finds a rebuttal of Harish Trivedi's position, not in *TLS*, but in *The Times of India*, in a column titled "Men and Ideas". The writer is Gurcharan Das, a well-known name in the corporate world, but also a writer of plays in English, and more recently a book on the liberalisation of India's economy. He objects to Trivedi's use of the word 'cyber coolies' to describe the call centre workers. Das says "at the root of the dispute is the ownership of the language." He argues that "to-day's confident young Indians see English as a functional skill", when they speak English they feel they own it "whereas Harish Trivedi's neo-colonial English flies the Anglo-American flag. ... So who is the coolie? Not the confident young person at the call centre with her liberated attitude to English, but Harish Trivedi, whose mind remains colonised in the old linguistic categories of post-colonial, pre-reform India."

When *Times of India* asked Harish Trivedi to respond, he explained his use of the word "coolie" by reminding us of the labourers who worked in the sugar plantations of the British empire. The call centre workers, in his view "occupy the same lowly place in the global economy as did the girmitya (indentured) labourers of the 19th century."

We have probably not heard the last word on the subject yet. In any case one question remains to be asked. If the English language belongs today to anybody who uses it, why do these "confident" young Indians have to change their accent and identity to suit someone else's requirement? Our readers' views on these and related issues are welcome.

Meenakshi Mukherjee

New Initiative

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