

Precarity, Violence and the Intersection of Race, Class and Gender in Roanna Gonsalves' *The Permanent Resident*

Anne Brewster

WE LIVE IN A MOBILE WORLD CHARACTERISED BY THE MASS MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE—both voluntary and involuntary—on an unprecedented scale. One billion people cross borders every year and international migrants account for 3 percent of the world's population (Standing 90). This diversity is reflected in the Australian population where one in every four workers is a migrant (Standing 90). Roanna Gonsalves' collection of stories *The Permanent Resident* (2016) focuses on the so-called 'second wave' of Indian immigration to Australia from the 1990s onwards and reflects the ways in which migration impacts one particular community in Australia, namely the Goan Catholic community.¹ While one reviewer qualified her whole-hearted praise of Gonsalves' book with the reservation that, in their focus on Goan Catholics, the stories were 'limited to one tiny subset of the Indian community' (Prakash n.p.), I suggest that this targeted focus allows Gonsalves to drill down into the racialised, gendered, class, religious and historical specificities of this community as it negotiates its position(s) within the post-settler white nation. If in this process Gonsalves critiques racialised power relations between the dominant culture and minoritised peoples within the white nation, her fiction also excavates power hierarchies and complicities *within the diaporic Goan community*. In turn, situating the Goan community as embodying one of the many histories of

¹ While not all of the protagonists of the stories are identified as Goan, many are.

migration in Australia, this essay takes up literary theorist Jumana Bayeh's call to theorise minoritised literatures in Australia through the concept of diaspora in order to counteract and challenge the operations of racism in the public sphere. Bayeh quotes Stuart Hall's comment that 'diaspora identities are those that are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference' (Bayeh 85) to argue that the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism can provide an antidote to racial essentialism (Bayeh 85). In their focus on 'transformation and difference', Gonsalves' stories investigate the ways in which migrants remake themselves and develop many different forms of belonging (both to the post-settler Australian nation and to their countries and cultures of origin) as they insert themselves into Australian suburbia. The stories thereby challenge fixed and essentialist categories of race and whiteness in their exploration of the production and reproduction of diasporic identity and subjectivity. In its thematising of diaspora and transnationalism, *The Permanent Resident* contributes to and extends both the transnational history of Australian literature and the global field of diasporic South Asian literature.²

In my readings of the stories of *The Permanent Resident* I focus in particular on the multiple ways in which diasporic women's lives are precaritized, analysing the many differences between them—differences refracted by class, labour, religion, marital status and ethnicity.³ To start with, I will look at the story 'Full Face' in order to examine how precarity impacts in diverse ways on a range of women. The story focuses on three Indian female voluntary migrants in Australia and portrays how violence against women is normalised. In this reading, I unpack class and cultural specificities of the Catholic Goan middle-class diasporic community exemplified by two characters: Gloria and the unnamed narrator. These two women's positioning as migrants is thrown into relief by a third character, Sheetal, who is 'other' to them on account of her class, religion and ethnicity.

All three women are 'economic migrants'. They have migrated along a south-north trajectory from the Global South to a first world country in search of the spoils of globalisation. Gloria and the narrator are middle class and are cushioned in many ways by their relatively privileged status. The narrator, an advertising copywriter, who has lived in Dubai as well as India, moves to Australia to escape India's 'swarming multitudes' (3), seeking class mobility and what Gloria refers to as the 'quality of life' (32). This elusive holy grail evades the

² The book has been published in India under the title *Sunita Da Souza Goes to Sydney and Other Stories* (Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2018). This essay focuses exclusively on the book in its Australian context.

³ This focus on precarity does not suggest that the Australian female Goan diasporic community is especially vulnerable or disadvantaged. Indeed, if these stories provide evidence of the racialised, gendered, class and religious specificities of this constituency, we can see that many of these characters hail from relatively privileged backgrounds.

narrator as it appears to have evaded Gloria in spite of the latter's best efforts to achieve belonging in Australia. Although the narrator initially thinks of Gloria as having succeeded in shedding her Indian identity and taking up an Australian identity to become a 'self-actualised being' (7), in the course of the story she comes to the opposite conclusion: that rather than being *transformed* Gloria is 'just another Catholic Bombayite *transplanted* into Australia ... only the colour of her aspirations had changed' (11, my emphasis). These stories depict the uneven impact of racialisation within the white settler nation, across class and gender.

Gloria's efforts to achieve 'quality of life' and demonstrate upward class-mobility are rendered comic; many of the household objects which she values for their 'quality' are in fact *faux*, such as the granite lawn and the silk flowers, and others are very cheap, such as the three-dollar bottles of 'top quality' wine. Yet Gonsalves' satire reveals as much about the racialising pressure that the Australian mainstream brings to bear on diasporic subjects as it does about Gloria's aspirations. Gloria refers to an imperfection in her otherwise ideal characterisation of Australia, in an offhand comment about her life in Australia: 'Everywhere you go in the world there are racists' (9). The narrator implies that Gloria's efforts to demonstrate class mobility are overcompensations for the racialised difference which sets her apart. As mentioned above, the narrator observes that 'the colour of [Gloria's] aspirations had changed' (11), implying the pressure on her to identify with whiteness. Looking at Gloria and her husband, the narrator notes 'the insecurities of these people who after twenty years in this country were still trying to fit in' (13). It would appear that the 'colour bar' (3) and racism are everyday parts of Australian life for Gloria as a middle-class diasporic woman in spite of the cheery image she cultivates.

When the narrator arrives in Australia Gloria asserts that 'this is the safest place on earth' and that 'in Australia everyone is equal' (9). If what Gloria values about Australia is its safety and equality, these are privileges accruing to the middle class, and not to the third woman in this story, Sheetal. She is from a class of migrants who do not benefit from a globalised neo-liberal capitalist economy. OECD figures indicate that women currently make up a greater share of international migrants than at any other time in history (Standing 92) and, concomitantly, a large proportion of the global precariat (Standing 90). Sheetal is indexical of this group. Like Gloria and the narrator, Sheetal has migrated from a poor country to a rich one but unlike them has fallen into the precariat in Australia. Working in a casual, unskilled, low-paid job as a beautician, she represents the global trend of the feminisation of low wage employment and embodies the insecurity and vulnerability of a growing number of migrant women. She represents the experience of globalism 'from below', that is, from the perspective of the large group of people who have not benefitted from the rapid expansion of post-industrial global capitalism, but suffer its brutal and

dehumanising effects of impoverishment and disenfranchisement. In Sheetal we see the nexus of neoliberal exploitation, gendered and racialised precarity and physical violence. This experience ‘from below’, of the ‘underside’ of globalisation, is one of the features of the dispersed constituency known as the ‘Global South’ (West-Pavlov 146-7). In travelling *from* the Global South (India) in search of a better life, Sheetal has in effect ended up inhabiting a pocket of disadvantage and precarity in Australia which reproduces the conditions of the Global South. Borrowing from West-Pavlov, I would suggest that she can be said to exist in ‘a Global South economic enclave’ within the first-world country, Australia (152). As Alfred J. López suggests, there are many ‘Souths’ within the North (and, we might add, first-world countries in the southern hemisphere) (v).

Sheetal’s life demonstrates a continuum between structural and interpersonal violence (Menjívar and Walsh). The gendered violence that she experiences in her home is a consequence of macro-level inequalities. She has no access to protection and justice via the legal system because of her ethnicity and class (which manifest in her lack of language skills and mobility). If Sheetal inhabits the precariat within a first-world country, this positionality is mirrored in her relationship with Gloria and the narrator, who express sympathy and concern for her predicament but fail to assist her. They in effect take advantage of her, allowing her to minister to them with her ‘soft hands’ (23, 33). While they deplore her violent husband, Gloria warns the narrator that it’s ‘better not to get too involved. You know what these people are like. They take revenge’ (29). In spite of their avowed compassion for Sheetal, the class, ethnic and religious difference of ‘these people’ to whom she belongs provides the alibi for Gloria’s and the narrator’s inaction and distantiation.

Yet Sheetal has a strong systemic and bodily connectivity with Gloria and the narrator who are implicated in the exploitation of her labour and, by imputation, that of other women in the global precariat. A woman who delivers ‘full face’ facial treatments to her erstwhile countryfolk, Sheetal loses her own face in the most brutal way imaginable through an act of domestic violence. While women in the global precariat such as Sheetal service middle-class women, the products of their labour are recycled for middle-class consumers under the guise of fair trade. The narrator tells us that at her state-of-the-art wedding, she had been showered ‘with biodegradable confetti, made from recycled waxing strips discarded by the beauty parlours in Bandra and sterilised by a charity working with street kids’ (2). The narrator’s middle-class commitment to sustainable living does not extend to a concern over the sustainability of the lives of women in the precariat.

Despite their middle-class aspirations and social capital, Gloria and the narrator themselves experience a degree of precarity living as migrants in Australia—

Gloria in her inability to fully belong, and the narrator in her fruitless efforts to find a job commensurate with her experience and competency. They nonetheless fail in their putative compassion for 'poor, dear Sheetal' (33). Gloria fails twofold in this respect, as she also fails to support the narrator's decision to leave her husband. She is in effect complicit with a patriarchal system which naturalises violence against women. While Sheetal's husband's violence is recognised as violence it is normalised as issuing from 'these people' whose ethnic, class and religious difference sets them apart from Gloria and the narrator. In a similar gesture, the narrator's husband's psychological cruelty and emotional withdrawal are also naturalised by Gloria, in this instance as part of middle-class marriage. Because he didn't abuse her verbally or hit the narrator he is, by default, a 'decent man' (36) in Gloria's eyes. For her, the psychological injury he perpetrates is not visible or recognisable as violence because it impacts in non-physical ways. By not recognising the harm that the narrator's husband inflicts, Gloria in effect blames the narrator for the breakdown of the latter's marriage. In 'Full Face', as in other stories, Gonsalves asserts the complicity of the middle-class in normalising violence against middle-class women and rendering it invisible.

Gloria's disapproval of the narrator's decision to break up with her husband, resonates with Sheetal's mother-in-law's defence of her son: 'That's what men do. It's normal. He hasn't killed her, has he? Then why are you complaining?' (28). The similarity of Gloria's comments to Sheetal's mother-in-law's bears evidence of the routinisation and normalisation of violence against women globally across class, ethnicity and religion. In effect, as Cecilia Menjívar and Shannon Drysdale Walsh argue, 'normalised familiarity with violence renders it unexceptional' (224). If 'Full Face' portrays the vulnerability of the lives of women in the global precariat, Sheetal becomes another statistic of femicide (Menjívar and Walsh 222).⁴

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The stories of *The Permanent Resident* depict diasporic women in various states of precarity within a variety of class settings and the ways in which these women are impacted by violence, with two stories dealing specifically with Catholicism and the complicity in this violence of people who consider themselves religiously upright. In the story 'Christmas 2012', a 'respectable' Indian-Australian family (78) celebrates Christmas with all the solemnity and ritual that befits their status as a 'pillar and post' (76) of the local Catholic church. Their midday meal is

⁴ Menjívar and Walsh refer to Radford and Russell's definition of 'femicide' as 'the killings of women because they are women' (1992). Menjívar and Walsh use the alternative term 'feminicide' in order to foreground 'the role the state plays in these killings' either through action or inaction (222). The term 'feminicide' was coined by Latin American women's advocates (Walsh and Menjívar 587).

interrupted by a phone call from a friend in India, to whom the father of the Indian-Australian family, Martin, expresses outrage over the highly publicised Delhi rape case (alluded to in the date in the title of the story).⁵ He complains about India, saying, 'Rapes and murders everywhere. Not safe to walk on the streets any more' (80) and piously thanks the Holy Spirit for 'guiding [him] to migrate to Australia' (80). Later we are told that he retires to his daughter's bedroom and the implication is that he is abusing her sexually. The hypocrisy of this conception of middle-class Australian Catholic families as a bastion of decency and respectability and the relegation of gendered violence to the developing world is sharply satirised by Gonsalves who reminds us of the adage that the home is often not so much a haven of safety for women (including middle-class women) as a place of danger and risk, especially for the most vulnerable: young women and children.

The Church and religious hypocrisy are the target of another story, 'In the Beginning', where Angie, a lapsed Catholic, returns to her local church with the intention of challenging the priest for his collusion in a child abuse scandal. When she attends a service in the church, Angie is drawn into the singing and the ritual of the service. Eventually, on observing how important the occasion is for so many of the other immigrant parishioners, she forgoes her resolve to challenge the priest. While the story is trenchant in its critique of the Catholic church's response to allegations of child abuse, it also focuses on the ambiguous positioning of racialised immigrants and their struggle to belong—both to mainstream Australian society and to diasporic communities. Angie is shown to be disaffected by a range of aspects of the middle-class diasporic Indian community such as its collusion with the Church's handling of child abuse allegations, its putative moral indignation at and lack of compassion for refugees, its gender politics and its consumerism. All these aspects of the community are subjected to Gonsalves' gentle satire.

However, Angie's efforts to distance herself from this community and her aspirations for upward mobility are also satirised. Her admiration of the 'chic' styles of the cultural and intellectual intelligentsia, for example, are shaped by her mis-identification with the first-world academics with whom she works, who commodify the third world, have no understanding of their own privilege, and subscribe to the myth of Australian egalitarianism. Through the free indirect discourse of the story we have a glimpse into Angie's image of herself as someone who, unlike her Indian friends, has 'moved on' from the 'laboured showiness of migrants' (158) to assimilation to the 'style and sophistication' (158) of the white intelligentsia. Angie believes that she has been incorporated

⁵ On 16 December 2012 a 23-year-old female physiotherapy student, Jyoti Singh, was beaten and gang raped in a bus by 6 men in Delhi. She died days later in a Singapore hospital. The incident generated widespread national and international coverage.

into Australia's putative egalitarianism by 'accepting that we were all equals ... [and] saying you reject the class system' (158). Gonsalves' satire, both of Angie and the other Indian Australians, I'd suggest, is affectionate and inclusive. It does not assume the high moral ground as it acknowledges both the consumerism and conservatism of immigrants on the one hand and on the other, the precarity of immigrant aspirations in the face of what one of Gonsalves' characters refers to as 'the colour bar' (3). The humour in *The Permanent Resident* is a response to precarity and a recognition of struggle against the effects of racialisation.

Angie's 'journey' (158) towards assimilation is, needless to say, incomplete or, rather, it is a journey that requires her to recall on occasion her own hybrid, diasporic and postcolonising Goan history. It reminds her of her mixed 'loyalties' (170) and inflects her complex relationship with the Church. At the church service that she attends she recognises her affinity not only with members of the Indian community but with the Nigerian migrants who constitute a large part of the Church's choir and its parishioners. It could well have been an African family with whom Father Bob was conversing towards the end of the story, the sight of whom brings about her change of heart and her difficult decision (which does not sit easily with her) not to confront the priest. *The Permanent Resident* bears witness to multiple forms of belonging and to the network of horizontal cultural, religious and class connectivities between minoritised groups within the white nation not just the vertical connectivities between dominant and minoritised groups, thus challenging white universalism.

Angie recognises that the Church's parishioners are largely drawn from non-white diasporic communities which, in first-world countries like Australia, comprise growing numbers of immigrants from third world and developing countries—from 'the Pacific Islands, Africa, South Asia, East Asia, the Middle East, South America'—who were supporting the Church with their tithes: 'the only parishes that were currently solvent across the world owed their prosperity to the swell' of Catholics from these regions (172). Mixed in with Gonsalves' critique of the Church is an affirmation (from Angie's narratological point of view) of South-South global solidarity—of these parishioners and their important contribution to the survival of the Church, an institution that, in spite of globalising transformation, persists in being 'desperately white' (172). *The Permanent Resident* mounts a trenchant critique of the ways in which the white nation disavows and refuses to recognise many Australian people's non-white transnational attachments and connectivities (including, those with its proximate regional neighbours) in favour of its historical ties with Europe and the US: Angie considers Australia a 'Pacific continent pretending to be Atlantic' (159). In this story, as in others from the collection, Gonsalves' critique of Australian whiteness targets, in particular, middle-class cosmopolitanism—to which many of her upwardly mobile Indian-Australian characters aspire—for its

commodification and consumption of cultures of the third-world and the Global South, whether those commodifiable cultures are drawn from Indigenous communities in the first world or poverty-stricken communities in developing countries.

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Many of the stories in *The Permanent Resident* critique what Gonsalves terms the diasporic Indian community's 'climb towards whiteness' (254). The Indian immigrant middle class's silence and moral cowardice in the face of the sexual abuse of the vulnerable portrayed in 'In the Beginning' is echoed in 'The Skit', where a group of young aspirational Indian immigrants, 'the Bombay gang', react to a fictionalised story of sexualised violence against a young Indian international student—initially with condemnation of the white male perpetrator and empathy for the female victim. Although this is a fictional 'skit', we are told that the story 'was an amalgamation of many stories in the newspapers that year' (42), which implies that its author intended that it mirror violence in the real world to some degree. The 'Bombay gang' profess to be moved by the situation the story depicts. However, over the course of the evening, their own self-interest, ambition and keen desire to assimilate prevail, and they end up recommending to the writer that she remove—lest they cause offence to a soon-to-arrive white male visitor—any possible implication of violence or short-coming on the part of the white male perpetrator in the story and the judicial system (which so egregiously fails to support and protect the young woman in the story).

Once again Gonsalves makes use of satire to critique the blatant consumerist and assimilationist aspirations of this young group of upwardly mobile Bombay people awaiting the results of their applications for permanent residence. Yet there is a touch of pathos in the reminder that they will not achieve the desired level of assimilation to the white nation in spite of their expectations and aspirations. This story focuses on language and in particular on the inventive and poetic vernacular English of the 'Bombay gang'. The listeners are proud that one of their number (like they themselves) has such an impeccable command of 'the Queen's English'. However, the dialogue of the 'Bombay gang' reveals that in spite of their reverence of all things British they have in fact made the so-called Queen's English language over into Indian English. The story thus depicts 'the Bombay gang' with a hint of satirical pathos: as their use of English indicates, they will always fall short of their best efforts to identify with whiteness. It also demonstrates the compromise of ideals and the reinscription of power hierarchies that occur in the process of migration and the fall of at-risk immigrants into the precariat. The fictional female victim in the embedded story within the skit, for example, who is exploited and unprotected by the educational

and judicial systems respectively, is 'abandoned' so to speak (like the skit), or more literally cut out of the story, by her more privileged and mobile compatriots. Significantly, the young female victim in the story who loses her court case is deported; a fate the ambitious Bombay gang would abhor above all others.

Another story which focuses on moral cowardice and the issue of complicity is 'Curry Muncher 2.0'. In this story the challenge of cowardice and complicity emerges from the ambivalent positioning of the unnamed narrator. She faces the dilemma of whether, in the face of white racialised violence, to attempt to identify with (and therefore assist) the Indian man being targeted or to (mis)identify with the dominant majority. The adage 'mind your own business' becomes an alibi, in the course of the story, for her initial failure to intervene in the violence. At the opening of the story the narrator establishes her class and ethnic commonality—as an international Bombay catholic student of Goan and Mangalorean heritage—with her colleague Vincent, who becomes the victim of violence. Despite this sense of their commonality, the narrator becomes aware of the fact that violence impacts on her differently due to her gender. She's aware that the ways in which her gender intersect with her ethnicity provide her—on this occasion at least—with an immunity to violence. However, it is not initially clear whether the racist thugs will leave her alone or not. Despite not being bashed like her male colleague (because she is female), she is nonetheless vulnerable to *racialised* exclusion. Her ethnicised difference as an 'outsider' (57) threatens to trump the visual regime of gendered exoticism which affords her some protection:

I was conscious of my power as a young exotic-looking woman. I was equally conscious of the apprehension and anxiety I felt as an ethnic, an *outsider* with an accent. I was unsure, in the face of imminent thuggery, whether my salvation lay in being coquettish and charming, or in making myself as inconspicuous as possible' (57, my emphasis).

As it turns out, she is not perceived as 'coquettish and charming' but as more or less 'inconspicuous'. As a racialised and gendered subject the narrator is either hypervisible or invisible in the face of violence. It is her *olfactory* difference which effectively mitigates against her being perceived as 'coquettish and charming'. In this instance race trumps gender. Her efforts to dis-identify with Vincent's racialised precarity and to pass as an 'insider'⁶ (59) fail, partly because of the tell-tale markers of her Indian ethnicity, namely her 'stinking curry clothes' (58). They prevent her from claiming affiliation with the 'bunch of cool dudes'

⁶ We can read 'insider' to mean, in this context, a woman worthy of the young white men's attentions.

(59) in the railway carriage. When her clothes prevent her from being positively assessed by the perpetrators as ‘a young exotic-looking woman’ (57) the narrator experiences being expelled from the ‘cool’ set with a mixture of ‘relief and mortification’ (58). She feels relief, I’d suggest, due to the fact that the aggressive young men identified her as an Indian (affiliating her with Vincent and thereby assuaging her guilt). Perhaps also on one level she did not want to play the role of being ‘coquettish and charming’. She may have experienced mortification (paradoxically) because she in fact relished on another level the role of being ‘coquettish and charming’. Either way, her feelings are complex and ambivalent. She later invokes a biblical image of Pontius Pilate’s betrayal to describe her feelings about Vincent: ‘I didn’t need water in order to wash my hands’ (59). The wry humour captures the instability of the narrator’s assigned identity as she negotiates—playfully but also with a degree of angst—her ethnicised positioning and the options that are available to her.

Numerous theorists have argued that humour undertakes gendered cultural work for women writers in challenging the codes restricting them (for example, Gagnier 138). Humour becomes a way for Gonsalves’ narrator to negotiate ‘conflicting currents’ in her own mind at the scene of violence. She compares the seduction of ‘mind[ing] [her] own business’ (that is, pretending she didn’t see the harassment and assault) and the lure of the putatively innocent racialised, gendered scripts/stereotypes available to her (‘coquettish and charming’ or ‘inconspicuous’), to transactions in the prelapsarian scene of the Garden of Eden. She describes her relationship with the perpetrators as ‘a little like Adam and Eve and the snake and God loving each other up in the Garden of Eden before the Fall’ (59). Humour is used here to figure the narrator’s precarity: her success or otherwise of identifying with the white majority in this instance is contingent upon her sexualisation which is impacted by her ethnicity—rendering her either ‘exotic’ or ‘a stinking black bitch’ (60).

From her point of view, her olfactory ethnicity is double edged. Indian restaurants are an index of the ‘zenith of Indian nationalistic pride: complete dominance of the West’ (55-6) and are thus comically doubly coded—they signify both pride and abjection. They metaphorise the racialised and gendered diasporic subject within the white nation as simultaneously powerful and vulnerable. This unstable and vacillating ambiguity—which emerges from contradictory feelings, identities and aspirations—can be accommodated in fiction by humour which expresses a sense of precarity similar to that found in gallows humour. ‘Curry Muncher 2.0’ demonstrates how Gonsalves, as a minoritised woman writer, deploys humour to navigate the conflicted issues of racialised and gendered violence in the white Australian nation.

If the stories discussed so far feature critiques of the dilemmas and ambiguities within mainly middle-class diasporic Goan communities, the story 'Soccer Mum' moves away from this theme to focus on an Indian woman negotiating her mobility within a largely white mainstream suburban community, that of a children's soccer club. Here the gendered and ethnicised narrator faces condescension and marginalisation. She is passed over when her offer to step into the position of coach of the soccer team is ignored. It is assumed that she does not have capability or skills; indeed, the other parents express surprise that Indians play soccer.

She is thus rendered invisible and precarious on account of her gender and her race. The story is an astute observation of the inertia and fixity of whiteness and the discombobulating effects that arise when the narrator is seen not to fit majoritarian stereotypes reserved for minority women. The narrator's interlocutor 'looks away' when the narrator reveals her own considerable accomplishments, telling her that she had made a film of the Sydney suburb, the Rocks: 'The earth shifts. The continents fall off their shelves. When they are put back together they don't quite fit like they used to' (186). Here the weight of systemic racism is figured in tectonic imagery which highlights the precariousness of racialised stereotypes. The hyperbole is burlesque but has a serious intention, I would suggest, in pointing to the entrenched and pervasive reach of white power which shores up the authority, privilege and entitlement of whiteness by marginalising, trivialising and infantilising minority people. The tectonic imagery suggests not only the magnitude of the reach of the systemic operations of white power but also the weight of white affective investments in its reproduction. The seismic shift figures the moment of recognition—by the narrator's white interlocutor—of the limits of the stereotype. In its stead the multiple agencies of the minoritised and racialised person become visible. This moment of recognition by the white interlocutor carries in its wake the requirement that the white interlocutor recalibrate not only their understanding of the minoritised person but the assumptions of authority and entitlement embedded in their conception of their own whiteness. What follows for the white interlocutor is discomfort: in the figurative terms of the metaphor, when the continents 'are put back together they don't quite fit like they used to'. This discomfort is also evoked in the numerous silences that punctuate the narrator's repeated offers to coach the soccer team.

Moreover, the responsibility for resolving the awkwardness that arises as white parents at the soccer club misapprehend the narrator, falls on the narrator who finds herself 'trying to brownsplain [her] way out of the knot of awkwardness in this conversation' (186). 'Brownsplain' is a word that suggests that the onus for resolving the 'awkwardness', for moving the cross-racial exchange forward, falls

on the minoritised person who is in the position of having to explain and account for their difference (or, in this case, their sameness—that is, their knowledge of soccer).

The tectonic trope thus conveys the epistemically violent effects of dismantling whiteness, both for minority and majoritarian Australians. The story is set against the backdrop of the soccer game and the aggressive Australian vernacular, a language that feels alien to the narrator. Within this competitive bodily and linguistic arena the narrator feels ill equipped to support her son in the game and, like the white interlocutor who is unable to negotiate difference, stays silent:

I am unsure what to say out loud in support of my son. I hear Will's dad, Simon, saying, 'Put it through, Neil, put it through!' I know that those words, in that accent would falter off my tongue like a taste that has not yet been acquired. I stay silent. (185)

We have been told that, although the narrator's son attends the same school as the other boys on his team, he does not socialise with them there, preferring 'the architraves of shadow and solace that only the school library can provide' (182). This contrasts markedly with the aggressive and confident bodily performance of the white boys in the soccer game, one of whom is described as 'springing himself into a game that is his, a field that is his, a country that is his for the taking' (187).

The white boys' sense of entitlement and their and their parents' sense of ownership of the game lend the story a sombre mood which makes the game a metaphor for the bodily and affective rough and tumble arena of racialised and gendered cross-cultural relations in Australia. Gonsalves returns to the tectonic imagery of continents later in the story to figure the narrator's feelings of distantiation and marginalisation when her offer to coach is ignored. The narrator says, 'I see that the Indian Ocean between the continents [India and Australia] is deeper than we ever imagined' (187). It is worthwhile noting that Gonsalves uses this continental imagery elsewhere in the book, namely in the story 'Cutting Corners', where the protagonist, Brenda, makes use of the trope to invoke a deep geological *connection* between the two countries, the shadow of which (it is implied) continues to the present day. Brenda describes her migration (across the sea) from India to Australia in terms that invoke the past connection as well as the present geological separation of the two countries: 'like Australia itself millennia ago, I broke away from India' (252). The ocean can be seen metaphorically to both *separate* and *connect* the two countries, signifying an ambiguous dynamic of affiliation and disaffiliation, of departure and return, that is played out in the zone of cross-racial intersubjectivity depicted in the stories of

The Permanent Resident. The narrator's fluid, bi-directional orientation towards both her country of origin and her new world evokes a transnational spatiality and temporality which exceed the pedagogic white discourse of nationalism.

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If Gonsalves' stories remind us of the manifold connectivities between India and Australia, they also have the power to foreground what I would call—adapting Nancy Tuana's and Charles Mills's terminology—the epistemology of white ignorance (Tuana 204) and the racialised marginalisation and sexualisation of minoritised women. The intersubjective scene of racism in the mundane life of the white nation represented in these stories reminds us that race is a constitutive aspect of settler democracy not an anomaly in the face of its putative egalitarianism (Mills). These stories portray the ways in which the migrant bodies of women, experiencing a range of both constraints and capacities, challenge entrenched beliefs that futurity and renewal are the exclusive prerogative of white subjects. In the last story I analyse in this essay, 'The Dignity of Labour', I focus on the diasporic capacity for renewal, even in the face of precarity.

'The Dignity of Labour' describes the breakdown of the marriage of a young couple, Deepak and Nina, after they have migrated to Australia, and Nina's eventual decision to leave Deepak after he behaves violently towards her. Nina embarks upon migration with the happy expectation that they would 'fly into a future' (221) in Australia. When they arrive she enrolls in an arts administration degree and works part-time but Deepak is unable to find work in the field in which he is trained and becomes increasingly frustrated, angry and volatile. His repeated failures to get a job amount to a 'rejection from corporate Australia' (229) which impacts upon him viscerally like 'slaps on your face' (223). Stripped of the dignity that meaningful labour would afford him, and subject as a consequence to what Bauman (1992) calls 'social death', Deepak ends up falling into the precariat, working in three jobs—a shelf-stacker at a supermarket, a petrol-station attendant and a pizza delivery person.

Deepak's acquaintance, Patrick, functions in the story as a foil to Deepak's migration narrative of failure. Patrick, who has also migrated from India and works in a middle-management IT position, praises 'the dignity of labour' in Australia, claiming that 'the worker is treated the same as the boss. Forget the caste system, there is not even the class system in Australia' (233-4). In his endorsement of the populist myth of Australian egalitarianism, Patrick concomitantly endorses the nationalist narrative of assimilation; Deepak disparagingly thinks of him as 'whiter than the whites' (236). Patrick declares that he has never experienced racism in Australia and expresses incredulity at

Deepak's claim that he has; Deepak tells him, 'come and work at the supermarket. You'll see' (234). The contrast between Patrick and Deepak indicates that racism is unevenly distributed and that class impacts upon and shapes the racialisation of migrant bodies.

In this story and others in the collection, Gonsalves further suggests that racism is differentially impacted by gender (in the pressure brought to bear on Deepak's subordinate masculinity, in this case). When Nina tries to console Deepak by reminding him that 'Not everyone is racist', Deepak responds, 'It's easy for you to say. They think Indian women are exotic. But Indian men! No white man will buy a car from an Indian man' (223). I have argued above that the female narrator of 'Curry Muncher 2.0' accrues cultural capital (however circumscribed and ambiguous) as racialised gendered exoticism. Deepak, however, does not report a parallel cultural capital attaching to his racialised masculinity. As a result of his abject and embattled racialised masculinity, Deepak's precarity tips over into the perpetration of violence within his marriage. Deepak's shame, anger and frustration continue to spiral downwards and he starts to vent verbally and then physically on Nina. Gonsalves clearly links gendered violence in this story to systemic structural racism. In Deepak we see the tense co-presence of two roles. He is both a victim (of racialised discrimination) and a perpetrator (of gendered violence).

Initially, psychologically imprisoned within the institution of marriage, Nina internalises and normalises Deepak's abuse and blames herself for his violence. She cannot imagine herself outside the marriage relationship or living without her husband: 'he was a habit she could not conceive of breaking' (229). The story has earlier set us up to understand the social pressures that make it difficult for Nina to leave this relationship. We get some insight into the social expectations of her family in a proleptic reference in the opening pages of the story to a conversation with her sister:

Nina's sister Sarita blamed Australia for all that had happened. After it [Nina's marriage] was all over, Sarita said to her on the phone, 'There are no morals in Western society. If you were with us in India, we could have all sat down and talked about things in a cool manner', she said. 'Things wouldn't have gone this far'.

'What things?' she wanted to ask Sarita. (214-5)

The euphemism, 'things', in this conversation indexes the silence around gendered violence against women in the home and its normalisation within the community of which Nina is a part. Violence is not seen as an act for which the perpetrator is to be held accountable; the priority is rather to uphold the continuation of the marriage. The stigma attached to divorce is a common theme

in *The Permanent Resident* where divorced female characters like Angie in 'In the Beginning', the narrator in 'Soccer Mum' and Nina in 'The Dignity of Labour' attract opprobrium from the Indian diasporic community. As the quotation above indicates, in many of these stories, divorce is seen as a white cultural practice. The narrator in 'Soccer Mum', who is a divorcee, is accused of 'imitat[ing] whites' (183) and 'mov[ing] away from [her] own culture' (183). She is accused of not thinking about the welfare of her children although she protests that this is the reason she left the marriage. It is the narrator's divorce, rather than her marriage, that is seen as dysfunctional and she as a woman is blamed for the failure in the relationship rather than her husband being held accountable for his aggression and violence.

Nevertheless the women in many of these stories attempt to recreate their lives outside the 'bower of respectability' (266) that marriage represents. Nina decides to leave her marriage after a casual conversation she has with a taxi driver, Donna. In this epiphanic moment of shared jollity, Nina 'laughs as a woman who has just absolved herself' (244) from the damaging effects of violence; her feet, which had been wounded by Deepak, are now infused with light. She removes her name badge with her married name. In addition to her personal bodily healing, this is a moment of cross-cultural connection with a white Australian woman, which affirms a relationality of 'women to women' (244) solidarity. Their joking momentarily takes them 'past the wall of colour that rightly or wrongly stands between them' (244). This new bodily relationality with her social and cultural environment is extended in the image of the kangaroo paw which Nina is growing at home (211). The kangaroo paw is metonymic of the Indigenous history and culture of the country, something that is alluded to in other stories such as 'Full Face' where the narrator refers to the Aboriginal middens in her backyard (9). Nina's awakening here and her sense of the potential of cross-cultural encounters in the post-settler nation thus gestures towards a broader cultural and political awareness of the presence of Aboriginal people and history within the suburban landscape she inhabits. This awareness is foundational for her developing a new sense of belonging (and the responsibility that belonging entails) in a landscape in which she had previously felt vulnerable and isolated.

Nina feels a sense of renewal and transformation, a sense of agency: 'Every pore of her being she can refashion in any way she chooses' (246). This 'buoyant moment' of mobility (246), which combines bodily renewal with images of planetary renewal (seeds, plants and rivers), links back to the image of hope and futurity which informs her migration to Australia, heralded at the beginning of the story when she anticipates 'fly[ing] into a future' (221) in Australia. Nina's transition out of gendered violence is thus simultaneously a transition into a new cross-cultural relationality with her host country (and its colonial history). In

'The Dignity of Labour' Nina's sense of precarity as a migrant woman leaving a violent husband exists alongside a sense of anticipation. Nina's sense of renewal and futurity, her sense of freedom and agency, flies in the face of the possessive white ownership of the nation's futurity, the relegation of migrant peoples to the passive role of monocultural assimilation and the rendering invisible of Indigenous peoples. The white status of futurity has meant that minoritised constituencies are often figured as passive recipients rather than active agents in social, cultural and political change either at the macroscale of the nation-state or the microscale of the household.

Moreover, change and mobility for migrant bodies and subjectivities are multidirectional. The characters in Gonslaves' stories are positioned within both global and local circuits. Nina's sense of freedom is a state of potentiality and possibility situated within this multidirectionality. After she leaves Deepak she muses: 'In time she will decide to go back to India. Or she will stay on, finish her masters degree' (246). A range of possibilities is open to her. As Lily Cho suggests, diasporic subjectivity constitutes both a turning away from and a turning back to the homeland. The characters in these stories experience a double turning—toward both the new world in which they find themselves and the homelands they have left. The spatial and temporal trajectories that the immigrants in *The Permanent Resident* follow in search of the spoils of globalisation foreground the shadowy bodily and spatial connectivities between India and Australia. In 'Cutting Corners' Brenda keeps her options open, saying, 'like Australia itself millennia ago, I broke away from India, leaving a trail of crumbs of do's and don'ts along the way as an investment in my return' (252). Like Nina, Brenda also breaks away from the restrictive category of divorcee/widow and turns to face the future. As well as maintaining their 'blood ties to South Asia' (26) these women want to 'put down roots in this land' (30). A part of the multiple histories of transnational and diasporic mobility within the white nation, they chart complex and multidirectional processes of belonging and contest processes of exclusion. The migratory women in the stories bear witness both to trans- and intra-national experiences of gendered precarity and disenfranchisement on the one hand and possibility and hope on the other. While Sheetal epitomises the 'disposable' people (Schmidt Camacho)—at the margins of citizenship and with tenuous access to legal protection—who have not benefitted from globalisation, other characters in the stories portray women who are presented with and forge multiple possibilities. For them migration is an ongoing and incomplete process marked by fluid temporalities of the persistence of the past in the present and of emergent futures. In these stories of survival, agency, creativity and courage, *The Permanent Resident* introduces alternative futurities into the social imaginary of Australian literature.

If, as I have suggested, *The Permanent Resident* contributes to the re-calibration of the parameters of Australian literature, it does so because the default subject positions of the stories' narrators and characters—together with those of other minority literary texts—are not those of a universalised white Anglo-Australian imaginary but of a broadened and diverse constituency, informed by multiple global migration histories. The characters and the narrators (several of whom recognise the prior and continuing existence of Aboriginal history and peoples) have a sense—if not of fully integrated citizenship (many are, after all, still seeking permanent residence)—then a sense nonetheless of belonging, however partial, compromised, or contested by the racialised epistemologies of the white nation. Roslyn, in 'The Skit', for example, sees herself as 'anonymous yet striking in the undulating uniformity of Sydney's affluent lower North Shore' (41). Despite her ('striking') difference she 'passes' as Australian (is 'anonymous'). Racialised difference in itself is not enough to disqualify her from belonging in this community. Roslyn in this case creates new forms of mobility and agency through negotiations of intersectional difference as we see numerous other minoritised women do in *The Permanent Resident*. As Gonsalves' female diasporic subjects renew and reproduce themselves they refashion the relationality between dominant and minoritised people within the white nation, repositioning whiteness within the national imaginary and challenging racialised essentialism, and acknowledging the presence and continuity of Indigenous people, culture and history. In these entangled engagements they exceed the discourse of pedagogic nationalism. In their vernacular fictional worlds of civic engagement where immigrants negotiate citizenship and belonging, these stories revise the earlier paradigm of multiculturalism (with what Menon describes as its 'weak engagement with the idea of diversity' and of difference [42])⁷ to posit new and complex forms of cosmopolitanism—particularly as they relate to women—and demonstrate the significant role of minoritised writers in transnationalising what we understand as Australian 'identity'.

ANNE BREWSTER is based at the University of New South Wales. Her research interests include Australian Indigenous literatures, Women's literatures, minoritised women's literatures, critical race and whiteness studies, violence studies, cross-racial research methodologies and explorative critical writing methodologies. Her books include *Giving This Country a Memory: Contemporary Aboriginal Voices of Australia* (2015), *Literary Formations: Postcoloniality, Nationalism, Globalism* (1996), *Reading Aboriginal Women's Autobiography*

⁷ Menon is referring to European concepts of multiculturalism but I would argue that his description resonates with the Australian discourse of multiculturalism.

(1995, 2015), *Towards a Semiotic of Post-colonial Discourse: University Writing in Singapore and Malaysia 1949-1964* (1988) and *Notes on Catherine Lim's Little Ironies: Stories of Singapore*, with Kirpal Singh (1987). She co-edited, with Angeline O'Neill and Rosemary van den Berg, an anthology of Australian Indigenous Writing, *Those Who Remain Will Always Remember* (2000). Anne Brewster is the series editor for *Australian Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Peter Lang).

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