



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT SPECIAL ISSUES

Number 60 October 2020

ISSN: 1327-9556 | <https://www.textjournal.com.au/>

There's no place like home: from cultural plurality to convergence in remote heartbeats

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To cite this article: Mitra, Z & P Muslera 2020 'There's no place like home: from cultural plurality to convergence in remote heartbeats', in J Sarangi & A Walker (eds) *Indian-Australian exchanges through collaborative poetic inquiry*, TEXT Special Issue Number 60, *TEXT: Journal of writing and writing courses* 24, 2 (October):

<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue60/Mitra&Muslera.pdf>

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Zinia Mitra and Pablo Muslera

There's no place like home: from cultural plurality to convergence in remote heartbeats

Abstract:

The title refers to the quadruple sequences of poems, linking the importance of cuisine and childhood memories to our shared ideas of home and cultural identity. We write as two poets based in Australia and India. This poetic exchange program explores cultural milieu that incorporate rituals and cuisine which are intrinsic part of culture along with the childhood landscapes, landscapes that exist as mindscapes now and craft a major part of our psyche.

Biographical notes:

Zinia Mitra teaches English in the University of North Bengal. Her travelogues and articles have been published in *The Statesman*. Her poems have been published in National and International journals including *Muse India*, *Ruminations*, *Contemporary Literary Review*, *Kavya Bharati*, *East Lit. Indian Literature (Sahitya Akademi)*, *Asian Signature*, *Teesta Review*, *Poetry Potion*, and *Setu*. Her translations have been published in books and journals including *Indian Literature (Sahitya Akademi)*. Her translation of Sukumar Ray's 'Kheer er Putul' has been published by Parabaaas. Her translation of 'Jatiner Juto' by Sukumar Ray as 'Jatin and his Sandals' is included in ICSE textbook, *A Magic Place*. Her books include *Indian Poetry in English: Critical Essays*, *Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: Imagery and Experiential Identity*, *Twentieth Century British Literature: Reconstructing Literary Sensibility* (co-edited), *Interact* (co-edited) and *The Concept of Motherhood in India: Myths, Theories and Realities*. She is on the editorial board of *Teesta Review*.

Pablo Muslera teaches Shakespeare, writing and communication at the University of South Australia. He supervises Honours in creative writing, and in 2019 performed his poetry at SALA (South Australia Living Artists) festival, and Coast FM community radio. Most recently, Pablo has had his poetry published in the latest edition of *Arthouse* magazine. From 2017–2019, he was co-editor of the reviews section of *TEXT* journal. Pablo's interests include developing innovative approaches to Shakespeare studies, including intervening creatively on his works, and active staging of select scenes, to facilitate better access of the language. His broader interest is in the mutual informing of creative-critical writing, and the rich perspectives afforded by artefact-exegesis theses. His current focus is on the contemporary popularity of role-playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, and how such games facilitate creativity through collaborative world-building, as well as functioning as the 'crisis-beard' of the current COVID crisis, by highlighting the absence of more conventional social connection.

Keywords: India – Australia – poetry – literature – culture – cuisine

Introduction

We write as two poets based in Australia and India. This poetic exchange program explores cultural milieu that incorporate rituals and cuisine, which are intrinsic part of culture along with childhood landscapes, landscapes that exist as mindscapes now and craft a major part of our psyche. The cultural milieu is explored by us as two poets by revisiting our childhood memories which unleash deeply buried poignant emotions that can be traced back to our formative days and help us unravel ourselves as two culturally cultivated and resonating minds existing within the structures of two diverse cultural ambiances with multiple layers of personality that serve to construct the whole of our identities and finally results in an understanding that our explored and diverse cultures have their shared components. Key points of our foci include culture, which includes food and upbringing, the books we grew up with, texts which are part of our curriculum at present and which greatly influence our thinking. Since both of us are into teaching we keep referring back to the texts we do/have done, falling back on characters and images, resonating lines. Our poems are deeply embedded in nature, touch upon the trees and landscapes as seen from the Indian and the Australian perspective which shows that our bringing up was closer to nature than our present location permits, and that has made us appreciative of the indigenous flora and fauna not necessarily in a pantheistic approach. The article's first section presents three poems by Pablo Muslera followed by three poems by Zinia Mitra penned in response to Pablo's trio. The second section presents our reflections on the poems in the first section and our learning through this process of exchange. The third and fourth sections follow the same pattern. Our study wraps up with a collaborative conclusion.

Three poems by Pablo Muslera and responses by Zinia Mitra

'Northern Wastes I' by Pablo Muslera

Somewhere in the Northern wastes, a resurrected heart beats.
Not Jon Snow's
Thudding for his murdered lover,
Cracking its shell to expose a dead thing
Killed by the softest of looks

Because this is a place, like Frank's diner
Where hope is handed out in cardboard boats
Where crinkle cut fries, which are salted in kindness
Are hotter than sin, which reminds you
An abundance of hope is a dangerous thing

But here where the Corporation has its final outpost
There's no sign of the president
Or a huckster trying one last pitch
(There's no need, the hucksters have won)

Which is why it stands out,
This fragile beat

Some tattered silk
A cobweb abandoned over a light fitting
Catching the breeze of the mechanized doors
Pounding out the bass like the membrane of a drum
Playing pas de chat with the treble from a tin

So looking, and seeing, and hearing
Is already a kind of contract
A witnessing of distant glory
The remnants of a deadly matriarch

Because compacts with spiders,
by their nature are unspoken
In the multitude of eyes, lies observance
And a witness has a choice to abandon her pattern
Or carry it, secret and close
Past the central square with its thousand travel signs
Beyond alphabet buildings:
Find the cracks within the carpark
Lay the egg sacs made of cotton, softly pulsing
With their long-forgotten promise.

'Encore I' by Pablo Muslera

So it's wrapped up for another year
Teaching Shakespeare through the winter twilight
never Winter's Tale of course, with its mock'ry of the pastoral

When the final questions come
There's a stillness in the dark
Like the quiet before killing
this is something Banquo knew

By the creek, you laid his ashes
There's a fog among the green and pale
Stops you stepping in too close
Crumbling banks are full of welcome
But the dark is too inviting
like a prophecy once heard,
can't be got rid of

So instead you take the high road
where the light is even rarer

Just a lonely lamp upon the path
Flickering when you look away
Dead again when you turn back
Playing games just to be playful; well, that could be either:
Not the M you're thinking of, two others
—but which is it?
One a scholar turning lead to gold,
Or the brightest Puck you knew?

'Encore II / timing is everything' by Pablo Muslera

For players, timing is everything: make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait
She did all three when she left us
Then compelled us to her playhouse
Each seat filled a proof of love (she filled them all)
And when sorrows came, they were battalions
A collective streaming brow of woe,
But who better to commend her,
Than the ones who warmed her stage
With their speech and verse and song?

Like a proper theatre spirit, you could hear her;
If you squinted ... mmm, yes, maybe
There she was upon the boards
Being passed from hand to hand
Twinkling in a too-bright eye, a flash of grin,
Or the eighteenth person saved by her, who asked
When she'd get another part

All the academics wondered
What the lesson here could be
What the purpose of her sisters' tears
Brutal cutting down of youth, so out of season
What a strange sight this would be
Those who'd graded her performance
being schooled in their humanity

Well the truth of it, she tells us
can be summed up through an actor's tools
Work out 'what's my motivation?'
then keep working

Let them see it, let them hear it, let them feel it

get them leaning in so close
They'll forget to be alone
They'll forget to be afraid
And the cruel and stupid heartless world outside will bow its head
To the wisdom of a jester.

'Naihati' by Zinia Mitra

I travel through repetitive railway tracks
sip at *bharer cha* smelling of the earth
hire a rickshaw whose wheels squeak history
travel the circumscribed memory lanes
and there stands my house
the house where I never resided long
yet the one I call my home.

The lattice door creaks open
I step into its courtyard
snapshots of bustling Durgapuja days
scurry out of the shadows –
heaped up leafy vegetables, freshly washed *atap-chal*
scrubbed grand copper utensils
jute sticks sleeping in the sun.
Firm black staircase
takes me up to yesteryears of desolation
each chapter a moth-eaten rug
behind closed doors.
My grandmother is somewhere here
these sighs are hers.

The timber beams of *karikath* have retained their polish
the bay windows are covered in layers of dust
a spectrum of colors in the sunrays.
My grandfather's library
of which I have inherited two books
one Flaubert one *Gitanjali* bought with two annas
is a den of termites now.
The books will crumble if I touch them
they exist in a dream.

I can see the abandoned *chandimandap*
old men sat their evening hours here over tea
politics and literature. It is a home of pigeons now.

Do I hear drumbeats from the drummer's mangled room?
No, the celebrations are long over!
These are the drumbeats of time,
beats that cracked the glasses
distorted the sepia-toned photographs
dances in the broken ribs of this structure.
My dusty horizon! My native house!
My grandfather is somewhere here
these sighs are his.

'It was a country of trees' by Zinia Mitra

These trees do not belong here
they belong to a borrowed soil
growing in perfect rows with almost faultless trims
on the tubs of stone pavements
beside these metal statues
they are a mere nostalgia of the green.

It was a country of trees
where I was born
green acres of arable farmlands and
paddy fields with wide grinning scarecrows.
Some trees there grew to be so ancient
they became gods
they stood revered vermillion smeared on their trunks
prayer-strings hanging from their branches,
some trees there bent over ganga
their vines sipping the holy water,
some trees sheltered oval stone gods,
some trees sheltered ash-smeared sadhus,
some trees became teashops with wooden benches around
where ancient men sat talking history,
some trees roped goats and cows,
some trees bloomed with red five-petalled flowers
one petal in each flower carrying marks
of a paintbrush dusted by an artist,
some trees flaunted golden-yellow *amaltash* flowers,
some trees sheltered memories or even a family history.

These trees here do not belong to this soil
they carry memories of another soil in their seeds
like me.

'Tea' by Zinia Mitra

I watch their hands pluck the two green eyes
of Buddha
their heads silently accede
earth in their nails smell of sweet potatoes
cloths soft-folded into baskets
hang from their heads like white clouds
green leaves fall on green leaves
an afternoon of heaviness
bees fly to and from their hives
a brainfever bird calls.

The sun sets in the saucer landscape
the mountains lose their white
rows of nine-to-five feet
communicate with ancient roots.
The smell of a mud-coated boiling pot
black leaves swim in the boiling water
like tadpoles then settle down
white teacups the miniature landscape
hold the sacred infusion.
A tired worker's hand closes the red sun
I hear her footsteps closing in my head.

Reflections on poems by Pablo Muslera and responses by Zinia Mitra

Pablo Muslera:

My initial reaction to reading Zinia's first trio of poems was a profound shift in perspective: her poems combined details of India's landscape and climate to create a sort of sensory homecoming for an imagined place, one only recently experienced in person. Through this process, she seemed to strive for greater meaning in her perception of self, by a cultural locating in concrete 'remembrances' of her 'home' (in which she hadn't resided long). These poems travelled back in time by framing the present as an unavoidable consequence of past events, but also as an imperfect fruit, which doesn't quite taste as it was imagined.

This idea provided fertile ground for me to reach outwards, as well as backwards, and reflect on how my own sense of self relied on such sensory details from my own culture (I'm Uruguayan by birth, but from the age of six have been brought up in Australia). This problematised my own perception of identity, forcing me to confront how I define myself –

through English literature, as well as Uruguayan cuisine, and music introduced to me by my father – within an Australian climate.

In terms of issues and ideas in India or Australia, there is strong common ground through literature (both countries having a strong British influence: as a Shakespeare scholar, I have often reflected on him as a sort of cultural lingua franca). Zinia's explicit naming of her own literary influences, some also familiar to me, as well as the detailed sensory picture she paints, gave me permission to examine the importance of such things in my own constructed self. Zinia's poems thus freed me to examine sites of cultural conflict in my own past (such as my father's desire for us to speak English at home, rather than my native Spanish, and my relative ignorance of Spanish authors), and situate myself more accurately as a migrant who has assimilated into his long-adopted Australian home, but also one within which a Uruguayan identity still contests. Rather than requiring extra research to appreciate culturally specific Indian elements, I thus found the universality of the themes in Zinia's initial poems – identity, home, family – and the way these are explored through landscape, cuisine, and sensory detail, as a poetic invitation for me to connect, and delve into the hybridity of my own identity.

My initial poems were penned in response to recent events: teaching new courses as a sessional academic, and the passing away of a colleague, as well as a student of mine. The way I made sense of these events was to embed them in the landscape of my university campus: the creek beds which contain his ashes, and the classrooms in which I taught her Shakespeare. In a sense, these poems follow on from the ideas contained in the first poem, 'Northern Wastes', which attempted to make sense of my lived experience of the changing landscape in higher education, where an increasingly casualised workforce sees sessional academics seeking contracts wherever they can. The 'softly pulsing' egg sac in the first poem is a site of resistance to this, which is continued in the call to arms in the final lines of the third poem (Encore II), and meditations on limited agency (ie choosing not to teach *Winter's Tale*) in the second (Encore I). Of course this connects strongly with identity: a greater sense of professional uncertainty makes one long for stability, family, and home. Thus, after reading Zinia's poems, my perspective shifted from immediate reflections on current events to a deeper examination of how I construct my identity over a longer period of time, and how we are all constantly reinventing ourselves, and responding to shifting impulses, to a certain degree. This tension between 'being' and 'becoming', then, also recalls the ontological debates between Parmenides and Heraclitus.

Zinia Mitra:

Pablo Muslera's poetry begins with a spectacular image of a resurrecting heart beating for his murdered lover. There are references to fries 'hotter than sin' and 'salted' with 'kindness'. Underneath is a reminder that 'An abundance of hope is a dangerous thing'. The presence of spiders is subtle, for spiders do not speak, but they are present like our consciousness, they observe and have free will to carry out a pattern or reject it. Their eggs pulsate with a promise of life that beautifully connects the dead lover's living presence. 'Encore I' takes me to the classroom. Shakespeare's characters like Banquo and Puck are familiar across academia. Pablo's 'teaching Shakespeare' descriptions are so intense that I felt I was walking the familiar

corridors of academia with the strong smell of books where fictional characters are more than a reality, a world where academics and performance mingle. A familiar platform for me, it makes me realise that another person far away lives a similar life of teaching, perhaps doing similar texts, a life of active interaction with students. But Pablo's voice soon travels beyond the familiar corridors to an unknown territory of personal sorrow – 'when sorrows came, they were battalions' (Encore II) – and triggers his deeply personal memories. The image of spider's 'egg sacs made of cotton, softly pulsing/With their long-forgotten promise' will capture a sensitive reader's imagination. Spiders lay eggs hidden from the common eye, in a safe secret hideout. It is their home. When I knocked my secret door, it took me through remembered roads to my native house that still lives and breathes in me with all its festivity. The reality of it has changed but in my mind the house is the same native house of my childhood.

My second poem is set in the urban space where I am presently located. It is an articulation of a feeling of oneness with the trees which, like me, do not belong to this soil. The memories of trees takes me back to my hometown and helps me explore the relationship trees have there with the native people. Their growth here, like my urban Indian woman cultural existence, is designed and trimmed. My engagement with landscape in my third poem takes me to a tea garden that extends around the present city I reside in. Siliguri is surrounded by teagardens. I see the labourers work and live there. But my feelings of home here is only a superfluous habit and does not agitate the deeper roots of my existence; therefore, I can at best remain a passive watcher. Only the footsteps of a worker woman returning home can resonate within me.

While penning these poems a deep realisation dawned on me that identity has many layers – my native childhood identity, the response to which is purely emotional, the present identity in the urban space which is much regulated and cerebral, is only two of them. I realised that we often hide our emotional identity and portray or like to portray our present identity, in my case which is an urban Indian working woman. In Pablo's case his worry and anxiety about the present situations life has put him into makes him totally engage with and emotionally respond to the present. This repetitive performance in the given space sometimes suffocates our other emotional identity where we are more at home. Art is a means to explore this identity, hidden or forgotten, and is therefore kind of therapeutic, restoring the severed limb as to say, to make it whole again. Pablo's reference to Parmenides and Heraclitus is an interesting way of looking at identity. Parmenides' belief that nothing changes truly and that it is only our senses that offer the impression of change hold true if we look at our inner selves where our formative years are so persuasive that they remain with us lifelong as a part of identity. Heraclitus, who believed in flux, saw the universe as a place where everything changed all the time, so much that one could not step into the same water twice; this is also applicable to identity, for we change constantly and so fast that when we step into the water for the second time not only the water, but also our physical and mental existence undergo some change. Our identity, similarly, is formed by sequence of events that unfolds and our responses to them. To quote Virginia Woolf 'The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old' (Woolf 1984: 157).

Poems by Zinia Mitra and responses by Pablo Muslera

'Flower' by Zinia Mitra

It is difficult to live like this
like the wheels of a huffing train
on the tracks of a time that is yours.
I occupy a secluded compartment
like a distant traveller
patchwork of green-yellow paddy fields
rivulets cut through my landscape like couplets
bridges jingle aloud breaking the monotonous rhythm.

Who is driving this train?
Does he know why I head to you?
Was it too painful a death?
More hurting than his infidelity
more hurting than your poetic visions?
I wish I could trim your pain like your hair
pull out your troubles
and kill them between my nails like lice
oil your hair to make them tangle free
then comb them until there was oil enough in my fingertips
so much that I would be scared to turn
the pages of your poetry book.
I would carry the smell of your hair
in my fingers throughout my day.
The perfume of your poems
grows in me like spiky red flowers.

They call it Sylvia.

'Cover Pages with a Poem Within' by Zinia Mitra

A volume with yellowed pages, the cover page
a faded picture
an old bearded seer
you were in my furious class notes,
asterisks, double asterisks
breathing into every pore of my body
you were my literature.

We felt your presence in Shantiniketan
when they recited you or sang
aj jyotsna rate sabai geche bone
the round moon glared at me
at my lone shadow under your bakul tree
the dry earth soaked up your words.

Even now in the empty banquet of my soul
your words dance
I become a quivering spectator
my whole existence a mudra, a metaphor for poetry
a deep-felt acceptance of life somewhere and a rejoicing.
I celebrate life through your dance poems
I celebrate with all your bokul flowers.

'Beyond Academics' by Zinia Mitra

When coffee brews
it smells like something else
its consuming scent overpowers our senses
Deleuze deluges our emotions
repetition and difference
repetition with difference
collapses the boundaries.

When coffee brews it smells like love.

'Rivera' by Pablo Muslera

She speaks of a home she never inhabited
Its marks are etched into her thoughts
In tendrils of tea which smell of earth
Infused with the script of a Bengali Nobel laureate,
the wit of a French literary realist.

So what to claim for my own lost youth?
Spent reading Poe, and Dickens
Revelling in English and American influences
Eventually finding my way to Cervantes
the elastic stretched taut,
springing back to the English through Shakespeare,
with barely an echo of Lope de Vega.

What can remain of the shadow realm of Rivera,
my grandfather's farm:
I learned to ride before I walked,
Abuela Elvia scattering snakes with her broom,
the horse with the white blaze born the same night I was,
pan frites
empanadas
asado
buñuelos,
alfajores
— roast armadillo fresh from the shell?

— the empanadas are baked, not fried
with beef mince, boiled egg, olives, and corn enfolded in triangular pastry
plump with stuffing
crenellated edges,
they are a cross between a Cornish pasty
a Uruguayan samosa,
best hot out of the oven,
or cold for days after—
they are comfort.

The asado which welcomes Christmas eve,
slow-cooked barbecue sides of salted lamb or beef
flavoured with my father's spirit
chimichurri of garlic, lemon, oil and herbs
spicy salchichas,
complemented by my mother's potato salad
piles of white bread, dishes of butter:
a Dickensian feast in defiance of loss, and want
where mince pies are crowded by the coconut bearded grins of alfajores,
fat shortbread wheels sandwiched by dulce de leche,
milk caramel paste as brown and sweet as chocolate
and arollado, yellow spongy scrolls filled with the same stuff.

—This is a tradition that suits the climate of Adelaide,
Where Christmas day is always hot, and getting hotter
And cold potato salad and empanadas are better comfort
as leftovers, prepared the night before—

It is a remembrance of home
Only to be recalled through a stranger's sharing of culture
All the half-forgotten details, biding their time

For the courage which reveals them.

'Viejas tradiciones' by Pablo Muslera

My father wanted us to assimilate,
which meant
Speak English
at home.
So now, to remember him
I listen to Julio Iglesias:
*... hay veces que es mejor querer asi
que ser querido y no poder sentir
lo que siento por ti ...*

Charles Aznavour (the French Armenian) crooned his way through my youth:
No, I could never forget ...
the age-worn beauty of his songs
connected
My Uruguayan melancholy to the Armenian,
taking delight in the romance of lost causes,
measuring its worth
against draconic windmills.

Now I have my own children,
the same passions well up
when I hear *Little Drummer Boy*
*—I am a poor boy too
pa rum pa pum pum—*
And that Fixer-upper song from *Frozen*
(cos people don't really change)
BUT
Love IS a force that's powerful and strange
so I curse at the slightest bit of air turbulence,
longing to be always a part of their lives.

and now I know
my father's need to assimilate into Anglophony
was his way of protecting us
from all the terrible uncertainties
he faced down,
discarded with a smile:
a winner's smile,
like Julio

like Charles.

'A Girl and Her Pony' by Pablo Muslera

First time on a horse
shows off four years of ballet:
toes pointed in the stirrups
back straight,
legs extended in an easy trot,
the confidence of seven.

Of course when I look at her, my firstborn
I picture the golden skin of Rivera
the clear eyes
the broad honest face,
the strong tanned hands
the ease with all creatures
and like a wolf,
I know her by her gait.

Of course there is also her mother's side
The English reserve
the quick wit,
politeness in public
her ease in the saddle,
knowing how to wear a helmet
fashionably

When I think I've run out of ways to love this girl,
it surprises me:
the hybrid vigour,
where blood runs true;
she adapts
wherever she is.

Reflections on poems by Zinia Mitra and responses by Pablo Muslera

Pablo Muslera:

Zinia's final suite of poems reinforce some of the imagery and themes that weave through both our earlier works: the meaning-making creative academics create by engaging with literary icons such as Sylvia Plath, embedding them into a narrative that is made fecund, and 'flowers' through allusions to their work, life, and torments. This fertility becomes febrile, and so is

further focused in the second of Zinia's closing poems, with the flowering of the bokul tree inspired by the work of the 'old bearded seer', who leaves the poet a 'quivering spectator'. The final poem in Zinia's sequence is a punctuation to the process of the creative writer in tension with the objective realities and nerveless politics of Academe: where coffee, that sensory delight which makes so much else bearable, collapses intellectual boundaries represented through French theorists such as Deleuze, turning the tension between critical and creative into something immediately accessible on an instinctual level: the scent we recognise as 'love'. This final sensory image suggests that after the prior struggle – of failed romance, or an inability to connect with one's home, ancestors, or sense of self – there remains nevertheless the possibility of acceptance, through a universal ritual such as the brewing of coffee, allowing hope for rejuvenation, and renewal.

Zinia Mitra:

In a pleasant turn of thoughts Pablo's first poem is a warm response to my poems. It brilliantly echoes my native emotions. Pablo travels inwards and backwards to his childhood in search of memories that he had left behind. His references to the books are also the books done in my childhood here in India – Poe, Dickens, Shakespeare under the same English and American influence at work. Some of them are also part of my curriculum now. Interestingly as a child/student I was unfamiliar with the name of Lope de Vega. This reveals how little we were and sometimes still are open to other important world literatures. Pablo takes us to his grandfather's farm, snakes, the horse, introduces new cuisine. His childhood landscape and cuisine are unfamiliar to me. The remembrance of childhood is inevitably mixed with food, the seasonal rhythm of the place, culinary and mealtime traditions, kitchen, natural fruits, vegetables and grains are very different from my own Indian experience. Armadillo's roast takes me instantly to Satyajit Ray's Agantuk, perhaps the only Bengali reference to armadillo's meat. I reached the references to food through its texture, customs and color, if not through nostalgic whiff and taste in the mouth. I could connect with the gardens, farmlands and fields, that are no longer outside landscapes but are now landscapes recollected in tranquility, are rather mindscapes, memories and childhood that defines us.

His second poem deeply located in culture speaks of assimilation and infiltration of English. He listens to Spanish song but his own melancholy is very 'Uruguayan'. His feelings suffuse with Christmas Carol. In the first poem too there is reference to Christmas traditions that leaves me wondering what the poet's original religion was. Is his religion also a part of the assimilation like literature and language? His third poem explains why his father wanted them to speak English. That was his way of protecting them from uncertainties. The poem speaks of love and strength of hybridity.

While my first poem is an imaginary travel to Sylvia Plath, whose *The Bell Jar* is my personal favourite (notice the influence and love of American Literature at work here), the second poem speaks of my love for Tagore. As a Bengali I grew up with Tagore's songs, memorised his poems as is the culture here in every household, before I even understood their meanings, and as a student I filled my pages with explanations of his poems. We turn to Tagore for love poems, we turn to him seeking balming lines in deep distress. My third poem partly inspired

by Pablo's very first poem in the series is a brief relief from academic theories such as Deleuze with drinking coffee in a universalised space such as CCD. My lines:

Deleuze deluges our emotions
repetition and difference
repetition with difference
collapses the boundaries.

When coffee brews it smells like love

take on a new meaning because it is not only a release from the classrooms and teachings of literary texts and theories but both Pablo's and my emotions are, in fact, 'repetitions with difference' and this collaborative project does collapse the boundaries as the smell of love and bonding grows stronger in us.

Concluding thoughts

We find through this collaborative technique of study that incorporates Pablo Muslera's (located in Australia, male) poems and responses, and Zinia Mitra's (located in Siliguri India, female) widely different lived experience underline the very basic foundations of our individuality, identity, home, family and they are explored through reference to known texts, landscapes, childhood memories, cuisine. We found that memories define much of our psyche. From external landscapes, trees and vines, customs and traditions observed in childhood homes they become internal locations and live within us in a magic locale that never grows paler. There is also the sense of comfort and belonging in returning to that landscape but at the same time we are painfully conscious that this part of us does not exist any longer in reality and can only be expressed in poetry in the acquired language that has now become part of us and define us. Some memories help build a sense of self-continuity, or personal identity a feeling of a reassuring continuity that I am the same person. Some memories function to guide us when we are indecisive, and others are social-bonding memories, involving relationships with others that helps in feeling included in a group or a family. We are now defined on the outside by the our profession, the texts and theories we engage with as a part of academia, and defined by the kind of lives we lead, the urban space where we reside, the kinds of entertainment we choose, a culture of CCDs and drinking coffee, but on the inside we are basically tuned to the same emotional responses to childhood memories.

As Said (1993) suggested, people are socialised to internalise narratives of superiority and oppression (Marable 2007). These processes of internalisation take place daily, even in the 21st century (Sawyer & Norris 2013).

We also learn that identity is constructed through many layers, sometimes we efficiently hide the other layers, at other times we loudly project it. Duoethnography is loosely based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) belief that 'consciousness and culture influence experience and that experiences are always mediated by individual and cultural meanings given to past

experiences. Its studies are layered examinations of meanings existing between researchers' lives and their cultural contexts' (Sawyer & Norris 2013: 3).

Construction of identity is an integral human component. It has been diversely studied over centuries, artists have projected their own personal identities and social identities which include memories, relationships, experiences of life, figurative representations of thoughts or emotions expressively connected with ethnic and cultural images. If food cannot cross borders the emotions related to homeland and childhood does and poetry turns into a celebration of cultural tradition. As awareness grows that though this is an acquired language, it is the language we identify ourselves with and write in it. This project provides us with the opportunity to celebrate our self-expression in all its diversity.

Works cited

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