

## Multiculturalism, Latin Americans and 'Indigeneity' in Australia

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What are the relations between the discourse of 'multiculturalism' and that of 'indigeneity' in Australia? In problematising these relations this paper explores the affiliations that Latin American migrants and political refugees living in Adelaide have with the notion of 'indigeneity'. For some Latin Americans affiliations with the struggle of Aboriginal people and indigeneity is a product of strong political identification with the political left and the struggle for human rights in their countries of origin. At the same time references to Latin Americans' 'indigeneity' are often evoked within Australian multicultural settings and performances that promote 'cultural diversity' and are consumed by White Australians for their exotic otherness and as forms of cultural enrichment. Such representations work to marginalise further the migrants (and the 'indigenous') into a cultural sphere which marks them as the tolerated ethnic 'Other'.

*Sometimes I live in the Square  
like a brother's Magpie spirit  
with the drinking bodies of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters.  
I fight against the society that forgets,  
which wants to establish a white system  
where the culture is just an official paper within an unborn  
Multicultural society. (Garrido 1996:54)*

### **Introduction: multiculturalism and indigeneity in Australia**

What are the relations between multiculturalism as an official state policy and the current debate regarding indigeneity and Aboriginality in Australia? In a sense Aboriginality stands apart from multiculturalism, which is seen and promoted as a policy that deals with migration, tolerance and cultural diversity. The dominant Anglo is what provides the multicultural image of the nation its core values and ordering structure. As such it is not surprising that multiculturalism is discussed and debated in ways that are separated from the indigenous peoples and their relation to the land. It is well documented that Aboriginal people themselves reject the multicultural imagery and are opposed to their inclusion as another 'ethnic group' within the harmonious model of the nation (Vasta 1996:51).

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Instead, and quite rightfully, they prefer a bi-cultural model in which the Aboriginal people are recognised as the owners of the land and are acknowledged as the first Australians (Morris 1988).

In contrast to the Anglo / migrant divide that multiculturalism assumes to resolve by promoting a friendly cultural exchange, Aboriginality stands as a referent to the 'real binarism' of Australian society. One such example is found in John Docker's criticism of the critics of official multiculturalism, or what he identified as the multicultural postcolonial discourse. The postcolonial discourse, as Docker explains, depicts official multiculturalism as a policy that mystifies the White / non-White (or 'migrant') power relations within a supposedly tolerant Australian society. As such it defines the 'migrant' cultures as marginalised in relation to the dominant White Anglo-Celtic 'Australian society'. Such views, according to Docker, create a false binarism which ignores the 'real' binarism within Australian society.

For Aboriginal people migrants are another set of invaders, not brothers and sisters on the margins, nor the fellow oppressed and the dispossessed (Docker 1991). Migrants in Australia are migrants, they are not indigenous people, and indeed in relation to Aboriginal dispossession and claims to sovereignty Australia is not a 'post colonial' society at all (1995:415).

Such a positioning of Aboriginal subjects exposes tensions that are evident in many other colonial settings and settler societies in which there are indigenous populations and those who settled in the same land and often destroyed and devastated the native populations (Clifford 1997:25). It is in this sense that the indigenous and their claims of sovereignty are always the antithesis of the settler, the diasporic and the migrant. This distinction is also evident in the contrast between the celebratory postmodernist hybridity, creolisation and fluidity, and the political discourse that promotes the 'indigenous' race and culture as localised, distinctive and *essentially* different from those of the non-indigenous settlers. From a postmodernist perspective claims to non-hybrid racial 'identities' can be perceived at best as 'strategic' or 'tactical' and at worst as a *passé* formation that attests to earlier and regressive phases of identity (Thomas 1998:11).

The taken for granted political distinction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is often used in a way that fails to acknowledge the diversity of both categories. Here I think it is important to challenge not only the way by which official multiculturalism attempts to include or appropriate Aboriginality into the harmonious model of the nation, or reduce the Aboriginal 'problem' to the level of management and control of 'otherness' (as it was symbolically embodied in the political persona of Philip Ruddock who is simultaneously the Aboriginal Affairs Minister and the Minister for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), but also to think about the ways by which multiculturalism and Aboriginality are divided into two separate debates. Such a separation is interesting because there is no apparent reason why multicultural imageries cannot be useful for indigenous struggles for land rights and resistance. In fact in Guatemala, as Nelson (1999:153) shows, Mayan activists are evoking the language of ethnic and cultural rights and frame their political struggle in a call for the construction of a multicultural and multilingual society. One of the main reasons for the separation between the indigenous struggle and multiculturalism in Australia, is the way in which terms such as 'migrant', 'ethnic' and even the 'multicultural' have come to signify the 'otherness' of those Australian citizens who are neither British nor Aboriginal.

The distinction between the indigenous / non-indigenous Australians that is actively promoted in advancing Aboriginal 'firstness', means that Australians who are of neither

British descent nor Aboriginal descent are often left out of the debate. The 'ethnics' are lumped together as the 'multicultural communities' or as 'The third Side of the Triangle' (Read 1997:87). One example of the exclusion is the reconciliation process. Reconciliation is predominantly constructed around notions of 'shame' and 'guilt' that are addressed in relation to the 'nation's' past and future. A critical look at this rhetoric reveals that it is often imagining an audience that is White and English speaking (Povinelli 1998:57). Paradoxically, it is exactly such a binary division that helps to redefine Australia as a 'White nation'. Discussions about 'our guilt' or about 'our denial' as a nation, assume a collective 'We' that is different from the 'ethnics' and at the same time, and again quite paradoxically, further excludes and marginalises the Aboriginals themselves.

Yet, as in the case of other such neat binaries, the social reality is much more complex. If we take seriously the Australian multicultural context we begin to see how relations to Aboriginality and to the indigenous political struggle are part of complex colonial and postcolonial histories that are 'Australian' even if they relate to other lands, other nation states and cultures that are neither Anglo-Celtic nor Aboriginal. The Latin American migrants' and refugees' affiliations with indigeneity that I will now move to explore, show such complexity and, as I argue, provide a way in which the debate about 'indigeneity' and 'multiculturalism' in Australia can be extended and brought together.

### **'No somos indios': Latin Americans affiliations with 'indigeneity' in Australia**

'No somos indios'<sup>1</sup> / 'We are not Indians', is a statement that Latin American migrants and refugees in Adelaide often made when defining their ethno-national identity in their countries of origins, and in contrast to the way 'los Australianos' imagine them to be.<sup>2</sup> This somehow contradictory framework influences the different affiliations with 'indigeneity' that Latin American migrants and refugees evoke. Such affiliations are evident in various cultural and political settings where Latin Americans as individuals or as members of organised groups express solidarity with the struggles of indigenous peoples in Latin America and with those of local Aboriginal activists in Australia. Other such affiliations were evoked when, as members of a 'migrant community', 'indigeneity' (from the migrants' nations of origin) becomes a marker of 'culture' that is exhibited within various multicultural settings.

The apparent contradiction within the statement 'No somos indios' and affiliations with 'indigeneity' disappears once we realise that the statement 'No somos indios' is already in itself an engagement with indigeneity. It relates to particular notions of otherness that need to be understood in relation to complex histories, particular social positions of indigeneity and 'identity' in Latin America and in Australia.

The epigraph of this paper is an example to the first type of such an affiliation. It is a section of a poem written by Juan Garrido, a local Chilean political refugee who came to Adelaide during the late 1980s. Garrido published this particular poem in his autobiographical bilingual selection of poems in a book titled 'Twenty Years on the Rollcall of the Marginalised'. A short prologue to the book explains the particular context in which the poems were written. It presents the author as a political activist and a committed Communist who like many other Chileans was arrested and tortured by the military regime in Chile.

'I, The Poem, confess my passion of hope' is a very personal poem. It expresses Garrido's political and religious views and it is loaded with references to liberation

theology. As the section above indicates, the poem is also a testimony to the author's understanding of 'indigeneity' as a form of social struggle. The political struggle for liberation is a struggle against a White society that forgets, but it is also a struggle for a multicultural society that is yet to be born. Garrido ends this particular poem, which is also the last poem in his book, with the following lines:

I believe in Jesus, Zapata's indigenous people,  
and Allende's Andes cordillera.  
I believe in people in struggle.  
I believe the indigenous people are the spirit  
of the passion for freedom.  
They plant in us the seed of freedom  
to re-open our identity against the eternal sin  
of this society. Amen (Garrido 1996:54)

It is interesting to note that the poem, which evokes the author's own 'Latin American' background, does not take on an indigenous identity. Instead it speaks of solidarity with the indigenous peoples who the author has positioned as the subjects of a global struggle for liberation. The 'indigenous peoples' are constructed politically, and within the structure of the poem, as a symbolic type, an expression of the desire and possibility for freedom and redemption. The eternal sin is not only the actual dispossession of the indigenous populations but refers to social injustices in general. Furthermore, to anyone who is familiar with liberation theology it is clear that the position of the generalised or global 'indigenous subject' in relation to an alternative identity indicates that the sin is modernity itself, and in particular Western capitalism that has robbed 'our' freedom just as it has destroyed the indigenous peoples. From my own personal acquaintance with Juan Garrido and his work I know that it is not only a particular political and theological agenda that makes him identify with the Aboriginal case, but also Garrido's own marginalisation and his life experiences as a victim and survivor of barbaric oppression that fuels his 'identity', his hope and his political struggle.

Solidarity with the 'indigenous' struggle was also evoked in other contexts. It was common, for example, to open Latin American 'cultural nights', solidarity events and political demonstrations in Adelaide (mainly those organised by various left wing political organisations and activists) with the symbolic statement that we are on Kaurana land. Some of the migratory and diasporic events that were conducted locally in relation to current political and social struggles in Latin America often involved Aboriginal performers. The commemoration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Che Guevara that was organised by the Australian Cuba Friendship Society and the Australian Progressive Unions, included Latin American performers alongside Aboriginals and Native Canadian Dancers. Another example was a series of protests that were organised after the dramatic arrest of General Augusto Pinochet in London. Local Chilean political refugees, many of them victims of the regime, held a number of demonstrations in support of the extradition of Pinochet to Spain. These demonstrations took place on the steps of the South Australian Parliament House and involved speeches, by various political activists, the shouting of slogans against Pinochet, and a commemoration for the Chilean 'disappeared' and the political prisoners still held in Chile. Aboriginal performers, as an act of solidarity, were invited to contribute to these events that were presented as a call for truth and justice in Chile.

Another example was a visit of Francisco Caquilpan, a Chilean Mapuche delegate, who came to Adelaide as part of an international campaign to pressure the Chilean government to stop the building of six hydroelectric dams on the Biobío River. These dams, some of

which are already built, will eventually flood a large part of a traditional Pehuenches land area. The Pehuenches are a subgroup of the larger Mapuche Indian population in the south of Chile (Brown, 1998). The visit was organised by local Chilean political and solidarity groups in Adelaide in association with Aboriginal activists and a local church that practices liberation theology and supports similar social struggles in Latin America and in Australia. In a public lecture, given by the Mapuche delegate at a local Aboriginal centre, a strong linkage was made between the political struggle for self-determination and indigenous land rights in Chile and the political struggle for Aboriginal land rights in Australia.

In Melbourne, as I recently learnt, there is a Chilean political and solidarity organisation called, 'The Chilean Popular and Indigenous Network', that focuses on indigenous rights in Chile and in Latin America, and promotes indigenous groups' struggles for land rights, and the fight against global capitalism and neoliberalism. The Chilean Popular and Indigenous Network's main political activity is directed towards Latin America and yet, as is explained in their newsletter, the organisation's political struggle is inclusive of the Koori communities' struggles for land rights and against racism and discrimination in Australia.

There are of course other types of affiliations with Latin Americans that do not directly involve aspects of 'indigeneity'. One such example was a meeting in the mid-1980s between *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (The Grandmothers of May Square) and Aboriginal groups in Melbourne and Sydney.<sup>3</sup> *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* is an apolitical group of Argentinean women who work for the disclosure of the truth about the 'Dirty War' (1976-83) in Argentina. The Argentinean grandmothers, in their call for truth and justice, established an organisational body that is searching, with relative success, for the several hundred abducted children of the estimated 30,000 Argentineans arrested and 'disappeared' by the military junta during the years of the 'Dirty War'. Large numbers of the abducted children were 'given' to the perpetrators of these crimes and to other families close to the military junta. The 'Grandmothers of May Square' were invited to Australia by Aboriginal groups who, as part of the search for what is now known as the 'stolen generation' were interested in hearing more about the grandmothers' search, and their plans, at that time, to establish a blood bank and DNA testing facilities for identifying the children of the disappeared. As in the case of the Mapuche delegate local Latin American migrant groups assisted with and took part in this particular meeting.

Political affiliations with the Aboriginal struggle in Australia are not surprising. After all, Latin Americans come from societies and histories in which, as in Australia, the indigenous presence works as a constant reminder of colonialism, dispossession and human rights abuses. Furthermore, current political unrest and various armed struggles across Latin America have directly involved the indigenous populations who are fighting for land rights, the recognition of their cultural rights and justice in relation to the crimes committed against their people in the past and in the present. It is in this context that Latin Americans in Adelaide, and in particular Chilean political refugees who belong to, and are identified with the political left, read Aboriginal history and the Aboriginal struggle as similar to their own histories and experiences of indigeneity and resistance back home (Langer 1998:173). Yet, it is important to stress that despite reference to a mestizo ancestry and having some Indian blood, most of these Latin American migrants and refugees fell short of defining themselves as 'indigenous'.

### Indigeneity ‘here’ and ‘there’

There are of course multiple historical, cultural and political reasons for the relation to indigeneity that have much to do with the particular contexts in which ‘indigeneity’ is struggled, spoken about, constructed or ignored within different countries in Latin America. In the Australian context, Aboriginality is one of many issues that migrants need to come to term with in deciphering Australian forms of ‘otherness’, power relations and cultural and political history. The most obvious way to ‘make sense’ of, and contextualise such new settings is by translating previous experiences, histories and a particular sense of ‘identity’ as similar to those which migrants encounter, construct and interpret in Australia.

A classic example of such a hermeneutic process is found in an Australian book written in Spanish and titled *Inmigrante Feliz en Afortunado País*—‘A Happy Migrant in the Lucky Country’. *Inmigrante Feliz* is a satirical book that consists of short anecdotes and a humorist critique of the life conditions of Latin American immigrants in Australia. The author uses the pseudo-name ‘Sarna’, Spanish for scabies, as a metaphor for the itchy reaction readers should have to this sort of cynical humour and critique. Many of the short stories target particular ‘Australian’ oddities that are constructed around the phenomenological tensions that exist between life *here* and life *there*. The author’s understanding of Australian racism and the treatment of the indigenous population is an example of a migratory construction of reality that helps define the ‘locality’ in relation to ‘our indigenous’ and ‘our racism’ back home.

*Quando los ingleses arribaron a lo que hoy se llama Australia, no sólo no se mezclaron con los nativos, como sí lo hicieron los españoles, que se acostaron con nuestras antepasadas las indias, sino que, por el contrario, los diezmaron, haciéndoles la “guerra negra”. A quienes lograron escapar del genocidio, les arrebataron sus tierras. Dada la espiritual relación del aborígen con su suelo, era tanto como matarlos en vida. Para nuestros nativos del Nuevo Mundo, como para los aborígenes de este Novísimo, debió ser más que demoledor el enfrentamiento de una sociedad acoplada con la naturaleza, a la sociedad invasora, en donde la tierra es vista sólo como fuente de riqueza ... ; de vivir en perfecta armonía con su medio espiritual, a una sociedad brutal, materialista, desespiritualizada; de formas comunitarias de propiedad, especialmente de la tierra, a una sociedad regida por el más feroz egoísmo individual. (Sarna n. d.:202-203)*

When the English arrived to what today is called Australia, not only did they not mix with the natives, as the Spanish did when they slept with our Indian ancestors, but instead they decimated them by conducting the ‘black war’. Those who managed to escape the genocide lost their lands. Given the spiritual relations Aborigines have with their land, this was like killing them alive. For our natives in the New World, as for the Aborigines in this New-ism, the destructiveness of the contact was a result of the meeting between a society that lived closely with nature, and an invading society that regarded land as a source of wealth. A society living in perfect harmony with a particular spiritual world to a brutal society, materialistic and despiritualised. A society that had communal forms of property, especially in regard to land, to a society ruled by aggressive individual egoism. (My translation).

In relation to racism in Australia the author describes the horrendous treatment of indigenous peoples in Latin America and writes that Latin Americans ‘cannot cast the first

stone' because they themselves are guilty of racism. This is evident and particularly sad because such racism is expressed in the ways by which many Latin Americans tend to negate their own 'indigenous' descent.

*Lo peor del caso es que, siendo nosotros mismos mestizos, debido a la influencia cultural clasista y racista, muchos reniegan de su procedencia indigena, cuando deberia ser motivo de orgullo pertenecer a las comunidades primitivas del Nuevo Mundo* (No year, p.205).

The worst aspect [of our racism] is that we are all mestizos, and yet as a result of racist and classicist cultural influence many of us tend to renounce our Indian ancestry, instead of being proud of belonging to the primitives of the New World. (My translation).

When I showed Paulina, a Chilean political refugee who lives in Adelaide, the text above, she got really upset. While I read it as a form of affiliation with the indigenous peoples in Australia and as acknowledgement of their suffering and struggle against a brutal oppression by the English colonisers, Paulina felt that by criticising the English the author was actually legitimising the Spaniards and in fact was undermining the indigenous suffering by celebrating the *mestizaje*. 'It is as if the author feels that the Spaniards were somehow 'better' in the way they treated the Indians, but this is not true', she told me. 'These views' she said:

... are based on ignorance of the real history of colonisation in Latin America. The Spanish conquistadors also committed genocide, they also raped the women, killed babies and even had dogs trained to eat the flesh of the 'indios'. The ignorance regarding these facts is because we have never tried to listen to the stories of the people from the First Nations, if we just learn to listen we would hear, and if we hear we can begin to understand what really happened.

Such an interpretation is part of Paulina's self identification with the 'Indians', in a way that shapes, among many other aspects of her life, her migratory experience and her understanding of Chile and Australia.

I have always been attracted to cultures other than Chilean ... as I have been all my life psychologically part of the 'Indian' culture ... although I never had the opportunity to live as an 'Indian' I always felt 'Indian' even in Chile, even as far as I remember, this is the case ... so my metamorphosis really started very early on in the piece ... when I came here my most important relationships were with Aboriginal people, I think this is a factor that must also be acknowledged ... I don't look at 'Australia' through the 'white Australian' eyes; I have been provided with the other history, the one most people are ignorant of, so when I talk about this land I am referring a lot to the Indigenous sense of being Australian ...

How should we understand such a claim of 'Indigeneity'? Is it a 'New Age' construction of the 'indigenous' as a form of spiritualism or is such a claim, taking into account the history of Latin America and the personal history of Paulina, a way of reclaiming a voice and an 'identity'? For Paulina, identification with the 'Indigenous', as the statement above indicates, is a way of challenging the official narrative of the 'nation' both in Chile and in Australia. At the same time she is careful not to appropriate the 'indigenous' voice by emphasising her mestizo ancestry and by making a distinction between her 'feeling' of being an 'Indian' and actual 'Indian' culture and 'identity'.

I am the product of the conquest... I should have been a Mapuche woman, living in Mapuche land and under Mapuche lore ... I am a mixed race person instead, brought up in a country with a tremendous inferiority complex towards Europe and in particular the US. I can't say I am Mapuche, because I think this is something that I should earn by being with Mapuche people... it is only the Mapuche people who can define me as one more Person from the Land ... I can't take this liberty ... in my heart I am an "Indian" I always have been and always will be ...

Such a perspective, even when not as clearly articulated, is what has helped Latin American political and solidarity groups frame 'indigeneity' as a form of resistance and struggle. Langer (1998) who studies El Salvadoran refugees in Melbourne describes how the Salvadoran 'Indigeneity' was 'called out' by different 'identity brokers' and interest groups. 'Indigeneity', as Langer explains, is one of several other 'Salvadoran specificities' that are constructed by different agents that are operating within particular local and global social fields:

'Multiculturalism' constructs Salvadorans as the most recent arrivals in a wave of 'Latin American immigration' which began in the 1970s, or as adding to some thing called 'Hispanic community' whose cultural origins are 'Catholic' and 'Mediterranean'. The discourse of 'indigeneity' favours a construction of Salvadoran as 'dispossessed indigenes' whose shared history of European invasion makes for a 'natural' bond with Aboriginal Australians. Human-rights activists see Salvadorans as victims / survivors of state terror whose shared history of torture and trauma makes for solidarity with other political refugees from Central and South America. Radical Christians view the 'Salvadoran experience' through the discursive frame of liberation theology, while to 'left remnant groups' like the International Socialist it is part of a Marxist-Leninist history of 'armed struggle' (Langer 1998:173).

From my own fieldwork experience this rather neat division, while very illustrative, is not always clear. The same Latin American activists often participate in and promote several, if not all of these discourses at the same time. Interestingly, in contrast to Langer's findings in Melbourne, in Adelaide, as I mentioned above, it is mainly Chilean political refugees who evoke 'indigeneity' in relation to the political struggle for liberation. Most of the Salvadorans I met regarded such affiliations as 'political' (i.e. of the political left) and as such as something they avoided and regarded as divisive to the 'community'.

'There are no *indios* left in El Salvador. Just a few old people who can still speak Nahuatl the language of the Aztecs'. This was a typical response made by Salvadorans when I talked to them about their indigenous peoples back home. Yolanda, a local El Salvadoran refugee, once told me a story about a strange incident in the new country:

Shortly after we arrived in Australia we were asked to be part of a research project conducted by the 'Ethnic Affairs' or something like that. We were told that this is going to be a long-term study and that every three or four years we will be asked to answer a questionnaire. In one of the questions we were asked to name our ancestors, we could not understand the question. The interpreter that sat with us told us that we should write that our ancestors were the Mayas. She said the Mayas were the ones who lived in and controlled most of Central America and as such it is best to write that we are descended from them. We had never thought of ourselves as Mayas, but we followed her advice and wrote it down anyway. It is now a kind of a family joke, every time we come across such a question we write that we are descendants of the Mayas.

Of course, such 'ignorance' is not accidental it is a direct result of an historical process that aimed, often by very brutal means (for example the Matanza of the Pipiles in 1932 in which 32,000 indigenous peasants were massacred), to annihilate any remnant of an indigenous presence in El Salvador.

The difference between the Salvadoran refugees Langer researched in Melbourne and those I worked with in Adelaide is probably a result of the social and political divisions within El Salvador. It may very well be a result of the different social structures of the 'Latin American communities' in Melbourne and in Adelaide. Yet such differences also indicate that affiliations with 'indigeneity' are always made from within the particular social position of the individuals and groups who evoke it.

The differences between Paulina and Yolanda are not merely a result of subjective understandings of 'indigeneity', but are part of complex social settings in which identification with the 'indigenous peoples' is operating as an 'identity' and as a political statement. For Paulina identification with the 'indigenous' is not only part of her sense of 'self', but it is also a political criticism of her country of origin and her life in Australia. Paulina had no difficulty claiming her mestizo ancestry as one that includes Spanish, German, Jewish and Mapuche 'blood'. Yet such a mixed background was, as she acknowledges, somehow suppressed in the social context of her life in Chile. 'I grew up in a family which only acknowledges the German and the Spanish background but denies the Mapuche and the Jewish side'. It is this suppressed ancestry that helped her define her affiliation with the Indians and the Aborigines. It is an affiliation that gains its legitimacy from a particular life history and a personal journey and experience of oppression and torture in Chile.

In the case of Yolanda however, identification with the 'indigenous' descent is regarded as a mere label. To be a descendent of the Mayas became a family 'joke' because it is something that she, from her own personal history and social positioning in El Salvador and in Australia, cannot really understand or see as relevant. For Yolanda 'indigeneity' is something of the past that has little to do with the way she defines and sees herself at the present, and this is despite and maybe because of her own *mestizo* ancestry.

Affiliations with 'indigeneity', whether in their political context or as I explain later in their more multicultural celebratory exoticism, are highly problematic. Not only did most of these migrants not define themselves as 'Indians', but for some this term carried mainly negative connotations and was seen as something that further marginalised them in relation to other Australians. As one Latin American migrant once bitterly told me: 'Australians have no idea where we come from. They tend to think that we are all Indians'. To understand such a contradictory position toward indigeneity it is important to look briefly at the complexity of the 'indigenous question' in Latin America itself.

Unlike Australia, where Aboriginality operates mainly in a racial context as opposed to Whiteness, in Latin America, while a racial element undoubtedly exists, any attempt to claim an indigenous identity faces the supposedly 'multicultural' notion of the *mestizaje*. The *mestizaje*, as Mario Vargas Llosa argues, 'works both ways'. As such it would probably be hard to find many Latin Americans who are 'purely' non-indigenous, and likewise to find many 'pure Indians', who no doubt do exist but live in remote areas and are in most cases a very small minority (Vargas Llosa 1993:7). For Vargas Llosa the process of the *mestizaje* is opposing what he regards as the regressive, utopian and racist claims for retrieving the lost 'Indian' identity and culture (1993:8). The *mestizo* condition is depicted as modern and civilised in contrast to those intellectuals who Vargas Llosa calls 'Indianists', who in their writing and calls for indigenous rights and identities 'deify the

course of history' (1993:8). Although in a different context, such ideas are not that different from John Howard's views regarding what he called the 'black armband view of history', in his criticism of those who 're-write' Australian history in relation to the treatment and destruction of the 'indigenous' populations.

Despite some obvious differences and particular political histories and complex racial relations in different Latin American countries, it is correct to argue that across Latin America White and Mestizo populations regard the term '*indio*' as a derogatory term.<sup>4</sup> As Daniel Mato argues, the term "Latin" America itself is very much a Eurocentric terminology that historically, despite its anticolonial context, was aimed at excluding the indigenous populations from the emerging nation states and the region in general (1998:175). To be labelled an *indio* is often to be victimised, marginalised and discriminated against in more than one sense. Furthermore, as a result of violent oppression and its often not less violent resistance, such as in Peru and Guatemala for example, the '*indios*' are often associated with terrorism and are presented by various 'experts' as a backward, primitive people who practice ritualised violence (Said 1989:219).

As a result of a lengthy political struggle in which transnational indigenous peoples' organisations have actively challenged their treatment and marginalisation within and across nation-states in Latin America, we are now witnessing some encouraging symbolic and political changes. One such interesting example is that of the Zapatistas' uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, and their extensive use of the Internet that has led to a new kind of global networking of their struggle (Mato, 1997:185). Other examples are the emergence of Maya activists in Guatemala and the election of Alejandro Toledo as the President of Peru. Toledo is the first elected president of indigenous descent (or a *cholo*, part Indian and part Latino) who, in a symbolic gesture, celebrated his inauguration by conducting a special Indian blessing ceremony at Machu Picchu.

Clearly, despite the above examples there is still a long way to go before the complex issues and enormous everyday suffering, discrimination and horrendous poverty endured by large indigenous populations in many Latin American countries are resolved. The presence and the voice of indigenous subalterns is central not only to the collective imaginary of particular nation states, racial and class structures and different social groups, but also has a direct effect on the everyday life of indigenous and non-indigenous citizens. It is this loaded history that Latin American migrants bring with them into Australia.

### **Indigeneity within the multicultural imaginary**

The migratory duality of place, the phenomenological gap and constant continuing relations *here* with the life *there*, mean not only that migrants construct the 'Australian' context in light of their 'original' identity, but also that they reinterpret and redefine their 'original' identity in relation to their social positioning as individuals and as members of a collectivity in Australia. It is in such a context that 'indigeneity' is evoked in relation to the definition of Latin American migrants as members of a distinctive 'ethnic / migrant community'. These other types of affiliations have more to do with the particular national and ideological context in Australia than with a sense of solidarity or political struggle in Latin America. In order to be recognised and visible as a specific 'ethnic community' Latin Americans implicitly and explicitly perform their distinctive 'culture' and represent their 'community' and 'traditions' by emphasising the exotic indigenous imagery of Latin America.

An example of such complexities emerged during a Latin American cultural exhibition held at the South Australian State Library during 1998. The exhibition 'Expressions of Latin America' was organised jointly by the State Library and the 'Federation of Spanish Speaking Communities', a multicultural ethnic organisation that aims to represent the diverse groups of Latin Americans living in Adelaide. The exhibition aspired to portray Latin American cultures and present artworks produced by Latin American artists living in Adelaide. As part of the three-month exhibition the State Library also held weekly story telling sessions for school children and an event titled 'Earth Wind and Fire'—a 'cultural evening' of poetry readings and Latin American music.

For the local Latin American artists, the exhibition was presented as an opportunity to express 'their pride in creating a new place for their culture and works in multi-cultural South Australia' (Sweeney 1998). The panel text at the entrance to the exhibition promoted this imagery of 'cultural enrichment' and multiculturalism. This exhibition reflects the cultural wealth, the thought, the feelings and the soul of South Australian artists from Latin American countries. They have brought with them to South Australia their vibrant culture heritage and creative skills, and in the process, enriched this community.

The exhibition displayed two main kinds of objects as 'cultural expressions' of Latin America. The first were representations of the 'original' cultures in Latin America. This was achieved by displaying various 'culturally purposeful objects' (Baxandall 1991) from *there*, such as traditional costumes, maps, musical instruments, indigenous artefacts as well as images of landscapes, traditional dancing, literature and poetry. Continuously played sound tracks of music from various countries and cultural traditions across Latin America (indigenous, folkloric, and *nueva canción* but not *Salsa*, *Merengue* or *Bolero*), added another dimension to the 'Latin American' feel of the exhibition. The second kind of objects were various forms of artwork produced by local Latin American artists. These included artistic works, such as paintings, photography, poetry, tapestry and pottery. Some of these works evoked Latin America in their subject matter and style. There was, for example, a series of paintings that depicted the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, an *arpillera* (tapestry) that was woven in 1992 by a group of Latin American women in Adelaide in commemoration of the 500 years of Spanish colonisation, and a bust sculptured by a local Chilean artist Pablo Neruda, the famous poet whose poetry and death symbolise the struggle against the dictatorship in Chile. Other works evoked Latin America in a very different way. A young Salvadoran artist presented her work titled 'A Day at the Market', a series of close-up photographs depicting her own screaming and anguished expressions as part of her personal experience and memory of the civil war in El Salvador. And yet other artworks in the exhibition did not evoke in their style or subject matter any direct reference to Latin America but were simply included because Latin American migrants had produced them.

At the opening night of the exhibition I asked one of the organisers and a community leader in what ways he believed such an exhibition could help the 'community'. I was quite surprised when he answered that the exhibition would show the 'Australians' *que no somos indios*—'that we are not Indians'. What he meant was that the exhibition would demonstrate that Latin Americans are people of sophisticated cultures—artistic, musical, literate, etc. To be represented in a sort of museum setting at the State Library was seen by him as an important recognition and acknowledgement of the presence of Latin Americans living in Adelaide. 'Not to be an Indian', however, meant that the representation was believed by the speaker to depict Latin Americans as 'civilised' people of high cultural

and artistic value who are unlike the image of the 'barbarians' or the 'uncivilised' and 'culture-less' *indios*. The speaker made a distinction between the image of Latin America as part of the Third World (and therefore the view of Latin Americans as people from undeveloped countries, less modern, backwards people, if not mere primitives) and the 'high' cultural achievements that he believed the exhibition demonstrated.

The statement *que no somos indios* struck me at the time as ironic because the exhibition openly celebrated the indigenous cultures of Latin America. In a way, through the choices made in selecting the objects and the forms of display, the exhibition actually encouraged the visitors to see the Latin American migrants as 'indigenous'. Such representations and interpretations were related to the western context in which the 'indigenous' people are romanticised as 'noble savages' (spiritual, closer to nature) a romanticism that prevails in some of the political discourse that evokes the 'indigenous' in the name of the resistance and survival of 'disappearing' cultures (Malkki 1992:30).

Some of the remarks in the exhibition's Visitors' Book reveal such interpretations:

Interesting and moving display. Keep up the good work. Indigenous cultures mustn't be lost.

This is one of many visits. The vibration of the indigenous cultures is felt here as well as the vibrations of the organisers of this exhibition and the people portrayed. Thanks a Million.

A sign of hope and inspiration in these dark times. An expression of the strength vibrancy and faith of indigenous people everywhere.

One of the interesting remarks in this context was made by a Maori visitor who expressed a kinship affiliation and common heritage with the indigenous people of Latin America.

I am a Maori from N.Z. and we're related in some way because our land our home is where you are from but we left South America before you were discovered by the Spanish. Great work brothers and sisters.

Notwithstanding the multicultural rhetoric of tolerance and the encouragement of migrants to 'retain' and express their original cultural identity, it is important to note that such difference is often a product of the social construction of the migrants as 'people of culture'. The assumed 'otherness' of the migrants is what makes them culturally visible while their 'visibility' works to reinforce the invisibility of the dominant culture. In a sense, '... the more power one has, the less culture one enjoys, and the more culture one has, the less power one wields' (Rosaldo 1989:202).<sup>5</sup> Cultural expressions of the migrants' otherness are based upon a set of power relations that creates zones of 'cultural visibility' that exist in contrast to zones of 'cultural invisibility' (1989:198). It is always 'they' who have culture and 'we' who do not. It is in this context that the Latin American migrants are depicted as colourful people, indigenous and exotic.

For the organisers of the exhibition the cultural visibility of their 'community' is a strategic imperative for gaining entry into the multicultural realm and for constructing a sense of pride and 'community'. I do not wish to argue that the affiliations Latin American migrants create with indigeneity are somehow 'inauthentic', far from it. Rather, what I criticise is the 'cultural logic' of such exhibitions which constructs the 'ethnic / migrant community' as an enclave of cultural difference.

## Conclusion

One of the ways in which the political and theoretical debate regarding 'multiculturalism' and Aboriginality can be sharpened is by studying 'indigeneity' in Australia and elsewhere, as something that cuts through particular localised 'identities'. Despite the image of the indigenous as peoples who are rooted in a particular place many indigenous people are on the move and even if they are not physically moving they are often part of global and transnational organisations that create complex networks, provide political support and enable an exchange of ideas and strategies.

The social relationships and political activities of left-wing Latin American refugees and Aborigines testify that the category of the 'migrant', as the 'non-Anglo' and 'non-indigenous' Australian is less solid and exclusive than the way it is often presented. Other frameworks, such as cultural exhibitions, in which Latin American migrants and refugees represent affiliation with their indigenous backgrounds, are also very significant. Yet such expressions are rarely being noticed. In a multicultural Australia it is important to scrutinise not only the 'indigenous' but also to look closely at the complexity of the 'non-indigenous' Australians. There is a need to be more sensitive to the different ways by which migrant communities and individuals understand and relate to notions of indigeneity. We need to look at the different contexts in which 'indigeneity' is expressed instead of simply restating the important but often simplistic binarism between 'indigenous' and 'non-indigenous' Australians.

## Notes

1. The term *indio* is a racist term in many Latin American countries. Therefore, the statement 'we are not Indians' should be read as 'we are not primitive backward people' or, in its more 'positive' meaning, 'we are people of culture'.
2. The majority of these migrants and refugees are Chileans and El Salvadorans but there are also smaller groups of Latin Americans from other countries such as Peru, Uruguay and Colombia. Most Latin Americans arrived in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s as refugees or under the Humanitarian Program, as well as on family reunion visas.
3. I thank Rafaela Lopez, a researcher in the project 'Hispanics in Victoria since Federation' for providing me with this information.
4. The category *indio* should not always be interpreted as a reference to the indigenous populations and in different countries in Latin America may have a different meaning. For example, in the Dominican Republic the concept *indio* refers to skin colour and not to an Indian race. Dominicans who define themselves and are regarded by others as *indios* are those who have brown skin (Sørensen 1997:293).
5. Rosaldo (1989) talks about such practices in relation to anthropology and the way by which the closer the anthropological subjects were to 'us' the 'less' culture they are assumed to have. It is in such a context that official multiculturalism adopts anthropological jargon including classic definitions of the term culture itself.

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