

**“Only Your Labels Split Me”:
Interweaving Ethnicity and Sexuality in English Studies.**

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Encouraging Students to ‘Map’ Multiplicity

I will begin this paper with an example of a ‘mapping’ exercise for students using the following two excerpts:

You say my name is ambivalence? Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man’s world, the women’s, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web. Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me.

(Anzaldua, 1987:205)

I never realised what diversity existed in an ethnic culture”, Jon said...”You’re so typically Italian, your talking hands, your flocks of family. But you’re so different. You speak with an educated Aussie accent. You hang around with all sorts. You hate some Italian traditions, but you hate some Australian ways too. You refuse to be categorised. You’re a feminist, and you won’t be caught dead without make-up. You’re married and haven’t a clue about wifely responsibilities and duties. You’re suburban, rustic, and a fringe dweller all at once. We’re a couple of chameleons changing colours to survive.

(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1991: 21)

First, students are asked to list the various components of the two characters’ identities. These may include specifics about ethnicity, class, gender, religious beliefs, level of education, and sexuality. Second, they are asked to draw unbroken lines or write

CONNECT between the various components that appear to connect or complement each other, and broken lines or write CONFLICT between the various components that appear or would be believed by the student to contradict or be in conflict with each other. What they are actually doing is exploring three themes: the interweaving of categories and labels within a person; the crossing and bridging of “worlds” and the “regulations and codes” of those “worlds”; and the chameleon-like ways of adaption, negotiation and selection in order to live one’s life as satisfactorily and successfully as possible. Students can then be asked to draw a similar “map” for themselves. Questions about stereotypes and prejudices can then follow, particularly in relation to homosexuality in the first excerpt and gender roles in the second.

The categories of lesbian, bisexual or homosexual within ethnic cultures is rarely addressed within our society (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995c). Our English classrooms have become locations for the exploration of ethnic and gender socio-cultural constructs involving the deconstruction of and resistance to racism, ethnocentrism and sexism. Even non-heterosexual sexualities and homophobia are finally beginning to be acknowledged and addressed as part of schools’ social justice and equity framework. My concern with much of this practice, including my own, is its construction of artificial homogeneity within the categories and a lack of what I call “interweaving” between the categories.

In other words, in English studies, are we presenting identity as signifying only *one* label, *one* category? Is someone *only* Italian, or *only* a woman, or *only* gay? Are we dealing with racism *or* sexism *or* homophobia without finding ways of exploring the lived realities of our multicultural society of combinations of racism *and* sexism *and* homophobia. How can we overcome this splitting through classification? How can we incorporate texts and reading practices that reflect the diversity in our society?

As Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1991) writes:

Multiculturalism does not lead us very far if it remains a question of difference only between one culture and another... To cut across boundaries and borderlines is to live aloud the malaise of categories and labels; it is to resist simplistic attempts at classifying; to resist the comfort of belonging to a classification (1991:107-108).

Gilbert and Gilbert (1994) point to four flaws in situating students into categories of “disadvantage” based on constructs such as ethnicity and gender. These points are useful in

preparing materials and exercises for students in our English classes that deal with multiple identity and/or multiple oppression. They are:

- *the disguising or denying of diversity within a group and differing individual experiences through homogenising practices such as stereotyping and essentialism;

- *focusing on one category of identity and thereby distracting from or denying attention to the relationships between various conditions and constructs such as ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, geographical location and education;

- *rendering definitions and identities as static rather than in constant processes of shifting and fluxing;

- *ignoring the subjective perceptions, definitions and meanings of the persons who have been assigned these labels and slotted into these categories.

Based on my own work with senior secondary students and first year undergraduate tertiary students, this essay will focus on two methods of implementation: connecting and crossing *between* ethnicity and non-heterosexual sexualities within the framework of social justice and equity; and connecting and crossing *within* ethnic cultures to explore the various positionings of non-heterosexual sexualities. A dilemma that confronts English teachers is the lack of readily available materials that address the issues raised by Gilbert and Gilbert(1994). I will provide examples of texts that are available in non-mainstream publications and bookshops. Of course, the lack of texts does not mean we cannot encourage students to write about and explore the representations of their own lived realities and identities and of those around them.

Connecting Landscapes of Marginality

In previous publications I have explored the intersections of ethnicity and gender from a pedagogic perspective.(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994d; 1994e; 1995b). There are more and more texts available that explore cultural conflict and synthesis, and diversity, in second-generation individuals and interweave these with other issues such as gender and class.

I have also previously discussed the English classroom as a powerful site of intervention and resistance into homophobic, racist and sexist discourses. “Ethnic, gender, racial and sexual landscapes of marginality are increasingly being acknowledged as connected within the frameworks of social justice and anti-discrimination”(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994b: 112; see also 1994c; 1995a). I have argued that if we only select “safe-to-challenge” social injustices such as racism and sexism and continue to ignore homophobia, we are constructing a new form of

what I call ‘hierarchical dualism’ of mainstream prejudices and marginal prejudices, the social injustices that are unjust and the social injustices that are just.

One of the successful ways that homophobia can be incorporated into the English classroom is “alongside and integrated within the overall thematic landscapes and narrative treatments of prejudice and social injustices”(1994b:112). The connections between sexuality, ethnicity and gender can also be explored within the thematic framework of personal identity and agency against restrictive norms. Through reading practices, students can be positioned with the fears and questions inherent in challenging social, familial, institutional prescriptions and ascriptions. Students who resist limiting gender stereotypes, students of non-English-speaking and Aboriginal backgrounds who resist the negative stereotyping and homogenising of their cultures, can locate themselves as having experienced some form of marginality and prejudice not unlike that of students and adults in our society experiencing homophobic stereotyping and prejudice.

Teachers using **Someone You Know** have encouraged students to locate the links between ethnic and gay-identity formations.(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994b; 1994c). Jon was a gay man, later to be diagnosed as HIV positive, with a Seventh Day Adventist religious upbringing, and teaching in a single-sex Catholic boys’ school. He was also a father who long ago had been prevented access to his own son due to his homosexuality. Students can also ‘map’ him as a chameleon “changing colours to survive” as he points out in the excerpt at the beginning of this paper. The following example also makes the connection between homophobic stereotypes and racist stereotypes. After stereotyping Maria’s ethnicity and gender codes such as “You can’t be a feminist. You’re Italian”, Jon’s comments in relation to his own ethnocentrism and sexism are actually pertinent to homophobia. Indeed, based on his comments and his body language, students have often positioned him as actually communicating about the homophobia he is subjected to while simultaneously fearing exposure:

“So, blinded by stereotypes, I don’t know you....
I should get to know you before I talk about you”
...He looked at me intently before brushing crumbs
off his shirt....He walked away, his head bowed,
hands in pockets, shoulders hunched, feet shuffling
(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1991: 7-8).

Here is a list of questions related to **Someone You Know**, as used by myself and by other teachers in Australian schools, that make connections and address issues of diversity:

*What are the ethnic, gender, gay and AIDS stereotypes the book challenges? Do they point to some common reasons for why people construct and maintain all forms of stereotypes and prejudices? Do you have stereotypes that the book challenged?

*Are their differences between homosexual and heterosexual love and relationships? What are the common anxieties, joys, fears and expectations?

*What sorts of parent-child relationships are presented in this book? Is your situation reflected in the book? How?

* Compare and contrast the lives of the Italian characters such as Maria, the best friend Maria, and the gay friend Matteo. What are the similarities and differences in relation to their being "Italian", e.g. relationships with parents, traditions upheld and resisted, codes of behaviour and lifestyle?

* Compare and contrast the various ideas presented in the book about religion and spirituality, particularly its negative and positive connections to prejudice.

The following quotations are samples from my own Year Ten and Eleven students, and from letters received from students from other schools in Australia. The text has been used alongside others on issues of social justice, and also in connection to students' own perceptions of personal marginalities.

I can now relate the prejudice that Anne Frank was subjected to for being Jewish, the prejudice Steve Biko felt from the white South Africans in **Cry Freedom**, to how Jon felt about his disease and his sexuality. He, like Anne Frank and Steve Biko, was faced with society's negative images about differences.

I am now more aware of what is happening around me. I don't regard homosexuality as a disease anymore or a disorder. I just see it as a characteristic of a person, like black skin or being Vietnamese.

When we are about to die there is no different colour, races or beliefs, majorities and minorities. We are all on an equal footing, no matter what walk of life we come from.

Coming out is not only relevant for gays and lesbians. It's about all of us saying who we are. Coming out about many things like sexual abuse, rape, etc. I grew up with a secret too but I'm slowly coming out of the shadows.

Me Mum's A Queer by Catherine Johns is about an Adelaide girl, Manny, who decides to tell her schoolfriends her mum's a lesbian. Socio-cultural constructions of "normality" and "deviance" are shrewdly questioned:

I tried to think of everyone I knew who had a real normal home. Pam's parents were always fightin'...The welfare was always around threatenin' to take the kids, but they sure weren't queer. Cathy's mum was on pills that made her go real crazy....But she wasn't queer. ...Where were all the normal people? Everyone I knew had somethin' strange goin' on. ...I thought of Monica's mum who worked in their fruit shop 'cause she had to keep an eye on Monica's dad. He said real rude things to the womyn if she wasn't there. He'd been reported a few times. But everyone laughed about it and no one seemed to think that it was queer....Brin's parents seem to be in a real big religion...They reckon we're all evil and that we will all burn in hell...her parents hate her bein' among pagans and poofers but she hasn't even met me mum(1994: 22-26)

Students can be asked to consider whether because a prejudice or exploitation is "common" or "accepted" in society, does it automatically mean it is "normal" or "alright". They can draw a line between two points designated as "normal" or "queer" and map where various prejudices were one hundred years ago, fifty years ago, twenty years ago, today, and at various predicted points in the future. For example, to be racist was considered quite "normal" and "acceptable" one hundred years ago but not so today. What about sexism? Homophobia? Classism?

The consequences of Manny's decision provide ample material for connecting the landscapes of marginality as the similarities between racism, sexism and homophobia are clearly presented through the characters from diverse cultural backgrounds. Manny's Aboriginal friend, Joanne, says to her:

Now you got somethin' to stick up for and fight for too, eh?
...Well, I've taken all sorts of shit all me life too. Boong this,
and Abo that, ...I guess you're lucky that your mum ain't a
black lesbian(1994: 45)

Why would Joanne say this? What is double or triple marginalisation/ oppression?

Although meticulously striving for such balance in most of the text, the ethnic family of the Greek boy Milos is constructed as sexist and homophobic, and there is no other ethnic representation to counterpose this. Stereotypes such as the arranged marriages, the house-bound, unhappy Greek mother ignorant of contraception and of the English language are presented without other images presented alongside. This runs the risk of perpetuating ethnocentrism. Likewise, the discussion on bisexuality as a 'cop-out' and "a real lack of commitment and bloody weak" without adequate balancing of the debates may also be oppressively perpetuating traditional stereotypes. Nevertheless, these sections in the text about ethnocentric and bi-phobic stereotypes are useful in giving students positions from which to consider and research alternative points of view. It may also be a useful exercise in illustrating how challenging one prejudice in a text may be counteracted by the possible perpetuation of another.

Interweaving Within The Landscapes: All/And Rather Than Either/Or

A second method of implementation is to represent individual identity as a site of the intermixture of ethnicity, sexuality and gender:

I am an act of kneading, uniting and joining that not
only has produced both a creature of darkness and a
creature of light, but also a creature that questions
the definitions of light and dark and gives them new
meanings(Anzaldua, 1987: 80-81).

I have provided the following two poems in full for teacher use. These two poems can actually be used together as one presents multiple marginality mainly from the position of victim about to begin challenging; the other presents it from the position of agent, negotiating her "worlds" and their "codes" in a satisfying manner.

In a poem called "The Fly", Rose Romano presents the many "worlds" and "codes of conformity" she negotiates and which students can 'map'. As a lesbian, she is "the scum of

the scum of the scum” oppressed by those who complain they are oppressed. She feels silenced within the Sicilian community because of her gender and sexuality; within the Italian community because of her “inferior” form of ‘Italianness’, her gender and sexuality; within the Anglo-American lesbian community because of her ethnicity; and within the American society because of her ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

Giovanni de’Medici,
the first of the branch
of the Medici family
that produced Lorenzo
who almost single-handedly
produced the renaissance
in Florence,
advised his descendants-
“Be as inconspicuous as possible.”

This guy sounds like my father.
The first 16 years of my life,
I learned only two Neapolitan phrases-
assiettete
and statte zitte.
I’m standing now and I’m speaking.

Lesbians are not womanly enough,
not Madonna or puttana enough,
to be recognized by the Italian-
American community.

Italians are not Olive enough,
not light or dark enough,
to be recognized by the American
Lesbian community.

I’m standing now and I’m speaking
yet I am neither seen nor heard.

I’m a Sicilian-Italian-American Lesbian,
the scum of the scum of the scum,

forgotten by those who scream
in protest because they are
forgotten,
and I am neither seen nor heard.

Sicilians tell their children-
“A fly doesn’t enter a closed mouth.”
I’m standing now and I’m
telling the Sicilians,
the Italians,
and the Lesbians-
You can’t spit a fly
out of a closed mouth.

(1990: 40).

The following poem “Conversation With My Grandmama”, by Annie Ling also provides a powerful and more positive example of the experiences of belonging to many “worlds”. The title of Ling’s anthology is **Mei Tze is Also My Name**, indicative of her claiming of her Chinese-Malaysian identity alongside her Chinese-Australian identity. She transcends both the traditional world of her grandparents in Sibü, Malaysia, and the Chinese-Australian world of her parents in Sydney, Australia. Simultaneously, she claims her dowry, “I want my gold as in Chinese tradition”, and talks about her “lesbian existence”. She challenges her grandmother’s gender and lesbian constructs and challenges Western society’s constructs of ethnicity, gender and lesbian sexuality. She draws from all socio-cultural constructions to devise a multiple identity that cuts through any stereotype of homogeneity within any one category. Like Romano, she can connect across time, geography and cultures to voice her particular identities with both her significant and societal others (see also Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994a). Students can be asked to ‘map’ her identity and list the influences of history, places, language, cultural traditions, “modern” lifestyles, and “modern” concerns such as HIV/AIDS.

Ah Po, Ah Kung
in Sibü, Malaysia
we, your grandchildren mostly overseas
our mothers, your daughters too, are overseas

reminiscent of the past
of the times I spent with you

of you so versatile, knowledgeable and wise
so adult whilst I was young, twelve or thirteen
coming on my bicycle to visit you
when I have available time
seemingly very often
the cycle along Lanang Road
sometimes being chased by dogs

Grandmama
we have to grow up
you older and having joint pains

Grandpapa older too,
you fainted in the shop in town
as you do your daily shopping of vegetables and meat,
gave us a fright.
I love you both

We talked about my lesbian existence
I asked when will I get my gold in dowry
you said I should get married to a man
I crushed your objections
and said we have been over that,
I will not change
I ask for fairness in my dowry
I want my gold as in Chinese tradition

yet you accept when I told you my girlfriend is Teochew
you asked who cooks
I replied she does
I joked "she does the ironing as well"
Grandmama said "you must be the man"
I said "no", we look after each other and sharechores

You listen you understood

you thought I would get AIDS for being a lesbian
I want to explain to you, I am an HIV/AIDS educator

you are so far away
we miss you
my mother and I

I thought to myself
how many of us (SAL or Sydney Asian Lesbians) are here
with ties and roots elsewhere too,
with a past and culture so different
from today

Myra with her Mum in the Philippines
Kimmy and her Grandpapa
Poonam who recently arrived

I miss you, my grandmama and grandpapa.

today
practising softball at Marrickville Park
Dragon Boat training at the Drummoyne Sailing Club
having noodles
going to Thai Thai or having Indian

today

Conversation with my Grandmama
speaking my dialect.

(1992: 8-9)

With both of the above poems, students can 'map' the different 'selves' of the characters: the 'self' of the first (ethnic)culture, the 'self' of the second (American/ Australian)culture, the gendered 'self', the lesbian 'self', the 'self' in grand/parent-child relationship, the adult

‘self’ in love and friendships. What are the expectations of the different “worlds” and “codes”? Where are the points of connection and points of conflict?

As part of encouraging students to think beyond homogenising categories, it is important that our discussions of sexuality are not limited to the heterosexual/homosexual divide. A good example of the interweaving of bisexuality and multi-ethnicity is from the poem “One...” by Sharon Hwang Colligan in the anthology **Bi Any Other Name**:

2. You see

I am white Chinese

I am bisexual Lesbian.

3. My father

is Polish and Irish and German

long blended in America

My mother is the child of

two brave Chinese who survived

in an alien and hating land

to raise bright and beautiful

middle class

daughters

who no longer speak Chinese

who work to succeed

to pass

White racism against my yellow

family and self is a crime The criminals

are of my own white

family, my own pale skin color

...

None of the coming-out stories

or other writings I devoured

Seventeen alone and bisexual never once

validated my reality

...

There is no camp in which I feel wholly welcome

I am looking and looking for a home

I do not find it

Maybe I will have to build it
(1991: 240-243).

Students can ‘map’ the various supposed contradictions that the character intertwines within her, the duality in her colour(“white Chinese”), her bisexuality, her class (working class, middle class), the racism toward members of her family from other members of her family as well as from the society around her. What are the various meanings in the phrase “to pass”: as white, as heterosexual, as a “modern”, middle class, educated woman?

In **Someone You Know**, Matteo, a gay man of Italian background, is a character who tries “to pass” with his family. He successfully interweaves ethnicity and sexuality in his personal identity, albeit at the cost of having chosen not to come out to his parents:

It’s harder for gay men and lesbians from Italian backgrounds to come out. I love my parents and don’t want to hurt them. I say things like “Of course I’ll get married one day, I’m just waiting for the right girl”. How can two old people who’d need to have the word ‘homosexual’ explained to them ever come to terms with their gay child? They’d think it was something we’d picked up from Australian friends. They’ve lived through poverty, war, hunger. They come to a country where they have to start again in everything. They make a thousand sacrifices for the kids they cherish. After all that, I haven’t got it in me to break their hearts. Some might handle it. Your parents don’t seem to be fussed with me at all.”

(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1991: 23).

Students can discuss the various reasons why Matteo feels he can’t come out to his family. How are these reasons linked to gender expectations, and the impact of the following on his parents: a lack of education and familiarity with sexual diversity, war, poverty and migration. The book presents alternative and diverse perspectives of migrant cultures and ethnicity, as in presenting some Italian migrant parents as non-homophobic. Students can discuss these differences and consider possible reasons, such as the influence of personal experience- getting to know gay men and lesbians. They can consider what makes them or would make them shift their own prejudices and stereotypes, whatever they are:

I would often stand back and watch my parents talking

to Jon and Kevin over the front fence, their cheerful voices carrying across the road....My father discussed his vineyard and winemaking with Jon, an interested listener, unlike his own children, who wouldn't drink his wine...My mother would invite them to come over any time and take eggs from the chickens because her daughter rarely cooked decent meals and they'd rot

(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1991: 23-24).

Here are two excerpts from my article in **Who Do You Think You Are? Writings By Second Generation Immigrant Women in Australia**, which explores the negotiations, resistances, joys and dilemmas of four lesbians of Italian backgrounds(see also Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994a, 1994e, 1995b, 1995c):

Melina has 'come out' to her family and is very close to them. When her mother asked her, "Are you more comfortable with women than with men?" Melina thought, "if she had the courage to ask such a question, there was no way" she could lie to her. In response, her mother gave her total acceptance, related her own experiences and those of others she knew as a young girl in Italy, and made it her "duty" to inform other members of the extended family. Melina is "loved and respected" and seen as a "very significant person" by members of her family of all ages(1992: 152-153)

In contrast to Melina's experience and thus presenting the heterogeneity within the Italian "community", there is Caterina who will not come out to her family:

If I could just deal with [coming out] to my immediate family, that would be one thing, but then I'd have to deal with all the cousins [and] Mum also has to put up with what the rest of the family say about me...I'd love to totally deny my Italian background. I could still have a cappuccino and a pizza...[but] I feel much more comfortable not being involved with Italians

(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1992:146)

Students can ‘map’ the various conflicts, negotiations and connections all four women have in ways similar to the ‘mapping’ and questions I have suggested earlier in relation to Matteo and his family. (A forthcoming narrative piece comprised of short scenes on ethnicity and sexualities may also provide intersecting points of contrast and connection for students; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995c).

In a short story of mine entitled “Roses”, published in a collection of multicultural writing, a day in the life of a lesbian of Italian background is chronicled, examining her relationships at work, with her mother, and with her partner on their anniversary (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994g). Since the plot is contrived that the reader does not obtain verification that Luisa is a lesbian until the last line of the story, an interesting activity teachers have used is to ask students to read the story twice, thereby embarking on two very different journeys with Luisa. They are asked to make two written responses and/or ‘mapping’ responses after each reading which can then be compared.

Upon first reading, students tend to position themselves alongside Luisa, remarking upon the ordinariness of her life disrupted on this particular day by the intrigue surrounding who sends her the roses to her workplace while curious colleagues look on:

She raised her face and made sure the smile she greeted him [the courier] with was calm and assured. She added a subdued amount of surprise and delight... The cool touch of the ribbon, the fragrance of the roses, the pleasure and danger of what the envelope would reveal, almost caused her mask to slip. She actually raised a hand to one cheek as if to readjust it (1994g: 142).

The usual student interpretation, based upon familiar socio-cultural ‘scripts’, is she’s having an ‘affair’ with a secret lover, male of course. A clue that jeopardises this reading occurs halfway through the story when a woman, a lesbian acquaintance of Luisa, arrives for a job interview with Luisa’s boss. It is a crossroad in the journey the students are taking with Luisa. Students are asked to explain their interpretation of this scenario. Before they can continue, they need to decide upon their positions about the possibility that Luisa may be a lesbian. Do they now distance themselves or do they go with her? Some students, however, read this point in the story as making statements about gender stereotyping and the possibility of Luisa being a lesbian does not enter into their scope of possible readings until the last line elicits surprise or aversion.

Upon second reading, students are positioned with her or against her from the beginning, and now map her negotiations throughout the story knowing why she masks and unmasks, silences and voices, various parts of her multiple identity throughout the day. This time they're challenged to consider and/or question what difference does knowing she's a lesbian make to their readings of the story and their language use in exploring their reading. For example, one student who had defined the story as "romantic" and about "a strong Italian woman who wants to live her own life" upon first reading, shifted her position in relation to the story upon second reading as follows: "It's a weird story. She's trying to hide her strangeness from everyone. She made me feel uncomfortable".

"So What's The Point Of All This?"

As our society becomes increasingly pluralist so that we are all exposed to a myriad of cultures, religions, traditions and lifestyle options, we need to develop skills of perception, critical thinking, the negotiation of differences, that engage with the diversity rather than reconstruct it as homogeneity. Novak proposes a "Cosmopolitan Ideal", a society comprising individuals with "pluralistic personalities", having participated in or become familiar with many traditions and lifestyle options. People would not be trapped in the duality of what they had inherited and what the dominant group wished to enforce, or indeed any single set of perceptions and ascriptions, keeping in mind that minority groups also tend to enforce their own conformist criteria for "belonging" and that exploitation of any kind is unacceptable (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1994f). People would learn to see things in the many ways possible: "even if we do not fully embrace them...we see clearly the valid points which lead others to choose [and live] differently"(1982:6).

As educators, we need to continue the exploration of the contradictions and connections inherent in the construction of multiple identities in two ways: as both end-products of larger socio-political and cultural forces such as the impact of migration, gender codes and lack of knowledge about diverse sexual identities; and how persons resist, negotiate, comply with these and begin to make inscriptions into society, politics and culture (Pallotta-Chiarolli and Skrbis, 1994). Our students can be assisted to gain broader and more understanding visions of themselves and others who co-exist with them in their school, their immediate world, and the world beyond their perception.

English studies has a great potential to demonstrate and transcend categorical limitations, oppressions, and the splitting of concurrent realities inherent in the need to homogenise,

categorise and simplify. It can assist students in the recognition of “multiplaced persons” and do much to challenge ethnocentric, sexist and homophobic perspectives. At this point in historical and socio-cultural time, much of the work and ideas I have presented in this paper may seem daunting and perhaps “dangerous” for teachers to undertake in the climate of their schools and society. Having undertaken my own isolated “trial-and-error” efforts and been on the receiving-end of personal, professional and public disapproval, I do not underestimate these feelings within teachers (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995a). However, with time and with efforts by individual educators and individual schools, the mainstreaming effect will take place as it has done with issues of gender and race. Much of what I am presenting needs to be discussed more fully and trialled more extensively. I can only say that from my own experiences, and from the experiences of teachers who have discussed their work with me in these areas, the creation of some space for these issues to be presented in a balanced and non-dogmatic manner in the English classroom proves to be very rewarding and exciting for both teachers and students.

As Trinh T. Minh-Ha writes:

“as long as the complexity and difficulty of engaging with the diversely hybrid experiences of heterogenous contemporary societies are denied and not dealt with, ... the creative interval is dangerously reduced to non-existence(1991:229)

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