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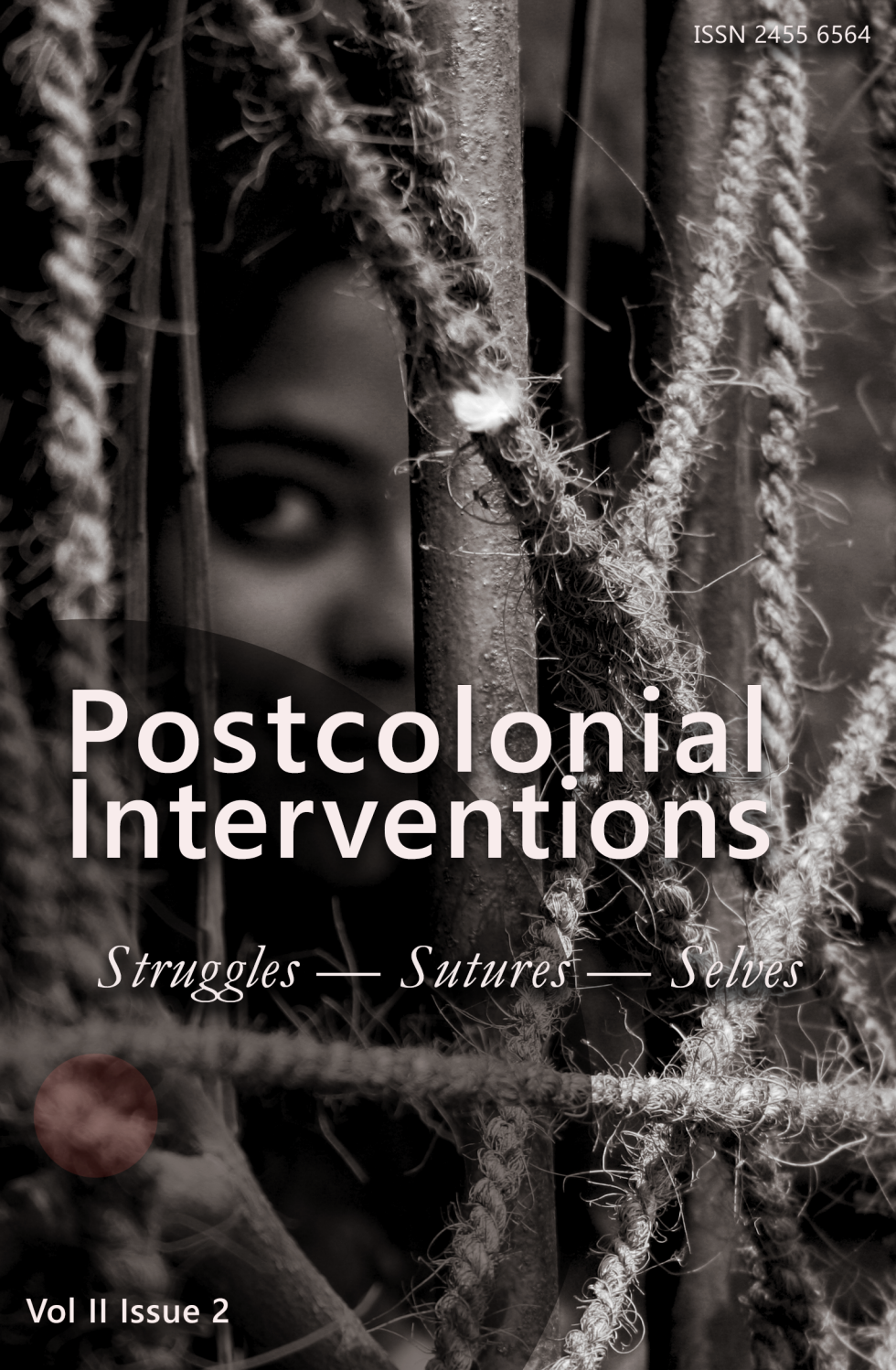

Postcolonial Interventions

Struggles — Sutures — Selves

Vol II Issue 2

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POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTIONS

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STRUGGLES — SUTURES — SELVES

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CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE

ABIN CHAKRABORTY

In a review of Gurinder Chadha's 2017 release, Viceroy's House, Fatima Bhutto remarks,

> Viceroy's House betrays the profound inferiority complex that plagues colonised people, a trauma as severe as the physical assaults and violence done to the land and bodies of subjugated people. It is exactly this kind of thinking that infected those who rioted and murdered their compatriots – a sense of fully absorbing the coloniser's claims of racial, moral and civilisational superiority. How else to explain the damage to the colonised psyche, whose imagination is so deeply corroded that it can believe that white skins are superior to brown skins, that the British are greater than Indians, that one religion prevails over another? It is in accepting these tragic untruths that nations are crippled with a paralysing fear of others and sincere loathing of the self. (*The Guardian*, 03 March 2017)

Bhutto's remarks and her anguished response to the film signify the abiding relevance of postcolonialism and the need to generate effective counter-discourses which are as much applicable to people in the West as they are to the people of the formerly colonised countries. We find ourselves at a particular historical juncture where racial hatred against non-white communities, particularly Muslims and migrants, rages in various parts of the West, even as other parts of Asia or Africa plunge into different forms of sectarian violence. India, in particular, is witnessing a rabid surge of majoritarian fanaticism which is principally fuelled by the typically Eurocentric notion of a nation consisting of one race, one culture, one language and one religion. It is almost as if the experiment of forging for ourselves a nation-state that could harmoniously integrate differences is being abandoned in favour of a discredited European model because our imagination and affective solidarities have run dry. As a result, we see the nation plunging into a widespread network of division, hatred and violence where the mere choice of meat can lead to the loss of one's life. If postcolonialism is about strategic interventions in the name of our future then it falls on us to mount discursive and material challenges against the dominant discourses coloured by seepage from colonial history to override the manifold adversities of the present.

The current issue of *Postcolonial Interventions* decides to take up this responsibility through its various con-

tributions which focus on the diverse avenues through which postcolonial agency manifests itself. Beginning with Krishna Sen's erudite exploration of travelogues by Rabindranath Tagore and others which subvert the power-relations of colonial travelogues and sketch the outlines of an alternate modernity, the issue encompasses within itself a wide range of discussions and interventions that include ecocriticism, diasporic negotiations, Arab nationalism, literary intersections between Latin America and India or notions of cosmopolitanism and refugees. One theme that runs through these papers is the idea of resistance, often in acknowledgment of adverse material circumstances that provoke resistant actions, at time desperate, but also governed by emancipatory aspirations. The papers of Linet Thomas echoes these considerations as it focuses on the socio-political maladies faced by marginalised sections of societies, either on account of class or caste or gender. She does so by tracing the influences of someone like Gabriel Garcia Marquez on authors from Kerala which again opens another vista of transnational connections.

Such transnational considerations are also the subject of Sandra Cox's exploration of the works of Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, where she particularly focuses on feminist refashioning of selves and identities in a global context of transcultural negotiations brought about migratory movements. Her paper fore-

grounds the ways in which fiction offers a challenge to preconceived notions about Bengali and Indian marriages and identities even as it analyses the productions of female subjective spaces in a global context. This global context also plays a particularly significant role in Soni Wadhwa's discussions of the city as a site of cosmopolitan negotiations which at times filters or entirely bypasses the pressures of the national. Based on the fictive world of Rushdie and the configurations of several key theorists, the paper explores the significance of the cosmopolitan city and the unique values it is capable of generating – values that are particularly significant in an increasingly xenophobic age where movements across borders of different kind are viewed with growing suspicion and even hatred. Alternate values are also proposed through Puspa Damai's analysis of arboreal articulations in Mahashweta Devi's fiction where she locates a kind of rhizomatic activism of grass and plants which interrogates the ideological assumptions of both colonial discourses and hegemonic nationalisms that function by erasing the voices and agency of indigenous communities. What emerges in the process is a kind of subaltern utopianism, a term which the author cautiously eschews, that remains strikingly relevant. But utopian gleams are necessarily offset by predicaments of the present and Tasnim Qutait's analysis of patrilineal nationalism in Arab countries astutely uncovers the various pitfalls and sloughs of disillusionment that bar our path to any

promised land. But recognising the pitfalls too is an important critical enterprise which prepares us for the future.

The aim of these intermingled critical explorations is to further enhance our consciousness of the multidimensional challenges of the present, both material and discursive. At the same time, such endeavours are also part of a larger network of critical thinking which is vital for the cultural, affective and imaginative well-being of humanity as a whole which remains imperilled by the networks of empire, capital and racial and religious fanaticism. As educational systems around the world, especially humanities and social sciences, face the onslaught of instrumental rationality and experience an attendant colonisation of lifeworlds, in Habermas' terms, it is all the more essential for us to keep alive the horizons of critical thought which must not be conquered by utilitarian logic of one kind or another. With the cooperation of our contributors and authors, we too hope to keep such horizons visible for the foreseeable future.

1

PROVINCIALIZING ENGLAND: VICTORIAN DOMESTICITY AND THE COLONIAL GAZE

KRISHNA SEN

"Man […] should not merely realize the fact of differences […]. Travelling reaches its best truth when through it we extend our spiritual ownership in return for our gift of sympathy"– so said Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in 'Illuminated Travel Literature' (716), his 1925 English review of Count Hermann Keyserling's Travel Diary of a Philosopher. Tagore's own extensive travel narratives about his journeys across the globe (not yet translated into English from the original Bengali) are luminous examples of empathetic travel informed by lively intellectual curiosity about unfamiliar cultures. The rubric of travel writing generally suggests colonizing movements from West to East: this essay will focus travelogues by Tagore and others that subvert such power relations as they move from East to West.

The template of imperial travel was very different from Tagore's ideal of cultural interchange. Said has famously defined this template –"European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient … during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said 3). Greenblatt (1991) shows how this discursive (and actual) domination in terms of othering and marginalization extended to the whole of the non-West from as far back as the early modern period. Mary Louise Pratt's Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992) embeds the reductive Western gaze in the very title, privileges "a Eurocentric form of global, or as I call it, planetary consciousness" (5), explores how "travel and exploration writing produced the 'rest of the world' for the European reader" (5-6; emphasis in the original), and defines 'transculturation' as the overdetermined cultural transformation experienced by the colonized as they interact with the colonizer in the "contact zone" (6). For Pratt the fixed poles of these contact zones are the Western "traveler" and the non-Western "travelee" (7). Clearly, there is no space within this axiomatic frame for the travelee to turn traveller, or for the gazee to become a gazer. The compendious Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing (2002) has only two cursory references (without detailed analysis) to Olaudah Equiano and Dean Mahomed as "non-Europeans sufficiently Anglicised" to write travel narratives (254-5; emphasis added), and does not, even for the recode, mention any other non-European travelogue.

By contrast, Tim Youngs includes two non-Western travel accounts in his 2006 edited volume on nineteenth century travel writing, asserting that "It would be wrong to think of nineteenth-century travel only in terms of an outward movement away from Britain" (13). This is a welcome recognition of what Michael H. Fisher felicitously terms the "counterflows" (Fisher 2004) of colonial travel from East to West. A major segment of this reverse travel in the imperial era originated from the Indian subcontinent. Fisher (2007) notes, "Indian men and women have been traveling to England and settling there since about 1600, roughly as long as Englishmen have been sailing to India. Most historians of England, India and colonialism, however, tend to neglect accounts of and by Indian travelers" (153). But not all Indian travellers became partially acculturated settlers, and, as will be seen elow, visitors from the colonial margin subjected the metropolitan centre to exacting scrutiny.

The two earliest Indian travelogues on Britain were in Persian (the court language of the Mughals) by court functionaries travelling on official business. Mirza Sheikh I'tesamuddin (1730-1800) wrote The Wonders of Vilayet: Being the Memoir originally in Persian of a Visit to France and Britain in 1765 ('Vilayet' is Persian for England). Mirza Abu Taleb Khan (1752-1896) composed Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan in Asia, Africa and Europe (1799-1803), written by himself in

the Persian language (2 Volumes). These two volumes were translated by Charles Stewart in 1810 and 1814 respectively, while James Edward Alexander published an abridged English version of The Wonders of Vilayet in 1827. But two nineteenth-century Urdi travelogues by Yusuf Khan Kambalposh (c. 1830-90), The Journey of Yusuf Khan Kambalposh to the Land of the Englishmen (1847) and How Strange is England (1873), were translated only in 2014 by Mushirul Hasan and Nishat Zaidi. A large corpus of Bengali travelogues to England still remains untranslated. The earliest English travelogue on Britain from India was by the Armenian immigrant Joseph Emin (1726-1809), Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, an Armenian, Written in English by Himself (1792). But the first Indian author of an English travelogue on Britain was Sake (i.e. Sheikh) Dean Mahomed (1759-1851), The Travels of Dean Mahomed, A Native of Patna in Bengal (1794). Within a half century there were more English narratives, such as those by Ardeseer Cursetjee in 1840, Jehangir Nowroji and Hirjibhoy Merwanji in 1841, and Munshi Mohanlal in 1846. Post-1857, English and vernacular travel texts proliferated, including English accounts by renowned figures like Gandhi and Nehru.

There is, however, a marked difference in travelogues from the Company era, and those from the post-1857 colonial era when the subcontinent was ruled directly from England till its independence in 1947. The Com-

pany era is often described as pre-colonial, but this is not entirely accurate. The British East India Company wielded enormous power from around 1757, and its Governors-General directly or indirectly controlled large swathes of upper India through a colonial-type administration, until the formal inception of the 'British Raj' in 1858. This is no mere historical quibble. The greater attraction of England over other European destinations for Indians was directly linked to the British East India Company's ascendancy over the French, Dutch, Portuguese and Danish East India Companies. Yet Company-era voyagers lacked the prior mental map of England that oriented their colonial successors.

This dichotomy can be illustrated by comparing I'tesamuddin's Vilayet or Abu Taleb Khan's Travels with the earliest of Tagore's several accounts of England. Both courtiers hailed from a highly developed Indo-Persian Islamic culture, but had little knowledge of "Firinghee nations" (i.e. Europe; Vilayet 87). I'tesamuddin performs fascinating acts of reverse cultural translation as he encounters unfamiliar Western ways. A devout Mustlim whose religion forbids imaging of the Divine, he constructs the West as the idol-worshipping Other: 'The Portuguese built a fort in Balagarh [modern Bandel near Calcutta] […] Together with the fort […] the Portuguese built a church where they began worshipping idols of Christ, Mary and various Christian saints' (ibid. 23).

On reaching 'Vilayet' he piquantly glocalizes England, as when he appropriates the University of Oxford within his own socio-cultural field, with astronomy sliding into astrology:

> Oxford […] is the seat of an ancient madrassah [i.e. Islamic school] […] One of the libraries contained many superb statues and pictures […] purchased from abroad, some for as much as ten to twenty thousand rupees. […] The English hold artists in such high regard that they are prepared to pay lakhs of rupees for a painting or a drawing […] I also saw an astrolabe […] with astrological markings, with whose help it is possible to determine auspicious times (ibid. 71, 72, 75).

Abu Taleb Khan inverts the imperial binary of cosmopolitan West/ provincial East when he remarks that England is "placed in a corner of the globe where there is no coming and going of foreigners" whereas "in Asia […] people of various nations dwell in the same city" (264). Tagore first stayed in England as a student at University College, London, for several months in 1878 when he was just seventeen. His copious correspondence with family and friends back home was later collected as Europe Probashir Patra (Letters from a Sojourner in Europe, 1881). The young poet's bubbling excitement clearly derives from his exposure to Western texts while still in India:

> I had imagined the British Isles to be so compact and the English people to be so enlightened that, before I came

> here, I thought that England would reverberate from one end to another with Tennyson's sonorous strains; I felt that wherever I went in this tiny island, Gladstone's powerful oratory, Max Müller's Vedic wisdom, Tyndall's scientific maxims, Carlyle's wondrous utterances, Renan's political philosophy, would be ringing in my ears. I imagined English people, young and old, as relishing nothing but intellectual pleasures. (Sojourner 242-3; my translation).

So while I'tesamuddin and Abu Taleb reduce England to their own terms, the young Tagore takes England apparently on England's terms.

How did Tagore know England even before he went there? Gauri Viswanathan (1981) attributed this to "the ideology of British education" in India (11). Viswanathan is referring to Lord Macaulay's controversial 'Minute on Indian Education' (1835) that sought to imbricate Indians within Europe's "planetary consciousness." By replacing traditional Sanskrit and Persian scholarship with an English-based Anglocentric educational curriculum, Macaulay attempted to fashion "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect [who] may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern" (116-17). The policy was widely enforced post-1857, and with it the British Government created a cadre of English-speaking, Western-oriented, urbanized professional Indians cutting across caste barriers,

who were dependent on the colonial administration for their livelihood and social standing. This completely new social formation, an upwardly mobile Indian middle class based on education and merit rather than on caste and inherited wealth, had little in common with the traditional orders of the feudal rich and rural poor. As Krishna Sen notes, English was "its point of entry into what is known in the West as the 'Civil Society' and it looked to England to structure its evolving social codes" (126). Journeying to England was a rite of passage for this aspiring (and sometimes deracinated) bourgeoisie. And like Tagore, they all carried a hyperreal imaginary of England mediated by English books.

It is precisely here that a historic interface occurs between empire and Victorian domesticity. Visiting England provided colonial Indians with a singular opportunity to meet the people they called 'Britishers' on a fairly equal footing, bearing in mind the gulf that separated 'natives' from 'sahibs' (i.e. Britons) back in the colony (one need only recall the hauteur of several English characters in Forster's A Passage to India and Orwell's Burmese Days). Everyday scenes and occurrences, the conduct of acquaintances and strangers - these were the realities to be measured against the hyperreal imaginary. So for all that metropolitan London overwhelmed these visitors with its magnificence, what they recorded most assiduously were the lives and mores, very different from their own, of ordinary

Victorians, people like themselves. Simonti Sen quotes in her own translation from an anonymous 1880s Bengali travelogue: "We have a special relationship with the city [London]; therefore […] we are not merely interested in her sights – we wanted to closely observe the manners, morals, social conditions, ethics, education and intelligence of her people" (93). Is this not the travelee becoming the traveller, and the gazee a gazer?

Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay (2002) dismisses these travelogues as mere colonial mimicry, arguing that both secular travel writing (as opposed to pilgrimage narratives) and the individualized perspective dating from Europe's early modern era were colonial imports into India. But leading nineteenth-century Bengali litterateur Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) had already anticipated and countered such historicist critiques. In his English essay, "Confessions of a Young Bengal" (1872), he had indeed admitted: "The very idea that external life is a worthy subject of the attention of a rational being, except in its connection with religion, is, amongst ourselves, unmistakably of English origin" (43). Yet Bankim (who famously indigenized the novel, a Western form) also highlighted the cultural translatability of the "travelling genre" and the situated autonomy of the colonial gaze in his 1873 Bengali review of Romesh Chunder Dutt's English travelogue, Three Years in Europe, 1868-1871:

> A volume like this is extremely necessary. Knowledge of English has enabled us to learn much about England from English books […] But English books and epistles are composed by English men. They depict England as it appears to English eyes. They do not portray England as it would appear to our eyes. […] Monsieur Taine has published a book on England written from his own French perspective. By reading it, we apprehend how dissimilar a Frenchman's perception of England is from an Englishman's. […] So if a Frenchman's England is so divergent, then it is easy to imagine how very different a Bengali's view of England might be. (444; my translation)

The titles of some late nineteenth-century Indian travelogues in English foreground this counterdiscursive positioning of the centre (rather than the margin) as the object of inspection – Behramji M. Malabari's Indian Eye on English Life, or Rambles of a Pilgrim Reformer (1891), Rev. T.B. Pandian's England to an Indian Eye, or Pictures from an Indian Camera (1897), G. Parameswaran Pillai's London and Paris through Indian Spectacles (1897). Fisher (2006) observes: "Indians were beginning to 'reverse the gaze' of Orientalism and analyze Britain based on their own direct observations […]" (90). It is interesting that Antoinette Burton says of her three voyagers "Like [Pandita] Ramabai's and [Cornelia] Sorabjee's correspondence, Malabari's narrative […] is a kind of ethnographic text, offering yet another close reading of English civilization, and especially of London life, in the late-Victorian period" (5).

It may seem strange to speak of ethnographic work by colonized Others, since nineteenth-century ethnography is usually associated with the totalizing of Asian and African cultures by the magisterial European gaze. Like many contemporary Indian visitors, Behramji Malabari (1853-1912) differentiates between the courteous Englishman at home and the churlish Englishman in the colony (67-9), but he goes further and nuances the issue of ethnographic 'knowledge' of the metropolis by boldly assuming parity for the periphery. While "contrasting the New Civilization [of the West] with the Old [of the East]" (Indian Eye vii), he neither extols nor excoriates his colonial masters, the people of Victorian England, but proposes "a friendly conversation, in open council, with Englishmen on the one hand and Indians on the other" (vii). This postulate for an affable intercourse subtly undermines the ground of empire: "We should be treated as equals. […] you must not give us less than our due; and pray do not give us more either. […] [and] the same equal treatment in the case of the nation as in the case of individuals" (65).

Hailing from Bombay, Malabari was a journalist, newspaper editor, and leading activist for women's emancipation in India (fittingly, The Indian Eye is dedicated "To the Women of England in Grateful Remembrance of 1890"). His first-person narrative conflates the viewing I/eye, staging the colonial viewer as subject, and portraying Victorian England, his object of inquiry, with humour, irony and pathos:

> What strikes an Asiatic most, on getting out at Victoria Station, is the noise and bustle about him. Every man and woman […] seems to be full of life. […] I happened to have read a good deal about this, but what I actually see here exceeds my anticipation.
>
> And yet the eye, if it can observe well, may detect a good deal of suffering among the gay or busy crowd. Here is some fashionable cad nearly driving over a fragile old woman. She rushes trembling to the constable's side. There goes a knot of boy-sweepers, running about between carriages and even under them, in order to keep the ground clean. You could hardly expect greater agility from mice or squirrels. […] Few respectable women, I find, will venture out into some of these streets towards evening […] so great is the rush therein of the unworthy ones of their sex […] The back parts of not a few streets seem to be given up to a Godless population, foreign and English. A large percentage of this, I should think, represents virtue first betrayed, and then crowded out, by vice. (27-29)

He is quick to note the dark underside of empire - acute poverty underlying "the keen pursuit of pleasure or business" (30):

> Poor as India is, I thank God she knows not much of the poverty to which parts of Great Britain have been accustomed […] Men and women living in a chronic state of emaciation, till they can hardly be recognised as human, picking up food that even animals will turn away from […] It is in winter, more than six months of the year, that you see the poverty of England at its worst. […] And side by side with such heart-rending scenes of misery, one

> sees gorgeously dressed luxury flaunting in the streets, dragged along by horses better fed and better looked after than many a human family in the same neighbourhood. (80-81)

He is disturbed by public displays of drunkenness among both men and women:

> Water is about the last thing the average Britisher thinks of for a beverage. […] He must have something stronger, you know. […] Mr. and Mrs. John Bull take a drop because it is so cold, then because they are so tired, or grieving, or disappointed. The habit grows on many till the victims are reduced to a state verging on lunacy. (50)

Malabari is sympathetic towards the impecunious "organ-grinders" (235) and good-natured about the impudent "street arabs of London […] dirty unkempt little urchins" (237) who mock his Indian attire. But he has nothing bur censure for fashionable cads and flaunting luxury: "It is the present that we live in, the self that we live for. […] If this be your English culture of the nineteenth century, let us remain ignorant in India […] [and] worship her stone-gods. […] The worship of self is the worst form of idolatry" (75). He is equally disillusioned after attending debates on India in the Houses of Parliament– "In this huge struggle for success which typifies the political life of England, what chance is there for her far-off Dependency? God help India!" (225).

Yet there are many aspects of the New Civilization that Malabari cannot but prefer to the Old – "Everything speaks of freedom for them [women] here – they have free movement and a free voice. Woman is a presence and a power in Europe. In Asia, woman is a vague entity, a nebulous birth absorbed in the shadow of artificial sexuality" (22). A natural corollary is the difference between domesticity in England and India:

> The life in a decent English home is a life of equality among all the members. This means openness and mutual confidence. Wife and husband are one at home … The children stand in the same position with the parents as the latter stand to each other. … All this is different in India (62).

Most of Chapter III (62 ff.) demonstrates how domestic equality and the constructive role of the English mother in bringing up her children to be self-reliant and enterprising (both unlike India) constitute the bedrock of English modernity. Ironically, England also exposes Malabari's innate Indian conservatism. This champion of women's rights is patently uneasy about unescorted women out of doors (27-28), flirtation in public (232), and especially working wives (73) whom he holds responsible for broken homes! There is no question, however, about his deep appreciation for England, which he does not hesitate to proclaim: "damp, dirty, noisy London" is "Mecca […] Medina […] Persepolis […] Buddha-Gaya […] Benares […] Jerusalem" (2) for

the colonial visitor because of the plethora of illuminating experiences it offers – "Great in varieties, great in contrarieties […] I sit entranced, watching thy divergent forces" (245).

Malabari's refusal to be trapped within the colonizer/colonized binary, his sardonic self-portrayal as an ingenuous provincial beating his "native tom-tom" (245) in the seat of empire, and his witty and sophisticated observations in polished English, scarcely fit the stereotype of the aborigine awaiting the gift of Western civilization. A large number of nineteenth-century Indian voyagers to England were, in fact, neither aides nor employees of 'sahibs,' but independent travellers prosperous enough to afford the long sea voyage as first class cabin passengers, very often to take higher degrees at prestigious universities.

Several commentators identify these people solely as "the Anglicised Indian service elite" (Fisher 2006: 90). But this is to forget those enlightened Indians unaffected by Macaulay's educational reforms who had close links with England unlike I'tesamuddin and Abu Taleb Khan. One thinks of men like the social and religious reformer Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) and reformer and business tycoon Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846; grandfather of Rabindranath). Both began by serving the British East India Company before fashioning spectacular careers of their own. Both men, especially

Rammohun, were significant participants, even before they went to England, in transnational networks of intellectual exchange that impacted England as well as India through the burgeoning print culture: Lynn Zastoupil records this important non-imperial interface between centre and margin in her provocatively titled Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain (2010). Rammohun was in England between 1830 an 1833; Dwarkanath visited twice in the 1840s using his personal steam ship. Both were greatly respected. Dwarkanath dined with Queen Victoria (later also with King Louis Philippe of France); Rammohun's close friend, the Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, proposed his name for Britain's House of Commons, but the idea was ahead of its time (Zastoupil 152). Cosmopolitan friendships between liberal Britons and educated Indians, running parallel with colonial oppression and racism, culminated in the election of Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), a Bombay businessman with major investments in Britain and a co-founder in 1885 of the Indian National Congress that fought for India's independence, as the first Asian Member of England's House of Commons (1892-1895), after successfully campaigning as a Liberal Party candidate from the London borough of Central Finchley. These complex and contrasting personal/political trajectories in the England-India relationship explain how Malabari or Rabindranath Tagore could assume positions of equality with their British counterparts despite com-

ing from the colony. Nobel laureate Tagore's galaxy of close friends included the most illustrious authors, artists and intellectuals of late Victorian England. Similarly Indian English novelist Mulk Raj Anand's 1920s memoir, Conversations in Bloomsbury, chronicles his affable relationship with eminent British Modernists.

Rabindranath Tagore visited England six times between 1878 and 1930. These experiences are recorded in four Bengali prose works – two travelogues, Letters from a Sojourner in Europe (Europe Probashir Patra, 1881) and Diary of a Traveller in Europe (Europe Jatrir Diary Parts I & II, 1891 & 1893), and two memoirs, Memories of My Life (Jibansnriti, 1912) and Treasures of the Road (Pather Sanchoy, 1912). As the earlier quotation from Sojourner indicates, Tagore's initial ideas about England were filtered through its literature. This is reiterated ten years later in Diary of a Traveller (so it must have been a deep-seated sentiment) when he wryly apostrophizes London:

> Alright, I admit that you are a great city in a great country, your power and wealth are unlimited. […] But it is impossible to find here those whom I met daily through your literature. And then one labours under the illusion that one will encounter these 'friends' in the highways and byways of London. But here I find only Englishmen, all foreign to me […] (Diary 400; my translation)

The teenager of Sojourner is amazed that "Dr. P, who is very educated, knows only that a poet called Shelley was born in his country, but he heard for the first time from me that Shelley wrote a play called Cenci and a poem called Epipsychidion!" (Sojourner 246; my translation). In fact, like several contemporaries who had also imagined the English as a race apart, he is taken aback by the humdrum nature of Victorian life:

> I have been sadly disillusioned. The women are busy with dress and fashion, the men with their work, and life goes on as usual – the only excitement from time to time is over politics. […] There are wine shops galore. Whenever I go out I spot masses of shoe stores, tailors, butchers, toy shops, but alas, very few book shops – and this never ceases to astonish me. (ibid. 242-3, 245; my translation)

To Tagore, London is all swirling crowds, inordinate haste, and rushing motorcars and trains (ibid. 244-5), and this worship of speed startles him on every visit: "The motor car is a new phenomenon here. […] With what gusto the English people manipulate time and space! […] The slightest error is fatal" (Treasures of the Road 901-2; my translation). Like Malabari, he is the butt of jeering street-arabs ("Jack, look at the blackies! [in English]" [Sojourner 252]), and is aghast at the pollution from London's innumerable belching chimneys (ibid. 323). Like Malabari, again, he is shocked by the widespread poverty that is harshest in winter (ibid.

258-9), and by the hardship of life in England: "I have never seen such a struggle for survival anywhere else. … Here only the 'fittest survive' [in English]" (ibid. 245; my translation). Some of his best memories of London are the National Gallery (ibid. 397), the theatre (ibid. 399), Gladstone and O'Donnell declaiming in the House of Commons (ibid. 255-6), and also that even the very poor were very honest (Memories 78).

The brash young observer of Sojourner is caustic about upper-class Victorian women:

> Though women here are free, their ultimate goal is marriage, and basically this is not very different from India. They may get a good education unlike our girls, but they are also polished up to become good housewives. When a girl reaches the age of marriage, she is dressed up like a shiny doll to make an effective display in the shop window of the marriage market, and at the balls and parties. There is nothing as sad as being an 'old maid' [in English] (ibid. 299; my translation)

However, he readily concedes that "the class of women known as 'old maids' [in English] are extremely conscious of their social responsibilities. Temperance meeting, Working Men's Society [in English] etc. - in all such clamorous organisations they may be seen busy in the background" (ibid. 243; my translation). As opposed to the "fashionable dolls," the "house-keeper," "nurse," "governess" and "housemaid" (all in English)

work tirelessly in wealthy homes. Tagore is surprised (coming from a hot country where baths are essential) that "a chief task [of the household help] is filling baths, as bathing is becoming fashionable in England" (ibid. 297; my translation). But middle class housewives without such help have many chores, and the narrator especially compliments their spotless kitchens and domestic economy (ibid. 299-300).

Like Malabari, Tagore is impressed by the equality of husband and wife in English homes. And young as he is, he offers a shrewd judgment on the truism that Englishmen were different in England and in India – "They [most 'sahibs'] do not come from polite, that is, really good families. […] English people from good families have beautiful minds" (ibid. 258-9; my translation). For Tagore, the prime example of beautiful English minds is the family he lodges with in London:

> Mr. K, Mrs. K, their four daughters, two sons, three maids, myself and Toby the dog make up this household. […] Mr. K is a doctor. […] His conduct is as amiable as his appearance is pleasant. […] Mrs K. genuinely cares about me. She scolds me if I go out without enough warm clothes. She coaxes me to eat more if she thinks I am not eating well. The English are terrified of coughs and colds. If I even cough twice, she stops my daily bath, rustles up mountains of medicines, and insists on a hot footbath at bedtime. […] After breakfast Mrs. K supervises the housework till almost one thirty, assisted by the eldest Miss K. […] The second daughter, Miss J, dusts the

> furniture while the housemaid sweeps the floor. […] The third daughter, Miss A, does all the mending. Now Miss J is relaxing by the fire, reading Green's History of the English People [in English]. […] After dinner we retire to the drawing room at seven. Sometimes they request me to sing English songs which I have learned from Miss A, while she plays the piano. Then we take turns to read out from books, some days till 11.30-12.00 at night. […] The youngest daughter, Ethel, is very fond of me. She calls me 'Uncle Arthur' [in English]. […] The other day Miss N told me that the Misses J and A had been horrified that an Indian was coming to stay in their home. […] The day I was to arrive they went away to a relative's house and didn't come back for a week. … Anyway, I am very happy here now. Everyone is a good friend, and Ethel won't stay away a minute from her 'Uncle Arthur.'
> (Sojourner 333-7; my translation)

These warm words of appreciation conclude the Sojourner.

The Diary covers several European destinations. It has less of the quicksilver observation of the first-time traveller, and is more of a philosophical meditation on the possibility of universal human values in a world fractured by colonialism. Yet Tagore has lost none of his sharp wit. He now responds differently to the tumult of London, with an impish reversal of terminology – "London is cacophonous to us, but not to the 'natives' [in Bengali, with single quotes] of London" (Diary 401; my translation). But what Tagore really took back from

Victorian England was not just memories, but Britain's strong intellectual tradition of humanist and liberal thought (Treasures 905-921), qualities that he inculcated in his ashrama-school at Santiniketan that is now Visva Bharati University. A feminine perspective on Victorian domesticity would provide an interesting contrast. By the late nineteenth century some Indian women were accompanying their husbands to England. The well-educated Tagore wives and daughters were great travellers, coming as they did from a liberal and affluent family. The lady who spent most time in England (about two and a half years from 1874) was Jnadanandini Devi, wife of Rabindranath's older brother Satyendranath who successfully cleared the tough British Civil Service examination. In Bilater Katha (About Vilayet; 'Bilat' is the Bengali pronunciation of Persian 'Vilayet'), her reminiscences as transcribed by her daughter, we find the following vignette about the solicitude of ordinary English people: "Miss Donkin, the English lady, helped me a lot during the sickness of my children. She […] was always going around helping others. When the condition of the children became very serious, she even rushed out in her nightdress to call the doctor" (Mandal 98).

One of the most detailed narratives about England from a feminine viewpoint is A Bengali Lady in England (Englandey Bangamahila, 1885) by Mrs. Krishnabhabini Das (1862-1919), who spent thir-

teen years in England with her husband from 1876 to 1889. Her life there was comfortable. London was still an affordable city - for 25 shillings a weeks, inclusive of all meals provided by the landlady, one could rent a beautifully furnished apartment in a respectable neighbourhood (40). Mrs. Das's first impression of London is not of crowds or cars but of myriads of brightly-lit shops brimming with tempting goods (39). The second strong impression is of Sunday mornings when the ceaseless traffic is still, all the church bells ring in unison, and well-dressed groups walk to Mass, "mostly women […], the young girls strutting in their finery since they go to church also in search of husbands […], but needless to say, this is no day of rest for housemaids" (46; my translation). Most unfortunately, however, "wine shops vastly outnumber churches. […] Women as well as men prostrate themselves before the Goddess of Liquor with horrifying abandon" (90; my translation).

As a homemaker herself, Mrs. Das has a sharp eye for the details of domesticity. Chapter 18 describes the daily household routines in wealthy, middle-class and working-class homes. Mrs. Das especially itemises meals in detail. In well-to-do homes live-in cooks spend hours preparing elaborate menus, but food gets scantier with the income. She is intrigued by local customs: "There is a strange system of knocking on the door in English households. Friends must knock three

to four times. Tradesmen and postmen knock twice. Domestic servants should only knock once. This way the people inside know exactly who to expect when they open the door" (137; my translation). Like her male counterparts she regrets the absence in India of some English domestic practices. "Here the man devotes himself to earning his living. […] the woman is the real queen of the household. […] Unlike India, women appear freely before male guests. […] Less affluent women actually work outside the home in stores, offices and schools. […] Women here are not like the British wives in India who are luxury-loving, lazy and haughty" (73-5; my translation). She appreciates the after-diner custom of the whole family congregating in the drawing room for music, reading and conversation, and laments: "How unfortunate that in India, men segregate themselves from the women and children and never share these warm family moments together" (136; my translation). And like all Indian visitors Mrs. Das especially commends the English traits of industry and enterprise: "English men are hardy and self-reliant and try to inculcate these qualities in their sons. Unlike Indian families where sons are always indulged and spoilt, an English father will encourage his son to earn his own living and not depend on the father" (53; my translation). England has its flaws too: "Wealth is the Englishman's God. […] Their class system is as virulent as India's caste system. Rich families will not associate with poor families. […] They are not

too eager to help even relatives in distress. They usually treat their servants well and give them enough to eat, but never dine or chat with them" (48-50; my translation; emphasis added). Nevertheless, Mrs. Das is ecstatic about the position of English women: "I cannot tell you how delighted I feel to see scores of girls going to school and college, even up to their twenties, just like the boys. They are allowed to go out alone. […] They even go to gymnasiums like the boys. This makes them strong and independent, but less graceful than Indian women. […] I believe that if Hindu ladies were given so much freedom, they would be no less efficient than English women" (75, 78; my translation). Indeed, after returning to India, Mrs Das dedicated herself to the upliftment of Bengali women – her gift to them from England.

The travellers discussed here demonstrate the diversity of the counterflow from India– I'tesamuddin and Abu Taleb Khan were Muslims of Persian descent, Malabari was a Gujarati Parsee and a Zoroastrian, the Tagores were Bengalis of the Brahmo Samaj, and Mrs. Das was a Bengali Hindu. None of them spoke from the position of the inferior Other. However, not all Indian travellers reacted in the same way. Bhikhu Parekh has identified four types of colonial Indian responses to England –"traditionalists" who abjured everything Western in their Anglophobia, "critical traditionalists" who adopted a few Western elements, "modernists" who wor-

shipped everything Western in their Anlophilia, and "critical modernists" who advocated a creative synthesis of India and the West (Parekh 42-3). The Indian counterflow had its share of Parekh's uncritical Anglophile "modernists." Simonti Sen (107) cites Calcutta's Trailokyanath Mukherjee who virtually endorsed the "Orientalist typology" of progressive West/retrograde East in his 1889 English travelogue, A Visit to Europe. Malabari, Tagore and Mrs. Das critique both England and India while recommending a productive fusion of both cultures, and 'provincializing' or indigenizing the metropolis by appropriating it within their own epistemology of reverse transculturation. The act of provincializing problematizes colonial binaries. Thus Jyotirmala Devi, a Bengali woman student in 1920s London who fictionalized her experiences in Bengali short stories, shows a young Bengali lodger fondly calling her elderly English landlady, "mother" (115): all older women are customarily regarded as mother-figures and addressed as "mother" in Bengal.

'Provincializing' as a trope for colonial agency is taken from Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential book, Provincialzing Europe (2000). Chakrabarty contends that "The project of provincializing Europe … is to write into the history of modernity, the ambivalences, contradictions" (43) of peripheral reception. The premise, shared by many Asian historians, is that colonial margins domesticated (and not transplanted) monolog-

ic Eurocentric modernity, evolving local modernities with multiple temporalities and valences. Jinhua Dai's translated Foreword to Xiaomei Chen's Occidentalism (1995) rejects "a single [Western] cultural logic such as modernization" for post-Mao China, opting for "an alternative modernization" instead (ix). Partha Chatterjee (1999) rebuts Benedict Anderson's model of nation-building, claiming that "The real space of modern life is a heterotopia" (131). Ultimately, the interface between Victorian domesticity and the colonial gaze did not operate along any single axis, either of Pratt's hierarchies or of Tagore's reciprocity, but along a spectrum of positive and negative axes emanating from a variety of intellectual and ideological locations, and creating a complex ecosystem of intersecting cultures.

Notes

1. Pioneering work from the 1980s onwards by Rozina Visram (1986. 1987), Antoinette Burton (1998) and Fisher himself has extended the frontiers of colonial travel studies, though their discussions solely focused non-Western narratives in English. However, it is their initiative that encouraged explorations of counterflow narratives in non-Western languages by scholars like Simonti Sen (2004) and Alam and Subrahmanyam (2007).

2. The reverse transculturation of Britain by its Indian migrants over the centuries has been recorded in two

major interdisciplinary projects sponsored by England's Arts and Humanities Research Council, "Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad" (2007-10) and "Indian British Connections" (2011-12).

3. 'Lakh' is 100,000.

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2

ARBOREAL ARTICULATIONS: TREES, PLANTS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF LANGUAGE IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S FICTION

PUSPA DAMAI

"We are tired of trees," say Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus,* adding that we "should stop believing in trees, roots and radicles" for "[t]hey have made us suffer too much (15)." Deleuze and Guattari are neither indifferent to the environment nor are they unaware of the insistence of suffering in human life. They have written extensively about the ethics and aesthetics of ecosophy (*The Three Ecologies* 41), and the masochist pain of the body without organs, "the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable" body with death as its motor (*Anti-Oedipus* 8). If pain, suffering and death constitute the essential "affect" of a body without organs, then why do these thinkers equate trees to death and suffering, and believe that we must find a different system of belief in which trees, roots and radicles hold no sacrosanctity? How have trees made us suffer? What in trees

inflicts pain on us? Why do the philosophers sound ecophobic to blame trees instead of the destructive political ideologies and technological inventions leading to disasters and tragedies such as the atom bomb, Chernobyl, colonialism, and the Holocaust for being the "root" cause of suffering?

Deleuze and Guattari's intriguing correlation between trees and suffering results from their identification of a few key problematic ideological features in an arborescent culture. Those features include hierarchy, rootedness, repetition reaffirming the origin, and sameness at the expense of difference, which in turn lead the philosophers to equate arborescence to imperialism. Linguistics – one of the sciences shoring up the ideology of arborescence – is linked up with "Oedipus" and characterized as imperialism. Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the sign speaks the language of an "Oriental despot" in which "the signifier is elevated to the concept corresponding to the acoustic image," which eventually in a self-serving manner "recomposes [the transcendental sovereignty of] the signifier" (*Anti-Oedipus* 207). Instead of promising meaning, Saussure's signifier lays a trap to enchain the speaker in the familial prison house of language. Against this self-referential, rooted, despotic and torturous voice of an arborescent signifier, Deleuze and Guattari posit a rhizomatic activism of grass and plants.

If trees represent imperialism, then why do many postcolonial societies deem trees as sacred signifiers of their struggle for freedom? Why do historians consider Gandhi's vegetarianism, nature cure and his ecologically informed pro-village politics to be the moral force behind India's movement for independence? Is Deleuze and Guattari's binary of trees and plants analytically ineffective to illustrate the opposition between imperialism and postcoloniality? Is their theory out of sync with history, and potentially useless in marshalling a politics of freedom and decolonization?

One may also ask: is there something missing from postcolonial politics of nationalism and Gandhian politics of "villageism" and vegetarianism? In what ways, if any, does Deleuze and Guattari's theory enable us to intervene into and refuel the conspicuously fallible and faltering movement of postcoloniality? We have already seen the gains and promises of critiquing "postcolonial reason" from a subalternist position in Gayatri Spivak's works. Yet Spivak's critique and method [like other "human-centered" "postcolonial criticism" (Huggan 702)] remain essentially anthropocentric. How would a critique of postcolonially rooted nationalism look from a non-anthropocentric point of view which engages not with the culture, the consciousness and the voice of the subalterns, but with their land and the issue of survival through, and co-existence, with trees and plants? I argue that Mahasweta Devi's works

enable us to wage this critique by at once exposing the colonialist identification of natives with wilderness and critiquing the nationalist exclusion and marginalization of indigenous population and outcastes.

Against the self-enclosed and torturous space of an arborescent prison-house which excludes difference through hierarchy and genealogical tracing, rhizomorphous grass and plants "connect any point to any other point," thereby opening "multiple entryways and exits" and enabling us to live "politically. . . with all the forces of his or her desire" (*A Thousand* 21, 13). Trees cause the death of politics; plants make politics possible. Trees torture like oriental despots, or Western colonialists and imperialists; plants unleash an intense politics of decolonization. Though "Deleuze does not 'directly speak' with the thinkers and writers of the postcolony," he, with Guattari, provides a very complicated theoretical map for outlining an anti-imperialist politics and rhizomatic and post-colonial activism (Bignall and Patton 1).

It would be erroneous to assume that the binary between trees and plants or arborescence and rhizomes parallels the opposition between imperialism and postcolonialism. Deleuze and Guattari clarify that trees also function as rhizomes, such as Buddha's tree of knowledge. But the juxtaposition of Western arborescence and Eastern rhizomes ends right there, for *A Thousand*

Plateaus introduce a plateau in-between, which is not only "always in the middle" (21), a "multiplicity" (22,) but it also constitutes a fold which contains other folds within, for a "fold is always folded within a fold" (*The Fold* 6). This rhizomatic map of "history" allows the philosophers to explode the binary of Western colonialism/imperialism and Eastern "nativism" by locating a fold within the colonized society. *A Thousand Plateaus* invokes "the double-headed figure of the Rex and flamen, Raj and Brahman [sic], Romulus and Numa, Varuna and Mitra, the despot and the legislator" (351). This figure helps them draw a parallel between the Raj (colonizer) and the Brahmin (colonized), revealing a fold within, consisting of other "natives" and nomads excluded from the sovereign double-headedness of the Raj and the Brahmin. Devi's literary works and her political engagement are "grounded" on this fold, which provides the location of what can be termed as her grass-roots activism.

In comparison to Deleuze and Guattari's nomads dwelling on the fold or the plateaus, Devi's indigenes are more rooted, and their culture more arborescent. Her grass-roots activism resists colonialist depiction and displacement of natives as wild savages and their continuous internal colonization within a postcolonial society. Moving beyond Deleuze and Guattari's perceptive binary of trees and plants, Devi simultaneously reveals the suffering caused by trees and makes trees

and plants witnesses of that suffering. In juxtaposing imperial or colonialist arborescence and anti-colonial grass-roots activism in which trees and plants function as agents, Devi lends a voice to the suffering of those heard neither by the Raj nor by the Brahmins. She imagines a politics of "arboreal articulation" or grass-roots activism in which trees and plants are at once the voice of indigenous or tribal suffering, the agents witnessing that suffering, and the house of refuge for those who suffer. The question for her is not to reconcile "the Northern environmentalisms of the rich and the Southern environmentalisms of the poor" (Huggan and Tiffin 2); more important is to question both postcolonial theory and eco-criticism from within. Devi's eco-political enunciations reveal what according to some theorists is the primary goal of all eco-criticism: to be able to "talk about how differently various human groups conceptualize and relate to their environments" (Mukherjee 81).

In an interview with Spivak, Devi reveals that "India belonged to [tribals] long before the incursion of the Aryan speaking people. *The Ramayana.* . . seems to contain evidence of how they were oppressed, evicted from their homeland" (ix). If *The Ramayana* contains the testimony of tribal oppression and destruction by the Aryan speaking people, then imperialism in India neither started with the arrival of the British nor did it end with their departure. If the epics are the measures

of India's ongoing colonialism, they really reach epic proportion in their depiction of the bloodshed and cruelty inflicted upon non-Aryan tribals.

Unlike Deleuze and Guattari, Devi refuses to confine her analysis of colonialism to the binary of trees and plants. Unlike the philosophers – who believe that trees only represent the imperial politics of hierarchy, pain and suffering – the arboreal politics in Devi represents survival itself. Forest is not only a means of tribal livelihood which provides them "with food, shelter, timber and hunting," it is a being to ask forgiveness of. The Sobors, Devi notes, "will beg forgiveness if they are forced to fell a tree: You are a friend. I do this because my wife doesn't have any food" (Devi and Spivak x). The tribals do not humanize a tree, rather they believe that a tree is worth more than a human being. Devi reports that once a tribal told her: "'I need five rupees a day to buy rice. Ask me to fell a tree, I'll do it unwillingly, but I will do it. Ask me to chop off a head, I'll do it" (Devi and Spivak xviii-xix).

Devi's identification of tribal transvaluation of values in relation to humans and forest differs from Deleuze's ontological understanding in *Difference and Repetition*, which defines being as univocity, "a single voice of Being which includes all its modes, including the most diverse, the most varied, the most differentiated . . . said in a single and same sense of everything of

which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself" (36). Whereas Deleuze's ontological univocity contains diversity without losing its univocal sameness, Devi's hierarchical "ahumanism" puts trees before humans to unsettle ontology by articulating difference through the voice of the other. Devi's tribal conceptualizes Being not as univocity but as the voice of the other: the forest consisting of its trees, plants, flowers, roots, radicles, and rhizomes.

Theorizing about the voice of the other, Cathy Caruth recalls Tasso's *Jerusalem Liberated* in which, after killing his beloved Clorinda, Tancred wanders repentant into a strange, magical forest. When he slashes a tree with his sword, blood streams from the trunk and through the cut he hears Clorinda's voice, complaining that he has wounded her again. For Caruth, Tasso's tale reveals more than suffering's uncanny repetition. She believes that the story foregrounds "the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*" (2). While moving beyond Freud's theory of the repetition compulsion by adding the dimension of the voice Caruth overlooks a key component: the wound of the victim is not only the origin of the voice, the wounded victim is also a tree. What remains unclaimed, uncanny and unknowable in the testimony of the voice is that it comes from a tree. The articulation of Clorinda's suffering is made possible by the split or wound on the tree, a wound

which at once divides and connects the tree and the victim. This "wounded" and split voice of the forest which allows and enables the tribes in Devi's works to express their suffering is what I call arboreal articulation or grass-roots activism.

This becoming-tree-of-a-human-being represents an event of enunciation. Yet this event cannot be characterized as ecolinguistics. Describing the interdependence of language and environment, Edward Sapir asserts that the vocabulary of a language, together with its morphology and phonetic system, "clearly reflects the physical and social environment of its speakers" (228). Ecolinguistics for Greg Garrard identifies "examples of rhetoric" or tropes such as pollution (6). Alwin Fill believes that ecolinguistics "began with a metaphor" (43), and it "transfers concepts and methods from biological ecology to the study of language" (44). Devi's arboreal linguistic act, however, exceeds the limits of reflection, rhetoricity or metaphoricity inasmuch as this articulation is a performative event that seeks to blur the boundaries between a tree and a human being; it is an event in which one's wounds give expression to the other's suffering.

Articulation as becoming-tree-of-a-child

Devi's novella *The Armenian Champa Tree* takes us to 18th century colonial Calcutta ruled de facto by a

crafty landlord and a corrupt *kapalik*. On the other side of this imperial triumvirate are the Bunos. The Bunos for the Raj are a tribe of dacoits to be severely punished under the law; Janaki Singh, the landlord makes them easy targets for his greed and guile. The ascetic *kapaliks* threaten the very existence of the tribe with devious demands for animal and human sacrifice. As these autocratic authorities steady their unsparing political grip on the town, Devi follows a young Buno boy, Mato, who puts his own life at stake in order to save his pet goat, Arjun, from being sacrificed at the bidding of a *kapalik*. The juvenile protagonist and perspective enable Devi to contrast innocence and injustice and to demonstrate how absurd and inconsequential Mato's life, his affections, and the very existence of the Buno tribe might have looked to the figures of authority. At the outset of the story Devi notes:

> You have not read about these things any where. Not everything is written down in books. No book contains the story of Mato of the Buno quarters, of his goat Arjun, and of the old padri sahib of the church. Though not written down, it is all true. An old pundit once asked me, "Who says these are true?" This pundit does not believe in anything that is not written in books or palm-leaf manuscripts or inscribed on stone. (3)

Devi's unearthing of narratives not heard before puts the Bunos back on the map of Calcutta, a map which is being drawn and redrawn by East India Company, the

landlords and the Tantriks. The map, which reminds of Deleuze and Guattari's conflation of the Raj and the Brahmin, threatens to entirely erase the indigenous Bunos. Putting them back on the map would be impossible without the help of trees and plants. Not only that many areas of Calcutta back then were covered by "swamps, woodlands [and] marshy jungles" (2), but also that without the forest, the Bunos have no other means of survival.

Mato's mother (a deep black-skinned woman nicknamed Tigress) reminds her tribe that "[t]his jungle is our savior. Mind you, it is this jungle which has sustained us through the endless famine" (9-10). Mato is still breathing because a village "kabiraj" (apothecary) treated his congenital heart defect with herbal concoctions. Mato's haedine playmate, "an abandoned and vagabond goat," (like the Bunos themselves in the power equations of 18th century colonial India), is named Arjun, a character from *The Mahabharata* who spent thirteen years of exile in the forest. Arjun also is a herbal tree used in Ayurveda to treat cardiac ailments. Saving the goat for Mato equals to saving himself. Arjun, whose capering shenanigans provoke the wrath of a kapalik who demands the goat to be sacrificed, can be saved only by escaping to and through the forest. The culmination of Mato's line of flight is the titular Armenian Champa tree itself:

> Mato knows where he has to go now. The town of Behrampur is four miles away. There is an Armenian church there. In the garden of the Armenian Church, masses of tiny champa flowers bloom. Drawn by the champa blossoms, Mato has gone there countless times. Mato knows the priest of the church; he has seen him often, from a distance. If he could only enter the church compound, there would be nothing to fear. (23)

Deleuze and Guattari equate trees to suffering and pain; in Devi, trees provide escape and refuge. The philosophers believe that only plants offer the multiple and rhizomatic entry- and exit-ways for escape; Devi documents an arboreal multiplicity irreducible to any structures and unbendable by any hierarchies. While trees (e.g. Nose-Cut Off) directly assist Mato in hiding from his pursuers, the Armenian Champa functions as his *kalpavriksha* – a mythical tree capable of fulfilling one's wishes. By locating the champa tree inside a church, Devi hints at the issue of conversion for the tribes. What draws Mato to the church is not necessarily Christianity, but the idea that the champa tree would be his *kalpavriksha*. While still fleeing from the villagers in a mad pursuit of him due to the fact that a successful capture of the fugitive will land a bounty worth one solid gold coin from Janaki Singh, Mato visualizes the "wondrous champa flowers," and how he would walk on the "soft green grass" once he reaches the church (38). Mato's flight goes exactly according to his plan, except that while escaping from his pursuers

he was also running towards his own demise; in saving Arjun from being "butchered" by the kapalik, Mato would not be able to save his own life. When the town expanded, concludes Devi's narrator, flowers continue to blossom in the champa tree. They blossom now as well. At times, on wintry nights, when the fog merges with the full moon to create a shadowy atmosphere, they say that the tree looks like a small boy. The boy kneels with folded hands [as if he still had Arjun in his embrace], his face raised upwards. At times the tree looks like an old *padri*. As if he is standing silently with his head bent, and his hand resting upon somebody's head. (51-52) In this becoming-tree-of the child or becoming-child of the tree, Mato, like the Sobor, saves a tree at the cost of his own life.

A Thousand Plateaus argues that "the tree has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought;" in contrast, the "East presents a different figure: a relation to the steppe and the garden . . ., rather than forest and field; cultivation of tubers by fragmentation of the individual; a casting aside or bracketing of animal raising, which is confined to closed spaces or pushed out on to the steppes of the nomads" (18). In creating this neat binary between the East and the West, the tree and the plants, structures and rhizomes, the book articulates the difference between suffering or imperialism and desire and freedom. Yet its emphasis on non-segmentarity and immanence leads it to confuse

colonialism with freedom. If the "rhizome is made only of lines" as a way of relating to "the animal, the vegetal, the world, politics, things natural and artificial" (21), those lines also lead to America's "ever-receding limit, its shifting and displaced frontiers" (19). If the rhizomatic lines are a unique way of relating to all things natural and artificial, those very intensities blur the lines distinguishing freedom from settler colonialism. In contrast to the rhizomatic lines transmitting only short term memory and anti-genealogy, Devi's fiction invokes the memory of a Buno youth from the forgotten history of (post)colonial India. By referring to a multiplicity of trees, plants and herbs, and to equally polyvalent ways of relating to trees, animals and the world prevalent among indigenous tribes, Devi points to a politics of arboreal articulation which attends to difference. Instead of confining herself to a neat binary, in *The Armenian Champa Tree* as well as elsewhere, Devi invokes a subtle and unique form of "grassroots activism" grounded on a long history of "eco-political" activism in India, a politics which may be divided into five major stages: mythical, medical, nationalist, ecological and Indigenous.

Eco-politics in India

The mythical stage of India's eco-political activism has two main branches: the Vedic and Puranic narratives

foregrounding the eminence of trees, plants and forest in the universe; and the Scriptural sanctions on the division of *ashramas* of human life on the basis of one's proximity to forest. Many scholars studying ancient India cite the *Rgveda*: "what was the wood, what the tree . . . from which they fashioned forth the earth and heaven" (Kumar 13). Some scholars have referred to "the "asvattha" tree whose leaves are the Vedas" (Jain 33). Following this Vedic arborescence is the myth of the *kalpavriksha* or *kalpataru* or *kalpalata* or *kalpadrum* – the wish-fulfilling tree, which emerged from the oceanic depths during a game of churning between gods and demons. This mythical tree fulfils one's wishes; it enables one to have desires or wishes, and the nature of the tree is as mercurial and varied as people's wishes. Though it was originally all golden, it may take the form of a tree (*vriksha*) or a plant (*taru*) or a vine (*lata*) or the wood (drum), a shape-shifting arborescence which confounds any attempt to distinguish between trees and plants. The multifarious kalpavriksha represents the very articulation of desires and wishes; and as many poets and critics have noted, it also signifies the politics of false promises made by corrupt politicians. In a poem titled "Kalpavriksha," Ramdaras Mishra lambastes the politicians who promise anything to voters during election without intending to fulfill any of their commitments. Mishra writes: "This is the Capital [of India]/Where you would not be denied even heaven" (quoted in Yadav161, translation mine).

The second branch of the mythical eco-politics is the Hindu division of human life into four-stages or ashramas: *brahmacharya* (celibate apprenticehood); *grihastha* (householding); *vanprastha* (forest-dwelling) and *sanyas* (renunciation). Forest-dwelling is a bridge between the worldly life of house-holding and the ultimate goal of *moksha* through renunciation. These stages are applicable to the "twice born" only, as the other side of this four-fold classification of life and society – *varnashram* (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) – would exclude anyone other than the first three "castes" from the religious order of life. Is Hinduism's appropriation of *vanaprastha* for the twice-born a colonial move to claim the land and resources of the tribal and the indigenous? According this biopolitical administration of life, tribes undoubtedly forfeit their right of access to the forest.

The second stage of eco-political activism in India is Ayurveda – the science of long life or survival. As Francis Zimmermann observes, in India "the jungle is a medical concept," therefore inextricable from the fact of surviving (ix). Zimmermann believes that Ayurveda brings "the stars, the waters, the earth, the plants, the fauna" together; and is "beyond our power of knowledge" (9). Critics have noted that "the recovery of Ayurvedic essence is linked to a recovery of Indian culture," thereby relating Ayurveda to Independence and decolonization (Langford 2). Its "ethnomedical" status

has also led some to deploy it as a means to return to a Hindu science, a "corollary of Hindu nationalism in the 1890s" (Chaturvedi 142-43).

Nationalism or India's movement against colonialism constitutes the third stage of eco-politics in India. One of the undisputed players of this movement, Mahatma Gandhi, has been characterized by his followers as "a practicing ecological yogi" (Khosoo and Moolakattu 7). While some doubt that Gandhi ever was an environmentalist as he "was first and foremost a social reformer," and for him [h]uman rights came before ideologies about nature" (Tomalin 81); many scholars believe that Gandhi's vision of swaraj or self-determination is based on his critique of Western industrialism. Gandhi's anti-colonialist movement is informed by his vision of an "ideal Indian village," an environmentalist utopia fueled by "local self-reliance, a clean and hygienic environment, the collective management and use of those gifts of nature so necessary for human life; water and pasture" (Guha 50). They often cite Gandhi's impatient response to a correspondent who believes that it is impossible to ignore "Western influences," or "modern civilization." Gandhi responds that "[T]he correspondent forgets that to make India like England and America is to find some other races and places of the earth for exploitation" (Gandhi 348). Seen from Devi's perspective, however, Gandhi's nativist alternative would seem to have succeeded in just doing

what it warns against: finding tribes and their forests for exploitation.

The ecological phase of India's eco-politics is perhaps the most diverse as it concerns many aspects of modernization, technology, biodiversity, capitalism and globalization. This phase is not just the most vocal, but also the most global. One of the leading voices of this movement is Vandana Shiva, whose works bring together ancient ecological practices and modern scientific rationale for environmentalism. Opposing the ideologies of taking "the planet as private property," and the world as "a global super- market," Shiva proposes the concept of "the planet as a commons" (2). However, Shiva's "earth democracy" confines itself to "sharing" of resources, for she believes that we "are the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe" and "reclaiming democratic control over our food and water" is "our necessary project of freedom" (5). Shiva has next to nothing to offer to people who do not have much to eat, namely the tribes in Devi's works.

Indigenous ecopolitics is grassroots activism. The Gandhians and the subalternists also masquerade their ecopolitics as indigenous. Some argue that "Gandhi encouraged indigenous capability and local self-reliance" (Khoshoo and Moolakattu 8). Others conflate peasants and indigenous tribes in their bid to outline "the ecological landscape of resistance" through "the

management of forest" in the context of the Chipko movement of Uttarakhand (*The Unquiet Earth* 6). Devi's works depict the grassroots activism of a "nomadic" indigeneity, thereby generating a critique not only of colonialism, but of its nativist fold, eco-colonization of the tribes by both the Raj and the Brahmins.

Grassroots Activism and articulation of sovereignty in Jungle ke Davedar and other stories:

In *Dewana, Khoimala, and the Holy Bunyan Tree,* Devi narrates the story of Khoimala, a poor Brahmin girl, and her outcaste admirer, Golak, who loses his mental balance due to his inability to openly express his feelings about her. Unlike Deleuze and Guattari, who equated the Raj and the Brahmins in their critique of imperialism, Devi discovers yet another fold within the term "Brahmin" – class (poverty) and gender (women). When Golak teases Khoimala about her being a Brahmin and poor, the narrator points out that since "Hastings was the Governor General," Calcutta was growing fast with people traveling and requiring boatmen's services, thereby making "Golak and his kind . . . moneyed people;" as a result, "the boatmen were better off than the Brahmin" (15).

As a knot in the imperial triumvirate, colonial governorship in Calcutta is directly responsible for the ex-

pansion of the municipality, poverty of the Brahmins and the economic ascendency of the boatmen. Devi introduces another fold here – no matter how much better off Golak is economically, culturally he cannot think or talk about his love for Khoimala. Khoimala's mother – who describes herself as "an animal marked for sacrifice" (26) – marries Khoimala off to an elderly landlord. Terrified by the thought of his love for Khoimala, Golak goes to see the holy tree and pleads: "Thakurbot, I have believed in you since I've been a boy. Hung garlands of champa from your branches during Rathayatra. . .You are god. Sanatan Thakur says holy men have sat in your shade . . . Now please make me forget Kaitari [Khoimala]" (35).

Thakurbot or the tree of god is divine as much as it represents the mythical kalpavriksha capable of fulfilling the devotees' wishes or better enabling them to acknowledge their own latent desires.The *kalpavriksha* is also like kabiraj endowed with the curative properties to heal illnesses both physical and psychological in people both great and small. The tree is the only being or space (besides Ascharya, the storyteller, who first told them the story of a man who lost his sanity for love) common and accessible to both Golak and Khoimla. Thakurbot makes them openly articulate their bodily needs for each other. The map of their desire and its "incriminating" divulgence run through the multiple and rhizomatic lines extending back to the

mythical period itself. Golak continues visiting the tree to fulfill his wishes to forget Khoimala and not lapse into insanity due to his inability to reveal his love for her. Khoimala also visits the tree in order to pray that Golak not leave her to go to sea.

Khoimala did not have too many occasions in her life to express her opinion. She was too young when her marriage was arranged – "she did not understand what happened" (31) – by her mother and grandfather to a man several times her age. Her conjugal fate was decided by her sadhu (ascetic) grandfather and her landlord husband (both of whom described by another character as "monsters"). While the grandfather was only interested in the food and the money the marriage would bring him, Nilmoni, her would be husband, was interested in the land and the coconut trees he was inheriting due to his marriage to Khoimala. He only asks – "how often the coconut trees bore fruit" for his "withered body now contained nothing but greed" (31). Visiting the tree to pray for her mother's life and for the company of Golak are perhaps her only volitional acts. During one of the visits to the tree, she asks:

> "Golak, what do you tell the holy tree?"
>
> "What do you?"
> "Golak, please don't go to the ocean!" Each word a wrench, as though her very heart was breaking into piec-

> es. Yet she felt that never again would she have a chance to speak to him this way.
> "Will you be sad if I go to sea, Kaitari"?
> She nodded. What was there to be ashamed of?
> Holy tree, you are the guardian of my modesty.
> I must tell it to him, now. (42)

No sooner had her husband died than his children from other marriages decided to "burn her alive" with his dead body (67). Golak, himself on the brink of a complete mental breakdown, comes to her rescue. As they flee from the people trying to capture and commit Golak to a brutal mental asylum and to burn Khoimala alive because she is a widow now, she implores: "Golak, take me with you!" (73). The endless line of flight fulfils their wishes; Khoimala comes close to self-determination, to making a decision herself even though that decision entails death.

Jungel Ke Davedar [The Inheritors of the Forest] is a revised and expanded Hindi edition of Mahasweta Devi's Bengali novel – *Aranyer Adhikar* [*The Rights of the Forest*] published in serial form in *The Betar Jagat* in 1975. Devi was awarded India's *Sahitya Academy Prize* for this novel. In this novel, Devi revisits the little known events of the 1890s' Munda movement in which the Munda tribe of Bihar's Chota Nagpur region waged a war of "Abua Disun" (self rule) both against the British and the non-tribal landlords known as Babu or Diku (outsiders). The Munda warriors led by

Birsa Munda, (1975-1901) known to his followers as *Bhagawan Birsa* [God Birsa] or *Dharati Aba* [father of the earth], waged a mass revolt or uprising [*ulgulan*] for two years in Rachi and Khunti against the missionaries, the police, and the outsiders. After the killing of a few policemen and destruction of property in the area, Birsa and his followers, the "Birsaits" retreated to the forest of Dumbari Hill, where they were surrounded and fired upon by two company of army led by the Superintendent of Police, Commissioner, and Deputy Commissioner. The death toll of the Mundas was high (about 400), even though the accurate number was debated. Birsa Munda was captured and sent to jail, where he died a suspicious death. The narrator of Devi's novel comments about Birsa's realization that history is written from the perspective of the victors:

> The sahibs have not always won, not all battles. Santhals, Kohls, Kharuwas, and Sardars won a few battles; the ones they lost have proved that only victors are included in history books; the defeat is planted like rice plants in the blood of the vanquished, and in their unemployment, hunger and exploitation. The names of the defeated make way into the songs of the vaquished, into their insipid and coarse meals, the naked and discolored skin of their children and the bloated stomachs of the Munda mothers. (224)

Devi's grassroots activism rests not only in invoking the songs of the defeated Mundas, but also in unearthing the history of their displacement and destitution,

their hunger and exploitation sowed like rice plants in their body. The image of planting as a way of coping with and expressing injustices of history makes Jungle ke Davedar Devi's most direct and eco-politically effective arboreal articulation.

Early on in the novel, Birsa's father Sugana Munda explains how the Mundas lost their rights over the forest, their homeland:

> I, Sugana Munda, cannot recall the day when my ancestors Chota and Nagu came to this virgin land to settle. They took the virginity of the land and established the settlement of the Mundaris. I cannot recall when they named this land, this rich and resourceful nation inhabited by bears, boars and tigers, and covered by the jungle of *shal, gazar, sidha and shisham* trees, Chota Nagpur, after themselves.
>
> Though a direct descendent of the founders, I, Sugana Munda, wander aimlessly around like an abject beggar clad only in tatters and without even a grain of wild grass in my stomach. Wouldn't I be better off if I were a bird gleaning its feed from the field! (44)

Sugana cannot put a fixed date on the Mundas' loss of the rights of the forest. The process of their dispossession was systematic and unrelenting the origin and cause of which was not just the arrival of Europeans. Nor does it resemble the settler colonial societies. As Birsa points out – "With the Mundas, everyone acts

as if they were masters [*diku*] or sahebs of the tribals" (73).

In contrast to the simplistic binary of European colonizers and non-European colonized, Birsa resorts to a language of the forest to distinguish his people from both European colonizers and their "native" counterparts, thereby revealing a fold which goes unnoticed in India's documentation of colonization or its glorification of independence. As Sali, one of the Birsaits in the novel notes, "the Munda equals a forest dweller, therefore a savage. A Munda's life is for Dikus; for the Munda works in Dikus' farmland to grow rice and mustard for them, who in turn will invade and occupy the forest; destroy and dismantle the Mundas' sacred villages and their places of worships in order to establish their own deities" (140).

The forest not only distinguishes the Mundas from Dikus by negation or erasure; i.e. by foregrounding the loss of the forest (e.g. the plant of rice embossed in the psyche and body of a Munda, because that is a staple the Mundas can only dream about for they can only afford grains from wild grass); the forest also flows in the "black blood" of the tribals. Even as a child, what made Birsa different was his knowledge of the mystery of the jungle. In an important section of the novel just before his advent as "god" or "*Dharati Aba*" (father of the earth), Birsa retreats to the forest to contemplate

his next move against occupation of tribal land. Suddenly he hears a voice coming from "the forest flowing in his veins":

> "Ah, I have been desecrated!
> "I will purify you!
> "Behold, Dikus and Sahibs have repeatedly assaulted me!
> "I will avenge your assault! . . .
> "Nobody hears me lament.
> "I do, mother.
> "Nobody looks out for me. . .
> "Where are you located, mother?
> "In your heart, in your blood! . . . Yes, and will forever flow there my Aba! Just look closely.
>
> "Birsa looked at his blood! Yes, indeed, his body is the land of Chota Nagpur and his blood is the river upon the banks of which is his mother, the forest, naked like a Mundari belle." (88)

Birsa's "ulgulan" (revolution) is not an attempt to go back to the forest as it existed before colonization; it is rather an attempt to flow. "Flowing" is how *Anti-Oedipus* would define "desire;" and desire is revolution. Desire implies "the revolutionary investment," (378) which, like death, constitutes an unpredictable flow escaping any axiomatics of decoding. Deleuze and Guattari would interpret Birsa's desire as "territorial," in which the socius remains the body of the Earth or

the body of the Despot, who seeks to channel flows of desires before the body of the Money takes over. For them, only "capitalism, through its process of production, produces an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge" (34). Birsa's voice of the forest would be a predictable invocation of territoriality or a Despot's attempt to create a socius. In contrast to this, Devi endows him with a deterritorializing unpredictability.

After leaving the mission school, Birsa tries to reclaim the jungle legally by filing an application to the Forest Department; but when he gets to the Department, the imperial bureaucrats ridicule him by questioning his credentials. Birsa responds by waving his application for the rights of the forest. The clerks couldn't believe that a Munda can utter a word such as "application," and can speak for his and his tribe's "rights." They again taunt him: "Swim across the ocean to London, where the Queen resides [and ask her for your rights]; she is already trembling with fear of the Mundas" (83). When the legal avenue closes, Birsa plans his initial attack on the Christmas Eve of 1895. Relating the history of the event and Birsa's planning of the *ulgulan*, Suresh Singh notes that the Deputy Commissioner of Ranchi had sent out spies to find out about the Mundas' plans, but to no avail. The rebels thought that "if they succeeded 'in striking a blow,' 'the bulk of the people all over Chotanagpur would be really on their side.' They

believed that 'Government mistook their real aim'" (Singh 96).

Birsa's revolutionary flow is unpredictable due to its eclectic nature borrowed from Christianity and Hinduism. Instead of going back to the tribal rituals and worship of *Sibonga* practiced by the Mundas, he desecrated their burial site by exhuming the bodies and selling the valuables buried with the dead. He announces that the ancient tribal religion cannot make the Munda's happy (*Jungle* 86). Instead he declared himself *Dharti Aba* or God by comparing himself to Jesus and Krishna. The stormy night on which Birsa assumed the role of God, "the lightening seared the sky; the elephants trumpeted, tigers roared, and Birsa looked up to the heaven and declared – 'Everything is mine. The jungle is mine; and I am the father of the earth'" (89).

Birsa's declaration poses a challenge for the British when they arrest him; even their torture cannot break him. The British failure to destroy his ideology would imply that Birsa indeed was God. After his death, the Birsaits would refuse to believe that he was dead: "God does not die; revolution does not end" (28). Karmi, Birsa's mother, would express her fear about Birsa's difference by remarking that "even though she carried him in her womb, and gave birth to him, he remained a stranger" (43). Neighbors would compare him to Krishna and his mesmerizing magic over both humans

and animals, which would lead Sugana to exasperatingly entreat him "to be just like others" (44).

By starting the novel with Birsa's death in the prison, and then by going back to his childhood and narrating the history of the movement up to the point of his arrest, Devi seems to corroborate the fact that indeed Birsa is God, therefore, he and his movement keep on coming back to life. Like Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the Body without Organs, or "opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity" (*A Thousand* 160), Birsa becomes a body connected to lines and flows representing revolutionary desire. Deleuze and Guattari interestingly compare the gaiety and ecstasy of the BwO or revolutionary desire to Krishna (*A Thousand* 151). But unlike Devi's depiction of Birsa as *kalpavriksha*, the wish-fulfilling tree of life and desire, and his recognition of sovereign rights over and with the forest, Deleuze and Guattari's flows do not lead to tribal sovereignty; in fact the philosophers would equate sovereignty to slavery and colonialism (*Anti-oedipus* 265).

Trees and plants enable Mahasweta Devi to locate and devise a language in which her characters articulate a grassroots activism against the ongoing colonization of indigenous tribes and outcastes. By blurring the ontological boundary between humans and plants, and by

making her subjects speak to, for and with plants and trees, Devi proposes an eco-politics of arboreal articulation through which she critiques postcolonial nationalism and anthropocentric "subalternism" in order to envision strategies of survival for indigenous people and their worlds.

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LOVING SOMEONE YOU DON'T KNOW: TRANSCULTURATION, SEX AND MARRIAGE IN THE FICTION OF JHUMPA LAHIRI AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE

SANDRA COX

JhumpaLahiri and Bharati Mukherjee are both writers known for crafting female characters who navigate the complexities of gender in the U.S.-Bengali diaspora. Those female characters' abilities to succeed in their navigations are often complicated by heteroromantic relationships, like marriage and extra-marital affairs. The pressures of orientalism and female objectification render those relationships, and the social meanings assigned to them, crucial to the identity politics implicit in both authors' work.

The line from which the title of this article comes appears in Lahiri's short story "Sexy," which features close-third person narration centered on an Anglo-American woman, Miranda, who has become the mistress of a Bengali man named Dev. Because of her relationship with one of her co-workers, Miranda is conscripted to babysit Rohin, the seven-year-old son of the friend of Miranda's aforementioned co-worker; that friend of a co-worker is filing for divorce because of her husband's infidelity. After Rohin insists that Miranda put on a cocktail dress he finds in her closet, he tells her that she is "sexy." Miranda, who is equally flattered and dismayed, asks the little boy what he thinks that word means. In response, he tells her "It means loving someone you don't know. [. . .] That's what my father did. He sat next to someone he didn't know—someone sexy, and now he loves her instead of my mother" (*Interpreter of Maladies* 108). In this

relationships where women have the agency to choose their lovers (as Miranda had selected Dev when she approached him at a department store) the level of intimate knowledge that lovers may have of each other cannot be easily determined, or even predicted, by the power differentials that culture, gender, national origin or ethnic identity might cause to manifest in these relationships.

In "Sexy," and in much of her other fiction, Lahiri asks her readers to consider how the diasporic conditions of these kinds of romantic attachments mightdemand a radical reconsideration of love, sex and marriage. Lahiri often writes about how affective bonds between men and women—love, as Rohin puts it—are distinct from familiarity—knowledge, or the lack thereof. For many of her female characters, diaspora introduces increasingly more complex connections between desire and identity. This is also true of the characterization of women in Mukherjee's fiction. These writers destabilize the assumption that any singular set of cultural traditions may produce more stable, healthy, or satisfying attachments than any other, and thus directly counters narratives about female subjectivity inherent in cosmopolitan readings of their works.

Writing by Lahiri and Mukherjee shows a wide range of effects that different heteromantic relationships have upon the female characters, which implicitly questions

some assumptions of Western feminist literary criticism. For example, MonishaPasupathi, notes that much of the in behavioral research conducted in the United States about arranged marriage labors under the assumption that choice is always empowering or that passivity is always oppressive. Rather that adopt that assumption, or the equally troubling one that cultural relativism allows help readers to simply avoid the ambiguities that intersections of ethnicity, class and gender may produce in a text, Mukherjee and Lahiri produce a diverse set of characters whose stories reflect what Pasupathi's own research shows:

> the practices of arranging marriage do not necessarily lead to the oppression of women. In fact, arranged marriages are but one of many practices that require Western feminism to confront and resolve issues of cultural variability and heterogeneity in their striving for gender equality. Without such confrontation, Western feminism will remain Western, at best ineffective in achieving its aims for benefiting women worldwide and at worst clumsily harmful. Unlike other culturally particularized rituals involving women [. . .], arranged marriages do not inherently require that women are injured or oppressed. (202)

Mukherjee and Lahiri craft female characters who are injured and oppressed by the choices provided to them in diasporic spaces, but each also imagines female characters who are bolstered and empowered by those same choices. What emerges from reading these texts together is an intersectional feminism that values women's abilities to adopt the cultural and marital practices thatt

work best for the situations in which they, their partners and families find themselves.

Entry into diaspora is occasionally undertaken through heteroromantic attachment; consider the cliché of the "green card marriage" so prevalent in literary and popular culture. Some of the Mukherjee's and Lahiri's characters immigrate through marriage; others test the adaptability of Bengali marital customs in increasingly Americanized contexts, and still others attempt to negotiate their own identities from within intercultural relationships. Miranda's affair with Dev, and the fetishization of Bengali culture that she derives pleasure from before identifying so strongly with Rohin's mother in the denouement, is its own sort of postcolonial encounter that makes desire, sex and marriage part and parcel of the ways identity is established. "Sexy" is only one example of how Lahiri and Mukherjee challenge Western feminist assumptions about the politics of nation and coupling. For additional examples of this sort of challenge, readers can look to two collections of short stories—Mukherjee's *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988) and Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999)—and two novels—Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) and Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003). In each of these pieces of fiction, the writers demonstrate how feminist theory and practice might be reimagined to better respond to the challenges of diaspora and to recognize the value of

transcultural exchange. Mukherjee and Lahiri write varied representations of heterosexual courtship and marriage between Bengali-American wives and their husbands. As each of the wives imagined by Mukherjee and Lahiri adjusts to life in the diaspora, she must cope not only with the challenges of living in a transcultural space as a hyphenated Indian-American, but also with the ethnosexual pressures that shape her identity as a woman. Amit Shankar Saha has argued that for new immigrants "the crisis of hyphenated existence—being Indian and U.S.-American at the same time—needs to be reconciled so as to define" a stable self (2). In Mukherjee's and Lahiri's fiction, this process of reconciliation and identity-formation is doubly complicated by the fact that marriage may be a conduit for entrance into that hyphenated state. As an institution that requires spouses to redefine themselves as a social unit rather than as separate individuals, which also is historically unequal in both U.S.-American culture and in Bengali culture, marriage becomes a kind of fulcrum upon which gender and ethnicity are tenuously balanced.

The confluence of ethnic and gendered structures of oppression can confound attempts by Bengali-American wives to reconcile identity within a diasporic space because of competing narratives about the meanings of gender according to the host and indigenous cultures. As sociologist Joan Nagel has noted,

> Ethnic boundaries are also sexual boundaries—erotic intersections where people make intimate connections across ethnic, racial or national borders. The borderlands that lie at the intersections of ethnic boundaries are 'ethnosexual frontiers that are surveilled and supervised, patrolled and policed, regulated and restricted, but that are constantly penetrated by individuals forging links with ethnic 'others.'(113)

The ways that boundaries between Bengali and American identities are constructed in these works of fiction can often become conflated with the ways in which sexual boundaries between men and women set up particular power structures. Because the borderlands Nagel frames are metaphorically staged between potential romantic partners, the extent to which the diasporic space marks transgressions against that border necessarily shapes the surveillance, supervision, patrolling, policing, regulation and restriction with which each couple must cope. American contexts for understanding what it means to be a wife are occasionally at odds with Bengali expectations for the behavior of married women. A closer look at how Mukherjee and Lahiri write about Bengali-American marriage may help to identify and explain the broader criticism of national identity and

explain the broader criticism of national identity and institutional sexism in each writer's corpus. Reading across Lahiri's and Mukherjee's portrayals of girlfriends, brides, wives, mistresses, and widows makes it possible to draw some conclusions about how these two writers complicate reductive notions of gender parity and cultural difference by writing seemingly contradictory characterizations of women living in the Indo-American diaspora.

One example of these sorts of contradictions might be between arranged and chosen marriages. Lahiri's *The Namesake* portrays a highly successful arranged marriage, while Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter* shows readers some of the challenges of a chosen marriage. A comparative analysis of these novels produces grounds for better understandinghow women's choices can be limited or expanded through cultural systems that allow (or require) their parents to broker matches for them independent of their input and/or consent. The Namesake tracks the courtship, marriage and subsequent immigration to the U.S. of AshimaBhaduri and Ashoke Ganguli. Ashoke is the third suitor to whom Ashima's parents have presented her, and the first who does not reject Ashima; the couple meet only once before their wedding. In fact, Lahiri writes "It was only after the betrothal that [Ashima] learned his name. One week later the invitations were printed, and two weeks after she was adorned and adjusted by

countless aunts [. . .] three days and eight thousand miles away in Cambridge[, Massachusetts] she has come to know him" (9-10). In this passage, Ashima is constructed as an object manipulated by her parents, and those innumerable aunties, who does not even know what she must consent to marriage and immigration, until after that consent is irrevocably given and she finds herself alone with her new husband far from her home. Because Lahiri's diction stresses the shortness of time—three days—and the greatness of distance—eight thousand miles—Ashima's swift displacement to become a companion to a man who's name she has only just learned could lead readers (especially those who are already inclined to accept a Western feminist narrative about arranged marriage) to believe that Ashima is victimized by this system of parental arrangement.

However (in a gesture that seems to undercut that Western feminist narrative),Lahiri gives very little dialogue to Mr. Bhaduri, Ashima's father, and instead depicts Ashima's mother as central to contriving her daughter's marriage to Ashoke. Lahiri writes that Ashima is "amused by her mother's salesmanship" (7) when she overhears her lauding Ashima's skill as a cook and knitter to Ashoke's father. In spite of the fact that that Mrs. Bhaduri seems to hold some sway in deciding her daughter's fate, the marriage is not in any way attributable to Ashima's own agency; in fact,

readers are told that she is "nineteen, in the middle of her studies and in no rush to be a bride" when she is promised to a man she has never met (7). In the novel, there is much ambiguity about Ashima's marriage. While in these early chapters of The Namesake the absence of choice is troubling, those chapters are necessary exposition for the later plot points that reveal how Ashima comes to forge her own identity through the shared experience with Ashoke of being displaced through marriage. This thematic shift is particularly clear in the denouement, when Ashima, newly widowed, returns to Bengal and, once there, is honored and accepted without any pressures to give up her independence or to step into the sometimes pitiable role of a Hindu widow, which is, in large part, the result of her American identity—she is excepted from participating in a more "traditional" Bengali widowhood.

During and immediately after Ashima's wedding, the absence of even the right to refuse consent to her parents' choice marks Lahiri's representation of courtship with her husband as quite distinct from the Mukherjee's crafting of her protagonist's marriage in *The Tiger's Daughter.* In direct contrast to Ashima and Ashoke stand Tara Banerjee and David Cartwright, who occupy the narrative center of that novel. Tara, a doctoral candidate and the daughter of a wealthy industrialist in Calcutta, meets and marries David,

an American and a would-be writer, while she is studying in New York. She neither informs her parents of her intent to marry him, nor does she ask their permission to do so. Unlike Mrs. Bhaduri's orchestration of Ashima's marriage to Ashoke, Mrs. Banerjee is both chagrined and angered by her daughter's decision to choose her own husband, which becomes very clear during the couple's first visit to India. Mukherjee comments upon her protagonist's fears that her father and the Hindu pantheon renounce their previous love for her, but the narration is most concerned with the anxiety Tara feels about her mother's disapproval of her chosen match. Mukherjee writes, "Perhaps [Tara's] mother, sitting severely before God on a tiny rug no longer loved her [daughter] either. After all Tara had willfully abandoned her caste by marrying a foreigner. Perhaps her mother was offended that she, no longer a real Brahmin, was constantly in and out of this sacred room, dipping like a crow" (50). This goes beyond the boundaries of the Banerjee family and extends into Tara's identity in a national context. The use of the crow as a metaphor is apt—the black swathed carrion eaters are not only unclean, but may be a reference to the Bengali Dalit tradition in which those "untouchables" at the bottom of the caste hierarchy are also tasked with removing the bodies of the dead. The fact that Tara compares herself to a carrion bird, which itself disposes of dead animals, as she describes her feeling of intrusion in her mother's religious space

seems to present readers with the consequences of Tara's choice in specifically Bengali imagery. She has not just taken a husband. She hastraded her religious and national identity for the right to make an independent choice about who that husband will be.

In addition to using this kind of imagery, Mukherjee crafts an interior monologue for Tara that clearly links her marriage to her outsider status—"In India she felt she was not married to a person but to a foreigner and this foreignness was a burden" (62).The fact that Tara chooses her own husband, and that she choose from outside her caste and surname is inscribed in the text as a willful act of self-displacement. In the middle of the novel, after her marriage to David, that willfulness may be a means by which Tara more directly claims the independence that Ashima grows into in her widowhood. However, in the end of *The Tiger's Daughter* Tara must grapple with the cultural continuity that she has lost. The refusal of an arranged marriage here becomes tantamount to a renunciation of Bengali culture and Brahmin caste; while the acceptance of an arranged one in *The Namesake* is seen as allegiance to the same, even when both kinds of marriages result in migration away from the homeland into the diaspora. The possibilities that are presented by returning to Bengal are marked in each novel in ways that reveal that distinction further. While Ashima is welcomed, explicitly accommodated in her difference; Tara is

tolerated, tacitly judged for hers.

Critics have, of course, commented before on the different reactions each of these characters has to returning to India after living in the U.S. RajibBhaumik notes that "Tara endeavors to reconcile two diametrically opposite worlds, but like Mukherjee's other female protagonists, she is torn between her two socio-cultural identities, between her anchoring in an alien soil and her nostalgia for India, her home country." However, Jyoti Rana notes that Ashima feels no such tearing and instead integrates her feelings of belonging in India with her experiences in the U.S. by "creat[ing] a close knit web of immigrants, who share a common language and culture. It is [the Ganguli's] enculturation and rooting in India that provides them peace in their host land." This displacement from the homeland seems less linked to the experience of living abroad than it is to the continuity of cultural practices and interpersonal relationships, which are maintained, in part, through shared marital customs. This is not the sum total of the measures of acculturation through marriage in works by Lahiri and Mukherjee, each of whom will treat the question in her short fiction, nor is it simple to measure the degree to which the fictional accounting of marital arrangements correlate with sociological data on diasporic marriage with respect to women's rights.

In an attempt to determine the effect of arranged marriage on women's opportunities, Pasupathi considers a broad cross-section of studies of arranged marriage and women's social positions; the conclusions she draws as part of that synthetic analysis suggest that

> [a]rranged marriages can be viewed as part of a system of inequities, with movement toward self-determination in marriage a route to improving other inequalities. Unfortunately, changes in marriage practices do not always result in improvements in other aspects of women's status [. . .] increasing freedom in choosing a marriage partner may not be accompanied by improvements in women's status overall. It might be less important to take a stand against arranged marriage and more important to take a stand against inequitable educational and career opportunities. (230-231)

By choosing to craft more complex characters whose marital situations are not as easily parsed as the assumption that greater choice will produce greater opportunity, both Mukherjee and Lahiri would seem to concur. Because Ashoke encourages Ashima to pursue a career as a public librarian, and because Ashima has access to a social network of other women living in the Bengali-American diaspora, her opportunities for improving her status are unconstrained by her arranged marriage. On the other hand, Tara's isolation and alienation from her family and culture seem to place barriers in the way of her ability to negotiate the

hyphenated existence that Saha finds is complicated by life in the diaspora. The social acceptance of the choices of young women may be the paramount concern here, rather than the ability to make those choices independently. Both Lahiri and Mukherjee seem to support such a conclusion in their thematic treatments of marriage. The portrayals of marriage in their fiction seem to shift the kinds of questions it is necessary for feminist critics to pose about inequity in arranged marriages. Rather than focusing exclusively on bridal choice, the novels consider broader social systems that account for the liberartory potential of each character.

The Tiger's Wife and *The Namesake* explore the ways that weddings might alter national identity or gender equality for first generation Bengali-American women, but in their short fiction both writers also explore the marriage practices of second generation Bengali-Americans. In particular, Lahiri's Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of short fiction The Interpreter of Maladies, in which "Sexy" is also published, presents readers with several permutations of arranged and chosen marriages in the diaspora. The first story in the collection, "A Temporary Matter," follows two second-generation Bengali-Americans, Shukumar and his wife Shoba, through the dissolution of their marriage after the stillbirth of a child. The couple is depicted as unhappy, perhaps owing to

their different methods of grieving after their shared loss,or perhaps because they were simply not well-matched. The ambiguity about these two causes is not easily resolved with the textual evidence Lahiri provides, which in and of itself suggests that she may well intend that subtext ambivalent about causation.

Shukumar and Shoba come together under circumstances that might only be described as transcultural. They date before becoming engaged; Shukumar even recounts their first interaction, wherein he forget to tip the waiter because he was distracted by the "funny feeling [he] might marry [her]" (52). The two were introduced by "a group of Bengali poets giving a recital" who, upon the urging of Shukumar and Shoba's families, had arranged for the couple to be seated "side-by-side on folding wooden chairs" (24). The way that Lahiri has other Bengalis, all of whom are also living in the diaspora, collaborate on the arrangement with the couples' parents is evidence of a transcultural courtship tradition that is neither wholly Bengali nor typically American. The match is not arranged by two fathers in negotiation, conferring only with their wives and their sons but not their daughters; nor is it a romantic and impetuous choice made without any consultation with parents or community. Shoba and Shukumar's marriage seems to be set-up and self-selected in equal parts. This transcultural mix of parental choice and bridal choice makes drawing

conclusions about the effect of that system on the success or failure of that marriage doubly difficult. By refusing to correlate the divorce with either system of marriage, Lahiri gestures towards a more complex view of how Shoba's identity as a second-generation Bengali-American woman is only one part of the explanation. The rest of that explanation may well be linked to the fact that she is organized and controlled, while Shukumar is messy and emotional, or that she has a stable salaried job while Shukumar is making little progress on the dissertation he is writing while she is at work, or that both their parents seem to be too far off to support them during their time of grief. In crafting these myriad reasons that the couple are unsuccessful at reconciling, Lahiri seems to communicate a profound ambiguity about using cultural traditions of courtship as a deterministic measure of the happiness and healthiness of a marriage or the authenticity and continuity of an ethnic identity.

A similar ambivalence is also to be found later in the collection, where readers will encounter the story "This Blessed House" and be introduced to another second generation Bengali-American couple, Twinkle and her husband Sanjeev, who yield to "the urging of their matchmakers" (112), friends of both their parents who had "arranged the occasion at which Twinkle and Sanjeev were introduced" (113) four months ago.

A similar ambivalence is also to be found later in the collection, where readers will encounter the story "This Blessed House" and be introduced to another second generation Bengali-American couple, Twinkle and her husband Sanjeev, who yield to "the urging of their matchmakers" (112), friends of both their parents who had "arranged the occasion at which Twinkle and Sanjeev were introduced" (113) four months ago. In the narrative present they are moving into their first home together as newlyweds. At first Sanjeev is dismayed that Twinkle is not more domestic. He comes home from work to find her reading magazines in bed or chatting on the phone to her friends in California, when he notes that there are boxes that want unpacking, an attic to sweep, paint to retouch, all of which he hopes she will undertake. Later, he comes to find her gregarious nature and odd passions—for drinking too much whiskey, dancing the tango in front of strangers, and wowing his co-workers with her effervescence and charm—distinctly more valuable than the qualities he had hoped to find in a traditional Bengali bride. His early disappointment is presented as an antecedent to his pleasure at their more equitable arrangement, which is also difficult to establish as causally related to the circumstances of their marriage.

In these two stories, Lahiri complicates the double

dichotomies of diasporic marriage (either arranged or chosen, either happy or unhappy) by demonstrating that shared national origin is not always enough to draw a husband and wife close to one another. In fact, by disrupting the expected parity of gender roles in both couples (Shukumar does all the cooking while Shoba works full time and Twinkle refuses to be made responsible for the keeping of the house), Lahiri seems to be suggesting that individual differences are of more account than categorical definitions of culture and gender that can, perhaps, be predicted using data about courtship rituals. This too seems to align with the research on transcultural and romantic coupling in the social sciences; Pasupathi also notes that the studies she looks at reveal a closer correlation between women's opportunities and class than women's opportunities and arranged or chosen marriages. What Lahiri and Mukherjee may be presenting, then, is a deliberative call to disrupt the expectation that systems stressing women's marital choices necessarily provide women with the most opportunity.

Both writers craft narratives about women of Bengali descent living in the U.S. for whom a traditional marriage of either cultural variety—chosen or arranged—is not an acceptable alternative. In *The Namesake,* Ashima's son Gogol marries Moushumi, a Bengali-American woman with whom he had a short lived antipathy in childhood.

Their first date after their reintroduction as adults is arranged by their mothers in the same transcultural mix of Bengali matchmaking and American dating that can be seen in "A Temporary Matter" and "This Blessed House." However, unlike the universally troubling issue of infant mortality that divides Shoba from Shukumar or the happy abandonment of expectations that brings Sanjeev comfort with Twinkle, the failure of this marriage does seem to have its roots in the acculturated differences between first and second generation Bengali women. Several chapters before her marriage to Gogol dissolves because of Moushumi's infidelity, Lahiri's narrator reveals the starkness of that difference by noting that Moushumi pities her mother's dependence and values her own "capability of being on her own" (247):

> Along with the Sanskrit marriage vows [Moushumi] repeated at her wedding she'd privately vowed she'd never grow fully dependent on her husband, as her mother has. For even after thirty-two years abroad, in England and now America, her mother does not know how to drive, does not have a job, does not know the difference between a checking and a savings account. And yet she is a perfectly intelligent woman, was an honors students in philology at Presidency College before she was married off at twenty-two. (247)

For Moushumi, the only way to escape this maternal script is to try marriage her mother's way, and thus prove it to be fully unworkable for her. Even at the

moment of her vows to Gogol she seems to be looking for ways to undermine that commitment. For instance, she applies for a postdoctoral fellowship in Paris just before their wedding and, when she receives the acceptance letter, declines the fellowship and resents Gogol without ever discussing it with him. This choice, as well as a dozen other small and unspoken resentments, allow Moushumi to sabotage the relationship in order to prove to herself and to her mother that a shared culture of origin is not the stuff that a life together must be made of. In this instance, Lahiri seems to craft another mix of arranged and chosen. Although Gogol's and Moushumi's mothers are pleased by the arrangement and have set up the initial date (an act that may be the source of Moushumi's inevitable rejection of the match), the fact remains that their courtship is never negotiated by any of their parents until after they are engaged, and the relationship is one they clearly chose together. In spite of that free and equal choice, this marriage is far less successful than those in Interpreter of Maladies. Moushumi is displeased by the same conditions that produce happiness for Twinkle and discord for Shoba. One of the key insights that may be offered by considering these narratives together is that ways in which spouse are selected may have little to do with the success of a relationship. What does seem to be an important predictor of marital harmony, is the extent to which the female characters are able to integrate their ethnic

identities with their genders in both of the cultural systems they must inhabit because the pressures of a diasporic identity. Twinkle and Ashima have community and self-knowledge and a means of deriving esteem outside their husbands; it may be argued that the rage the Banerjees feel toward Tara and the self-isolation that is the subtext of Moushumi's rejection of Gogol are symptoms of an extended disjointing of cultural identity with these character'sexperiences as explicitly gendered subjects.

The character who may provide the best evidence for the claim in these works of fiction is the titular protagonist written about by Mukherjee in her novel Jasmine. Jasmine is a character who is crafted as an alternative to both sets of culturally produced courtship norms. Mukherjee writes about a woman who has a series of monogamous relationships that each are a sort of stepping stone in a transcultural transformation; every time the protagonist takes a new lover, she also takes a new name. The titular character, born Jyoti in Hasnapurna, a small village in East Bengal, has three particularly important coupling. The first is a traditional arranged marriage to a man named Prakash who renames her Jasmine. After his death she immigrates, without documents, to the United States where she becomes the live-in nanny to an American girl named Duff, and the lover to Duff's married father, Taylor, who renames her Jase. When that

relationship sours, Jase moves to Iowa and begins living with Bud, an older man who runs the bank she works in, and she is again renamed by her lover, who calls her Jane. Much has been made of this repeated renaming in the published criticism on the novel. For example, Erin KhueNinh argues that the novel is an allegory of Vanity Fair, with Thackeray's consideration of social climbing reimagined as an exercise in border crossing:

> Jasmine's path in the United States [is] a linear trajectory from foreigner to American, from border to heartland, and on toward multiculturalism. [. . . H]owever, it seems impossible to ignore the novel's less teleological scripts concerning the roles into which the heroine is cast: undocumented transnational migrant worker, domestic servant, caretaker, sex worker, and mail-order bride. Considering that she arguably navigates not one but all of these key positions of the third-world woman in her sequence of employment and relationships in the United States, Jasmine's resumé suggests less her successful assimilation than her perpetual liminality. In her, the novel prefigures the current discourse around global migration, labor, and family for the Asian female foreign body.

Alternatively, K. S. Dhivya and K. Ravindran argue that the process of adopting several names is a way of manifesting a kind of self-actualization; they write "in Jasmine the life of Jyothi is glorified by herself and her inner consciousness[,] which makes her act according to her own wish. Mukherjee's novel reaches the theme

of fulfillment within the inner self at the final moment" (65). Whether because of her own ability to exercise choice or because to the diasporic pressures to assimilate, it is clear that the hypersexualization of the character's body shapes each of these depictions of Bengali-American women's marital behavior as important to the narrative about women's liberation through transculturation. Mukherjee's depictions of her protagonist in what is, perhaps, her most widely-read and certainly most critically-discussed novel, are profoundly ambivalent about the nature of female subjectivity in a transnational context. Because it is so different from Lahiri's ambivalence in the two stories from Interpreter of Maladies, Jasmine's resistance to the dominant script of marital behavior is perhaps less facile than Moushumi's. For Ninh, the novel Jasmine has radically destabilizing potential because it reveals the ways in which "first-world patriarchy" has been bolstered by global capitalism; Jasmine is a character who embodies "the importation of foreign reproductive labor" as the direct result of the empowerment of American women. Ninh supports this argument by suggesting that Jasmine's perpetual liminality is an economic necessity after "Western women may no longer be purchased at the same depressed rates" as immigrants may be (157). When read in tandem with the rest of Lahiri and Mukherjee's work on this topic, however, the conflation of marriage, sexual exploitation, and domestic labor is more difficult to square

with notions of self-actualization through choice. It is undeniably true that Jasmine comes to accept that her identity must be shaped in response to the needs and expectations of her male partners, which seems to produce a set of conditions under which self-actualization is impossible. Rather than crafting a set of copies of Jasmine that reaffirm this impossibility as a structurally extendable truth, Lahiri's and Mukherjee's later fiction complicates the narrative Ninh constructs by providing textual evidence of female subjectivity that emerges from marital relationships with men. That subjectivity is contingent upon those relationships being reconfigured by women through the negotiation of the tensions between ethnic and gendered identity. For instance, Ashima is able to successfully self-actualize from within an arranged marriage because Ashoke does not prevent her from using the diasporic space to open up a negotiation about the roles of husband and wife in Bengali and American culture. The facts that he helps raise their children—Gogol and Sonia—and that she is well-educated and works outside the home in a job that is intellectually fulfilling show that these kinds of negotiations can be successful for some women. That may then suggest that Ashima's daughter-in-law's inability to reconcile her complex feelings about her cultural origins limit her ability to see her own marriage to Ashima's son as similarly flexible.

The notion that a transcultural understanding of heterosexual relationships may be of particular use to women is perhaps hardest to pin down in the works by Mukherjee and Lahiri that treat pairings of Bengali-American men and non-Bengali American women or, conversely of Bengali-American women with non-Bengali-American men. Much of Mukherjee's fiction is inspired by her own experiences as the Bengali wife of an American man, the poet Clark Blaise, with whom she immigrated to Canada, then Iowa and finally California; most notably the two wrote a text together called *Days and Nights in Calcutta* and from which most of the content of *The Tiger's Daughter* is fictionalized. Lahiri has been quite private about her marriage to Alberto Vourvoulias-Bush, who is not Bengali, but her writing includes many characters in transcultural relationships—for instance, Gogol has two long term girlfriends—Ruth and Maxine, both Anglo-American—before marrying Moushumi.

Lahiri and Mukherjee have crafted fiction that is populated by cosmopolitan characters who defy the typically binary understandings of globalization implicit in many postcolonial theoretical models. In doing so, their representations of Bengali-American women often seem to bridge a gap between cosmopolitanist assumptions (that Western cultural traditions are inherently more developed and therefore more egalitarian than non-Western cultural traditions) and

transculturalist edicts (which suggest that a synthesis of cultural traditions is not only beneficial but inevitable). On the one hand the term "cosmopolitan" seems to indicate that cultural difference is homogenized by acculturation, that immigrants are "Americanized" and lose their culture due to pressures within diasporic contexts. Timothy Brennan has even argued that cosmopolitanism is the "way in which American patriotism is today being expressed" (682). On the other hand, cosmopolitan perspectives might be understood to maintain rather than resolve tensions between cultural differences that force individuals and their increasingly global communities to reject the limitations of nation as a means of determining identity, thereby undermining nationalism conceptually as well as practically. As Elizabeth Jackson has noted, "[i]t is possible to have a culturally open disposition and to imagine the world as one community while remaining rooted in one's homeland; conversely, it is also possible to retain a limiting sense of national and cultural affiliation while traveling and even living all over the world" (109). Mukherjee and Lahiri characterize women in their works of fiction in ways that mark any categorical notion of national allegiance or cultural purity as an impossibility in a world in which the diaspora is everyplace and no-place. The histories of displacement and migration which frame post-partition Bengali life in particular are rendered as the implicit context of the transnational experiences those

characters have, which are radically diverse. Additionally, because national origin is but one facet of identity, which intersects with and is affected by so many other facets, any strong theory that makes deterministic claims about the ways that one set of cultural traditions liberates women as another set constrains them is doomed to suffer continual exceptions. Jackson goes on to point out that

> the specificities of individual experience and the complexities of interpersonal interaction within a global framework encourages a vision of human beings as individuals rather than members of nations or other exclusionary communities. Such a vision implies an ethical imperative for individuals to think beyond the boundaries of self, community and nation in their interactions with others. (115)

Reading across this corpus of texts by two diasporic women writing about the lived experiences of other imagined diasporic women allows that vision to be understood in its manifold iterations. There are instances where cultural difference and gendered oppression line up neatly so that claims about the constraints of Hindu values upon Bengali women are supportable through a wealth evidence. However, there are just as many instances when the norms of Western culture disempower and even victimize women in ways that Bengali culture would not, or when issues of gendered oppression seems to cross national and cultural borders crafting more common

critiques of transnational misogyny than of culturally-specific codes about women's behavior in the institution of marriage. The fiction simultaneously obfuscates and reveals the complex processes of transculturation, because identity-formation after displacement is doubly troubled by gendered and cultural identities that are altered or recontextualized through sex and marriage, as Bengali and American women are regularly socially redefined by their sexual behavior and romantic attachments. Reading this fiction encourages a more nuanced consideration of how displacement confounds the notions of identity produced by a longstanding legacy of feminist thought about sex and marriage. In depicting Bengali marriage in the diaspora as both a conduit of transnational movement and as dynamic, multifaceted and varied in its adherence to cultural norms, Mukherjee and Lahiri confront preconceptions about Indian identity and gender politics, and explore the particular pressures the diaspora brings to bear upon women's abilities to produce for themselves an identity that occupies an individual subjective space in an increasingly globalized society.

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4

READING THE SOCIO-POLITICAL UNREST: A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO THE SHARED SPACE OF "THIRD WORLD LITERATURE"

LINET THOMAS

Introduction

"It was like entering the atmosphere of another age, because the air was thinner in the rubble pits of the vast layer of power, and the silence was more ancient, and things were hard to see in the decrepit light" (*AP*[1] 2). One can feel the same, expressed by the author, within the opening passage of *AP*. This magical aura within the narratives of Gabriel García Márquez's works seems tremendous, that it turned out to be a universal phenomenon. Diverse situations and characters with irreplaceable traits, one among the several features of Márquez's works, makes each of his narratives several steps ahead of others, accordingly turning it a bit curious to be studied and explored. Why/what between Márquez and Kerala is a possible question to be

thought about by any reader. The comparison between the selected works within this paper, to an extent, is a venture to provide elucidation to the above mentioned inquiry.

Making an allowance for several literary works after the Second World War, Márquez's "solitude, power and love" remains stirring; the trinities that were least deliberated, and that never would be figured out again so profoundly and differently. The supremacy of these human emotions is equally romantic and opinionated, mixed with staunch reality. Here the liberty that Márquez exhibits through magic realism stands apart. The characters within his narratives are the embodiment of varying emotions, capable enough to make each reader addicted to the situations portrayed. Painting the whole life of Latin America in a single canvas, for this reason, Márquez could draw the attention of readers across globe.

In the same way, the political modernist fiction writing of Kerala, a parallel trend is marked amid 1960s and1980s. All the more, the writers of the same age estranged themselves from the predetermined ideologies of modernist approach on art and culture. In its place they carved out a path of their own, perpetuating the social commitment that a writer has to the society one belongs to. Exploring the literary movements of this period, a trend of drifting apart from the earlier works

to that of the literary works of the same is noticeable; witnessing a constant struggle against the consumerist and capitalist ideologies.

Especially, making an allowance for the plays staged during the same were intermingled with day-to-day affairs of the ordinary life, assorted with their sorrows and joys. Two major works which brought out path-breaking results were Thoppil Bhasi's *Ningalenne Communistakki* and K. J. Baby's *Nadugadhika*[2]. Bearing in mind the collection of short stories titled *Reverberations of Spring Thunder*, we come across the writers who have audaciously conversed the socio-political issues within the context of Kerala during 1960- 90. Pattathuvila Karunkaran, U.P. Jayarajan, V. P.Shivakumar, John Abraham, and P.K.Nanu brought into limelight several issues with related class and caste issues, which were ignored within the general public.

Political Unrest

Through his *Patriarch*, general and the assorted voices within the narrative, Márquez identifies the very existence of the ordinary Latin American life. Nonetheless, at times the history drawn through the narrative seems entwined with several events, a clear decoding helps in analyzing the interplay between the game of 'power and language' that is transfused all over the Latin

American society. It pursues one to revise and scrutinize the cultural phenomenon of power/ patriarchy and language. History is overturned by power, worded differently; we see how history is re-written with the acrimony of power and language.

> … he would shut himself up in his office to decide the destiny of the nation with the commandment of the forces of the landing and sign all manner of laws and decrees with his thumbprint, for in those days he did not know how to read or write, but when they left him alone with his nation and his power again he did not poison his blood again with the sluggishness of written law, but governed orally and physically, present at every moment and everywhere.… (*AP* 6-7).

The ruler within the narrative encapsulates all other rulers within the history were supremacy has preceded everything that existed. Like so, Márquez could universalize his monarch and his ordinary folks, which has paved way for a wider understanding about the unusual perception of power. Not only does Márquez discuss about his monarch, but also recreates the history of Latin America through his attempts. Concurrently a purposeful effort is made by Márquez to code and decode the power system that has distorted history to an extent making the people confused, which is palpable within the narratives.

The chain of power drawn within the two selected novels of Márquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975)

and *The General in his Labyrinth* (1989) explores how it gets expanded further and the extents to such a degree where despotism even inverses the history. Both these novels become a supreme example of autocracy where they display the malice of power and its manifestation within all arenas of life. The narratives seem to re-assert the lost linguistic identity of the region when he condemns the use of Latin language in the ordinary discourse. The language that prevails within these two narratives takes it to a different realm which goes beyond the scope of this paper.

"Bendicion Alvarado didn't bring me into the world to pay heed to basins but to command, and after all I am who I am, and not you, so give thanks to God that this was only a game" (*AP* 16). At this point it can be stated that, the patriarch addresses himself as I, not by any name, were he accentuates the fact of he being different from others determinedly. Basic nature of the Patriarch within the narrative is that he carries no name. His nameless nature sketches the decisive position that he is above all title and supremacy. It becomes obvious that the system of politics trivializes the very presence of the other, were by the existence of the other remains in question. The same is done by the patriarch in this context. "I am not you". The phenomenon that becomes evident here is the patriarch despite his namelessness becomes part of the history. His namelessness along with his attires, his attitudes, and finally his whole life

generates a myth within the language and culture of the society. A striking fact about the Patriarch is that, he is not only a part of history but also his historicity. Albeit that the Patriarch is in his old age is alone and vulnerable, his very being and the abhorrent nature is an unending annoyance. Thus the monarch becomes an archetype whose his field of power is capable of consuming everything within his propinquity. The fact that is marked here is the impact of power in redrawing the system of a nation's culture. For instance, the celebrations following the funeral ceremony becomes a public occupation.

In a very deplorable state we notice the Patriarch writing his name Zacarías, he re-reads it but being unable to accept his name, he tears the paper and proclaims to himself that "I am me" (*AP* 82). This substantiates the infinite power of the patriarch. From the very moment of the death of the patriarch, one can witness how the common people begin their life from the present moment. Nevertheless due to the dreadful nature of power, it functions mechanically and turns out to be natural. Sáenz de la Barra, the ruler who followed-the-leader subsequently was furthermore vicious.

Márquez through his Patriarch illustrates the political picture of Latin America, hence efficiently universalizing the concern undergone by people under despotism and autocracy. The narratives emerge out

as an influential apparatus where Márquez converses about the history of power and the code of violence. For example, *Thousand Days' War* of 1899-1902 is the crux of *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1968), which is very evident within the narrative. Likewise through the misrepresentation of the history of colonialism and imperialism, Márquez engenders within the readers the need to examine the policy of power that has annihilated the legacy of Latin America, which is familiar to other countries with a colonial past. Power being established through several autocratic methods turn-up to be natural. The final result would be the way in which power becomes a reality or a truth that is apparent in this narrative. Gradually it gets absorbed to the way of life, the generation befalls to be the victims of this everlasting violence. This is the mechanism of power, with all its manipulative power gets imbibed within all walks of life.

Under the clutches of privatization, we witness the monarch even selling the Caribbean Sea. This privatization, that is to say, the process of denationalization leads to a general hostility and abhorrence towards the Patriarch, as benevolence falls short. As a consequence, violence becomes an apparatus for the monarch that facilitates in asserting the whims and fancies of the system. In totality this becomes the code of living of a nation, when despotism reaches its climax. In other incident it is seen that how the patriarch manipulates the culture and replaces it.

> [E]verything had been a farce, your excellency, a carnival apparatus that he himself had put together without really thinking about it when he decided that the corpse of his mother should be displayed for public veneration on a catafalque of ice long before anyone thought about the merits of his sainthood and only to contradict the evil tongues that said you were rotting away before you died, a circus trick which he had fallen into himself without knowing it ever since they came to him with the news general sir that his mother Benedicíon Alvadaro was performing miracles and he had ordered her body carried in a magnificent procession into the most unknown corners of his vast country.... (*AP* 98-99)

Considering Pattathuvila Karunakaran's "Akbar's Upanishad", the first story from *The Reverberation of Spring Thunder*, what strikes a reader at the outset is the perceptible ideological eruptions within the narrative. The events are linked meticulously to the history, where the assertions of distinctive events drawn from the past are coupled with the events with utmost accuracy. For instance, the narrator reads about Lenin in a particular situation:

> Listen to this! I read aloud from the book about the revolution of the Russian Sudras: It was just 8.40 when a thundering wave of cheers announced the arrival of a short, stocky figure with a big head, set down on his shoulders, bald and bulging. Little eyes, a snobbish nose, wide, generous mouth and heavy chin, clean shaven now, but already beginning to bristle with the well known beard of his past and future. Dressed in shabby

> clothes, his trousers much too long for him. Unimpressive to be the idol of a mob, loved and revered as perhaps few leaders in history have been (Karunakaran 18).

The narrative dwells upon the issue of Sudras[4], where it is discussed within the context of Russian ideologies and that of *Manusmriti*[5] . An open discussion is occurring throughout the narrative about *Veda*, Sudras and Lenin.

> Lenin said: November 6 will be too early…on the other hand November 8 will be too late. We must act on the 7th, the day when the Congress meets so that we must stay to it, here is the power! What are you going to do with it? [...] Shall I read from the Veda? [...] The soul has no sex, but the body is male or female. In the Vedas the soul is referred to as 'it', not 'he'. 'He' would signify that Divinity is male. 'It' is unqualified and neutral. This is advaita (19).

Accordingly with the day-to-day events, Karunakaran mixes the historic details of the Russian revolution, where the narrative moves back and forth between the present and the past. Though narrator tries to detach from what is happening around in order to fully involve in the revolutionary aspects of life, it is apparent that the optimism which the narrator had about the revolution is waning and he is at the verge of outburst. The story is intertwined in such a way that that reader is able to figure out the mental state of the narrator.

Again, Karunakaran's *Divine Dispensations* deals with the code of power that slaughters those within the margins of life. The narrative is oscillating between the present and the past and the narrator's voice shifts at diverse points in time. As the title itself explains, the speaker is experiencing and narrating the events within the present and past simultaneously, within his 'divine dispensations'. Nowhere is it apparent that the narrator has witnessed the past event, and the same is narrated as if it is continuing.

> That was almost five years ago. On the first day in custody, nothing dramatic happened, apart from the usual injuries. His new guardians—both the uniformed and the plain clothed variety—treated him politely, almost affectionately. That was the new sophisticated technique! Hot and cold! Please sit down. He sat down […] there was no reply from Ayyapan. He looked stone deaf. Hours passed […] you were in college for two years, weren't you? You have some sense […] there can you hear? (31-32).

Dealing the plight of Ayyappan, a revolutionary, trampled under the power system is the core of the plot. In the present the story begins through Kaveri (the first person narrator within the story), which is later carried over by Pater[6] and ends with Ayyappan in the past. But when the story ends, it is a collective voice.

> Something was wrong, they felt. Let's try one last method. They brought some soap […] some hopeful signs appeared at last. He went into a coma. Later, he opened his

> eyes for a moment with, what sounded like, a question on his lips. Ayyappan has passed into a long, painless coma. A living corpse, a vegetable! (34).

Both the above-mentioned narratives are the examples of the outcome of the life of two revolutionaries. Despite the fact that no hope appears within the two contexts, they cannot be stated as failure. The texts chosen from both the contexts turn out to be a model of its culture and tradition. Márquez within his narratives unmistakably depicts the cultural practices happening in the country; the feats, the celebrations, the fights etc., and the extent to which power can alter these cultural and traditional set-up of a nation (all over again a subject of argument). The manner in which power manipulates the life of people is palpable in and out both the context; even the religion is not spared. Here it can be propounded that the narrative elucidates how the culture gets distorted and undergoes continues course of action towards its resumption. Even the religious norms get overturned as the power becomes so dictatorial and paramount.

The Paradox of Power and Freedom

An additional detail that is marked within the narrative is the dearth of general advancement within the life of the people or the nation; nothing seems advanc-

ing within the narrative, neither wealth nor life. People being away from politics can be a reason or the Patriarch being such a tyrant has not allowed growth. To have all the power can be the autumn for the patriarch. "Long live the stud, they shouted, blessed be the one who comes in the name of the truth, they shouted" (*AP* 88). At another situation, one can again notice the triviality of the deeds of the patriarch. "They had paid eighty pesos to a gypsy woman who pretended to give birth in the middle of the street to a two-headed monster as punishment for having said that the miracles had been set up by the government" (*AP* 98).

Within a different perspective, it can also be stated that, to a great extent, it was the people who venerated and glorified the Patriarch to a level that he was accepting the need to be an autocrat. He was left with the undeserved burden of truth,

> … in this nation which I didn't choose willingly but which was given me as an established fact in the way you have seen it which is as it has always been since time immemorial with this feelings of unreality, with this smell of shit, with this un-historied people who don't believe in anything except life …. (*AP* 100).

Hereby it is clear that not only the Patriarch is responsible for the oppression undergone by the people but also the people themselves. Albeit the Patriarch dies, the people are in dilemma to accept the fact that they

are free to live their life. A world devoid of the whims and fancies of the Patriarch seems unusual for them. At this point the code of culture facilitates them to evoke and revive the history which benefits the people for a change that awaits them. Wherein the politics fail, the cultural codes play a vital role in revamping the situation. It can also be argued that, it is the culture that in actuality turns the Patriarch to a myth.

> Similar to the above context, John Abraham's Feline Sorrow discusses the existential crisis faced by the narrator along with the cat in the story. "Neither the kitten nor I had any foreboding of what was to befall us. I lived in the midst of arrack barons who had no qualms about adulterating the stuff they sold and giving unsuspecting revelers their queries as long as they donated generous sums to orphanages". (Abraham 38)

These thoughts of narrator symbolize the crisis that common people underwent during that era. The uncertainty that remained within the lives of people is the motif around which the story revolves around, and the narrator adheres to liquor to escape the realities. "The arrack was consumed to wash down the sorrow of taking up other people's guilt without committing a single sin, mortal or venial. As the drinking progressed, my social commitment and sense of justice became more and more pronounced" (38).

The vagueness of life undergone by the people while the Indo-China War is the centre of *Broken Glass-*

es written by M. Sukumaran. The day when the narrator's glasses break, concurrently the same happens with many other people around him, where they lose their "long sight". When the narrator within the story lost his glasses, he shows a lackadaisical approach towards everything, symbolizing many others of his society. The manner in which the common man trembles under the national unrest is rendered within the narrative. At times people lose their faith about the future, which gives vague impression about the future and leaves them in utter frustration and bleakness. But their story also gives the hint that there "were young men who had not yet been troubled by long sight" (Sukumaran 49).

When the story ends, we witness the Central Committee member's speech in order to trigger off the spirit within several others similar to the narrator who seems devoid of hope. The committee member used no glasses, and represented a different section within the society looking forward for a better tomorrow albeit everything seems unfavorable.

> Comrades, as we all know, a number of people here have had the experience of their glasses breaking, getting scratched or suddenly giving them a blurred vision. This may have been due to the sudden, brief tremor that was felt in these parts few days ago. However, a plot hatched by one of the monopolistic cartels of lens manufactures cannot be ruled out. Whatever the cause, the need of

> the hour is to overcome the crisis at any cost. Keep your prescriptions safely with you. Remove your glasses and put them away at the slightest hint of a tremor. Keep the glasses in their cases when you are not wearing them. And don't forget to wipe them clean regularly. (49-50)

From this point of time the narrator regains his spirit and gets back to normalcy. It symbolizes the clear vision that is attained by a group of people. The narrator sits back to apprehend what has happened for the past days, and at the particular point when the narrator recognizes the past and comprehends, it's almost dawn. Thus symbolizing the new beginning where the people are able to survive the adversities. The newspaper of the same day carries the news that the Indo-China has come to an end.

> I was reading the last lines of the previous day's paper when the paper-boy appeared at the gate. The rolled-up paper came sailing through the air and landed at my feet. I picked it up, unrolled it and read the headlines in bold letters with joy: Peace returns to Indo- China. End to Vietnam War (50).

By adhering to the North Malabar dialect[7], P. K. Nanu's *Alternatives* gives authenticity to the narrative. The narrative deals with the situation where the society is faltering, unable to speak as "the chain of sounds was broken abruptly" (Nanu 68). It's a collective "us" where the whole society is falling into the plight of speechless-

ness. "Nobody spoke a word. All they could do was to make signs at one another […] but speech seemed to have deserted them" (Nanu 71). The narrative implicitly depicts the circumstances where even the thought process of each individual is conglomerated. "Libraries have degenerated into joints where you can just drop in to have a chat…" (69). A condition where everyone was searching for 'alternatives' so that they can consciously disregard/ run away from truths.

Writing as a Tool

At this juncture it is apparent that the writers have deliberately brought out the role of culture in re-drawing or re-shaping the history of a nation within both the contexts. Márquez deals with the mechanism of myth to fill the gap between culture and politics. At the point when the connection between history and power seems lost, myth takes over the errand by referring to the origins of the nation's culture. In a particular instance the Patriarch himself asks:

> What was going on in the world because it's going on eight and everybody's asleep in this house of scoundrels, get up, you bastards, he shouted, the lights went on, they played reveille at three o'clock […] and there was the noise of startled arms, of roses that opened when there was still two hours left until dawn time […] while he opened a way lighted by the day through the persis-

> tent adulators who proclaimed him the undoer of dawn, commander of time, and repository of light. (*AP* 45)

It can be comprehended from the above passage how the patriarch re-orders the natural order. In many other instances, we see the Patriarch "stopped time by his orders on the abandoned streets" (*AP* 154), he imposed "state of plague by decree" (154) and even again "Sundays were suppressed" (154). As power manipulates the myth to such a great extent, the common people visualizes the Patriarch as the 'alpha and the omega'. Accordingly when the Patriarch dies all these codes of myth get disrupted where the people get a re-birth, "it was like entering the atmosphere of another age." (2)

Márquez through his narrative portrays how the people of Latin America are in their pursuit to re-create their historicity that was seized by power. At the outset of the narrative one can perceive the voice of a collective narration, "only then did we dare to go in without attacking the crumbling walls of reinforced stones …." (2). Here Márquez is speaking about the whole Latin American context where everyone urges for a revival of cultural and traditional norms of life that was lost under the Patriarch. Following the death of the Patriarch, collectively, a whole nation shows the urge to reclaim freedom and peace. Along with this collective voice, it is evident that the voices are changing at times, from collective we to I and again we which includes the

Patriarch too. Accordingly through the assorted voices, Márquez is affirming the undertakings inside-out of Latin America.

Despite the fact that a new perspective is brought out, The General in his Labyrinth is a further extension or an elaboration of what has happened in The Autumn of the Patriarch. The General is presented as an elaborative study of the other (the Patriarch). One compliments the other, through explanations and examples with diverse technique and circumstances providing with information necessary to prove the history. Through *The General in his Labyrinth* by dealing with the history of more that forty five years and the uneasy life of the Latin Americans, Márquez portrays the whole Latin American life in its labyrinth. Dealing with the extensive and unrelenting years of political unrest, the narrative explains the inconceivability of life all through that period. The characteristic attribute that marks out the Patriarch from that of the General is the series of events depicted in *AP.* Those events are about the distant past which prefigured the contemptible future that the nation had to encounter. As the title itself suggests, the narrative deals with the game of power, a topsy-turvy world where nothing is of surety. "Weary of searching for a ray of hope on this blind men's journey, incapable of living bereft of a soul, he had decided to flee to Venezuela and lead an armed movement in favor of integration" (*GL* 83)[8] . Even the

General seems at times unable to have the command of the whole situation, "I am no longer myself" (*GL* 27). The *General in his Labyrinth* portrays the solitude existing within the General's journey towards his death. "As said by Gerald Martin, the novel can be described as the 'death of another patriarch' or 'the solitude of seven months'. Power, solitude, and death are again the theme reverberated within the novel" (Jeevankumar 80). Similar are the cases of the General and the Patriarch, at a point of time both of them seem to be powerless to admit their dissolution of power. Even the name Bolívar is hardly ever used within the narrative.

In the fourth chapter of *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, an instance strikes where the term 'General' is used to refer to the Patriarch. "[H]e he was alone in the shadows looking for himself in the brackish water of his tears general […]" (AP 105). These interconnections of the incidents are evident within these two works strikingly. Garcia Marquez tells Maria Elvira Samper in an important interview published in the Colombian weekly *Semana* (20 March 1989)

> *El general* is more important than the rest of my work put together. It demonstrates that my work as a whole is founded on a geographic and historical reality. That reality is not that of magical realism and all those other things which people talk about. When you read [this novel], you realize that everything else in some way has a documentary, geographic, and historical basis that is

> borne out by El general… all over again, but historically grounded this time." (Palencia, Michael, and Roth 56)

Resembling a great storm of revolution, along with commenting upon the turbulent past of one's own locale, the narratives are set to question the rapidly changing present, and thus, is a living organism that evolves with the passage of time. Each of the situations and characters is carefully chosen to convey in a specific way accentuating the political situation within both the contexts. The works in eternity makes the readers to look into the real and at the same time to the world of fiction that deals with things unimaginable. The upheavals are not only that of Latin American and Kerala context, but are relevant to the whole of the Third World, where slavery/oppression of the common man is still being practiced, however, in an indirect manner. Collectively, from both the contexts, the narratives deal with the disintegration of power.

The common connecting factors evident within the works from both the contexts are the shared experiences of the crisis encountered within the economic and political arena. Though differences are obvious within the political circumstances of the two contexts, the economic status can be viewed parallel. Though the frame of "third world" has several short comings, in "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Fredric Jameson[9] presents a theory of the then current state of world literature.

In the essay "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", Fredric Jameson argues that all third world texts are to be read as "national allegories" (Jameson 69) because "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society" (67). For Jameson, the denial of a "placeless individuality" to the third world leads to "the allegorical nature of third-world culture, where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself" (85-86). This paper keeps Jameson's view in the background, gives a clear notion featuring the fundamental changes that differentiates the third world's literature from that of other literatures. Here it is marked that the narratives chosen from both the contexts are meant to awaken the common people to the alternate possibilities for social structures that they might pursue.

Notes

1. *AP* is used as the short form for the novel T*he Autumn of the Patriarch* throughout the paper.

2. Thoppil Bhasi (1924 –1992) and K. J. Baby (1954 -), the two eminent writers, activists and directors paved way for groundbreaking works within the theatre of Malayalam during early seventies and eighties. *Ningalenne Commun-*

istakki means "You made me a communist" and *Nadugadhika* is translated as *Nadugadhika: A Play by Shirly M. Joseph*.

3. It is the name of the short story collection that consist the works of the writers mentioned in this paper from the Kerala context, translated by Dr. K.M. Sherrif.

4. It refers to the lowest of the four Varnas within the Hindu caste system; the servants and workers of low status

5. Within the Indian Vedas, it is an ancient legal text among the many *Dharmasastras* of Hinduism which documents social laws. It is known as *Laws of Manu* or *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*

6. In the context of Kerala, Pater refers to the male head of family or tribe.

7. It is the dialect spoken within the historic and geographic area of southwest India covering the state of Kerala's present day Kasaragod and Kannur Districts, some regions of Wayanad District and Kozhikode District of Kerala and the entire Mahé Sub-Division of the Union Territory of Puducherry.

8. *GL* is the short form of the novel *The General in His Labyrinth*.

9. Fredric Jameson (1934) is generally considered to be one of the foremost contemporary Marxist literary critics writing in English. He has assimilated number of

theoretical discourses into his project and has intervened in many contemporary debates while analyzing a diversity of cultural texts, ranging from the novel to video, from architecture to postmodernism.

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5

THE COSMOPOLITAN CITY AND ITS GESTURE OF REFUGE

SONI WADHWA

> Mélange , hotch potch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world.
>
> – Salman Rushdie, "In Good Faith" in *Imaginary Homelands*

Rushdie's answer to the question he raised in The Satanic Verses about newness extends the idea of exile to understand it as a universal phenomenon, 'a metaphor for all humanity' and as the defining characteristic of one's identity. His answer to the question about how newness enters the world turns the idea of newness into a situation that sneaks into one's identity, because we are all immersed in exile. While moving on, and the resolve to move on, are significant gestures on the part of the individual, they do not reflect upon

the societies and institutions that continue to estrange writers, intellectuals or artists for thinking and acting differently. Perhaps, the cities of refuge as concepts, institutions and spaces could change that. This paper deals with a moment in what kinds of resolving, reconciliatory strategies the society and the writers per se have come up with in the increasing number of scenarios of persecution of intellectuals, artists, writers, and journalists. The specific text that this paper takes as its starting point is Derrida's essay 'On Cosmopolitanism', an address to the International Parliament of Writers at Strasbourg in 1996. The short essay deals with the question of cosmopolitanism, rooted in the idea of tolerance, co-existence and refuge. But it also opens up greater references to the concept of theological (Judaistic) origins and the contemporary problems surrounding it.

In the essay 'On Cosmopolitanism', Derrida raises the question of cosmopolitanism vis-à-vis cities of refuge, an idea rooted in The Old Testament , which refers to the protection of those who escaped the vengeance of the people for unintentional manslaughter. It makes provision for six cities, neither too large nor too small to shelter those who accidentally killed someone and were now in danger of being attacked by the kin of the dead. Derrida takes this religious diktat, (as indeed do the International Parliament of Writers and other political institutions like the League of Nations and after

that deal with refuge, and asylum rights and institutions), and talks about the possibilities of making it applicable in contemporary reality. In such an established context, Derrida calls for a need to the address the specificity of different situations covered under it – the exiled, the deported, the stateless, or the displaced. He also calls for the need to rethink the modalities of membership thus granted to such individuals in the cities of refuge at one level and the need to rethink the sovereignty of such cities within the space of the nation-state, without which the duty of hospitality and the right to hospitality cannot be reformed. Derrida says, "If we look to the city, rather than to the state, it is because we have given up hope that the state might create a new image for the city" (6). This opens up the need to bestow greater powers to the being of the cities – more rights, greater sovereignty, something on the lines of a different politics of the city. With the constant interference of the state, the power and the right to grant asylum to the victims of persecution get hugely compromised. For instance, in certain situations, the person seeking the asylum has got to be financially independent and not expect economic benefits from the relocation. The cities, Derrida says, need to thrive and generate scope for network of places and language to ensure the safety of the asylum seekers. Instead, they tend to be interfered with by the electoral, political and police forces under the pretext of fighting 'illegal' migration, or migration for economic reasons. Not only

that, the cities of refuge are called so because the term connotes an ethic of hospitality – a tautological expression for Derrida because for him, ethics is hospitality. The idea is to welcome each and every one in need in the thus-created sanctuary. The debates surrounding such unconditional, ethical grant of hospitality date back to Kantian philosophy, which leaves some scope for limitations and state interference in the issue. The cities of refuge in the contemporary scenario are thus spaces of flourishing of new order of law and democracy.

Derrida's essay leads towards larger question of urbanization of asylum, of cosmopolitanism, and of geography of freedom. What is this peculiar rhetoric of the city? How does it come into being in praxis of urbanization?

The question of the city and of its existence have become a given. That is a distance quite farther from the time when the Baudelairean handling of the city as an aesthetic object was something of a novelty and needed to be theorized upon. The urbanization of the question of dwelling, especially for those who are forced to move from one place to the other in the hope of living, is the intensely predicated upon a phenomenology of the concept of living. That a new politics of living together is being inscribed on the face of the city is a challenging tenet to think about. It is also the basic

ground for the democracy to come through the institution of cities of refuge.

This idea of the cosmopolitan city ought to be seen as a centre operating on the project of open borders. The cities of refuge figure in the discussion of the issue of migration as a solution to the problem. It is the cosmopolitan connections around these spaces that emerge around mid-twentieth century to address the increasingly growing and visible figure of the exile.

There are many angles to the discussion of the practice and possibilities of cosmopolitanism – the development of the cosmopolitan city transcending the concept of the nation-state, the coming of the "Stranger" and the ways in which his or her presence in handled, and the impossible possibility of unconditional hospitality, for instance. In theoretical discourses, cosmopolitanism and the city get foregrounded in discussions of hospitality and forgiveness.

What does the cosmopolitan city constitute? What are its problems? How does it address the practice of democracy? To begin with, the city works as a microscopic model of a democratic nation-state. Various studies in urban sociology point towards the relevance of cities in contemporary times. For one, they are microcosmic of world culture. As Ulf Hannerz in 'Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture' explores the connections

between cosmopolitans, locals, cosmopolitans as intellectuals and world culture, "People like the cosmopolitans have a special part in bringing about a degree of coherence . . . . If there were only locals in the world, world culture would be no more than the sum of its separate parts" (249). As sites of coherence, such cities help bring a sense of continuity and stability to the understanding of urban experience.

As a twentieth century phenomenon intertwined with globalization, 'cosmopolitanization' is a phenomenon emerging out of mobility. So with its roots in the mythical cities of refuge, the idea of cosmopolitanism has come a long way from providing refuge to the half-guilty and half-innocent man-slaughterer to exile in general to the phenomenon of moving for occupational or other purposes. Thus these liberal cities, as they are sometimes called, become sites of world culture characterized by huge diversity across social and cultural phenomena. Ulrich Beck goes on to define cosmopolitanization as "internal globalization, globalization from within national societies" (17). In the process, it introduces the cities to everyday conflicts and differences in consciousness and identities. For Beck, it thus becomes "a methodological concept which helps to overcome methodological nationalism and to build a frame of reference to analyse the new social conflicts, dynamics and structures of Second Modernity" (18) . Cosmopolitanism thus has the potential

to demonstrate and engage with dialogic imagination, transcending beyond singular perspective of the nation. Beck says:

> The national perspective is a monologic imagination, which excludes the otherness of the other. The cosmopolitan perspective is an alternative imagination, an imagination of alternative ways of life and rationalities, which include the otherness of the other. It puts the negotiation of contradictory cultural experiences into the centre of activities: in the political, the economic, the scientific and the social (18).

The origins and practice of unconditional hospitality existed in primitive societies because of the presence of nomadic way of life; with the shift to settling down and belonging to one place, offering or withholding hospitality became a choice. New questions became pertinent about the identity of the foreigner, his/her/its intentions. These questions were not posed by the foreigner; on the contrary, the foreigner was these questions – he embodied them. Rooted in the perspective of modernity and the city is also the difference of the need for cosmopolitanism today:

> The cosmopolitanism of our times does not spring from the capitalized "virtues" of Rationality, Universality, and Progress; nor is it embodied in the myth of the nation writ large in the figure of the citizen of the world. Cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism's upward mobility, and bereft of those

> comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitical community. Too often, in the West, these peoples are grouped together in a vocabulary of victimage and come to be recognized as constituting the "problem" of multiculturalism to which late liberalism extends its generous promise of a pluralist existence (Pollock et al. 582).

The changed modernity, the changed political scenario and the phenomenon of globalization call for a different kind of cosmopolitanism. Sassen's concept of the 'glocal' is very useful here. Its uniqueness also lies in the way in manages the idea of location in the concept of the glocal, in the way it handles "home and non-place, a nowhere place" (Beck 31). This nowhereness combined with the technology of the Internet and mobile phones situates the city better in the dialogic imagination mentioned earlier: "A cosmopolitan sociology should investigate not only presence and absence, but also 'imagined presence' . . . . Dialogic imaginations presuppose, among others, imagined presence of geographically distant others and worlds" (Beck 31). Such an understanding helps fashion a discerning view of the strategic advantages of the use of the city as a site of refuge. These kinds of sociological interventions in the study of the operation of cosmopolitanism foreground the particular nature of the city as a peculiar location of being. The way the city lends itself to the treatment of the heterotopic plane of a non-place or a place of

absence makes it an invigorating study of the cosmopolitan space. Thomas Claviez makes an interesting intervention in this idea of non-place by asking if such a place of Derrida's unconditional hospitality can ever possibly exist or "does such an idea of hospitality represent a genuine utopia: a u-topos, a nonplace, in which, by definition, nothing can "take place"?" (Claviez 3). It is interesting to note that discussions of place invariably invite the haunting of utopias and non-places. The existence of a place, of something 'taking place' is intertwined with nothing 'taking place'. Claviez's is an interesting take on Foucault's heterotopia – he talks about a "heter-u-topia" that allows for such a simultaneity of differences to (co)exist. This heter-u-topia need not be a place of loss of identity and orientation; it need not even be an actual geographical location; it could be a space in thought itself, which comes with the larger possibility and responsibility of sheltering the other within one's self since exile is the first experience of humanity, especially as beginning with the alienation under capitalism. The encounter with alterity is rooted in the very rubric of sociality: " . . . hospitality is no longer a private gesture but an issue for a whole society anxious to close its frontiers to illegal immigrants and refugees, the solicitants of this world" (Dufourmantelle 13). The non-place that Claviez suggests gets reflected in Anne Dufourmantelle's thought: "To think is to invite, to offer a shelter to the other within ourselves, the other as the possibility to be(come) our-

selves" (Dufourmantelle 13-14). Applied in this sense, Derrida's radical, unconditional hospitality "denotes an almost mystical experience, a borderline concept" (Durfourmantelle 16). In its existence and execution in the space of thought, there is a greater potential for the cosmopolis to materialize: "… should we not rightfully expect from political utopia a "placelessness" which opens the possibility of a human (cosmo)polis?" (19).

Yet there is another way of looking at the presence and absence of cosmopolitanism, at the ways in which the city deals with the presence of the stranger in the city. With a streak of phenomenology in their work, some sociologists have theorized the ways in which the society tries to look at the ('invasive', 'invading' – perceived to be so) being of the stranger, the 'problem' of the stranger. Zygmunt Bauman writes eloquently about the 'making and unmaking of strangers' : "All societies produce strangers; but each kind of society produces its own kind of strangers, and produces them in its own inimitable way" (Bauman 17). He records the coming of the Stranger as having an effect similar to the coming of an earthquake in that it unsettles and disrupts the value of order in a society and its ethic of ordering. His ways of being, in their difference, highlight the assumptions of the locals as assumptions and he thus turns everything – every practice, every norm in thought and deed – into a question. He thus takes away the givenness of the locals' world and takes away

the very idea of the routine from them: "Strangers are no longer routine, and thus the routine ways of keeping a things pure do not suffice. In a world constantly on the move the anxiety which condensed into the fear of strangers saturates the totality of daily life – fills every nook and cranny of the human condition" (Bauman 11). Because they disrupt the locals' routine, the society seeks different ways of getting rid of them. This riddance is a continuous process and not a one-time situation.

In a way, the Strangers are not just the exiles or the displaced – they are just about anyone who does not feel at home in the city. In Adorno, the two coincide as seen in his critique of (American) society – it is not merely the case that he misses being in Germany and does not fit in America; he is also not at home in the violence of modernity in its consumerist and capitalist scenario. In other words, he is 'cognitively ambivalent: "In the harmonious, rational order about to be built there was no room – there could be no room – for 'neither-nors', for the sitting astride, for the cognitively ambivalent" (Bauman 18). The Strangers' is a crisis in identity formation, discussed hugely in the context of roots, home, belongingness and hybridity in the literature and the criticism of the diaspora but what Bauman's perspective makes a case for is the qualification of anyone feeling uprooted in the ever-present and ubiquitous state of "either-or" and includes everyone partaking of the

'neither-nor' position. The "self-perpetuating uncertainty" (Bauman 25) defines the being of the Strangers. If they give up the ambivalence of their situation and become agents of exoticism by selling a different cuisine, or by "promising unusual, exciting experiences to the taste-buds, [by] sell[ing] curious-looking, mysterious objects suitable as talking points at the next party, [by] offer[ing] services other people would not stoop or deign to offer or [by] dangl[ing] morsels of wisdom refreshingly different from the routine and boring" (Bauman 28), they participate in the either-or process of consumerist illusion of choice and thus no longer remain threatening or inimical to the locals. Since that is not the case in every situation, the modern city faces a greater question – how to live with alterity, for the Strangers are not a temporary inconvenience but a daily encounter: "At one pole, strangehood (and difference in general) will go on being constructed as the source of pleasurable experience and aesthetic satisfaction; at the other, as the terrifying incarnation of the unstoppably rising sliminess of the human condition – as the effigy for all future ritual burning of its horrors" (Bauman 34). The city then needs to invent a different kind of 'life politics' to deal with this difference.

Martha Nussbaum's answer to the question of cosmopolitanism involves the idea of a moral imagination. Her idea of loneliness experienced by the Stranger is contiguous with the cognitive ambivalence of Bau-

man's Stranger but locates it in the figure of the citizen of the world and defines it vis-à-vis the patriot: "Becoming a citizen of the world is often a lonely business. It is, as Diogenes said, a kind of exile – from the comfort of local truths, from the warm, nestling feeling of patriotism, from the absorbing drama of pride in oneself and one's own" (Nussbaum 15). For her, feeling beyond patriotism, thinking beyond the nation, thinking and practising cosmopolitanism is being an exile. Like Bauman (and Adorno, and Said), Nussbaum universalizes the experience of the exile. It broadens the need to implement cosmopolitanism not just in relation with the actual others but also at the level of emotion. In the concept of Kwame Anthony Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism: "Cosmopolitanism and patriotism, unlike nationalism, are sentiments more than ideologies" (Appiah 23). The contrast with nationalism brings us again to Sassen's de-nationalizing the nation and Beck's notion of (world) cultures: "Culture … is a (power-ridden) negotiation of differences that always transcends – and historically always has transcended – national boundaries, and thus steadfastly subverts the homogeneity that a national(istic) concept of culture implies" (Claviez 2). So the nation-state is again, in Thomas Claviez's argument, not a very fruitful way of approaching cosmopolitanism, and hence Derrida's suggestion of greater empowerment for the cities and the need to think beyond the nation, towards the city.

Eduardo Mendieta has another very intriguing orientation and on that basis, he predicts a totally different future. In "Invisible cities: A phenomenology of globalization from below ", he looks at the contemporary world as existing in the collapse of the matrix of time and space and argues for the need to invent new matrixes to deal with new ways of being in the city – those of exiles, the displaced peoples or even cyber-nomads. This different urbanization implies "that otherness is not going to be a mere metaphysical, or even phenomenological category and concern. Under the reign of the city: Otherness has become quotidian and practical " (17, emphasis original). If the project of the cosmopolitan city in general, and not just the concept of the isolated cities of refuge, has to resolve the issue of the Stranger, the Foreigner or the Other, it needs to recognize its encounter with the Otherness in its real practical, everyday manifestation. Mendieta keeps emphasizing " . . . the routinization and de-metaphysicalization of otherness brought about by the hyper-urbanization of humanity" (19, emphasis original) and points towards the radical nature of the presence of otherness when he says, "Either everyone will be a stranger, or no one will be because we will all be strangers in a city of strangers" (20). This is a very innovative way of approaching the persistent need to build and encourage the practice of cosmopolitanism in the cities, especially in our age of de-nationalizing the national. Cities are the sites of unbundling of the

state thus are the new sites for the unbundling of a new life politics. The mini-nations found within the cities in the form of small Italys, Chinas, Japans add to the need to surpass the nation and focus on the local in the city, creating new cultures: "These places are where the centripetal and centrifugal forces of homogenization and heterogenization interact to produce new cultural formations" (22). In this quotidian experience of exile, ' the condition of modernity after an extended experience with modernity ' (103, emphasis original), as Peter Wagner puts it in his book Theorizing Modernity, one is forced to think about exile as an all-pervading condition, one that calls for thinking, experiencing, practising, and asking for resolving at multiple levels – individual, social, historical and philosophical. The exiled writer is only one example; the consciousness and the living of the precariousness of the situation of being forced to go away, and to be away perhaps haunt everyone in the similar manner:

> To lose this place, in particular if one was or felt expelled rather than going voluntarily, has often been described as the loss of a kind of ontological security, of the confidence of the availability of the world as it was. In particular, the human condition threatened to be robbed of its existential temporality. Once the safety of that which is given was gone, that which was and that which can be could no longer be relied upon either (Wagner 103).

With this universal shattering of confidence, with the way the germ of doubt has penetrated the ontological

security of our lives, we increasingly get to see how pervasive (dis)location is in the times of modernity.

As Chris Rumford points out, "cosmopolitanism can provide us with the requisite conceptual toolbox with which to understand the novel spaces and borders emerging in Europe" (1). As a politics and practice of space, it makes for an interesting intervention in the way living in the cities, and interfering with living in the cities is debated today. More than jargon, it is a concept of hope, a "possibility of new ways of conceptualising spaces and borders" (2). What cities can take away from the concept is a set of qualities, preferences and practices that speak volumes about what it means to live together in 'spaces of wonder', a concept that Rumford uses to discuss opportunities and spaces that are interpreted in terms of threat and fear and are attempted to be controlled in the aftermath of 9/11.

Donald makes an attempt to discuss and contextualize cosmopolitan space and the need for it in our times when we find ourselves in a situation of being thrown together and poses this question: "How can we stroppy strangers live together without doing each other too much violence?" (147). His is the most lucid account of the question of cosmopolitanism, the need to deliberate on its praxis and the ways in which it can materialize in urban culture. At first, his thoughts might sound very commonsensical: "What makes living together

possible is rational deliberation . . . . It seems pretty self-evident that if we strangers are to live together in at least reasonably peaceful coexistence, then we need to talk about matters of mutual interest, and it seems sensible to seek non-violent ways of negotiating conflicts" (152). It is very refreshing to find such an insight amidst all the jargon about different names of modernity and various kinds of cosmopolitanism. It is one thing to look for answers to the questions of (lack of) cosmopolitanism in institutional implementation or to ask for separate cities of refuge. (The demand for the cities of refuge for the persecuted writers is of course valid as discussed in the context of Derrida's essay.) It is another to engage with it at a personal level, in individual ways. The discussion here is about the larger practice of cosmopolitanism among the publics, regarding the ways in which strangers, aliens, foreigners, and migrants are perceived. In their potential of disrupting democratic rubric, these conflicts have a straight-forward answer: "if you are interested in the formation of a democratic culture, then you have to understand and take seriously the texture and rhythms of living together: its spatial manifestations, its disjunctural temporalities, its ordinariness and its social complexity, as well as its political consequences" (Donald 151-2). And what are these "spatial manifestations", "disjunctural consequences" and "political consequences"? The first could be the ways in which the city opens and unfolds into its streets, and its transport amenities, places of

recreations like parks and sites of buying and selling from the grocer's shop to the shopping malls – the locations that Simmel spoke of as demanding the activity of the eye. The "disjunctural temporalities" that Donald refers to could be the contrast that the migrant or the exile specifically lives and lives in , in the way she experiences time in her new location. The "ordinariness' and "social complexity" of living together consists in the way we share our disjunctural temporalities and the anxieties and the insecurities around it. The political consequences emerge when each of these conditions are shared and understood successfully and 'in good faith', as Rushdie (in the essay of the same name) puts it: "What it requires is a moment of good will; a moment in which we may all accept that the other parties are acting, have acted, in good faith" (395). In fact, the disjunctures that Donald talks about echo Rushdie's words from The Satanic Verses : "The modern city . . . is the locus classicus of incompatible realities. Lives that have no business mingling with one another sit side by side upon the omnibus. One universe, on a zebra crossing, is caught for an instant, blinking like a rabbit, in the headlamps of a motor-vehicle in which an entirely alien and contradictory continuum is to be found" (ch. 2). Donald draws from Rushdie, his novel and his defence of the novel in order to underline his idea of cosmopolitanism and the ways in which it can be a part of lived reality:

> Gone is any idea of transcendent identity. Gone too is an ideal of virtuous citizenship. In the offing may be a thicker description of the openness to unassimilable difference, and so also a concern with the mundane, pragmatic but sometimes life-or-death arts of living in the city. These skills shade into and out of the virtues made possible by the great adventure of the city: politeness as well as politics, civility as well as citizenship, the stoicism of urbanity, the creative openness of cosmopolitanism (171).

The answer is bafflingly simple: "politeness as well as politics, civility as well as citizenship, the stoicism of urbanity, the creative openness of cosmopolitanism" (Donald 170). These are the conditions that entail the act of seeking refuge and giving it, more so in the way they can be extended to every human being because they are not exclusive to writers and intellectuals. The whole world is the diaspora world; the whole world is the migrant world. As the quotidian condition of exile comes to be seen as the universal condition, Rushdie puts it eloquently: "If The Satanic Verses is anything, it is a migrant's-eye view of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity" (394). As "a metaphor for all humanity", it calls for a set of life skills that conjure a way of negotiating conflicts, of being together, of being a little less "noisy neighbours" (the title of the chapter in Donald's Imagining

the Modern City). To go back to Donald in order to situate cosmopolitanism and the conditions for the possibility of a cosmopolitan city:

> The arts of living in the city are more demanding, more diverse, and more ingenious … they require a variety of skills: reading the signs in the street; adapting to different ways of life right on your doorstep; learning tolerance and responsibility – or at least, as Simmel taught us, indifference – towards others and otherness; showing respect, or self-preservation, in not intruding on other people's space; exploiting the etiquette of the street; picking up new rules when you migrate to a foreign city. It is through this rougher urbanity, rather than the nice disciples of 'civil deportment', that the modern urban self is routinely formed (168).

In The Satanic Verses that Rushdie created and that critics of cosmopolitanism have used to theorize about what it means to be cosmopolitan and what it means to create a cosmopolitan city, there is a celebration of the exile, in the newness it generates, in the newness it brings to light:

> The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. …. The Satanic Verses is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves (Rushdie 394).

To be a mongrel and to recognize it one's own self and identity are requisites for the creation of the city of ref-

uge, the cosmopolitan city, and any city. It is a gesture that we as modern, urban inhabitants owe to each other, and to the great city that we see as places of dwelling, and as places that we live in and leave. It is a turn that global cities would need to take in order to generate and sustain spaces of cosmopolitanism. The solution of looking at cosmopolitanism as a way of reading the city, not merely for the sake of incorporating the stranger, but also for generating better environments for the thriving of cultures is, to some extent, a strategy for turning every city into a city of refuge. In its encounter and co-habitation with otherness, the city would acquire a new dimension of looking at things – conscious and at home along with those not at home, be it the flâneur observing the city, or the exile constantly on the move.

The cosmopolitan space – a 'mongrel' site of hybridity, fusion and conjoinings – stands for the ethic of hospitality assumed in the cities of refuge or the cosmopolitan cities, and since exile is both the 'outside world' and 'inside world', it is assumed in all the cities. Rushdie's and Donald's contribution to the possibilities that can let a cosmopolitan city emerge come from the same streak, from the recognition that one's identity may be a given absolute, but what we do with it and how we invent it and choose to invent it contributes hugely to the recognition and application of the life skills that help us deal with the so-called noisy neighbours. The

cosmopolitan city in its encouragement of such values becomes the space for the exile, writer or not. It becomes a site of the in-between or the third space in its encompassing of here and there.

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“LIKE HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM”: PATRILINEALITY AND NATIONALISM IN THE WORK OF HISHAM MATAR, JAMAL MAHJOUB AND ROBIN YASSIN-KASSAB

TASNIM QUTAIT

Hisham Matar's autobiographical text *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between* (2016) is framed by a return to Libya in the wake of the 2011 uprisings, continuing a search for answers about the disappearance of his father in 1990. The "land in between" in the title captures Matar's ambivalence towards "the land my father loved more than anything else" (42), as he describes himself as "reluctant to give Libya any more than it has already taken" (2). In a passage that highlights the distance between these positions, Matar describes how his father was asked to refrain from putting himself at risk by openly criticising Gaddafi. He notes that "[t]he disagreement … placed the nation against the intimate reality of a family" (42). This setting of nation against family captures the divide between the state and the private sphere of the home,

even as the danger of political defiance highlights the vulnerability of the home to the violence of the state. The violent intrusion of the state into the home reveals not only the contingency of a protected private sphere, but the illusion of a homeland belonging to its people. This passage thus sets the father's vision of what Libya could become against the reality of what it is.

Matar, in addition to his autobiographical writings, has written two novels focusing on the relationship between fathers and sons and the "land in between." Although, Matar has been careful to emphasise that his novels are not autobiographical, his fictional texts are very much concerned with the triad of fathers, sons, and "the land in between" examined in his memoir *The Return*. In this triad, the father is more than a symbolic representative of the nation. Rather, I argue that the sense of being "in between" which Matar is concerned with also relates more broadly to a sense of distance from the post-independence generation, and to the growing awareness of the discontinuities between an emancipatory national project and the reality of state violence. In this article, I consider the implications of the relationship between fathers, sons and the land "in between" as a recurring plot in Arab British fiction. I examine Matar's two novels, *In the Country of Men* (2006) and *The Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011), alongside Jamal Mahjoub's *Travelling with Djinns* (2003) and Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road*

to Damascus (2008). Matar, Yassin-Kassab and Mahjoub are three writers settled in Britain and writing in English with family backgrounds in Libya, Syria and Sudan respectively. In each of their texts, the protagonist searches for a connection with an always distant father, aspiring to his level of patriotism. However, in attempting to follow in their father's footsteps, the sons discover both the failures of their fathers and the limitations of the patriarchal, postcolonial nation-state.

Discussing his second novel, Matar notes that he is

> [F]ascinated with the structure of the family [...] One of the questions that *Anatomy of a Disappearance* is asking is, is it possible to ever know your parent [...] But also [...] how do you tell the story or the reality of existing in this very peculiar political atmosphere? ("Reluctant Spokesman").

The link between the two questions – between the unknowability of the parent (here the father) and the peculiarity of the post-colonial Arab nation-state – does more than underline the connection between the family unit and the nation. As Anne McClintock writes, "[n]ations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space. The term nation derives from natio: to be born" (357). This paradigm focuses on the gendering of the nation through the family allegory. In the texts that I examine here, the focus on the son's failure to inherit the father's legacy

raises questions about the patriarchal frameworks of the nation-state as well as the ideals of nationalism and patriotism. Mediated through father-son relationships which shift between idealisation and disillusionment, the texts open up a space where the patrilineal and patriarchal structures of the postcolonial nation-state are disrupted.

The gendering of the nation that takes place through the legitimating metaphor of the nuclear family includes the representation of the leader as the father of the nation. In his influential work *Neopatriarchy* (1988), Hisham Sharabi discusses the central feature of the modern Arab state as "the dominance of the Father (patriarch), the center around which the national and natural family are organised" (7). The cultivation and manipulation of the idea of the national family through the utilisation of the "metaphor of state leader as father" involves a naturalisation of power imbalances that depends on an acceptance of patriarchal authority (Joseph 348). The idea of the family as a microcosm of Arab society offers an understandable framework, though it reduces the connection between authoritarian structures to the cultural and tends to ignore the social and political.

In her study of fathers and sons in modern Arab literature, Dalya Cohen-Mor notes that "[t]he father-son relationship is predominantly portrayed as conflicted in

Arab fiction" (qtd. in Preville). Examining this antagonism reveals how representations of filial relationships often intersect with the failures of decolonization. For example, in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's novel *al-Bahth ʿan Walīd Masʿūd* (1978, The Search for Walid Masoud, 2000), a family history of resistance is represented in terms of a broken patrilineal legacy. The novel centres on the search for Walid, a Palestinian political activist, writer and symbol for nationalist struggle. As Samah Selim suggests, the text "initiate[s] a journey through the psychic and political landscape of a quixotic Arab modernity that is, like the novel's central character, intensely present and yet irretrievably lost" (89). One of Walid's friends, Amer, represents this loss as a severance from what seem to be the futile struggles of previous generations in Iraq. He "refuses to look back at the past, to his country's history", relating the trajectories of national history to a patrilineal heritage he feels alienated from:

> [t]o him all history started with his grandfather, when he was fighting the Ottomans during the last years of the nineteenth century, then continued with the British occupation of Iraq, when his father distinguished himself as a national fighter, sustained by the dream that every time he was jailed or placed under house arrest his country came closer to the day of liberation. But liberation remained a dream. From the time Amer crossed over into his forties, he felt his immediate history had been severed from him. (Jabra 140)

In this passage, Amer's identification with the nation is dependent upon what Diane King calls "lineal masculinity" where "collective memory is masculinised and codified as male achievement transmitted through patrilines" (328). While his forebears work towards nationalist goals, Amer's severance from this heritage, living "for the present, for the present alone," reflects an awareness of his failure to continue their nationalist legacy (Jabra 146). Thus, Jabra presents the failures of decolonisation as inextricable from Amer's failure to continue the male intergenerational legacy of resistance. In the Anglophone novels that I will now turn to, this sense of distance from the nation and the attempt to affirm connection to homeland is further undercut by the discontinuities of exile. The novels reconstruct national history from both a spatial and temporal distance, with protagonists who themselves experience the dislocation of exile, as well the discontinuities of the nation itself, as contrasted against the myths of local and/or pan-Arab nationalism.

In Matar's debut novel *In the Country of Men*, the narrator Suleiman recalls his childhood in Libya, specifically recounting the months leading up to his father's arrest in 1979, and his own gradual awareness of his father's dissident activities. Christopher Micklethwait describes the novel as an exploration of "the mechanisms of state power in a violent hyper-vigilant postcolonial dictatorship" through the child narrator's

perspective on the surveillance, show trials and public executions of a police state (174). The novel depicts the way in which Suleiman is drawn into betraying his best friend, and later informing on his father to the friendly security man patrolling outside the family home. As Nouri Gana notes, Matar's novels convey "the power of the state apparatuses to penetrate the lives of Libyans and extend its rule over them with their own consent and collaboration" (20). This is captured in an early scene where Suleiman watches Moosa, one of his father's friends, hang up a portrait of Muammar Gaddafi to ward off suspicion and then pretend to salute the "[t]he benefactor, the father of the nation, the guide" as he "punched his fist, chanting El Fateh, El Fateh, El Fateh" (160-161). In identifying the dictator as "[t]he benefactor, the father of the nation," Moosa mocks the regime's assumption of paternal authority. Notably, this portrait of the Guide replaces the portrait of Suleiman's father, Faraj. The scene thus dramatises the antagonistic parallels between the father and "the father of the nation" (160). Throughout the novel, Suleiman yearns to connect with his "aloof" father, even as he becomes aware that Faraj's activities are endangering the family. When Suleiman's mother attempts to burn Faraj's political books, Suleiman saves one of them, leading to Faraj's arrest years later when he takes the book to work and reads from it to his colleagues. Suleiman's ambivalent feelings about his father are captured towards the end of the novel, when he concludes that

there was "an element of intrigue and madness in the way Father had behaved" (237).

Matar's second novel, *Anatomy of a Disappearance,* also centres on the relationship between father and son in the context of political struggle, but this time in a nameless country seemingly based on Iraq. At the beginning of *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, the young narrator Nuri el-Alfi lives with his father Kamal, an "ex-minister and leading dissident" in exile in Egypt (106). The novel is a coming-of-age story centred on a son's struggle for intimacy with his father, a struggle extended indefinitely following the father's abduction. Reading about his father's political activities, Nuri imagines himself living a similar life, a life given significance by political goals: "I, too, wanted secret meetings in Geneva, allies in Paris with whom I had watched history march and worked to change its course" (Matar, *Anatomy* 90). The son seeks to inherit the father's ideological convictions and work, in this case conjoined to a romanticised idea of espionage and being an agent of historical change.

While Matar's novels are narrated from the point of view of child protagonists, Robin Yassin-Kassab's novel *The Road from Damascus* opens with the protagonist Sami Traifi returning to Damascus to "discover his roots". Initially, Sami aspires to emulate his father Mustafa, sure that "as his father had before him, he

would write books about Arabic poetry" (14). Sami aspires to be "like his father. But better than his father. Leaping forth from the giant's shoulders, he'd go further" (32). After his father's death, however, he realises that he was "an academic only because his father had been ... [m]aking him in his own eyes not much of a man – unsettled, out of place, unexplained" (35). The narrative charts the protagonist Sami's ideological transformation as he tries to convince himself that "there were paths other than the one his father had trodden ... other, valid paths" (10). As with Matar's texts, the son looks back on the failures of the nationalist ideals of his parents' generation, as he "stopped believing his own myth" (Kassab 87).

In Mahjoub's *Travelling with Djinns* (2003), the father-son dyad frames the protagonist's struggles with his sense of nationhood. A journalist living in Britain, Yasin is on a road trip across Europe with his young son Leo, the narrative of this journey becoming intertwined with flashbacks exploring Yasin's relationship to his own father, a dissident journalist ideologically driven by Afro-Arab nationalism. Yasin remembers that:

> [t]here was a centre of gravity to my father's life. ... The books, the piles of newspapers cuttings, the maps, the photographs of African statesmen on the walls – Nkrumah, Kaunda, Nasser ... The fate of the country gave his life meaning – the absurd conviction that the curious

> collection of ethnicities, races and creeds fenced in together by colonial rule could be turned into a cohesive nation. (90)

For the journalist Yasin, "the absurd conviction" that Sudan could become a cohesive nation is belied by the current political stagnation, and the failure to achieve the aspirations of anti-colonial movements. Yasin sees his father as representing the disappearing generation who had witnessed "those halcyon days, with independence in sight" (104). He had lived to see that "[i]t had all gone terribly wrong. The great age of national independence had proved to be nothing more than a neocolonial mirage" (140). In Mahjoub's novel, the politics of the independent generation seem to have no place in the current reality of Sudan. Yasin realises that "the ideals [his father] had founded his adult life on, from the dark pre-independence days … all of it was gone, defunct, old hat. And so, in a manner of speaking, was he" (137-8). He reflects that those who fought for a "nation of equals ... were now just a gang of toothless old grumps who mumbled nostalgically about things nobody remembered" (138). At the end of the novel, Yasin's father has joined the ranks of "the exiled journalists from Baghdad and Damascus, the poets from Lebanon" (325). Through this trajectory, Mahjoub dramatises the failure of the grand narrative of Arab nationalism from the perspective of the son who feels disconnected from this narrative (228).

Mahjoub raises this generational disconnection as a shared dilemma in an interview with actor Alexander Siddig, where they discuss what "link[s] the two of [them], both born in the 1960s, the children of Sudanese fathers and English mothers" ("The Accidental Arab") A In this conversation, Siddig describes his character Ibn Khaldun in the British drama series Spooks as "trying to take a snapshot of this guy before he disappears. He was my father. He was your father. He was the father of all the generations that had a liberal upbringing" ("Accidental Arab"). Agreeing with this characterisation, Mahjoub adds:

> He's also the archetype of old Arab nationalism, the intelligentsia who became marginalised, the technocrats of Nasser's early ambitions. But they were deemed a threat, and the West feared them. So did Nasser, who imprisoned them. They left a void that was eventually filled by political Islam. ("Accidental Arab")

Both Siddig and Mahjoub mourn the "disappearance" of the nationalist generation and attempt in their work to represent them. In this sense, the disappearance of the father comes to reflect the disappearance of a generation for whom commitment to a nationalist cause was possible. In each of the texts, the sons' severance from the past, and from the nationalist project, is sharpened by the tensions of the father-son relationship.

In Mahjoub's novel, Yasin feels guilty about his inabil ity to continue the father's legacy. Even as a child he-

knows that he will be unable to carry on his father's work, reflecting that "[o]ne day ... I would inherit all these heaps of paper and books and would be incapable of carrying on where he left off" (91). That Yasin sees his father's work as a personal burden and that he does not feel qualified for both amplifies the idealisation of that work and sharpens his criticism of the naiveté of the nationalist generation.

In both the novels of Matar, the narrative is similarly framed by the son's awareness of his failure to continue his father's cause, contrasting a nationalist sense of purpose with his own unsettled identity and exilic perspective. As Kamal's friend Taleb tells Nuri in *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, "he wanted someone to inherit it all" (62). The use of the word 'inheritance' again presents the obligation to continue in the nationalist struggle in terms of familial legacy. Having ultimately failed to commit himself politically, Nuri describes feeling "guilty … at having lost [his father], not knowing how to find him or take his place. Every day I let my father down" (108). Here, the ambivalence about taking the father's place becomes a political indictment as well as a personal failure. The dynamic of inheritance presents the national project as a failure to carry on a father's legacy, giving an emotional impact to the characters' conflicted feelings towards their countries of origin.

In both Matar and Mahjoub's novels, then, the protagonists' conflicted relationship with their dissident

fathers is accompanied by the recognition that they are unable to "inherit" their nationalist work. The same notion of inheritance also appears in Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus*, though here the son transitions from feeling he has failed to continue his father's work, to questioning his father's Arab nationalism, eventually coming to "the realisation that the condition of being an Arab was impotence … not the idea he'd inherited" (90).

Framing Arab failure in masculinist terms, this anxiety of "impotence" in Sami's words is a recurring rhetorical trope in the works of Arab writers. Lebanese writer Etel Adnan, for example, speaks of a region "castrated by underdevelopment and occupation" (12). Similarly, in his indictment of Arab nostalgia for the golden age, journalist Samir Kassir speaks of "the feeling of impotence" which is "coupled with a civic powerlessness … all the more overwhelming because the Arab unconscious filters it through nostalgia for a forgotten but still fantasised-about glory" (27-8). The language of patrilineal inheritance here highlights the masculinism with which the idea of nationalism is forged. Masculine and national identities become intertwined, with the masculine ideal representing a parallel to the idealised notion of the homeland. Reflecting this intertwining, these novels emphasise how the protagonists initially construct their sense of self through attempting to model themselves on their father's example.

However, as the protagonists mature, they confront the gap between these masculine and national ideals, and the violent realities which are gradually revealed to them.

Both Matar's novels explore familial bonds in a context where, as he puts it, "private life is infiltrated regularly by these regimes" ("Reluctant Spokesman"). The narratives dramatise what Homi Bhabha describes as the "unhomely" intrusion where "the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions," where "the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (141). Bhabha defines the unhomely as "the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the-home-in-the-world" stemming from "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place" (141). In these novels, the protagonists' growing feeling of estrangement develops through their uncovering of secrets that come to light to destabilise the sanctity of the home, tarnishing their "inherited" ideals.

In *The Road from Damascus,* Sami realises early on that "there was a secret here which [he] alone had not penetrated", though it takes him the course of the novel to understand the full story of his father's direct

implication in the Syrian regime's suppression of the 1980s rebellion (5). As a secular nationalist, Sami's father Mustafa supported the Ba'athist dictatorship over their opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, during the armed conflict. Sami recalls what Mustafa has to say about the government's suppression of the Hama uprising in 1982 : "[i]n the face of the Brother's fanaticism, the government stood unwaveringly firm. Sami's father, Mustafa, safe in London, had explained it to him" (3). The narrative Sami inherits is then challenged when he meets his maternal family in Damascus, and understands that they have suffered as a result of the regime's brutality. While Sami accepts in principle the death of tens of thousands, he is unable to deal with the revelation that his father had informed on his uncle, who spent twenty-two years in a Syrian jail and was mentally disturbed after his release. The justifications his father had given him for supporting a secular police state seemed valid until Sami is forced to confront the human cost to his own relatives, through a betrayal that undermines the national family myth. This discovery turns Sami's former idealisation of his father into disillusionment. As Sami's mother Nur tells him, "[n]obody should tell anybody that their father was a traitor" (342), pointing out that personal ties should trump loyalty to the regime, something her husband had failed to respect. In this novel then, the anxiety of inheriting parental legacies is inextricable from the guilt by association that in part motivates Sami's cri-

tique of his father's politics on moral grounds, and his later rejection of nationalist frameworks.

In Matar's *In The Country of Men*, there is a similar transition away from an initial hero-worship of the distant father. In a central scene, Suleiman becomes implicated in Faraj's political activities after he watches the televised interrogation of Ustath Rashid, his father's close friend. During the interrogation, he hears a question about "Bu Suleiman" (father of Suleiman): "[i]t was strange to hear Baba's name on television ... [t]he voice reread the name, this time inserting "Bu Suleiman" into Baba's name, which ... made me feel implicated, dragged by my name into something I knew nothing about" (114). Following this interrogation, Faraj is arrested and tortured to the extent that Suleiman is initially unable to recognise him when he is released. This traumatic scene, where the son sees the father as a stranger, symbolically represents the es trangement Suleiman experiences as he comes to understand that Faraj was released because he had given the names of his co-conspirators. While Suleiman does not fully understand this betrayal as a child, the older narrator who looks back on these events is aware of the implications of Faraj's actions. In this sense, the impact of violence at the level of the family parallels the sense of alienation from the nation.

In Matar's second novel *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, the father's name is again central, as Nuri becomes aw-

are of Kamal's political activities by "search[ing] the indexes" of his father's books: "[i]t was not until [he] encountered [his] father's name—Kamal Pasha el-Alfi—that [he] realised what [he] was looking for" (66). Again, the father's name represents the intersection of political and personal. In these scenes, histories of violence intrude suddenly into the protagonist's life: as Nuri reflects, "[he] read these things about [his] father before [he] could understand what they meant" (26). The uncovering of the father's political role, which explains his later abduction and disappearance is paralleled by the eventual revelation that the family's servant, Naima, is in fact Nuri's birth mother. As the nation-as-family myth is based on the notion "that the nation, like the family, has a single point of origin", the revelation of mistaken origins and unclear lineages undermines that analogy (Puri 133). Significantly, the period of Naima's arrival into the family is narrated together with the repercussions of the event that exiles them: "[e]ighteen months after my parents employed Naima, our king was dragged to the courtyard of the palace and shot in the head" (58). This one sentence, we later understand, conjoins the beginning of the unhomely "secret" in the family (the fact that Naima, the maid, is Nuri's real mother) and the violence that prevents them from returning home. In both Matar's texts then, the confrontation with the father's name involves the son's discovering or acknowledging the cost of his nationalist agenda, and coming to a realisation

about the gap between his father's avowed principles and his actions. As the protagonists become aware of their implication in their fathers' choices and the moral failings of their worldview, they gradually become disillusioned from the nationalist cause.

In Mahjoub's novel, though to a lesser extent, the protagonist Yasin's admiration for his father's nationalist work is similarly tempered by doubts about his father's teachings. As a reporter during the first Gulf War, witnessing the backlash against Arabs drives Yasin to reconsider his views of British journalism, inherited from his father: "[f]or the first time in my life I began to wonder about the integrity of the British press, which I had always been lead to believe was second to none (my father of course)" (95). The betrayals of the press here are connected not only to the shock of the war on leftist sensibilities, but also to Yasin's unease about his father's conflicted ideology. As Yasin realises, his father's "claims of Afrocentric allegiance only went so far" covering "a thick, chalky streak of Anglophilia" (103). His sister Yasmina is more forthright in her rejection of her father's "high ideas about western civilization" which she describes as "[c]ultural slavery […] The big postcolonial trap" (166). Once a fan of Olivia Newton-John, she is described as becoming "Malcolm X in drag," dressing "in the drab greys of a Muslim feminist of the late twentieth century; emancipated and devout in one breath," resorting to an Islamist pol-

itics that opposes that of her secular nationalist father (138). In Mahjoub's novel, ultimately, the nationalist father's teachings and dreams are rejected by both his children, though the narrator Yasin is almost equally critical of his own confused politics, and especially of his sister's Islamism. The result is that Yasin's father realises that he has not been able to convey "those principles he had tried to instill in his children … telling [them] about the great leaders" of the anti-colonial era (137). This attempt to "instill" nationalist ideals captures the ideological locus of the family as a crucial site for the formation and enactment of national identity.

In Matar's *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, the father similarly attempts to instruct his son in his duties towards the nation. In an early scene, Nuri recalls witnessing his parents arguing, his mother Ihsan objecting to the idea that Nuri should inherit Kamal's project:

> "Don't transfer the weight of the past onto your son," she once told him.
> "You can't live outside history," he argued. "We have nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary."
> After a long pause she responded, "Who said anything about shame? It's longing that I want to spare him. Longing and the burden of your hopes." (26)

Nuri recalls that his mother shielded him from his father's "secret work". With hindsight, he sees his father's "daydreaming" as out of joint with his parental role: "as

if he were the boy obliged to share a meal with adults, as if he were the son and I the father" (8). This role reversal, where the father is imagined as the son, not only unsettles the ideals of fatherhood, but disrupts the binary constructions which uphold the model of the nuclear patriarchal family. As the father, Kamal, is represented as naïve and childish, the ideals of fatherhood are revealed as a precarious performance.

It is not only in this novel that the protagonists' image of their father as a nationalist hero are disrupted along these lines. In very similar terms, Suleiman's mother Najwa in Matar's first novel *In the Country of Men* describes her husband and his colleagues as irresponsible "children playing with fire" (95), and critiques her husband's "crazy dreams" (80). Similarly, in *The Road from Damascus*, Sami's mother Nur describes her husband's hopes of a socialist nationalist utopia as "Mustafa's daydream" (245). Towards the end of the novel, Nur explains Mustafa's single-minded belief in the pan-Arab narrative, telling Sami that "[his] father had dreams" (340) about what Syria could one day become:

> He thought it was only a matter of time until everyone would work in an office, productive eight-hour days, and go home in the evening to read novels or go to the cinema to watch art films. He thought everyone would own a car and a house to fit a nuclear family … Progress, so-called … they made the country a prison to do it … He thought there'd be one Arab nation. One Arab nation from the

> Ocean to the Gulf. What we have now is everything but. We have everything smaller and everything bigger. Little sects and ethnicities, little nationalisms and big Islamism. But no Arab nation. (340)

In the phrase "they made the country a prison", Nur locates the failure of Mustafa's project in its repressive demands for conformity as a path towards progress. The fact that Nur "veer[s] from he to they, from Mustafa to the Ba'ath Party," suggests an overlap between the state's repressive structures and the family crises (340). This overlap ultimately undercuts notions of the nation and family as stable anchors, moving away from an idealised vision of nationhood towards the development of a more complex view of both personal and national histories.

In these four novels, the protagonists' relationships with their father are not only conflicted, but intertwined with their sense of connection to the nation, and with their coming to terms with the past. The novels dramatise both a sense of estrangement from a repressive regime and the creation of a diasporic identity which acknowledges the protagonist's distance from his parent's homeland. The struggle to make sense of complicated national and personal histories is never resolved; instead the protagonists attempt to create a new identity after accepting the exiled outsider's vantage point.

In Mahjoub's novel, Yasin eventually finds reassurance in the idea that he and his son "are part of that vast, nameless body of mongrel humanity ... there is nothing odd about us really in that chaotic tumble ... Nothing odd about us at all" (173). The repetitions however suggest an attempt to convince, to revise the understanding of identity through territory. Throughout the novel, Mahjoub subverts the notion that as James Clifford puts it, "[d]welling [...] [is] the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes." Instead, the journey reveals that displacement is "as constitutive of cultural meaning rather than as their simple transfer or extension" (Clifford 3). Yasin attempts to reframe Europe as a space where displacement is as inscribed as territoriality: "[t]he face of this continent is scarred by the passage of people … A history of transgression, of frontiers and border lines being crossed and recrossed" (Mahjoub 173). Here, the notion of a history bound to origins and roots is replaced with the routes that people have traversed. However, there is never any sense of resolution to the question Yasin returns to throughout the novel: "am I just running away?" (86). Undercutting the notion of roots might ease the restrictive trappings of national belonging, but it raises the question of whether such distancing is simply an escape from the complex issues of postcolonial nationhood.

The same emphasis on revoking the notion of origins is expressed in *The Road from Damascus*, in Sami's re-

alisation that "[t]he roots are shallow and mythical, we all come from everywhere at once, and we are floating creatures" (38). Towards the end of the novel, Sami is left without an ideological narrative to make sense of his life. After 9/11, having abandoned the nationalist framework that made sense of the world, he is left with no frame of reference: "What was happening? Sami couldn't tell. He had not scale to measure the event. Nothing inherited from [his father] Mustafa. No nationalist way of judging. No Qabbani verses to help him" (315). Having acknowledged the inevitable break with the past does not resolve the search for belonging. The novel ends with this tension between seeking a stable sense of identity and acknowledging the shallowness of roots, with Sami left asking, "what is he now?" (340). At this point, after the revelation about the imprisonment of his uncle Faris, Sami has abandoned his nationalist agenda. In a sense, the novel comes full circle from the early scenes when Sami's aunt tells him that Faris' imprisonment was a reduction to "Mr Nobody", as the guards make him "write his name, his family's name, and his address" and then ritualistically burn the paper "because he had no name or family or address any longer, nothing to write down" (6-7). At the end, it is Sami rather than Faris who is "Mr Nobody," at a loss to define his identity:

> For what is he now? Not much any more. Not Mustafa's son, nor Marwan's son-in-law, not an academic. Not a

> member of the eternal Arab nation. So what, then? He's Nur's son. Muntaha's husband. But to define himself as other people's attributes – it isn't much. (340)

This trajectory away from nationalist ideology is followed by other characters in the novel, including Marwan al-Haj, Sami's father-in-law. Once a "secular and romantic" would-be poet, who "believed he was a model citizen of the new Iraq", Marwan is imprisoned and then exiled (71). Moving in the "wide-ranging circuits of Arab London," Marwan becomes more insular, going to the mosque to foster a sense of alternative community (79). Discussing his novel, Yassin-Kassab suggests that Marwan "represents what happened to that generation of Arabs: they were secularist and internationalist, and now they're conservative and vaguely Islamist" (Jackson). Marwan's increasing conservatism and withdrawal from his family leaves Mustafa's son, Ammar, feeling as distanced from his father as Sami does: "Ammar wasn't sure what was wrong … Except that he had no country. Except that he was orphaned. Except that there was nothing for him to love. Except the endless gaping depths of space separating him from his father" (142). This passage rehearses the themes that recur in these four texts dealing with patrilineality and nationalism: for each of the protagonists, the sense of "space separating him from his father" is intimately related to his sense that he has "no country" (142). To return to Matar's *In the Country of Men*, "the country

of men" signifies not only the opposite of a country of law, but also an induction into a society where men are both beneficiaries of and victimised by the patriarchal autocratic system.

At the conclusion of *Anatomy*, Nuri has returned from England to Egypt, the country where he and his father had last lived together in exile, and in the final lines, is trying on his father's clothes, and then replacing them to await his return: "[t]his might still fit him. I returned it to its place" (246). These lines capture the condition of being suspended in the past, in the limbo that is the psychological shadow of a disappearance, without the finality of bereavement. Metaphorically, this suspension of temporality, the inability to come to terms with an undetermined fate, is in all four novels extended to the exile's relationship to the lost homeland, the unhealable rift that makes belonging always contingent.

As we have seen, all the novels I have discussed have endings which offer little sense of resolution, concluding with their protagonists coming to a full realisation of the impossibility of return. In *The Return*, Matar weighs the arguments of those who try to "cure [themselves] of [their] country" and those who returned: "[r]eturn and you will face the absence or the defacement of what you treasured … Leave and your connections to the source will be severed … What do you do when you cannot leave and cannot return?" (Ch. 1, location

58). As Yasin reflects in *Travelling with Djinns,* "coming back was not just a matter of physically returning, there were other adjustments to be made, gaps that had to be compensated for. You are no longer one person … but two – both of them strangers" (204). This recognition of otherness within the self captures the conflict that recur in these novels, between political engagement and personal fulfilment, between the instabilities of diasporic identity and the weight of an inculcated sense of obligation to the country of origin, between the father figure's high-minded teachings and his moral failings.

This article has traced similarities in the way three Arab British authors depict the relationship between fathers and sons as central to the national project. The negotiations of nationhood through the lens of filial relationships in these texts interweaves the political and the personal to analyse the predicament of the region for an international audience. The novels showcase the "unhomely" intrusions that collapse the illusion of a private sphere of the home and the dream of the homeland, rewriting the plot of the national story to include the intra-national violence excluded from official representations of the national imagination. The rendering of the "land in between" is thus ambivalent and contradictory, represented both as an idealised space with emancipatory potential and as a narrow and claustrophobic site of violence and control.

The novels explore the failings of a post-independence generation who have dedicated their lives to national project, and the ways in which the second generation desperately want to believe in this project, even as they find it deeply problematic, and ultimately unviable. At the end, both the fathers and their sons are alienated from the national cause, and exiled from the homeland itself. Thus, in Yassin-Kassab's novel, the protagonist describes himself "[a]rrowing westwards like his father before him." The very next few words however are "he thought of the past". This double movement of "arrowing westwards" while remembering foregrounds the inability to fully leave behind the complexities of national narrative, the nation remaining "in between" (12).

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POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTIONS

VOL II ISSUE 2