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Indiascapes. Images and Words from Globalised India

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Edited by Rossella Ciocca and C. Maria Laudando

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Indiascapes. Images and Words from Globalised India - Introduction

Fig.1: Francesco Clemente, *In meiner Heimat III*, 2009, archival inkjet print, collection of the artist.

In meiner Heimat is the subtitle of a special section of *Shipwreck with the Spectator 1974-2004*, a recent exhibition devoted to Francesco Clemente and held in Naples, the artist's native city.[1] The section includes a series of ten maps conceived as the artist's exclusive contribution to the question of his geographic and cultural belonging that lies at the core of the retrospective.[2] The new works are elaborated as intriguing patchworks of ancient and different sorts of maps imbricated one upon another or smoothly gradating one into another. One of the most suggestive is endowed at the bottom with the double inscription of Varanasi in block capitals and assembles pieces of morphological representations of rivers and hills from different territories with fragmented urban strips of the cities of Naples, New York and Varanasi, thus creating a baffling hybrid cartography in between the Mediterranean area, the States and the Indian peninsula. The map is artfully constructed as multi-layered and composite, oscillating between abstraction and figuration and self-consciously playing with the geographical dislocation and artistic relocation of the 'imaginary homelands' that have marked Clemente's nomadic career, incessantly

[1] 'Arte Contemporanea Donna Regina (MADRE, Naples, 29 May-12 October, 2009).

[2] Clemente's works are obviously inspired by the famous provocative maps of Alighiero Boetti, focused on in another important exhibition at the MADRE this year (21 February-11 May). Boetti was a mentor for the young Clemente; and their journey to Afghanistan in 1974, along the old legendary silk road, left a deep impact on both of them.

moving to and fro between Naples, Rome, Madras and New York. The special bond that unites the artist with India is further strengthened by his illustrations for Salman Rushdie's short story, "In the South", a story written by the Indian migrant writer as his personal homage for his friend's retrospective.[3]

Even if the present issue of *Anglistica* focusing on the Indian subcontinent covers only partially the territorial extension of Clemente's maps, the palimpsestic, revisionary and fragmented features immediately perceptible through his artistic cartography may undoubtedly provide a privileged key of access for introducing the main questions raised by our subject. As Indian culture is playing an increasingly imposing role in shaping new globalised scenarios, dramatically contributing to a radical interrogation of its national, linguistic and geo-political ties, this issue tries to highlight a few of the possible outlines that emerge from the multifarious, variegated, complex cultural background offered by the Subcontinent, both in its domestic and diasporic dimensions. To draw with a few strokes a significant portrait of a reality so internally differentiated and multi-layered as the Indian contemporary panorama is an impossible task, so we didn't in the first place conceive this as an aim. From the beginning, our project was clearly limited by India's multiplicity and thus by the impossibility of any form of disciplinary systematization. Images and words from globalised India form a landscape in which narrative, history, myth, fiction, the entertainment industry, linguistics, politics and the arts stay side by side, each adding a piece to a tessellated, composite and obviously partial sketch.

"Indias of the mind" was the expression used by Salman Rushdie when he spoke of the imaginary homeland built in the memory of diasporic subjects.[4] Since then he has insisted on the intrinsic capacity of culture to flow between national boundaries, trespassing borders and undermining the old narratives of the centre-periphery world order. Arjun Appadurai, in *Modernity at Large* (1996), has articulated this idea of cultural fluidity and movement with special reference to motifs, icons and mythologies which disentangle national cultures from the anchorage of territory setting them free-floating in the space of mass-mediated imagination and the electronic circulation of symbols and discursive practices.

Indiascapes, paraphrasing Appadurai, is the term we have chosen to represent this current assemblage of languages and perspectives which speak about Indian cultural richness, its complexity and ambiguity, trying to convey the strong appeal it is increasingly exercising upon the de-territorialized world-space of the imaginary. The object of this group of essays could thus be summarized as the disparate but convergent reflections upon the vernacular terms of the inscription of modernity on the globalised culture of the largest and most contradictory, maybe the most important for its geopolitical location, democracy in the world.

[3] Rushdie had already contributed to the catalogue of Clemente's 2005 exhibition of self-portraits at the Gagosian Gallery in London with an exclusive brief essay on the history of Western portraiture.

[4] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), 10.

Dialoguing with artists and intellectuals who operate daily on the very tissue of Indian culture, the emerging texture knits for example political analyses on the near past and the immediate future of post-secularist India with reflections upon the translational quality of multilingual cultural contexts and the politics of postcolonial translation. Visual arts are interrogated in their dealings with the idea of identity along the frontiers which separate national communities or differently re-locate the body in traditional forms of artistic expressions. The urban scenarios are looked at in their relation with fiction and the fabrication of social models is revealed as being shaped by the movie industry, while cinema in general is seen in its interplay with nostalgia, conservatism and the subliminal disparaging strategies of consumption and desire. Matrimonial politics is analysed in its hyper-traditional observance of stridharmic norms, castal bias or the insurmountable obstacles posed by horoscopes, together with the hyper-modern use and abuse of electronic media, showing how religious and ideological integralism is articulated, and at the same time resisted, also through the social networks operating on the Net. Hybridity and translation, code-switching and linguistic appropriation confirm their role as agencies of g/localization.

As usual, to organize a possible reading route, we have arranged a few sections. The first, devoted to "Discussion, Debate, Dissent", customarily located towards the end of *Anglistica* volumes in the previous printed series, is anticipated in order to open our issue. The seminal quality of the contribution is able to topicalize a framework for the ensuing articles. Sunil Khilnani, the much appraised author of *The Idea of India* (2003) and one of the most brilliant and concerned exponents of the Indian academic intelligentsia, answers questions about the difficult relationship between plurality and the risks of religious, ethnic and social fragmentation, the strengths and the flaws of a still young and imperfect democracy, the role played by the subcontinent in "one of the most volatile regions of the world, surrounded by an arc of failing and authoritarian states". Khilnani speaks about the contradictions of a State which, making plurality and the chosen practice of syncretism the bulwarks of its independence, has encouraged indulgence in the dream of a 'fusion of horizons', but where, at the same time, the daily intestinal outbreaks of communalist violence and, even more dramatically now, the escalation of attacks by national and international terrorisms, are feeding anxiety about the fate of secularism. Paradoxically, far from extinguishing sectarianism and division, in the form of caste, or religion, or ethnicity consciousness, democracy has rendered them more salient as political categories and more strongly institutionalized in civil society. If, on the one hand, one result is that the political scene is mobilized around the problem of social upgrading; on the other, it seems that the idea of individual rights, say of women or homosexuals or artists,

gets dramatically challenged by an increasingly rigid and restricted sense of public decorum in a country growingly maimed by fundamentalism and fanaticism. The ills of identity politics are thus highlighted by Khilnani who nonetheless confides in the Indian choice of an 'engaged universalism' locally defined and made significant in relation to the peculiarities of India's historical situation and social complexity. Indeed, the dangers posed by identitarian constraints provide a sort of circular framework for the whole volume by recurring in the final section devoted to the reviews (which we have decided to restrict to works one way or another connected to the Subcontinent), as the voice of the noble-prize winner Amartya Sen is heard, through Marie-Hélène Laforest's review, exposing the "miniaturization of human beings" along the mortifying lines of exclusivist ideological or religious affiliations.

The interrogation of national boundaries and the ever growing risk of identitarian violence also lie at the core of the feminist agenda of visual artists like Nalini Malani and Shilpa Gupta as discussed in the essay by Alessandra Marino in the section devoted to arts. In particular, the focus is upon the controversial Western Indian border with Pakistan which still represents an infected wound for both nations. In opposition to the official imposed demarcation that sustains ethnic and religious divisions, the works by the women artists involved in the *Aar-Paar* ("this side and that side") art project are conceived as political acts of reimagining the frontier as an open space hosting uncertain identities and haunted by mournful memories. Thus, the illusion of a monolithic national identity is dismantled and deconstructed through a re-narration of Partition which denounces the violence upon women's bodies underlying the traumatic creation of that border, while claiming new kinds of social bonds based on the intimacy of mourning. The crucial role played by imagination as a revisionary process of one's own social belonging comes to the forefront in the other essay of the arts section, by Annalisa Piccirillo, which moves to the world of contemporary mixed forms of theatre-dance as developed by the Anglo-Indian dancer Akram Khan. His innovative movement language, based on the 'confusion' of a classical dance form from South Asia, Kathak, endowed with a strong narrative impulse, and the open repertoire of Western contemporary dance is analyzed in the light of Bhabha's theorisation of the third space as the in-between space of interruptions and dislocations opening a possibility of cultural hybridity. The concept of confusion vindicated by the dancer as a distinctive character of his art is also related to the linguistic and cultural tear which represents a major theme of some contemporary Indian poetry facing the dilemma of the double linguistic heritage of British colonization. What emerges is a sense of endless fluctuation and restlessness, the expression of incessant transitions and oscillations in between different cultures, histories, art forms and body languages.

In the section on cinema, the tensions and contradictions attending the clash between tradition and modernization and its dramatic impact on women's life conditions are resumed through the cinematic versions of their strenuous battle for emancipation in the essays devoted to Bollywood by Alessandro Monti and to diasporic cinema by Esterino Adami. The first focuses on the conflict between unrestrained love and dharmic duty as this is thematized in popular Hindi cinema. Against the background of mythological traditional models and the ambiguities of contemporary marriage politics, Monti surveys a series of productions stretching from the Fifties to the present to underscore a normative chain of reactive punishment against sexual infringements, regularly attributed to feminine responsibility. Adami, for his part, dedicates his critical attention to a production which appears to stand in transit between contrasting viewpoints as "the migrant's frame of mind is split between eastern roots and western dislocation". In his reading of *Provoked* (2006), the film not only brings a charge against patriarchy but also "goes beyond the superficial translatability of cultures and explores the puzzlement and disorientation of 'weak' subjects in a multilingual context".

The vitality and extreme complexity of Indian cinema, as articulated both in the powerful 'exceeding' exuberance of Bollywood and in the different but no less problematic hybridity of its diasporic production, is also explored in the volume edited by Lidia Curti and Susanne Poole, *Schermi indiani, linguaggi planetari* (2008), reviewed in this issue by Bruna Mancini. Here, the dense stratification of different cultures and traditions in the corpus of Indian films literally embodies the real post-colonial 'in-between' space, reflecting the diversified and dramatically partitioned territory of the Subcontinent and questioning concepts of identity, gender-genre and subalternity.

Turning to television and comedy, the centrality of the diasporic experience is again resumed in the review section with relation to the phenomenal popularity of the *Goodness Gracious Me* TV series. As Giuseppe De Riso remarks in his comments on Giuseppe Balirano's study devoted to *The Perception of Diasporic Humour* (2007), the series has achieved wide-ranging acclaim due to its capacity to subvert Western and Eastern stereotypes and generate a mixed, Indo-Saxon form of narration helping South Asian immigrants in their "difficult relocation of home".

If the political and social analysis of the fractured and composite landscape of the Indian Subcontinent delineates the critical framework of this issue, its core is undeniably represented in the "Languages in Transit" section which highlights the crucial question of translation in the distinctive, unique case of the multi-lingual and multi-cultural scenario of the Indian nation, a scenario which has also been invested in recent years by a vertiginous expansion of the media and the Internet. The section opens

with an essay by Neelam Srivastava which sketches a historical overview of the most salient stages in the history of translation in South Asia, while pointing at the determinant role translation can play today in the formation of the literary canons of the major Indian languages (such as Bengali, English, Hindi, Malayalam, and Tamil) in terms of a comparative literature. From this perspective, translation is starting to emerge as a privileged field of research for the elaboration of a "possible 'theory' of South Asian literature" spanning its diverse language-literatures; and in particular 'Indian English' is being continuously re-defined as "a rapidly evolving literary idiom" subject to a continuous process of cross-pollinations and language-mixture. The Indian scholar further develops these issues, in relation to the importance of comparative investigation of the multi-lingual production of the subcontinent, in her review of *Other Tongues: Rethinking the Language Debates in India* (2009), a volume edited by Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare. On the whole, this study represents a timely contribution to the current debate on the inter-relatedness between the study of Indian literature in English and literature in the *bhashas* (indigenous languages of the subcontinent) in order to suggest a more comprehensive "re-thinking of the canon of postcolonial South Asian writing" capable to overcome the monolingual (i.e. Anglophone) focus of postcolonial literary studies.

A specific case study of Indian English is discussed in the essay by Eleonora Federici devoted to matrimonial websites that offer a particularly fruitful terrain for the investigation of linguistic and cultural hybridity. Here the analysis of inter- or trans-cultural language practices provides material for the exploration of gendered discourse in India's shifting cultural scene with relation to one of the most ancient norms of social life in the Subcontinent, that of arranged marriages. Even if it is undeniable that a series of constraints (like class, caste, profession, education, religion, and astrological constellation) still obtain, the easier and wider circulation provided by the ads on the Net has helped to gradually introduce significant changes in the institution of premarital negotiations, thus providing useful insights into the contemporary social fabric of Indian culture caught "in between tradition and Western influences".

Moving to the Indian communities of immigrants dispersed all over the world, the essay by Giuseppe Balirano considers the crucial role that translation may play, both as a process and as a corpus of studies, for the analysis of Indian diasporic creativity. Under the strong influence of the transnational circuits of popular culture, contemporary narratives of diasporic subjects seem to translate the thorny dilemmas of 'identities' and 'home' into original forms of re-visitations and "complex processes of creolisation", displaying a wide array of different media and idioms. To illustrate this phenomenon the paper focuses on a multimodal analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* (2003) and its homonymous filmic

translation by Mira Nair (2007), putting to the fore the transit from one medium to the other and their different strategies of cultural decolonisation and hybridization.

In the "writing society" section, Silvia Albertazzi investigates the complex interplay between fiction, politics and transnational identity a propos of the Rushdie affair. Twenty years after the fatwa the novelist is called again to represent an entire line of intellectuals compelled by the cause of free expression to reconsider the concept of authorial liberty. But he is also engaged by a world which has in the meantime become 'frontierless', thanks to mass-migration, economic globalisation, international terror. Comparing Rushdie's last two novels with the filmic production of the Mexican director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, Albertazzi explores the ways in which an "entanglement of sites and stories" emerge from a restricted world where, in the wake of 9/11, all the great abstractions of politics nonetheless manage to find a place.

In the same section, the inextricable knot between imagination, media, and ideology surfaces again in the essay by Rossella Ciocca dedicated to the greatest metropolis of the Subcontinent. Looming large in India's imaginary landscape, Mumbai is seen as the epitome of its contradictory urban modernity. Its emancipatory anonymity is pointed at both through the terrible conditions of life in its slums and its cinematic appeal as a city of dreams come true. Its attractions and the frantic rhythms of its affluent capitalistic transactions make of the city the outpost of the West and therefore also the target of integralist terror and violence.

The narrative section which closes the present issue once again shifts the focus to the Indian diasporic literary scene. Oriana Palusci discusses the contradictions and limitations inherent in the proliferation of hyphenated labels for migrant writers, as Jhumpa Lahiri's collections of short stories have poignantly brought to the fore in terms of spiritual and cultural maladies. Her first- and second-generation characters are always caught in the risk of falling "'between the cracks' of linguistic and cultural national borders, like the author herself". One major merit of her fiction is her subtle deconstruction of commonplaces and stereotypes on multiculturalism through a crafty use of inter-textual references to the British and American literature that again confirm her willingness of belonging to a transnational context.

A deliberately farcical staging of intertextual abuse is instead at work in Salman Rushdie's short story "Yorick" here investigated by C. Maria Laudando as a complex palimpsest of literary, linguistic and cultural traces that mimic two of the most exemplary works of the Western canon: *Hamlet* and *Tristram Shandy*. For all its ludicrous inversions, this text too shares the crucial questions of hyphenated identities and home: Rushdie's reconstruction of a dubious genealogy of fools descended from Yorick

and a bride mischievously called Ophelia comprises the question of the migrant writer's second tradition within a hybrid parchment of spurious fragments and bastard characters, grotesquely revolving around the fissures and crevices of cultural displacement.

A radical revision of familial and literary relationships is also kept in the foreground at the very end of the review section through Manuela Coppola's commentary on the recent Italian translation of two hybrid texts by the Anglo-Indian lesbian poet, Suniti Namjoshi, *Istantanee di Caliban. Sycorax / Snapshots of Caliban* and *Sycorax* (2008). It seems indeed an apposite if incidental conclusion for an issue devoted both to a country which has the size and diversity of India and to the infinite proliferation of the diasporic "Indias of the mind" scattered all over the world, that the last word of our editorial should be left to such an evocative and powerful mélange of voices and noises, seeking to capture in a provisional series of fragments this strange, monstrous and ever-changing land of magical creatures.

Rossella Ciocca

Plurality, Identity, Democracy, Globalization… A Conversation with Sunil Khilnani

Plurality or Fragmentation?

RC: Multiplicity can be considered the key feature of the Indian Subcontinent. Recurrent invasions and foreign dominations have configured its past whether in terms of an arena of clashing civilizations or as a fruitful history of cultural encounters. Today ethnic, religious, linguistic varieties still compose a tessellated nation. Society is crossed by differences that the heritage of the caste-system makes more numerous, complex and difficult to overcome than in any other country. For better or worse, India appears intrinsically, irretrievably plural.

Commentators and scholars agree on the substantially mixed nature of the country. And yet, with regard to its political perspectives, they tend to divide or at least to be internally divided between hopes and fears. More optimistically multiplicity is confidently believed to be able to ripen into pluralism; on the other hand it is feared that conflicting diversities may develop entropic tendencies capable of making India implode and collapse.

Professor Khilnani, what do you see in the future of your home-country? I mean would you still describe India in terms of Nehru's idea of "some ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed"?[1]

Do you think that the dialogic, argumentative, non-clerical tradition Amartya Sen has helped to unearth will check the revisionist reconstruction of India as a fundamentally Hindu civilizational unity?

And finally would you still be ready to celebrate, in your own words, "the mongrel character of India's peoples and their histories"(XI), "its ability to transform invasion into accommodation, rupture into continuity, division into diversity"(XII)?

[1] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Penguin, 2003), XV.

SK: When asked about the future, my initial instinct is to look back at the past for some clues – not because the past determines the future, but it does offer a set of probabilities on the basis of which one can try to say something about what is still unknown. If one looks back over the past 60 years of India's history, there have been recurrent periods of crisis when India seemed to be on the verge of losing its identity as a plural, tolerant space of democratic experience: this was true in the 1970s, when it was wracked by struggles over language, in the mid-1970 era of the Emergency,

during the violent secessionism of the 1980s, and perhaps above all during the 1990s, which saw the rise of an intolerant, aggressive Hindutva. Each of these episodes no doubt has affected, and sometimes scarred, India's identity – but they have not managed to transform its basic character and shape. Somehow, India has still remained something like that palimpsest of which Nehru wrote. Hindutva and exclusivist ideologies still remain a source of potential threat in India today, and I would not underestimate them – but the intensity that marked the debates over religious identity in the 1990s has somewhat receded, and the search for a 'master-cleavage' through which to divide Indians has so far proved futile. This does not mean that the identity battles are over in India – some new source to fuel them will quietly surface again. But the more conflicts a society survives, the more available resources it has to deal with the next one. It is that – rather than any belief in 'dialogic traditions' (about which actually I am quite sceptical) - which gives me some hope about the future.

Identity politics

RC: In *The Idea of India* you wrote: "Indians have poured their faiths into politics, pinning their hopes to once-great movements like the Congress Party or to its current challengers like Hindu nationalism or the surging movements of India's lower-caste and Dalit parties. Politics at once divides the country and constitutes it as a single, shared, crowded space, proliferating voices and claims and forcing negotiation and accommodation"(9).

If India has entered modernity through the language of politics, you went on, her particular way of speaking this language was not through the liberal lexicon of individual rights but through the language of community rights and collective identities. The Constitution itself anchored the recognition of civil liberties within the larger dimensions of communal groups. And as the ethos of democratisation entered the political arena, the hitherto marginalized and low ranking groups benefited from a principle of positive discrimination to compensate for the ominous inequalities and iniquities of the past. The affirmative action of the 'reservation' policy, originally intended to be a temporary expedient, aimed at articulating a space of negotiation and reparation. Yet its effect was in fact to reinforce the collective, caste/religion/ethnicity-based, identities it was supposed to dissolve.

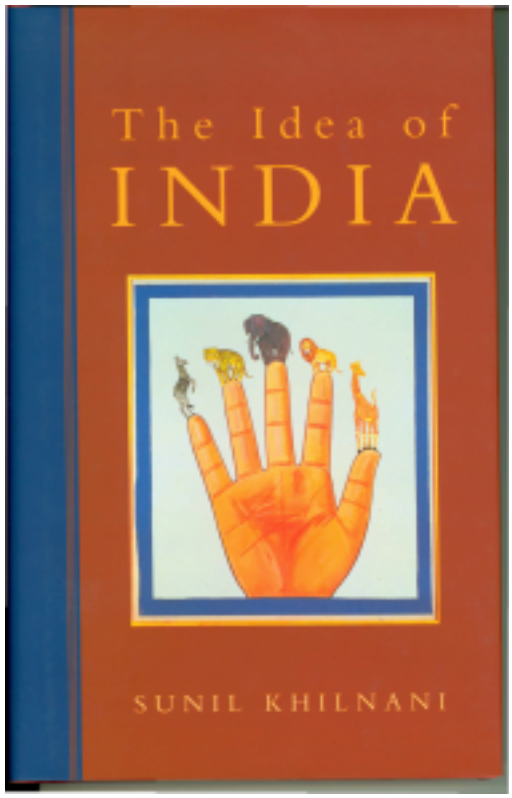

Fig. 1: Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 1997, cover by Francesco Clemente, courtesy of the author.

Professor Khilnani, if the individual is a multitude of selves, as so many writers and intellectuals tend repeatedly to emphasise, how do you see the phenomenon of prescribing and limiting identities, of enveloping and flattening the complexity of one's entire being along the schematic lines of exclusivist ideologies? What do you make of identities focused through the lenses of loyalty-filters? I mean, in your opinion, is there a possibility to reconcile the right of minorities to cultural specificity, on the one hand, and the free choice of individuals to be exempted from any compulsory affiliation, on the other? To put it differently, don't you think that cultural freedom has to be distinguished from the forced acceptance of any given or inherited identity?

And finally, considering how widely Indian problems resonate throughout the world, knocking nowadays at the doors of all democracies, affected as the latter are by parochial, particularistic internal dialectics and caught, one way or another, in the international reductionist trap of the 'clash of civilizations' (just for convenience I use here the much abused expression coined by the late Samuel Huntington), don't you fear that the whole globalized world is in danger of becoming a huge universal site of proliferating identity conflict?

SK: The space for individual rights is under pressure in India: we see this in the numerous attacks, verbal and physical, directed at India's artists, writers, filmmakers, scholars, as well as at ordinary citizens going about their lives – women who want to go to a bar for a drink, for example (who a few months ago were subject to a shocking attack by a Hindu extremist group operating in one of India's most liberal cities, Bangalore). What has occurred is a kind of democratization of offense and injury – every group can now make a claim that its sentiments are being injured by some one else's free expression, and can then take the law into their own hands to curb that free expression. This is to render Mill's Harm Principle into a farce, and a dangerous one at that. Indian public debate needs to address this shrinking of the space of individual liberties; and, linked to this, a debate too is needed on the commitment, made in the Constitution, to establishing a common Civil Code (Uniform Civil Code, UCC) for all Indians. This debate has been captured by the Hindu Right: but liberals and those who believe in pluralism have also to take it up, and acknowledge that now, almost 60 years since the Indian Constitution was promulgated, it is time to ask tough questions about the continuing legitimacy of India's legal pluralism.

At the international level, I'm afraid I do see a growing role being played by nationalist and identitarian claims. I think the view that economic linkages and convergence – 'globalization' – would blunt the edge of such claims was always very hopeful. And it seems to me that Asia will have to

face a period of rising and aggressive nationalisms jostling for recognition in close proximity to one another. That is not a comfortable prospect.

Democracy and its flaws

RC: As you yourself recognize, India's past and the contingency of its unity prepared it very poorly for democracy. The dimension of its poverty and the deeply hierarchical nature of its social order gave little hope that it could defend and keep its republican institutions and practices in the long run. Lamenting the contradictions of a system which guaranteed political equality to all its citizens without providing for free and equal access to resources and opportunities, the leader of the 'Untouchables', B. R. Ambedkar, poignantly expressed his fear that the whole democratic project would eventually be impaired by extreme social disparity. The Subcontinent's location in the most economically dynamic region of the world where, nonetheless, as you pointed out, the political regimes in charge consider the very idea of democracy extraneous to the nature of the people they govern renders the Indian experiment even more significant – a sort of historical challenge or a bet made by history.

Professor Khilnani, beyond the limits of all possible western/eurocentric implications, do you consider the recent 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human rights a date worth recording, and if so, what do you make of the so called Asian Values? I mean, is, in your opinion, the democratic option, with all its limits and contradictions, still the most reliable system for facing the immense problems of development or social justice in your country? What would you answer to those who lament the inherent encumbrances and weaknesses of democracy compared with the supposedly greater efficiency of other political models, such as the Chinese one, in satisfactorily facing the grave problems of social disadvantage and extreme poverty?

SK: I have no doubt that democracy anywhere and in general is a flawed system: so is any form of human endeavour. I would also agree that democracy in India has its own idiosyncratic imperfections and partialities: corruption, disenfranchisement, unaccountable power are all common characteristics of Indian democracy. Yet, equally, I have no doubt that there is no better or more reliable alternative system which would be better for India. Democracy is a continual project of self-improvement, which is also sceptical of any sort of perfectionism; other political systems generally assume that they are starting from a position of certitude and perfection – and that is an even greater form of self-deception.

The Indian political project is self-avowedly a universalist one: but it is also one concerned with particular contexts, that's to say it is not an abstract but an engaged universalism. Think for instance of some of the greatest figures who helped to define this project: Tagore, Gandhi, Nehru. All were universalists, but located in and engaged with particular struggles and ambitions. The recourse to 'Asian values' as a way of rejecting calls for liberty and democracy seems to me to have been an entirely self-serving ruse of reigning Asian despots. Finally, to respond to your last question: I think it is important to insist that democracy is a value in itself – it is not an instrument for achieving other goals, such as development or social justice. Those are other goals, no doubt, and have to be pursued by other means – in a way that does not do damage to democracy.

RC: Today one of the most effective denunciations of the conditions suffered by the very poor comes from the story narrated by Aravind Adiga in *The White Tiger*, in the form of an ironical epistolary addressed to the Chinese Prime Minister. In his Booker prize winning novel, through the protagonist, a low caste entrepreneur who fights his way out of the 'Darkness' to become an affluent businessman in Bangalore, the author gives voice to the rage and the sense of frustration and exclusion felt by the underdogs of society.

Fig. 2: Voters hold their identity cards in a queue to cast their votes in Badimunda village in Kandhamal district of Orissa, 2009, photograph, © Biswaranjan Rout/AP

Fig. 3: Voters show their voter identity cards before they cast their ballot in Bapally, Hyderabad, 2009, photograph, © REUTERS

Indeed most of the flaws and grave deficiencies pointed at by the fathers of the Indian Republic seem unfortunately to be still there. Just to name a few of them: the neglect of massive school education especially in socially backward regions; the in-built corruption of the political system and its responsibility in maintaining the status quo, even among the parties born to defend the rights of the very needy; familism (according to the ironical 'relativity theory' enunciated by Salman Rushdie: "in India everything is for relatives"); the radically subaltern position of women among the disadvantaged groups, subjected to the exploitation and violence perpetrated within the dowry system and the terrible phenomenon of selective gender-based abortions; the lack of basic home facilities and infrastructure in the rural areas; etc...

Going back to the Indian political trends of the last few years, do you think that the recent option of economic liberalism will produce more results than the socialist, centralistic vision of the first decades after Independence? How would you judge the Indian present in the light of the enthusiastically promising goals listed in Nehru's 'Tryst with destiny' speech?

In other words, are you confident about the possibility that in a reasonable time lapse, the yoke of caste would really be, if not eradicated, at least substantially reduced in its disproportionate power of interfering in personal fate and the range of existential choices?

SK: Over the past decade and more, India has been experiencing the highest growth rates in its history. Undoubtedly this is beginning to transform the country – in terms of material conditions certainly, but also very importantly in terms of people's psychology, their hopes and fears, their sense of how they should be treated (that really is the insight of Arvind Aadiga's novel). Caste too is being transformed – as much by electoral politics as by economic opportunity – and in this sense India is experiencing what my friend Christophe Jaffrelot has called a "silent revolution" through the ballot box. It remains a trap for many millions; but quite a few are now breaking through this trap.

I would just add that it's important to remember that economic growth, even as it solves a variety of problems, generates many new and sometimes unanticipated problems – some obvious ones for instance concern the environment, the uneven distribution of the benefits of growth, the consequent internal migration this often creates, and so on. India's challenge is going to be as much how it deals with the consequences of growth.

Globalization and culture

RC: Globalization is not a new phenomenon. In the past, cross-cultural dialogue and commerce have produced circulations of ideas which greatly contributed to the development of many countries and to the shaping of modernity itself. India-China relations, for example, were highly productive for each other around the end of the first millennium and they also contributed, via Persian and Arabic cultures, to the birth and spread of notions that were fundamental for Europe's subsequent Renaissance.

Today the role played by culture is considered central in theoretical reflections upon the way Globalization is taking shape. It is currently maintained that while cultural homogenisation, resented as a form of 'Westoxication', is generally resisted, the history of European modernity itself must be 'provincialized': questioned in its ethnocentric universalistic presumptions, situated in its peculiar and contingent historical context and conditions and rewritten in its entanglement with imperialism (Dipesh Chakrabarty). The other move to define Globalization is the attention nowadays paid by preference to the locally accentuated versions of modernity (Partha Chatterjee, Arjun Appadurai, Avijit Pathak and many others).The very concept of hybridity itself, as the new quintessential feature of contemporary culture, has been conceived and given theoretical

dignity largely through eminent Indian intellectuals and artists. Many of them, like you, are now stars of the international Academic system.

Professor Khilnani, what's your position with regard to the centrality accorded to the role of culture in shaping new globalized scenarios for the third millennium?

Both in its spiritual mystic version, as the land of Ayurvedic wisdom and New Age wonders, and in the more recent dynamic, colourful, metropolitan 'shining' image conveyed by movies and novels, India is central in the contemporary western picture of the world. What do you make of these images, are they to be dismissed as only the latest form taken by Orientalistic attitudes, now expressed in terms of marketing and consumerist assimilation, or do they constitute a possible space of approach, of meeting, of improving reciprocal knowledge and symmetrical cultural exchange, however imprecise and entangled in desires and projections this may be?

In your opinion what are the chances and the still substantial limits of India's presence on the international scene as a protagonist, in economics and politics as well as in culture? Does it gain more power from the strength of its cultural identity, its economic vitality, or its nuclear power?

And finally, since you are at the moment based in the USA, what's your position towards the new American leadership? Do you feel optimistic about the opportunities of a new multilateralism in international questions?

SK: Indians have always – or at least for the past 200 or more years - been very concerned with how the world sees them: not least because they do see themselves as part of a universalist project of humanistic progress. This sensitivity to India's place in the world continues today- and because India still lacks what people like to call 'hard' power, Indians have taken refuge and comfort in the idea that they have considerable 'soft' power, based on cultural products etc. But I think this can be self-deluding. Culture has become an object of mass marketing and consumption – this is certainly true of how many aspects and products from India are today circulated. Real 'soft' power is the ability to persuade by non-coercive means – Gandhi was the first practitioner of this. Here, India continues to have some abilities – but it needs to develop these. Ultimately, the source of such persuasive power will have to lie on India's continuing political legitimacy – as a democracy, based on pluralism and tolerance. If India does damage to this aspect of its identity, its legitimacy will weaken. But if India really wants to be able to pursue its own interests in the world order, and defend itself against threats which arise from this, it will definitely need to develop its economic as well as its military capacities – that latter need is a sad but true fact of life for any modern state. It's particularly true for India, which

is located in one of the most volatile regions of the world, surrounded by an arc of failing and authoritarian states. In this task, India must devise its own protections: it cannot rely on other friends to do this for it. The US under President Obama, for instance, is preparing to engage much more intensively with Pakistan and Afghanistan – but this will be entirely to pursue American interests, which do not by any means always coincide with India's. India has to be prepared to develop a coherent conception of hard power – and to accumulate such power.

RC: Thank you very much.

Alessandra Marino

No Women's Land.
Re-imaging Border Spaces through Visual Arts

The borderland between India and Pakistan is a travelling place; women visual artists from the subcontinent portray the frontier as an open space to be passed through and constantly rebuilt. Following multiple transgressions of limits and borderlines, this article explores how art can be turned into political praxis in order to actively modify reality. Shilpa Gupta and Nalini Malani use their art works to present border crossing as a valuable political action, able to re-signify geography and introduce a sense of community based on lack and mourning. Their artistic narrations of the Western Indian border invite the audience to take part in a journey across time and space, contact zones and war areas, and eventually question the very foundation of nations and national identities.

Wagah, the frontier on the trunk road linking Amritsar to Lahore, is the starting point of this journey; because of its position it joins and divides the two nations. Here, every evening a flag-lowering ceremony celebrates the closure of the border, before the eyes of many tourists and daily visitors that participate in the ritual. *YouTube* stores several videos of this event, many of them accompanied by brief explanations and personal comments. Here are some examples retrieved at the end of June 2008 (some of which were subsequently identified as spams):

> superpower555
> Only two words - Fuck Pakistan
> cruizer83
> Only Indian Punjab is enough to destroy Pakistan.
> khaled43
> what the hell u r telling?
> boxerbhai99
> PKI PUNJAB WILL FUCK U UP, WE HAVE LAHORE
> superpower555 (1 month ago)
> Muslims will never change their murderous ways. Killing them wholesale is the only way to clean-up the collective mess that is Islam.

But also:

> zuben21 (1 month ago)
> Let us break this border again and unite!
> *jigigijgij*
> From some of the comments posted from both sides, I can only give an example of an *infected wound* filled with pus that flows as the lava from an explosive volcano. As a people beware of those who have been gifted with nothing

> more than leprosy of the mind blocked from the understanding that it was no choice of theirs to have been born on the other side.[1]

Strong feelings and different perspectives are expressed in these comments, but they all seem to see the frontier as an infected wound, a wound that is still open, spreading a contagion of hatred.

The borderline crossing Wagah is called the *Radcliffe Line*; it owes its name to Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who in 1947 chaired the two Boundary Commissions in charge of giving a shape to the new nations of India and Pakistan. On the other hand, Punjabi citizens living in the areas surrounding the border call it the "line of hatred".[2] This definition derives from Partition and reveals its performative character: the cut causes an affective infection that extends the negative effects of splitting. The creation of physical borders can in fact reinforce and naturalize both ethnic and religious differences.

In India the national limit is a multiple divider and its existence is largely considered to worsen the tensions existing between Hindu-Indians and Muslim-Pakistanis. In a scenario where religion and nationality intertwine, the celebration of the frontier appears to have the theatrical function of re-drawing the limits it commemorates. In her lecture, "Porous Sovereignty Walled Democracy", Wendy Brown analyzes the new walled boundaries that are spreading all over the world (Gaza, USA, India, etc.) in order to show how delimiting territories means re-inventing societies. For her, walls are like staging devices "projecting power and efficacy" in order to create an image of security, of protection and, I would add, of purity. When Brown argues that "many of the new walls do not merely bound but invent the societies they limit", she is referring indeed to the strong impact frontiers have on the definition of national identities.[3] The materiality of the borders, together with the celebrations repeating the cut of Partition, promotes the idea of living in an enclosed, safe and homogeneous space, affirming and guaranteeing the existence of a natural belonging.

Within this homogenizing fantasy women occupy a space that cannot be assimilated, a space of difference. Contesting what Virginia Woolf in *The Three Guineas* identified as "the stigma of nationality", they retain their distinctiveness in responding to the cohesive impulse of the national project and oppose their own lives to the melting pot ideal lying at the basis of modern Indian multiculturalism.[4] Quoting from Guillermo Gomez-Peña's *The New World (B)order*, Homi Bhabha uses the powerful image of "stubborn chunks" to refer to hybrid and hyphenated identities that reveal the failure of the melting pot.[5] Like the stubborn chunks in Bhabha's stew ("*menudo chowder*"), women do not blend into any pre-constituted space but open new ones "remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any

[1] "Waga Border Crossing (India-Pakistan)", © YouTube, LLC,<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38z1oYyflu0&feature=related>, 30 August 2008.

[2] The expression is used by Ritu Menon in Ritu Menon, ed., *No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004).

[3] Wendy Brown, "Porous Sovereignty, Walled Democracy", lecture given at Rome University, 29 March 2008, printed and distributed by courtesy of the author.

[4] See also Ashis Nandy, *Creating a Nationality: the Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[5] Homi K. Bhabha, "How Newness Enters The World", in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 218-219.

claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race".[6]

[6] Ibid.

In India their multifaced resistance took the public stage in the 1990s when a group of feminists and political activists, associated with the publishing house Kali for Women, gave a new impulse to the historical revision of Independence. Their testimonies and essays inscribed gender at the core of the problem of nationality. The revision of Partition started with a book entitled *Borders and Borderlines* (1998), edited by Ritu Menon, the co-founder of the feminist publishing house. In 2004 Menon also co-edited *No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India*, a collection of essays highlighting how borders are drawn arbitrarily to mark an imposed difference.

Interestingly, the book starts with a physical description of the Punjabi border as a mined area:

> The 449 km. Punjab border is lined with 600.000 landmines, laid in place over 10-15 years ago by the Indian government in order to contain the Punjab insurgency of the 1980s. At Hussaniwala, fields and trees stretch away into the horizon shrouded in thick mist. In the near distance on the Indian side there is electrified fencing, great hoop of concertina barbed wire across the land.[7]

[7] Menon, ed., *No Women's Land*, 1.

The aggressive border and the in-between condition of the people living by the frontier immediately appear as the principal themes of this collection of essays. Here many writers openly declare the non-coincidence of the national limits with the territories of their belonging and underline the importance of questioning identity, nationality and borders.

> The great preoccupations of the human condition – freedom, nation, religion, home, friend and foe, Self and Other – are shot through with those other great themes – loss, exile, death, destruction, displacement and violence – , and they compel us to look anew at those age-old borders and boundaries of nation and religion, community and identity; and at those ancient myths about shame and honour, blood and belonging. For those women who have written Partition, all these are open to question.[8]

[8] Idem, 10.

Partition is described as a war fought on women's bodies: as Menon underlines, between 1947 and 1948 about 75.000 women were raped and an unknown number killed. Once kidnapped they often stayed with their kidnappers and, since they had had children, were unable to go back to their families. The trauma of Partition was thus repeated and five years after Independence thousands of women experieced a second forced migration, because each country asked to have 'its women' back. Almost fifty years have passed since that historical moment and women are now speaking out to show how modern states were born out of violence inflicted on the 'abducted women'.

Sharing the task of these writers, many women artists want to expose the female trauma inscribed within the collective trauma of Partition.[9] Malani has openly declared that her works react to this need for visibility; commenting on her recent installation, *MotherIndia*, she has underlined that an important role of art is to deal with history and its unspoken chapters:

> A Partition had taken place (the Independence of India and Pakistan), and then five years later both governments started to say, "We want our women back." And for these women it was like a second partition. They said, "But we have now established ourselves. We have learnt about their way of life, we have had our babies here." Some jumped into wells. Others said, "What do we have to go back to?" After this, many sociologists tried to speak with these people but nobody wanted to speak about it, there was just a curtain of silence. It is only now that these women are much older and they will soon pass away that they want to be remembered. And they want to talk.[10]

For all the women raped and kidnapped in the name of the constitution of the 'motherland', no identification with the nation is possible. Displacement, silence and sometimes death are inescapable. For this reason Sara Suleri concludes her short essay "Papa and Pakistan" stating that in this "most modern thing, a Muslim or a Hindu nation" that has replaced people's homes, women have no place.[11]

Within this space of exclusion women can make room for themselves and, using visual arts, reimagine the space they live in and their national borders from a new perspective. The Aar-Paar art project, which started in 2000 and is coordinated by Gupta and Huma Mulji, deals with political issues of identity.[12] Artists contributing to this project challenge the fantasy of a unified modern nation by showing that it is built on women's blood; they disrupt the very idea of nationality by presenting art as an ongoing, perpetual experiment of border-crossing. The literal meaning of the word Aar-Paar is " 'this side and that side',though it has additional meanings of '[pierced] through and through'" and it has "undertones of crossings, over rivers, for instance".[13] This metaphorical crossing of borderlines is a way to promote the emergence of a new way of living within the geographical spaces.

Recent productions by the co-ordinator of the project are particularly interesting in this perspective, because they directly question the naturality of borders and border-drawing. *Blame*, Gupta's 2002 contribution to Aar-Paar, first appeared as a sign hanging in the peripheral areas of Indian and Pakistani metropolises. In its digital form, via e-mail, it crossed the physical gates and iron curtains delimiting the frontiers in order to be printed and hung beyond them by partner artists. The poster carries the slogan "Blaming you makes me feel so good, so I blame you for what you cannot control, your religion, your nationality, I want to blame you, it

[9] On the trauma of Partition see also Veena Das, "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain", in Veena Das and Stanley Cavell, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 38-58.

[10] Jennie Guy, "Interview with Nalini Malani", 9 July 2007, <www.recirca.com/articles/2007/texts/nm.shtml>, 12 May 2008.

[11] Sara Suleri, "Papa and Pakistan" in Menon, ed., *No Women's Land*, 25.

[12] Huma Mulji is a Pakistani artist born in Karachi and based in Lahore. Her works, often sculptures, question rootedness and belonging in a post-colonial world; *But What is Your Country, Madam?* (2006) and *Run* (2009) focus on unstable, constantly travelling identities. See her official website: <http://humamulji.com>, 2 September 2008.

[13] Chaitanya Sambrani, *Printing Across Borders: The Aar-Paar Project*, paper presented at The Fifth Australian Print Symposium, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2004, <http://www.aarpaar.net/text.htm>, 5 September 2008.

makes me feel good". The violent act of blaming creates a clear-cut division between the 'you and me' polarities. The sign mimics the political propaganda based on the connection between religion and nationality and refers to a contemporary episode of violence to reveal the destructive effects of strict identity policies. With white letters clearly impressed on a blood-red background, it iconically reminds Indian and Pakistani viewers of the bloody pogrom that caused more than one thousand deaths in Gujarat during the same year.[14] The massacre epitomizes the mournful consequences of the cut showing that an act of separation implies the construction of a deadly dialectic and of imaginary boundaries built up in language.

In 2004 Gupta transformed this work into a performance. First in the streets of Mumbai and then in different western towns, she distributed small kits with bottles of synthetic blood and a few other tools carrying the following instructions: "Squeeze small quantity on dry surface. Neatly separate into four equal sections, can be unequal too. Tell apart sections according to race and religion". After this invitation to divide and label the blood under the sign of violence, the performance is eventually accomplished when the audience is forced to face the impossibility and nonsense of cutting a fluid and shapeless substance. Through art and the travelling bottles, this simulated blood circulates within an imaginary transnational body; thanks to its crossing of borders, it can no longer be used as a signifier of purity and belonging.

[14] The Gujarati pogrom or massacre is not a single episode but a series of violent riots that took place between Hindus and Muslim communities in the Indian state between February and May 2002. For a socio-political analysis see Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

Fig. 1: Shilpa Gupta, *Blame*, 2002-2004, interactive performance (selling Blame kits which contain bottles of simulated blood, posters and stickers), courtesy of the artist.

The instructions in the box, as well as the slogan, suggest that every cut needs a narration and a rhetoric in order to create new borders, or to rework the appearance of borders that already exist. After *Blame* Gupta kept on working on the re-presentation of frontiers through language and visuality and in 2005 she represents the borderlines as strips of self-adhesive tape printed with the statement: *Here There Is No Border*. The strips were located in places where they spoiled the natural landscapes, but also marked contact zones like banisters, gates or walls. These 'borders' are thick with words: not simple lines or borderlines, they appear as 'intense' spaces contrasting any sense of limit and barrier. *Here There Is No Border* both affirms and denies the existence of a border. Its beginning, "here there is", could lead the viewer to expect a real frontier to be actually and actively present; but its ending, "no border", excludes this possibility. The non-border enters the domain of ghostly presence: due to its adhesive properties it exists, even when it is invisible, in the very possibility of its being removed and shifted somewhere else. Its spectral presence, activated through language, is able to modify the surface it is placed upon.

When stuck on a wall, the strip seems almost to pierce the flat surface transforming it into a dimension that can be crossed. Using the line of the adhesive tape, Gupta uses this idea to sketch the outlines of some houses whose mobile walls reveal the precariousness of living in a 'third space'. Gloria Anzaldua considers the interstitial space as the residence of the illegal immigrant, the *mujer indocumentada* who is unrecognized within the order of the nation. The danger of the immigrant's condition lies in living on the border, in a house built on the edge of a barbwire fence: "This is her home/this thin edge of/barbwire".[15]

[15] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), 35.

Fig. 2: Shilpa Gupta, *Here There Is No Border*, 2005-06, Installation with self adhesive tapes, La Cabaña Fortress-Havana Biennial, courtesy of the artist.

The houses Gupta draws on the walls are characterized by the same features that separate inner domestic spaces from the exernal environment; here, however, the walls are as permeable as doors and windows, resembling thresholds that call for new crossings. The frontier then metonymically presents itself as a threshold "where an earlier understanding gives way to a new investigation", as Iain Chambers underlines in his discussion on "The edge of the world".[16] "Here", in the contingency of the encounter, Euclidean geometry cannot hold; it appears inadequate to represent the multiple space of the frontier. As a contact zone, the frontier is irreducible to the monodimensional mark of a line or to the bidimensional aspect of a wall: on this multidimensional threshold every point can be the place where old knowledge is re-articulated. The wall itself, modified by these drawings, stops being a frontier: it is put under erasure, ironically becoming the physical reminder of perpetual and unstoppable crossings.

[16] Iain Chambers, *Culture After Humanism: History, Culture, Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 186.

In several of Gupta's works this transformation is a key point: the wall is often turned into a contact zone promoting communication. Like *Here There Is No Border*, *Untitled 2005-2006* hosts open walls that allow different scenarios to interact. The installation creates a narrow corridor between the walls of the museum room and the outer walls of a house in which interactive touch screens are inserted. The audience can look through these window-screens expecting to access a vision of inner spaces. But instead of showing a single scene, the screens transmit several fluxes of images and sounds that weave a discourse on the Kashmiri borderland. Two of the five screens that make up the video installation stress the permeability of the frontier by using the possibilities provided by new media.

One of them looks onto an open space: the border landscape from Srinagar to Gulmargh is shot from the window of a taxi. The view of this beautiful Kashmiri land is only disturbed by the presence of military

figures that appear, like ghosts, in an almost unspoilt territory. The soldiers, whose spectral shapes clash with the natural environment, keep towns and villages under siege. Touching the interactive screen, the spectators can stop the video loop and see clearly what these figures are, after which the journey can start again. While the trip goes on, the artist's voice questions the taxi-driver about the land they are crossing: does it belong to India or Pakistan?

Another screen is a hazy window. On the other side of this window you, the spectator, can see a finger moving and writing letters as in a game for children, while a childlike voice invites you to do the same and use your finger to touch the 'other' by touching the screen. The specular image that is thus created reveals the permeabilty of this separation. "Left, Right, make a Dash. Left Left Left Right Right Right Right Right Left Left. A for Army." says the child's voice, while the game slowly builds up a feeling of horror. Together, the fingers write the alphabet of the war zones, in which every letter bears images of death.

Fig. 3: Shilpa Gupta, *Untitled 2005-2006*, 2005-06, Interactive Installation with touch-screens, courtesy of the artist.

B for bomb. C for curfew. D for death. E for explosion. F for fear. G for garden. G for grave. H for hospital. I for Identity Card. J for jail. K for kalashnikov. L for Land of Free Kashmir. M for militant. N for NTR - Nothing To Report. O for obituary. P for Papa 2. Q for questioning. R for rape. S for scar. T for television. U for utopia. V for VDC – Village Defense Committee. W for widow – half widow. X for X-ray. Y for Yes Sir! Z for Z-Security.

Thus the security zone proves to be insecure and the walls cease to be a barrier to become an area of contact.

Walls in this work are the frame from which to access the real war experience of this region. Touch screens enable communication between spaces ambiguously constructed, presenting no difference between inside and outside. As Lev Manovich states in his study of cinema as a cultural interface: "the frame acts as a window onto a larger space which is assumed to extend beyond the frame", casting the spectator into a plurality of contexts.[17] At one and the same time the frame can connect and separate different spaces that somehow coexist.[18] In the article "Who am We?" the sociologist Sherry Turkle observes that this possibility of being in different places and different selves is deeply constitutive for the self using new media:

> Windows have become a powerful metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple, distributed system…the self is no longer simply playing different roles in different settings at different times. The life practice of windows is that of a decentred self that exists in many worlds, that plays many roles at the same time. Now, real life itself may be just one more window.[19]

[17] Lev Manovich, "Cinema as a Cultural Interface", 2001, <http://www.manovich.net/TEXT/cinema-cultural.html>, 28 August 2008.

[18] Cfr. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, (Massachusetts: MIT, 2001), 95.

[19] Sherry Turkle, "Who Am We?", in David Trend, ed., *Reading Digital Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 236-250.

Art then uses new media to show how multiple selves can simultaneously be in several places and communicate.

Well aware of the power of windows in new media, Gupta uses multiple screens to present several chances of unfolding subjectivities. Her interactive art involves subjects in a sort of role-playing game offering "a play of difference through identities", as Axel Roch underlines in his essay on the "Critique of Mediation through Art as Polycontexturality".[20] Interaction appears as an invitation to make contact with other dimensions; rather than pushing the spectators into a system of power, controlling their free will, Gupta promotes critical and differentiated participation. Art can be the utopian space where multiple interactions contribute to an eventual dissolution of the dialectical alterity. It is polycontextural because it mediates between multiple contents and contexts: a double transformation, of both the means and the subject involved, occurs in this open communicative process: "Whereas the common definition of interactivity is that the viewer changes the artwork, the artwork changes the user. Similar to polycontextural computation, the change of the identity of the system, the spectator is changed through the introduction and staging of polycontexural content".[21] The possibility of decentering the self is linked to a reconfiguration of the wall, which can be reimagined as an open frame. Domestic walls then lose any reassuring power; instead of representing inner spaces, they become the material signifiers for unknown and uncanny places. This uncanny power links them to the doubleness characterizing the border. Gupta's works question the concepts of familiarity and domesticity, showing how the Freudian terms *heimlich* and *unheimlich* are inextricably intertwined. A dark shadow falls on the very idea of the 'house' as a secure and comfortable place.

[20] Axel Roch, "Critique of Mediation through Art as Polycontexturality", Catalogue Essay, in *Shilpa Gupta 2006* (Bombay: Spenta Multimedia, 2006), 61.

[21] Ibid., 70.

Unreachable security and a sense of dispossession haunting one's own house and national territory are also the main themes of Malani's video installation *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* (1998). Malani only joined Aar Paar in 2004, but her art has always been engaged in political issues like the constitution of the nation and its borders. This video forces the audience to experience life as it was in the borderland between India and Pakistan.

Interacting images are projected onto three screens. The largest one shows images of the nuclear bombs that killed millions of people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War. These fragments refer to the political decisions that lead to underground nuclear tests in India in 1998. The two other screens are placed on the smaller walls of the rectangular room and depict two women's faces and bodies facing each other. The room also houses twelve tin trunks, each of which contains TV monitors and bedding, representing the trunks refugees use to carry their goods during forced migrations. While these television sets broadcast archival images of deportations, the spectators unwillingly inhabit the

house of memory. There they can share a feeling of both displacement and loss with the refugees, because the house is a place where everyone lives "but nobody possesses".[22]

On the side screens the two women mimic their disappearance under the flowered fabrics of their saris. Then they throw the edges of these long strips of material at each other and try to fill the gap that separates them, but the fabric they throw never manages to reach the other side. In spite of the constantly audible noise of a fax or a web connection, the voice-over reads some excerpts of a short story by Sadat Hassan Manto. It is the story of Bishen Singh, called Toba Tek Singh from the name of the land he comes from. After 15 years spent in a lunatic asylum, because of Partition, Bishen Singh is taken to Wagah with other patients to be relocated. But while policemen divide them according to their 'new belonging', he dies in this blank space between India and Pakistan:

> Just before sunrise, Bishan Singh screamed and as the officials from the two sides rushed towards him, he collapsed to the ground. There, behind barbed wire, on one side lay India and, behind more barbed wire, on the other side lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh. [23]

Manto's words stress the indeterminacy of this borderland. The "bit of earth" with no name can only be identified by barbed wire, as a space of death and mourning. In Malani's video though, Toba Tek Singh is a woman and her dying image provides a fitting representation of a space of exclusion and subalternity.

The tale crosses genres, sewing together news and fiction, history and 'stories', present and past, as it reiterates the traumatic event of the nation's splitting. Memory permits the emergence of a spatial cracking characterized by a simultaneous presence of different tenses and by non-linear time. Future war times, represented by nuclear experiments, then appear to be already inscribed in the earlier moment of Partition. The room, like the narrow corridor of the frontier, is inhabited by a messianic time and disseminated with women's bodies and voices. As Lidia Curti underlines: "their voice is crucial in re-configuring frontiers and borders, in transforming what was considered an exotic alterity into an active and powerful presence".[24] The borders Malani explicitly calls "man-made" are supported by a "national fantasy" that "bars the way to memory", a process Jacqueline Rose has illustrated in her discussion of memory and mourning.[25] On the contrary, if personal stories are recollected, it will be possible to challenge the homogenizing trend of nationalism and pave the way for a sense of community founded on both mourning and loss. Mourning and loss, which are also the necessary consequences of the cut of Partition, may come to represent a long-lasting call for ethical responsibility.

[22] "The house of memory is not simply our customs, rituals and traditions, our bodies, institutions and monuments, nor even our innermost selves and individual unconscious. It is ultimately the place of concentrated being that is the historical hum of our earthly habitat"(Chambers, *Culture After Humanism*, 53).

[23] Transcription of the translation chosen by the artist and read in the video.

[24] Lidia Curti, *La voce dell'altra: scritture ibride tra femminismo e postcoloniale* (Roma: Meltemi, 2006), 85. Translation mine.

[25] Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 5.

As the art historian and curator Chaitanya Sambrani writes:

> The border between India and Pakistan has remained, for successive generations after partition, the constant marker of an absence: and it has been a very curious absence. For it is an absence of one who is intimately known, and yet shrouded in the mystery that impermeable barriers generate.[26]

[26] Sambrani, *Printing Across Borders*.

This intimate absence existing within a single self has the power to neutralize the dialectical opposition between 'self and other' or 'me and you' used by political rhetoric to sustain the foundation of a national identity. In the intimacy of mourning lies the awareness that all the pain we suffer when we lose someone comes from the part of ourselves that we lose when someone goes away. Ethical responsibility derives from this fundamental mutual dependence as well as from human exposure to loss; an exposure that is a daily experience for those who live on the border, just as death is the trauma by which the border is haunted.

Annalisa Piccirillo

Hybrid Bodies in Transit: The 'Third Language' of Contemporary *Kathak**

* I would like to express my gratitude to Silvana Carotenuto and Jane Wilkinson for their comments on a previous version of my article.

Fig. 1: Anders Røren, *Akram Khan*, April 2009, photo, London, <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/akram_akram.htm>, © Anders Røren, 30 April 2009, courtesy of Akram Khan Company.

> It is the dichotomy of the opposites. One place, which is the classical world, offers you tradition,history. It offers you discipline,
> something very sacred and spiritual, too.
> And the other place, the contemporary, offers you a science laboratory. It offers you your voice to be heard. It offers you numerous discoveries and possibilities.
> To be in a position where you can reach out to both, is the best place to be for me. I don't want to be in any one place for too long. I am always moving, like a tennis ball, from one side to the other and my favourite moment is when I am just in the middle, just above the net. That is the place where I feel most happy.
> (Akram Khan)

In this article I observe the Dance Theatre of the Anglo-Indian performer Akram Khan, in his ability to feel and 'confuse' the two different worlds that constitute his body.[1] Khan is the son of the new Indian diaspora:

[1] Throughout this article, 'confuse' and all its derivatives are to be intended in the sense Khan attributes to this word, one of the key concepts of his hybrid, in-between performance language.

born from migrant Bangladeshi parents, and living in London, his state of being in a postcolonial time-space drives him to dance the transit from one culture to another, from one body language to another, from his British to his Indian identity. The flexible map of his body sustains him in his creative investigation of Contemporary *Kathak*, a hybrid language in transit from classical Indian *Kathak* to Western contemporary dance, an in-between space which Khan identifies as a chance to exhibit the performative language of his dislocated Anglo-Indian body/identity.

For Khan, Contemporary Kathak dance is a 'third language', where the Indianness of its classical form mixes with Western dance and where traditional and modern realities coexist in a "third space".[2] Bhabha's terminology is particularly appropriate for my description of Khan's transit, the 'in-between' of his kinesthetic body, at the crossroads of cultural policy and theory, in the encounter between Dance and the Postcolonial challenge. Khan's Dance Theatre offers an alternative aesthetics that re-shapes the colonial encounter and records the postcolonial openness of India today. His dance interrupts and interrogates both the Indian and the English languages and their always-already hybrid nature, as it pushes them to leave their original 'home' to move towards other bodies, other identities, and other dances.

[2] Homi K. Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha", in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211.

From *Kathak* to Contemporary Dance

> My parents are from Bangladesh .... Eventually, just before 1970, they moved to London for further education. I think my mother was going to do a Master there. And my father was doing a Business degree .... My mother was always fascinated by the Arts, so she continued bringing the community together through performances. Particularly with the Bangladesh Centre in London. They encouraged me to dance, and that's how I got into it.
>
> (Akram Khan)

Khan took his first steps in the art of dance following the traditional Indian language of *Kathak*, a classical dance originally from Northern India and Pakistan. Its name derives from the Sanskrit *katha*, "story", and it shows a strong narrative involvement with the two famous epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Sunil Kothari actually describes the *Kathak* performer as a storyteller: "One who tells a story is called a *kathak*. An ideal *kathak* is one who can sing, dance, enact mime, knows music ... and has an admirable command over several aspects which go into making of a dance performance".[3] Not surprisingly, the original space for this performance used to be the Hindu temple, where spirituality, tradition, history and drama were ritually combined. Over the centuries, however,

[3] Sunil Kothari, "Kathak: An Open-ended Classical Indian Dance Form", <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/docs/Kathak%20essay%20by%20Sunil.doc>, 30 November 2007.

Kathak has been changing location, target, and audience, growing and developing into schools with different stylistic approaches:

> Its roots in the religion, as a performing art in the Hindu temples, its journey from the temples to the Mughal court, to the salons of the courtesans, the *tawaifs*, mistakenly termed as prostitutes, and after the British rule was over in India, its emergence as a classical art, worthy of practice by the educated and respected middle class gentry, is phenomenal. During the past century *Kathak* as a dance form was nurtured in … two independent schools …. The Lucknow school has delicacy, beauty of bodily movements and a lyrical quality, whereas the Jaipur school lays stress on the vigorous aspects of dance and on the intricacies of time.[4]

[4] Ibid.

On the whole, *Kathak* can be described as a dynamic dance, featuring complex variations and changing tempos; its dancers wear ankle bells whose music beats to the vigorous movements of their bodies, their fast pirouettes and (apparently) improvised gestures. This dynamism must have been the reason why Khan, who did not learn *Kathak* in India but in Britain, found it appropriate to his perception of dance: the fluidity of *Kathak* could easily abandon its traditional Indian space, eroding all national cultural borders, and travel onto a British-Asian body. In a globalizing view, *Kathak* seemed to allow and follow the diaspora of Indian migrant identities, bearing their postcolonial inscriptions. Its transplanted practice could be read as a cultural heritage of the colonised Indian self, performing its independence on the stage of the former colonial power.

Still, Khan's curiosity could not be limited to the horizon of an art form of this kind; his attention was caught by the contemporaneity of what was going on in his 'British' life, at the moment when his Indian 'half-world' met his Western 'half-world': "I didn't know what contemporary dance was. My community was quite self-sufficient in its art forms and didn't encourage me to go out to look at other forms of dance… But I saw a leaflet on contemporary dance and decided to try it". [5]

[5] Khan, cit. in Preeti Vasudevan, "Clarity within Chaos", *Dance Theatre Journal* 18.1 (2002), 18.

Contemporary dance originated in Europe and in the United States after the Second World War, following the revolutions enacted by modern and post-modern dances. These historical transformations were looking for a natural body expression, far from the lyrical idealization of ballet. Moreover, contemporary dance language does not converge into a single technique, with perfect, unified and controlled forms; its vocation is for the multiple styles that share in the deconstruction of classical traditions. The contemporary dancer is not trained to interpret unchangeable repertories, but to develop his/her body as a 'hyper-body' – a 'hypertext' – with several different expressive inputs for both dancer and spectator. The dancer's body is not a fixed or immutable entity, but a living structure continually adapting and transforming itself.[6]

[6] See Elizabeth Dempster, "Women Writing the Body: Let's Watch a Little How She Dances", in Alexandra Carter, ed., *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 227.

The same inventiveness characterises the space of contemporary dance, exploited in all its geometrical dimensions: on the lower level, you have improvised falls; on the middle level, there are unstable movements; the upper level is where transient jumps can take place. Space is fluid: a dancer can be seen from the front and from the side, with equal interest.[7] All codified rules of classical ballet can be broken and developed, thus enriching the possibility of representing the multiplicity of the Western bodies. In the versatile passage between *Kathak* and contemporary dance, Khan locates himself as a hybrid, transitional dancer and body, moving between the traditional (the past, the sacred and the spiritual) and the modern (the present, the human and the material), between an original physical language and the Western system:

> [W]hen I am in one place, the contemporary dance world, then I feel I can't reach somewhere higher; there isno sense of spirituality; and when I am entirely in the classical world, I feel, I have no freedom to reach out there; so the most beautiful place for me to be is a place where I can reach both worlds at the same time.[8]

[7] See Merce Cunningham with Jacqueline Lesschaeve, "Torse: There Are No Fixed Points in Space", in Carter, ed., *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, 30.

[8] Khan, from the programme of *Sacred Monsters* (2006).

The 'Third language' of Contemporary *Kathak*

> It was not a conscious or intellectual development, but simply that my body was making decisions for itself and yes, a unique language of movement was emerging from the confrontation of these two dance forms.
>
> (Akram Khan)

Akram Khan's is a confused body: the acquisition of contemporary dance exposes his Indian 'mother-dance' to mutation. The code he was accustomed to dwell upon is torn by (an)other body language; but his former self does not disappear: "I can't take ten years of my training away. So in my class I would always move very differently from the other contemporary dancers, because my body is informed with something very different".[9] The collision of the two forms of dance on his own muscles provides an object to search into, investigate and understand: "both my classical and contemporary dances were getting rather frustrated, so I decided in a way to investigate this frustration".[10] Thus, Khan's body-laboratory produces Contemporary *Kathak*, a language based on his discovery of 'dis/ordered' elements governed by confusion. Confusion becomes indeed his creative tool; just as he avoids fossilizing within a single, specific genre, the dancer-choreographer also avoids applying a label to his work: "I don't like the word 'fusion' so much, because I think it's used in a wrong way, and it doesn't cut deep enough. I like to call my work 'confusion'".[11]

[9] Khan, cit. in Naeem Mohaiemen, "Akram Khan: Explosion in Contemporary Dance" (5 December 2003), <http://www.thedailystar.net/magazine/2003/12/01/coverstory.htm>, 15 January 2008.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

As well as being a rational form of research, Khan's confused art may be seen as work in progress, recording the transit of two contrasting dances on his intellectual flesh-and-bones body. The dis/order created by the encounter of traditional *Kathak* and the fleeting movements of contemporary dance, discloses the confusion between the "clarity" of the former and the "chaos" of the latter. As Khan points out: "Classical to me is clarity, where the boundaries are clear and visible. Contemporary is chaotic. It is an unfortunate misconception that has no boundaries. The difference is that you cannot see them. It is invisible that makes it chaotic. You know the boundaries are there but cannot see them."[12] In the progressive interplay between the clashing expressions of clarity and chaos, he is searching for an element of harmony within both dance forms. Through their material metaphors, he explores energy:

[12] Vasudevan, "Clarity within Chaos", 18.

> My image of *Kathak* is based on a formless hunch, as suggested by Peter Brook. Imagine a person standing still within a cube or box. The body is filled with sand and the fingertips have holes, the sand is flowing out of there and the body is deflating. However, there is a small turbine on the top of the box and a vacuum pulls you creating a sandstorm. The clarity of the dancer is the feet on the ground while it is chaotic around. It is finding clarity within chaos. What I'm exploring is *Kathak*, the dynamics and energies of *Kathak*. It is *Kathak* that informs the contemporary.[13]

[13] Ibid.

Khan's experimentation assumes concrete form in the development of the multicultural company Akram Khan Company he created in 2000. The purpose of this company is not only to examine the relationship between Western dance and traditional Kathak, but to emphasize the dis/order in the structural and mathematical elements comprising both dance styles. Maths is basic to Khan's double art. In Kathak, choreographies endorse the logical configuration of Indian music, since "everything in Indian music works mathematically and is very logical".[14] A logical organization also shapes contemporary Western dance, which unhinges the composure of ballet while preserving the geometrical relation between the dancing body and space. Once again it is Khan himself who explains:

[14] Patricia Boccadoro, "Akram Khan in Paris" (25 January 2004), <http://www.culturekiosque,.com>, 30 May 2008.

> I used connection through mathematics, because math is a universal language. I wanted to compare that because in North Indian and South Indian music and dance, maths plays an integral part … that's why I started to play with numbers on stage. In Indian dance, the maths comes from the music. In contemporary dance, the geometric and geographic structures in relation to the body and space is where the maths comes in.[15]

[15] Khan, cit. in Mohaiemen, "Akram Khan".

Khan's 'mathematical' dance involves several transits – between tradition and modernity, clarity and chaos, geometry and disorder, past and present, South Asian and British identities. The diasporic confusion of their languages mirrors the displacement of Khan's own, hybrid identity, the identity of a

stranger: "I am not British nor even Bangladeshi" – the choreographer repeats – "my condition is that of a stranger everywhere".[16] This condition urges him to search for another, "third", road or voice: "Like many others of my generation that live in my condition, I am searching for a voice that is the combination of my motherland roots and the culture of the place where I was born. It is about a third road, a new path in between the East and the West."[17]

In a performative application of Bhabha's third space, Contemporary *Kathak* is the third language Khan uses to dance through a liminal space in which he may elaborate new "strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – initiating new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation".[18] The perspective offered by Bhabha's in-between space enables "something new" to emerge, raising questions as to the sense of belonging to a specific culture:

Fig 2: Anders Røren, *Akram Khan*, April 2009, photo, London, <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/akram_akram.htm>, © Anders Røren, 30 April 2009, courtesy of Akram Khan Company.

> [A]ll forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the "third space" which enables other positions to emerge …. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.[19]

The third space or language of Contemporary *Kathak* presents a cut and mix of languages, a possibility for playing and performing cultural hybridity.[20] Through it, Khan enacts his own in-betweenness, the negotiation of his postcolonial and Anglo-Indian identity. Thus the 'writing' body of his dance expresses and enhances the confused landscape of Khan's soul: "I feel that the essence of dance is the expression of man – the landscape of his soul."[21]

Into the Elsewhere of the Possible

> At the moment I am in transition of searching. I have not quite found a solid foundation to … define clearly what I mean by 'Contemporary *Kathak*'.
>
> (Akram Khan)

> I ask you, what would you do
> if you had two tongues in your mouth,
> and lost the first one, the mother tongue,
> and could not really know the other,
> the foreign tongue.
>
> (Sujata Bhatt)

[16] Khan, my translation, <http://www.romaeuropa.net/archivio/eventi/kaash/index.html>, 30 May 2008.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

[19] Bhabha, "The Third Space", 211.

[20] Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities", in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall, Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 446.

[21] Marta Graham, "I am a Dancer", in Carter, ed., *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, 67.

Akram Khan's movements recall the dis/ordered words of other hybrid bodies and identities. In its transit through other in-between spaces, Khan's diasporic male dancing body resonates with female poetics of voicing. His search for a language of movement mirrors the work of poets such as Sujata Bhatt, whose "Search For My Tongue" gives visual and bodily form to the issue of language.

In Bhatt's poem, her tongue "slips away", like a lizard's tail cut from its body. This is the moment when, placing herself in between human and animal, the poet compares her despair at being unable to save her mother-tongue with the lizard's inability to keep its tail alive. Language becomes a material practice that pulses as the poet switches from one language to another, diasporizing all in a cut and mix of English and Gujarati:

> Days my tongue slips away.
> I can't hold on to my tongue.
> It's slippery like the lizard's tail
> I try to grasp
> But the lizard darts away.
> Mari jeebh sarki jai chay
> I can't speak. I speak nothing.
> Nothing.
> Kai nahi, hoo nathi boli shakti
> I search for my tongue.[22]

Bhatt's words belong to a travelling body, wandering and searching for a tongue – the metonym of her identity. Her hybrid body transits between the loss and appropriation of different words, giving them new meanings and possibilities. Not surprisingly, "Search For My Tongue" has itself inspired a dance production, opening up the poem to a further movement. The Daksha Sheth Dance Company – with its own hybrid bodies in transit – had in fact choreographed the poem back in the 90s, searching for an experimental body language and dancing the cultural dislocation and transformation of India today. [23]

Daksha Sheth is a professional Indian dancer who received initial training in *Kathak* but who has always been something of a rebel in the Indian dance world. Her company hosts performing artists from different backgrounds and disciplines; in their productions they seek to bridge western contemporary dance and traditional Indian arts such as *Kathak*, *Mayurbhanj Chhau*, *Vedic chanting*, *Kalaripayattu* and *Mallakhamb*:

> My dance combines dance, acrobatics, aerobatics, martial art and completely original music specifically created for dance. I have taken elements of traditional dance and combined it with modern music, clothes and movements …. the inspiration is essentially Indian. It is an evolution from my training in various dance forms.[24]

[22] Sujata Bhatt, "Search for my tongue", in *Brunizem* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1988), 63-64.

[23] The work was first created in 1994 for a group of five young South Asian dancers living in UK – the YUVA (The South Asian Youth Dance Company) – under the title *Tongue Untied*; the piece was then re-elaborated by Daska Sheth for her company under the name *Search for My Tongue*, an experiment that met with great public response in India.

[24] Daksha Sheth in Liza George, *The Hindu* (20 March 2009), <http://www.hindu.com/fr/2009/03/20/stories/2009032050780200.htm>, 21 July 2009.

The confusion of several body movements and traditions is visualized and articulated in a third language again, a unique dance vocabulary that gives voice to the hybridism of a postcolonial culture and the in-betweenness of South Asian dancing bodies.

The choreographed version of *Search for My Tongue* performs the poet's journey in life, her movement from home to Europe and America, from Gujerati to English. The bi-lingual poem is performed by multi-lingual dancers who use their bodies to ask the same questions as those raised by Bhatt's her investigating voice: Which is our identity? Can it be danced through a sole language? Bhatt's fear of losing her identity as a Gujerati-speaking Indian is overcome in the dimension of the dream, where her mother-tongue comes back.

> I thought I spit it out
> But overnight while I dream,
> Munay hutoo kay aakhee jeebh aakhee bhasha
> *May thoonky nakhi chay* …[25]

[25] Sujata Bhatt, "Search for My Tongue", 64.

For Sheth a similar fear is defeated on the stage, in the theatrical dimension, where diasporic bodies speak a third language, confusion is danced through the cut and mix of different techniques, arts and traditions and identities transit between two cultures. Broken words inspire untied body movements, while poetic rhythm becomes the music to which Sheth dances her own search for an independent identity and language: a third language made of loss and appropriation. In *Search for My Tongue* Bhatt's voice and Sheth's body break the Indianness of their languages, taking them where they have never been before.

The art of Bhatt and Sheth, like that of Khan, invites us to re-route the meanings of the Western language/dance and the Indian mother-tongue/dance as mobile sites of belonging and becoming, as "elsewhere[s] of the possible", to borrow Iain Chambers's expression. In his exploration of the wandering experience of languages with no fixed abode, Chambers speaks of the destabilizing and re-routing of colonial languages and bodies, bringing language "to the point where it is shaken apart, and the habitual meanings of words are exposed and sacrificed as customs and the prescribed is unsettled by an unsuspected shift into the elsewhere of the possible."[26]

[26] Iain Chambers, "Signs of Silence, Lines of Listening", in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 50.

Dances of Interruption

In his dance, Khan usually interrupts his dancing language in order to converse with prestigious writers, sculptors, musicians and dancers. His art works with other arts; his language is combined with other languages from different cultures and different countries. In these interactions, the

limits of the knowledge of East and West blur, creating undefined borders. In addition, Khan's third language of Contemporary *Kathak* does not recall the past as an aesthetic precedent but, like Bhabha's artists of the 'beyond', it "renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living".[27] The traditional aspect of *Kathak* dance is re-integrated in contemporary art practice not as a synonym of the old-fashioned, but as an essential form. Khan's interruptive intercultural experiments are often made in collaboration with other artists, as in *Ma* (2004) with the Anglo-Pakistani writer Hanif Kureishi, *Zero degree* (2005) with the Flemish-Moroccan dancer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (engaged, like Khan, in a search for zero at the core of life, the middle point through polar opposites), *Banhok* (2008) in which the Akram Khan Company joined forces with the National Ballet of China, and *In-I* (2008-9) with Juliette Binoche. In this paper, I have chosen to concentrate on *Kaash* and *Sacred Monsters*, a choice dictated by the intense emotion I experienced, as a dancer, while watching these productions.

[27] Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 7.

Kaash: The Mysteries of Forms

> It is important that we remind ourselves of
> the value of that which we cannot touch.
> Is it not true that the empty space inside the
> cup is what renders it useful?
> Similarly, the stillness between steps, the spaces
> between musical phrases and the empty
> spaces in space itself contain all the mysteries of their
> eventual forms.
> (*Kaash*: words projected on screen)

"Empty space"; "stillness"; "mysteries" – these are the key to the dance language of *Kaash* (from the Hindi word for "If"), in which Khan uses images, stories, colours and movements belonging to his mother-India.[28] His 'interrogating' performance is built around the god Shiva, a pivotal character in traditional *Kathak* dances: "I am basing it on the concept of Shiva. Shiva in Hindu religion is the destroyer and restorer of order … What if you put a dancer in a ice cube and then the energy is released when the cube melts? That's what Shiva is about".[29]

[28] *Kaash* - choreographer: Akram Khan; composer: Nitin Sawhney; set designer: Anish Kapoor, 2002.

[29] Vasudevan, "Clarity within Chaos", 21.

Energy is explored through the combination of different languages: set design, music, and dance. Energy is above all explored through the 'unsaid' dialogue between Khan and the artist Anish Kapoor. The minimalism of Kapoor's set supports the geometrical body effect reproduced by Khan and his dancers. The sculptor generates a dark rectangular backcloth framed by three overlapping squares, three geometric shapes whose colours change with the tempo. The set seems to create a never-ending condition of ambiguity

between empty and full spaces, matter and colour, place and non-place.

Kapoor aims to exploit unexpected depths by using colours with ritual Hindu meanings, playing with light and shadow, as 'if' he wanted to re-shape the unfinished within the finished. The 'infinitive' sensation he evokes may be linked to the unfinished state of being inscribed on his hybrid body. Kapoor, too, is (un-)defined in his dual Anglo-Indian identity: born to a Hindu father and a Jewish-Iraqi mother, the sculptor has been part of the multicultural space of London since the beginning of the seventies. This is one of the ways in which *Kaash* mirrors the transitory dimension of his existence, combining the spiritual traditions of India with Western art concepts. Music produces a similar effect: the musical track is provided by the British-Asian composer, Nitin Sawhney. In conversation with Khan, Sawhney works on some close parallels between Western techno-dance and the musical cycles of traditional Indian music. He is searching for affinities between sounds coming from different lands, so as to create nuances of difference between cultures and musical languages. In a similar way to Khan and Kapoor, Sawhney transits in 'travelling rhythms' that reproduce his displaced Anglo-Indian identity.

Fig. 3: Artist Unknown, *Kaash,* 2002, photo, <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/akram_akram.htm>, 30 April 2009, courtesy of Akram Khan Company, London,

What happens to Khan's third language choreography on stage? Five dancers vitalize the performance space; group variations are alternated by solos and duets; but all the dancers stage the confusion of Contemporary *Kathak*. The combination of speed and stillness, chaos and clarity, geometry and disorder stuns the audience, imposing a new and different form of perception. The ensemble pieces tend to reproduce the choreographic strategy of the canon: in a contrapuntal manner, each dancer in turn performs a movement, with a different tempo, then they synchronize it in unison. This strategy creates visions of hybrid bodies, transiting from confused improvisation to logical order. In addition, Khan intentionally chooses dancers with no *Kathak* background. His desire is to make them approach the classical practice anew, pushing them to experience a natural confusion on their bodies. The upper parts of the dancing bodies are used with rigour and energy; arms deconstruct the space around the body, cutting it and perforating it with slashes, lines and waves in mid-air, creating a mixed effect of softness and rigidity. *Mudras* hand positions from Indian

classical dance are also used, dynamically amalgamated with the breaking movements of contemporary dance.

From a theoretical perspective, *Kaash* raises stimulating issues relating to the performativity of diasporic identities. Ramsay Burt has suggested a parallel between national identity and gender performativity, recalling Judith Butler's theory of gender as a performative act. For Butler, gender is not a biological given but is constructed through discursive practices based on repetition and performativity. According to Burt's interpretation of Butler, national identities are built on similar practices: "the individual is called upon to perform gender and in responding to that call recognizes her or himself as subject to gender norms. Where national identities are concerned, individuals are similarly interpellated into nationalist discourses including those found within movement forms invested with cultural significance".[30]

Before going on stage, the performance act needs repetitions and rehearsals which are both "a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" as Butler explains.[31] Gender performativity also entails an act of repetition: "the act one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed."[32] For Burt, the performative acts of gender and national identities share the repetition and re-enactment of the discourses upon which they are based. For British-Asian subjects, the act of repeating/performing traditional forms such as *Kathak* means perpetuating a sense of affiliation, of belonging to their motherland; this sense of affiliation, however, emerges from the interstices because it is performed by diasporic bodies/identities.

Khan's dancing language clarifies all this. He re-enacts his 'mother-dance' as he explores and hybridizes it, performing his own liminal Indianness and that of other South-Asian diasporic bodies. *Kaash* is clearly a repetition of the Indian national identity, if only thanks to the choreographer's cooperation with other postcolonial British-Asian artists. What one should underline here is the performativity of new Indian national identities as non-static and hybrid – just like the transitory art they display on stage. In this sense, *Kaash* develops precise diasporic cultural strategies similar to the practices of assimilation and resistance to the host (in this case British) cultural system described by James Clifford.[33] Contemporary *Kathak* is a language that accommodates the host culture by incorporating Western dance; similarly, it resists it by repeating the Indianness of *Kathak*.

The hybridism of *Kaash* represents a common terrain for both the migrant and the host community: it encodes the languages of British-Asian displaced bodies, as well as containing the presence of an element of *différance* that interrupts Western performing art. "If" both cultures are present in the third language of Contemporary *Kathak*, *Kaash* fulfils to some extent the

[30] Ramsay Burt, "Contemporary Dance and the Performance of Multicultural Identities" (19 April 2004), <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/text_articles.asp?id=7>, 30 May 2007.

[31] Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity", in Colin Counsell and Laurie Wolf, eds., *Performance Analysis*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 76.

[32] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", in Sue Ellen Case, ed., *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 277, cit. in Burt, "Contemporary Dance".

[33] James Clifford, "Diasporas", *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994).

promise of the words that open the performance, "contain[ing] all the mysteries of their eventual forms".

Sacred Monsters: Shared Bodies, Shared Histories

In *Sacred Monsters*, Khan works with the most sublime contemporary *étoile*, the French ballerina Sylvie Guillem.[34] The performance is a journey in which both dancers challenge the classical dance techniques they have acquired, renewing their traditional languages: here, Western ballet and classical *Kathak* share a third language. The title recalls the term coined in the nineteenth century for theatre stars and their divine status for the audience and media. The encounter between Guillem and Khan is between two such sacred monsters, two perfect, classical/sacred bodies revealing their contemporary, monstrous dimensions. In their interrupting journey the two dancers admit imperfections and impulsiveness, theatrical elements denied both by the severity of ballet and by the coded forms of *Kathak*. This is the moment when the divine becomes monstrous and the weak, unstable, human condition of the performers is acted out, staged and danced. In this transit, the two artists discover the possibilities hidden in worlds – the classical and the modern – that are usually considered incompatible. Speaking of his project, Khan explains that "Working with Sylvie Guillem gives me the opportunity to explore another classical dance language … creating a situation that will unearth the things that are most often lost between the classical and modern world".[35] On her part, Guillem needs to free herself from the classical clichés of style, technique and tradition. What matters is that, on stage, monstrosity turns one into someone else: "I am a classical dancer. I have been trained as a classical dancer. But I cannot say that my 'religion' is a style, a technique, or a tradition. What I can say is, that the 'place' where I perform, whatever style I perform, feels strongly a 'sacred place'. The stage … a monster … my sacred monster".[36]

The dancers interrupt their personal narrations, sharing different bodies, traditions and histories. The breaking point is visible in the transition from solos to duets. The performance opens with the solos representing the historical form of both dancers, their classical training. The duets show the artists' evolution, their effort to be true, natural and hybrid; the solos perform the past, while the duets materialize the contemporary. Khan starts his solo of pure *Kathak*: the ankle bells support the power of his footwork, stamping with a resounding 'tak-tak' sound. The typical speed of his cutting arms seems to draw slipstreams in the air. It is followed by Guillem's solo: although the solo does not offer a ballet variation, it shows the lyricism and linear strength that shape the dancer's marvellous classical technique.

After mirroring Western and Eastern classical traditions, the dancers deconstruct the sacred status of their bodies. Guillem and Khan's interior

[34] *Sacred Monsters* - choreographer: Akram Khan; dancers: Akram Khan and Sylvie Guillem; additional choreographers: Lin Hwai Min, Gauri Sharma Tripathi; composer: Philip Sheppard; set designer: Shizuka Hariu; dramaturge: Guy Cools; 2006.

[35] Khan, *Sacred Monsters*, <http://www.sadlerswells.com/show/06-Sacred-Monsters>, 30 May 2008.

[36] Sylvie Guillem, from the programme of *Sacred Monsters* (2006).

journey displays their monstrosity by interrupting their traditions and meeting each other in between contemporary dance. Both dancers exploit their previous training: *Kathak* and ballet are employed as the seeds that sprout into contemporary dance. Hence, they go constantly back and forth, their movements describing a third space where classical mode and contemporary experimentation meet and where a common third language can emerge, by being danced and spoken together. At one point, Khan and Guillem exchange childhood memories. Unexpectedly, the stage is used in order to speak, joke and smile about infant fears. The script, written by Guy Cools, is in English. Music plays its part in the performance of this third language. On stage multicultural musicians produce sounds coming from East and West, that support the dialogue between the two dancers. Now, as in Guillem's solo, the voice and delicate sound of the female singer guide the dancer's body. The female conversation marks a wonderful performative encounter. Dancing bodies, musicians and singers move into an essential set design dominated by white: a bright white wall with a deep rip, an interruption letting the audience catch a glimpse of 'another' zone. This is the way in which *Sacred Monsters* transits between different languages and hybrid bodies, creating, in this very multiplicity, a common energy.

Fig. 4: Mikki Kunttu, *Sacred Monsters*, 2006, photo, London, <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/akram_akram.htm>, © Mikki Kunttu, 30 April 2009, courtesy of Akram Khan Company.

Moments of intense hybridism are experienced when Khan and Guillem dance together, magnetizing the audience with their encounter. Both are dressed identically, in loose trousers and t-shirts, but at the same time they form a contrast thanks to their black and white skins and their different physiques. Yet, whenever they meet, their bodies adjust in perfect harmony. They seem to be moving on a third stage, where cultural, ethnical and physical differences are overcome. Syncretism is disclosed in a precise sequence: Khan is in the middle of the stage, reached by the female dancer; Guillem's legs are on his waist, then on his back – the two bodies are totally intertwined.

They perform a sinuous mirror dance with their arms and torsos, in such a way that there are four arms, recalling the multi-limbed Hindu god Shiva. Crucially, two bodies collide into one – a 'third' – body. It becomes impossible to distinguish their different bodies and identities. The third language spoken by Khan and Guillem shapes their

metaphorical journey into a transition from the divine to the monstrous, from personal to shared experiences, from classical to contemporary styles, from South Asian to Western languages.

From a postcolonial point of view, the performance language transits between the ex-colonised and the ex-coloniser, since it is the third language of their shared histories. As Catherine Hall observes: "Both colonisers and colonised are linked through their histories, histories which are forgotten in the desire to throw off the embarrassing reminders of Europe, to focus instead on the European future."[37] Indeed, it is Guillem's European body that becomes unexpectedly shareable and hybrid, marking a further interruption: on her journey towards (an)Other history and (an)Other body, one of the leading representatives of ballet (the 'monolithic' European language) interrupts the solidity of Western dance. By meeting the confused Anglo-Indian identity of Khan, Guillem becomes a hybrid body, and, by dancing a third language, she localizes herself within a discontinued space.

Fig 5: Nigel Norrington, Sacred Monsters, 2006, photo, Londo, <http://www.akramkhancompany.net/html/akram_akram.htm>, © Nigel Norrington, 30 April 2009, courtesy of Akram Khan Company.

[37] Catherine Hall, "Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment", in Chambers and Curti, eds., *The Post-Colonial Question*, 66.

Mirrors, Hybrids, Movements and Words

Following Khan's creative transit, it is possible to say that the body on stage is a presence that dances, entertains and communicates emotions. If the staged body belongs to an Anglo-Indian artist it is above all the mirror of a cultural identity: a hybrid identity. The language of the body is the language of an identity: "The body is absorbing and the mind is absorbing the culture, the smell, the religion, even politically. And so – the body is an identity in itself, it has its own opinion."[38] Starting from the essential bond between body, identity and language, Khan performs the cultural re-elaboration of his double self. His third language endorses cultural, political and identity discourses. Contemporary *Kathak* is moulded by hybrid 'movements' breaking with both the classical and the contemporary world. All this tunes in with the hybrid words and female voice of Bhatt and the "idiolect of movement" of her choreographer, Sheth, which have interrupted my own writing. In any case, the danced-spoken third languages I have recalled interrogate the shared and re-shaped histories of the national languages of both the former colonised and the former coloniser;

[38] Khan, cit. in Mary Kay Magistad, "Akram Khan", *PRI's The World from the BBC, PRI and WGBH, Global Perspectives for an American Audience* (8 February 2008), <http://www.theworld.org?q=node/15900>, 30 January 2009.

interrogations that find their possible answer in the multiple possibilities acquired by languages when they transit into elsewhere.

In *Kaash* and *Sacred Monsters,* the confusion of languages reveals the artist's choice to feel and dance two worlds at the same time. The confusion enabling hybrid bodies to express the openness of the postcolonial reality is also the reality of India today seen through the gaze of an Anglo-Indian. Khan's Indian half is disclosed in images, feelings, colours and stories referring to his motherland – a danced, explored, imagined homeland. It comes in fact from a diasporic representation or translation, from which "something always gets lost", but at the same time a language where "something can also be gained". [39]

In its hybridism, Khan's British-Asian body performs the polyphonic mosaic of cultures, languages and world-views of the contemporary Indian aesthetic. Moreover, his third language can be appreciated on multiple stages: evolving on the artistic stages of Europe and South Asia, it enriches the theoretical and political stages of cultural, performance and postcolonial studies.

[39] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 17.

Alessandro Monti

Love and Punishment. How Passion is Meted out in Bollywood.

Arranging Marriages

Both thwarted and unhappy love are a seminal feature in Indian films. The informing notion behind failure in love concerns authorization, this being a key concept, one that implies at least two agencies, constituted respectively by the family circle and by the dharmic norms, which are carried out by the family itself. Traditional Indian families, even in contemporary society with its globalising movements towards modernization, constitute a powerful instrument of control and imposed behaviour, particularly as far as women are concerned. Of course I would refer to stridharmic rules (*stri* being a Sanskrit term for a woman), whose importance in the urbanite middle class of today has been extensively stressed by Sudhir Kakar:

> The message from her parents, though, is mixed. Obedience and conformity, selflessness and self-denial are still the ideals of womanhood and a good woman does not "create waves" or "rock the boat". Middle class parents, however, also encourage and take pride in the academic success of their daughter. Their aspirations for an occupational career for her, though, more ambiguous than for a son, are not completely absent. The parents' cherished goal for the daughter, however, remains a "good" marriage. Her education should help the girl to find a well-educated, economically well-off man from a respectable family rather than pursuit of a career …. The preference for arranged marriage, where the modern Indian woman has a right of veto on prospective partners chosen by the family, is partly based on the young person's acceptance of a cultural definition of marriage as a family rather than individual affair, where harmony and shared values that come from a common background are more important than individual fascination. …. By marrying late, typically in her early twenties, the middle class woman no longer enters her husband's family as a submissive daughter-in-law, as is the case with her more traditional counterpart. Because of her education and maturity, she begins to play a significant role in her husband's family affairs from the very outset. The middle class woman's potential for individual self-assertion in her marriage and the new family has, however, clearly defined limits which come from her traditional "markings", etched deep into her mind during the process of growing up. She, too, believes that getting along in her husband's family and earning the good opinion of his family members, including the traditionally reviled and feared mother-in-law, are important obligations – even when these entail a measure of self-sacrifice and self-denial. [1]

[1] Sudhir Kakar, *DOST Critical Studies* 6 (Alessandria: Dall'Orso, in press).

Such – and sometimes even sterner – intimations against whatever inchoate, or even mildly wild, misruly behaviour on the part of potentially infringing women have been backed by the so-called and time-honoured

Laws of Manu, which are punitively misogynist: women are considered lecherous by nature, unreliable and weak in character, so that they must always live under the controlling shadow of a male, either a father, brother, or finally a husband. The *Ramayana*, a normative Hindu myth, has further stressed the subaltern role meted out to women in family life. Rama, the divine *pati* (a Sanskrit word meaning either master or husband) sets the tune for Sita, his *patni* (the feminine form of *pati*).

Sita evades the stridharmic norms at least twice: first when she follows Rama into exile, instead of taking care of her husband's parents, according to her primary feminine duty. A more serious rupture, laden with heavy consequences, takes place when Sita steps across the forbidding line drawn by Rama's brother: Laksman. To start with, Sita cannot keep her frivolous feminine nature in check – she has seen a golden deer in the forest and instantly covets after it. As a matter of fact, the deer is actually a demon in disguise, whose aim is to beguile her male guardians away from Sita.

After a while Sita insists that Laksman go to help his older brother. He does that, on one condition: that Sita will be safe so long as she remains on the right side of a protective line (the Laksman-*rekha*). She fails to obey and is consequently abducted by the demon Ravana. In the current interpretation this episode is seen as a warning against trespassing women, emphasizing the need to guard women, given female thoughtlessness, not to say worse. The normative relevance of the episode may aptly be summed up as follows:

> [T]he Laksmana-rekha could in fact be viewed as a form of constraint, a line which Sita, *as woman*, had no right to cross over. It was a boundary drawn by a male, who had been deputed by another male to guard Sita the female. When Sita failed to obey the male dictate and crossed the line, she saw why it was necessary to remain confined to where the male world wanted her to stay.[2]

[2] Vrinda Nabar, *Caste as Woman* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1995), 110.

An implied Laksman-*rekha* similarly informs Mehboob Khan's 1954 film, *Amar*, in which a young lawyer falls in love with a teasing milkmaid, although he is officially engaged to another woman. The metaphorical *rekha* is represented in the film by a thorny hedge that separates the transgressing couple when they first meet. The woman crosses the line to help her future lover and by doing so she discards the stridharmic duties imposed on her behaviour. Both of them yield to unrestrained passion, a sort of *rati* which drives the man to the verge of death and makes a social outcaste of the woman, who is expelled by the village and finally charged with murder.

Two agencies rule out punishment against the adharmic and possibly miscegenating couple, one responding to the passionate myth of Krisna and Radha, the other stressing the self-sacrifying attitude we expect from

a dutiful Hindu woman. The milkmaid is surely an updated and rustic version of the *gopi* which shared the erotic play (*lila*) of the seductive god. Not by chance the young woman in the film addresses Krisna to ensure protection both for her lover and herself, since the *lila* staged by the god (the term stands both for divine creation and spectacle) deploys a constant frame of impending separation and loss of love. The feminine symbol of this myth is Radha, the forbidden woman, one who is married and therefore belongs to someone else.

On the other hand, the split male character is rescued by a painful choice (or rather by stinging shame and social repulse) made by his legitimate would-be wife, whose act of renouncing allows him to marry the woman he has violated. Here sexual intercourse may be seen as an inferior form of marriage, out of the eight possibilities traditionally made available to a Hindu couple.[3]

The self-effacing woman in the story embodies the role of an ideal wife. Albeit the intruding wedge driven by the sensual milkmaid breaks the link the legitimate betrothed has with the man she loves, the unselfish behaviour of the woman makes a *pativrata* of her, that is "someone who loses her identity and whose state of mind reflects that of her husband".[4] However, an added half-concealed agency of rehabilitation may be seen at work in the troubled happy ending of the film. Whereas the man is apparently doomed to an excruciating condition of emotional splitting, the jilted woman seems to act out of solidarity with her rival. By restoring the fallen honour of the milkmaid (a motherless orphan, whose daily life is made miserable by an ill-disposed stepmother, and who stands in a lower castal position, since she is presumably an *Ahir* by birth), the behaviour of the self-sacrificing woman suggests an intimation, albeit unexpressed, of sisterhood.

A later film about a heartrending story that involves an adulterous couple among the expatriate community in the States is more ambiguous in sorting out the new life of a 'sinful' pair (since it is devoted to a punishing frame of reference). This severe return to type, as expressed by the dharmic norms, is loaded by the very title of Karan Johar's *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006), which could be translated as *Sooner or Later Things Come to Light*. A man and woman whose respective marriages are slowly crumbling meet and fall in love with each other. Both of them nourish sadly failed or truncated dreams or hopes in life, but both are also loath to trespass on their conjugal duty. The invisible *rekha* that binds them to their unhappy marriages is finally broken by their respective partners, when they tell them the truth. They are exiled out of their homes and apparently doomed to live in remorseful solitude and loss of family status.

However the two lovers meet again after some time and decide to live together – a very sad ending though, given the bitter words spoken by the

[3] I refer quite loosely to the fifth type of marriage, *gandharva*, which could amount to no more than a liaison, which was often clandestine and took place with the consent of the two parties. It should be understood that in *Amar* the choice is between two kinds of relationships – consequently the issue deals with arranged authorization and self-authorization.

[4] Nabar, *Caste as Woman*, 43.

man as an introduction to their new life, "if you are willing to take what is left of me". This painful partition of being echoes back to the Hindu notion that the unity of the married couple (*jori*) is unbreakable and consequently an infringing husband (or wife) has no role within the dharmic frame. Differently from the two-pronged model evoked by the dual paradigm informing the myths of Rama-Sita and Krisna-Radha, here the conflict between duty and possibly unrestrained passion does not involve gender (the admonitory tale concerning Sita) or the very precarious balance between feminine obedience and the call for a free attitude (the play of Krisna with Radha).

Differently from what happens with *Amar*, in *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* the audience is introduced to tensions which oppose 'dharma' to 'dollar': the film elaborates on the mundane side of the expatriate life (the pursuit of a successful career, which isolates the weaker member in the couple) and the maintaining of a superior *deshi* morality. This juxtaposition of values defines the thematic background of films which bring into focus such issues as arranged marriages and free choice. The seminal film concerning rebellious behaviour and a more or less spontaneous return to type is undoubtedly Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1996), variously translated as *The Hero* (or *The Young Man*) *Will Conquer the Girl*. The term *dilwale*, which may be split into *dil*, heart, and *wala*, a suffix that indicates someone's role or identity, could be smoothly equated to the different personae attributed to the male or female protagonists on the Sanskrit stage. Both a *nayaka* and a *nayika* are defined according to their different modes of characterization – for instance the hero of *Dilwale* meets the qualities of being noble in behaviour (*dira*) and fierce (*iudatta*), whereas his *nayika* is represented without experience in love (*mugdha*). This primary framework extends to a prologue, one that introduces the characters to the audience, a Swiss interlude, one relying heavily on filmic quotations, in which unauthorized love explodes, and the punishing imposition of an arranged marriage for the girl, who is forced to return to the rustic Punjab of her parents to be married.

Notwithstanding its seeming atmosphere of passional transgression the film still keeps on the safe side of the imagined *rekha*. Despite a drunken night spent in the Swiss ice-box, the reputation of the heroine cannot be blemished or stained – she is one over whom no unclean shadow or suspicion can be cast: "Hindustani women don't do that" is her forbidding statement in front of sex. On the other hand, the hero discards his *udatta* identity when he comes to the rescue of his faithful (*anukula*) heroine. Instead of acting overtly against the arranged marriage which is going to separate him once and for all from the woman he loves, the hero acts in the playful mode (*lalita*), yielding fully to comedy. He even refuses elopement, as suggested by the mother of the girl, who would like a better life for her daughter.

His words of refusal are correlative with the previous standing back pronounced by the girl, when the consummation of sex between them had been mischievously insinuated by the pretending man. On being offered a rupturing alternative the hero sternly says that only a father can marry off his daughter and that he will take her out of her father's hands. This sudden plea for conformity to tradition re-assesses the imposing role of the family circle, in a way that causes a dramatic standstill in the plot. However, by restoring the authorizing persona of the *pati* as the implied deus-ex-machina in the film the director does not follow a path leading to instructive change in the frame of mind of the father, but keeps to type, as expressed on Sanskrit stage, whenever a king allows a marriage which otherwise could not have taken place. As a matter of fact such endings do not imply a dramatic twist to the tale; but rather, they maintain dharmic order, including outsiders or rebels within its normative pale.

Passion and Compassion: *Rati* and *Karuna*

Two basic perceptions (*rasa*, literally "taste", suggesting how an audience is able to experience emotions or passions taken from real life) are deployed by the feeling of love (*sringara*) – which can either be love in separation (implying as a rule the final meeting of the two lovers) or love in union. However *sringara* always moves on the borderline of *karuna* (compassion), if one considers how love needs authorization and implies a suitability/unsuitability divide. Both perceptions highlight the social relevance of the dharmic framework, as far as daily life is concerned. As such they impose the agencies that control conformity to tradition, or keep alive social change and evolution notwithstanding.

Coming back for a while to the norms regulating dramatic development on the Sanskrit stage, I would mention *Mrcchakatika*, by Sudraka, a text I am considering and quoting from a recent French translation (*Le Petite Chariot de terre cuite*).[5] The events are about a poor Brahman, one well-known for his pious behaviour, and a rich courtesan – their mutual passion (even if the man is a husband and a father) should be understood in terms of *vipralambha* (separation which does not exclude a possible happy ending), whose dominant emotional mode is *rati*, that is love rather than sadness or compassion (*karuna*). If *Le Petite Chariot de terre cuite* introduces the audience to a situation of crossed love, the contrast does not concern at all a juxtaposition between conjugal (or dutiful) love and the yielding to untrammelled passion. A further agency of conflict operates through a typical villain, one whose jealous rivalry in love threatens a thematic transition from *rati* to *karuna*.

The love of a Brahman for a courtesan is beyond the institutional pale of marriage. To understand better how individual love (or the implied

[5] Sudraka, *Le Petit Chariot de terre cuite* in *Théâtre de l'Inde Ancienne,* Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 2006). This is a comedy of manners, in which Sudraka deals with certain aspects of contemporary life in town.

right to sexual choice) and what I would term authorized marriage (such as takes place even nowadays in India, when the family circle chooses or authorizes the choice, through the practice of the so-called arranged marriage) are to be considered side by side, I would refer, perhaps unfashionably, to Engels. In *The Origin of the Family* (1884-1891), he deals with this specific issue in the section "The Family". Here he speaks of conjugal love as an objective duty (*dharma*, in our perspective), not as it were an individual disposition or preference. Of course he is referring to a pre-modern age; however, his views endorse how a substantially conservative society like India behaves in the matter.

A further issue, which is also connected to this question, leads us to the relationship between authorized love (or the monogamic relationship) and professional love. Although they are diametrically opposed to each other, these two instances of passionate behaviour should not necessarily be viewed in terms of uncompromising antithesis. They rather contribute to defuse progressively the strict surveillance regarding the behaviour of women – it is through the freedom granted to a courtesan that individual passion acquires acknowledgement within the social canon. *Le Petite Chariot de terre cuite* constitutes a valuable case in point. The courtesan is finally granted the honoured status of wife, since the king authorizes her to become a wife, that is to become a true woman following the notion of dharma.

This numinous upgrading of identity has been discarded by the Bollywood dramatic comedy of love. We could take as an example the latest cinematic version to date of the classic Bengali story, *Devdas*.[6] The male character Devdas, the son of a landed Brahmin, has been in love since childhood with Paro, or Parvati, the daughter of a poor Brahmin, one lower in the Hindu social and religious hierarchies. Devdas's family is against their marriage, and the male hero discards elopement as a possible solution, by deferring to social taboos which will appear again in *Dilwale*.

In this filmic version, which is quite different from the original narrative, no reasonable means of escape are made available to the couple. As a consequence, the story moves unpityingly from the *rasa* of passion (*rati*) to the tragical *rasa* of compassion (*karuna*, also implying sorrow, *saka*), a mode that evokes failure in love. *Rati* turned sour yields quite easily to the madness of love (*unmada*), one that leads Devdas to drink his life away and to punish himself with the half-rejected affection of a courtesan. Here no superior authority can act as an agency of authorization – the Hindu code of values refuses any form of social re-classification of the courtesan, who is de facto entrapped within her excluding role of non-wife and non-mother. She is a non-woman by all accounts, as Devdas remarks drily to the loving courtesan.

[6] I refer to the latest and somewhat extravagant version of the story, the 2002 remake by Sanjay Leela Bhansali.

Fig.1: Still from Mehboob Khan, *Mother India*, 1957, Mehboob Productions Private Ltd.

Imposing Stridharmic Norms

One should understand that a traditional Hindu marriage shifts the issue of the passion which is allowed within the family circle, as far as the women of the house are concerned, from the husband to the sons. It is shameful for a married couple to show marks of mutual affection, however innocent they might be. In Mehboob Khan's 1957 film, *Mother India*, the mother-in-law violently blames the happy newly-married couple when they yield to mutual fond

Fig. 2-3: Still from Deepa Mehta, *Fire*, 1996, Trial by Fire Films, courtesy of David Hamilton.

earnestness of behaviour. In Tagore's novel, *Choker Bali* (1903), a mother-in-law is seen prying with indignant eyes and commentary on a loving married couple caught in the privacy of their bedroom. If one moves to contemporary issues a similar powerful taboo stands behind the reactions of blind violence aroused by Deepa Metha's *Fire* (1996), a film that features a lesbian passion born out of solitude and neglect between two women. They are married to brothers and live in today's Delhi within the stifling pale of a rather traditional extended family.

The film claims an absolute refusal of stridharmic values: its title makes devastating fun of *agni-pariksa*, the proof of fire a woman has to submit to in order to show her innocence when she is suspected of betrayal. The notion behind *agni-pariksa* should be referred back to the *Ramayana*, after Rama has rescued Sita from Ravana. However, as Sita had lived in his

house, her honour might possibly be tainted (the obsession for family *izzat* again). In *Fire* female transgression takes place within, not outside, the domestic walls – two naked women make love to each other or exchange ambiguous marks of private affection in the presence of the family. To make things worse, *agni-pariksa* is equated to the domestic practice of the so-called 'kerosened wives': wives burning, or rather burnt, 'accidentally' to death, because of the synthetic fabric of their saris. The elder wife catches fire in the final discussion with her husband, who she is going to desert once and for all (she will eventually escape with a few burns).

The bare breast that appears for a short while in *Fire* marks the distance between this film and Rituparno Ghosh's *Antarmahal* (2005), in which the younger wife of a Bengali *zamindar* (a landlord) hangs herself out of shame after her unveiled face has been reproduced and exposed to the public in a statue. This transgressive range includes however a full view of shame as opposed to love and passion. Several films exclude *a priori* conjugal *rati* from their narrative frames. Such is the case of Sooraj R. Barjatya's *Vivah* (2006), whose title evokes the Sanskrit word *vivaha* (implying marriage). As a matter of fact, the original meaning of *vivaha* suggested that a girl was taken away for a specific purpose – a marrying procedure that might be transferred semantically to the hasty matrimonial expedition to Punjab in *Dilwale*. In *Vivah* the requirements of an ideal Hindu bride include a modified form of *agni-pariksa*, when a domestically-persecuted young woman orphan is severely burnt in a fire just before her marriage. The bride-to-be is thus deprived of her beauty in a radical way that makes sure that her feminine (and potentially dangerous) body should be purified of its agency of disturbing seduction.

Again, a true *patni* (the Hindu wife) must be somewhat tamed, or reduced to subaltern domestication. Indian matrimonials or the current discourse concerning the position and status of women make an extensive use of the expression 'domestically trained', to indicate a suitable prospective wife. This training to silent sacrifice and submissive duty may even happen during and not before marriage. In Ram Lam Hans's *Karwa Chouth* (1980), a younger wife within an extended family is sorely victimised by her jealous mother-in-law and elder sisters-in-law. Of course the very title of the film refers to the yearly day of fast kept by the women of the house on behalf of their husbands – here an implied equation (or a normative statement) to enforce the understanding that a marriage is not a festive or cheerful circumstance. In such a dreary perspective fasting assimilates feasting, and the *patni* merges into the *pativrata*, a wife inflicting punishing austerities on herself.

However, even the domestic and at least for the husband blissful festival of Karwa Chouth may give rise in Indian cinema to a clever metaphorical

bedtrick, an exchange in which one partner is substituted for another. According to Wendy Doniger, bedtrick stories "represent [a] tension between the urge to diverge and the urge to merge", suggesting also "the desire to masquerade, to assume the identity of another in addition to one's own".[7] In my opinion the unauthorized lovers in *Dilwale* and *Fire* invalidate ritual by assuming displaced identities: they think and behave like someone else. In *Dilwale* the intruding lover conforms to traditional Hindu type; whereas in *Fire* the two women act by substitution: their procedures of mimicry (such as the film-like ballet they stage at home) imply a free move above the strict boundaries laid out by gender. In both films the concealed lovers (and not the legitimate husband or betrothed as tradition would have it) give the woman the first glass of water at the end of the fast – a clever trick to amuse an Indian audience, but also a covert intimation of adultery or illicit love. The very act of bed-tricking hints at the dramatic divide between duty and passion, so as to deploy strategies of concealment and introduce comedy within the drama. This state of split consciousness regarding values and choices in life is probably shared in equal measure by the characters in the film and by an Indian audience – not as a transfer of moral standards from dharmic to adharmic, but as an act of self-authorization which awakens aesthetical pleasure.

[7] Wendy Doniger, *The Bedtrick* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7.

It would be possible to support this view by making reference to the *viparita* framework of *rati*, one in which an inversion of roles (both in sexual intercourse and in metaphor) takes place in the couple between man and woman.[8] Crucial to this discourse is the way appearance overrules substance, so as to engender confusion and finally the defeat of any conformity to dharmic type. This duality of behaviour on the part of the unauthorized lover goes beyond the act someone puts on deliberately to mislead – it rather suggests a move on the borderlines of received identities, in a way that dimly implies the possibility of a new self. However, such an inchoate metamorphosis of being concerns essentially women, given their presumed lack of balance. In everyday life this impermanence in correct behaviour leads to stern intimations of punishing control. A meek, silent response is what the Hindu conduct-book suggests to a woman, in particular if married. Family hierarchy and social etiquette impose everlasting obeisance and tame self-effacement on a bride, as shown in these current instructions:

[8] Cheever Mackenzie Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1992/1990). I refer to the cosmic fight of the Devi against the demons, as featured in the *Devi-Bhagavata*. The Devi appears to her foes as a beautiful woman roaring in rage as a warrior, in a way that confounds them about her true identity.

> 1) "Consider the family you have entered as your own" 2) "Study the routine of the family" 3) "Never compare the new routine with life as it is in your house" 4) "Be organised and knowledgeable about running a house" 5) "Dim the light on your gourmet culinary skills unless called upon to do so" 6) "Always do a little more than what is expected of you" 7) "Make a friend of your sister-in-law" 8) "Never gang up with the other daughter-in-law" 9) "Never criticise the behaviour of any child in the family" 10) "Do not interfere" 11) "Be ready to

lend [your clothes and jewellery to someone in your immediate family]" 12) "Be ready to apologise".[9]

[9] "Joining the Family", *The Hindu* (11 January 2001).

Shilpa Shirodkar's *Ghar Ki Laksmi* (1990) illustrates the strict authoritarian point of view quite well. The title itself discloses the patriarchal ruse in attributing a double nature to the feminine self. One should actually translate it as *The Goddess in the House*, given the pun which associates Laksmi, the goddess of wealth and well-being, with the wife and the mother of the house. This may be viewed as another clever bedtrick, one which downgrades the potentially untamed energy of a woman to the subaltern role of domestic drudge, and self-effacing provider of food (but not of breadwinner) for the whole family, in particular for her children. Thus the pestering instances of domestic harassment shown in the film reassert a strategy which shifts the weight of women from heaven to kitchen, from the cosmic battlefield to petty domestic and trivial bickering.

The splitting of locations yields to a further division within the private world, whose intricate network includes both the family circle (known as *ghar*, the house – a concept reminiscent of the Greek *oikumene*) and the social framework at large (known as *bahir*, the world, seen as an outer extension of home). In Krishna Wamsi's *Shakti* (2003), the dramatic clash hitting married life revolves around the power of the extended family (and its emotional interconnecting links) set against an apparently modern nuclear family. Once again the intimate relationship between a mother and a son constitutes the motivating kernel within the film, not, however, as a metaphor of national identity and unity. A happy couple of second-generation expatriates to Canada returns to backward and violence-ridden rustic India, as soon as the husband learns that his family is dangerously involved in a local fight.

Their voyage back to the husband's ancestral *ghar* breaks up the initial blissful interlude, since the couple is dramatically caught in a crescendo of bloody internecine feuds whose tragical climax is the murder of the husband. Previously he had repeatedly postponed their return to Canada because of his reluctance to be separated again from his mother. After the man's death his widow and their orphaned son cannot leave India, since the domineering *pati* of the *ghar* needs an heir for his small empire (*bahir*) of illicit traffics. The woman fights desperately on behalf of her son and in the end will be able to leave the land, thanks to the sudden authorization of the *pati*, following a scheme I have already discussed apropos of *Dilwale*.

In *Shakti* the authority constituted by the *ghar* overflows into the wider range of the external world – an encroaching which erases from the patriotic agenda the eulogistic persona of the Mother seen as a symbol of unification. Even the all-powerful *shakti* is reduced to desperate acts of impotent resistance on the part of the mother, who has lost her numinous power

and her war-like inner qualities. By discarding myth despite its title, the film downgrades the crucial mother-son relationship to sheer mundane pathos and supposedly evocative quotation, so as to deconstruct semantically, if nothing else, the compensatory rebounds investing the current mythicized and imagined discourse against subaltern position and role in gender.

This pattern imposes *karuna* as the prevailing mode in Bollywood love dramas. The other possibility seems to be authorized marriage, following a scheme of postponed happiness which is strongly reminiscent of Greek romance, as analyzed by Bakhtin.[10] Time passes, but people are always the same, since what happens in the meantime between the beginning and the end is just a blank space to be filled in, one which does not modify reality. A good case in point appears to be Rimal Roy's 1958 film, *Madhumati*, in which the haunting presence of a woman seems to ensure stability notwithstanding social change.[11] However, the tribal Madhumati is finally replaced by Radha (her avatar), "the urban middle-class woman who quietly displaces the tribal woman to assume her place beside the male protagonist".[12]

Change acts behind and beyond fixity, but different reactions may be viewed against a possible modification of type. For instance, Vipul Amrutlal Shah's *Namastey London* (2000) re-writes with a vengeance the theme of the controversial return to *deshi* type, a feature one could smoothly equate with the synchronic grid suggested by Bakhtin. A bunch of second-generation Indian expatriates leads a free-floating life in London. A Muslim is ready to convert in order to please his fiancée's family, whereas a young woman is promised to a high-class Britisher. The heroine is lured into a voyage back to Punjab – there she is entrapped in an unwelcome (or rather enforced) marriage with an apparently rustic, rather beefy simpleton.

So far the tale seems suspiciously similar to *Dilwale*, although the libidinal (actually drinking) excess which is astutely suggested in the Swiss escapade becomes a glaring spree in postmodern London. To evade a perspective of caged life in Punjab, the heroine consents to a Hindu marriage, with the clause that the first nuptial night and the honeymoon will take place in London. Once there she abruptly discards her husband, since a Hindu marriage has no legal validity in England. As a matter of fact the simpleton turns out to be a convincing nationalist, one who induces the errant expatriates back to *deshi* values and one who will be able to conquer his reluctant bride. A turning point in the story should be recognized when the heroine refuses to have pre-conjugal sex with her English fiancé – her words (I am an Indian woman, and we don't do that) echo back to the anguished denial (I cannot possibly have done that) of sexual easiness expressed in *Dilwale*.

[10] Mikhail Mikhlailovich Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel", in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998/1981, originally 1975).

[11] For a full discussion concerning *Madhumati* see Jyotika Virdi, *The Cinematic Imagination. Indian Popular Films as Social History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 47-55.

[12] Idem, 55.

Thus the filmic theme of love in temporary separation acquires a normative turn whose roots go well beyond *Dilwale* and reach back to Manoj Kumar's *Punjab our Pashim* (*East and West*) (1970), the story of a young westernized bride in London who travels back to India and to "her lost origin".[13] Both films (*Punjab* and *Namastey*) adjust to nothingness the colonial heritage[14] concerning the affirmation of womanhood – *Namastey* in particular re-invents the male, turning him from an innocuous maverick, whose independent behaviour is no better than a sequence of pranks, to a self-regulating resister against western ways of life. By doing so, the so-called "Funjabi" boy transfers the fight for a *swadeshi* rule (*swa* meaning self) from the *bahir* (or public sphere) to the private world of the *ghar* (the household), a cleansing move which reverberates imagined views of authority and self-authorization. This strategy is perhaps laid bare in the film by two rather crude episodes of racist intolerance and mocking attitudes against Indian culture, first in a party and subsequently in a rugby match between the English and the expatriates.

No doubt the Punjabi boy will save the day on both occasions, and will consequently be authorized "to conquer the girl". He features a true *dilwale*, whose acts of resistance go straight home, differently from the rather innocuous tricks staged by the presumptive hero of the eponymous film.

[13] Idem, 64.

[14] As far as stridharmic norms for feminine behaviour are concerned, one has to take into account that any step towards the gradual introduction of social changes cannot leave unnoticed the discourse of colonial hegemony.

Concluding Remarks

My hasty and necessarily incomplete overview tends to endorse at least two hypotheses, on the ground that the prevailing framework in Indian films is apparently split into two motifs, the first of which is the romantic (or passionate) side of love. A Sanskrit model for this kind of drama might be found in *Urvasi Conquise par la Vaillance* (*Vikramorvasi*) by Kalidasa, in which the figure of the male hero is on the forefront. The theme of temporary separation also informs the diegetic movements within the drama, before the external authorization to marriage finally takes place, so as to ensure *dharma* again.

If one switches to contemporary Indian society, one has to confront the everlasting dilemma caused by the excessive importance attributed to passion against social duty. Given the dharmic restraint still heavy on the individual arousing of passion, one would rather speak of imagined outbursts of unchecked love, rather than of intimations of a real conflict between duty and heart. Individualized passion does not constitute the ultimate aim of filmic representations of love – it rather suggests the *rasa* of *sringara*, or the use of a specific literary language, that reverberates meanings through a formulaic background.

On the other hand dharmic laws rule out authoritative individuality in social and even private life. They require homogeneity instead of freedom

in making choices and managing passion. Not at all casually the usual term in Indian matrimonials for a proposal of marriage is "alliance sought for". Groups rather than individuals are claimed here – passion must rage elsewhere. Consequently a traditional drama of love such as *Devdas* must etymologically refer to categories of truncated love, in implied opposition to deferred love, beyond any sociological reading of the sad events one might be induced to follow. The madness of love which hits *Devdas* should be understood as *unmada*, a state caused by definitive separation.

A different case is that of temporary separation (*Dilwale* or *Namastey*), one in which external or even individualized authorities restore dharmic values. This restoration is perhaps the founding pillar on which Indian cinema rests. It may take many and various shapes: in *Shakti* it gives a son back to his mother, whereas in *Mother India* a mother has to kill her son. However, acts of adharmic resistance may also be seen: in Rajesh Singh's *Ab…bas*! (2004) the rage of Kali explodes against a criminally persecuting husband. In this film (whose title could translated as *Enough is Enough*) the usual incipit constituted by sudden love and a potentially happy marriage turns all too soon into a hellish nightmare of betrayal and murderous violence.

At last the heroine discards the suffering identity of the *patni* and becomes the avenging Goddess. In this capacity she makes mincemeat of her husband, to the accompaniment of a voice that sings "You are Kali, you are the Power". This evolution of the feminine character might be associated with the different aspects assumed by Kali, here essentially in the puranic corpus of texts. She was initially a divine being verging on the demonic: afterwards she will be endowed with powers which as a rule equalize Kali to her divine male counterparts, in a measure that makes an untamed wife of the Goddess.

Similar intimations of reactive revolt against male violence have lately been transferred to the expatriate field. In Jag Mundhra's *Provoked* (2007), set in London, a domestically persecuted migrant wife kills her sadistic husband by scorching him to death with some chemical liquid used to clean the house. Domestic detergents are turned into weapons of cathartic revenge, or keys that open the door to a new life. This story, apparently taken from real life, updates the discourse concerning the married life of Indian migrant women, most of them hailing from rural areas and unable to cope with the new foreign setting. They are doomed to complete isolation (Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, 2003, may illustrate the point) and domestic harassment. Women lawyers have founded organizations in the States and in England, which take charge of the problem and offer legal assistance to these persecuted women: *Provoked* may be considered their manifesto, beyond the sheer rhetoric of the namesake featured in *Ab…bas!*. The dilemma is to find a way in-between the passive persona of the Laksmi within the house and the revengeful Kali.

The stereotype of the revengeful and murderous woman was probably first introduced in the literary field, before extending to the cinema, with Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989). The novel represents a migrant woman who avenges rape by assuming the identity of Kali, naked and with a protruding and bleeding tongue, drinking spurting blood as a blissful fountain of life and dancing frenziedly on the prostrate body of Shiva. We are beyond passion, but this is another story:

> I extended my tongue, and I sliced it. Hot blood dripped immediately in the sink …. I began to shiver. The blade need not be long, only sharp, and my hand not strong, only quick. His eyes fluttered open even before I felt the metal touch his throat, and his smile and panic were nearly instantaneous. I wanted that moment when he saw me above him as he had last seen me, naked, but now with my mouth open, pouring blood, my red tongue out. I wanted him to open his mouth and start to reach, I wanted that extra hundredth of a second when the blade bit deeper than any insect, when I jumped back as he jerked forward, slapping at his neck while blood, ribbons of bright blood, rushed between his fingers.[15]

[15] Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 118.

Esterino Adami

Enduring Identities in Diasporic Cinema

Indian popular cinema and Bollywood productions have recently acquired great visibility as contemporary modes of storytelling and ways of representation of the complex cultural and social contexts of India. This also emerges in the research work of scholars who analyse the plots and narrative mechanisms of films, investigating the plethora of issues and features that characterise this cinematic typology. Equally important are the films produced and directed by diasporic or migrant film-makers, mainly British Asians or Indian-Americans, since "their work necessarily negotiates a dialogue between postcolonial identity, be it 'Indian' or 'diasporic', and the demands and preconceptions of Western audiences".[1] To a certain extent, the cultural contaminations of diaspora cinema emerge in eclectic Anglo-Indian productions such as *East is East* (1999) and *Just a Kiss* (2003), or even TV films like *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1993).[2]

However, it may not be easy to apply such tight categories to a film like *Provoked* (2006),[3] directed by Jag Mundhra, in view of the fact that it seems to stand in transit between two contrasting viewpoints, with the Punjabi cultural code of reference for identity and behaviour alongside the troublesome burden of identity reconstruction for expatriates in the Western world, which turns out to be 'incomprehensible' for them. Adapting some critical tools primarily devoted to Hindi or Bollywood films, I shall discuss the peculiarities of this film and highlight the implications underlying the diasporic experience, seen as a metamorphosing dimension of being, when the migrant's frame of mind is split between eastern roots and western dislocation.

Provoked focuses on the story of Kiranjit Ahluwalia, a Punjabi woman who settled and married in Southall towards the end of the 1980s. Subjugated and molested by her violent husband, she sets fire to him and is arrested and subsequently charged with murder because the man eventually dies. In spite of her rotten English, when she is in prison she manages to build up a close relationship with other inmates, thus creating a kind of alternative female community. Support and help are also provided by the social workers and lawyers of Southall Black Sisters, a charity dealing with cases of abused women. The film intermixes memories of the woman in India and England, and charts her precarious condition against the backdrop of the rigid structures of legal discourse in the West. Yet, the tense node of the film lies in the double condition of Kiran, torn between the traditional values of her own culture, which prescribes a regulated role for women, imagined either as wives or

[1] K. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake, *Indian Popular Cinema. A Narrative of Cultural Change* (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 2003), 96.

[2] See the essays "Bollywood Galore. Disarranged Marriages and the Impossible Return of the Native" and "Londoni Husbands and the Forgotten Wives", in Alessandro Monti, *Society, Culture, Diaspora. A Reading of Indian Literature* (New Delhi: Prestige, 2008). Concerning the extension of diasporic imagination within TV productions, see my *Essays in Diaspora. Rushdie, Kureishi, Syal* (New Delhi: Prestige, 2006).

[3] *Provoked. (A True Story).* Director: Jag Mundhra. Writers: Carl Austin, Rahila Gupta. Cast: Aishwarya Rai (Kiranjit Ahluwalia), Miranda Richardson (Veronica Scott), Naveen Andrews (Deepak Ahluwalia), Raji James (Anil Gupta). Country: UK/India, 2006. Language: English/ Punjabi. Filming location: London. Naveen Andrews is a very popular actor in British diasporic cinema, starring in films like *London Kills Me* (1991, written and directed by Hanif Kureishi) and TV series like *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1993, based on the novel by Hanif Kureishi and directed by Roger Michell).

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mothers, and her desire to struggle for freedom and reject Deepak's violence and humiliation.

The tension between these poles is encapsulated in the two key phrases in which Kiran expresses her sense of dislocation and her quest for identity. When she is taken to jail, she declares "I feel free", but when she is told that her husband has died and that she therefore risks a mandatory life sentence, she says "I made a sin". This double act of reaction, viz. a move towards emancipation and then a return to fixed social roles, constitutes the thematic backbone of the entire film, marked by a sharp and painful clash between social norms in the West and cultural heritage in the East. The film-maker also organises a complex discourse based upon the fundamental role of language, a constant preoccupation in diasporic or postcolonial fiction too, and the regulating notion of law as a social structural leveller.

However, *Provoked* does not merely represent a filmic instance of abrogation against patriarchal or chauvinistic constriction: in deepening the inner cultural and social agencies that mark the emergence of diasporic communities and their practices of life, it goes beyond the superficial translatability of cultures and explores the puzzlement and disorientation of 'weak' subjects in a multilingual context. In order to fully understand the dynamics that shape the storyline of the film, it is necessary to approach the concept of *pativrata*, namely the modalities prescribed for the roles and functions attributed to husband and wife. In particular, the term may be deconstructed into *pati*, which indicates the 'master of the house', and *vrata*, whose meaning ('penances, austerities') defines the contours of female identity. The former thus regards Deepak, whilst the latter points to the (expected) behaviour of Kiran. This normative model does not tolerate interferences and here the husband exacerbates the conditions of family life, within the space of the home, disjointed from the outside world, through physical abuse and violent manners. To a certain extent, Deepak and Kiran are sketched in an almost stereotypical fashion (the rough man vs. the shy woman), and this aspect echoes the orientation of most Hindi popular films, in which "the heroes, heroines, villains and comedians are readily identifiable. Their demeanour, dress and gestures are highly conventionalised and immediately convey the nature of the character".[4] Nonetheless, they also activate strategies of interaction that pertain to the unstable condition of locating migrancy, in terms of upholding cultural norms and societal reactions.

[4] Gokulsing and Dissanayake, *Indian Popular Cinema*, 96.

Kiran's behavioural pattern clashes abruptly with the surrounding environment when she starts her new life in the western context, after the collapse of her unhappy love-cum-arranged marriage. It generates conflicts that have to be mediated via legal procedures in the attempt to restore a certain order, that is to say with the idea of law rebalancing the evils of

society. Kiran is almost unable to speak English and is depicted as a violent, ruthless criminal, whereas the lies of a police constable and her mother-in-law contribute to her jail sentence. To tackle Kiran's thorny case, Anil Gupta, the solicitor from the Southall Black Sisters, pinpoints the aspect of 'provocation' as the true reason for the woman's violent reaction, since in her opinion the migrant defendant "boiled over, she did not cool down". Consequently, the magistrates reopen the case in 1992, and now deal with an appeal specifically based upon three grounds, namely the definition of provocation, the idea of loss of control, and the 'battered woman syndrome'. Not only do these elements reconstruct the real experience of Kiran, but they also throw light onto the psychological (and cultural) sphere of the woman, now engaged with the problematic enigma of diaspora, split between faithfully accepting a fixed role and reshaping the self in the new urban environment. The judge orders a retrial, which does not actually take place, as the court considers the time Kiran has already spent in prison as a full term, and so eventually she is set free.

Perhaps it is tempting to read the woman's sad story of crime and punishment as a mere feminist parable, but the key issue here concerns the identity crisis a migrant subject experiences when s/he has to come to terms with the sense of displacement that arises in dire circumstances, affecting domestic and social relationships. The burden of liminality that surrounds Kiran seems to match with the woman's passive character, a kind of helpless acceptance of her fate. It is possible here to identify an echo of the Hindi popular films that build up "idealized women figures: passive, victimized, sacrificial, submissive, glorified, static, one-dimensional, and resilient".[5] However, what emerges in the film is also a sense of resistance, whose discourse articulates the framework of melodrama as a communicative strategy to express sociocultural forces. Indeed, challenging the *dharmashastras*, namely the Hindus' code of proper behaviour that prescribes and regulates the practices and customs of life by defining roles and actions, the film adopts another perspective by addressing the question of women's rights in circumstances of segregation and abuse, in order to deal with the feeling of solidarity and like-mindedness, irrespectively of the cultural or social background of the various characters.

However, the critique against the abusive treatment of women does not coincide with a thorough attack on religious strictness, but it is expressed as a more subtle claim, inasmuch as Deepak himself, the subject who would be expected to follow a proper behaviour in his capacity as head of the family, is portrayed in negative terms, being a rough and alcoholic husband, unconcerned about his own family and duties. Therefore, the filmic structure interrogates contemporary forms of diaspora that are based on the sense of impermeable communities, constructing and following

[5] Jyotika Virdi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 60.

internal or external behavioural patterns. In the 'Little Indias' created by diasporic flows, social roles and stratifications are perpetuated according to time-honoured models, in which the powerful roles are assigned to men, who are also supposed to perform their duties. In this film, the male protagonist does not fulfil his obligations, and therefore the representations of the cogs of the traditional diasporic lifestyle are undermined within their very workings.

Within this critical perspective, Kiran and the women befriended by her in jail make up a wealth of unconventional voices that question the monolithic structure of society's restrictions and evils. The film director and writers accentuate this aspect also in the outside world: the marching rallies and demonstrations that the Southall Black Sisters organise give visibility to the case and bring to light the difficult issue of abused women in ethnic communities. The prisoners' 'special' community, based on sympathy and collaboration, functions as a site of emancipation and rescue, rooted within a synergy of codes, languages, images. Particularly prominent is the relationship between Kiran and her cellmate Veronica Scott, apparently a rude English woman. Initially, the coarse context of life in prison seems to affect all contacts between the Asian woman and the other women, who are all oppressed by misery and discouragement, but after a shy approach the two become close friends, with Veronica teaching Kiran proper English.

I would like to expand this theme in particular, since language in a diasporic milieu, whether cinematic or literary, represents a primary sign of definition and meaning. Authors and film-makers alike emphasise the salient importance of the verbal code used in their works as it illustrates sociolectal and dialectal features of the different characters, simultaneously expressing cultural meanings and a sense of belonging. Kiran's limited proficiency in English is instrumental not only in representing her restricted identity, but also in setting her towards a further challenge. In prison, a sad and alienating environment where people regress to brutality and lose their individuality, the Asian woman is now introduced to language as a fundamental instrument to approach and understand the manifold manifestations of life as well as to reach a moral redemption. In the end, using the jail library resources and under the tutoring of Veronica, Kiran successfully manages to master the nuts and bolts of the English language. The Indian woman's request for help is taken by Veronica, and this formation of strong human bonds is symbolically represented when the two play Scrabble. Kiran makes up the word 'sholder', meaning 'shoulder', but Veronica corrects her misspelling, so that her comment constitutes a pun with deeper implications that the Asian woman promptly understands: "I need a U/you". Revealing a hidden gentle warmth, the English woman contacts her brother, a famous lawyer, in order to organise her friend's appeal.

Kiran's English evolves from an almost naive survival level to a more conscious competence, and this educational process of catharsis affects her whole identity. With reference to postcolonial fiction, Ismail S. Talib suggests that "visibility of language use or the experimental use of language does not draw attention away from language but makes it part of the content of the work",[6] and we could probably extend this quotation to other creative genres and media, like cinema. Although Kiran's speechways are still strongly accented, she is now 'allowed' to speak within the sociocultural arena of diaspora. Indeed, the frequent use of code-switching between Punjabi and English (expressed in the recourse to dubbing especially in the first part of the film), the chief bond between Kiran, her mother-in-law and Deepak, is eventually substituted by the woman's desire to be involved in spoken interaction. Thus, the linguistic dimension, shaped as a kind of cross-cultural encounter, emerges as the token of voicing the interactions between culture and identity. The woman's emancipation, reinforced through the linguistic medium, breaks the fixedness of her pigeonholed role and turns her into a heroine *ante litteram*.

This is probably due to the hybrid nature of the film, whose narrative patterns differ from Hindi popular films, since here the diasporic essence allows transformations and mediations of characters rather than the adoption of the (unchangeable) Indian palimpsests, with their network of links akin to traditional theatre. Furthermore, the film, by means of its subtitle, boasts a 'realistic' and challenging orientation, since it claims to be based upon, or inspired by, a real similarly brutal episode. Almost as if he were trying to make a documentary-drama, the film-maker intertwines several narrative structures, and aims at audiences both in the UK and India by swiftly developing a film that plays with ambiguities. Simultaneously, while it uncovers the painful anxieties of migrant life, it also obliquely perpetuates models of social positioning, in particular the subalternity of women, to borrow Gayatri Spivak's well-known vision.

With its denouncing force, the film reviews the conditions of diasporic communities settled in the postcolonial metropolis. Indeed, the Southall location is not incidental, because this London borough has been involved in migratory processes from Asia since the mid-1950s, when Punjabis started arriving from the Indian subcontinent. Although the film strives to express the atmosphere of such groups not in visual terms but through the psychological and cultural characterisation of the protagonists, the setting is highly symbolic. A traditional protean stage on which the dramas of diasporas are performed, Southall is a suburb in which social actors de- and re-construct norms and practices: "what is changing in Southall, then, is not just the balance of populations, but also the sense of what space means".[7] Of course, space has to be interpreted as the contact zone between subordination and resistance, not only against centripetal agencies of

[6] Ismail S. Talib, *The Language of Postcolonial Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 130.

[7] Sandhya Shukla, *India Abroad* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 125.

assimilation, but also operating within ethnic communities. Indeed, the deeds and objectives of the Southall Black Sisters against domestic violence also take into account social stratifications like class, gender, caste, and thus concentrate on projects aimed at redesigning societal profiles.

The strategy of intermixing sequential levels is exploited by Jag Mundhra to achieve a fuller vision of a sadly all-too-common case of domestic abuse. The stylistic choices employed include frequently revisited symbolic references (the image for example of fire as destroyer and purifier in Indian culture, almost a trope in Bollywood dramas, is used here against a man, and not, as tradition would impose, against a woman). This may to a certain degree produce stereotypical vignettes, but nonetheless they also elaborate on diasporic questions of identity in a subtle and powerful way. Quoting Kiran's own words, we should refer to her distressing experience as a shift from "her husband's jail" to "the jail of law", thus highlighting the precarious female condition in expatriate communities, as expressed in the work of many Indian women writers, from Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) to Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). Voicing, the core theme framing the entire film, is explored by focusing on how the perpetuation of the traditional Indian sociocultural apparatus affects the conditions of life for women, relegating them into an opaque zone of liminality. The youngest of nine children born into a family background in rural Punjab that wanted her be a "proper Indian woman", Kiran's de-voicing is then reiterated through claustrophobic diaspora, and her silent cry for freedom testifies synthetically to the female emancipation that timidly emerges from expatriate groups. Ultimately, far from being a passive, strengthless subject, Kiran's main provocation lies in her resistance and reaction against androcentric norms. The film, therefore, with its multiple viewpoints spanning the upholding of traditions, the clashes between ethnic communities and English society, the sociological problem of domestic violence and the complexity of legal practices, offers glimpses into the dynamic context of migratory flows, returning full circle to the site of diaspora, the double process of producing Indianness abroad and of receiving and perceiving these values in the host country.

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Postcolonial Translation: The Case of South Asia

In this paper I wish to offer some preliminary observations on the outcome of an ongoing research network entitled "Postcolonial Translation: The Case of South Asia". This network is a collaboration among scholars based in the UK and in India, specialists in different South Asian languages and literatures. Our first workshop was held in Delhi in January 2009, and consisted of a series of seminars that focused on the theme of translation and bilingualism in five languages: Bengali, English, Hindi, Malayalam and Tamil. The workshops brought together academics, translators, and editors and showed a vibrant and flourishing translation scene in contemporary India.[1] In the course of the paper, I would like to provide a brief historical overview of the most salient moments in the history of translation in South Asia, offer some general observations on the role of translation in contemporary Indian literary culture, and some comments on 'Indian English' as a rapidly evolving literary idiom that has begun to acquire its own homegrown audience in India. I conclude by discussing some of the insights and observations that emerged out of our language-specific and thematic workshops.

Though translation has historically been a central factor in the evolution of literary culture in the subcontinent, the field of South Asian translation studies is still significantly under-theorized. However, recent years have witnessed a greatly increased scholarly interest that goes in hand with the renewed vitality of translation projects taking place all over the region.[2] In many ways, translation is a quotidian aspect of linguistic interaction in the subcontinent; the fact that many South Asians operate with at least two languages in everyday life (urban and peri-urban Indians may even speak three different languages) "is an informal and unstudied part of daily life in India".[3] Among the four nation-states comprising South Asia, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, India is characterized by the greatest number of languages. The Indian Constitution recognizes 18 official languages, plus numerous other languages and dialects. This situation of multi-lingualism means that national identity in India was not premised on a single linguistic identity, unlike the case of many Western nation-states. What consequences does this have for an attempt to map out the contours of a national literary system? Our project aims to explore the central role played by translation in the development of literary canons in South Asia. We propose to develop an in-depth collaborative study of the mutual exchanges between contemporary writing in Bengali, English, Hindi, Malayalam, and Tamil, in order to identify models of 'postcolonial

[1] I am conscious that throughout this essay, though I speak of 'South Asia', I am mainly referring to 'Indian' examples of translation practice and theory. Our network aims to look beyond the confines of the Indian nation-state to explore the transnational and diasporic dimensions of the five languages mentioned above, but this objective will be the topic of our future workshops. Here I offer merely some preliminary and provisional observations that focus principally on India.

[2] See for example Rukmini Bhaya Nair, ed., *Translation, Text, and Theory: The Paradigm of India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002); Rita Kothari, *Translating India* (Manchester: St Jerome, 2003); GJV Prasad, ed., *Journal of the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies*, special issue on Translation Studies (Autumn 2008); Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare, eds., *Other Tongues: Rethinking the Language Debates in India*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).

[3] Kothari, *Translating India*, 6.

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translation' that can help us to understand South Asian literature as a multi-lingual corpus of texts. These five languages were chosen for a variety of reasons. I lack the space here to give a comprehensive overview of their rich histories, each of them boasting more speakers than most of the major European languages. Firstly, they are all official state languages. Hindi and English are also the official languages of India, as well as being languages of the national public sphere (the national media use Hindi and English as their privileged medium of expression, and India's film industry relies on Hindi cinema as its major product). As Rita Kothari notes, though Hindi is the most widely spoken language of India, the status of English is closely guarded by "ideological, regional and class interests".[4] Tamil and Malayalam are two of the most important languages spoken in South India, and Tamil in particular has a long and illustrious literary history, as it is one of the classical languages of the subcontinent alongside Sanskrit. Bengali has 207 million native speakers[5] and a rich and sophisticated literary-intellectual tradition. Most crucially, all of the languages have been important source languages and host languages for translation. They represent widely differing geographical and cultural areas of the Indian subcontinent.

The focus on these five languages pays particular attention to the distinction made in the Indian context between 'horizontal' translation, namely that which occurs between the *bhashas*, and 'vertical' translation, namely that which occurs from the *bhashas* into English. These adjectives are telling in the way that they signal the inherent power relations that obtain between English and the other languages of the subcontinent. English, quite aside from its colonial heritage, is also the language that signals privileged socio-economic status in South Asia, as the poet Vikram Seth recognizes: "English! Six-armed god,/ Key to a job, to power,/ Snobbery, the good life,/ This separateness, this fear".[6] As these lines highlight, however, English also contains the inherent potential for dislocation and alienation from one's mother tongue.

Within the ambit of these five languages, our network aims to focus on the way in which translation has shaped, and is shaping, a developing corpus that one might call, provisionally, 'South Asian literature'. It is undeniable that English, for good or for bad, plays a central role as a link-language between various South Asian language-literatures, not least because it is the most significant host language for translation. Some have gone so far as to argue that, together with Hindi, it is the language in which 'Indian' literature in particular takes on a 'national' dimension. A text will be canonized nationally if it is translated into English. Multi-national publishers tend to produce books in English, with some notable exceptions (and their books are priced significantly higher than those in the *bhashas*). But is there a way to decentre the role of English in canon formation, and if so, how?

[4] Idem, 31.

[5] "Languages spoken by more than ten million people", *Encarta*, <http://encarta.msn.com/media_701500404/Languages_Spoken_by_More_Than_10_Million_People.html>, 19 June 2009.

[6] Vikram Seth, "Divali", *The Poems: 1981-1994* (New Delhi: Viking, 1994), 66.

A possible answer might lie in thinking of South Asian literature in terms of a network connecting multiple language-literatures; thus the most productive approach for studying it is to view it in terms of a comparative literature. Comparative literature by definition brings together bodies of writing in different languages, and is premised on an acceptance of multilingualism as a structural characteristic of the canon. "Lacking a specific country, or single national identity, comparative literature necessarily works towards a non-nationally defined disciplinary focus, pinning high stakes on successfully negotiating the pitfalls of *Weltliteratur*, especially in an increasingly globalized economy governed by transnational exchanges and flows".[7] Conceptualizing South Asian literature as a comparative literature, whose various corpora are connected together through translation, allows us to escape the national bias that is still so prevalent in literary studies today. Bengali, English, Hindi, Malayalam, and Tamil all have a transnational reach that cannot be captured by a focus on their usage on the part of speakers bound by national borders.

[7] Emily Apter, "Global *Translatio*: The 'Invention' of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933", in Christopher Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), 77.

Thus scholars who wish to develop some lines of interpretation and systematization of literature in South Asia might do well to heed Franco Moretti's urge to enact forms of "distant reading" which are at the basis of any attempt to write a literary history that spans different languages. In referring to the possibilities of sketching out the contours of a world literature, Moretti advocates a form of second-hand literary history: "a patchwork of other people's research, *without a single direct textual reading*. Still ambitious, and actually even more so than before... but the ambition [of the project] is now directly proportional to *the distance from the text*".[8] If in "distant reading", as Moretti says, "distance is a condition of knowledge", then translation can be understood as a very concrete form of "distant reading" on which scholars rely to investigate the possibility, if not of a civilizational unity, then of a civilizational coherence and emergence of common trends, "family resemblances" to use Wittgenstein's term, among the diversity of literatures in South Asia.

[8] Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature", in Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature*, 151.

When formulating this project on translation, we were conscious of the sharp divide that exists between the study of South Asian languages and literatures, and postcolonial literary studies. What was clearly evident was that the study of 'postcolonial Indian literature' tended to imply a monolingual and mostly Anglophone focus, and was thus mainly situated in English Literature departments. Moreover, the canon of postcolonial Indian literature rarely included Indian literature in English translation, and only considered a small body of texts written in English. This focus restricted its usefulness for exploring the multicultural and polyglot context of literary production in postcolonial South Asia as well as fostering a schizophrenic view of Indian literature as divided between the literature in the *bhasha* languages and the literature produced in English. Francesca

Orsini has argued that there are several distinct literary formations in India, due to the circulation, the publishing opportunities, and the readership of English-language literature and *bhasha* literature. She distinguishes between institutions of regional, national, and world literature in India, each characterized by different publishers, their place in the educational system, different sets of journals, literary associations, and prizes.[9] Thus the panorama of South Asian literary production, with reference to India in particular, appears fragmented, with little communication or overlap between these quite distinct literary spheres. A reader of Hindi fiction is likely to belong to a very different socio-economic class from a reader of Anglophone fiction, and the urban-rural divide is an additional line of demarcation in the heterogeneous audience of South Asian literature. However, our project aims to focus on the inter-relatedness between literary production in different Indian languages, including English, and we seized on translation as the key process through which one can understand this inter-relatedness. Kothari notes how the exchanges between major and minor streams in Indian literature have taken place largely through translation.[10] Thus we should not view translation in South Asia as merely a process that privileges English as the language of translation, at the expense of production of, and exchange among, the *bhasha* languages; on the contrary, we can view the translating process as a "way to *vary* the major language", in Lawrence Venuti's formulation.[11]

Until quite recently, translation in India tended to be understood as little other than an institutional practice that 'nursed' *bhasha* literatures, and was mainly funded by state bodies such as the Sahitya Akademi and the National Book Trust. The first phase of translation activity in India after independence in 1947 was supported almost entirely by the Indian government as a way of fostering nation-building and the development of a national literary canon, deemed essential to the foundation of an Indian public sphere. "The systematic identification, translation and publication of regional writing in English was first undertaken by the state-supported Sahitya Akademis in the 1950s and 60s".[12] The purpose of the Sahitya Akademis was to "encourage cross-cultural exchange within India and present the best of our literary output to those whose mother tongues are not the same as the works translated".[13] In this phase, Ritu Menon argues that non-commercial considerations were primary, whereas the quality of translation and production values were secondary, while marketing, distribution, and critical attention were, and continue to be, disappointing, in her view.

The second phase of translation activity in India, spanning the 70s and 80s, witnessed a stronger commercial orientation by publishers of regional writing, such as Jaico, Hind Pocket Books, Oxford University Press's Three Crowns series, Vikas, Bell, and Penguin. This phase was characterized by

[9] Francesca Orsini, "India in the Mirror of World Fiction", in Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature*, 328.

[10] Kothari, *Translating India*, 38.

[11] Lawrence Venuti, "Introduction", special issue on Translation and Minority, *The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication* 4.2 (1998), 137.

[12] Ritu Menon, "Authorial Submissions: Publishing and Translation", in Nair, ed., *Translation, Text, and Theory: The Paradigm of India*, 123.

[13] Ibid.

an improvement in distribution and marketing, and much greater attention to the quality of the translation. But the books still proved quite difficult to sell, and eventually Oxford University Press, Vikas and Bell Books stopped publishing altogether. The third and most recent phase of translation activity in India is characterized by a renewed attention to the vitality of *bhasha* literatures, and a commitment on the part of publishers to see them better represented in translation. In the late 80s and 90s, three different publishers "set about publishing fiction and poetry in translation with a clearly defined editorial focus, a carefully worked out acquisition and selection process, and a distinct marketing strategy".[14] These publishers were Kali for Women, Penguin India, and Katha, founded in 1984, 1985, and 1988 respectively. Katha in recent times has come to dominate the scene of Indian literature in translation; it is a non-governmental organization working on sustainable learning and as a story research and resource centre, through which it fosters translations, especially of short stories. Unlike the Sahitya Akademi, which does not devote particular effort to ensuring circulation and audience for its translations, increasing access is the primary goal of the Katha project. The editors at Katha are also less constrained than the state academies by the need to represent the largest possible number of Indian languages, whereas the Sahitya Akademi is institutionally bound to represent all major and minor Indian languages, including the oral languages. In the last few decades, translation activity in India has shifted from a state-sponsored venture to a series of exciting literary initiatives actively promoted by major national and multi-national publishers.

[14] Idem, 125.

The mission of Katha is to foster good English translations of *bhasha* texts, thus addressing a significant gap in Indian publishing, where until quite recently translations were often error-strewn and there was little editorial intervention. At Katha, the editors work very closely with the translators on the text. The language of English translations has produced different varieties of English in relationship to the *bhasha* source language, as one of the Katha editors has commented:

> At Katha, we try as far as possible to assimilate into English the rhythms, tones, nuances of the *bhasha* or *boli* [dialect], without compromising readability, the story or the writer. But yes, every text throws up new challenges and demands that the English bends, twists and breaks and reshapes and relocates itself accordingly. So you could say that there are as many Englishes as there are *bhashas* or texts. Because we believe forcing a pan-Indian English on these translations would defeat their very purpose.[15]

[15] Moyna Mazumdar, "Response", *Postcolonial Translation: the Case of South Asia*, <http://www.postcolonialtranslation.net/workshop_reports.php>, 20 June 2009.

Thus translation is changing the very face of Indian English, by a simultaneous domestication and foreignization of the source language. Translation can benefit, and not merely marginalize, the minority language that is involved in the process, and can subvert the major language. As

Venuti remarks, "a minor language is that of a politically dominated group, but also language use that is heterogeneous, that deviates from the standards, varies the consonants".[16] English in the South Asian literary context, as a link-language of translation, can be, and is constantly minoritized and de-territorialized through code-mixing, transfers of context, and hybridization: "Languages often reveal their minor status through the impact that translating has made on them, measured through the volume of loan words and calque renderings from hegemonic languages".[17] This is especially evident in Indian English writing, where authors constantly transform the English they are using through the insertion of Hindi words and the syntactical imitation of Indian sentence structure. This procedure is akin to what Moradewun Adejunmobi, within the context of Europhone African literature, calls a "compositional translation", namely "texts which are published in European languages and which contain occasional or sustained modification of the conventions of the European language in use, where 'versions' or 'originals' in indigenous African languages are non-existent".[18] Writers such as Upamanyu Chatterjee and Arundhati Roy Indianize the English and thus produce a non-standard version that is arguably as South Asian as texts in English translation, such as Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire*, originally published in Urdu in 1960, and translated into English by the author herself in 1997.

It is important at this point to introduce and explicate the term 'postcolonial' in relationship to literary translation in South Asia. Translation has emerged as a key theoretical concept in postcolonial studies with particular emphasis on colonial India: as a 'metaphor' of the colony, as a mode of transaction, as a 'supplementary' site of culture, and as 'epistemic violence'. The British, in formulating a language policy for education and governance in the colonial territory, oscillated between two different approaches to the 'ungovernable' multi-lingualism of India, namely Orientalism and Anglicism. The earlier cultural policy, Orientalism, aimed to educate British colonial officers and natives elites in the many languages spoken in the subcontinent. The colonial literary discourse exemplified in Rudyard Kipling's late imperial novel, *Kim* (1901), retains this ideology, conveying the sense that if, as a would-be colonizer, you are not fluent in Indian languages and cultures, then you are not fit to govern the colony. Kim, who is "burnt black as any native", appreciates the British officer Colonel Creighton because of his command of Urdu: "Then the Colonel... turned to fluent and picturesque Urdu, and Kim was contented. No man could be a fool who knew the language so intimately, who moved so gently and silently, and whose eyes were so different from the dull fat eyes of other Sahibs".[19] An intimate knowledge of the linguistic terrain is seen as equivalent to an intimate knowledge of the thought-processes and ways of life of the colonized, thus the Other is made one's own; and

[16] Venuti, "Introduction", 136.

[17] Venuti, "Introduction", 137.

[18] Moradewun Adejunmobi, "Translation and Postcolonial Identity: African Writing and European Languages", *The Translator* 4.2 (1998), 165.

[19] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1901; repr. 1987), 118.

the dialogues of the novel mimic the syntactic structures of Hindi, conveying simultaneously the linguistic exoticism of India, by stressing its 'archaic' and formalized speech-patterns, and the omniscient control of the narrator over the various native voices of the text.

Orientalism in the British educational policy was largely prevalent in the colony until its defeat by a more successful policy spearheaded by Thomas Babington Macaulay, namely Anglicism. Orientalism consisted of educating both the colonial and the native elite in the indigenous languages, while imposing a European discursive framework on the organization and systematization of Indian culture. A symbol of this ideology in *Kim* is the Lahore Museum, or the Ajaib-Gher (the Wonder House) as it is known to the locals: "The Museum was given up to Indian arts and manufactures, and anybody who sought wisdom could ask the curator to explain"(4). The truth about these objects is reconstructed and transformed into a tangible form of 'wisdom', and offered back to the natives by the British curator in an act of colonial magnanimity. The passage below highlights the value placed on Orientalism as a cultural strategy:

> 'My order is to take thee to the school'. The driver used the 'thou', which is rudeness when applied to a white man. In the clearest and most fluent vernacular Kim pointed out his error, climbed on to the box seat, and, perfect understanding established, drove for a couple of hours up and down, estimating, comparing, and enjoying .... [Lucknow] is the centre of all idleness, intrigue, and luxury, and shares with Delhi the claim to talk the only pure Urdu.
>
> 'A fair city—a beautiful city'. The driver, as a Lucknow man, was pleased with the compliment, and told Kim many astounding things where an English guide would have talked of the Mutiny. (120)

It is to Lucknow, the seat of pure Urdu, that Kim comes, when he is finally sent to school. His is a distinctly Orientalist education, aimed at the best possible governance of a country through an insider's knowledge of its language and culture. In this passage, we note that the Indian driver initially addresses Kim with the familiar form of *tum* (the 'thou' of the text) – a possible hint at the dubious status of white people in this city, which was the centre of the Indian Mutiny or Revolt of 1857. It is through the use of "the clearest and most fluent vernacular" that Kim establishes a good rapport with the driver, implying that the most effective way to interact with the natives is through the ability to enact a convincing native identity in linguistic performance. In this manner, he also gains a knowledge of the city that exceeds superficial Western understanding, otherwise limited to the stories that the driver knows a British person would want to hear about Lucknow, namely as the site for the Mutiny.

Colonialism utilized translation profusely in its cultural project; but oftentimes, the translation of a text took place even before the text was actually written in the original language. As Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks,

"the prose in which the early Indian novels came to be written was also shaped to some extent by European colonial enterprise".[20] Competitions were held to encourage Indian writers to compose novels in the *bhasha* languages, so as to provide reading material for colonial officers in the Indian languages and as a form of 'cultural translation' of local customs. Thus the novel form itself can be seen as a form of postcolonial translation: a literary genre imported from nineteenth-century English literature, that would eventually incorporate narrative structures from Indian literature such as the oral tale, and that was to act as a linguistic palimpsest by showcasing cross-pollinations between *bhashas* and English, known in Indian literary studies as *bhasha sankar* (language mixture).

Translations of a source language into a host language imply a translation of the source language's cultural values, and this was no less true for colonial British translators, who wished to gain, as well as disseminate, a knowledge of India by rendering its written literary and philosophical traditions accessible to a British public. By highlighting the complexity of Indian civilization through these texts, they were also hoping to persuade policy-makers back home that Orientalism was a viable way of administering the colony. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, British Orientalists undertook very selective translations of Indian texts, including a legal text translated into English as *A Code of Gentoo Laws* or *Ordinations of the Pundits* (1776), the *Bhagavad Gita* and the medieval Sanskrit play, *Shakuntalam*. "The Orientalist disregard for India's present" meant that British scholars tended to translate only legal and spiritual works from Sanskrit. This lack of interest in contemporary literary production, argues Kothari, led to a certain conceptualization of India as other-worldly and characterized by a "universal mysticism".[21]

Colonialism also used translation to disseminate its British cultural and civilizational values, and Homi Bhabha's "colonial mimicry" is an imperfect translation of Englishness that becomes a subversion of the colonial norm, the idea that to be Anglicized is precisely *not* to be English. But while translation was being used by the British to communicate a civilizing discourse, at the same time it also became a key tool for the emergence of a multicultural idea of India during the nationalist movement. At stake was also the issue of 'translating' the principles behind the Indian nationalist movement into an appropriate idiom that was rooted in the *bhasha* languages and that could convey its message effectively to a sympathetic international public opinion. Javed Majeed, in his recent book on the autobiographies of the three great nationalist thinkers Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal, notes how Gandhi's search for the term *satyagraha* "was initially motivated by the project to find an Indian substitute for the English term 'passive resistance'".[22] However, by coining this term, both he and his followers soon stopped using the term 'passive resistance', even in English

[20] Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985; 2nd edn 1994), 19.

[21] Kothari, *Translating India*, 16.

[22] Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel, and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 259.

translations of Gandhi's works such as the celebrated nationalist tract *Hind Swaraj* (1910), and only used the Indian term. Thus *satyagraha*, argues Majeed, "is not a stable meaning fixed in a system of translation; instead it enacts a productivity of meaning which is released by the precariousness of translation itself, reversing the original terms of the translation ... The name *satyagraha* is always and already a term in translation, held together by translation and constituted through translation, while simultaneously being an original term".[23]

[23] Ibid.

Translation emerges as a fundamental process for the dissemination of colonial and subsequently, anti-colonial ideas in the South Asian context. One of the basic premises of our project is that most Indian writers today operate in a situation of multi-lingualism; their literary language can be described as a syncretic co-existence of linguistic influences, often presenting itself as a form of 'translation' from an original that has never existed in its complete form, but of which traces remain in the text. Indian writers in English, argues GJV Prasad, deploy strategies to make their texts read like translations from *bhashas*.[24] The obvious case in point is the novel *Kanthapura* (1938) by Raja Rao, written, quite significantly, 'before' Indian independence and moulding its English onto the syntactic structure and lexical influence of Kannada. Indian bilingual authors incorporate translation into the practice of writing itself, and in some sense collapse the two professions, that of translator and author, into one. An author can find herself thinking in ways that cannot be contained within a single language, whereas linguistic chauvinism tends to restrict speakers, and thus writers, to the use of a single language. Thus we can begin to understand how translation – both as a concept and as a process – is at the heart of a possible 'theory' of South Asian literature today that spans its diverse language-literatures.

[24] GJV Prasad, "Writing Translation: The Strange Case of the Indian English Novel", in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), 41-57.

The critic Aijaz Ahmad, in a famous 1992 essay, asked whether an Indian literature actually exists, and he deliberately placed the term in inverted commas, as if to emphasize its status as an 'idealistic' construction.[25] For this reason, rather than attempts at generalization, the most illuminating approach to an understanding of Indian literature as a coherent entity is the comparatist one; a comparison across discrete language-literatures to map common trends, mutual influences, crossover genres. Today, contemporary Indian literature presents a fragmented picture because of its linguistic differences across the country. At the same time, however, we are witnessing the development of a pluralistic literary scenario, that draws on the presence of multiple literary histories and traditions, as well as the emergence of new genres. What is most striking about contemporary production is its language mixture; Indian languages cross-pollinate each other, and literary texts bear evidence of the frequent code-mixing and code-switching that characterizes Indian linguistic usage. Thus Malayalam

[25] Aijaz Ahmad, "'Indian Literature': Notes Towards the Definition of a Category", in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), 243-286.

and Tamil, both spoken in Southern India, influence each other, and the traces of this 'collaboration' are present in contemporary works in each of these two languages. Similarly, more and more works are being produced in 'Hinglish', the hybrid Hindi-English idiom spoken by many urban Indians today.

What has emerged so far out of the discussions during the workshops organized by the network, was a sense of the growing importance of translation both in the theory and the practice of literature in contemporary South Asia. Kothari has identified 20 or so Indian institutions of higher education that offer courses and degrees in translation.[26]

[26] Kothari, *Translating India*, 37-38.

What also emerged out of the network discussions was a clear sense that translation is not only happening into English. 'Horizontal' translation, namely that between different Indian *bhashas*, has gained a new purchase in the past ten or fifteen years. Malayalam is, after English, the major source-language for translations in India. Sage Publications, an Indian academic publisher, has launched a wildly successful translation project that translates Anglophone academic texts into Indian languages. Sold at tobacco-stalls and train stations, these books, priced significantly lower than their English originals, garner excellent sales. Translation between Indian languages has also helped Dalit writers form a sense of literary community across languages, such as Tamil and Hindi, two major vehicles of literary expressions for this politically and socially marginalized group. Many translators contributed significantly to our discussions, explaining how their activity is often related to ideological positions, and almost always reveals a 'philosophy' of some sort behind it. The critic and translator Mangalam, who works with Tamil, outlined the distinction between 'academicist' translations, that tend to occur into English, and 'activist' translations, that take place, for example, from Tamil into Hindi, and which she argues have a stronger social and political impact. Though translation into English gives greater visibility and financial rewards, horizontal translation has a huge ideological importance. For example, in the case of Dalit literature, thanks to translation we are witnessing the development of a multi-lingual corpus of writing that presents itself as an alternative to a literary system premised on a normative idea of nation. Translation establishes a dialogue between a Tamil Dalit writer and a Hindi Dalit writer, who can thus discover common concerns and issues. Dalit literature can be understood as a form of 'resistance' literature, where writing is often mobilized for activist and political purposes, to raise awareness of the dire socio-economic conditions of Dalits living in India today, and this cuts across languages.

The publishing workshop held in Delhi with a number of prominent publishers and editors, revealed the very interesting and diverse approaches to translation among Indian publishers today. From what the participants

said, it was clear that while English language publishing dominates the production of books, there is a substantial readership for texts in *bhasha* languages, and for English-language literature in translation, while there is a real need to build up the market for translations from *bhasha* languages into English.[27] More than one participant remarked that big publishers need to take more risks with publishing translations; ironically, it is usually the small publishing houses who go out on a limb and specialize in translations. All participants agreed that it was difficult to market translations and to create an audience for them, because readers tended to prefer texts originally written in English. Another very interesting phenomenon was the rapid rate of increase of the internal market for Indian fiction in English. It is no longer seen as a genre that is 'produced' merely for the West, a proof of this being the fact that Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* sold 80,000 copies in India alone, between October 2008 and January 2009, after winning the Booker Prize. The number of sales is unprecedented in India for a novel in English (and a first novel at that). The book was being sold in every possible location in addition to the more obvious venues such as bookstores: at newsstands, in small shops in remote parts of the country, at traffic intersections. A parallel development was the growth of South Asian popular fiction, a homegrown genre literature in English, such as 'chicklit', children's literature, and detective fiction. Anuja Chauhan's wildly successful novel *The Zoya Factor* (2008), published by HarperCollins India, displays a language that has come a long way from any self-consciousness about English as an imported or alien language. It is a blithely confident and brilliantly humorous blend of Hindi and English, 'Hinglish', the code-mixed language spoken by many urban Indians. The language of the novel establishes its audience as young and decidedly South Asian, and is characterized by pop culture references to Bollywood stars such as Sharrukh Khan and to jingles for television commercials (Chauhan works for an ad agency). The hybridized language of advertising is an evident template for Chauhan's entertaining and fast-paced Indian English narrative. This is simply not fiction 'written for the West', because it is not easily translatable for a metropolitan Anglophone audience. Moreover, any attempt to translate this text into another language would pose significant challenges, because for all practical purposes, it is written in two languages, English and Hindi; reading requires a bilingual sensibility that the author takes for granted among her implied audience. See for example this passage from the novel, where the heroine Zoya, a junior advertising executive, is attempting to reach the venue of a film shoot which will feature the Bollywood actor Sharrukh Khan:

> Anyway, she said I looked nice and made some cheapie remark about how I'd duded up to meet movie stars. I beamed like a besharam and shamelessly

[27] Report on Publishing Workshop, *Postcolonial Translation: The Case of South Asia*, <http://www.postcolonialtranslation.net/workshop_reports.php>, 20 June 2009.

> admitted that I had as we stepped out jauntily into the dripping world, hailed a cab and told the driver to take us to Ballard Pier.
> "*Wahan* barrier *laga hai*, shooting *chaalu hai*," he said dourly and I got major thrills out of replying, "*Pata hai*, it's *our* shooting only!"[28]

[28] Anuja Chauhan, *The Zoya Factor* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2008), 5.

The dialogue is in Hindi to approximate the representation of the cab driver's speech in the written narrative, and presumes the reader's perfect understanding and acceptance of the seamless switch from English into Hindi, albeit interspersed with English words. A rough translation of the dialogue would be: "There is a barrier there, a [film] shooting is going on", to which Zoya replies, "I know, we're the ones doing the shooting!". In attempting to convey the meaning of this exchange to a Western reader, one must not only translate the actual Hindi words, but also render the Indian English of the text accessible. In "it's *our* shooting only", the "only" is a typically Indian English expression, which seeks to emphasize the fact that the film shoot is being organized by Zoya's ad agency, and thus constitutes a matter of pride for her—she can't resist showing off a little to the cab driver. This passage demonstrates how difficult it is to pinpoint what a 'translation' actually consists of in the South Asian context: is it an "authorized" translation, namely the translation of existing *bhasha* language texts or expressions, or a "compositional" translation, namely versions of indigenous originals that do not exist?[29] Or, as is more likely, a bit of both? In other words, distinguishing linguistic from cultural translation makes little sense in contemporary South Asian writing.

[29] These helpful terms are coined by Moradewun Adejunmobi with reference to African literature in English and in translation from indigenous languages; see his essay "Translation and Postcolonial Identity".

One of the major difficulties faced by publishers when contemplating the production of translations from the *bhashas* has to do with marketing. A translated text is not a first-hand product, and so it is hard to sell. Also, few people in this notoriously unpredictable industry like to take risks; they prefer to publish writers who are well-known and well-established in this or that language. One editor, VK Karthika at HarperCollins, suggested there should be more marketing of the original language writer in the case of translations; alternatively, works in translation could and should be marketed as simply 'stories'.

But the question is: what is the right sort of marketing for a translated text? In terms of readership, translated texts tend to sell two to three thousand copies on average, and so there is no guarantee of immediate returns. As for translation into *bhasha* languages, another important task ahead is to build a library of good international fiction and translate it into Hindi, for example; but this is a long-term investment, which not many publishers would be willing to take on. The fact of the matter is that there are not many immediately bestselling translations, unless the translator herself is well known, as is the case with Baby Halder's autobiography *A Life Less Ordinary* (2006), originally written in Bengali, subsequently translated in Hindi, and then translated into English by the well-known

publisher and feminist writer, Urvashi Butalia. Even then, the success of this book was partly due to the unusual circumstances of its writing: the author was an uneducated domestic worker who had been encouraged by her employer to put pen to paper and write the story of her life.[30] The issue of the (in)visibility of the translator is felt keenly by contemporary Indian publishers, and as the quality of translations improves, so does the prominence of the translator; Katha, for example, places the name of the translator on the covers of its books.

Thus, through the discussions of the workshop, a varied picture of the publishing sector emerged. It was unusual to hear that academic publishing has such a vibrant market in the *bhasha* languages, due to its reduced sales price and to its availability in unconventional venues such as tobacco-stalls and roadside stands. It was interesting to see the growth, in the short space of a very few years, of a robust internal market for Indian fiction in English, which had meant the rapid development of genre literature such as chicklit, with immediate crossovers into film. The editors all agreed that marketing literature in English translation was a risky business, and that it deserved more investment on the part of big mainstream publishers. However, what also emerged was that the market for translation 'into' *bhasha* languages 'from' English is very healthy, and growing day by day.

[30] Baby Halder's case was a publishing phenomenon and made international headlines. See Amelia Gentleman, "A Maid Becomes an Unlikely Literary Star", *The New York Times* (2 August 2006), <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/02/books/02maid.html>, 20 June 2009.

Eleonora Federici

Brides and Grooms Wanted for: Matrimonial Websites in India

English in/and India

Indian English (I. E.) is the result of a linguistic adaptation for communicative needs in a multi-lingual/multi-cultural context.[1] In the Indian value system English words are conceptualized in a different way, they acquire new meanings and express culture-bound connotations, while the use of English continues to raise questions regarding identity-making and modes of social promotion. It varies widely according to social class and educational level; ranging from the more grammatically-standard English spoken by upper-class Indians, especially those with greater exposure to the West through books, electronic media, television and cinema or travel, to the so-called 'Kitchen English' or 'Babu English' spoken by the lower classes. Ethnicity and the socio-religious positioning of the speakers are other factors to be taken into account. This is evident in popular textual typologies like, for example, matrimonial ads which present a revealing picture of India's constantly shifting social and cultural scene.

Today, the media and above all the Internet, whose popularity has expanded enormously over the last few decades, following the boom in the country's electronics and computing industries, present particularly interesting fields for the study of inter- or trans-cultural language practices. In Indian websites the reader can find linguistic interferences, atypical word-divisions, coinages and English words that are no longer in use. They offer an example of the evolution of Indian English, "a new language made of Indian and English colloquialisms, jargons and popular references, not pure English, but … gloriously impure".[2] English "has been Indianized by being borrowed, transcreated, recreated, stretched, extended, contorted perhaps. It has been used and 'abused' but these abuses are not serious ones and the uses are often joyous".[3] Among the examples of this hybridization, matrimonial websites deserve special attention. The analysis of matrimonial ads on the Internet reveals the continuous evolution of I. E. and offers a new perspective on the handling and reshaping of English as a way to rebuild a new concept of linguistic and cultural identity.

Matrimonial Ads in India

Advertising for a partner is an old phenomenon in the Indian context derived from centuries of arranged marriages, but nowadays new technologies, especially matrimonial portals and websites, make it possible

[1] A general overview of I. E. can be found in Tom McArthur, *Oxford Guide to World English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). For the particularities of I. E., see G. Subba Rao, *Indian Words in English* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954); Braj Kachru, *The Alchemy of English* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1986); Braj Kachru, *The Indianization of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Probal Dasgupta, *The Otherness of English. India's Aunties Tongue Syndrome* (New Delhi: Sage, 1993); N. Krishnaswami and Archana S. Burde, *The Politics of Indians' English Linguistic Colonialism and the Expanding English Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[2] Anthony Burgess in Robert McCrum, William Cran and Robert MacNeil, *The Story of English*, (London: Faber and Faber and BBC Books, 1986), 322.

[3] Jean D'Souza, "Contextualizing Range and Depth in Indian English", *World Englishes* 20.2 (2001), 150.

to simplify the elaborate search for the ideal partner and offer a new perspective on this ancient social norm. If matrimonial columns in newspapers have already been present since the 19th century,[4] today the internet offers an easy and powerful way to contact potential partners in a larger number and in a shorter period of time. The analysis of this kind of advertisement allows a reflection on important social changes in the institution of marriage because the language used reveals how matrimonials function as cultural artefacts mirroring values and culture-bound interpretations of the Indian context. Advertising at one and the same time romantic desires and practical needs, these texts demonstrate the powerful interplay between culture and language and the necessity to use terms with culture-bound connotations.

First of all, an analysis of matrimonial ads emphasises the differences implicit in gendered discourses, as roles and expectations are clearly different in men and women's ads in India. The presentation of the "advertised bride/groom" is quite different; the would-be bride is always referred to as a "girl", a "daughter", a "sister" or a "niece", while the bridegroom is a "man", a "graduate" or a "professional". On the one hand, the bride is categorised through a family designation; on the other, professional title and role in society speak for the groom. This differentiation makes it clear how through the "naming process" the writer of the ad selects specific terms in order to present the son/daughter's qualities for his/her target audience creating an appealing e-profile.[5] Lexical choice, together with syntagmatic placing proves to be extremely important in the search for a suitable spouse, an enterprise considered as part of the parents' responsibility and duty. If matrimony is thought to be a life ritual needing experience in order to build it up, the 'advertisers' must build the candidate's presentation with great care. Because the writer has a particular target reader in mind, in order to carry on the negotiation s/he utilises what can be defined as the 'language of matrimony' and many of the texts show recurrent elements of negotiative pre-marital discourses according to a specific lexicon-semantics.

In India, creating an e-profile is a serious business and the seriousness of the tone of numerous ads reveals how this electronic medium is considered as a new way to achieve a precise goal: the union of two families. Generally speaking, the pre-electronic criteria continue to apply: the parents and relatives who are the decision makers of the love match still 'introduce' the bride/groom and look for a partner with a precise profile. However, social changes over the last few decades surface in between the lines and if today a marriage is a contract ruled by social choices as in the past, an "alliance" between two families, the way to find the ideal partner is changing slightly.[6] Since marriage is pivotal in the fabric of the Indian society, an elaborate search for the right bride or

[4] For a discussion of the rise of matrimonial advertisements in Indian newspapers and magazines between 1870s and 1940s see Rochona Majumdar, "Looking for Brides and Grooms: Ghataks, Matrimonials and the Marriage Market in Colonial Calcutta, circa 1875-1940", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63.4 (2004), 911-935.

[5] For an analysis of the naming process in the press see Danuta Reah, *The Language of Newspapers* (London: Routledge, 1998) and Roger Fowler, *Language in the News. Discourse and Ideology in the Press* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[6] Francesca Vigo, "A Rite of Passage: Alliances as Comunicative Events in Indian Society", in Carmela Nocera, Gemma Persico and Rosario Portale, eds., *Rites of Passage: Rational/ National, Natural/ Supernatural, Local/Global*, Atti del XX Convegno AIA (Soveria Mannelli, CZ.: Rubbettino, 2003), 321-333.

groom – according to social class, caste, profession, education and religion – has to be carried out. However, if in the past the matrimonial ad was seen as a way to construct an alliance between two families belonging to the same community and caste, today the new technological medium discloses some elements of individual choice.

The Internet offers much wider space for future brides and grooms to give far more details about themselves and in a more informal way: they can specify the city they live in, their profession or religion and even insert their picture in the ad. Accessing the site and searching under specific domains make it possible to find people who share some of the elements that are considered important for the future of the marriage. While it should be acknowledged that not everyone has access to these sites and that people advertising in these portals are mostly highly educated and live in urban areas, a glance at the different categories already gives an idea of the many different social and cultural issues at stake in India today.

The data of the present study come from various matrimonial websites from which the ads were randomly selected over a two month period. The analysis focuses mainly on lexical features and outlines the denotative/connotative meanings of I. E. and culture-bound terms as examples of the effective confluence of language and culture. The meaning potential of any word tells us something about contemporary Indian culture in between tradition and Western influences. Recurrent keywords remind the reader of Indian values and norms but they are accompanied by data which demonstrate how fast Indian culture is changing in the globalised world. Moreover, since the corpus of analysis is a specific textual typology we are able to recognize a precise lexicon and style that we can define as a rhetoric of matrimonial ads. Already at a first glance a restrictiveness related to specific categories such as caste, religion or the location of the "advertised" is clearly recognizable as a way to help the screening process of the suitable partner and refuse unsuitable proposals.

The structure of these texts with its underlying conventions is central in the creation of the e-profile: first of all, in matrimonial ads sentences are short and sometimes ungrammatical; secondly, Indian English features such as the use of the progressive form of verbs, an anomalous use of prepositions, tag question construction, change in word order, word reduplication for emphasis and compounds with English terms and elements from South Asian languages can easily be traced.[7]

[7] See Gunnel Melchers and Philip Shaw, *World Englishes. An Introduction* (London: Arnold, 2003).

Matrimonial Portals and E-Profiles

If Indians believe marriages are made in heaven, for many of them the Internet matrimonial portals are a 'door' they can open in order to find a

perfect match. There are many matrimonial portals in India; the most popular is *Shaadi.com* which offers a clear division between "profession search" (matches for a particular profession), "Astro-soulmate search" (matching horoscopes which has always been considered a positive prerequisite for marriage negotiation), "community search" (divided into Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Hindi, etc.) and "city search" (specifying the location of the bride/groom). One of the first websites to be created was *BharatMatrimony.com* which is still considered a credible service of alliances, a portal to be trusted. This site is a more traditional one, similar to ads in newspaper columns. The connection with Indian values and traditions is clear from the very beginning because the term *Bharat* is the pre-colonial name for India and echoes the role of kings in ancient times. Other matrimonial portals which have been included in the research are *Shubhlagan.in* where a bigger space is dedicated to wedding traditions and customs, offering a sort of guide to the ways in which a traditional Indian wedding ceremony can be conducted; *LifepartnerIndia* full of links to matrimonial success stories and with a strong focus on community differences; *Jeevansathi.com* presented as the portal for "an intelligent matching" and divided into categories such as education, profession and income considered an important issue for the perfect match. Other websites are more similar to Western "lonely hearts" columns: *H1Bmarriages.com* which presents a wedding glossary explaining Indian terms to non-native speakers acknowledging the presence of non-Indian seekers, *Findyourlove.Indianmatrimony.com*, *newmatrimonial.com* and *Indiabestmatch.com* with shorter profiles and a more colloquial style.

In Indian matrimonial websites profiles are usually posted by parents or relatives and offer a detailed description of the family background presenting the potential bride/groom as part of a definite and joint family group. The family's social and economic status is relevant and even the category of "ancestral origin" can be included in order to specify the possible ideal candidate, a partner with a similar ethnical, social and economic environment. The ads are mostly made by upper middle class parents and siblings looking for matches that take into account issues still thought to be important for a good match such as caste, religion, income or education even when sentences like "no caste bars" are included. They clarify the supposed characteristics of the addressee and are based on cultural interpretations of the texts, structured in order to establish the credibility of the advertised bride/groom to be.

The cultural and religious constraints of the Hindu marriage system are more widely reflected in the ads of *Bharatmatrimony* than in other portals. Caste concerns of a hierarchical society segmented into several castes are to be found here; the ads run under headings such as Brahmin (the highest Hindu caste) or Kayastha (a merchant subcaste), or under professional

rubrics (engineers, doctors, accountants). Looking at these ads it seems that caste mobility is still a myth in the Indian context. The Indian words included denote culture-bound terms like caste/subcaste or astrological details referring to Vedic astrology; a recurrent term, for example, is "manglik" or "Mangal Dosha": an astrological condition that occurs if Mars is in the 1st, 4th, 7th, 8th, or 12th house of the \o "Vedic astrology" Vedic astrology lunar chart. This condition is believed by some to be devastating for marriage, causing discomfort and tension in the relationship, leading to separation and divorce; in some cases, it is believed to cause the untimely death of one of the spouses. This is attributed to the fiery nature of the planet. However, if two mangliks marry, the negative effects are believed to cancel each other out.

Other terms frequently used are for example "broad-minded", meaning the capacity to embrace Western modern values while retaining the core values of Indian culture, or "clean-shaven" which refers to a non-traditional Sikh who cuts his hair. Other adjectives refer to physical features such as "good looking" or "tall" and indicate a local cultural ideal of beauty. The use of these expressions adds a colourful style to Indian matrimonial ads which differ greatly from "lonely hearts" or "personals" items in the Western press and websites.[8]

The majority of brides' ads are written by parents, siblings or relatives utilising standardised and codified forms of expressions similar to matrimonials in the press, as in the following example:

> My daughter is a traditional girl with modern and practical thoughts. She is very patient and can adapt herself in any situation. She is excellent in communication and mannerism as per modern life. She is a convent educated girl and competent enough to anchor her career. She is a science[chemistry(H)] and GNIIT graduate. She has 3years faculty experience in teaching. These days she preparing for P.O banking as well as for M.B.A.[9]

The ad balances between tradition and innovation; the girl is portrayed as educated and modern implying that she will be able to adjust to a traditional family who wishes her to be a housewife or to a more broad-minded one which will let her have economic independence as a young working woman. She is "convent educated", a term which comes from colonial times and implies a certain command of English and educational level. These are common features of matrimonial ads, together with references to skin colour which is still a hierarchical factor in Indian society. Many terms refer in fact to complexion like "very fair", "fair" meaning not markedly dark-skinned, "wheatish" which refers to a golden colour of skin, or "dark" rarely used because the term is considered derogatory. The bride's temperament, personality, occupation, hobbies and long term goals are

[8] An interesting volume on Western personal ads is Ester Gwinnell, *Online Seductions. Falling in Love with Strangers on the Internet* (New York: Kadansha, 1998). For a comparative analysis of Western and Indian ads see Anita Pandey, "Culture, Gender and Identity in Cross-Cultural Personals and Matrimonials", *World Englishes* 23.3 (2004), 403-427.

[9] <www.hindimatrimony.com>, 18 October 2008.

always listed. She is usually "gentle", "soft spoken", "caring", "simple", "obedient" and she can manage home and workplace, being capable of handling household duties while being devoted to her husband's family. Many profiles are of highly educated young women, professionals with a role in society; brought up according to Indian family values, they are ready to put their future husband and children at the first place in their life:

> She is sweet, simple, loving, affectionate, religious, spiritual and family oriented besides being modern and smart. She is a good combination of modern outlook and traditional values. Smart and semi modern, keeping in mind always her traditions and family respect. We are a family with a progressive outlook.[10]

[10] <www.bharatmatrimony.com>, 1 November 2008.

The focus is often on depicting a pleasing personality and presenting a moderate, religious girl (even when she is a mature woman the presentation never refers to age but to the fact that she has never been married). The importance of being "homely" is still a characteristic that a bride must possess to appeal to more potential grooms. Patience, a good temperament and the awareness of being part of a larger family unit are at the centre of the ad. The balance of traditions and progressive thinking within the family implies an upper- or middle-class way of life divided between ancient social norms and contemporary shifting values. In many ads the parents identify themselves as middle class and giving importance to religious values, combined however with progressive thinking. The family's characteristics are followed by the description of the girl:

> [S]weet nature, helpful, kind, hearted confident, co-operative, religious, understanding self respective, jolly nature intelligibility & sincerity. She is soft spoken, fair, beautiful and down to earth girl. She is well educated, very caring, polite and honest person and comes from a very respected and cultured family. She is a vegetarian and well versed in domestic work. She respects moral values and traditions and also a very strong believer in God and its powers. She has done her masters in Physics and has also done B.Ed. She has been teaching Physics to both College and higher secondary students since last 6 years. She takes her work very seriously and is ready to work or be a complete housewife if required and it depends on the situation. She is looking for a suitable alliance, which is very understanding, caring and responsible and believes in family values and in the institution of marriage. He should respect her and her feelings and most importantly should be a decision maker.[11]

[11] Idem, 6 November 2008.

The girl is presented as ready to adapt to any circumstance and to respect her husband's wishes. The ad clearly suggests the groom's family should possess the same values. The family as a social unit is taken as the basis of the possible match and marriage is seen as a serious enterprise to be carried on for life, a "suitable alliance". The last sentence refers directly to the ideal partner who should respect her ideas. The section which specifies

the expectations from the desired partner is a common and important element. Here the family of the bride-to-be usually depicts the ideal husband as "well-established", "well settled", "professionally qualified", combining educational, professional and economic qualifications. Men are required to be anything from "teetotalers" to "broad minded", "confident", "decision-maker" and "responsible". They should preferably have a secure job and be independent. Some ads, like the following, are structured in order to give more details about the search. Here the bride's family feels the necessity to add a "few humble requests" in order to select the future groom:

> Please show/accept interest only when the guy in question has gone through this profile thoroughly. Profiles without Pictures and Dowry seekers please excuse. Profiles with casual approach and those who tend to delay things and meanwhile do profiles shopping/hopping. Please excuse us too. Profiles with a serious and genuine interest should only accept/approach, it is our humble request once again. If you find this profile matching your interests and requirements then we would like to go ahead with a telephonic/email communication and then if all goes well then would like to meet personally and decide for a simple early marriage. We have made our requests and have mentioned our requirements very clearly so as to save each others time and respect each others feelings and sentiments.[12]

[12] Idem, 10 November 2008.

The style of the ad clearly reflects the 'Indianization' of English and some features of Indian English reveal the syntactical and grammatical 'anomalies' which make it unique: the use of the third person reference for example, denotes deference, an important value in the Indian relationship system. The structure of the text exposes other aspects of Indian culture to view; the repetition of terms such as "humble request" and the use of the verb "to excuse" together with the sentence "save each others time and respect each others feelings and sentiments" combines the practical desire to choose among 'selected' candidates and the importance given to respect for elders and in social relationships. Language unveils the Indian notion of education and appropriate behavioural attitude through specific polite forms of expression. The last sentence too stresses the importance given to serious behaviour in this matter and the wish not to waste time if the candidate is not interested or compatible. Moreover, the reference to dowry reflects an unwritten social norm still present in India where girls' parents are expected to offer substantial amounts of money for a good match. This norm is part of a family ethics where the duty of every member of the family is to support the others and uphold family honour.[13]

[13] See Rajagopal Ryali, "Matrimonials: A Variation of Arranged Marriages", *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 2.1 (1998), 107-115.

Matrimonial ads on the Internet show some of the changes that have occurred in the practice of arranged marriages; first of all "the agent wishing to marry has considerable autonomy over the actual marriage decision. In other words, while the family and friends look for appropriate marriage prospects, it is the agent who decides when to say yes. This agent receives

marriage proposals as a result of the investigative activities undertaken by others".[14] This attitude is disclosed by the use of terms such as "bride self-guardian" or statements like "correspond directly with the bride" possible in a more democratic medium like the Internet where women feel free to speak for themselves and look for their possible husbands. The Internet can thus be seen as a new discursive space where the voice of the marginalised and silenced can be heard and where access to a virtual world with implications in the real one becomes an effective way for women to speak for themselves.[15] The qualities of some prospective brides underline some of the changes that have taken place in Indian society, as when highly qualified working women take for granted they will go on with their career after marriage and ask for men "willing to share domestic work and other chores" or assert they are looking for "a sincere and honest person who can value his partner on equal terms and make her laugh, … give space and can discuss things out."[16]

The ideal of equality between partners and mutual understanding is at the centre of these ads. Where the first person is used, it tends to portray a new way of thinking about social conventions and relationships between men and women, as in the following example:

> Hi, I am a simple, down to earth, happy going, caring and understanding girl with good moral values. Always like to keep smiling and deal every problem of life as an opportunity to learn from them. I am a person who respect the feelings of others. Pursuing PGDBA in HR, Working as a Analyst in MNC in Gurgaon. Looking for: he should be smart, caring and good from heart with positive attitude towards life. Mutual understanding between partners leads to a joyful life, that's what i feel. I would like to marry a boy who can respect me & whom i can see with respect all my life. preferably staying with family and working in delhi/ncr. One thing more, i am just looking for a person or a family who don't believe in matching kundlis and for whom caste is no bar.pls. contact only if u don't believe in these things and values person for who is she as a person and not value for what her caste and religion is, best of luck for your search.[17]

The more colloquial, informal style typical of the Internet itself reflects the writer's idea about marriage and her disdain for hierarchical divisions, social norms or beliefs. An even more anti-traditional ad is the following one where the writer demolishes the Indian approach to marriage and proposes a new way of thinking where religion becomes spirituality:

> [B]elieve in miracles, in magic and in a higher purpose of life … I started off my adult life with a certain set of beliefs and dos and donts and as I walked in to the real world, I realized that few of those beliefs and rules work and can be applied, when life is actually to be LIVED.
> So the result is that today I believe marriage is a comfortable and understanding companionship of two souls, love is precious and so are all the relationships

[14] Amitrajeet Batabayal, "A Dynamic and Stochastic Analysis of Decision Making in Arranged Marriages", *Applied Economics Letters* 6 (1999), 440.

[15] Ananda Mitra, "Voices of the Marginalized on the Internet: Examples from a Website for Women of South Asia", *Journal of Communication* 54.3 (2004), 492-510.

[16] <www.shaadi.com>, 10 November 2008.

[17] <www.Indiabestmatch.com>, 6 November 2008.

> that led us to it ... companionship and friendship is as important as an "ideal marriage". If you yourself have been watching your life closely, you would have seen the truth in this. So in other words, I am a seeker, I am seeking God, I am seeking someone to share my life, my thoughts, my ups and downs, my hopes, oops, our hopes.[18]

[18] Ibid.

Here the personal is more important than the public; all details are about the writer's personality and attitude to life. Everyday language is used to create a completely different register which mirrors the changed content of this textual typology. But other social changes have also become visible in matrimonials, like for example, divorce. Nowadays the idea of remarriage has become more acceptable in India and the traditional stigma attached to divorce has been at least partially erased. The I. E. term "divorcee" however, differs from "divorced" (which seems to have a derogatory connotation). It is usually accompanied by the adjective "innocent", which reveals the wish to attenuate the negative implication of the word and implies, as the person is not responsible for the end of the previous marriage, that s/he must be excluded from blame and trusted for a future relationship. Gendered discourses are visible also in these examples, where in the fewer cases of divorced men ads are written in first person and do not justify the end of the marriage. Quite a few ads present widows, mainly women, who have daughters and sons and wish to have a second opportunity in private life and find a caring man who will take care of them and their children. Usually they look for a widower, or a divorced or separated person, revealing the idea that a second marriage for both partners is considered as more appropriate.

Some matrimonials refer to non resident Indians (NRI) living abroad, mainly in the U.S. and England, and looking for a bride at home by recurring to the traditional method of finding the soul mate through ads. The establishment of overseas communities in England and the United States have influenced the notion of suitable bride or groom and have brought some changes as regards Indian society. This is once again shown in the lexicon: a term used for example to present men or women who have lived abroad is "foreign-returned", where the adjective refers to a person who has recently returned from a Western country and is possibly influenced by other contexts and cultures.

While the majority of brides' ads in these websites are written in the third person from the point of view of a sibling or parent (usually the father) many grooms' ads are written in the first person and posted by the future husband himself in both more and less traditional portals. Grooms' ads deal more with the individual than the family, give more details on personality and character together with a description of what is wanted from the future bride. The following example goes hand in hand with brides' ads written in the first person revealing a similar attitude:

> I am looking for an educated, loving, caring & understanding life partner. Very much against all sorts of dowry, we wish to share the marriage expenses. Not bothered about Religion, Region, Cast, Creed, Sect, Marital Status, Looks, Skin Color of the person whom I wish to have as my life partner but prefer to have a girl with beautiful mind & heart and should be loving, caring & understanding. I too have a desire to love, care, pamper to the most & like to take her all through / walk of my life. Though I am very liberal but spiritual, religious minded & God fearing person who admire, respect elders as well as the customs & manners of the society.[19]

[19] <www.LifepartnerIndia.com>, 6 November 2008.

In men's ads too, traditions are united to a more modern conception of society where seekers look for women who can share the responsibility of family life. Some of the ads declare a detachment from traditional social norms and emphasise the importance of the bride's personality, disclosing a new perspective on love relationships:

> I'd like to have my life partner to be bold, broad minded, liberal, loving, caring, understanding. For me, I am not at all bothered about the Religion, Region, Cast, Creed, Sect, Marital Status, Financial Status, Outer looks, Skin colour but prefer to have a girl with a beautiful mind & heart, I mean not outer beauty but inner beauty. My earnest wish is to love, care, pamper my wife a lot where I want to see that she is always happy / smile at her face. Prefer a girl who is ready to travel along with me since I do travel quite a lot on Medical assignments. It is my desire that my wife should be with me at all times if possible.[20]

[20] Ibid.

Conclusion

The comparison of Indian matrimonial websites has revealed some relevant changes in society as regards the practice of arranged marriage. The textual and discursive strategies of matrimonial ads are the result of the rich cultural hybridity of the Indian context. Ads are articulated in a persuasive fashion in order that the writer may appear trustworthy and authentic. They follow standardised textual typologies characterised by specific norms and conventions. Syntagmatic positioning, together with a precise lexical choice, shows how matrimonial ads function as cultural artefacts mirroring values and interpretations of the Indian context. The culture-bound terms in Indian matrimonials are part of I. E. vocabulary, some are calques with a different meaning potential, some are words in Indian languages which reveal the intermingling of English and other idioms in Indian life and culture. The analysis of recurrent keywords and attributes demonstrates not only that Indian culture and values are changing in a globalised and westernised world but also that these texts are still marked by gender difference. However, it is interesting to see how, as new and different elements emerge in the different portals, the perspective is shifting, opening new scenarios in Indian married life.

Giuseppe Balirano

Indian Diasporic Aesthetics as a Form of Translation

Over the last decade, transnational media and in particular American visual culture seem increasingly to have fostered diasporic creativity through a non biased representation of 'home abroad'. Construing subjectivities in diverse migrant settings, this new creativity inevitably leads to innovative types of identifications, re-visitations and complex processes of creolisation which criss-cross several artistic expressions.[1] Creative productions from the Indian diaspora, in particular, seem more and more to aim at de-colonising culture from both the typical Western gaze and the migrants' longing for their lost or 'imagined' homeland; two stereotypical forms of representation which have often contributed to the construction of a marginalised image of hybrid productions.

Recent Desi re-presentations seem to facilitate the circulation of a new diasporic narrative, one which construes the unresolved dilemmas of 'identities' and 'home'.[2] Thus, contemporary diasporic self-representations can no longer be considered a simple imitation or reflection of the mainstream, but real forms of identity construction; they are discursive practices which are carried out by diasporic subjects within specific power relationships. A new stability is thus enforced by a hybrid optic which offers an alternative and visible practice, interconnecting and negotiating identities by means of different media and idioms; thereby producing original forms of self-identification with the homeland.

Several postcolonial artists are trying to create a framework for this new creative wave, which, according to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, can be seen as "the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of the group 'purity', and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilized".[3] This diasporic practice traverses several affiliations, trying to 'translate' the community's desire for multiple homes through particular narrative strategies that interrogate dislocations and relocations in personal, regional, post-national and gender terms. As Sujata Moorti aptly remarks, transnational culture strengthens migrant communities' desire for their homeland to avoid a typically biased representation of the Other:

> The transnational circuits of popular culture permit immigrants to construct a community of sentiment that is articulated in the domestic idiom, one that emphasizes kinship and affective relations based on shared affiliations and identifications. This alternative practice offers a useful way to conceptualize the longing for homeland in the diaspora, recognizing rather than dismissing the desire for home, and does not inevitably regress into chauvinism.[4]

[1] See for example Marie Gillespie, "Dynamics of Diasporas: South Asian Media and Transnational Cultural Politics", in Gitte Stald and Thomas Tufte, eds., *Global Encounters: Media and Cultural Transformation* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 2002), 173-193; Sujata Moorti, "Desperately Seeking an Identity: Diasporic Cinema and the Articulation of Transnational Kinship", *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6 (2003), 355-376.

[2] Desi (or Deshi) is a Sanskrit word literally meaning 'from India' or 'of the country'. Desi is generally used to refer to a person of South Asian origin from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka.

[3] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), 36; For a more specific reading see Douglas Robinson, *Translation and Empire. Postcolonial Theories Explained* (Manchester, UK: St Jerome Publishing, 1997), 26; Maureen Mahon, "The Visible Evidence of Cultural Producers", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29 (2000), 467-492.

[4] Moorti, "Desperately Seeking an Identity", 356.

Although this alternative practice is produced exclusively in one main 'source' language, English, in order to make a wide and multicultural audience appreciate its diasporic, dialogic and polyphonic art, it seems to rely on some techniques typically used in translation, such as amplification, which alter the source text. Translation studies have indeed recognized that in every act of translation the source text is inevitably transformed. This kind of transformation in diasporic productions is mainly realised by the employment of linguistic devices such as the mixture of different accents, norm-deviant syntax, code-switching, code-mixing, double-voiced discourse or alternative forms of semantic collocations with the aim of representing the lives and adventures of hybrid characters who, rather than speaking English, are intentionally portrayed as 'dubbed' or 'translated' into English. Therefore, new questions are inevitably raised about the original and the adapted version, the source and the target, the text and the context, the content and the form of Desi productions.

In the analysis that follows, I will attempt a multimodal examination based on a contrastive study of Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel, *The Namesake* (2003), and its filmic trans-*lation* by Mira Nair (2007) with the purpose of decoding typical Desi media practices and discourse(s) as new forms of narration in diasporic representations of 'Indianness' in the US.[5] In this article, I contend that cultural products of diasporic creativity, by recrafting a sense of community and cultural identity, seem to demand new kinds of linguistic and semiotic analyses which imply an unambiguous model of postcolonial linguistics. Consequently, linguistic positions, not just historical or geographical ones, as well as questions of caste, gender and location, will be taken into consideration as determinants in the challenging representation of translated Indianness abroad. What I thus propose to do is to look at the question of centre and margins through translation, using it as the metaphor of diasporic aesthetics. Thus, in order to understand the implications of diasporic creativity and translation, I shall move away from the traditional notion of translation as a solely linguistic or textual activity for the achievement of semantic equivalence between texts. Translation is seen here as a creative act of political and cultural transformation; as such it has the power to change the representations it creates and re-creates. It is the metaphor for diasporic creativity, a social practice which opposes history and tradition. It is a creative act of liberation which becomes a real political activity, as appropriately highlighted by Maria Tymoczko:

> [T]ranslation is a cultural function that ultimately resists the fetishizing of cultural objects and cultural constructs – including the fetishizing of a national tradition. Translation acts to counter the petrification of images of the past, of readings of culture and tradition. Thus, translation is also potentially a perpetual locus of political engagement.[6]

[5] Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake* (USA: Houghton Mifflin, 2003).

[6] Maria Tymoczko, "Post-Colonial Writing and Literary Translation", in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Post-colonial Translation. Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999) 22.

The political and social engagement expressed in the creative work of Desi artists, film makers and writers such as Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Pico Iyer, Amit Chaudhuri, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Chandra, Anita and Kiran Desai, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Nair and Lahiri is helping in trans-*lating* the locus of political engagement from London to New York and back to Bombay, confronting the authors' different hyphenated identities. These hybrid productions can be approached as sites that re-inscribe dominant ideologies, thereby potentially contributing to social change and countering commonly disseminated negative narratives or images, or simply images produced by 'outsiders'.

The Namesake(s): Duality in Representation

The Namesake was published in 2003 after a very successful collection of short stories.[7] Following the new trend of second-generation immigrants, re-writing their parents' homelands and the difficult question of identity abroad, *The Namesake* breaks with former representations of Indianness in the US. The author highlights the problem of ethnicity and identity by proposing a critical but also touching examination of the contemporary implications of being culturally displaced and growing up in two worlds simultaneously. She outlines with insight and concern how two generations of a migrant Bengali family, the Gangulis, strive to find an identity connection with each other, over thirty years and in two continents, against resistance and alienation, by trans-*lating* and re-trans-*lating* their Indian and American identities. In 2007, the well-known film director Nair turned Lahiri's brilliant novel into a cinematographic blockbuster, *The Namesake*.

The two diasporic products bear the same title, tell the story of the same dislocated characters, and portray the same distant locations: Calcutta and America. Yet, the narratives construed in the two homonymous products are framed within a different optic which introduces a duality of representation: Nair's focus seems to linger more effectively on the first generation of Bengali immigrants to the US. She describes Indian practices by illustrating the not-always-negative consequences of an arranged marriage, which sometimes may even turn into a romantic love story, as in the case of the protagonists Ashoke and Ashima. Nair's description of Gogol, the Bengali couple's son who fights for his identity, ends up by delineating the prototype of an ABCD rebel.[8] The director is interested in depicting the peaceful world of the first generation of immigrants, what she calls "our parents' generation", as we can learn from her own words in an interview with Aseem Chhabra while discussing her filmic translation of *The Namesake*:

[7] *Interpreter of Maladies* (London: Harper Perennial, 1999) translated into almost 30 languages, was a worldwide bestseller and award-winner (Pulitzer Prize for fiction, 2000, PEN/Hemingway, New Yorker Debut of the Year, Addison Metcalf awards, Los Angeles Times Book Prize nomination). Lahiri was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2002. Born in London in 1967, Lahiri was raised and educated in the U.S. at Rhode Island.

[8] ABCD (American-Born Confused Desi) is the acronym coined in India for American second generation immigrants, in contrast to those who were born overseas and later immigrated to America. It encompasses Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Americans who hover uncertainly between two identities.

> I wanted to capture the stillness of *our parents' generation*. If you have a cup of tea, you only have a cup of tea. You do not talk to each other. You do not multi-task. That kind of stillness is a very rare quality. Our parents' generation had everything we have, but it is just a different language, and it is deeper than any language we know. I was interested in people who are strangers and who fall in love versus today's lack of courtship, of how you fall in love or fall in lust. It is such a different style. I believe romance must have been far more acute in their generation.[9]

[9] An interview with Aseem Chhabra, "Mira Nair: The Lessons of Our Parents", <http://www.beliefnet.com/Entertainment/Celebrities/Mira-Nair->, 5 Feb. 2009. (Italics added)

Conversely, Lahiri's focus is on the perfect juxtaposition of the autonomous, assimilated American lifestyle and the stronger, more traditional Indian way of life; she does so suspending any possible feeling of superiority of one country over the other, so that the reader is shown the full complexity of living life with one foot in American culture and the other in Bengali tradition. Lahiri's Gogol is essentially an American with an Indian background; he cannot be seen as a would-be American (or ABCD) since he 'is' American, yet he is also the quintessence of a contemporary Desi with his dislocated ways of feeling and living in a hybrid condition.

This double symbolic optic with which the two authors narrate the 'same' story, besides their obviously different diamesic perspectives, seems also to be echoed within the two distinct productions. Therefore, the classical distinction – to bring the metaphor of translation back into play – between the source (the traditional, the original copy) and the target text (the ultimate product of the translational process), is embedded in the two stories. On the one hand, in the filmic production, the original text can be associated with the first generation of Indian migrants, Ashima and Ashoke, since it deals with the story of their diasporic adventures and the way the two protagonists perceive the world after being borne across the ocean. Therefore, in this case, the 'original' represents the South-East, India, and as a result, Nair succeeds in subverting the typical Western representations/translations of the East. On the other hand, Lahiri's novel can be seen as the target text, a copy dislocated somewhere else – that is in the US, far from the original. The novel narrates the perception of the world mainly through the eyes of the second generation of immigrants, the American born Gogol and his sister Sonia, and just like a translated text it can be seen as the hybridised 'other' copy.

Duality is sketched out in the opposition of several elements in both narratives: tradition vs. cultural displacement, India vs. the U.S., Bengali festivals vs. Christmas, inside vs. outside (particularly in Nair's version), private vs. public, morality vs. immorality, puffed rice with lots of spices, chili and lemon vs. "Shake'n Bake chicken or hamburger helper prepared with ground lemon", white (the colour of mourning in the South East) vs. black, *bhalonam* vs. *daknam*, Nikhil vs. Gogol.

The Importance of Being Gogol

The importance of names and the act of naming is certainly a shared leitmotif in both narratives, the name Gogol is in fact the bond between the novel and the film.

Having a proper name is universally considered an ordinary phenomenon which reflects and indexes people's identities, ethnic origins or even nationality.[10] Names are representations of identity; they provide a sense of 'Self' in opposition to the 'Other'. Lahiri plays with the binary opposition between Self and Other by introducing the name 'Gogol' in the narration in order to represent the ways in which her young protagonist's cultural legacy separates him from the social sphere, creating a gap between him and the American society he lives in; thus his name becomes a constant reminder of his hybrid condition. Gogol is American, but just like his name, he is different. Gogol Ganguli's name itself, which he hates bitterly, pinpoints his Indian parents' naïve approach to American culture, together with their deep expectations for him to stand out; moreover, Gogol is a name he cannot share with anyone else, except for Nikolai Gogol, after whom he was named. Gogol Ganguli's father, Ashoke, owed his life to Gogol's *The Overcoat*. The fluttering of the pages of the book on the railway attracted the attention of the rescuers who saved Ashoke's life after a terrible train crash. When Gogol was born, his parents awaited the arrival of a letter from Ashima's grandmother containing the baby's *bhalonam*, the good name a child is given in Bengali tradition which is used outside the family, in the non-Indian world. But the letter never arrived "forever hovering somewhere between India and America". Ashoke, indebted to Gogol, decided to give his name to his son. The name becomes the metaphor expressing the displacement of the immigrant's experience and the conflicts of assimilation. In the novel (henceforth *TN1*), Lahiri identifies the practice of naming as a real linguistic problem. She provides her readers with a long explanation as to the importance for a Bengali subject to have both a *bhalonam* and a *daknam*, and of course she does so by offering an accurate 'translation' of the two Indian concepts, using a linguistic expedient that echoes the translation technique of amplification:[11]

> In Bengali the word for pet name is *daknam*, meaning, literally, the name by which one is called by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments. Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated. They are a reminder, too, that one is not all things to all people. They all have pet names. Ashima's pet name is Monu, Ashoke's is Mithu, and even as adults, these are the names by which they are known in their respective families, the names by which they are adored and scolded and missed and loved.
> Every pet name is paired with a good name, a *bhalonam*, for identification in

[10] Joseph E. Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 177-180.

[11] Joseph L. Malone, *The Science of Linguistics in the Art of Translation: Some Tools from Linguistics for the Analysis and Practice of Translation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

> the outside world. Consequently, good names appear on envelopes, on diplomas, in telephone directories and in all other public places. (*TN1*, 25-26)

The high occurrence of terms connected to different types of names, and to the act of naming in general ("word", "called", "name(s)" [3], "pet name" [4], "good name" [2], "*daknam*", and "*bhalonam*") in the passage, collocates with the very high frequency of tokens referring to either private or public life. This suggests that on a connotative level, while drawing from the same semantic field, the words *daknam* and *bhalonam* lead to a multiple array of meanings – unknown to the western reader – by means of recurrent sequences of words. Following Biber's frequency-driven approach to the identification of word sequences, Fig. 1 indicates that 'lexical bundles', that is the most frequent sequence of words in a register, become a unique linguistic construct.[12] Lahiri's narrative stains the American literary canon by means of an act of linguistic identity, which in the words of Braj Kachru is a viable way to construct a structural nativization: "The 'acts of identity' …. are not only a matter of perception, but they have formal realization in lexicalisation, in syntax, and in discourse, styles, and genres".[13]

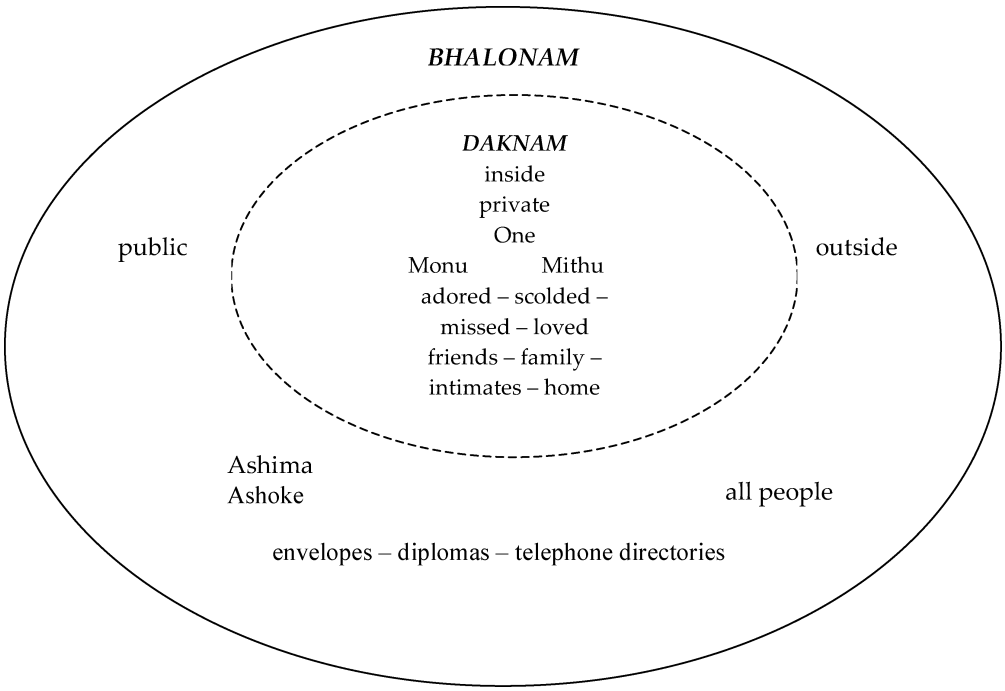


Fig. 1

The lack of a public name, *bhalonam*, is an uncanny theme which will prevent Gogol not only from fully taking part in public life but also from establishing his identity either as an American or as an Indian.

[12] Lexical bundles are neither complete grammatical structures nor idiomatic expressions; they function as basic building blocks of discourse. Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad, and Viviana Cortes, "If you look at …: Lexical Bundles in University Teaching and Textbooks", *Applied Linguistics* 25.3 (2004), 371-405.

[13] Braj Kachru, "World Englishes: Approaches, Issues and Resources", *Language Teaching* 25 (1992), 1-14.

> There's a reason Gogol doesn't want to go to kindergarten. His parents have told him that at school, instead of being called Gogol, he will be called by a new name, a good name, which his parents have finally decided on … The name, Nikhil, is artfully connected with the old. Not only is it a perfectly respectful Bengali good name, … but it also bears a satisfying resemblance to Nikolai, the first name of the Russian Gogol. (*TN1*, 56)

In its dual function of separation and aggregation, the good name contributes to the reunion of the generations. Gogol learnt about the story of his name when he was a college student, in the very period he was feeling estranged from his family. This moment of illumination, the long awaited *agnitio*, is fundamental to the economy of identity-building within the story:

> And suddenly the sound of his pet name, uttered by his father as he has been accustomed to hearing it all his life, means something completely new, bound up with a catastrophe he has unwittingly embodied for years. "Is that what you think of when you think of me?" Gogol asks him. "Do I remind you of that night?"
> "Not at all," his father says eventually, one hand going to his rib, a habitual gesture that has baffled Gogol until now. "You remind me of everything that followed".(*TN1*, 124)

Before going to study at Yale University to become an architect, Gogol becomes Nikhil, "he who is entire, encompassing all", reinventing his Self by reconciling with the *bhalonam* his parents have chosen for him, and his life will change again.

A Tale of Two Cities: A Multimodal Reading of *The Namesake*

Following Kress and van Leeuwen,[14] I will attempt an analysis of some of the signs, indexes and symbols from the film *The Namesake* (henceforth *TN2*), in this section, for a more substantial insight into an evaluation of the Desi filmic strategies enacted by Nair to (re)translate/construe a new representation of 'Indianness'.

Nair's excellent photography makes use of a number of symbolic images referring to both intimate and universal themes which the story uses to occupy a central discourse in American culture. Images of objects, signposts and places, *dis*-seminated between New York and Calcutta, constitute the more general image of the migrants' world skillfully evoked by the director. By means of a dense symbolic framework, Nair bridges the gap between the typical migrant's nostalgia for a mythical past and his/her present hybrid condition in the new nation.

My examination of the film's visual elements uses Paul Thibault's grid for multimodal analysis.[15] Thibault's method of transcription offers an inclusive synoptic perspective aimed at framing relevant elements of film-supported material. I will focus on the three main images with which Nair

[14] Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* (London: Arnold, 2001); Theo van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

[15] Paul J. Thibault, "The Multimodal Transcription of a Television Advertisement: Theory and Practice", in Anthony P. Baldry, ed., *Multimodality and Multimediality in the Distance Learning Age* (Campobasso: Palladino Editore, 2000), 311-383.

construes a hybrid representation of 'Indianness' abroad: suitcases, bridges and the airport.

The multimodal analysis is designed as follows: 1. after trimming the visual frames (Visual Frames) to fit into the first column of the multimodal grid, the images are juxtaposed in order to represent duality in representation; 2. a general description of the scenes can be found in the second column (*Description*); and finally, 3. a short comment on the symbolism of the images is given in the last column (*DC)*.

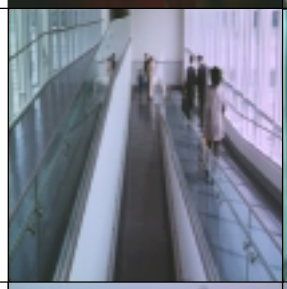
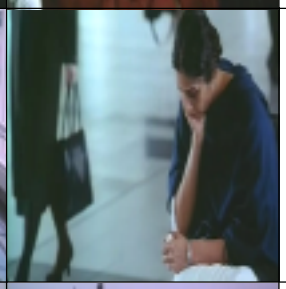
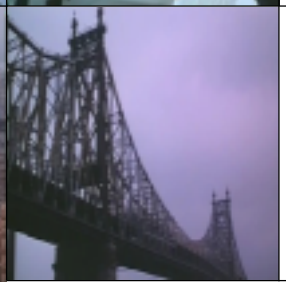
F	VISUAL FRAMES	DESCRIPTION	DC
1	 	1. Calcutta: Ashoke is about to board the train which will take him to his journey to America. 2. Calcutta: The Gangulis are going on a train excursion to the Taj Mahal.	Migrant's luggage vs. The search for identity.
2	 	1. New York, JFK airport: the Gangulis are going to India for the death of Ashima's father. 2. New York, JFK airport: Ashima is waiting for Gogol to come home for his father's funeral.	Departure vs. Arrival. A place of transition between the East and the West.
3	 	1. Calcutta: the Howrah Bridge over the Hooghly River. 2. New York: Manhattan's 59th Street Bridge.	A game of reflections. Division and reunion. East = West Reconciliation

Table 1. Multimodal analysis of *The Namesake* (Stills from Mira Nair, *The Namesake*, 2007, Fox Searchlight Pictures Mirabai Films).

As we can infer from Table 1, Nair is particularly fascinated with telling a tale of two cities, namely New York and Calcutta. The faraway cities merge in the film into a single cityscape. The images are so tightly bound together that it becomes quite impossible to discern one from the other, as Nair herself stated in an interview:

> These streets and these situations are now more than 40 years in my blood. In the conception of the film, I decided to shoot the two cities as if they were one city. This is also the state of being for an immigrant. …. Knowing these places so well made it easier to make transitions between locations.[16]

[16] Cynthia Fuchs, "Unbridled with Life: Interview with Mira Nair", <http://www.popmatters.com/pm/feature/unbridled>, 5 February 2009.

Calcutta, the 'familiar', home seems to amalgamate with its opposite, New York, the 'uncanny', a blend which will develop further in the direction of a real ambivalence. And finally, the two cities overlap becoming 'one city' with the same bridges, trains, airplanes, and the constant coming and going of immigrants. Geographical displacement is introduced in the film by the ambivalent meaning attributed to the word 'home' by the main female characters: Ashima and her daughter Sonia. The word 'home' is employed in *TN2* to refer to both Calcutta and New York, depending whether the viewpoint is from the first or second generation of Gangulis. Therefore, while Ashima is willing to 'go home', that is to India, in order not to raise her children in a lonely country; Sonia wants to 'go home', namely to New York, after a few chaotic days spent in India.

The film begins with a close-up on Ashoke's huge suitcase, so that the viewer follows the piece of luggage through Howrah Station in Calcutta (Frame 1.1) until it is loaded on the train carrying Ashoke to his journey to America.

The migrant's suitcase is a recurring symbol in diasporic creativity; however, it is also a universal marker signifying simultaneously mobility and home. Even when the immigrant arrives at his final destination, the suitcase often remains an important reminiscence of the journey he has made, and at the same time the suitcase reminds him of the unpleasant prospect of further dislocation and displacement.[17] The suitcase represents the past, the migrant's home, the objects and memories the migrant brings with her during her journey, but it also witnesses the movement away from the past. In *TN2*, it is symbolically the same piece of luggage (Frame 1.2) that will be chosen by Ashoke Ganguli when he goes to India with his family on a visit to the Taj Mahal. Like cohesive devices in language, the two identical images connect Ashoke's first voyage to America to the different identity he assumes when he returns to India, no longer as a resident, but rather as a tourist, with his own family.

Another uncanny image is given by the neutered spaces of the airport, where travellers surreally queue anonymously before heading for their destinations. The airport presents them with their first impressions of the city; it is a place where almost every language of the planet can be heard, a hybrid temple of culture with traditions and aspirations. Nair uses the image of the airport as the leitmotif of the film symbolising a meeting point where her characters gather to begin their voyage. In *TN2*, the airport is always connected to a journey of sorrow, as in the case of Ashima's trip to India on the occasion of her father's death (Frame 2.1), or Gogol's reconciliation with his mother after Ashoke's death (Frame 2.2). According to Nair: "[a]irports are like the temple for an immigrant. We're always in these neutral spaces, you live your most crucial hours in them, as you're on your way from one home to another, or your father's funeral".[18]

[17] See David Morley, *Home Territories, media, mobility and identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

[18] Cynthia Fuchs, "Unbridled with Life".

A recurring image used to underline the change of the geographical setting is the imagery of two bridges (Frame 3.1 and 3.2): the Howrah Bridge over the Hooghly River which connects the city of Howrah to its twin city, Calcutta, and Manhattan's 59th Street Bridge also known as The Queensboro Bridge. Again, Desi creativity seems to rely on a duality of representation, two bridges in two different countries merging into a single symbol which stands for the migrant's mobility and connection with the past. The numerous shots of the bridges alternating in *TN2* introduce the metaphor of division and re-union, calling for a reconciliation between the cities, between the East and the West and between the first and second generation Gangulis. The American bridge is seen by the author as a place where the ghost of Howrah could be glimpsed as a reflection of the migrant's dislocation:

> The massive steel of the Howrah Bridge, like an iconic sash across the Ganges, was echoed in the light grace of the George Washington Bridge across the Hudson River outside my window. I scouted a hospital on Roosevelt Island and felt that it might easily have been a hospital in Calcutta. Ashima could give birth to Gogol here, I thought. She could look out of the window, and in the girders of the Queensboro Bridge, the shake and hum of traffic above and below, would rest the ghost of the Howrah. That is, after all, the state of being of many of us who live between worlds.[19]

Consequently, Nair's visual symbolism presents an innovative reading of contemporary Desi identification, giving birth to a real process of creolisation. This process is enacted by means of a brilliant juxtaposition of images which are used to narrate the story from a diasporic optic.

Conclusion

Lahiri and Nair's Desi creativity self-consciously draws on the media to explore the social terrain inhabited by diasporic communities and the truth the communities both inherit and create for themselves. Consequently, when the 'Other' is no longer represented by the dominant self, identity and power politics or ideology immediately come into play, co-habiting, interfering with, and even 'staining' the cultural discourse of the dominant culture.[20] Lahiri and Nair's diasporic aesthetics builds a diasporic world from its very centre, using symbolism based on duality of representation, to investigate identity, disseminate hybridity and occupy a central position in Western culture. Their artistic form is an act of liberation since it gives voice to alterity, and destabilises the old dichotomy between the margins and centre(s) of the world.

[19] Posted by Landmark, 8 March 2007, 11.08 pm, <http://friends.landmarktheatres.com/profiles/blogs/600744:BlogPost:126>, 5 February 2009.

[20] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992); Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995); Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis", in Teun A. van Dijk , ed., *Discourse as Social Interaction* (London: SAGE, 1997), 258-284; Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse and Manipulation", *Discourse & Society* 17.2 (2006), 359-383.

Silvia Albertazzi

The Years of Writing Dangerously: Salman Rushdie and the Fatwa Twenty Years After

The aim of this paper is not to deal with the so-called Rushdie affair and the chronicle of the "unfunny Valentine" that overnight changed a writer into a martyr for freedom. I will concentrate instead on how the cultural world reacted to the fatwa at the time, and how Western intellectuals (and Rushdie first among them) reconsidered it – and redefined the concept of 'freedom' - in the light of 9/11.

To start with, I think it is interesting to have a look at a short piece on the casualties of censorship that Rushdie wrote in 1983 for the *Index on Censorhip*. Here, more than five years before himself becoming a victim of cultural intolerance, Rushdie affirmed that "the worst, most insidious effect of censorship is that, in the end, it can deaden the imagination of the people …" because "[w]here there is no debate, it is hard to go on remembering, every day, that there is a suppressed side to every argument".[1] Not by chance, after the fatwa one of the main concerns of Rushdie's fellow writers and readers was to be constantly calling his case to the attention of the general public, starting from the *Festchrift* that some of the leading figures of British and American culture put together for *The New Statesman and Society*, only a fortnight after Khomeini's death sentence. Authors like Margaret Atwood, Harold Pinter, Colin McCabe, Nadine Gordimer, Joseph Brodsky, Thomas Pynchon, Ralph Ellison, Derek Walcott, Martin Amis, Octavio Paz and many others gave their contributions for free to support the cause of freedom of speech. As the British novelist and broadcaster Melvyn Bragg commented, the Rushdie affair created a global community of authors. "It is difficult to think of any writer who has provoked such a closing of ranks", Bragg wrote in the *Festschrift*, "His isolation has triggered our sense of common purpose. In Britain in particular, it has encouraged and enabled writers at last to break through that barrier which forbade them to be serious in public on public matters".[2] Almost all the contributors to the *New Statesman Festschrift* stress the necessity of freedom of speech and horror at Khomeini's threat, feeling themselves menaced by "the corrupt barbarity of the capitalist west, and the anger and terror of the Muslim east", in Fay Weldon's words (*F*, 30). Yet only two film directors, Stephen Frears and the late Derek Jarman, try to take into account also the reasons of the Other, the first stressing that "What matters is ... writers ... being able to write what they want ... and Muslims being listened to when they want to say something"(*F*, 25), and the second underlining the problem that "Nothing anyone can say will influence

[1] Salman Rushdie, "Casualties of Censorship", in George Theiner, ed., *They Shoot Writers, Don't They?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), 87.

[2] Melvin Bragg in "Words for Rushdie", *New Statesman and Society* (31 March 1989), 24. Page references to contributions published in the *Festschrift* are henceforth referred to in the text as *F*.

religious demagoguery …" because "[w]ith all religions one is dealing with the irrational, particularly Christianity"(*F*, 29).

Within a few months, in the wake of these and other pronouncements of intellectuals, politicians and artists, an "International Committee for the Defence of Salman Rushdie and his Publishers" was founded: by the 4th of July 1989, 12,000 writers and readers had signed a world statement declaring that they too were involved in the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, "insofar as [they] defend the right to freedom of opinion and expression as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights".[3] "We are all Salman Rushdie" seems to be the motto of the undersigned: "We are involved, whether we approve the contents of the book or not", claims the "World Statement", "We call upon world opinion to support the right of all people to express their ideas and beliefs and to discuss them with their critics on the basis of mutual tolerance, free from censorship, intimidation and violence"(5). From this moment on, the Rushdie affair will be interpreted in the West mainly as a matter of 'our' freedom threatened by 'their' fanaticism, thus leading to the transformation of Rushdie himself into a living martyr, to use a pregnant definition by Norman Mailer.

Five years later, replying to an almost hopeless Rushdie, who, on Valentine's Day 1993, intimated to his supporters: "You must decide what you think a writer is worth, what value you place on a maker of stories and an arguer with the world",[4] twenty-six of the world's most important writers wrote letters to the author of *The Satanic Verses*, confirming their support and their sympathy with him and his situation. "I am trying to live your daily anxieties and illusory hopes with you", states Günther Grass (*TRL* 30), while Mario Vargas Llosa observes that, since "in a world where blackmail silences writers, literature could not exist", "It is our obligation as writers ... to maintain our indignation and protest alive" (96). Not very differently, Nadine Gordimer affirms that: "the fatwa ... is a crime against humanity that also casts a shadow over the free development of literature everywhere" (45), while Graham Swift, wondering "How scant the stock of literature would be if all the books that had occasioned offence had been excluded from it", concludes with this exclamation: "How poor and mean a world that would so prescribe and proscribe"(64). These kinds of comments lead to the ultimate metamorphosis of Rushdie, a man who has "made history which in turn is making [him]" (37), according to Arnold Wesker; "no longer a person", as Peter Carey observes, he becomes "an apparition, less than an apparition – an idea"(51). Therefore, if Abraham B. Yehoshua reflects that with his "Iranian" story, Rushdie has shown that "literature should be also a dangerous thing, a thing that speaks the truth" (94), Wesker can end his letter by addressing him as "a hero of our time"(37).

In a similar collection of essays in defence of Rushdie, put together the same year by Arab and Muslim intellectuals, the tone is less emphatic. The

[3] "World Statement" reported in The International Committee for the Defence of Salman Rushdie and His Publishers, *Writers and Readers in Support of Salman Rushdie* (London: The International Salman Rushdie Committee, 1989), 5.

[4] Salman Rushdie, "One Thousand Days in a Balloon", in Steve MacDonogh, ed., *The Rushdie Letters: Freedom to Speak, Freedom to Write* (London: Brandon, 1993), 24. Further references to *The Rushdie Letters* are henceforth referred to in the text as *TRL*.

stress is on the dangers of story-telling, and the respect of freedom more than on the difficulty of Rushdie's situation. While Edward Said positions himself among the heartiest paladins of Rushdie, whom he considers "the *intifada* of the imagination",[5] many other intellectuals who contribute to this project underline Western prejudices against Islam and the wrongs of the Western press and media with regard to the Rushdie crisis. In this way, while Tahar Ben Jelloun stresses that even if "A book ... can irritate and annoy, stir people up, even do harm ... [it] should never be the pretext for an incitement to murder" (110), Assia Djebar addresses Rushdie as "the first *man* to have to live in the condition of a Muslim *woman*" (125). Yet it is in the essays of authors such as Orhan Pamuk and Amin Maalouf that we hear, clearly, the voice of the Other. The first writes:

> The death sentence ... sets in motion a double mechanism and provides satisfaction for two interested parties. On the one hand, it establishes the image of a 'fanatical Islam' in Western public opinion; on the other hand, in Muslim countries ... it reinforces the judgement that the West sees in Islam nothing but fanaticism. ... The whole Rushdie affair, we should not forget, is a media phenomenon serving vulgar, violent, authoritarian, imperialistic, and antidemocratic interests in both of the two camps. We should not therefore fail to see that the tragedy of this individual writer, intrepid and authentic as he is, is our tragedy too.(247-248)

And the latter echoes him, almost prophetically:

> The essential problem remains, that which makes a Rushdie affair possible in our days. I want to talk about the fact that a billion Muslims have the impression of living in a foreign, hostile, indecipherable universe. They no longer even dare hope for a better life, in freedom and dignity; they wonder how they can be integrated into the modern world without losing their souls. For them it is an anguishing dilemma indeed, and also for the whole humanity, because it brings with it heartbreak and violence. Until it is resolved, other dramas await us, before which we will also be impotent.(216)

With September 11, 2001, the 'we-are-all-Salman Rushdie' attitude turns into an I-am-Rushdie' stance. While shortly after the fatwa declaring one was co-responsible in the diffusion of *The Satanic Verses* was a symbolic way of defying the tyranny of the Iranian Ayatollahs and supporting the man they had condemned to death, after the tragedy of the Twin Towers "the nine years of solitary dread inflicted on Rushdie ... turned out to be the private *hors d'oeuvre* to an all-comers' feast of hatred and horror",[6] as a journalist of the *Independent* wrote. As for Rushdie himself, a cause célèbre from 1989, he turned into a reluctant free-speech martyr after 1998, when the fatwa was withdrawn, only to be forced again into a public role after 2001, as a symbol of freedom, the man about town paradoxically "beatified by the fatwa", as Vikram Seth has written. Not by

[5] Edward W. Said, "Against the Orthodoxies", in Anouar Abdallah, ed., *For Rushdie. Essays by Arab and Muslim Writers in Defense of Free Speech* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), 261.

[6] Boyd Tonkin, "Paradise postponed", *The Independent* (9 September 2005). All the review and interview quotations referring to *Shalimar the Clown* come from the March 2006 press review provided by Rushdie's Italian publisher Arnoldo Mondadori. Page numbers inserted hereafter in parenthesis refer to the Mondadori press review.

chance, the protagonist of his post-9/11 novel, *Shalimar the Clown*, is a tightrope walker, whose life – like that of his creator – is suspended between East and West, safety and terrorism. Yet what intrigues most in Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* is the representation of a restricted world, made up by interconnected local realities where all the great abstractions of politics find a place. Rushdie justifies this entanglement of sites and stories with the following explanation:

> When I wrote *Midnight's Children* I felt able to focus my story on a place, the Indian subcontinent, and didn't feel the need to encompass any elsewheres. Since then I have begun to feel more and more that because of many things – mass migration, international mayhem, economic globalisation – the world's stories are no longer separate but commingled, and have set myself the challenge of exploring the literary consequences of taking on this new frontierless world.[7]

[7] S. Prasannarajan, "Interview. Salman Rushdie: 'Greed Killed Kashmir'", *India Today* (12 September 2005).

The result is a novel where the whole world is seen as a village, so that, "no matter where you are ... everyone and everything has a connection …" and "[e]verybody's story is running into everybody else's story".[8] As Rushdie himself has admitted, his purpose with *Shalimar the Clown* was to investigate a new type of fiction capable of reflecting today's 'shrinking' of the planet, the idea that everything is connected, so that, the world being much 'smaller' than it was a quarter of a century ago, stories springing from the furthest parts of the globe belong to the same history. "Everywhere was now a part of everything else", we read in the novel, "Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's, were no longer our own, individual, discrete".[9]

[8] Ginny Dougary, "The Incredible Lightness of Salman", *Times Online* (20 August 2005).

[9] Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (London: Cape, 2005), 37.

The nearest model for this kind of narration seems not to be found in literature but in the cinema, in the works, for instance, of the Mexican director Alejandro Gonzalez Iñarritu. Those who have seen his 2006 tour-de-force *Babel* will surely remember how several stories of solitude, loss and lack of communication, taking place at the four corners of the world, are intertwined and related by way of a series of narrative geometries, cross-references, agreements, building a complex framework of interlocked patterns.

As in Iñarritu's films, in *Shalimar the Clown* personal experiences bleed into political actions. Moreover, the menace of radical extremism and terrorism are implicitly observed through the lenses of Rushdie's past experiences which, he admits, "gave [him] an interior viewpoint on that world before other people".[10] Dealing with the loss of tolerance and secular pluralism in Kashmir, once the archetype of such imaginary earthly paradises as the mythical Shangri-La, then the site of greedy invaders and Islamic pogroms, and today the battlefield where tensions between India and Pakistan are heightened by the recruiting of the valley's youth for al-Qaeda terrorist training camps, Rushdie depicts a non-Miltonian Paradise

[10] Thierry Gandillot, "Salman Rushdie – 'Aucun auteur ne devrait être aussi connu comme je le suis'", *L'Express* (29 September 2005), (my translation).

lost. As he explained to the American writer Paul Auster in a double interview for *Le Nouvel Observateur*:

> This dream-like Kashmir becomes a kind of Paradise Lost, but not in the sense of Milton, who developed the Christian idea of the human fall of man. Here, I am dealing with the real destruction of this Paradise, ruined by bombs and cannons, as if many armies invaded the garden of Eden to lay it waste. In a way, the destruction of this Paradise is the key idea of the novel. We live in a world without Paradises and we must learn to live without this idea of a better world.[11]

[11] Salman Rushdie in Didier Jacob, "Auster et Rushdie: rencontre au sommet", *Le Nouvel Observateur* (1 November 2005), (my translation).

Yet, even more than by bombs and wars, Rushdie's Kashmir is ravaged by a battle between memory and history. If in *The Moor's Last Sigh* – a novel that in many ways anticipated some themes of *Shalimar* – Rushdie wrote that "The end of a world is not the end of the world",[12] here he seems to imply that the end of certain worlds – dreamlike places, imaginary homelands, invisible cities – 'is' the end, at least of one world: the world of innocence. As Christopher Hitchens has observed: "Rushdie is telling us, No more Macondos. No more Shangri-Las .... Gone is the time when anywhere was exotic or magical or mythical, or even remote. Shalimar's clown mask has been dropped, and his acrobatics have become a form of escape artistry by which he transports himself into 'our' world".[13] The first lines of the dedication poem in Rushdie's fable *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, "Zembla, Zenda, Xanadu:/ All our dream-worlds may come true./ Fairy lands are fearsome too", seem to forecast the tragic epilogue of *Shalimar the Clown*. Paradoxically, while that fable, the first literary work composed by Rushdie in the darkest days of his concealment, was his funniest book, a story which, as he has admitted, cheered him up during his enforced concealment,[14] *Shalimar the Clown*, the first novel of his to appear after 9/11, is his most tragic one, a story driven by political extremes and terrorism, a plot pervaded by a threatening fusion of psychopathic and apocalyptic elements. Defined by Shashi Tharoor as "topical and typical, a novel derived as much from today's headlines as from yesterday's hopes",[15] *Shalimar the Clown*, by showing a series of situations where nationhood and identities are not one and the same, indicates the inconsistency of freedom when contained by borders. Appropriately, all the main characters change names and identities more than once throughout the novel. It is once more Tharoor who notes that: "A recurrent theme of *Shalimar* is the transformation of identities, as characters change nationalities, addresses, professions and names, reinventing themselves, remaking their lives". Commenting on this attitude of his characters, Rushdie said that here, almost for the first time, his creatures "speak in their own names" (see Gandillot Thierry), like autonomous beings shaping their own tales. Consequently, even if, as Rushdie himself acknowledges, "the

[12] Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Cape, 1995), 376.

[13] Christopher Hitchens, "Hobbes in the Himalayas", *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 2005).

[14] Edward Guthmann, "Salman Rushdie Never Pulls his Punches", *San Francisco Chronicle* (9 October 2005).

[15] Shashi Tharoor, "Tangled Roots. Salman Rushdie Recalls and Reinvents his Heritage in a Story of Love and Terrorism", *The Financial Times* (10 September 2005).

question of how much our lives and natures can be externally determined has always been a subject for fiction" (see Boyd Tonkin), here, through his fictional figures, and in the light of his past forced denial of freedom, he digresses on the place of free will in a world where character is no longer destiny. The fatal question – 'Are we the masters or the victims of our times?' – becomes entwined with the more personal 'Are we the masters or the victims of our stories?'

Referring yet again to Iñarritu's cinema we could say that in Rushdie's novel the global multiple intercut story strands of *Babel* combine with the poignant and hopeless reflection on free will that is the pivot of *21 Grams*, Iñarritu's second film. Therefore, if in *Shalimar* as in *Babel* we are confronted with a post 9/11 ever-shrinking global village where life is coloured with the fear and loathing of international terrorism, in Rushdie's novel the associative temporal logic reminds one also of the disjunctive narrative puzzle of *21 Grams*, at whose core is the idea that choice is illusory and the individual cannot control destiny. While both *Shalimar the Clown* and *Babel* might be read as narrative digressions on the axiom that a butterfly's wing flapping at one end of the world can provoke a hurricane at the other, the open ending of *Shalimar* shows, as is the case for *21 Grams,* that it does not matter what happens at the close of the story, but 'how' we reach that point.

Not by chance, one of the protagonists of Rushdie's latest novel, *The Enchantress of Florence,* introduces himself at the beginning of the novel as "Uccello di Firenze, enchanter and scholar", specifying that he has chosen this name not as a homage to the deceased painter Paolo Uccello, but because in Italian "uccello" means "bird", "and birds are the greatest travellers of all".[16] Yet, since "a man who travel[s] constantly might lose his bearings" (16), he is always running the risk of being "spirited away into fairylands where [he is], and look[s], frankly absurd" (48). In a complicated and fascinating play of mirror and painted images, all the characters of the book reproduce this desire for, and fear of, travelling, this awareness that "One must stand outside a circle to see if it is round" (81), and, at the same time, this continual need to "begin in a different place" (100), or to cross half the world to tell a fairytale. It therefore appears rather superficial to define *The Enchantress of Florence* solely "a bravura entertainment" as some critics have.[17] Rushdie's most recent novel is much more: it is a fable of migration and of the encounter with different cultures, of tolerance and totalitarianism, a completely untrue story whose "untruth ... could sometimes be of service in the real world"(168).

As Rushdie confessed to an interviewer "When people first started to make a connection between me and 9/11, I resisted it because of the disparity of the scale. But I have come to feel that what happened with the *Satanic Verses* was a kind of prologue and that now we're in the main

[16] Salman Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence* (London: Cape, 2008), 14.

[17] Ruth Morse, "Beware the enchanted", *Times Literary Supplement* (4 April 2008), 21.

event".[18] Between the prologue and the main event, like in a Rushdie novel or an Iñarritu film, issues of global importance are mixed with individual problems, according to the disjunctive editing of human life. Yet if in the narrative world the main characters – and the readers with them – are obsessed by questions like: 'How many lives do we live? How many times do we die?', in real life the eponymous protagonist of the Rushdie affair has seen off all his adversaries, from the Ayatollah Khomeini to Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay, from Zulfikar Bhutto to his daughter Benazir. Back to life after the dark days of the fatwa, with his works and his testimony Rushdie jokingly sends this message to his audience: 'Don't mess with novelists'.

[18] Dougary, "The incredible lightness of Salman".

Rossella Ciocca

Mother India and Paradise Lost: Myth, History, and Fiction in the City of Mumbai

Names

The original site of Mumbai was a cluster of islands probably inhabited by fisherfolk. Ptolemy in AD 150 called it Heptanesia, the city of seven islands. Tossed from one kingdom to another, it took the name of Bombay from the Portuguese who called it *Bom Bahia* meaning 'Good Bay'. They also called it Boa-Vida, for the pleasantness of its surroundings and the abundance of food. The main local languages used a range of expressions: from Manbay, Mambai, Mambe, Mumbadevi, Bambay to Mumbai, the latter after the Sultan Kutb-ud-din whose rule over the Hindu population in the fourteenth century was somewhat unpopular and who was believed after his death to have become a demon called Mumba. The British developed the natural harbour into a commercial port and for more than 400 years the city was known to the world as Bombay. In 1997, the coalition in power in the state of Maharashtra officially changed the name of the city. As Suketu Mehta punctually reports: "The government took a look at the awesome urban problems plaguing the city, the infestation of corruption at all levels of the bureaucracy and the government, the abysmal state of Hindu-Muslim relations, and took decisive action. They changed the name of the capital city to Mumbai".[1]

Name-changing has lately been in great vogue all over India. Meant as a process of decolonisation, it has increasingly become a practice of de-Islamisation. The idea is to go back to a purified Hindu past, removing the traces of all other civilizational encounters which, albeit between asymmetrical powers, had nonetheless structured the subcontinent's very rich and syncretic cultural identity. Recently the quest for a unifying heritage selecting Hinduism as the nation's main flagship has undermined the ethos of inclusiveness expressed in post-independence India. And Nehru's idea of the nation, conceived in somewhat romantic terms, as an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed without hiding or erasing what had been written previously seems unfortunately, as Sunil Khilnani laments, "itself in danger of being hidden and erased".[2]

And yet the effort to purify its image by onomastic strategy has not succeeded in the least. Mumbai, "the bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding"[3] as Salman Rushdie calls it, is not only the most capitalistic, most dynamic, most crowded of the Indian cities, but, even with its brave-

[1] Suketu Mehta, *Maximum City. Bombay Lost and Found* (London: Review, 2005), 65.

[2] Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London: Penguin, 2003), XV.

[3] Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Vintage, 1996), 350.

new-original-indigenous-Hindu name, is also the most complex, ambivalent and protean sign of contemporary Indian identity.

Compared to Chicago in the 1920s and New York post September 11, 2001, it is the capital of modernizing India, the sum of its contradictions, the dream of its potential, the nightmare of its delusions. It is not only a capital of the industry of images but is itself a very source of fiction: an aestheticized metropolitan scene inspiring stories and lifestyles. It is a fundamental hub in the financial world network but at the same time has a massive concentration of abject poverty. It is becoming one of the symbols of the world's shifting axis, but its power, transforming it into the target of terrorist violence, is also increasing its vulnerability. Glamorous and vulgar; secular and sectarian; broad-minded, cosmopolitan and parochial, even racist; dynamic and backward; Mumbai, says Mehta, " … is a city of multiple aliases, like gangsters and whores"(15). Some are ready to swear that the only true and original etymology derives from the Bombil fish drying on stilts in the sea breeze: Bombay the malodorous town of fishy stench. Others have even re-baptised it as Bumbay: the bay of defecating bottoms, the shitting town, due to the millions actually using every roughly sheltered corner to discharge their bowels in the open air: the women rigorously at night, the men at every hour of the day.

The Hybrid City

"India's cities house the entire historical compass of human labour, from the crudest stone-breaking to the most sophisticated financial transactions. Success and failure, marble and mud, are intimately and abruptly pressed against one another, and this has made the cities vibrate with agitated experience".[4]

[4] Khilnani, *Idea*, 109.

More than any other Indian city, Mumbai 'vibrate(s) with agitated experience'; it is the quintessential symbol of the new god-and-mammon India, of the uneven and unruly pace of the nation's modernizing advance.

Fig.1: Still from Danny Boyle, *Slumdog Millionaire*, 2008, Celador Entertainment in association with Film 4.

While the wealth of the country flows through its veins injecting business energy, financial turbulence, frenetic overbuilding, billowing corruption and rampant crime, each day new arrivals from the villages, piling hut upon hut and rags upon rags, make excrescences erupt on the

surface of its body, and new conglomerations mar the schemes of the rational town. The first shock of Bombay is the vision of this juxtaposition: skyscrapers and hovels side by side; shopping malls surrounded by the most elementary belongings of pavement dwellers, giant overpasses crossed by the continuous flow of public and private traffic housing the down and outs who nonetheless are not the most wretched of the town, having at least a cover over their heads.

In his love song to the city, David Gregory Roberts underlines the precarious march of urban development, the tainted nature of its unequal, lurching progress:

> Inland from the slum there were a large number of tall apartment buildings, the expensive homes of the middle-rich. From my perch, I looked down at the fabulous gardens of palms and creepers on the tops of some, and the miniature slums that servants of the rich had built for themselves on the tops of others. Mould and mildew scarred every building, even the newest. I'd come to think of it as beautiful, that decline and decay, creeping across the face of the grandest designs: that stain of the end, spreading across every bright beginning in Bombay.[5]

[5] Gregory David Roberts, *Shantaram* (London: Abacus, 2004), 256.

In a more nostalgic tone, Manil Suri makes one of the denizens of the block of flats, which constitutes the narrative universe of his *The Death of Visnu*, lament the loss of the old historical elegance of the town, with its variety of classical, Indo-Saracenic and neo-Gothic styles in favour of the standardized restyling of commercial metropolises:

> This was what he liked most about Irani hotels – sitting at a white marble-top table on one of the black cane chairs, staring at the quotes from holy books painted on the mirrored walls, hearing the orders being called out by the busboys, letting the tea-soaked Gluco biscuits dissolve one by one in his mouth. It was a shame so many of them were closing down. Just last month, the one down the street had been converted into a clothes boutique (the fifth boutique on their street), while there was talk of this one being sold to make way for a video store.[6]

[6] Manil Suri, *The Death of Visnu* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 23.

But it is Altaf Tirewala who is able, with the series of striking snapshots which map the seething landscape of Mumbai in his *No God in Sight*, to express the sense of utter desolation of the city of the homeless:

> You are free. You can go anywhere. Do anything. No one knows your name. Nobody –not even you – can remember when you were born, how old you are, or how you came to be here.
>
> You just are.
>
> You can shit wherever, piss wherever, sleep everywhere and anywhere. You will eat anything. No matter how putrid … . You can wear anything; sometimes nothing at all. You could be lying naked under the seat of a jam-packed train and no one would even notice.
>
> It is not easy to die when you are a beggar. Life clings to you like a rabid stray with its teeth sunken into your flesh. You manage to survive riots, floods,

> blackouts, morchas… and then you multiply. You father innumerable children with innumerable women who lie by the sides of the roads with their mouths and legs wide open.[7]

Fig. 2: "Zaveri Bazaar and Jeweller's Showcases", 1991, photograph, Mumbai, Maharashtra, <www.raghubirsingh.com>, © Succession Raghubir Singh.

From body to body, from mouth to mouth, from hand to hand innumerable dealings make overcrowded, overheated Bombay a city of transactions: financial, cultural, political, sexual.

From the Stock Exchange's negotiations to street market bargaining, Mumbai deals in every kind of possible commerce: legitimate and bootleg. The capital of smuggling: gold, currencies, drugs, spirits, girls, boys, Mumbai sells goods for every taste. Often sneaked in by legal professional transients, such as sailors or stewards or even diplomats, commodities from the West but also from Hong Kong or the Emirates flow into town and transform the consumers' attitudes. From the 'freedom of religion and of movement' granted by the East India company, Bombay drew the energy to flourish as a free port, open to trade and continuous human transit. Peoples came from all over India and the world. Jews and Parsees; Mughal, Portuguese and British; then Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi, Sindhi, Punjabi, Bihari, Bangladeshi.

The ethnic composition has always been rich in variety and complex in its arrangements. With trade and religion, as well as with caste and census, it draws the lines of a metropolitan cartography the traveller ignores but the temporary resident begins to recognize:

> The section from Nana Chowk to Tardeo was known as a Parsee area. It had surprised me, that a city so polymorphous as Bombay, with its unceasing variety of peoples, languages, and pursuits, tended to such narrow concentrations. The jewellers had their own bazaar, as did the mechanics, plumbers, carpenters, and other trades. The Muslims had their own quarter, as did the Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsees, and Jains. If you wanted to buy or sell gold, you visited the Zhaveri bazaar, where hundreds of goldsmiths competed for your custom. If you wanted to visit a mosque, you found several of them within walking distance of one another.[8]

But as the protagonist of *Shantaram* had also to learn, the complicated map of divisions and separations in the polyglot, multicultural city was not as rigid as it appeared and traffic across the borders went on almost regularly. Crime and showbiz, business and politics, always weakly fenced against commingling and corruption, tend to trade with one another, and

[7] Altaf Tirewala, *No God in Sight* (San Francisco: MacAdam Cage, 2007), 185.

[8] Roberts, *Shantaram*, 203.

even the lines between religions, the critical field of tense relations, were often 'stepped across' in Bombay more easily than elsewhere.

> Saturdays were a day of atonement for Mr. Asrani. He would 'make the rounds' as he put it, to ask forgiveness for all his sins over the week. Primarily, he supposed, for all the time he spent at the drinkwalla. He would first take the 81 to Mahim, and pay his respects at the big Ram Mandir temple there. Next, he would stop at the Prabhadevi temple, and the Mahalakshmi temple, and sometimes at the small shrine to Hanuman along the way as well. After finishing with the Hindu temples, he would take the bus all the way to the masjid near Metro, and offer his prayers there, covering his scalp with his handkerchief like the Muslim mosque-goers. On the way back, if nobody he knew was watching, he would make one final dash into the Catholic church across the street. Mr. Asrani believed in not taking any chances where appeasement of the heavenly powers was concerned.[9]

[9] Suri, *Visnu*, 27.

Indeed, syncretism and partaking in different cultures have been Bombay's hallmark from the very beginning. Its geographical position, and the contingencies and rationalities of colonial history put it at the entrance to the rest of the world, supplanting even Calcutta as the main gate of Empire when the opening of the Suez Canal halved travel time to England. As the threshold connecting the Subcontinent to the Globe, Bombay was where 'all India met what-was-not-India'. Bombay's vocation, as depicted by Rushdie in *The Moor's Last Sigh*, was to be a 'middle' town, in all the possible senses implied by the term. "Everything north of Bombay was North India, everything south of it was the South. To the east lay India's East and to the west, the world's West. Bombay was central; all rivers flowed into its human sea".[10]

[10] Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, 350.

In 1927, the basalt domed arch known as the *Gateway of India* was built in Bombay to commemorate a previous visit of the English king, George V. Twenty years later the same monument saw the last British troops marching out of the Empire. The town had been the gateway of colonialists seeing them in and then off. But also for Indians, Bombay has often been a passage town: a sort of outpost of the West. Rushdie remembers how his parents, before the partition massacres, left Delhi and moved South "correctly calculating that there would be less trouble in secular, cosmopolitan Bombay".[11] Suketu Mehta with his family paused and rested for a decade 'under the Arch' on their journey from Kolkata to New York. Remembering his early life in Bombay, Arjun Appadurai recalls experiencing modernity, seeing and smelling it through cinema, *Life* and American college catalogues, before theorizing modernity itself in the States.[12] For them all, as for the hundreds of thousands of poor migrants, Mumbai represents a kind of 'acclimatisation station' in their travel towards the World. And yet it is also considered as "the most Indian of Indian cities".[13]

[11] Salman Rushdie, "A Dream of Glorious Return", in *Step Across This Line* (London: Vintage, 2003), 195.

[12] See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1.

[13] Rushdie, *Moor*, 350.

The selfsame hybrid, mixed quality that makes it belong "to nobody, and to all"(350-1), is indeed the quintessential mark of its Indianness, reflecting the multiplicity of the nation's complex patchwork identity. It has been described by many as the epitome and the emblematic representation of the contrasts and ambivalences of the country, both in fiction and in essays. In many novels, Bombay is identified with the idea of India as Mother, *Bharat-Mata*, a traditional rooted vision of the country as female: powerful and inexorable when depicted as a deity or divine feminine energy, Shakti, but also frail and victimized when conceived as the prey of foreign attack and colonial exploitation. In Rushdie's magic-realist stories, the peculiarly metaphorical renditions of his writing capture and create at the same time a Bombay that is even richer and denser, adding to its spectrum of possible meanings a much deeper symbolical resonance. Bombay stands for an alternative vision of India-as-mother, not the sentimental mother of the India of the villages but a mother of cities: "as heartless and lovable, brilliant and dark, multiple and lonely, mesmeric and repugnant, pregnant and empty, truthful and deceitful as the beautiful, cruel, irresistible metropolis itself"(204).

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the novel which he particularly devoted to his birthplace, the trope of motherhood encapsulates one within the other, Matryoshka-style, the actual figure of the protagonist's mother, the image of the mother-town, and also the idea of the nation as mother. And when Aurora, the mother of the Moor, from a Catholic Portuguese family marries a Jew from a Spanish and Moorish background, the image of Bombay as *Palimpstine* takes shape under the strokes of her paintbrush in terms of a hybrid palimpsestic city of mixed creatures belonging to two overlapping worlds where it is impossible to establish which is which.

> The water's edge, the dividing line between two worlds, became in many of these pictures the main focus of her concern. She filled the sea with fish, drowned ships, mermaids, treasure, kings; and on the land, a cavalcade of local riff-raff – pickpockets, pimps, fat whores hitching their saris up against the waves – and other figures from history or fantasy or current affairs or nowhere, crowded towards the water like the real-life Bombayites on the beach, taking their evening strolls. At the water's edge strange composite creatures slithered to and fro across the frontier of the elements. Often she painted the water-line in such a way as to suggest that you were looking at an unfinished painting which had been abandoned, half covering another. But was it a waterworld being painted over the world of air, or vice versa? Impossible to be sure.(226)

Slums

India is not an overpopulated country but it shares the Asian phenomenon of megalopolises. Mumbai is a megacity; greater Mumbai numbers 19

Fig. 3: Hema Upadhyay, *Wish*, 2007, courtesy of Roger Fournier.

million people, the average density is 17,000 per square kilometre, but as the congestion is unequally distributed, the island city reaches a density of 45,000 per square kilometre. Being this densely crammed, the city appears as a congested organism which sneezes and coughs from oppressed lungs. Pollution and traffic jams are the normal conditions and humidity only adds to the almost unbreathable quality of the air. (One of the recurrent topics of novels set in the town consists in rhetorically exuberant descriptions of terrible rush-hours).

Overcrowding makes it impossible for the well-off to distance the underdog; new arrivals every day feed the jaws of maybe the biggest and most widespread monstrous conglomerations of shanties in the world. But, as the really poor occupy flyovers and sewage pipes, the inhabitants of the city-villages are usually workers belonging to a sort of lower middle class. In *Sacred Games* by Vikram Chandra for example a police constable is the Virgil whose residential experiences serve to describe life in a *basti*.

> The lane was narrow, narrow enough in some sections that Katekar could have touched the walls on both sides of it with outstretched hands. Most of the doors of the homes were open, for the air. … Katekar came around a corner, past a tiny shop selling cigarettes, packets of shampoo, paan, batteries, and then he stood aside to let a row of young women go by, and the girls stepped tidily over the curve of the gutter, powdered and properly salwar-kameezed for shops and offices. … He had one foot propped up on a two-inch pipe that ran along the bottom of the wall. The mohalla committee had collected money for the laying of this secondary water pipe last year, but it worked only when the pressure in the main municipal pipe down near the main road was good. Now they were collecting money for a pump.[14]

[14] Vikram Chandra, *Sacred Games* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), 72.

Out of unsuitable surroundings and premises, in slums people tend to build a network of relations which most often evolve in a community with a history, a cultural character and even a model of rough social organization. Spatial proximity and the sharing of problems help develop mutual help and solidarity. Despite causing outbreaks of violence in the name of private justice and retaliation, such conditions tend to make a form of identity and social conscience emerge from common difficulties.

In *Shantaram*, a great feast is organized when, after many attempts and actually coming to blows, a sort of temporary school is granted to the

800 school-age children who were not admitted to the already-full official schools in the surroundings.

> The people got their own teachers organised, and found a good spot for a school, but the authorities still put up a hell of a fight.'
> 'Because it's a slum…'
> 'Yeah. They're afraid that a school would give the place a kind of legitimacy. In theory, the slum doesn't exist, because it's not legal and not recognised.'
> 'We are the not-people… And these are the not-houses, where we are not-living.'
> 'And now we have a not-school to go with it'.(250)

But the school is to be torn down as the construction site closes, which allowed, in the first place, the first nucleus of huts to be erected in order to eliminate travelling time for the thousands of workers who were employed regularly, or on a daily basis, in construction. In fact, many illegal slums in Mumbai derive from temporary areas set aside and marked off in hovel-sized plots to keep the entire work-force, hired for huge building programmes, living in a single community. Drawn by the regular income of the workers, their needs and their vices, squatters usually arrive in abundance to spread outside the fence-line, rapidly blurring the division between legal and illegal sites and leading to a ten-fold rise in the original number of occupants.

Whole districts of shacks were erected from the beginning through illicit means by criminal speculators, giving a roof to thousands of illegal denizens. Telling the story of the rise of Ganesh Gaitonde, Vikram Chandra explains how entire cities within the city emerged from the show-off building projects of gangsters in the areas over which they had won their criminal supremacy.

> Gopalmath filled up fast, there were citizens queuing up for the kholis even before we finished them …. Up and down the road the basti spread, and it went climbing up the hill, it seemed to grow every day. Right from the beginning, we had Dalits and OBCs, Marathas and Tamils, Brahmins and Muslims. The communities tended to cluster together, lane by lane. People like to stay with those they know, like seeks like, and even the thick crores of the city, in this jungle where a man can lose his name and become something else, the lowest of the low will seek his own kind, and live with them in proud public squalor.[15]

[15] Chandra, *Games*, 111-2.

Incredible as it might appear, in Bombay even the slums are ranked by hierarchy and crossed by confessional differences: not only in the move from pavement to shack, or from shack to suburban one-room flat, but also within the hovel-dwelling there is a possible progression or a finer selection of affinities.

> "Imagine …imagine you and me in the heart of Mumbai on the seventeenth floor. What a view! Oh, the breeze! Ah, the silence! … I saw it today! A slum on

> the top of a building. It has nine shacks and two toilets with running water". Suleiman and my embroiderer uncle rented two adjacent hovels; over a few days they shifted our things from Barauli before bringing us women to this Muslim slum on the terrace of a Muslim skyscraper in a Muslim area.[16]

[16] Tirewala, *No God*, 61-2.

The phenomenon of small slums on top floors is well known in Mumbai, and again their origin lies in working conditions. As the people who worked on the upper floors of skyscrapers were not allowed to use the elevators, which were reserved for building materials, they tended to stay up there and gradually developed resident communities, a sort of base camp with kitchens, beds and even farm animals.

> An area around one of the pillars was fenced off with wicker and bamboo for use as an animal pen. Straw and hessian was strewn about to serve as bedding for the goats, chickens, cats, and dogs that foraged amid discarded food scraps and rubbish in the pen. Rolled blankets and mattresses, for the people who slept there, were heaped around another pillar. Yet another pillar had been designated as a play area for children, with a few games and toys and small mats scattered for their use.[17]

[17] Roberts, *Shantaram*, 253.

What is particularly contradictory and reversed in this re-visitation of village life in town is the notion of what is superfluous and even lavish. While in the average slum every hut usually has a TV set and many have satellite aerials, the people living there have very few basic home facilities. The real luxuries are running water, private toilets, sewerage and drains. Life can be dangerous at nights along the pathways by the shacks where dogs and rats roam freely and regularly attack children and drunks. Space and privacy are the real treats, and even the concept of intimacy is substantially revisited. However, for many people, living in a crammed hovel, a large and empty bedroom in a modern block of flats can prove dispiriting and even desolate, causing insomnia if not agoraphobia… as recorded, for example, by Mehta when interviewing his underworld men in their rapid ascent up the ladder of wealth and status.

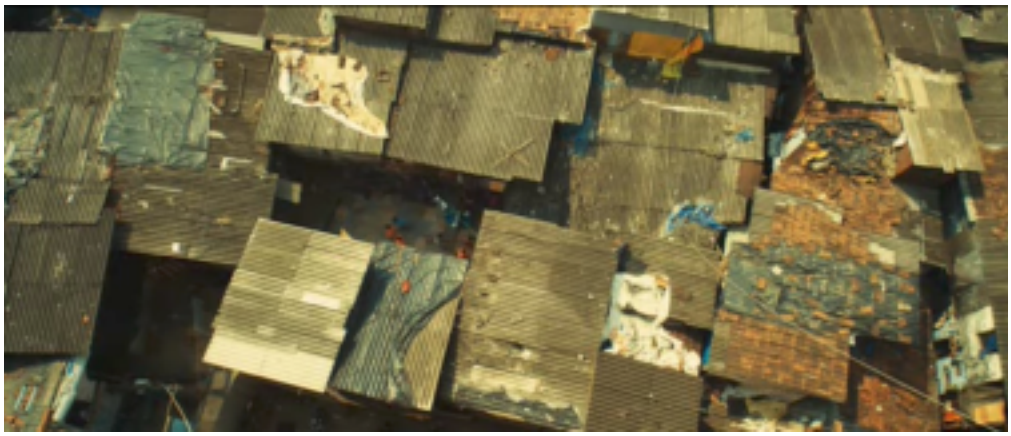


Fig. 4: Still from Danny Boyle, *Slumdog Millionaire*, 2008, Celador Entertainment in association with Film 4.

However, with their endless expanse of tin roofs and small mud-brown walls, slums are not only dormitories and ghettos for the poor but also busy engines that pump life into the city: producing, recycling and trading all kinds of

goods, from shoes to clothing, and plastic to paper, even medicine.[18] Slums provide the workforce for every modernizing infrastructure or housing estate project of the official town, every commerce and deal, the whole system of private transport and, with their pressing energy and melodrama, with their frantic, toiling fervency, they contribute massively to the ever-flowing kinesis of the never-sleeping city. Ceaselessly adjusting its flanks to host the multitudes of new refugees and adventurers from all over India desperately wishing to fulfil their 'Bombay dream', the gigantic monstrous creature, made of a million shacks perennially on the move between making and dismantling, is one with the town of hopes and its *filmi* logic of happiness at hand.

[18] On this topic, both Roberts in *Shantaram* and Vikram Seth in *A Suitable Boy* (London: Phoenix, 1994), give long and detailed descriptions.

A City for Fiction

One of the principal by-products of the new global cultural order oriented by the media is the role played by the imagination in social life. As highlighted by Appadurai in *Modernity at Large*, people are increasingly inclined to see their fate through the spectrum of all the possible lives offered by cinema, television or the net. Fantasy has entered into the fabrication of social models as never before and "even the meanest and most hopeless of lives, the most brutal and dehumanising of circumstances, the harshest of lived inequalities are now open to the play of the imagination"(54).

Being rooted in the hearts of people as the city of dreams come true, Mumbai has become the destination of massive immigration from the poorest areas of the nation. At least since independence and increasingly after, Bombay has figured in the minds of Indians as the land of wondrous opportunities and terrible temptations, of wealth and corruption, of happiness and disillusionment, of success and downfall.

With its emancipatory anonymity in a land of compelling traditions and rigid social constraints, Bombay represented in post-independence India a more fluid receptacle of democratic aspirations. Its gigantic urban cauldron was brimming over with opportunities; its attractions had the giddy effects of feeding hopes about self-made destinies. What lodged this fascination in the popular fantasy was Hindi cinema.[19] The city, with its traps and its enchantments, was long familiar from celluloid. Everybody in India already knew and was then able to recognize the dazzling skyline of Malabar Hill and the imposing crescent of the Necklace (Marine Drive), Chowpatty Beach and Nariman Point, the gothic cavernous cathedral of Victoria Terminus, the meeting point at Flora Fountain and the busy shops of Colaba, the seductions of the Taj Mahal Hotel and the opening to the sea-breeze of the Gateway of India. Today, with the ever-increasing audience of Bollywood, and the worldwide success and the Oscar awards acclamation of *Slumdog Millionaire* (another

[19] As Mehta tells us, Hindi film directors loathe the term Bollywood which implies a derivative origin from its American Californian counterpart. The film industry in Bombay is in fact older than that of Hollywood as the Lumière brothers brought their invention to Bombay only a few months after their extraordinary Paris debut. As early as 1897 a Maharashtrian called Bhatvadekar was making short films on wrestling matches and circus monkeys in Bombay (383).







Fig. 5-11: Photographs by the author.

fable of social and love dreams fulfilled, set by the English director in contemporary Mumbai),[20] these places are familiar to a globalized public and Mumbai begins to rival more traditional urban cinema sets.

Having in the meantime become the world capital of commercial cinema, Mumbai has transformed the ethos of the somehow radical cinema of the 1950s, enlivened by a nationalist vision of an inclusive, secular India, into the mirror-house of capitalist, glossy, sophisticated success. Cinemas are now seen as 'temples of desires': "They are designed to seduce: monumental spaces gleam with light and color, vestibules are plastered with posters of gods and goddesses, red carpets exude desire and wantonness".[21] The hold that Bollywood's average product has on Indian imagination, not only in the subcontinent but also overseas, not only on the traditional middle-class audience but also on the hungrily desirous, self-projecting proletariat, is usually that of an affluent, smooth and glossy world of pleasure and self-complacency. If for a 'mediascape' one intends, again with Appadurai, a large and complex repertoire of images and narratives which feed throughout the world a sense of belonging disconnected from territorialization, Mumbai has become for all Indians, in and out of the subcontinent, the quintessential centre of an imaginary Indian landscape or 'mediascape', created by the intermingled agencies of diasporic memory, desire and the media. The most virtual and aestheticized and fantasised of all the 'imaginary homelands'. Anyway, both in the comedy version, confected above all for the homesick public abroad, where conflicts are reduced to a minimum, and in the more melodramatic or violent domestic pictures, the invasive soundtrack portrays a colourful, energetic life reduced to, or at least diluted and mitigated by, a long series of dance numbers. Indeed, the musical sequences of Hindi cinema are becoming the soundtrack of Indian public and private life as they are used in every family festivity, at every wedding, as well as in the night life of Mumbai when, in the so-called bar line, demurely clad girls flirtatiously make eyes at their spectators as they sing and dance to Hindi film music, dreaming to interpret in reality the fictionalised lives of the movies and thus to elide the distinction between "the life of fiction and the fictionalisation of lives".[22]

Bombay is indeed a difficult city in which nonetheless life flirts with pleasure in an incredible number of ways and where it is almost impossible to forget that one is alive, drawing injections of nervous energy from the

[20] The movie directed by Danny Boyle was drawn from Vikas Swarup's novel *Q. & A.*

[21] Vijay Mishra, *Bollywood Cinema. Temples of Desire* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 1.

[22] Appadurai, *Modernity*, 55.

frantic urban chaos of daily fervency and above all from the spectacular, extravagant and somewhat hysterical rhythms of the night when, as Mehta puts it: "The city unfurls itself, luxuriously … in the receptions, premieres, parties and dinners of the night; in the beer bars, hotels, dance clubs, whorehouses and alleyways." (289)

Transgression is the subtext of many activities, and crime, in the social imagination, proves a powerhouse of models and myths at least as exciting as those of cinema itself: glamorous, flamboyant lifestyles being the prerogative of gangsters as well as of film stars. Night-life occupies the shared stage in this folly.

Bollywood's entanglements with the criminal underworld of Bombay have been repeatedly emphasised in fictional and journalistic mappings of the town (from Rushdie to Roberts, from Mehta to Chandra) which have showed by and large how illicit earnings are often laundered in the mega-budget productions of the dream factory. What is more interesting, however, is the contiguity of the two world-pictures and their reciprocal reinforcement in inducing ways of life. Not only do the *dons* figure as press heroes as much as Bollywood celebrities, but they are also romanticized by the movies as in the gangland glory period of the Chicago prohibition era. A special affinity binds the two worlds, including also spectators in a special complicity which reinforces the pleasure of stepping beyond limits in a projected, and thus safe, world of every possible excess.

> Gangsters and whores all over the world have always been fascinated by the movies and vice versa; the movies are fundamentally transgressive. They are our eye into the forbidden. Most people will never see a human being murder another human being, except on the screen. Most people will never see a human being have sex with another human being, except on the screen. Cinema is an outlaw medium, our torch into the darkest part of ourselves.[23]

[23] Mehta, *Maximum*, 380.

From their point of view, dancing girls and killers receive from the movies confirmation of their social status as stars of a sort, and even the very poor end up looking for shortcuts to success which is felt as the indistinct privilege of show businessmen and criminals. In *Sacred Games*, this logic is analysed in the advancement of the protagonist's great career as an offender, but it is also shown in the sadder story of an ordinary slumdog losing.

> The dead boy had wanted more than marriage for his sisters, he had wanted a television set and a gas range and a pressure cooker and a larger house. No doubt he had dreamed of a brand-new car … What he had dreamed was not impossible, there were men… who had begun with petty thefts and had gone on to own fleets of Opel Vectras and Honda Accords. And there were boys and girls who had come from dusty villages and now looked down at you from the

> hoardings, beautiful and unreal. It could happen. It did happen, and that's why people kept trying. It did happen. That was the dream, the big dream of Bombay.(226)

At every level, from the deep underbelly of the city's slums to its exclusive penthouse suites, life in Bombay tends to be aestheticized and led with an undercurrent inflected by media overtones, a fictional pose which recalls similar attitudes in London, Los Angeles, New York, Shanghai, Tokyo or Hong Kong. The intense fictional charting of its streets and characters and stories and places, recently carried out by cinema, television and literature have immensely added to its recognizability and its progressive transformation into the perfect totem of India's contradictory urban modernity: lively and chaotic, violent and full of hopes. Above all, Mumbai has seen a tumultuous increase in its narrativity; as its most inspired writer has said: "It was an ocean of stories; we were all its narrators, everybody talked at once".[24]

[24] Rushdie, *Moor*, 350.

The Loss of Innocence

Bombay, long reputed immune to India's ferocious communalism, saw the destruction of its innocence myth in a series of acts of violence perpetrated between 1992 and 1993 in the long bloody trail of terror which followed the destruction by a Hindu mob of the *Babri Mosque* in the northern town of Ayodhya. Spurred on for months by religious zealots, the rabble of fanatics had desecrated the building stone by stone, reducing it to smoking ashes in their belief that it had been constructed by the Mughal emperor Babar over the very birthplace of the Hindu god Rama. What had been acceptable for centuries had suddenly become intolerable.

Of all places, Bombay, the multi-faith, cosmopolitan, tolerant Bombay ignited the fire of blind retaliation and went to war with itself. The tragedy was consumed in three acts. The first saw the largely Hindu police confront a Muslim upheaval. The second wave followed some weeks later, probably fomented by the rumour of Hindu women abused by a "horde of circumcised". Instigated by the leader of the Shiv Sena, Bal Thackeray, the violence left behind it almost 2,000 victims, the majority of whom were Muslims. People were raped, lynched and set on fire; in most cases the police refraining from intervening. Finally, marking for good the transition from secular to post-secular Bombay, even the underworld took sides and the powerful Dawood Ibrahim, *don* of the Muslim mafia, began to smuggle explosives into town. On March 12, on the sadly famous 'Black Friday', ten deadly bomb blasts devastated Bombay in symbolic central locations, such as the Stock Exchange or the Air India building, killing hundreds of people.

Bombay was never the same again. The tragic dates of the riots and the blasts are each year relived with actual terror and people painstakingly avoid places and routes, with almost superstitious fear. The victims still exhibit their wounds; injuries are still open and aching.

> Now Mushtaq doesn't even know when to shit. He has been circling the city yelling mother-sister abuses for eight years, ever since his laundry-cum-clothes-rental shop at Anjieerwadi was gutted by neighboring slumdwellers. It was the night after the masjid was broken. The night people stopped being neighbors, cobblers, tailors, bakers, vendors, or drivers, and everyone turned Hindu or Muslim, Hindu against Muslim. It was the night some Hindus wished they weren't Hindu and most Muslims wished they weren't Muslim. When the curfew lifted three days later, Mushtaq rushed out like other anxious businessmen. He searched Anjieerwadi for his shop, not finding it where it should have been, as if shops could be mislaid. He ran in and out of the slum's gullies, refusing to believe that *that* fifteen square feet of ashen heap was his shop.[25]

[25] Tirewala, *No God*, 156.

With the atrocities of 1992-93 a certain symbolic geography which saw Bombay as a sort of city-state, independent and insulated against the landmass of the subcontinent and its communalist excesses, was irrevocably changed. It became painfully apparent that Mumbai had progressively transmuted into a centre of parochial sectarianism, whose declared intent was to change the value of its original cosmopolitanism into a threatening miscegenation and convert the image of its multiracial citizenship into a sort of hierarchical grid of internally homogeneous but rigidly separated communities. This drastic change in social climate was mainly due to the fundamentalist political organisation Shiv Sena, born in the mid-1960s as an anti-immigrant party, named after a warlord hero who had fought the Mughals off Maharashtra in the seventeenth-century (Shivaji). However, its aim was to keep the trappings of Bombay affluence within a single closed community of 'original' and 'pure' citizens, represented by the Marathi-speakers in a city of never ending immigration, disclaiming the rights of the last to come, and branding them as thieves of resources, houses and jobs. As a result, the selected victims of chauvinism kept changing, producing the somewhat paradoxical sensation that the demonised other was never the same…

> The Tamil had once been the feared newcomers into the city, the ones denounced and hated by the Rakshaks as the threatening outsiders who supposedly stole jobs and land. Now they were old Mumbaikars. …
>
> So now the Rakshaks protested about the Bangladeshi menace, and told 'unpatriotic' Indian Muslims to leave the country.[26]

[26] Chandra, *Games*, 219-20.

Even though the targets of their animosity would prove changeable, the Shiv Sena and its leader Bal Thackeray irretrievably inoculated the germ of

son-of-the-soil patriotism in the organism of the liberal city and tainted it with the ills of hatred and discrimination. Paradise was lost for good.

> "It was no longer my Bombay, no longer special, no longer the city of mixed-up, mongrel joy" laments the Moor, mourning over the desolate fate of his fallen mother-town:[27]

> O Bombay! *Prima in Indis! Gateway to India! Star of the East with her face to the West!* Like Granada … you were the glory of your time. But a darker time came upon you, and just as Boabdil, the last Nasrid Sultan, was too weak to defend his great treasure, so we, too, were proved wanting. For the barbarians were not only at our gates but within our skins. We were our own wooden horses, each one of us full of our doom. … We were both the bombers and the bombs. (372)

[27] Rushdie, *Moor*, 376.

The myth of the inclusive and peaceful town of the first post-independence years was shattered. Previously unthinkable scenarios opened both in fantasy and unfortunately also in reality. In *Sacred Games*, the participation of the criminal underworld in religious confrontation sees the gang-leader Gaitonde become entangled in a nightmare of destruction. Embracing a Hindu identity not only gives him political endorsement but also propels him into the arms of a plotting megalomaniac who plans to unleash a nuclear attack on the city. The novel conjures up the image of a Mumbai completely annihilated by a final act of cosmic violence and mass murder with the population of the metropolitan island reduced to a million stinking corpses.

But the news has not lagged behind. Under global media coverage Mumbai has become the latest spectacular scene of international terrorism with billions stuck to TV screens following the fate of its people and the temples of its worldly, tourist soul such as the Taj Mahal Hotel (the source, it was later calculated, of 80 messages, or 'tweets', sent every 5 seconds through the *Twitter* social network to communicate to the world in real time what was happening). On the one hand the city was targeted by terrorists because of its secular and westernised identity. On the other, the fact of being hit in the attacks and being subject to global media coverage highlighted and reinforced that very identity: a symbol too potent to be ignored by the forces of integralism, too lively to be destroyed. Once again the city represented India and was hit for this, but it was also the image of an India opening to the world, projected outside itself and hence hit again. The aura of a democratic, hospitable, broadminded community had faded but the ambiguous, contradictory city was still considered India's most symbolically important gateway. India's door has been slammed, we are confident it won't be permanently closed.

Oriana Palusci

The Elephant and the Refrigerator: Jhumpa Lahiri as Interpreter of Maladies

"Some people fall between the cracks"
(Jumpa Lahiri)

According to a well-established commonplace on multiculturalism, moving from one country to another, living a nomadic existence does create a new open-minded and richer identity. The *Financial Times* weekend issue celebrates this perspective in the page devoted to "Expat Lives", where successful transnational characters relate their wanderings throughout the world, enabling each of them to develop their skills and improve their professional opportunities. A plethora of hyphenated words have been coined – not only in English— to describe subjects belonging simultaneously to at least two different nations/cultures/languages. In the era of glocal nations borders contain the multiplicity of identities co-habiting contemporary diasporic individuals. Asian-American, South-Asian American,[1] Indian-American, Italian-American, Chinese-American and so forth denote a mutual belonging to worlds apart. These coordinative compounds – or "dvandva, Sanskrit term for a compound in which the relation between members is like that of coordination"[2] – should encourage a balance between the contradictory selves represented by the nationality nouns. Even if coordinative compounds are supposed to have two equivalent heads (i.e. Asian 'equal to' American), the tendency is to interpret compounds according to the Right-hand Head Rule (in this case American).[3] Consequently, it is not by chance that many postcolonial writers have rejected these terms, feeling that they sentence them either to a thorough integration with the nationality 'head-noun' or to existence in a no man's land, lost in translation. A statement by the Canadian cosmopolitan writer Yann Martel is highly relevant in this context:

> Sabine Sielke: You're Quebecois and your mother tongue is French, yet you write in English. I assume you consider yourself a citizen of the world?
> Yann Martel: No. I'm Canadian. I don't believe there are citizens of the world. Everyone is from somewhere, rooted in a particular culture. We're also citizens of the languages we speak. Some people speak many languages – I speak three, I'm a citizen of English, French and Spanish – but no one speaks World. World is not a language.
> Sabine Sielke: You prefer writing in English, obviously?
> Yann Martel: Yes, I grew up going to school in English. It's the language I learned to write in and to think in at my most subtle. But French and Spanish are dear to my heart.[4]

[1] South Asian American has a different meaning from Asian American, the latter referring to people of East Asian origin.

[2] P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 107.

[3] Thomas Roeper and Muffy E. A. Siegel, "Lexical Transformation for Verbal Compounds", *Linguistic Inquiry* 9.2 (Spring 1978), 199-260.

[4] Yann Martel and Sabine Sielke, "'The Empathetic Imagination': An Interview with Yann Martel", *Canadian Literature* 177 (Summer 2003), 12-32.

Is Martel French-Canadian, Quebec-Canadian or English-French-Canadian? Likewise, is Jhumpa Lahiri South Asian-British-American, Indian-American or Indian-Bengali-American? Once or twice hyphenated? Which label defines them best? Should Lahiri be included within the canon of American or of Indian literature? Criticism of Lahiri's work is also 'hyphenated'. While many interviews and articles have appeared in the United States, in India two books have been devoted entirely to her work.[5] One thing is sure: both Martel and Lahiri are citizens of the same language: English, be it in its Standard Canadian or American variety (Lahiri uses Standard USA spelling and lexis in her stories).

Lahiri is a second-generation writer of Bengali Indian parents who grew up and studied in New England. In her short stories she explores a point of view based on the difficulties of multiculturalism through characters who do not belong to the White American majority, as she suggests in a recent interview. Lahiri has insisted in many interviews, on being in-between cultures and languages. Asked if she would call herself an Asian-American author, she answers that "labels are restrictive and daunting. I've never felt American nor Indian. Some people fall between the cracks".[6] "Fall", here, also implies the danger of 'falling down', a loss of identity, a surrender of previous traditions and deep-felt beliefs. Devoid of a solid background, traditions and beliefs become empty rituals, unsubstantial shadows of a past the new Bengali generations living in the United States put aside or weakly cling to, in their efforts to achieve a deceptive American identity, to fully share an often elusive, slippery, uncertain American way of life. Disillusionment, resignation, emotional dislocation, lack of love and spiritual emptiness are the result of the characters' behaviour Lahiri probes in the wide range of short stories collected in her first two volumes *Interpreter of Maladies* (2000) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), as well as in her novel, *The Namesake* (2003).

If we follow the four categories, based on the "choice of locale – the physical, geographical, and cultural landscapes that form the backgrounds and contexts of works by most of these authors" outlined by Roshni Rustomji-Kerns in her introduction to *Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian American Writers*, we find that the majority of Lahiri's stories, with due exceptions, fall into the third category which "feature South Asian protagonists' lives in America".[7] By quoting this anthology I wish to underline the existence of a long standing tradition of diaspora writers migrating from the Indian subcontinent to North America, to which – alongside Chitra Divakaruni, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Kirin Narayan and many other women writers – Lahiri's name should be added. Winning the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for fiction – a prize for an American book by an American author – with *Interpreter of Maladies*, put the young author, and thus South Asian American voices in general, under the international spotlight.

[5] Suman Bala, *Jhumpa Lahiri: The Master Storyteller. A Critical Response to Interpreter of Maladies* (New Delhi: Khosla Publishing House, 2002) and Indira Nityanandam, *Jhumpa Lahiri. The Tale of the Diaspora* (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2005).

[6] Oriana Palusci, interview with Jhumpa Lahiri, Milan (8 July 2008), unpublished. Italian version in "Identità allo specchio. Jhumpa Lahiri e il realismo domestico", *Il Manifesto* (10 luglio 2008),13. See also Jhumpa Lahiri, "My Two Lives", *Newsweek* (6 March 2006), and Teresa Wiltz, "The Writer Who Began with a Hyphen" (8 October 2003),<www.washingtonpost.com>, 26 June 2008.

[7] Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, *Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian American Writers* (Boulder: Western Press, 1995), 4. A fundamental role in consolidating the visibility and achievements of transnational Indians is played by *India Abroad*, the oldest Indian weekly newspaper published in North America, advertised as "An Indispensable guide for Indian-Americans".

Fig. 1: *Washing India*, photograph, Jaipur, August 2007, courtesy of Veronica 76

Ironically two very different symbols of India and the United States – on the one side the powerful elephant, representing the strength and god-like vitality of this hugely populated country,[8] on the other the refrigerator as the triumph of domestic technology and well-fed bellies — blend together in "Only Goodness", a short story in *Unaccustomed Earth*. During the very American celebration of Halloween, the uprooted girl Sudha envisages a fancy suit for Rahul, her younger brother, born in the United States, who will become a miserable drunkard in his adult life: "She thought up elaborate Halloween costumes, turning him into an elephant or a refrigerator".[9] Asked why refrigerators seem to assume a relevant role, among the domestic objects that figure in her stories, Lahiri quotes a personal episode, explaining the rather surreal detail of Sudha's choice:

> I remember I once saw a boy dressed as a refrigerator and I was impressed, when I was young. When we went to India to visit our relatives, the refrigerator was a physical reminder of what we were and where we came from. Our refrigerator was taller than me. At the beginning very few people in India had refrigerators. In Bengali, at a certain point, I remember my aunt had a refrigerator with a key, so that servants couldn't open it. It was a priced object. When you have a refrigerator it's a totally different way of life.[10]

Diasporic Sudha dreams of a beautiful life for Rahul, after her own childhood has been wasted by the migrations of her family from Bengal to racist London in the 1960s, from London to Massachusetts. At school Sudha is unable "to present her autobiography", and can only exhibit a few casual pictures taken in London by Mr. Pal, their Bengali landlord: "None of these mattered after Rahul arrived. Sudha had slipped through the cracks, but she was determined that her little brother should leave his mark as a child in America".[11]

Lahiri does not deny the influence of the American literary tradition, and acknowledges Hawthorne as a master, so that her second collection of stories, *Unaccustomed Earth*, starts with an epigraph distilled from Hawthorne's "The Custom-House", referring to the fact that Hawthorne's children (Una, Julian, Rose), by being born respectively in Concord, Boston and Lenox, and not in Salem, had avoided the sterility of too long a lineage of ancestors and the dangers of a dull, repetitive existence.[12] Behind "The Custom-House" lies, of course, the 'scandalous tale' of Hester Prynne

[8] The elephant is an integral part of the cultural history of India. It symbolizes the strength of the mind in Buddhism and stands generally as a symbol of eternal India.

[9] Jhumpa Lahiri, "Only Goodness", in *Unaccustomed Earth* (London, Bloomsbury, 2008), 136.

[10] Palusci, "Unpublished Interview".

[11] Lahiri, "Only Goodness", 136.

[12] See, among others, Gillian Brown, "Hawthorne's American History", in Richard H. Millington, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 121-142.

in *The Scarlet Letter*, but Lahiri seems to be satisfied with Hawthorne's introduction to his historical romance. The "unaccustomed [urban] earth" a few miles away from Salem, strikes a slightly ironical note, compared with the huge cultural and geographical gap dividing Bengali (one of the manifold facets of India) and New England (one of the manifold facets of the United States). It is also true that Hawthorne travelled with his family, taking up residence in England and Italy, two European countries well known to Lahiri, who has lived most of her existence in New England, but was born in London (thus making Sudha one of her most autobiographical characters) and visited Rome, the site of her conclusive story in *Unaccustomed Earth*. In both her collections, Lahiri's characters cross the globe, migrate from one country to another, settle down, reluctantly leaving behind and secretly cramming into their baggage memories and ways of seeing, while still hoping to crystallise remnants of their homeland culture in their daily life by sticking with people from their own country, thus establishing a 'little Indian Bengali abroad' in which caste imperatives evaporate into thin air. Differences considered insurmountable in India appear irrelevant in the United States, although a sense of loneliness defines each individual in the American-Indian community. Be it by way of "drawstring pajamas", "a packet of loose Darjeeling tea" or a wife selected through an arranged marriage in the homeland of one's ancestors, cultures undergo deep scrutiny and gain significance exactly because they project a sense of longing never to be completely satisfied. In the short story "The Third and Final Continent", the first-person nameless narrator's initiation to life requires a long journey through space – geographical space, from India, to Great Britain, to the United States — in order to acknowledge some aspects of an 'Indianness' which are dangerously given for granted, forgotten, excluded from daily life. Only after his newly wed wife Mala arrives in Boston (a marriage arranged in Calcutta by his family) does the narrator, who believes he has adjusted to "cornflakes and milk" and the new life in America, realise he "speaks Bengali for the first time in America":[13] "We ate with our hands, another thing I had not yet done in America" (192). As a foreigner in his own national heritage, he observes Mala's elegant saris and wedding bracelets, the vermillion in her hair with curiosity. Lahiri disseminates her writing with culture-bound items related to the home of her characters' ancestors: food, clothing, customs, place-names and family names crop up in her American English, but not in the way a travel writer would employ them or a tourist from another country. Sudha, Rahul, Raj and Mina Das, Mala, Hena, Kaushik, Dr. Choudhuri, Parul Di, Mr. Kapasi embody their diasporic selfhood through their names. Lahiri's Bengali home-bound lexicon placidly makes room and settles down in the English language, enriching it through the addition of cultural terms rooted in a far away land, translated into the target language texture

[13] Jhumpa Lahiri, "The Third and Final Continent", in *Interpreter of Maladies* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 191.

by her characters. The author was in fact surprised to see that the Italian translation of *Unaccustomed Earth* was provided with a Glossary.[14]

At the end of "The Third and Final Continent", the nameless protagonist is ready to visit the house of old Mrs Croft – the centennial lady who had rented him a cheap room on his arrival in Boston. The moon landing, watched on television on July 20 1969, blends in his memory together with the consciousness that the past has not vanquished, it is still alive, and that maybe, being American means to apprehend both the new technological world and the old habits and recollections. Thus Lahiri engages the male protagonist of her story – a narrative portrait of her father? – in yet another voyage, significantly juxtaposing his 'awakening' with the slow acquaintance of his wife, Mala, the 'stranger' from Calcutta revitalising, through her presence and habits, the language of his forsaken self. In order to speak about Mala, the protagonist recalls details and aspects of his home culture; positioning himself as a mediator between worlds, he voices what for him – after all a migrant in Boston — is a form of in-bred knowledge of the female world:

> I wondered if Mrs. Croft had ever seen a woman in sari, with a dot painted on her forehead and bracelets stacked on her wrists. I wondered what she would object to. I wondered if she could see the red dye still vivid on Mala's feet, all but obscured by the bottom edge of her sari.[15]

Two polarities play with one another in Lahiri's stories: her characters cover great geographical distances, live in a rootless condition, but their life is still encoded in the pattern of everyday domestic experiences. On the other hand, homes conceal secrets, unhappiness, mutual hostility. The writer is well aware of it, as she states "Homes have both a material and a metaphorical meaning. … Homes left behind. Homes recreated elsewhere. Houses are so foreign to me. … I feel a strange contradiction, a sense of being a refugee within the home".[16] Everyday life and family relationships – involving sexes and generations – are surgically dissected and reassembled so that what looks banal and routine opens up windows into memories, the past, distant lands and desires. The intricate structure and fine texture of her work bring to mind that of Alice Munro, the Canadian short story writer, who is much admired by Lahiri. North America has a long and solid tradition of short story writing, starting with Edgar Allan Poe; so too does Indian English literature.[17] Munro's personal contribution is to polish the sentence to the essential, making it allusive, ambiguous, pregnant with meaning, while weaving seemingly distant lives into her stories. This is what Lahiri succeeds in doing in her best stories, while she replaces Munro's provincial Ontario setting with a map of the world consisting of distant lands of the heart.

[14] Palusci, "Unpublished Interview". See Jhumpa Lahiri, *Una nuova terra* (Parma: Guanda, 2008), 367-369.

[15] Jhumpa Lahiri, "The Third and Final Continent", 195.

[16] Palusci, "Unpublished Interview".

[17] See Suman Bala, "Jhumpa Lahiri: The Master Storyteller", in Bala, *Jhumpa Lahiri: The Master Storyteller*, 9-16.

A sophisticated artist from the very beginning of her production, Lahiri selects Hawthorne as a sort of Virgilian guide through her limbo of shy and careworn heroes and heroines; behind Hawthorne we glimpse another writer, Henry James, an expatriate himself, whose artistic subtlety, irony and ambiguity have certainly influenced the structure of some of Lahiri's best short stories. On the other hand, if we take into proper consideration Lahiri's "Interpreter of Maladies", the title story of her first collection, composed of nine short stories, we also detect the influence of Edward Moragan Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). Intertextuality is an essential tool for reading Lahiri, who reverses Forster's title and re-defines it as "A passage to America". Both passages end in failure: in Forster's novel the English are unable to embrace the vastness and complexity of India also because their role of colonisers undermines any possibility of friendship and mutual understanding, while in most of Lahiri's stories the Bengali migrants – often professional, wealthy people — are doomed to be totally assimilated and, at the same time, to live in unhappiness and nostalgia, until their roots are totally severed by their offspring. A different lot awaits first- and second-generation migrants to the United States, Lahiri tells us, as the process of integration, imbued at school and by society, increasingly cuts away the tenuous threads with the parents' country of origin, as in the case of Rahul in the short story quoted above, or in many other characters she portrays, where India tends to be embodied by the figure of the mother, who at times upholds Indian secular tradition, at other times modernity. Hema, the narrative I in "Once in a Lifetime", the first of the three stories forming Part II of *Unaccustomed Earth*, perceives for instance the deep contrast between her mother and her beloved Kaushik's mother: in India the two women would have never had the occasion to meet as they belonged to different social classes:

> They talked about the lives they had left behind in Calcutta: your mother's beautiful home in Jodhpur Park, with hibiscus and rosebuds blooming on the rooftop, and my mother's [Hema's] modest flat in Maniktala, above a grimy Punjabi restaurant, where seven people existed in three small rooms (225).

If the national personification of India after Independence was to be found in the Bollywood 1957 film *Mother India*, directed by Mehboob Khan, where Rahda, interpreted by Nargis Dutt, desperately fights for her children, her village and her dignity, the life of these two female expatriates reads as a double version of Indian motherhood abroad: the more traditional and the modern sophisticated Americanized lady. Both women had had an arranged marriage; they are not poor and destitute, yet each in her own way is uprooted, clinging desperately to homebound cultural values and family ties within the Bengali community in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Forster's *A Passage to India* and the film directed by David Lean in 1984 both play a role in the development of the short story "Interpreter of Maladies", especially through the episode of the journey to the Marabar Caves, enthusiastically planned by the ambitious Mr. Aziz for his two distinguished English guests, Mrs. Moore and her would-be daughter-in-law Adela. The day ends in disaster as the innocent Aziz is arrested and charged with molesting the white girl, while Mrs. Moore is haunted by a nightmare of cosmic emptiness and chaos inside the caves. In "Interpreter of Maladies", one of the three stories set in India, Mr. Kapasi, a Bengali English speaking friendly guide, drives a car with a second- generation family of Bengali descent living in New Jersey, which allows them to visit the Sun Temple at Konarak, in Orissa. The young couple reveals their Indian origin, but does not seem proud of it: they behave like perfect Western tourists, shooting photos, commenting chattily on their holidays, explaining a few superficial details of the landscape to their children, the girl Tina and the boys Bobby and Ronny (also the name of Mrs. Moore's son who should marry Adela in *A Passage to India*). In fact, Mr. and Mrs. Das – Raj and Mina – were born in the United States and travel occasionally to India only in order to meet their parents, who have returned to Assansol, in West Bengal. Second-generation offspring, their degree of Americanization is displayed through their children's English sounding names. It is interesting to notice that the narrative point of view in the story is that of the Indian guide, even if we know him only by his surname, while all the members of the Das family are given a forename. Sudhir Dixit, in speaking of "names as symbols of identity" in Lahiri's stories, points out that to call Mr. Kapasi by his surname suggests "a representative characterization".[18] I believe Dixit's remark is true in some of the other stories in the collection, but in this case it is difficult to say that Mr. Kapasi, who speaks many languages, is just a sort of allegory of a faceless nationality.

In fact, this genuine Indian character – the only one in "Interpreter of maladies" – is fascinated by Mrs. Das, by her bare legs, the seductive strawberry sewn on her blouse, her easy-going behavior, and excited when the lady is intrigued by the story of his life and his other job as an "interpreter" in a doctor's office:

> "What does a doctor need an interpreter for?"
> "He has a number of Gujarati patients. My father was Gujarati, but many people do not speak Gujarati in this area, including the doctor. And so the doctor asked me to work in his office, interpreting what the patients say" … ["A job] so romantic," Mrs. Das said dreamily breaking her extended silence.(50)

As a translator, Mr. Kapasi considers himself an ideal go-between among different languages, and the fact that Mrs. Das is sympathetic to him and

[18] Sudhir Dixit, "Names as Symbols of Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's Stories", in Bala, *Jhumpa Lahiri*, 63. Names are essential in Lahiri's writing, as can be clearly seen in *The Namesake*, which revolves around the protagonist's name, Gogol – particularly demanding for an American of Indian origin, 21. Lahiri, "Interpreter of Maladies", 50.

even asks him for his address in order to send him the photographs of their Indian journey raises his brightest expectations. They will write letters to each other: "In its own way this correspondence would fulfill his dream, of serving as an interpreter between nations"(59).

It does not matter if the disturbing sculptures of the ancient Temple of the Sun, with their explicit erotic meaning, do not elicit any reaction from the American family, who "looked Indian" but dressed and spoke with "accents [which] sounded just like the ones Mr. Kapasi heard on American television programs"(49). Especially Raj Das, the science school teacher, with a "camera slung around his neck, with an impressive telephoto lens", is concentrated on the photographs he obsessively shoots. The family views the human beings and animals on the road in the most superficial way, like the most conventional tourists, singling out images of their stereotypical idea of India. The car is stopped to shoot a photo of the monkeys, who have bounced onto it. It is stopped once again to allow Mr. Das to take "a picture of a barefoot man, his head wrapped in a dirty turban, seated on top of a cart of grain sacks pulled by a pair of bullocks. Both the man and the bullocks were emaciated"(49). This last shot by Mr. Das perfectly immortalizes a country to be pitied, a place of poor and starving people, typical of a tour book on India printed abroad, and to be kept at a safe distance. The plump Mina Das, who complains about the car not being air-conditioned, has no such problem. Her refrigerator is obviously full.

"Interpreter of Maladies" is also a story about tourism and its pitfalls: on the whole when literature deals with tourism, it usually focuses on the negative, controversial aspects of this widespread industry, and stresses the conflicting points of view of the tourist, the touree, and the native guide. [19] The cheapness and silliness of the remarks attributed to the Das family underlie their newly acquired spotless American identity. India has been digested and assimilated, or rather, reduced to a few snapshots, souvenirs for the children, a guidebook in the hands of Mr. Das, the middle-class leader of the small expedition, only slightly less prejudiced than his grumbling and bored wife. Lahiri is more generous with Hema, the main character of "Going Ashore", the final story in *Unaccustomed Earth*, but Hema, whose knowledge of home is more authentic, heart-felt, is a scholar and a researcher on Latin and Etruscan antiquities, and the Jamesianlike writer, together with her heroine, succumbs to the beauty of the Italian past.

In "Interpreter of Maladies" Lahiri seems to lead her readers towards an obvious conclusion. The Indian tourist guide, whose source in America is the TV serial *Dallas*, does not give due weight to the fact that the scrap of paper on which he writes "his address in clear, careful letters" had been "hastily ripped from a page of her film magazine", the same "folded Bombay

[19] See Graham Dann, "Revisiting the Language of Tourism: What Tourists and Tourees are Saying" and Carlo Pagetti, "Visita al Maelstrom: Edgar Allan Poe e le modalità del racconto turistico", in Clotilde de Stasio and Oriana Palusci, eds., *The Languages of Tourism. Turismo e mediazione* (Milano: Unicopli, 2007), 15-32, 165-172.

film magazine written in English" that Mina fanned herself with. Lahiri – the translator of cultures— spreads clues and ironic touches. Mr. Kapasi will be bitterly disappointed when a second tour, suggested by him, triggers a minor accident, involving Bobby, frightened and slightly wounded by a fastidious bunch of monkeys. (Monkeys, by the way, are not mentioned in Forster's *A Passage to India*, but they crowd the landscape of the cinematic version by David Lean). Besides, Mr. and Mrs. Das do not grasp the cultural implication of the word *hanuman*, the monkeys named after the Hindu monkey-god Hanuman, thus representing the sacred monkeys of India. While monkeys abound, no real elephant is in sight except "a picture of the elephant god taped to the glove compartment" (45) in the car Mr Kapasi is driving and the carved "procession of elephants" near the statues of the naked lovers in the Sun Temple. In any case, the slip of paper on which Kapasi has written his address "fluttered away in the wind", while Mrs. Das reaches for a hairbrush in her bag to smooth Bobby's hair:

> No one but Kapasi noticed. He watched as it rose, carried higher and higher by the breeze, into the trees where the monkeys now sat, solemnly observing the scene below. Mr. Kapasi observed it too, knowing that this was the picture of the Das family he would preserve forever in his mind. (69)

Ironically, Kapasi's gaze below is compared with the monkeys' gaze above. In both perspectives India does not 'connect', does not belong to the same level of reality the Indian American tourists inhabit. This implication is made clear also through the intertextual web linking "Interpreter of Maladies" to *A Passage to India*, so that the visit to "the hills at Udayagiri and Khandagiri" – "there's something mentioned about it [in the guidebook]. Built by a Jain king or something"(60) according to Mr. Das, "there is much to explain about the caves" according to Mr. Kapasi (62) – acquires a dark undertone. Mrs. Das, alone in the car with Mr. Kapasi, unburdens herself of a secret she had never told: Bobby was conceived with an occasional Punjabi friend of her husband, "staying with them for a week for some job interviews in the New Brunswick area"(64), and now she wants to know from the Indian interpreter of maladies ('maladies' now more correctly meaning spiritual, not physical, diseases) what she should do to heal her "terrible urges"(65). Thus, a real communicative process has been finally established between two very different figures, although one might stress the fact that Mrs. Das is the one who asks, while Mr. Kapasi has only to supply a convenient answer: "Eight years, Mr. Kapasi. I've been in pain eight years. I was hoping you could help me feel better, say the right thing. Suggest some kind of remedy"(65). Mr. Kapasi replies with another question: "Is it really pain you feel, Mrs. Das, or is it guilt?"(66). He tries to reach into the woman's

soul, and, of course, he fails. All of a sudden, the epiphanic instant is lost. Mrs. Das does not want to be genuinely helped and Mr. Kapasi is not a healer, not a doctor like Forster's Aziz, only a well-meaning cicerone and driver for rich tourists. Whatever India the American-like family has seen (or rather not seen), they have completed their voyage:

> "God, let's get out of here, "Mrs. Das said. She folded her arms across the strawberry on her chest. "This place gives me the creeps"
> "Yeah. Back to the hotel, definitely," Mr. Das agreed. (68)

The strawberry attached to Mina Das's blouse is a fit substitution for the heart she has stifled inside her, together with her forgotten Indian identity. Maybe Mr. Kapasi is wrong: the slip of paper with his address on it was not removed by chance by a mediocre casual adulteress, but deliberately thrown away. No relation is possible, no positive ending, no secret revealed, no dream fulfilled. As an interpreter of maladies Mr. Kapasi has failed. Lahiri takes the place of her benign character, with the wisdom of an artist and the irony of her subtle language. Now it is her turn to explore the secrets of the soul, to seek for the heart under the strawberry, the scarlet letter denied and demeaned, by metaphorically doing what Mr. Kapasi is not allowed to do. She follows the Das family – or, rather, their fictional counterparts – to the unaccustomed earth of America.

But yet, as often happens in reading Lahiri's stories, there is still another possible thread to follow: Mina Das's blouse, "decorated at chest-level with a calico appliqué in the shape of a strawberry"(46), reminds us of Hester Prynne's red scarlet uppercase letter A, placed on "the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread"[20] to signal her sin – adultery. That letter will be embellished and made precious by the fallen woman. From Puritan Boston and from Hawthorne's masterpiece, Lahiri draws out another red mark on another American woman's bosom, where it tells the secret truth of a young lady betraying her newly wed husband of Bengali descent and accidentally conceiving a baby boy. Lahiri's story resounds with parodic overtones: the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale is replaced by an Indian, a man from Punjab, himself a diasporic character, hoping to settle far from his homeland, about whom the reader knows very little (he is married "to a Punjabi girl", lives in London and exchanges Christmas cards and the ubiquitous family photos). Mina Das is no Hester Prynne, even if she shares with her an act of sexual rebellion and sin. Her deep secret – adultery – is revealed, in the land of her ancestors, where ancient caves loom in the background, to a total stranger, who is also an Indian and can be easily discarded, erased. Thus, Mina has not only light-heartedly betrayed her husband but also her son Bobby, who will forever ignore his true

[20] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (London: Penguin, [1850]1986), 80.

father, and her Indian heritage, in favour of an American way of life – short skirts and nail polish – in which exterior values prevail over spiritual ones. She is not interested in the caves, in their historical and spiritual importance. She ignores the existence of The Hathigumpha cave (or "Elephant cave") with its precious inscription. We might imagine her refrigerator heavy with cold, tasteless dishes. No elephant in sight indeed, only a world of monkeys, aping human beings.

C. Maria Laudando

A Line of Yoricks. Salman Rushdie's Bastard Legacies between East and West

East, West

> But I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, *choose*, *choose*. I buck, I snort, I whinny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoes, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose.
>
> (Salman Rushdie, *East, West*)

Since the beginning of his career Salman Rushdie has unflinchingly sustained and translated his otherwise all-too-dangerously unsteady location between East and West as an empowering gift, both in fictional and critical terms: the gift of "inventing new parents … [and] giving birth to fathers and mothers".[1]

In his short story "Yorick", Rushdie's reconstruction of a whole hybridized genealogy of Fools seems to respond, for all its ludicrous overtones, to a similar generative and translational dynamic. [2] Accordingly, this paper discusses the text as a complex palimpsest of literary, linguistic and cultural traces, echoes and influences, locating the author's storytelling between and beyond two of the most exemplary texts of the Western canon: *Hamlet* and *Tristram Shandy*. Moving to and fro between Shakespeare and Sterne, Rushdie's revisionary virulence heightens, parodies and exploits to the full the carnivalesque, 'motley' character of Shakespeare's fool and his equivocal heir, Parson Yorick. At every level the palimpsestic interplay of uncertain filiations and precarious affiliations contributes to disrupting a linear, univocal transmission of names, meanings, families, stories and texts. Although Rushdie's short story seems firmly anchored to the literature of the West, the West itself is furtively and obliquely re-inscribed by the author's stereoscopic vision, becoming a hybrid parchment of spurious fragments and bastard characters.

Originally published in 1982, "Yorick" was slightly revised and reprinted in 1994 in *East, West*, a single collection of nine separate stories, six of which had already been published and re-arranged *a posteriori* in the tripartite symmetrical structure of the book: "East", "West", and "East, West".[3] As usual with Rushdie, the emphatic repetition of East and West in the three sections of the text, however, works as a false track for the readers naively expecting to find clear demarcations and passages from one section

[1] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Pan Books, Picador edition, 1982), 108.

[2] "Yorick" was published twice: originally in *Encounter*, 59.3-4 (September/October 1982), 3-8, and then in a slightly revised form in Salman Rushdie, *Est, West* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994, repr. London: Vintage, 1995), 63-83. Quotations all refer to the latter edition; references will henceforth be included in the text.

[3] Although this symmetry is "more seeming than substantial" from a strictly chronological point of view (see Stefano Manferlotti, "Salman Rushdie's Short Stories", *Textus* 11.1 (1998), 39), it responds to Rushdie's need to assemble the previous stories as gradual steps towards a more coherent design for his collection.

to the next. Instead of neat signposts and partitions, each story ambiguously resists a safe anchorage to a single section. Rather, they oscillate between the location and the dislocation of commonplaces, of real and imaginary landscapes, and of broken, scattered memories. Each tale, endowed with its own peculiar physiognomy, contributes to exploring the interstitial and translational process that has marked Rushdie's existential and literary formation as a migrant writer, sharing the crucial questions of all his work: "home, exile and change among them".[4]

As the author himself revealed in an interview, his divided yet unresolved position between East and West was somehow condensed in the very punctuation of the title: "'I said to people when I started thinking of calling the stories East, West that the most important part of the title was the comma. Because it seems to me that I am that comma – or at least that I live in the comma'".[5] The comma in the title marks the space of the interval, the interstices between different localities and temporalities, creating a "third space" from the interruption and disruption of the migrant's life caught between past and future, memories and expectations, desire and frustration, home and the world.[6] In addition to the mute eloquence of that piece of punctuation, the very wording of the title helps to elicit complex questions of geographical and cultural belonging, for it ironically echoes two much abused expressions of Englishness. 'East, West' is, indeed, the beginning of the familiar saying "East, West – Home's best", but also the opening line of one of Kipling's most controversial ballads, "The Ballad of East and West": "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet". The less well-known lines that follow seem however to work as a counterstatement: "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,/ When two strong men stand face to face/ tho' they come from the ends of the earth!".[7] As Florence Cabaret suggests, the line "may point either to the irreconcilable nature of the two territories or to their possible merging thanks to the relationships between people from the two areas", so that Rushdie's truncated quotation of the ballad's infamous beginning may allude to the deep ambivalence and impossible choice lying at the heart of the whole collection.[8]

As to "Yorick", the short story obviously belongs to the section entitled "West", but its textual location undergoes the same estranging process of dislocation and radical fragmentation as the whole of the collection. One might almost hazard the suggestion that it is the story's all too familiar title that spurs its author's iconoclastic response, arraying a whole series of defamiliarising strategies against its canonic weight. In this respect, Rushdie's "Yorick" may also be interpreted as a caricature of the author's own "eagerness to dis-locate and relocate famous texts of English culture",[9] so that the very name of Yorick literally entitles the story to being included in a book provocatively called *East, West*. If at first glance

[4] Anonymous, "Homeless Is Where the Art Is" (1994), in Michael Reder, ed., *Conversations with Salman Rushdie*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississipi, 2000), 163.

[5] Ibid.

[6] As Homi K. Bhabha acknowledges in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), ix, Salman Rushdie's writings have had a strong impact on his elaboration of the concept of the third space as the space opening a possibility of cultural hybridity.

[7] Rudyard Kipling, *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973), 234.

[8] Florence Cabaret, "From Location to Dislocation in Salman Rushdie's *East, West* and Rohinston Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baay*", in Martha Dvořák and W. H. New, eds, *Tropes and Territories. Short Fiction, Postcolonial Readings, Canadian Writing in Context* (Montreal and Ithaca NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 172-73.

[9] Ibid.

the text may strike the readers as a fanciful sort of extravaganza, yet at a deeper level it entertains a paradigmatic relationship with Rushdie's authorial project of assembling new and already-printed material under this title: "Yorick" shares not only the same revisionary agenda as all the other stories (in line with Rushdie's life-long exploration of geographic, linguistic, national, and cultural boundaries), but also the conception of the whole text as a fragmented assemblage of distinct tales. As such it urges its readers to make what Cabaret terms "a double reading" – one that is both metonymic (as each short story stands for the whole) and metaphoric (as thematic and symbolic motifs incessantly shift from one story to another). [10] From this perspective, the palimpsestic mélange of intertextual fragments in "Yorick", each resonating with a characteristic narrative regime and a different stylistic imprint, may also work as a caricatural *mise en abyme* of the writerly and readerly effect of the collection as a whole, made of fragmented and partially overlapping stories. It is worth noting that the main difference between the first version of "Yorick" and the one included in the collection concerns the segmentation of the text, apart from a few cases of semantic change. The earlier version is divided into five sections of much the same length; whereas the latter provides many more disjunctions and intervals in the layout, even isolating single paragraphs – like the opening monologue with its abrupt digressions, or the part that is interrupted by impatient readers/spectators, the list of a monstrous banquet and so on. In a way, even the paratextual re-arrangement and re-location of "Yorick" in *East, West* seem to suggest a further dramatization of its cultural displacement and textual dismemberment.

[10] Idem, 169. The caricature of this fragmented reading in "Yorick" is further illustrated in a note at the end of Cabaret's paper (175).

Imaginary Homelands

If the reprinting of "Yorick" in *East, West* is coherent with the overall design of the collection, at the same time it is equally significant that the story should first have been published over a decade earlier, only one year after the 1981 Booker Prize winning-novel, *Midnight's Children*, and the same year as the seminal essay on "Imaginary Homelands" that would lend its suggestive title to Rushdie's first collection of essays and criticism in 1991. In this essay, conceived as the author's own intervention in the worldwide debate still going on around his ground-breaking novel of the previous year, Rushdie begins to come to terms with his vocation as a "literary migrant" and to vindicate the right "to choose his parents", [11] invoking for himself the same empowering gift he had conceded to Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of his first family saga. In the case of Indian writers in English the creative process cannot escape the tense, ambivalent confrontation with "a

[11] "Imaginary Homelands" (1982), in Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 21.

second tradition", which may be consciously exploited and reinterpreted as a means of enriching the writer's own cultural inheritance and as a pre-text for a continuous process of transnational crossover and revision. Indeed, it is by virtue of what Rushdie calls "the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group" that he feels most confident in claiming for himself the same artistic freedom as that enjoyed by Western writers:

> Art is a passion of the mind. And the imagination works best when it is most free. Western writers have always felt free to be eclectic in their selection of theme, setting, form; Western visual artists have, in this century, been happily raiding the visual storehouses of Africa, Asia, the Philippines. I am sure that we must grant ourselves an equal freedom. (20)

The power of choosing one's parents and the freedom to happily raid the treasures of Western literature lies at the heart of "Yorick", which assembles motifs and echoes from the most popular Shakespearean tragedy, *Hamlet*, with the ironical modes of the most eccentric novel of the English canon, *Tristram Shandy*, a novel ambiguously divided *avant la lettre* between modernism and postmodernism.[12] It is not accidental that Western critics have often indicated the latter text as a possible source of inspiration for the rambling digressions of *Midnight's Children*, even though Rushdie has always downplayed its influence in favor of stronger ties with the millenarian tradition of Indian oral storytelling.

The present paper suggests the same generative, translational matrix for Rushdie's short story and his acclaimed novel of 1981, a matrix that uncannily resembles and dissembles Rushdie's intertextual abuse of his literary predecessors: the narrative plotting of the narrator-protagonist's parental, national and cultural inheritance in terms of a family saga – a saga that will prove vulnerable to a plurality of beginnings and hybrid affiliations. In other words, the precarious condition of the migrant facing a perplexing plurality of legacies is explored, or better, translated by Rushdie into a narrative of disputable conceptions and dubious ties that simultaneously intertwine both the genealogical and literary level. Whereas the novel develops the theme of individual and collective belonging into a fabulous epic historiography of post-Independence India, the short story comprises the question of the migrant writer's second tradition within a farcical palimpsest of surrogate parents and multiple ancestors. In both cases, the narrative is initiated as a series of spurious false starts leading finally to the disintegration of the protagonists and the dissemination of their equivocal heirs. As Saleem has to choose between too many parents, so too Rushdie's "Yorick" has to confront the influence of too many predecessors competing for authorial recognition.

[12] On the controversial location of Sterne's writings see David Pierce and Peter de Voogd, eds., *Laurence Sterne in Modernism and Postmodernism* (Amsterdam and Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1996), in particular Carol Watts, "The Modernity of Sterne", 19-38.

Spurious Beginnings and Double Plottings

> But there are other mothers-to-be, other future fathers, wafting in and out through the silence.
> (Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*)

The very incipit of Rushdie's short story "Yorick" makes all too clear that his rewriting of *Hamlet* is inspired and in a way authorized through the same material source as Sterne's is for *Tristram Shandy*'s Parson Yorick. No sooner has Sterne's narrator introduced the Parson's name, than he immediately hastens to explain: "as appears from a most ancient account of the family, wrote upon strong vellum, and now in perfect preservation".[13] The document is itself a palimpsest and as such the most apposite support for the intertextual play that characterizes the novel at large, serving explicitly to authenticate the Danish origin of Yorick's name – which is tantamount to authenticating the Parson's descent from *Hamlet*'s famous jester. The passage introducing Rushdie's precious family record is not however limited to a parenthetical remark as in Sterne, but is elaborated and structured as a sort of dramatic 'aside' to the readers/spectators, in terms which exasperate Tristram's self-complacent and rambling accents as well as his irrepressible penchant for self-interruptions and digressions. Rushdie's tale opens with a hyperbolic, almost hysterical monologue:

> Thank the heavens! – or the diligence of ancient-time papersmiths – for the existence upon our earth of the material known as *strong vellum*; which, like the earth upon which I have supposed it to exist (although in point of fact its contacts with *terra firma* are most rare, its natural habitations being shelves, wooden or not wooden, some dusty, others maintained in excellent order; or letter-boxes, desk drawers, old trunks, the most secret pockets of courting lovers, shops, files, attics, cellars, museums, deed-boxes, safes, lawyers' offices, doctors' walls, your favourite great-aunt's seaside home, theatrical property departments, fairy tales, summit conferences, tourist traps), … like the earth, I say again in case you have forgot my purpose, this noble stuff endures – if not for ever, then at least till men consciously destroy it, whether by crumpling or shredding, … , by actions incendiary or lavatorial, _ for it's a true fact that men take an equal pleasure in annihilating both the ground upon which they stand while they live and the substance (I mean paper) upon which they may remain, immortalized, once this same ground is over their heads instead of under their feet; and that the complete inventory of such strategies of destruction would over-fill more pages than my ration, … so then to the devil with that list and on with my story; which, as I had begun to say, is itself the tale of a piece of vellum – both the tale of the vellum itself and the tale inscribed thereupon. (63-64)

The passage opens and closes with the reference to the *strong vellum*, celebrated as a noble and enduring material; yet its solidity is soon disrupted by the two long digressions *à la Sterne* that intervene in between. The

[13] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, ed. by, Graham Petrie (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1985), 52-53.

first provides a humorous inventory of unsteady dislocations from *terra firma*, by enumerating all sorts of possible arrangements for such documents. Whereas the second only embarks on a preliminary discourse but is abruptly interrupted because a list of destructive human energies would prove excessively encumbering. Located within such a discouraging framework of interminable caveats, the strong vellum turns out to be precariously balanced between preservation and deterioration, transmission and censorship, destruction and recreation, and what comes to the fore is not so much its noble resistance but its physical vulnerability to all sorts of location and dislocation, change and abuse. In this way the parchment is literally and figuratively unravelled as a palimpsest of erased sources and traces that juxtaposes "both the tale of the vellum itself and the tale inscribed thereupon". By pointing to its multilayered texture, it not only bears testimony to the family narrative but also to the parallel tale of the manipulations to which any text as a physical object is always exposed. Here, as in Sterne's novel, the focus is on the palimpsestic quality of the text, indeed of any text, and thus on the controversial issue of origin and originality. Rushdie's short story opens ironically with the vulnerable legitimacy of its familial and literary source, amplifying Sterne's parodic use of the XVIIIth century narrative cliché of providing material evidence into a palimpsest that even suggests a global network of economic transactions. The latter point is elucidated by Adelaine La Guardia Nogueira as follows:

> The materiality of writing is recalled by the word *vellum*, as a whole economic history of writing involving East and West is synthesized in such reference, for the *vellum*, a parchment originally made from calf skin, came as a substitute to the papyrus made in the East, after an embargo of the product by the Greek City of Pergamon. Destruction, therefore, is not restricted to the writing practices but affects the whole economy which involves and controls the writing and reading activities.[14]

[14] Adelaine La Guardia Nogueira, "Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Rushdie's 'Yorick', and the Dilemmas of Tradition", in Aimara da Cunha Resende, ed., *Foreign Accents: Brazilian Readings of Shakespeare* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 2002), 144.

If Rushdie shares the same authorial preoccupation as Sterne with regard to the 'worldly', material circumstances involved in writing and reading, both authors also have in common their deconstruction of familial genealogies and thus their questioning of any naive assumption of literary origin. If we turn to *Tristram Shandy* and the passage that introduces the character of Parson Yorick, the focus soon shifts from the strong vellum to the expectations that such a name may elicit in the readers' imagination. Gradually the initial scenario of a perfect preservation of Yorick's lineage is undermined by the risk of alteration and fragmentation attending the very transmission of family surnames, even in the most entitled cases:

> *YORICK was this parson's name*, and, what is very remarkable in it, … it had been exactly so spelt for near, – I was within an ace of saying nine hundred

> years; _ but I would not shake my credit in telling an improbable truth, however indisputable in itself; _ and therefore I shall content myself with only saying, _ *It had been exactly so spelt, without the least variation or transposition of a single letter, for I do not know how long*; which is more than I would venture to say of *one half of the best surnames in the kingdom*; which, *in a course of years, have generally undergone as many chops and changes as their owners* …. But a villainous affair it is, and will one day *so blend and confound us all together*, that no one shall be able to stand up and swear, 'That his own great grandfather was the man who did either this or that'.(52-53, emphasis mine)

But such a remarkable preservation of every single letter in the name of Yorick very soon appears hard to sustain, for readers are explicitly alerted to the need to check the case in the authoritative source for *Hamlet*'s storyline, the *Historiae Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus, where no such a name is actually to be found. Sterne's narrator cunningly leaves the task to his readers: "I have not the time to look into Saxo-Grammaticus Danish history, to know the certainty of this; – but if you have leisure, and can get easily at the book, you may do it full as well yourself"(53-54). For his own part, he prefers to further insinuate a suspicion of corruption and ambiguity for his Parson due to the destabilizing effect of the capricious climate of England upon "the cold phlegm" and "exact regularity" of the Danish descendants of the jester. In other words, it is the transplantation of Yorick's family to the "unsettled island" of Albion – a transplantation concomitant with the supposedly authentic facts reported by Saxo-Grammaticus – that has proved fatal for the preservation of the familial/national features. The result is Parson Yorick's eccentric and erratic characterization in open contradiction to his avowed extraction: not only did he seem not to have retained "one single drop of Danish blood in his whole crasis; in nine hundred years, it might possibly have all run out"(54), but he was endowed with "as mercurial and sublimated a composition, – as heteroclite a creature in all his declensions; – with as much life and whim, and *gaité de cœur* about him, as the kindliest climate could have engendered and put together"(55). By virtue of this parodic interplay, the originality of Sterne's Yorick is ambiguously alleged on the basis of its hybrid and composite nature, simultaneously encouraging and discouraging Tristram's authorial claim that his Parson shares the same Danish ancestry as Shakespeare's fool.[15]

There is no space here to discuss all the intertextual threads Sterne weaves into his 'motley' characterization of Parson Yorick: not only as one of the putative 'fathers' of *Tristram Shandy* and the only protagonist and first person narrator of *A Sentimental Journey*. His notorious name also proved a rewarding, even if equivocal, mask for his very author, the parson Laurence Sterne, who, soon after the clamour of his first novel, hastened to publish his *Sermons* under the pseudonym of Mr. Yorick in order to exploit to the full the confusion of life and fiction in his artful self-fashioning of a provocative print identity. In more than one sense, Parson Yorick

[15] I have already focused upon Sterne's provocative, deconstructive re-reading of *Hamlet*'s jester in "L'avventura eccentrica di Yorick nel *Tristram Shandy*", *Annali-Anglistica* 32.1 (1989), 125-50, where I also discuss clear traces of Rabelais and Cervantes in Yorick's 'heteroclite' crasis.

may be seen to embody the "multilaminated" nature of Sterne's pioneering self-conscious fiction,[16] comprising different layers of translation from one source to the other, from one text to the other, from the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet* to the novel's humorous black page – the page arranged by Sterne as the typographic illustration for the famous epitaph quoted from the tragedy, "Alas poor Yorick!", that marked the tragicomic end of Tristram's beloved mentor.

While adopting and accentuating the palimpsestic texture of Sterne's presentation of Parson Yorick, Rushdie's own rewriting of the Danish family saga still maintains a characteristic and original position. To begin with, his short story retraces the trajectory backwards again from the eccentric XVIIIth-century text to the remote, turbulent times of the Danish kingdom represented in *Hamlet*. What is more relevant, his reconstruction does not translate the tragic play into a local, postcolonial setting, as is the case of most contemporary appropriations of Shakespeare. Refusing any binary divide of the West/Rest axis, Rushdie seems more interested in disclosing, to the utmost degree, the fruitful impurity and dense intertextuality already at work in both his Western predecessors, thereby mapping and relocating a network of cross-references for his journeying to and fro between *Tristram Shandy* and *Hamlet*. This explains why the first Yorick we meet in Rushdie's text is not the Shakespearean jester but the "velluminous history" in the possession of his equivocal Shandean heir –

a move coherent with the palimpsestic arrangement of the tale, where the more recent layers are also the first to be critically unravelled. As Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan and Ana Sáez Hidalgo point out, the intertextual interlacing of the short story "even goes beyond the idea of literature about literature and becomes literature out of literature in a new sense", inverting the linear direction of literary tradition and proceeding backwards from the texts temporally closer to the present age to those that are more remote.[17] After his mocking exhibition of the strong vellum, Rushdie's narrator flamboyantly introduces the literary layers that have been superimposed upon his "ancient" and "dusty" parchment:

> Yorick's saga, of course; that same ancient account which fell, near enough two hundred and thirty-five years ago, into the hands of a certain – no, a most uncertain – *Tristram*, who (although Yseult-less) was neither triste nor ram, the frothiest, most heady Shandy of a fellow; and which has now come into my possession by processes too arcane to detain the eager reader. Truly, a velluminous history! – … Here, dusty-faced and inky-fingered, lurk beautiful wives, old fools, cuckoldry, jealousy, murder, juice of cursed hebona, executions, skulls; as well as a full exposition of why, in the *Hamlet* of William Shakespeare, the morbid prince seems unaware of his own father's real name. (64)

Here, the self-complacent linguistic exuberance of Rushdie's narrator suggests an irrepressible sense of relish in so luxuriant and varied a banquet

[16] For "multilaminated" see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 21. It is applied to Rushdie's rewriting of Shakespeare in Parmita Kapadia, "Transnational Shakespeare: Salman Rushdie and Intertextual Appropriation", *The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 3.2 (Spring/Summer 2008), 5.

[17] Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan and Ana Sáez Hidalgo, "The Fooler Fooled: Salman Rushdie's Hybrid Revision of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* through 'Yorick'", in Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia, eds., *Native Shakespeares. Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2008), 81.

of different stylistic tastes, each mimicking the flourishes and punning acrobatics that were prominent features of the vellum's author/proprietor predecessors. The image of a linguistic banquet seems particularly suitable for Rushdie's entanglement of a familial and literary saga descending from a professional royal fool, "a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy" and "whose gibes, gambols, songs and flashes of merriment … were wont to set the table on a roar".[18] On the other hand, a taste for the voracious, promiscuous, carnivalesque heteroglossia of language is typical of Rushdie himself, who has explicitly recognized the cannibalistic drive at the heart of his storytelling. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai boasts he is "a swallower of lives" (9); and if the narrator of the fabulous epic novel has to swallow the world in order to make meaning out of a single life; analogously, the narrator of "Yorick" has to ingurgitate a whole line of Yoricks, a whole tradition of literary and critical issues, in order to initiate his tale. This explains why the short story introduces Yorick's saga with a stylistic palimpsest that gluttonously swallows up words, phrases, and even critical interpretations, mostly derived from the rich inventiveness of Elizabethan prose and Shakespeare's masterful parody of its pedantry,[19] together with Sterne's own digressive variations on learned wit. Rushdie's command of fragmented mimicry revels in misquoting and misnaming, turning the arms of equivocation, peculiar to the Shakespearean fool, against the very authors who had mastered them before him.

Thus, Sterne is mocked for his most "uncertain" *Tristram Shandy* through a couple of telling attributes that comprise a network of dubious intertextual and intratextual associations with the fatal name of his protagonist. From the medieval romance of *Tristan and Isolde* to the woeful fate lamented by Walter Shandy for the truncated form of his heir's name (the pitiful fall from the noble 'Trismegistus' to the most dishonorable 'Tristram'), the adjective *triste* points to a Latin quotation in the novel (*Quod omne animal post coitum est triste*) that recapitulates the unhappy circumstances both of the protagonist's and of the whole book's conception: as a critic has put it, "the joke is that poor Tristram is sad for the rest of his life, not because of his own but because of his parents' coition".[20] And Tristram's impaired virility is also insinuated by the reference to "ram" that may represent Rushdie's Indianized inflection of Sterne's own lubricious play with "bulls" and "cocks".

The text of *Hamlet* undergoes a similar misreading, or mis-editing: significantly, in order to begin his story, Rushdie's narrator freely plunders the very ending of the tragedy, turning the solemn final words of the faithful Horatio into the literal starting point of the "dusty-faced and inky-fingered" characters still legible upon his parchment. If the act of storytelling was crucial in the play in order to restore Hamlet's "wounded name", Rushdie's retelling aims to open up and grotesquely anatomize the very

[18] The verses are quoted from the gravediggers' scene in *Hamlet* (V, 1, 178-79 and 184-85, Arden, ed. by Harold Jenkins (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). Significantly, Sterne's Parson Yorick is described in the same eulogistic terms in the initial chapters of *Tristram Shandy* devoted to his tragicomical end.

[19] The echoes of Elizabethan witticisms and of tools used in critical editing are analysed in Guerrero-Strachan and Hidalgo, "The Fooler Fooled", 80; and in Kapadia, cit., 7.

[20] Christopher Ricks, "Introduction" to Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 19.

wounds that equivocation and intertextual migration may inflict upon names and legacies. Thus the action of his "Yorick" is set in motion by the need to elucidate the secret plots lurking behind the fatal, albeit unconscious, oblivion of his own father's name by the "morbid prince" _ Hamlet's Oedipal slippage from his father's true name, Horwendillus, to his own. The narrator does not miss the chance to dramatize the sensational impact of such critical insights upon his audience of unruly spectators:

> What's this? Interruptions already? Did I not tell you, have I not just this moment set down, that the bardic Hamlet, that's to say Amlethus of the Danes, is quite mistaken in believing the Ghost's name to be Hamlet too? – An error not only unusual but unfilial, not only unfilial but downright *unsaxogrammatical*, one may say, for it is contradicted by no less an authority than Saxo-Grammaticus's *History of the Danes*! – But were you to be silent and hear me out you'd learn it was no mistake whatsoever, but rather the criptic key by which our tale's true meaning may most swiftly be unlocked. (64-65)

As the tale unfolds, Rushdie's narrator seems more and more determined to recklessly embrace the Shandean role of "philologist cum story-teller",[21] and it becomes almost impossible to disentangle the literary plot from the family plot ensuing from his endless virtuoso self-editing practice. Thus, he not only pretends to comply strictly with the authoritative text of Saxo Grammaticus, where the King's name is actually Horwendillus and not Hamlethus, but while vindicating such philological exactness for his ingenious interpretative key for Hamlet's unconscious misnaming of his father he also pretends to reconstruct a more surprising, parallel lineage omitted by Shakespeare _ the "Line of Yoricks" descending from the king's jester and a bride mischievously called Ophelia. Again the narrator gleefully claims his right to duplicate and reinterpret names and characters from the tragedy, Ophelia's *name* being provocatively misattributed to the female branch of the jester's dynasty:

> I repeat :
> Horwendillus. Horwendillus Rex … – Still more questions? – Sir, of course the jester had a wife; she may not feature in the great man's play, but you'll concede that a woman's a necessary apparatus if a man would make a dynasty, and how else? – answer me that? – could the antique Fool have produced that Line, that veritable Monologue of Yoricks of whom the ill-named Tristram person's *parson* was but one single syllable? Well! You don't need ancient vellum to see the truth of THAT, I think. – Good Lord; her *name*? Sir, you must take it upon my word. But where's the puzzle? Do you imagine that this 'Ophelia' was so blasted uncommon a name in a land where men were called such things as Amlethus, Horwend&c., yes, and Yorick, too? So, so. Let's go on.
> Yorick espoused Ophelia. There was a child. Let's have no more disputes.(65-66)

Rushdie's garrulous narrator is not content with taking on Shakespeare's jester from the gravediggers' scene, bringing him back to life, as Sterne

[21] On Rushdie's mimicry of Sterne's parodic techniques see Michael Meyer, "Swift and Sterne Revisited. Postcolonial Parodies in Rushdie and Singh-Tor", in Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein, eds., *Cheeky Fictions. Laughter and the Postcolonial* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2005), 123.

had already dared to do in his novels, but he reduplicates this "excavation process" with Ophelia, and endows 'his' Yorick with a spouse all-too-dangerously called by the same name.[22] If the two characters only shared the common ground of the cemetery in *Hamlet*, Rushdie's tale not only restores both of them to life but unites the incredible couple in matrimony in order to ensure Yorick a dynasty. Even if the narrator insists that this Ophelia is not the character buried in Shakespeare's play, he is well aware that for readers familiar with *Hamlet* the confusion is as inevitable as impudent, and his story will accordingly exploit the risks of such equivocation, as embodied to a caricatural extent in the woman's pestilential bad breath.[23]

By continuously alerting his grunting, skeptical readers to the fatally disfiguring and estranging power of names and namesakes, Rushdie's imaginary saga cannot help being literally engrossed in the fissures and crevices of the world that is turned tragically upside down and out of joint in Shakespeare's play. Built as it is upon the airy Shandean foundations of spurious names ("the ill-named Tristram") and dubious surrogates ("the person's *parson*"), Rushdie's plot perversely retranslates the figurative density of the tragedy into the literally coarse and degrading level of a farce and, accordingly, transforms every step of *Hamlet*'s psychosexual drama into ludicrous events "that foreground grotesquely smelling, puking, copulating, and urinating bodies".[24] Hamlet is portrayed as a seven-year-old capricious child, who already muses gravely over his mixed feelings of filial/unfilial attachment to his father's jester and the latter's wife Ophelia. One day, hidden behind an arras in Gertrude's chamber, the boy misinterprets his parents' lovemaking as the king's attempt to suffocate the queen. Obsessed by the scene, he meditates a double revenge using his surrogate father against his royal father. He prompts the venomous suspicion in the fool that his adored wife Ophelia and the King are lovers. Blind with jealousy, Yorick pours real venom into Horwendillus's ear, and when the murder is discovered Ophelia goes mad and dies, while the buffoon is sent to death. When Gertrude marries Claudius, Hamlet, "in his mother-loving passion", accuses the new King of his brother's murder using again Yorick's execution as "the camouflage, the *arras* behind which the Truth was hid". But the ghost of jealousy bearing his own name haunts the prince, making him betray his guilty conscience. At last, Hamlet really goes mad, rejects "his own Ophelia" and "drinks from a poisoned cup"(82). Clearly, the main themes of the tragedy (revenge, madness, and suicide) are not only maintained, but in a way ludicrously mimicked through a comic subplot involving lower-class or marginal characters. In so doing, Rushdie's text duplicates and exacerbates *Hamlet*'s family ties and plots almost to a paroxysm, providing the play with a clamorous prequel.

[22] La Guardia Nogueira aptly underlines the "sort of excavation process" at work in Rushdie's rewriting of *Hamlet* that amplifies the "carnival sense of the world" already present in the gravediggers' scene ("The Dilemmas of Tradition", 140).

[23] As Guerrero-Strachan and Hidalgo explain, Ophelia's bad breath was "an anecdotal – and maybe covertly moral commentary" on her character in late XVIIth-century criticism, but in Rushdie it becomes "somewhat of a *leit-motif*" ("The Fooler Fooled", 81), and, what I find more telling, with grotesque consequences for the story.

[24] *Cheeky Fictions*, 125.

In a way, it seems no exaggeration to argue that the short story's perversely self-proliferating play with all sorts of carnivalesque inversions and torbid mésalliances is prompted from its very beginning by the intoxicating air of linguistic estrangement pervading the whole act of retelling, and thus of Rushdie's writing back to "the great man's play" from the viewpoint of minor, marginal or even suppressed characters. The prevailing atmosphere is thus indelibly imbued with the strangeness and 'newness' of foreign names which enter and unsettle the state and stage of England. The very name of Yorick, together with those of Amlethus, Horwendillus and the duplication of Ophelia, seems to allude not only to the possibility of other sources and versions of the story but also to the suppressed memories of the remote, turbulent times of the island's exposure to Nordic invasions from Jutland. The alternative genealogy of fools reconstructed by Rushdie thus revolves grotesquely around the uncanny "amalgam" of different languages, histories, geographies and cultures that lies at the very heart of Englishness.[25]

[25] For the image of English literature as an amalgam see Stephen Greenblatt, "Racial Memory and Literary History", *PMLA* 116.1 (2001), 48-62 (52). The point is already elaborated in relation to Rushdie's rewriting of Shakespeare in Kapadia, "Transnational Shakespeare", 16.

Equivocal Coda: Bastard Slippages from Clocks to Cocks

For all its biting, rambunctious overtones, the most disruptive character of Rushdie's "Yorick" is its retelling or reinterpretation of the most famous tragedy of the Western canon in terms of a family saga of migration and linguistic displacement; a saga that begins with the dubious names of the parental/authorial couples and ends with a legacy of cultural mélange and incessant cross-pollination that goes well beyond the apparently farcical denouement of the short story. Significantly, the only survivors the story admits _ out of the fatally morbid entanglement of royal and surrogate parents _ are the offspring of Yorick and Ophelia,[26] allowed to "wander the world" eastwards and westwards, disseminating the fool's irreverent seeds right up to the Rushdian heir of the "sorry" line:

> Yorick's child survives, and leaves the scene of his family's tragedy; wanders the world, sowing his seed in far-off lands, from west to east and back again; and multicoloured generations follow, ending (I'll now reveal) in this present, humble AUTHOR; whose ancestry may be proved by this, which he holds in common with the whole sorry line of the family, that his chief weakness is for the telling of a particular species of Tale, which learned men have termed *chanticleric*, and also *taurean*.
> And just such a COCK-AND-BULL story is by this last confession brought quite to its conclusion.(83)

[26] It may be worth noting that the only characteristic the text discloses with regard to Yorick's heir is the baby's "proboscis"(70), a telling detail not only for its explicit Indian connotation but also for the centrality of noses (and smells) in Sterne and Rushdie.

The very end of the tale echoes the notorious, nonsensical conclusion of *Tristram Shandy*. Significantly, in Sterne's novel the last words are spoken by Parson Yorick, responding to another of Mrs. Shandy's most untimely questions with a pun on the impotence of Walter Shandy's bull. As such,

for all its mockingly inconsistent connotation, the reference to a "cock-and-bull-story" opens up a number of cross-references to bastard innuendoes in-between Sterne and Rushdie's fiction. For readers familiar with the eighteenth-century text, the final insinuation of "a cock-and-bull story" also seems to corroborate the mark of illegitimacy for the sad heir of the Shandies, transferring the incrimination of impotence from the bull to the male proprietor of Shandy Hall, thereby suggesting a radical disruption of the familial lineage. As an intriguing essay has recently argued, the bastardy motif also marks the "clock-ridden" inception Rushdie's major novel shares with *Tristram Shandy*.[27] In the case of the latter, what is still worthier of note is the paronomasia linking the word "cock", which closes the story with its gross sexual allusion, to the infamous "clock" of the initial bed scene, supposed to have set Tristram "a-going" and thereby contributing to a sort of equivocal circular frame for the whole act of Tristram's storytelling. [28]

It is perhaps not accidental that the heir to this Western line of Yoricks, Rushdie's narrator, does not miss the opportunity to point to a similar slippage from "clocks" to "cocks" at the end of his short story where he coins the words *chanticleric* and *taurean* in order to translate "a cock-and-bull story" in more elevated, learned terms. If *taurean* is the equivalent to bull according to its Latin etymon, *chanticleric* obliquely refers to the famous cock of the "Nun's Priest's Tale" from another capital work in the English canon, *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's cock is called Chanticleer and his crowing was stouter "[t]han the loudest abbey clock".[29] Far from being a far-fetched, peregrine instance of pedantry,[30] the cock/clock rhyme from the most famous collection of tales in English literature represents the last pregnant trace gleefully disclosed by Rushdie's hybridized palimpsest of Yoricks.

[27] See Catherine Pesso-Miguel, "Clock-ridden Births: Creative Bastardy in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*", in Christian Gutleben and Susana Onega, eds., *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi 2004), 17-52. The paper suggests Parson Yorick is indeed the true father of Tristram Shandy.

[28] I have slightly rephrased the expression "'set a-going' (like a clock)" nicely suggested by Walter Göbel and Damian Grant ("Salman Rushdie's Silver Medal", in *Sterne in Modernism and Postmodernism*, 88). For an intriguing discussion of the paronomasia of cock/clock see Pesso-Miguel, "Clock-ridden Births", 20-21.

[29] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Portable Chaucer*, sel., trans., and edit. by, Theodore Morrison (New York: Viking Press, 1949), 201.

[30] For Rushdie's coinage see Guerrero-Strachan and Hidalgo, "The Fooler Fooled", 81.

Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny* (London and New York: Penguin, 2006), 215 pp.

Reviewed by **Marie-Hélène Laforest**

Identity politics has created appalling conditions and deadly conflicts around the world. This often repeated truth is the point of departure for Amartya Sen's reflections in his slim volume, *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny*. The nine chapters which comprise the text evolve from Sen's own experiences – his background and history, his work as an economist, his observations of contemporary conflicts, and his ethical and humanist stand.

At seventy-six, Sen has lived not only through the partition of his own country, but through many world disasters ensuing from the political use of identities. Thus he knowingly alerts us to the "religious and civilizational partitioning of the world" which, by presuming to "identify, know and determine actions towards a people," has become, alas, 'the' way of dealing with difference. Based on flawed reasoning, "descriptive crudeness and historical innocence"(58), the categorization of human beings in civilizational or religious terms implies a limited view of each culture and an oddly parochial reading of Western civilization. The West's history has, after all, been marked by encounters and appropriations.

Increasingly, however, in both the West and the Rest, a politics of divisiveness has come to predominate and religion has turned into an "allegedly primal way of seeing the differences between people"(10). This has brought about what Sen rightly calls the "miniaturization of human beings": the wealth of experiences individuals accumulate, their multi-faceted lives are reduced to a single, foundational identity which takes precedence over all others, in all circumstances. The spread of this reductionist view has become the main source of the violence and terrorism afflicting the world.

To counteract this tendency and convince readers otherwise, the Indian economist ventures into the minefield of identity. Perhaps aware of the lost habit of reading a book from cover to cover, he reiterates the plural nature of identity in each chapter. His premise is clear enough: only through "recognition of the plurality of our affiliations and in the use of reasoning as common inhabitants of a wide world"(xvii) does the prospects of peace lie. At the same time, he is eager to point out that the singular categorization of people holds sway not only in Islamic countries, which have come to stand for essentialist attitudes, but in the West as well. For instance, social analysts have theorized identity in an unsatisfactory way and his fellow economists have, more often than not, fallen prey to the idea of singular

affiliation. But, as he points out, there are myriads of ways in which people identify:

> I can be, at the same time, an Asian, an Indian citizen, a Bengali with Bangladeshi ancestry, an American or British resident, an economist, a dabbler in philosophy, an author, a Sanskritist, a strong believer in secularism and democracy, a man, a feminist, a heterosexual, a defender of gay and lesbian rights, with a nonreligious lifestyle, a Hindu background, a non-Brahmin, and a nonbeliever in afterlife (and also, in case the question is asked, a non believer in a "before-life" as well)".(19)

Readers of Sen's acclaimed economic texts, which earned him the Nobel Prize in 1998, are used to seeing an apparently banal idea transformed into an innovative proposal. Here, the argument goes that if identities are plural, there is more leeway for reaching agreements than "when our differences are narrowed into one devised system of uniquely powerful organization"(17), namely a religious one.

Sen draws on his previous works to argue his case. Traces of *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (1970), *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1981), *Choice, Welfare and Measurement* (1982), *Development as Freedom* (1999), *Inequality Re-examined* (1995), are all found here. Readers are left bewildered by the series of thorny issues he manages to compress in *Identity and Violence*. All are directly related to the heart of the matter, to Sen's fundamental concern on how to reach global peace. Sen deals as much with the Asian countries' anti- or pro-Westernness, the African countries' plight, both continents' reactive policies to the lingering effects of colonialism, the selling of armaments and global justice, as with Muslim history, religious interpretation (*itjehad*), Indian pluralism, antiglobalization protests, and Western misguided policies.

Sectarian violence in Asia and Africa has a common matrix: the social memory of abuses and humiliation – transmitted through literature to which these populations were subjected by Western powers. However, despite their paramount significance, past colonial relations should not have been allowed to determine the countries' identity formation. Still, in both continents, following decolonization, identities were formed in opposition to the West. Especially in Africa a prevailing anti-Western attitude has grown; whereas in East Asia (Singapore is the lead example), there have also been efforts "to beat the West at its own game"(92). In either case, whether through difference or through admiration/imitation, subservience to the West prevails. A decolonization of the mind has not taken place and non-Europeans continue to view themselves as the other of the West. From a cultural viewpoint, this may be too sweeping a statement (both continents abound in decolonized minds) but official government

policies may be another matter. Sen's reasoning seems after all to follow a mainly political logic.

Thus politically speaking Africa, plagued by dictatorships, internecine wars, and stunted economic growth must add to the nefarious legacy of colonialism, the West's recent political and military role. From the Cold War onwards, the two camp division of the world has led the two superpowers to support satraps of the worst sort. The deprecable conduct of rich countries has not abated since they have been militarizing Africa. The violence which flares up in different parts of the continent may derive from a variety of causes, but the world powers' "selling and pushing of arms gives them a continuing role in the escalation of military conflicts today in Africa and elsewhere"(98). To Sen fairer global economic arrangements would change the climate of tolerance of violence in countries which bear the scars of unequal development.

From a different angle, but also influential in promoting terrorism and violence, is the form multiculturalism has taken in the 'overdeveloped countries' as Paul Gilroy dubs the West. In the wake of 9/11 and the July 2005 bombings in England by what the press and Sen define "homegrown terrorists", the practice of multiculturalism needs to be questioned. With this goal in view Sen takes up the case of British multiculturalism with which he is more familiar.

As he recognizes Britain's early efforts to integrate its foreign born population through voting rights and non-discriminatory public services, he is also strongly critical of its idea of multiculturalism. To him, "the existence of a diversity of cultures, which might pass each other like ships in the night"(156) cannot be counted as successful. It is more a case of "plural monoculturalism", whereby each culture is kept separate and an individual's cultural origin becomes determinant. Thus a child born, say, into a Muslim family, is fated with the state's complicity and its acceptance of 'faith schools' to remain within that culture. A child's identity is defined through religious or ethnic a prioris, without him or her having had the opportunity to consider other alternatives. In other words her relation to Britain is "mediated through the 'culture' of the family in which he or she has been born"(158).

> A person may well decide that her ethnic or cultural identity is less important to her than, say, her political convictions, or her professional commitments, or her literary persuasions. It is a choice for her to make, no matter what her place is in the strangely imagined 'federation of cultures'.(159)

Sen advocates instead an inclusive form of multiculturalism in which the exercise of cultural freedom and reasoning would allow children of immigrant families to participate freely in civil society and the political

and economic processes ongoing in the country (150). Insightfully, the author takes state policies to task for not recognizing the hybridization which has been going on in the country and overlooking its transformative power, even on traditional definitions of Englishness: "She is as English as daffodils or chicken tikka masala"(154) might be the mantra of a new multicultural Britain.

It is surprising that Sen, in comparing the British and French situations, is critical of the French treatment of its immigrant population on the only basis that it has given rise to violence. Yet, his own position, which values citizenship rights, and the French Republican or secular stand are very similar. The violence which erupted in the *banlieues* in 2005 was not because of lack of voting rights or nondiscriminatory health care, schooling, and social security, which exist in France as in Britain. It was due to the discriminatory everyday practices – granted, more serious in France where job discrimination is ignominious but widespread in both societies. Sen himself recounts to have been the butt of impudent remarks recently. But to him these are not definable as violence. Yet there is a name for the gratuitous verbal attack on Sen at a bus stop "I have seen through you all" (156), or for the question an immigration officer, looking at his home address in England (Master's Lodge, Trinity College, Cambridge), asks him: whether the Master is a friend of his. Not recognizing an Indian as a Master of Trinity College bears the name of racism. Sen's ironic eye passes lightly over these episodes, they become secondary to his main concern which is public policies.

Firstly, he writes that sectarian violence "gets significantly reinforced by the implicit support the anti-Western fundamentalist warriors get from theories bred in the West"(58). Secondly, that there is not enough recognition of the ongoing political struggles within the Islamic world where a large number of Muslims do not think solely in terms of their Islamic identity. Thirdly, that attempts at fighting terrorism through recruiting religion "on one's side" has been ineffective and suffer "from a serious conceptual disorientation"(75). Finally, that the voice of religious authorities has been strengthened while the importance of nonreligious institutions and movements downgraded (77). His plea is therefore addressed to all sides, the West and the Rest, to define identities as plural, to see affiliations as multiple.

Especially in our globalized age, he asserts, with the opportunity of extended networks, great possibilities are available for people to create their sense of self. Individuals indeed have a choice between alternative identities or combination of identities (38). But the "reductionist view" obviously ignores this. It downplays the way in which identities cut across each other, different civilizations borrow from one another, and membership to a particular group varies according to circumstances. This last point

suggests the notion of performativity which has been current in Cultural Studies scholarship since Michel Foucault and since Judith Butler's publication of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Performativity points to the process of assuming an identity and allows us to view it as socially constructed rather than fixed and to keep thinking of it as flexible. Performativity refers "not to a singular or deliberate 'act', but is rather the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names"(1993, 3).

It is not the Indian economist's intent to delve into theoretical questions, rather, he quotes well-known examples of encounters, influences, and cross-fertility of times long gone Arab numerals and Chinese printing or the Jewish presence in Muslim Spain. Neither does Sen intend to be drowned by theories of the subject; his practical aim is to convince readers that, for instance, Samuel Huntington's approach was wrong, that if our common humanity takes a back seat to singular identities, we are creating the premises for conflicts of unimaginable magnitude.

The language used by Sen can create some unease in readers. His unfortunate use of the expression "*tolerance* of diversity" refers to an Enlightenment virtue which echoes differently today. But he makes his point nonetheless, through the many examples from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iraq, and India scattered in the text.

The book's concluding pages increasingly focus on possible solutions to foster "reasoning over unreasoned faith". Sen prioritizes education, state support of secular schooling, curricular changes to stress the robust past interactions between different peoples, and teaching of global history to overcome "the false sense of comprehensive superiority of the West that contributes to identity confrontation in an entirely gratuitous way"(183). Of course, government policies must aim at abolishing the classification of people on a religious basis and putting a stop to acceptance of religious leaders as spokespersons for ethnically defined communities. At the same time secularists must be supported both at home and abroad.

Fixed group ascription implies the denigration of those who are not like us, but what a globalized world needs is exactly the opposite. Sen seems to suggest that thinkers of the calibre of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabrindanath Tagore can become our beacons and a country like India our model. The horrors that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984 seem a history of bygone days.

With an 80% Hindu population, Sen notes, India has at the same time one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, a Sikh Prime Minister, a Muslim president, a Christian-born head of the ruling Congress party, "but all are seen as Indians in general"(167). Sen would like to believe that this Indian political arrangement is the result of a belief in the values he has so convincingly expressed in this volume. We certainly would like him to be right.

Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare, eds., *Other Tongues: Rethinking the Language Debates in India* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 208 pp.

Reviewed by **Neelam Srivastava**

Increasingly, critics have been questioning the lack of dialogue between scholars of South Asian literature whose prefix 'postcolonial' usually reads as a shorthand for 'anglophone', and scholars of South Asian literatures in the various *bhashas* (indigenous languages of the subcontinent). There exist very few full-length studies of South Asian writing considered holistically, rather than separated out into its numerous language-literatures. This volume presents a timely contribution to this emerging discussion around the links and connections between Indian literature in English—recognized as the globalized, successful face of Indian writing—and literature in the *bhashas*. The volume also tackles head-on the question of what this might mean for a re-thinking of the canon of postcolonial South Asian writing, when viewed within the context of the multi-lingual production of the subcontinent.

In the introduction, the editors, Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare, claim that their collection "explores the parameters of the energetic public debate among Indian authors and academics over the hegemonic role of Indian writing in English"(xi). The volume, which grew out of a seminar on South Asian writing across languages, is both multi-vocal—featuring contributions by academics, creative writers, publishers, and translators—as well as multi-generic—featuring the academic essay, the personal essay, and the interview. Iyer and Zare wish to redress the woeful paucity of attention bestowed to South Asian *bhasha* literature by Western scholars, citing the lack of references to this literature in the MLA database as an example. They claim, and rightly so, that the attention of postcolonial critics in particular has focused almost exclusively on a narrow canon of works by internationally fêted authors writing in English. They see translation as playing a very important mediating role in the debate around the contested canon of South Asian writing: a role that is increasing thanks to the growth of translation initiatives from *bhasha* literatures into English. Iyer and Zare are careful to add the proviso that their volume focuses on the language debates as they take place within the US and India exclusively. The debate on language in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh thus does not fall within the remit of this study, nor does the UK or the Caribbean, other key areas of the South Asian diaspora.

The volume has a tri-partite structure and content: the first section contains essays focusing on the debate about literary canons and authors

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of Indian writing; the second features interviews with Indian publishers on "the challenges and opportunities available for Indian literatures in India and in the global marketplace"; and thirdly, a section on the role of translation "in bringing Indian-language literatures to Indian and non-Indian readers"(xxxiii). While such a wide-ranging structure allows for a multiplicity of perspectives on this debate, at the same time the rather uneven quality of the contributions betrays its origin in a series of oral presentations. Highlights of the collection are the essays on translation in the Indian context, and the interviews with renowned and ground-breaking Indian publishers and editors such as Urvashi Butalia, founder of Kali for Women and Zubaan Books (both hugely important ventures that contributed to the emergence of women's writing in India); Mini Krishnan, an editor of Oxford University Press India who has been at the forefront of translation publishing; and Geeta Dharmarajan, founder of Katha, an organization that undertakes the translation of Indian writing from 21 different languages into English.

Having said that, the section on literary canons also features very interesting essays. Nalini Iyer and Lavina Dhingra Shankar write eloquently and intelligently on the success and status of South Asian American women authors such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Meena Alexander, within the US literary context. Iyer argues for a consideration of the South Asian American canon on its own terms, rather than lumped together with 'all' South Asian diasporic writing from such diverse locations as the Caribbean and the UK, linking it to the different patterns of immigration undertaken by South Asians in these parts of the world. Iyer and Dhingra Shankar both establish the links to, as well as the divergence from, other Asian American writing. Dhingra Shankar analyzes the problems arising out of the reception of Divakaruni and Lahiri by American and South Asian American audiences. She finds that Divakaruni's bestselling novel *Sister of My Heart* "perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes regarding India, while appealing to feminist audiences interested in themes of female bonding and sisterhood"(32). Similarly, Lahiri is careful not to antagonize her North American audience with her narratives of inter-cultural encounters and experiences of Bengali immigrants in the Northeastern US. Her criticisms of Americans are mild rather than scathing: "self-consciously writing to and translating other tongues and cultures for multiple audiences, Lahiri enlists identification (and either regret or self-exoneration) among (Caucasian or other non-South Asian) readers who might have indulged in a similar rejection of the barbaric Other"(40). Dhingra Shankar's criticism of Lahiri tends to conflate author and narrator in a way that establishes a problematic equivalence between fiction and a form of ethnography that is judged according to a more or less 'authentic' or suitably 'political' standard. However, the critic is quick to recognize this, also recognizing

the difficult position of the ethnic woman writer in the US, who if she achieves any form of recognition by the mainstream, is immediately accused of selling out and being a traitor to her community. Neither an ethnic writer nor her characters should have to bear the burden of representing their entire ethnic group. However, given that these communities get a limited exposure in fiction, it is true that literary representations acquire an increased capacity and power in shaping these communities for mainstream audiences. Dhingra Shankar concludes that Lahiri's and Divakaruni's are narratives of "assimilation", drawing a distinction between the negative connotations this word assumes in the academy, and the positive ones it assumes among the South Asian immigrant community: assimilation is considered "an unquestioned prerequisite of professional and personal success. These audiences may be glad to read about their own and experiences of similar Others, without pondering the political implications of the representations"(48).

Josna Rege's essay on the writing of Ambai, a Tamil writer (the pen name of CS Lakshmi), and Rukhsana Ahmad, a British South Asian playwright, aims to offer a way out of the binary opposition between anglophone and vernacular literature in the South Asian context. Both authors, she argues, "represent a small but emerging tendency among South Asian writers to write in two languages and two genres"(54). By their constant shift between languages—Ambai writes her creative work in Tamil, and her academic and essayistic work in English—both authors present connections and bridges between diverse South Asian literary and linguistic traditions. Rege's essay suggests how we might enlarge the restrictive canon of postcolonial authors currently present on most course offerings in Anglo-American universities.

The weaker sections of the volume are the interviews with, and personal essays by, South Asian authors, including Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Mahesh Elkunchwar (a Marathi playwright), and S. Shankar. While these may have some value for students and scholars interested in their work, in my view they did not contribute in any significant manner to the debate around literary language in India, and tended to regurgitate truisms that were more carefully explored in the critical essays of the collection.

The interviews with Indian publishers make for very interesting reading. Geeta Dharmarajan gives a brilliant overview of the work done by Katha in assisting the growth and spread of Indian literature in translation. All three publishers offer a valuable insight into the development of Indian publishing, and its interesting positioning between the onset of the big multinational conglomerates in India—HarperCollins, Random House, Penguin—and the outstanding work done by small publishing houses like Kali for Women and Zubaan, driven by a political agenda rather than by the market. Home-grown publishers such as these have been

instrumental in increasing the visibility of *bhasha* authors on the Indian literary scene, where the focus of the national media is almost exclusively on the author-celebrity writing in English.

In the translation section, the following essays stand out. Anushiya Sivanarayanan offers a focused and nuanced reading of Bama's famous Dalit autobiography, *Karukku*, and its translation into English from the Tamil. Sivanarayanan finds that the English of the text homogenizes and simplifies the personalized and emotional connotations of Bama's use of rural (as opposed to literary) Tamil, the language of her childhood. Sivanarayanan warns against the perils of globalization in translation, of the easy standardization of language, taking away its nuances. But the critic also has an issue with the way Bama presents her subject-position in the novel as entirely subsumed within a Dalit identity politics; as a we, rather than as an I. *Karukku* is the first novel that "extends and reconstructs the question of Dalit identity in literature"(136). The rise of the Dalit politics in the 1990s made this into a "poster text" for its emancipatory project. Bama wants her text to be read primarily as a testimonial of a caste-based identity, and this comes through even more clearly in the English translation, because it does away with Bama's specific choice of register in Tamil. "What remains is a singular insistence that we read her works as peculiarly Dalit and nothing else"(139). In doing so, Sivanarayanan argues that Bama "proves the essentialist justifications of those who continue to oppress her in the name of her caste"(146). But Sivanarayanan advances an unsatisfying argument against Bama's purported "essentialization" of her identity; the argument that "being a Dalit is a subject position that is available to anyone involved in liberatory activities"(142). She invokes James Baldwin as an African American author who constantly 'problematized' his own racial identity. But Fanon argues that the racial Other is over-determined from without, and that it is almost impossible to escape the imposition of a racialized identity. As for suggesting that anyone involved in an emancipatory activity is a Dalit, this seems to be a naive statement at best: to be a Dalit is to be subject to constant and relentless discrimination and oppression throughout your life.

Christi Merrill's essay on the place of translation in postcolonial studies is perhaps the one that engages with the issue of translation theory most directly. She considers arguments by Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, Tejaswini Niranjana and others on the status of translation as a way forward out of the aporia of thinking universalism: Butler proposes "a second view of universality as a future-oriented labor of cultural translation" (Butler quoted by Merrill, 182). While Merrill offers many suggestive remarks, her overarching argument on translation was not always easy to follow or extrapolate.

The collection ends with a thought-provoking discussion by Arnab Chakladar, of the Web as a possible site where translation can feature as a

process and not just as a finished product, where alternative versions of an already published translation of a text can exist, and where the market economy of publishing, with its emphasis on a text "that sells", has less purchase. The web also may provide a solution to the lack of communication across practitioners and readers of different South Asian languages, by offering bilingual websites. The Web, by virtue of its constantly unfinished and interactive nature, offers the possibility for translators and readers to comment on translations, and for editors to present footnotes and prefatory apparatus in the form of hypertext.

This volume, in attempting to link different academic and literary constituencies together, will appeal to a variety of audiences: scholars of South Asian writing, translators, specialists of Indian postcolonial literature, will all find something of interest here. Moreover, the strongest essays also offer insightful interpretations of emerging new canons of South Asian writing, such as South Asian American women's writing and Dalit writing. Most importantly, by not focusing on the hyper-canonical postcolonial authors present in countless academic publications on South Asian writing, the editors effectively bring about a creative re-mapping of the canon.

Lidia Curti and Susanna Poole, eds., *Schermi indiani, linguaggi planetari. Tra Oriente e Occidente, modernità e tradizione, avanguardia e popolare* (Roma: Aracne, 2008), 209 pp.

Reviewed by **C. Bruna Mancini**

In the Introduction to his celebrated *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema* (2000), Prem Chowdhry observes that "empire cinema" (including productions of the 1930s and 1940s by both British and Hollywood filmmakers), provides the major manifestation of the classical binary opposition between colonial Self and colonized Other, encoded in colonialist discourse as a dichotomy necessary to domination. Empire films contributed to a vision of the Empire which emphasized "the unique imperial status, cultural and racial superiority and patriotic pride not only of the British but of the entire white western world". Thus cinema emerged as the most influential propaganda vehicle in order to maintain the status quo in Britain and its colonies. Films like *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935, by Henry Hathaway, with Gary Cooper, Franchot Tone, and Richard Cromwell), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936, by Michael Curtiz with Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland, and Patrick Knowles), *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937, by John Ford, with Shirley Temple, Victor McLaglen and C. Aubrey Smith), *The Drum* (1938, by Zoltan Korda, with Sabu, Raymond Massey, Roger Livesey), and *Gunga Din* (1939, by George Stevens, with Cary Grant, Victor McLaglen, Douglas Fairbanks Jr) served to prevent non-alignment, sociopolitical changes and revolt, while sustaining the importance of the strategic role of British presence in the colonies – India, in particular – for the 'protection' of the native inhabitants. After all, as Winston Churchill affirmed on 18 March 1931, in his famous speech "Our Duty in India", the British people had to fight hard in order to maintain their "Indian Empire" and not to be led blindfold into a trap; obviously, their "mission" had a religious as well as a highly moral connotation, strictly connected to their glorious past and to the untamed spirit lodging in their breast:

> What *spectacle* could be more *sorrowful* than that of this powerful country casting away with both hands, and up till now almost by general acquies cence, *the great inheritance which centuries have gathered*? What spectacle could be more *strange*, more *monstrous in its perversity*, than to see the Viceroy and the high officials and agents of the Crown in India labouring with all their influence and authority to unite and weave together into a confederacy all the forces adverse and hostile to our rule in India? … It is a *hideous act of self-mutilation*, astounding to every nation in the world. The princes, the Europeans,

> the Moslems, the Depressed classes, the Anglo-Indians – none of them know what to do nor where to turn in the face of their apparent desertion by Great Britain. (emphases mine)

Using the encoding/decoding model masterly developed by Stuart Hall, based essentially on "dominant", "negotiated" or "propositional" responses, Prem Chowdhry also demonstrates that, in the Thirties, Indian spectators inhabited a realm of ramifying differences and contradictions, stretching from acceptance to resistance. But this question seems even more complex if we consider that, as Lidia Curti puts it in her Introduction to *Schermi indiani, linguaggi planetari*, India's devastated and partitioned territory – a diversified continent in terms of climate, geography, language and culture, putting into question the very concept of 'nation' – also makes the expression "Indian cinema" an abstraction; the term reflects the diversifications of a place which is in fact a complex connection of different countries and cultures. Curti observes how:

> the various historical constructions show a cinema that is linked from its very beginning to traditional forms of Indian theatre, with its interweaving of natural and supernatural, its fixed frontal positioning, its frequent use of close ups and stylization. The general intention – at least before the arrival of sound – was that of maintaining the characteristics of live theatre, through the presence of a narrator in the cinema and intermezzos of music, dance and song, elements that were to become an essential part of Bollywood film language. This hybrid narrative technique, with its interpolation of songs, dances and comic sketches, also goes back to classical Sanscrit theatre and popular religious ceremonies.(12)

Moreover, after Independence, the Indian government mainly reproduced the inequalities and subalternity of the so-called *ancien régime*, exerting a "dominance without hegemony" to recall the title of Ranajit Guha's renowned book of 1997; subsequently, many migrants from the Indian subcontinent reached the former 'centre' of the Empire, building new multiethnic urban communities which had to face a never dormant resurgence of xenophobia, hostility, and violence. The movies realized by Hanif Kureishi, Stephen Frears, Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair, and Gurinder Chadha perfectly portray this hybrid "geography of diaspora and multidiaspora", also considering its "transversal passages"; because, instead of a unidirectional displacement from the colonies towards the so-called motherland, many migrants paths touched Uganda, Madagascar, Guyana, and the Caribbean. Curti asserts in this respect that for the "directors, both male and female, who had been born and brought up in Britain, often with mixed race parentage, this implied a temporary return to a 'home' that was no longer home in the full sense of the term, in order to find their roots or, more probably, to set their films in their land of origin"(22).

Thus the filmic *corpus* becomes the real post-colonial, 'in-between' space, in which 'colonizer' and 'colonized' can reciprocally observe each other and provide feedback. Several interesting examples of this productive and intense cultural exchange are attentively analyzed in the present volume. I refer in particular to "Linguaggi e percorsi in *Aparajito* di Satyajit Ray" by Fiorenzo Iuliano (27-43), "La 'scrittura' cinematografica di Hanif Kureishi" by Annalisa Spedaliere (63-80), "L'altra India: *Fire* di Deepa Mehta" by Laura Sarnelli (83-95), "A casa e altrove: il cinema di Mira Nair" by Alessandra Marino (97-115), "Il cinema di Gurinder Chadra" by Serena Guarracino (117-137), and "Mitografie di riscatto femminile: *Banditi Queene* di Shekhar Kapur" by Raffaella Malandrino (139-154), each of which concludes with a list of "Key words" and "Things to Ponder", clearly aimed at stimulating further discussion. The questions raised range from contacts between the different cinematographies and/or cultures to concepts of identity, gender-genre and subalternity, and again to the centre/borders, empire/nation, global/local oppositions. Constant references are also made to the rich critical apparatus developed in the fields of Cultural, Postcolonial, Subaltern, Feminist and Post-Feminist Studies.

In short, as Susanna Poole writes in her Afterword, "Bollywood come cinema 'altro'", if a film is a "stratified construction" in which different languages, stories and temporalities cross and come to a new life, the film spectator is also to be considered as a cultural construction, a complex crossing of languages, (his/her)stories, spaces, and times. Hence Bollywood too, a popular cinema with few aspirations to becoming experimental, can create disturbance, destabilization, and (positive) crisis. In fact, its multi-genre representation does not respect all the conventions of 'our' narrative cinema, constantly putting into question – both metaphorically and stylistically – the classical Occidental viewpoint, centered on the identification of the spectator with "a main male protagonist", in Laura Mulvey's words, and a straight progression of the story line. Thus, in a way, Bollywood 'exceeds' – in Edward Said's definition – the norms of the Occidental (film) culture, questioning our deepest beliefs and certainties, and depicting a reconciled, non-existent national imagery in order to create an idealized community as well as a coherent (and necessarily mythical) national identity:

> In a territory inhabited by about a billion people talking over 800 different languages and belonging to a multiplicity of ethnic and religious groups, Bollywood offers a world view that in its absolute unreality may be shared by all. ... But the production of a homogeneous, coherent identity bears with it a form of violence: the exclusion of the internal 'others', the affliction shared by numbers of former colonies rebuilt as nation states. (164-5)

This temple of dreams and desires – as I would define Bollywood cinema – is the 'cinema of otherness' *par excellence* ("un altro cinema, un cinema

'altro', ma anche il cinema di un altro", Poole writes, craftly playing with the term 'altro'/other). In fact, in *Imag(in)ing Otherness: Filmic Visions of Living Together* (1999), S. Brent Dale affirms that: "A cinema of otherness would be one in which the structure of production and the style of a finished film would necessarily be different than what we are expecting to see, indeed, what we have been trained to see. For those of us raised on Hollywood cinema, a cinema of otherness would be unrecognizable". Using different narrative modes and techniques (from those of the Occidental 'norm'), based upon a different way of viewing, different rhythms, the mythical re-invention of the past and the instability of personal and collective identity, Bollywood creates an unattainable dream:

Faced with the partial failure of the emancipation of the Indian people, and the substitution of colonial power with that of the multinational companies allied to local governments, the dream of an equalitarian, independent country has given way to the dream of Bollywood. Only the perfection of its artifice, together with its absolute cultural recognizability, allow it to represent for millions of Indians an ideal motherland India, an India of absence and desire.(175).

Giuseppe Balirano, *The Perception of Diasporic Humour – Indian English on TV* (Loreto: Tecnostampa, 2007), 192 pp.

Reviewed by **Giuseppe De Riso**

The Indian diaspora is probably a microcosm of India. Barring a few exceptions, Indian emigrants around the world zealously try to preserve their ethnic, language and caste identities. Owing to their distinct lifestyles and cultures, the Indian communities in the UK experienced considerable difficulties in assimilation during the 1950s.

Placing emphasis on education has granted them valuable resources to accelerate upward social mobility and improve their general position in the host country. Indeed, only a few decades later, a group of British-born Indians decided to bring their culture into the limelight by using the media in an attempt to break with Britain's conservatism and to add a new concept of multiculturalism to the UK public agenda.

First broadcasted as a radio program by the BBC, *Goodness Gracious Me* was an ingenious Asian comedy which originated precisely from this new resolution. The sketch show's resounding success spurred BBC2 to promptly convert it to a mainstream TV series which would later hit the towering peak of 3.84 million viewers. An astonishing performance for a show intended both to produce a more accurate representation of India beyond its stereotypical global image as a land of poverty and snake charmers, and to suggest, in Balirano's words, immigrants' "difficult relocation of 'home'". Despite being written and performed by Indians for Indians, it was apparent that the show had made an impact on the British audience as well.

Whereas other ethnic TV programmes broadcast in Britain at the time were steeped in colonial rhetoric which would only hinder communication between the parties involved, Balirano argues that *GGM*'s producers dealt with universal and ethnic topics exploiting the classical British 'sense of humour' and comedy tradition, thus making Indian and Western cultures come humorously into contact. More specifically, the show resorted to 'stereotyped reversals' which, in Balirano's words, turned "the Indian characters into hilarious English subjects, ridiculing, in a conventional all-British manner, their fellow countrymen". Aptly mixing culturally connoted jokes with Anglo-centric or white-friendly skits, this stratagem produced a new blend of Indian and English cultures, thereby preventing anyone from feeling excluded. This allows Balirano to pinpoint the main reason behind the show's phenomenal popularity within such different ethnic groups. The scholar recognizes that the subverting blend of Western and Eastern stereotypes generates a hybrid, Indo-Saxon form of narration which

hinges on what he terms "Diasporic Humour". In *GGM*'s case, this kind of humour ensues from the clash between group-specific need for cultural pluralism on one side, and national aspiration for absorption into conventional culture on the other; yet it manages to appease both England's authoritarian national discourse and the immigrants' resistance to it. For even though England and India are connected to the two main scripts (a.k.a. mental frames concerned with personal or group-related ideas representing social attitudes) overlapping in *GGM*, diasporic humour is in fact unique in the sense that it cannot be substituted by either.

To expose the existence of this diasporic sub-category of humour, Balirano analyses the 289 sketches from *GGM* which constitute the corpus of his study. While still conducting a computer-assisted linguistic analysis of the sketches, he is aware that the inferential activities triggered by script opposition in composite, multi-level narrative structures such as filmic productions do not necessarily pivot upon verbal utterances. On the contrary, the narrative structures thrive on the distinctive combination of language, moving images and sound. Moreover, since the comic effect achieved in a witty show like *GGM* is 'concocted' through what Balirano calls "Semiotically Expressed Humour", another crucial factor in his research is his detection of the incongruity between words and significance, implementation and encyclopedic or cultural information. In order to carry out a comprehensive transcription of the *SEH* the show features, Balirano frames all the relevant elements of video supported material within an inclusive synoptic perspective borrowed from Paul Thibault's multimodal analysis. He then adopts the mathematical theory of graphs to map the interaction of the various visual and textual elements, thereby highlighting the sketches' final humorous effect. Far from considering humour as an element of the comic simply consisting in the ability to amuse people or make them laugh, Balirano embraces a semantic and pragmatic perspective on *GGM*'s humorous strategies in order to bring into focus the narrative organized opposition and overlapping of ethnic models, pursuing his investigation with meticulous scientific rigour. Indeed, in the last of the five chapters which compose Balirano's work, the quantitative results of a questionnaire proposed to 95 subjects stratified according to three ethnic groups (namely Indian immigrants to the U.K., British people of Indian origin and white English subjects) showed the Indo-Saxons always occupying a middle position in the enjoyment of *GGM*'s humour, testifying to the progressive assimilation to a shared hybrid culture between second and third-generation British-born Indians and Anglo-Saxons.

With his work Balirano helps the reader understand why *GGM* wasn't merely a huge mainstream success but a powerful social instrument as well. Mocking and aggregating at one and the same time, the sketches' diasporic humour overturns the Western balance of power so that both

euro-centric and ex-centric subjects can surface as hybrid post-national identities and acknowledge one another. More generally, as a product of hybrid interactions between mother-country and host-country, this kind of discourse has the power to remove the boundaries between different and often opposite cultural dimensions, thereby overcoming their polarity and dissolving the very notion of 'origin'. That's why, looking beyond the rich data his study abounds in, Balirano's observations point to more fascinating landscapes for cross-cultural interaction. The work of successful immigrants can help to provide a ticket home. Not the homeland they (or their ancestors) left behind, but the new one their skills could make out of hybridity.

Suniti Namjoshi, *Istantanee di Caliban. Sycorax*, ed. and introd. by Paola Bono, trans. by Paola Bono and Serena Guarracino, afterword by Laura Di Michele (Napoli: Liguori 2008), 98+ xxvii pp.

Reviewed by **Manuela Coppola**

Used as colonial text and pretext, *The Tempest* has often been relocated and revised in order to expose the limits and explore the critical reconfigurations of the fixed relationship of master and slave represented by the Prospero-Caliban dyad. Feminists have usually found few possibilities for literary revision in Caliban, the symbol of the voiceless colonial male subject, turning to the more inspiring figure of Miranda as feminist heroine, or giving voice to the absent female characters of the play, Claribel and Sycorax, conveniently erased from the *dramatis personae*. In the wake of female rewritings such as HD's *By Avon River* (1949) or Marina Warner's *Indigo* (1992), *Snapshots of Caliban/Sycorax* by the Indian-born poet and writer Suniti Namjoshi offers a radically new perspective on *The Tempest* by focusing on the Caliban-Miranda relationship and giving voice and physical presence to a dying Sycorax. A conflation of two poetic sequences mixed with prose and written twenty five years apart – "Snapshots of Caliban" and "Sycorax" – the text presents the Italian reader with a rich introduction in which Paola Bono appropriately contextualizes the writer and her text, while accounting for the complex issues intersecting the multiple identities of the diasporic British Indian lesbian poet.

Originally published in *From the Bedside Book of Fables* (1984) and translated by Paola Bono, "Snapshots" is inhabited by multiple voices/noises, just like Prospero's island. But if in *The Tempest* Prospero dominated and manipulated the narrative, his meditations are interrupted here by Caliban's and Miranda's journals, syncopated and forthright like an adolescent's diary, fragmenting and dispersing the master's narrative in the snapshots of the title. The irruption of other voices thus offers the possibility to imagine a different web of relations in which Namjoshi suggests a complex and unexpected interplay between the master and his "creatures", each inextricably linked to the other.

The critical reconfiguration informing the characters' relationship fractures expected representations and offers a radical re-vision (A. Rich) of the play. By imagining a female Caliban entangled in a repressed lesbian relation with Miranda, Namjoshi sheds new light on the Calibanesque figure which has often embodied the possibility for postcolonial agency and "writing back". Although she joins a "Calibanic genealogy", Namjoshi's Caliban conveys a different image of the subaltern by intersecting it with

issues of gender which complicate conventional male assumptions. While she shifts from the claims of territorial sovereignty and political freedom foregrounded by male writers, Namjoshi creates an oxymoronic 'delicate monster', a girl marginalised and excluded by the intellectual games of Prospero and Miranda or of her imaginary Ferdinand ("They are playing chess. I could learn too. I am not stupid. But they say it's a game intended for two. They have left me out", 10). Yet, although the writer seems implicitly to identify with the ill-treated Caliban, here reconfigured as a creature marginalized for her race, gender and sexual orientation, Namjoshi suggests that no character is ontologically good or bad, but each proves to be part of herself, as the poet claimed during a conference at the Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale": "I remember that when I began *Snapshots* I was fascinated by the irrepressible and unkillable Caliban. It was almost as though I wanted to kill that part of me that was like Caliban. But the person who disapproved of Caliban, namely Prospero, was also a part of me; and was this person who disliked Caliban so thoroughly all that admirable? And then there was Miranda - always fitting in, always conforming – I didn't like her much either, but perhaps she too was part of me?" ("You taught me language, and my profit on it is I can ask questions: A Discussion and Reading based on *The Tempest*", 29 April 2005, Naples).

Writing at the intersection of cultures, at the borders between self and other, Namjoshi blurs any clear distinction between maid and monster: bound by a common childish cruelty, Prospero's 'monstrous' creatures are inextricably related. As he watches them fighting over the possession of a sand castle, Prospero comments: "Caliban howls/ with bitter rage. Not very pretty,/ these little children"(8). Thus de-mythologized in her association with Caliban's monstruosity, Miranda is not the silent and obedient creature 'to be looked at', the 'wonder' praised by Ferdinand (I, ii, 427), but she is rather the rebellious little girl who hates Caliban and poisons her out of envy and rage. It is significant that, in her stereotypical depiction of Caliban as a debased creature, Miranda mimics male imperialistic justifications that "if she had her way, she would rule the island"(14). As is evident in the recasting of Miranda as a hating and vengeful girl who disturbingly mirrors Caliban's bad temper, the crossing of boundaries of self/other contributes to dismantle reassuring given categories. Unable to recognize Caliban as her equal and oscillating between disgust and identification, Miranda represses her homoerotic desire and channels it into violence towards her impossible love object.

However, Namjoshi's Miranda develops a critical and autonomous conscience, deliberately breaking her conventional image of passivity. As she starts to distance herself from her overwhelming father who "made her" a dream, she becomes increasingly aware that "in myself I was nothing"(26). The ambiguity of the line ("he made me a dream")

strengthens Prospero's power over her daughter while it resonates with the usage of dreams in *The Tempest*. By contrast, all the dreams evoked in the poem are invariably shattered by Caliban. Whether she smashes Miranda's "pretty dreams" of getting married (18), or reveals the deceptive nature of Prospero's art ("They dreamed it. There was no storm, no shipwreck. Nobody came", 16), Caliban relentlessly contests and unmasks illusory mental constructions. Likewise, if Miranda still fashions herself as a pure, snow-white creature, who can be "a thing or a *dream*" (34, emphasis added), Caliban's empowering dream of hunting a tiger will serve as an actual instrument of reconciliation. The offer of the tiger as a gift to Miranda attests to an effective gesture of forgiveness and sharing which opens up the possibility for mutual recognition and for the elusion of normative sexuality.

By recasting the Shakesperean relationship of abuse and punishment as female alliance, Namjoshi suggests new alignments which defy the claims of a global sisterhood erasing racial difference. The laugh re-shaping the relation between the two at the end of the poem is pertinently associated by Laura Di Michele in her Afterword with the laugh of the Medusa analysed by Hélène Cixous. Frightening and empowering at the same time, the laugh excludes Prospero and contests his power, prefiguring both the liberation of same sex desire and the dismantling of imperialistic claims. By the end of the poem, an uncomprehending Prospero will not dare claim the girls as his own, finally aware that the two are equally 'monsters', allied against his controlling and divisive patriarchal authority.

In the following poetic sequence, "Sycorax", translated by Serena Guarracino, and published in *Sycorax. New Fables and Poems* (2006), Namjoshi transforms the "blue-eyed hag" into a good witch who, left alone on the island, is deliberately imagined as having bright blue eyes and finally free to "fantasize". Just as Caliban discloses her own version of the story, revealing that there was no tempest and no wreck, Sycorax similarly relates her truth in which not only does she deny her death, but she also outlives Prospero and denounces his lies. As a symbol of Prospero's darker side in the Shakespearean text, Sycorax has some elements in common with him: both arrive on the island respectively with their daughter and son-to-be and both use their magic to control the elements. Yet, by appropriating the centre of the stage in Namjoshi's revision, Sycorax now dominates the narrative through the manipulative power of language. As Guarracino argues in the Translator's notes, the uncanny specular relation between the two is signalled by the depiction of Prospero as "grown into a hoop", thus reusing the Shakespearean description of Sycorax. In addition, this textual subversion dispossesses Prospero of his linguistic mastery and marks the achievement of a verbal agency which will also prefigure the territorial reappropriation of the island.

The recovery of her voice and of her island allows Sycorax to carve a space for her narrative which poetically combines fragments of memories, secrets, and the voices of the animals inhabiting the island. She claims she is part of the place, "whether or not the birds and the beasts acknowledge it"(46), on the grounds that on the island she is able to dream again. Yet, as problems of material survival combine with the "malfunctioning" of her mind producing copies of herself, Sycorax becomes aware of the nature of her real enemy: not Prospero, not Ariel, but the enemy who devours her daily, tarnishing her eyesight and deafening her.

Although Sycorax spitefully distances herself from Prospero, obsessively recalling her destiny of dispossession, she inevitably replicates his concerns about old age and death. Pressed by the passing of time, fearing she may fall into oblivion, Sycorax decides to leave her name on the waters, her "entire inheritance to those who will keep my name from dissolving…". Yet, just like a child or a fool, she will deny dissolution and try to postpone her impending death by suddenly claiming: "I leave you nothing./ I need it for myself./ Pray precede me./ I have no intention of just as yet dying"(70). It is significant that in desperately seeking to regain control over her life, Sycorax will write her own poem in order to preserve her heritage through writing. If Prospero's books are consigned to the waters, her poem, fragmented and written on the backs of the sparrows, is similarly entrusted to the sky, engendering a powerfully evocative image of the cultural dissemination of Shakespearean texts. When Sycorax dies, she meaningfully leaves the stage empty for someone to occupy it later. Namjoshi thus suggests the ceaseless work of revision which will fulfil the epilogue's invocation: "O keep the blue wave from closing / over her head,/ the foam from dissolving, the wind/ from carrying all traces away".

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