India in Canada, Canada in India

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Edited by

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To Professor Bernd Dietz, for his advocacy of the value of Canadian and Indian Studies in Spain –
It is a privilege to have your inspirational guidance and care.

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INTRODUCTION

The Spanish Association for Interdisciplinary India Studies (AEEII) held its first International Conference in Córdoba from the 29th of June to the 2nd of July 2009. The topic selected for its inaugural event was "India in Canada, Canada in India: Managing Diversity", as the English Department at the University of Córdoba has had an influential history of research on both Canadian and Indian Studies. With the sponsorship of the Permanent Seminar on India Studies at the UCO two years ago, Dr Navarro-Tejero invited representatives of several Spanish and Indian universities to create the first and only association of India studies in Spain. Among them were professors of high recognition and prestige who not only supported the initiative but also actively participated in the creation of the AEEII.

The main driving force behind this venture was Professor Bernd Dietz, the Founder President of the Spanish Association for Canadian Studies and founder of both the Centre for Canadian Studies of the University of La Laguna and the Permanent Seminar of Canadian Studies at the University of Córdoba. Previously in 1986 he created the first Group for Canadian Studies in Spain, and in 1988, was responsible for the First Seminar on Canadian Studies. Ambassadors Ms. Julie Loranger (Canada) and Ms. Suryakanthi Tripathi (India) honoured both founding Conferences with their presence and support.

Thus, the principal focus of the 1st AEEII International Conference has been to study Indo-Canadian relations from an interdisciplinary perspective. The primary objective of this Conference, in accordance with the rules of the aforementioned organization, was to create a much-needed platform for the advancement of interdisciplinary studies and research on India, Canada and Spain, especially on the existing relations between them. Taking into consideration all panel presentations and plenary conferences, there has been a significant amount of participation from experts in different branches of the Humanities, and different areas of Social Sciences. The Conference hosted twelve award-winning plenary speakers from different parts of the world, and more than forty panellists from diverse national and international academic institutions.

The AEEII was constituted with the aim of promoting research and interdisciplinary studies on India, and since its conception, has carried out

a series of academic activities designed to disseminate knowledge on India in various cultural, social and academic sectors. The present volume is its first major publication, just as *India in the World* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011) can be considered the starting point of this association. In that sense, it is not only unique but also long awaited by our members, as well as the general public interested in a multicultural and interdisciplinary approach to India studies.

Originally intended to be the conference proceedings of the 1st International Conference "India in Canada, Canada in India: Managing Diversity", this collection has become an edited volume of interdisciplinary academic work relating India and Canada. Thus, we cover many areas of the Humanities such as literature, film studies, history, and literary theory. While some articles focus on individual Indo-Canadian authors, others make a broad analysis of particular themes such as the Indian diaspora in Canada from a feminist perspective, gender and power relations, or focus on specific locations such as the reconstruction of India in East Africa, the Iberian connection in Indo-Canadian diasporic history, and India in Canada within the historical and literary consciousness. So, in this volume, various themes relating India and Canada have been explored in different configurations both by experts in the field as well as by young research students. We have striven to ensure that the eighteen chapters in this book provide a fresh perspective on this field of study.

This volume has been divided into two parts, each of them arranged alphabetically by the last name of the contributors. Part I deals with Indo-Canadian literature and criticism. We start with Alexandre-Garner's article, which analyses the image of Canada as it is represented in the fictional discourse in some of Shauna Singh Baldwin's short stories. Bhaduri's article looks at the Iberian connection of the Indo-Canadian diaspora, restricted to the Bengali context. He analyses the Bengali word "Harmad" and the Bengali bilingual dictionary cum grammar book in order to show how vestiges of this proto-consciousness linger on in later articulations of the Bengali diaspora, even in Canada, with the Indo-Canadian diasporic encounter having a veritable Iberian basis.

Cuder's article attempts to read Nalini Warriar's first novel, *The Enemy Within*, and Manju Kapur's fourth novel, *The Immigrant*, in the light of Malashri Lal's definition of the psychological processes immigrants undergo, exploring the connections between gender and nation. A couple of articles are devoted to M.G. Vassanji, an exponent of Indo-Canadian literature, who was present at the conference and whose work is included in this volume. Draga Alexandru focuses on a comparative reading of Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* and M. G.

Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*. She argues that in the two novels the nomadic text brings technical and conceptual challenges not only to the narrative mode as a whole, but also to the ways in which identity is re-imagined across spatial and temporal borders. González Rodríguez turns to Indian Women Writing in Canada, more concretely, to how the writers Meena Alexander, Sherazad Jamal, Uma Parameswaran, Bharati Mukherjee and Surjeet Kalsey denounce gender, class and race oppression, positing that writing becomes the best tool to deal with their self-exile, the vehicle to rediscover who they really are after the migration experience. Hawley brings the readers back to M. G. Vassanji, exploring the fascination with roots that shapes the diasporic imagination, as evidenced in his novels. Looking principally at *Amriika*, *No New Land*, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, and *The Assassin's Song*, this article considers the development in Vassanji's investigation of the diasporic question, ranging from the discomfort as a Kenyan that haunts Vikram Lall, to the old world and its values that pursue Nurdin Lalani to Toronto in *No New Land*, to Karsan's rejection of his spiritual inheritance in *The Assassin's Song*. Along the way, the variations on violence as a recurring theme will present themselves as a corollary to the notion that you really cannot go home again—nor, it appears, were you ever there in the first place.

Martín-Lucas also examines feminist Indo-Canadian fiction. In her article, she argues that the expression of sexual desire in these writings constitutes in itself an important rupture with social and religious mores that deny women sexual agency. Many of the narratives break old taboos and transgress racial, sexual, class and even family limits, unveiling the hidden sexual lives of Indian women. Sengupta, through a study of the individual tales of *The Robber Bride*, examines how Margaret Atwood explores the myth of womanhood, subverting the angelic image of the woman through a portrayal of "bad" and "good" women who mould themselves in any which way they wish to, without succumbing to the diktats of the patriarchal society. Villa Jiménez touches upon the issue of the practice of *sati* or Hindu widow immolation, how widow identity has been created and how it could be [re]gained, through an analysis of Sunny Singh's novel *With Krishna's Eyes* and Deepa Mehta's film *Water*.

Finally, Part II includes articles on the Arts, publishing houses, audiovisual translation, film, drama, poetry and three pieces of creative writing. Aziz relates the founding of TSAR publications, dedicated to bringing out new literary works from Canada and across the world that reflect the diversity of our rapidly globalizing world, particularly in Canada and the United States. Bannerjee's short story focuses on an immigrant mother's unconditional love for her son as he not only

overcomes the hurdles of alcohol and drug abuse, but also learns to perfect the back-and-forth dance he choreographs for himself as an Indo-Canadian youth.

Deepa Mehta's film *Bollywood/Hollywood* is the subject of the next two chapters. Gupta analyses the hybrid text as defined by Bhabha, Pratt, Mehrez and Snell-Hornby among others, within the context of Audiovisual Translation. She applies the notion of hybridity to translation, where the previously delineated dimensions of one source and one target culture and language are blurred when it comes to diaspora cinema. Drawing on AVT, Film and Culture Studies, she examines the strategies applied to the Spanish subtitling of Indo-Canadian diaspora films, which display the hybrid culture of first and second generation Indian immigrants in Canada. On the other hand, Iglesias-Díaz attends to questions related to film genre in order to analyse to what extent Deepa Mehta's film is both inscribed into and resistant to Bollywood and Hollywood's romantic comedy conventions, paying attention to the narrative strategies employed, among them parody, fragmentation of the narrative line, intertextual references and metafictive devices.

Navarro-Tejero makes a critical overview of Padma Viswanathan's play *House of Sacred Cows*, where she applies some of the bases of Marxism and Hinduism to one example of utopianism and community: the co-operative house as a microcosm of "free and diverse" Canada, both as social experiments. She argues that as the co-op stands for an example of the failed communal utopia, the Indian character stands for a new breed of Indians who question the "utopian" functioning of the Hindu precepts. Oliva analyses how confessional poems of Indo-Canadian poets play with the notions of reality and remembrance using water metaphors. He focuses on the water element represented by the flow of two important rivers: the sacred Indian Ganges and the prairie Canadian Assiniboine. Singh's story is a response to people disappearing in Iraq. Set in Barcelona (her old neighbourhood that had once been a centre of republicanism in the city), this short story is another step in the Said-ian enterprise of overturning colonial legacies, as her racially vague and culturally "universal" narrator seems to be a "western" quality. Vassanji's introduction to *A Place Within: Rediscovering India* tells of the author's first visit to India in 1993. The chapter relates his motivations for the journey and his expectations, based upon the knowledge he had so far acquired in his lifetime. Viswanathan's short story portrays the cultural confusion of the immigrant parent. Her protagonist *Desire* (after Bob Dylan's album *Desire*) externalizes the feeling of a deep and poetic ambivalence.

We would not like to end this introduction without announcing that the AEEII has launched its academic journal, *Indi@logs*, which welcomes academic interdisciplinary contributions. We are glad to continue on the line of promoting India Studies. For this reason, we owe special thanks to the contributors, the AEEII members and our editor Carol Koulikourdi, who has supported the AEEII publications so far. We would also like to thank our colleagues and students who helped to organise the 1st International Conference "India in Canada, Canada in India: Managing Diversity," and all the institutions involved. We hope this volume will make a welcome contribution to the existing literature on India, Canada and Spain and that it may inspire both researchers and young scholars to carry out further investigations in these areas.

Antonia Navarro-Tejero
Taniya Gupta
Editors

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

THE TEXT AS TRANSITIONAL SPACE: WEAVING OTHERNESS INTO THE FABRIC OF THE TEXT IN SHAUNA SINGH BALDWIN'S *RAWALPINDI 1919* AND *MONTREAL 1962*

CORINNE ALEXANDRE-GARNER

When, in November 2002, I invited Shauna Singh Baldwin at Paris X University to present her book *What the Body Remembers*, which had just been translated into French, we hardly spoke of her collection of short stories, *English Lessons* (1996), two texts of which I will present today. At the time though, she mentioned the particular role of women, often silent yet so active, especially at the time of historical upheaval and personal hardship. Speaking about religion, she said "women became the carriers of faith, the carriers of messages from one community to the other." The two short stories I have chosen to present do not exactly deal with faith, but rather with belonging and dealing with tradition, change and exile. Yet faith or rather loyalty to one's native community is not absent from the protagonists' complex relationships with the values of their new lives. And it is the women who are the go-betweens linking the world of the past and tradition and that of the present and change. However, unlike the dragomans, epitomes of the figure of the go-between, who used to welcome visitors to the cities they had come to visit–often on business–and who knew the languages and cultures both of the stranger and of the inhabitants of the city (he came to visit) and were able to understand the two worlds, the characters in Singh's fiction will have to negotiate a difficult passage and build a bridge between two worlds as they move along. It seems that these women's abilities to cope with impending upheaval makes them the real bringers of change even though, as women, they are often relegated to the interior space of the home and tradition. Yet it is their skilful probing into their inner world and their helping hand which transform the world picture. Thanks to them, the black and white

representation of opposed political horizons (where differences in skin colour, gender, times, places, generations and memory can only be apprehended in Manichean terms) takes on more subtle hues. In a way they help break the dichotomy of a world built on binary oppositions, separated between *us* and *them*, *now* and *then*, *here* and *there*. The (lines of) boundaries become blurred when these women negotiate the terms of transition, and are able to weave the past into the future. Alienated as women in their original patriarchal communities or/and colonial societies, they come to inhabit a particular country, at an angle to the world, and map out new territories where crossing formerly closed boundaries becomes possible. Both short stories present a micro-cosmology and the same central motif though the contexts differ.

In *Rawalpindi 1919* (1996), the mother who knows little about *Vilayat*, the Punjabi term for abroad, foresees and prepares for her son's future homecoming before he has even left for his three-year university term abroad.

In *Montreal 1962* (1996), it is the resilience of an immigrant woman rooted in her ancestral culture which permits the transition from the dream of Canadian immigration which has turned into a nightmare, to a pragmatic decision enabling her to deal with reality as it is.

When they become aware of the opposition between two worlds, be it that of India under British rule as opposed to that of the Western world, or that of Canada as opposed to their native independent country, the women, whose point of view is described in the two short stories, find new paths to accommodate their traditional values and the new ways of the world.

Throughout those two narratives, I will show how the representation of what anthropologists call material culture becomes part of the writing technique which hints at how writing, *l'écriture*, may become a kind of transitional space, a fabric into which otherness may be woven.

Though I will describe the opposition between two worlds and the gap between the communities through the analysis of personal pronouns, the weaving of Punjabi words into the English text and the use of tenses, what I wish to suggest is that literature should not be seen only as the screen on which the image of imperial oppression or social struggle may be projected but as the very canvas which reflects and also reveals the gaps that it often tries to veil. It is the surface of inscription and the in-depth space where archives like memories may be stacked through the chiselling and embroidering of words into the fabric of the text, delineating a space where otherness may be unconsciously woven. This text as texture may then be seen as a transitional object, helping the writer to come to terms with separation, loss and re-appropriation of reality.

When, in her acknowledgements, Shauna Singh Baldwin writes that her late grandfather was the old storyteller behind *Rawalpindi 1919,* she only confirms that most of her short stories are autobiographical and insists on the verisimilitude of this story about her grandfather's mother overcoming her fear of the impending departure of her younger son. But as the writer choosing to create an omniscient narrator who unfolds a woman's thoughts while she is kneading and cooking the chapattis for her family, she already transforms the original oral story into a written text and informs the text with a totally different perspective. By deliberately changing the point of view, she introduces a particular culinary mix of meal (and here it has to be the one ground at the father's own mill) and words, the material and intellectual aspects of culture, and a woman's understanding of a man's world.

At first sight, there is nothing very original about this opening story of the book entitled *English Lessons*: A Sikh mill owner would like his sons to take over the family business, but the first son is a poet "gentle and kind, but no businessman" (Baldwin 1996, 9), so Sarup (the real name of the writer's grandfather), the younger son, will be sent abroad for three years, to the white man's country, and will come back to Rawalpindi in three years to take over the business. The plot is simple and while mixing, kneading and cooking the dough the mother keeps thinking and spins the tale of the future. The word "thought" is repeated again and again, like a leitmotif. The paragraphs describing the actual kneading are interspersed with those about the son's future and imperial relationships, as though a layered dough of text was being kneaded before our very eyes. The maternal words and thoughts flow like water into the father's meal, male and female materials bring life to the page–"her fingers moulded and formed the dough, knuckling into it; brown soft hands suppling it, readying it as she had made her sons ready" (9)–creating a new space-time continuum, a new logic of temporality, and a matrix of creative imagery.

Of course the dough is to be seen as the fabric of life and of the family that lives from the earnings of the mill. When she kneads, it looks as though she was taming the future pain of separation by enacting the gesture of separation with the dough. She separates "a small ball out of the large one", cradles it like a baby, "she could still return it to the large ball and no damage would be apparent. She could knead it back and it would blend again" (Baldwin 1996, 9). But she can foresee that unlike the small ball of dough, she will not be able to blend the young man unscathed into his family, and it is the preparation for change that her own personal unravelling thoughts anticipate and that her final words to the father announce.

"It will be different in three years, she thinks. [...] round and round, faster and faster, flatter and flatter, larger and larger" (Baldwin 1996, 10). Like the chapatti which becomes thinner and thinner as she flattens it, the son will be affected by his life abroad. The rhythm of the sentences becomes as regular as her gestures. It is as though words were repeated to soothe an anxious child with a rhythmic lullaby, but here it is a mother and not her child who needs reassurance because she imagines her son abroad will be lost and will lose weight without a proper Indian mother or a wife to take care of him. The description of the kneading of the dough corresponds to a parallel description of the imperial world where the two communities cannot really communicate. It is a world in which you wash your hands so as not to be polluted by the Englishman's handshake (the word *Angrez* is repeated as a kind of threat) as the latter refuses to use the traditional greeting of *Sat Sri Akal* (the Indian gesture of *Namaste* which consists in joining the two hands while the head is slightly bowed as a salutation). Thus in the paragraph, East and West are described as two worlds that cannot be reconciled while the mother in her kitchen has the power to put back together and reunite the two separate pieces of dough she is kneading. Her gesture foreshadows the work of elaboration in the psyche and the weaving of the different levels of the text, both descriptive and symbolic. This impossibility of East and West to meet is inscribed on the body and everything pertaining to it: body attitudes and taboos are different, but also clothing and skin as the external envelope that separates one from the outside world.

Thus the collector's red face and his *topi* become emblematic of the irreconcilable difference. But it is the way "they keep themselves distant for their food" (Baldwin 1996, 11) which strikes her as she is now baking the chapattis, and seeing in her mind's eyes the chapatti held in one's hand, she is made aware of the Indian direct relationship between the mouth and the hand that brings food to it. This image triggers a flash of awareness in her mind: Western eating utensils will have to be bought because her son will be used to them when he comes back: "He will have to learn that" (11). The reader is also warned of the importance of bodily gestures and of the representation of the hands not only as tools but as emblems.

In the penultimate part of the story, the words *chapatti* and *thali* are repeated again and again, echoing the repetitive rhythm in the first part. But it is when the woman compares knives to *kirpans* (the traditional curved ritual knife of the Sikhs) that we understand how she will come to terms with reconciling the world she knows with the still unknown one. She will adjust and accommodate differences. In the narrative, oppositions are now replaced by analogies and comparisons, the use of the future tense

replaces the conditional in her depiction of her son's destiny. All those linguistic elements hint at her coming acceptance of his fate: it enables her to take the last step which is described in the last lines when she puts her *chunni* on her head (the ritual scarf patriarchal codes say she must wear) to enter her husband's space and speak to him. Literally and metaphorically, she crosses the threshold. Now she is in his world but also in the world of the future which she foretells when she says: "*You* will need to buy chairs for this house when he returns, and *we* will need plates […]" (Baldwin 1996, 11, italics added). The shifting from the personal pronoun *you* excluding her from action, to the first person plural *we* hints that not only does she become active in anticipating the future but obviously she will be a helper in a changing world. She might play a new part on the family stage and in the public world. She is able to foresee a change she has accepted, and the use of the pronoun *we*, which fuses the patriarchal world excluding women with her own, seems to dissolve simultaneously the formerly irreconcilable dichotomy between *them* and *us* both at the level of her own community and of the colonial world.

Moreover the weaving in the English text of Punjabi words used without italics, in a performative way, blends the two cultures and languages into the textual tapestry.[1] Paradoxically the kitchen, where the story is set, the most secluded space of her domestic world, becomes a space of expansion and liberation when the mother's power of imagination and anticipation helps her envision the future. The stereotyped alienating female chores become acts of distancing and recognition and the son's going West is going to bring change to the East, opening up new doors to a traditional mother ready to adapt to new traditions both private and public. Hence the changes brought about by the future departure in the mother's imagination raise the question of how to write about changes and how to accommodate otherness in the textual fabric.

In the second short story, *Montreal 1962*, Shauna Singh Baldwin confirms that she is writing about her own parents' experience when they arrived in Montreal. Here, two young qualified professionals already fluent in English seem to have been lured by the officials of the Canadian embassy in India who had praised them as "exotic new Canadians, new blood to build a new country […]" (Baldwin 1996, 13). Yet when they arrive, things look bleak and disappointing.

The story is set in a basement apartment, with pallid walls, small windows unusually high with a well-worn carpet, where grey is the dominant colour. They have come to the last of his savings and her dowry, and he has just found a job. As landed immigrants coming from a

traditional Sikh family from Delhi, they feel cold both literally and metaphorically during the long Canadian winter.

As in the first story, the narrative is a long interior monologue. But here the young bride addresses her husband who is absent from the scene and has just been accepted for a job but she recalls his telling her, "They said I could have the job if I take off my turban and cut my hair short" (Baldwin 1996, 13) and she keeps thinking about it.

Here again the story could be read as the mere representation of two conflicting worlds and values, yet a closer study discloses the concealed paradigm. The use of the personal pronoun *they* (referring to the Canadians and their deceptive offer) is used repeatedly at the beginning of the text but it almost disappears to be replaced by the pronouns *I*, *you* and *we* at the end, when the young bride recalls her family, her present actions and the future she foresees. The past tenses describing the past in India and the actions of the woman are opposed to the future tense linked to the personal pronoun *we* at the end of the text and set the stage for the stereotyped presentation of a conflict between two worlds. Yet when the personal pronoun *they* used to designate the Canadians disappears from the text it might well mean that stereotyped representations will be abandoned. Thus in the last sentence the pronoun is replaced by the noun Canadians, as though *they* had become individualized and real, as though naming things meant taming them. Canada is not named but described as "this land of strangers", reversing the representation of strangers in a foreign land and making the story more universal. The end of the text highlights the tone of the narrative and shows the determination of the young woman to take their future in her own hands. Here again we are made to see how women are instrumental to change, the helpers, decipherers and bringers of a new social life despite their place in the confines of the traditional family.

> And so, my love, *I* will not let you cut your strong rope of hair and go without a turban into this land of strangers. The knot my father tied between my chunni and your turban is still strong between us, and it shall not fail you now. My hands will tie a turban every day upon your head and work so *we* can keep it there. One day *our* children will say 'My father came to this country with very little but his turban and my mother learned to work because no one would hire him.' Then we will have taught Canadians what it takes to wear a turban. (Baldwin 1996, 16, italics added)

I wish to spin the metaphor of unfurling the past as a turban and tying the knot of solidarity and kinship through the washing of the colourful turbans to hint that weaving the description of domestic menial tasks into a written text may be a way to subvert classical colonial and postcolonial

writing based on binary oppositions. Here the poetic description of washing dirty turbans in private may well play the same role as kneading the dough of the chapattis. The repetition of the gestures of unravelling, soaking and lifting the soft muslin, the long repetitions of the juxtaposed names of colours giving life or special materiality to these colours[2], the adverbs used like beads one would say, at regular intervals in the sentences, all hint at the fact that these textual repetitions are used as a way of retaining the elusive quality of something soon to be lost, and which one keeps close as long as one can. "Repetitions help deal with loss" as Roland Barthes used to say. It is as though the body as a recipient of the past was trying to exorcise its stifling memories and to knead them into actions, everyday tasks and new images.

Here again the regular tender gestures of the woman doing the laundry can be read as the gestures of a mother lovingly washing her child. I quote: "I lifted them as someday I'll lift children. When the milky bowl had fed them, my hand massaged them free of alien red-blue water, I placed them carefully in a basin […]" (Baldwin 1996, 14). Instead of the stereotype of an alienated woman doing her daily chores the reader is faced with the stereotype of the tender Eastern woman bathing and massaging a child.

One cannot deny the poetic quality of the description of the colourful veils of muslin which turn the drabness of the grey room into a shining screen of rainbow colours, on which happy vivid remembrances can be projected. The turbans are not only personified as babies but they exemplify the pride of the warrior's defiance[3], the beauty of the dancers she imagines them to be, the heroes and martyrs of her people. The favourite turban, the red one, she sees as a Sikh Sardar and a bleeding martyr, but above all as the stream of blood that links different generations. Thus the question of lineage and transmission becomes the central question of the text. The turban is the same rope of red material that she would tie every morning onto her brother's, father's and husband's heads and that she ties today, in a defying gesture, onto her own head. Yet the knotting of the cordlike turban which is linked to the transmission of traditions along the male lineage can be read paradoxically as the gesture which allows the woman, like a newborn baby whose umbilical cord has been cut, to start her own independent individual life. This announces the end of the story. Strained by conflicting values, a woman wearing the sacred headdress of the Sikh male on her head is now looking at herself in the mirror and what she sees is the reflection of her father as a young boy blurring with that of her brother, her husband and even with her own very real image. Thus disguised in the red bloodlike muslin, she ties her own fate to that of her male ancestors, breaks a taboo and enters a genderless destiny. And in the

mirror appears a genderless anonymous smiling face, "the face beneath the jaunty turban began to smile" (Baldwin 1996, 16). This young Sikh immigrant woman is now ready to enter the world of modern Canada with manly courage.

Both Shauna Singh Baldwin's short stories seem to present a world of binary oppositions where when East meets West, the confrontation of cultures is problematic and the well-defined identities cannot be reconciled. But such a reading of the text would be superficial as the poetic writing of the simplest domestic chores subverts the apparent stereotyped discourse. The renewed and creative representation of cooking and washing in the confines of the home suggests a new vista on the poetics of exile. We may go as far as saying that the traditional discourse on oppression along with the traditional feminist and colonial ones are unconsciously put to the test here.

Paradoxically, in *Rawalpindi 1919*, the most enclosed space of the most inner sanctum of a traditional woman's life, the private space of the kitchen, becomes the very space where an interior monologue is staged, and it is this most silent elaboration of her thoughts which permits the protagonist to anticipate the future and decide to change the domestic balance at home. The waltzing hands of the focalizing narrator while kneading the dough of the family's simple fare represent the agile movements of her thoughts which anticipate in imagination, the conception and delivery of a world to come, as though she had found an inner room of her own in her psyche.

In *Montreal 1962*, the representation of a very domestic and in a way traditionally alienating task–the washing of her husband's turbans– provides the time and space for the poetic inscription of the past transformed into the future. Thus both cooking and washing become acts of remembering and writing one's past and future. The representation of the material aspects of culture paves the way for a new prospect in which the tedious metamorphoses into the poetic while the stereotyped dichotomy is shattered not through a dogmatic political discourse but through the reversal or rather the subversion of traditional codes of culture of origin and colonial discourse. If one agrees with Sander Gilman[4] that "stereotypes are used when the integration of the self is threatened and that they reflect a gross network of mental representations of the world," then we may also agree that "they are like palimpsests on which original bipolar representations can still be deciphered" (Gilman 1996, 15).

In Shauna Singh Baldwin's fiction, the male-oriented, imperial and post-immigration worlds are shattered each time a woman becomes the icon of change through the performance of alienating tasks, so that the

usual places of a woman's silence turn into a mindscape and a space for creation.

This is how the distinction between self and other no longer applies: the series of opposites *here* and *there*, *then* and *now*, *them* and *us* are definitely subverted, while the external other seen as the oppressor no longer seems threatening as a space for the other within oneself is discovered. It is as though the dyadic structure offered an illusion necessary to establish the dichotomy between self and object, which might soon become the Other.

The Other, the stranger, begins and ends in ourselves: it cannot only exist as the projected figure of the oppressor or of the immigrant. "Strangely," as Julia Kristeva[5] writes, "we are inhabited by the other, the stranger who is but the other side of our own identity. Only when we become aware of this uncanny presence in ourselves can we stop hating the visible stranger, the alien threatening an illusory fixed single identity […] Our difference ends when we acknowledge that we are all strangers, not slaves to rigid links and communities" (Kristeva 1988, 9).

At first sight, the communities depicted in those two short stories may have looked like two conflicting worlds. Yet when Shauna Singh Baldwin weaves, in a poetic canvas, her family's past into universal images of everyday life, she creates a complex texture. Clear boundaries cannot be drawn any more between the two antagonistic worlds but are woven into a space of in-between embodied by writing and it is within the fabric of the text that this space of in-between emerges where converging spaces, times, mixed identities and values blend and move, like the hands of the two protagonists in the stories, to create an intermediary space which I would compare to the transitional space described by Winnicott. Like the transitional object which enables the child to cope with his mother's absence and break the primal dyadic relationship to find his own inner self and independence, I contend that the matricial text we have analyzed has enabled the writer to come to terms with her own loss and immigration. In his essay *The In-between*, the French psychoanalyst Daniel Sibony (originally from Morocco) states that "The in-between is about how to articulate the other; it is about another time when dealing with memory, another space when looking for one's space, another person […] thus it appears as a figure of origin (where time is lost and regained) […] and origin may thus be seen not only as the place where one comes from, but as the place where one is, and is moving" (Sibony 1998, 16, my translation). It is this movement in the weaving of the different elements in the text which saves the protagonists as much as the writer from the deadly opposition which petrifies all things and often entraps strangers together into exile and ensnares the natives in their erroneous feeling of territorial belonging, in

the fantasy of a (paralyzing) frozen identity. As Karima Berger, a French writer born in Algeria, writes in her essay *Eclats d'Islam*[6],

> the only coherence that guides me is the one which permits my circulations among my different sources which irrigate one another while I can navigate between them as in an open delta where I find nourishment wherever I go. Even though I know the risks, I wish to pursue my adventure of exile which keeps nourishing me. This exile is definitely not just the disappearance of my land, culture, memory or religion. It is an exile, alive and exhilarating. An adventure that began before I was forced to move away from the country where I was born, before I went to school. It is an exile which has been transmitted to me by several generations of my ancestors. (Berger 2009, 13)

Finally, for exiles and expatriates turned writers, beyond the mere space where political struggle can be staged, writing becomes not only their passport[7] and chosen territory but also the surface of inscription of their borderline existence. Neither deprived of their identity, nor totally uprooted and lost after having shed the phantasm of a pure and intact origin, those artists make theirs the poetics of space and the appropriation of universal values, a process which Karima Berger depicts as follows: "Writing [is] the only place I really inhabit, my only form of belonging. Writing which puts all my senses to work, those senses which are sharpened by the space of the in-between both uncomfortable and fecund" (2009, 25). Texts may then be seen as the matrix of the struggling of one's self into an object. It is an exercise fraught with danger yet fertile and fluid. It is my hypothesis that artists who skilfully negotiate reality into fiction and weave their subjective self into the text do create a work of art which is akin to the Winnicottian transitional space, because the act of writing enables them to create an emblematic space which is neither a space for recrimination nor a space to reclaim and clutch to an illusory fixed identity[8]. The fabric of the text could be seen as the material where absence and presence can coexist, where loss can be inscribed and located within the ever-changing textual fabric. In this nomadic textuality, identity is perpetually in question, reshaping itself, permitting the re-discovery of who one is, as one writes, putting to the test our ever-changing origin.

> Origin, like the horizon, follows us as we depart from it, goes away as we try to reach it, and its elliptic returns cannot be marked as single events, unique and pure, but as two movements, two instances in between which one is caught and one must know one is caught, often unbeknownst.[9] (Sibony 1998, 16)

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Notes

[1] Yet one might wonder about the deformation of the pronunciation of "Inglaand" and "Angrez": are they to be read as a sign of orality in the text or as a means to accentuate the opposition between the two worlds, thus emphasizing the distance the mother covered to accept the Western world and the complexity of this woman's coming to terms with a global world?

[2] See the selection of words that make the colours more vivid and alive.

[3] "[…] hushing their unruly indignation, gentling them into temporary submission. Finally I faced them as they sat before me."

[4] *L'autre et le moi, stéréotypes occidentaux de la race, de la sexualité et de la maladie*. Paris: PUF, 1996. My translation.

[5] *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris: Gallimard (folio), 1988. My translation.

[6] *Eclats d'islam, chroniques d'un itinéraire spirituel*, Paris: Albin Michel, 2009. My translation.

[7] I borrow this line from Lawrence Durrell's description of his adopted country.

[8] What the Alexandria born French psychoanalyst Jacques Hassoun called "une identité incantatoire", an incantatory identity.

[9] *L'entre-deux en partage* , op.cit.

CHAPTER TWO

INDO-CANADIAN DIASPORA: THE IBERIAN CONNECTION

SAUGATA BHADURI

While it may seem odd to many that the "Spanish Association for Interdisciplinary India Studies" would organize a conference on the Indo-Canadian diaspora[1], there is actually more Iberian connection than meets the eye in Indian diasporic articulations, and this article proposes to look at the same. India and the Indian diaspora being a very vast area, this article will keep itself restricted to the case of the Bengali diaspora alone, and show how the two very fundamentals of the diasporic experience–consciousness of maritime travel and the possibility of expressing the same through print capital–are inescapably Iberian, at least in the Bengali context. First, the word that serves as a metonym for the often-coerced early diasporic maritime travel in the Bengali language is "Harmad" (referring generally to Portuguese indentured-labour-merchandising ships and a direct derivative of the Spanish "Armada") and, secondly, the very first printed Bengali book was Manoel da Assumpçam's (also spelt as Manuel da Assumpção) bilingual dictionary cum grammar book of the Bengali language, *Vocabolario em idioma Bengalla, e Portuguez dividido em duas partes*, published in the Roman script from Lisbon in 1743. The very foundations of the Bengali diasporic experience–consciousness of diasporic maritime displacement and having a print medium to articulate the travails and tribulations of the same–being Iberian in origin, this article proposes to show how vestiges of this proto-consciousness linger on in later articulations of the Bengali diaspora, even in Canada, thereby probably forming the contours of a justification of the aegis of the Conference too, with the Indo-Canadian diasporic encounter having a veritable Iberian basis. But, let's unfold the story.[2]

Time: March and November 2007, Place: Nandigram, West Bengal. The media, public fora, intellectual circles, political organs … all abuzz with one phrase: "Harmad Bahini", the name the people of Nandigram

gave to the armed alleged Commmunist Party of India Marxist (CPIM) supporters who tried to enter and "capture" their "liberated" zone. A term that has thereafter found a place in political vocabulary to such an extent that even P. Chidambaram, the then Indian Union Home Minister, in a December 2010 official communication to the West Bengal Chief Minister used this term to describe the allegedly armed CPIM activists.

"Bahini" one understands as an armed force, but who or what is "Harmad"? This not all that unfamiliar a word, derived from the Spanish/Portuguese "Armada", refers to the dreaded Portuguese seafarers and pirates, who stormed the coasts of Bengal through the 16th and 17th centuries, at times settling down in its soporific clime as traders or colonial administrators, but more usually returning back with their booty, often in the human form, men and women picked up to be sold as slaves or indentured off to plantations. This fairly marginal colonial encounter (ultimately, Bengal was primarily colonized by the British[3]), that too from some five centuries back, must then be relevant enough to the contemporary Bengali consciousness for it to be invoked at ease to describe a current political crisis. Needless to say, the first Bengali diasporas are direct outcomes of the "Harmad" experience, and in these days of thinking globalization, hybridity and multiculturalism, this originary brush with dispersion must have proved to be significant to the Bengali psyche. But, was the encounter of the Bengali with the Portuguese restricted only to the forced shipment of slaves, or is there a far greater Iberian connection to Bengali multiculturalism, so much so that the "Harmad" will always be somewhere near us, within us? This is the question that this paper attempts to probe and takes you in the course of its inquiry on a short historical ride.[4]

One final clarification before I begin. Since from 1580 to 1680, the Portuguese empire was annexed to Spain, what were really "Portuguese" exploits in Bengal were technically Spanish imperial pursuits. To highlight the complexity of this situation as also to avoid historical inaccuracy, I choose to use the word "Iberian", while referring to the general schema of things, as in the title, and retain "Portuguese" in more particular cases, lest the ethnic specificity of the individuals concerned stands elided, but technically these connections can actually be legitimately called "Spanish", lending further credence to the possibility of a Spanish Association's foray into studying the Indo-Canadian diaspora.

The first European to arrive in Bengal was, however, not a Portuguese but an Italian traveller Ludovico di Varthema, who left Europe at the end of 1502, and came, via Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, Mecca, Hormuz, Cambay, Dabhol, Goa, and different parts of the Deccan, to the leading river-port town of