

attempt to re-interpret the notion of kinship. For our author, Antigone embodies the potential site to challenge the above mentioned language structure, since she neither holds the symbolic law, nor restores it at the very end. Tangled by and in *human* norms, Antigone is, nevertheless, simultaneously banished. Antigone speaks in the language of a forbidden right, problematizing the defining preconditions of a legitimate existence. In Butler's words, "if kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the human" (p. 82). Such thoughts, far from being fruitless and barren, allow Judith Butler to reconsider Antigone as the emblem of a culture that, inhabited by the privilege of a normative heterosexuality, impedes and blurs different forms of sexual and political freedom. The controversy about whether to make legitimate different and varied configurations of kinship should not only consider the cases of miscenegation and homosexuality, but also the recognition of blood relationships. Innovative in her analytic strategies, Judith Butler purposes the legitimatization and the recognition of such possibilities—which may well be embodied in the figure of Antigone—, not without previously revising the tenets of a cultural and psychoanalytic apparatus that would easily discredit Antigone's act as aberrant and pathological. Hence, this book widens the communicative scope of culture, and enthusiastically attends to the resignification of diverse theoretical disciplines in order to explore different spaces of socio-cultural, legal and political existence. Interestingly enough, some of these possibilities already exist; they may subtly appear as real, and therefore, subject to the choice of being explored, embodied and lived. This has been Antigone's legacy for the culture of a new century, or so argues Judith Butler, the latest theorist to rediscover and reevaluate the mythic figure lost between death and life.

**SHIFTING CONTINENTS/COLLIDING CULTURES.
DIASPORA WRITING OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT**

Ralph J. Crane and Radhika Mohanram (eds.)

Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi. Cross/Cultures. Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures. *Journal of American Studies*, in English, 42, 2000.

(by Dora Sales Salvador. University Jaume I de Castellón¹)

"...at the crossroads of history and literature,
bridging the home and the world."

Homi Bhabha (1994: 13)

The issues addressed in this volume include reflections on the literature of the Indian diaspora, and the diverse ways of appraising identity, language, subjectivity, representation and constitution of self in cross-cultural contexts. From the outset, it seems important to clarify that, as Ralph Crane and Radhika Mohanram claim in their introduction, the "Indian diaspora" is not always interpreted in the same way. In a discussion of migrations, it is pertinent to distinguish between enforced exiles and chosen diasporas. In any case, identity is shown to be not a monolithic fetish, but a dynamic means to learn. And, as Nilufer Bharucha notes, it is worth remembering that India has experienced many and different diasporas: the precolonial diaspora, the colonial diaspora, the Partition diaspora, and the postcolonial diaspora. Diverse critical perspectives could be displayed, depending on the particular object of study and how the key concepts in this area are understood. Migration is mostly lived as a process of loss and pain. However, it can also be highly creative and motoric. Notions such as home, embodiment, identity and sexuality constitute the core of many considerations in this book, and it is in respect to all these threads that this book is at its most interesting.

The thirteen essays gathered in *Shifting Continents/Colliding Cultures*, with an introduction and an afterword, cover a wide range of authors, experiences and topics: all of them related to the aftermath of British colonization in the Indian subcontinent, including Sri Lanka, and migration to places such as England, the United States, Fiji, Australia and Canada. One of the main purposes is to explore how South Asian identity is negotiated in Western locations, and the other way round, that is, how Western identity is mediated in South Asian sites. The reading of identity by privileging history is also of interest, as well as the role of diasporic women both in the nation and in the West. The relationship between diaspora and canon, the creation of alternative identities in cinema productions and the position of diasporic fiction within the broader scope of Indian literatures are relevant points too.

Ralph Crane, Chandani Lokugé, Susheila Nasta, Debjani Ganguly and C. Vijaysree explore the role of women and read immigrant experience in the West and diverse kinds of exile, analyzing the gendered differences that characterize the diasporic experience. Ralph Crane puts forward the need to take account of history in the construction of identity, which in his opinion begins to take shape when difference is perceived. He focuses his study on Leena Dhingra's novel *Amritvela* (1988). Dhingra is an Asian woman writing and living in Britain. In *Amritvela* she tells the cross-cultural story of the search of an Indian woman, Meera, who was taken to England as a child, where she has grown up, married an Englishman and had a daughter. In her search for identity, she travels to India, to discover her other half. However, what she in fact finds out is that she is "different" both in England and in India, that her sense of displacement exists in both spaces, that she is most comfortable between the two cultures, in the interstitial third space defined by Homi Bhabha (1994), because in Crane's (2000: 7) own words: "Diasporic identity, then, can be seen as a recognition that the self is multiple, fluid and dynamic".

On the other hand, Chandani Lokugé examines the identities of Sri Lankan migrants to Australia, in the novel *A Change of Skies* (1991), by Yasmine Gooneratne, herself a Sri Lankan immigrant. Lokugé examines how Asians are stereotyped and converted into "marketable products", and how in order to cope with the serious issue of migrant identities Gooneratne employs irony, as a strategy to see things from a certain critical distance. Susheila Nasta deals with South Asian writers living in Britain and emphasizes their heterogeneity: authors such as Hanif Kureishi, Meera Syal, Ravinder Randhawa, Farhana Sheikh, Sunetra Gupta, Amit Chaudhuri and Rukshana Ahmed, among others. This is not a homogeneous group: their narratives are diverse, not all were born in Britain and many are bilingual. But, above all, Nasta's main concern is to emphasize that there has been a lack of serious critical interest in Asian women writing in Britain, and so her aim

is to explore the construction of female Asian identities in that country. For that reason, she centers on Sunetra Gupta's novel *The Glassblower's Breath* (1993), where the weavings of language, identity and place are reshaped from an elaborate formal experimentation. Introducing the topic of religion, Debjani Ganguly explores Hindu and Islamic fundamentalism, comparing the works of Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen. Their diasporas stand as instances of the painful consequences of holding purist notions of religion and ethnicity, together with the absence of dialogue between differences. Nasreen's *Lajja* (1993) and Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) are the novels chosen for analysis. C. Vijaysree's contention is that exile is a familiar theme in Indian women's literature, because they are already expatriates under the system of patriarchy. For her, diasporic identity and gender are the two sides of the complexity that has to be faced by Indian women writers settled in the West: Bharati Mukherjee, Suniti Namjoshi, Kamala Markandaya, Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt, among others. Exile and sexuality become their main concerns. Their writings, dwelling on the empowerment of the autobiographical mode, enact difference and otherness against any hegemonic form of domination, whether patriarchal, colonial or racial.

Satendra Nandan and Nilufer Bharucha underline the importance of the historical perspective in order to understand individual identity and how identification within minority communities is negotiated. Satendra Nandan traces the genealogy of the twice-exiled Fijian Indian, who has been an almost invisible and unspoken presence for over a century. More than 60,000 *girmityas* (people who signed the *girmit*, that is, a contract of indenture to work in overseas colonies) travelled to Fiji during the *Raj*. Many years after that forced dislocation, the descendants of this Indian diaspora are still longing for their own homeland. After the military coup that took place in Fiji in 1987, an apartheid constitution was set up. Suddenly, the Fiji-Indians became aware that they were perceived as alien at "home". In fiction, diverse works accounted for this painful experience, such as Satendra Nandan's novel *The Wounded Sea* (1991), Sudesh Mishra's poems in *Tandava* (1992), Subramani's collection of stories *The Fantasy Eaters* (1989), and some of V.S. Naipaul's novels. In a historical and highly informative essay, Nilufer Bharucha deals with the minority identity of the Parsis in India. Coming from Iran, the Parsis arrived at Gujarat (India) in the 7th or 9th centuries A.D. This was, indeed, the first Parsi diaspora, before the European colonization of the subcontinent. Later, in the postcolonial era, with their loss of elite status, many Parsis migrated to the West. Bharucha manages to provide a broad and enticing overview on Indian literature written in English by Parsi authors such as Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Boman Desai, Bapsi Sidhwa and Ardashir Vakil, to name a few. At the same time, she explains that a special feature of Parsi diasporas is their racial pride and their determination to preserve their own individual ethno-religious

identity in the face of both colonial and postcolonial constraints. In the light of the present-day Hindu fundamentalism enacted by the Shiv Sena government in Bombay, this defence of ethnic identities within the real plurality of India, becomes particularly relevant.

Zohreh Sullivan, Susan Spearey, Radhika Mohanram and R. Raj Rao offer different patternings of diaspora and identity. Zohreh Sullivan compares the writing of the Indian diaspora with that of postrevolutionary Iran. In her view, the chief difference between these postcolonial exiles lies in the fact that, apparently, the Iranian diaspora travels from a land that aspires to be monolithic and homogeneous. Focusing on V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), Susan Spearey approaches diasporic Indian fiction by means of spatial metaphors. Significantly, space is put forward as an interactive force that informs any historiographical reading. Radhika Mohanram's interest is focused on the novel genre (as associated with the construction of the nation), the canon, and the fact that the postcolonial novel is nowadays interrogating the established canon very closely. To make her point, she examines Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1880) in juxtaposition with Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* (1993), in order to show that postcolonial literature re-locates the English literary canon, revealing its own ambiguous identity. Raj Rao delves into the relationship between national and sexual identity, especially regarding the ex-centric and dis-located position of gay and lesbian writers within the discourse of the nation. By means of his analysis of the novel *Funny Boy* (1994), by the Sri Lankan author Shyam Selvadurai, Rao voices the presence of the variable of (homo)sexuality in the literature of the South Asian area.

As cinema also plays an important role when it comes to the construction of identity, Jane Roscoe and Isabel Santaolalla center their contributions on intercultural British cinema. The filmmakers discussed, Gurinder Chadha and Horace Ové, hybridize the national character of British film, showing their particular views of "Britishness" from *within*, from a center that, evidently, cannot hold anymore. Jane Roscoe devotes her paper to the film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1994), directed by Gurinder Chadha (the first Indian woman director in Britain), with a screenplay written by the popular and multifaceted Meera Syal. The film pictures a group of cross-generational Indian women living in Birmingham, paying great attention to how the popular cinema of Bombay, known as "Bollywood", influences these enactments and remains as a dynamic presence in the imaginary of the diasporic subjects. *Bhaji on the Beach* is an energetic, age-race-and-sex-relations comedy. Topics include generation and culture gaps (and clashes), domestic violence, sexuality, sexism, and the still alive British racism. Contemporary Indian experience in Britain is not represented as unitary or homogenised. Quite the contrary: identity is perceived and negotiated in different manners by women

of different ages. At the same time, Isabel Santaolalla's essay also concentrates on *Bhaji on the Beach*, together with Horace Ové's *Playing Away* (1986), and on a screenplay by Caryl Phillips. In an analysis carried out from a very interesting viewpoint, Santaolalla posits that both films undermine monolithic discourses. And not only those of the dominant hegemonic culture, but also those that delineate patronizing views of ethnic minority groups. Thanks to Roscoe's and Santaolalla's papers, the interstitial nature of diasporic cinema is described in an accurate and skilful way.

Finally, Makarand Paranjape's afterword comes to be the counterpoise to the whole volume. Instead of the diaspora writing India, he is interested in how India writes the diaspora. Paranjape aims at accounting for the voices that, from India, respond to the diasporic representations. In his opinion, there is no "pure" belonging and no "pure" diaspora. But his main concern is to explain how, metonymically speaking, postcolonial diasporic Indian writers in the West are usually considered as the representation of Indian writing as a whole: they are published in the West, and the West views them as speaking for all Indians, producing discourses that, according to Paranjape, are in fact perceived as misinformed, false or even harmful by those who live in the subcontinent, as discourses that aim mainly at marketing the margins. Though he declares that he does not mean to say that those who live in India are best qualified to represent the country, because his purpose is not to disregard but to reject the privileging of the diasporic over the native, I believe that this polarization itself is quite problematic. Paranjape is right when he complains that, regretfully, Indian literatures originally written in Indian languages, even those available in English translation, are rarely analysed. He is also right when he says that, due to the contemporary dynamics of the literary market, the most widely read Indian fiction is that written by diasporic writers who publish in English and in the West. So, it is indeed appropriate that he should voice the somewhat silenced fictional reality of India's many literatures. His claim is pertinent; his counterpoise in this debate is sound and necessary. Nonetheless, where do you draw the line within and between people of India? His sharp divide between natives and diasporics, entering into the realm of "Indianness", is hollow in more than one sense. How can you tell somebody that he or she is not a *native* of India simply because he or she lives abroad? How can you measure identity? How can you grade "nativity"? Paranjape's contention seems to link identity closely to location, belonging to residence, and in so doing, disregards and underrates feelings, values and thoughts that can be carried inside oneself, anywhere.

In sum, as is shown by the miscellaneous nature of this collection, there are multiple experiences concerning the Indian diaspora, mainly because there are diverse experiences of what India is. Chiefly, as Shashi Tharoor (1997: 6) contends: "[...] the singular thing about India is that you can only speak of it in the plural".

The diasporic authors straddle the national and the global, the outside and the inside, past and present, memory and forgetting, identity and otherness, belonging and alienation, to be or not to be. A strong sense of place permeates the texts written by diasporic authors, as the papers collected in this volume show. However, though language is one of the most important factors in cross-cultural relationships, including the diasporic movements, none of the essays focuses on the relevant problematics of language and/or linguistic choice. This is indeed a subject mentioned by Paranjape in his afterword, and a study of this field would have been welcome.

Though it is easy to say and hard to feel, most of the literature of the Indian diaspora—like many other cross-cultural representations—fosters the idea that there is no need to choose, no need to see the intercultural self as a struggle between irreconcilable sides. It is evident—and a source of hope—that cultural differences exist, but though migration produces complex identity crises and transformations, negotiation is always possible. In our global and highly diversified world, it is time to dissolve binary oppositions; it is time to believe that, as Gayatri Spivak (1993: 216) states: “If there is a universal principle it is in the incessant negotiation of difference. Such a principle is an impossible starting point for anything. It is better to keep working away at the impossible, than to make things seem possible by way of polarizations”. The essays edited by Crane and Mohanram offer diverse views and recall different experiences that echo the straddling perspective mentioned above. Nonetheless, the difficult question remains the same: How to locate oneself from a diasporic consciousness and experience? How to find one’s own place in the world? Displaying their ever-searching sensibility, from their dis-located position and constant play between gain and loss, together with the Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros’s beautiful prose, perhaps the Indian diasporic authors make theirs the words of Cisneros (1989: 64): “I see a home in the heart”.

Notes

1. The research carried out for the writing of this review has been financed by the Generalitat Valenciana. FPI00-07-210.

Works cited

- BHABHA, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- CISNEROS, Sandra. 1989. *The House on Mango Street*. London: Bloomsbury.
- SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1993. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. London and New York: Routledge.
- THAROOR, Shashi. 1997. *India. From Midnight to the Millennium*. New York: HarperPerennial.