

NARRATIVES OF RELOCATION: NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN HOME AND EXILE

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Abstract

The discursive formations of new immigrant literature have almost taken the shape of a separate identity of a genre which I would prefer to call the 'narratives of relocation'. People, in the course of their movements, swung between the in-betweenness of home and exile, with a sense of 'two worlds', strive to cope with the enigmatic nature of their ordeals of arrival and survival. The ordeals of their ambivalent subject positions get represented in artistic terms in the discursive practices, more recently, of immigrant literature, for which American multiculturalism has provided a complex space for the issues immigrant literature deal with. The paper argues for a comprehensive critical and comparative remapping of these practices. The paper will include authors from Asian American diasporas particularly those whose works have been pioneering in providing 'interpretation' of maladies/dilemmas immigrants confront in their adjustment with the new sociocultural environment by becoming a 'middleman' in interpenetrating the meaning of America through 'quest narratives' and by defining the nature of identity in terms of gender, race or sexuality. The paper will examine how their exploration of the challenges of cultural displacement through a distinctive author-protagonist relationship revealing the uneasy negotiations between the traditional homeland culture and the American culture on the issues of assimilation and resistance, through a complex, multi-layered, heteroglossic and quasi-fictional narrative by a complex intermingling of fact and fantasy, history and biography, the echoes of an autobiographical subject, and even the invocation of ghosts as an aid to tell stories are constructs to relocate their homes.

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1.Introduction:

There has been an emergence of "new immigrant literature" in the United States of America in the last three decades. Most significant writers of this genre of which, in fact, are the Asian Americans: immigrants from China, the Philippines, Japan, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Korea and the countries of the Arab World. Its contemporary significance today has been cogently put by Elaine H Kim (see ADB Bulletin 080 Spring 1985: 34-41), "AS BOTH social document and a mirror of memory, myth, dreams, and desire, Asian American literature provides unique access to understanding the social history and sensibilities of an often misunderstood American racial minority group." In other words, this literary discourse is a metonymy of 'place', 'displacement' and 'relocation', originating from the experience of displacement with a sense of dislocation from the original homeland of the immigrant writer. There is always an enigma "in" and "of" the arrival, shocks, holding the homeland memories, ethos, nostalgia trying to survive "in another man's country" in the midst of the feelings of strangeness and solitude" (Naipaul, 1987:6). Attempts at adjustments and reconciliations take place in a dynamic and shifting environment which deconstruct the formations of a separate identity and cultural distinctiveness.

Meena Alexander, the Asian American poet and novelist, describes this new trend in literature as, "a world of migrant memories and multiple languages at the rim of the twenty-first century" (Alexander, Meena (April 1, 2001). Discussing Jessica Hagedorn, Bharati Mukherjee, Cheng-rae Lee and other "celebrated writers" like Maxine Hong Kingston, Frank Me Court, Sandra Cisneros and Jamaica Kincaid and referring to their works as "a new literature of immigration" S. Shankar in his article, "America Inside Out" in *The Hindu* (Online edition Sunday, March 07, 2004) says, "It is a literature of protest, and of celebration.... it is a literature in which to read the story of contemporary America." But in my opinion, it is more than the story of contemporary America. In fact, it is the story of human being's quest for a home away from home. It is a celebration, celebration of human being's indomitable inner desire to move, to walk on and on and on.

The tales of Asian American writers of contemporary America are the tales of "relocation", narratives in which to borrow the lines from Jessica Hagedorn's poem "Sorcery" "Words are very/tricky things...instruments of illusion/.... and once /you start dancing to words/you might never/ stop." (Hagedorn nd). Words are tricky in this world of cracked souls and fractured sensibilities because it is "a fusion of multiple worlds" (Alexander, Meena qtd. in "Migrant Music" <http://www.bookcounter.com/big/o-89608-546-5>). Words are tricky instruments depicting a world of encounters, a world in which men and women have moved physically and emotionally from one place to another to "seek fortune far from home" (Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* 1999: 198, "The Third and Final Continent"

), hiding guilt and fears in the silent corners of their hearts like Mrs Das, Mr Pirzada (Lahiri, 1999 "Interpreter of Maladies" and "When Pirzada Came to Dine"), Padma, (Mukherjee 2002, *Desirable Daughters*); seeds of rebellion in Jasmine (Mukherjee 1989, *Jasmine*), the members of Ramoud family in Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* and the beautiful and accomplished chef Sirine and the visitors of Um-Nadia's café in her another novel *Crescent*, Rio Gonzaga (Hagedorn 1990, *Dogeaters*), Kingston's protagonist in *The Woman Warrior* (1977) and the conflict between the Chinese immigrant mothers and their American born daughters in Amy Tan (1989, *The Joy Luck Club*, and 2001, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*). To unravel the mysteries and the enigma of arrival, the words are means of relocating oneself in a new environment.

This attempt at relocation is invariably ambivalent, an in-betweenness between home and exile/abroad, a shock and strain to overcome and to be able to "survive" (Lahiri: 1999) with a sense of "two worlds" (Naipaul qtd in Prasad: 2005). The paper has selected Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), and *The Namesake* (2003), Bharati Mukherjee's *The Middleman and other Stories* (1988), *Jasmine* (1989) and *Desirable Daughters* (2002), Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) and *Crescent* (2003). In the course of discussion Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1977), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001) and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990) will be referred to for a comparative study to show how despite a shared experience, the cultural realities represented in their works differ greatly. But the scope of the paper does not allow me here to do so.

2. Discussion:

2.1. The Narratives of South Asian Diaspora:

The scope of the paper does not allow the inclusion of all the novelists and their works who belong to Asian American literature. Therefore, three representative writers of South Asian Diaspora: Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, and Diana Abu-Jaber have been chosen, whose works have been pioneering in "interpreting" the maladies of the Asian immigrants consequent upon their arrival in, to use the title of Lahiri's short story, "The Third and Final Continent", i.e. North America and as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni ironically puts it "liberated and trapped by myth and magic of America." (see *Profile of a SAJA Speaker: Chitra Divakaruni*).

2.1.1. Lahiri: the interpreter of maladies:

Lahiri's collection of short stories and also her recent novel *The Namesake* portray the pictures of culture shock and displaced identity. The characters invariably live "two lives" like their creator and the narratives unfold their experience of the feelings of "foreignness", homesickness and being out of place living incomplete, fractured lives, though living a life of freedom with opportunities of work. It is interesting that Lahiri, herself a daughter of immigrant parents, recalls, "As a child I sought perfection and so denied myself the claim to any identity. As an adult I

accept that a bicultural upbringing is rich but imperfect thing." ("My Two Lives", Online *Newsweek* International Edition). She further comments, "The immigrant's journey, no matter how ultimately rewarding, is founded on departure and deprivation, but it secures for the subsequent generation a sense of arrival and advantage" (Ibid). Similar are the feelings of the unnamed narrator in "The Third and Final Continent" after remaining "in this new world for nearly thirty years", he reflects:

I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each time I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination. (p 198)

Her characters express their sense of departure, deprivation, and arrival through the tropes of food, clothing, people and place as it is evident from the passage quoted above. It is interesting to note how the characters define their identity with the clothes they wear, the food they eat, the memories they keep, and the new encounters they have. A beautiful example is in *The Namesake* when Ashima Ganguli is taken to Mount Auburn Hospital "through deserted Cambridge streets, up Massachusetts Avenue and past Harvard Yard". .. She is asked to remove her Murshidabad silk sari in favour of a flowered cotton gown that, to her mild embarrassment, only reaches her knees." She continues thinking and her thoughts reveal her deprivation in a "foreign" land where "she is alone, cut off by curtains from the other women in the room."...where

[T]here is nothing to comfort her in the off-white tiles of the floor, the off-white panels of the ceiling, the white sheets tucked tightly into the bed . In India, she thinks to herself, women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives.

She is deprived of the love and care and "it was happening far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she loved" and "she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare". The clash of culture caused by arrival in a new place "nothing feels normal to Ashima" who

For the past eighteen months, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge, nothing has felt normal at all. It's not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow, she will survive. It's the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land.

One of the things of place which gives solace to her is "a tattered copy" of *Desh* magazine

that she'd brought to read on her plane ride to Boston and still cannot bring herself to throw away. The printed page of Bengali type, slightly rough to the touch, are a perpetual comfort to her. She's read each of the short stories and poems and articles a dozen times.

In the short story "Mrs Sen's" Mrs Sen's loneliness and in-betweenness between home and exile are understood by the young character Eliot "who understood that when Mrs. Sen said home, she meant India" (p 116) and "The mention of the word seemed to release something in her" (p 113). Her loneliness deepens "rising above the weary sigh of the waves" (p 116) when Mr Sen could not come being engaged by a meeting, she takes Eliot by the hand into the bedroom and

She flung open the drawers of the bureau and the door of the closet, filled with saris of every imaginable texture and shade, brocaded with gold and silver threads. Some were transparent, tissue thin, others as thick as drapes, with tassels knotted along the edges. In the closet they were on hangers; in the drawers they were folded flat, or wound tightly like thick scrolls. She sifted through the drawers, letting saris spill over the edges. "When I ever worn this one? And this/ And this?" She tossed the saris one by one from the drawers, then pried several from their hangers. They landed like a pile of tangled sheets on the bed. The room was filled with an intense smell of mothballs. (p 125)

Eliot "especially enjoyed watching Mrs Sen as she chopped thing, on newspapers on the living room floor". Instead of a knife she used a blade that curved like a Viking ship, sailing to battle in distant seas" (p 114). Memories from home, the fish she buys and the letter she receives from home are there to sustain her no matter whether she is able to drive a car or not. Lilia, the young narrator in "When Mr Pirzada Came to Dine" describes this sense of "foreignness" in a new social and cultural environment of home and exile foregrounded through the visits of Mr Pirzada, Lilia "[A]t first knew nothing of the reason for his visits" (p 24). But the reasons are expressed through a description that speaks for itself in the following lines:

The supermarket did not carry mustard oil, doctors did not make house calls, neighbors never dropped by without an invitation, and of these things, every so often my parents complained. In search of compatriots, they used to trail their fingers, at the start of each new semester, through the columns of the university directory, circling surnames familiar to their part of the world. It was in this manner that they discovered Mr Pirzada, and phoned him, and invited him to our home. (Ibid)

Mr Pirzada's watch is always "set to the local time in Dacca", the capital of his country. By looking at this Pirzada's "two lives" Lilia "realized" that even living away from home "Life.... was being lived in Dacca first" (p 30). And Lilia

understands that "[O]ur meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already happened there, a lagging ghost of where Mr Pirzada really belonged." (p31). Lilia, the young narrator, does not know about the history of the country, that is India, her parents belonged. Her father corrects her when she referred to Mr. Pirzada as "the Indian man." (Ibid) and tells her about the country's partition in 1947 and the aftermath of the partition. This "made no sense" (Ibid) to her because,

Mr Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or more the less same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents Mr Pirzada took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol..... Nevertheless my father insisted that I understand the difference and he led me to a map of the world taped to the wall over his desk. He seemed concerned that Mr Pirzada might take offence if I accidentally referred to him as an Indian, though I could not really imagine Mr Pirzada being offended by much of anything. His finger trailed across the Atlantic, through Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and finally to the sprawling orange diamond that my mother once told me resembled a woman wearing a sari with her left arm extended. (pp 25-26)

The dilemma of the second generation Asian American from India is being solved by the father who is showing the geographical contours of being an immigrant and the minute differences of colour differencing the diasporality of a person living in America. But the idea of a home away from home is further complicated by the teachings in the American schools of the American history which the young narrator, Lilia, when was "given blank maps of thirteen colonies, and asked to fill in names, dates, capitals. [She] could do it with [her] eyes closed". (p 27)

The second generation Asian Americans from India figure in the title story "Interpreter of Maladies". Like Lilia both the husband and wife are "born in America" as announced by the wife and corrected by the husband, Mr Sen "Born and raised" (p 45). "The family looked Indian but dressed as foreigners did" (pp 44-45). The malady of Mrs Das , her "secret" which makes her feel 'terrible" finds expression eventually in her confiding it to Mr Kapasi to get "some kind of remedy" (p 65) who " found it strange that Mr Das should refer to his wife by her first name when speaking to" his little daughter" (p 45). Mrs Das's "impatient sigh" reflects "as if she had been traveling her whole life without pause" (p 47). Mr Kapasi is an interpreter without remedy. The remedy is not so easy to find as we find in the following discussion of Bharati Mukherjee's characters who are living a life of adventure into their own personal and cultural experience.

2.1.2. Mukherjee: adventures into personal and cultural experience- "No one behind no one ahead...I am alone and find my way":

Mukherjee's latest novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002) describes three daughters of a well-off traditional Bengali-Hindu parentage, among them the oldest one Padma has a pre-marital affair resulting into the birth of a son unlike Mrs Das in Lahiri's "Interpreter of Maladies" who has post-marital affair resulting into the birth of a son which is the cause of her malady. For Padma this is not a malady, on the contrary, for her sister Tara this is something very disconcerting her elder sister must be made aware of. The migratory vision of Mukherjee is dramatized against these three daughter's journey from Calcutta to the two different parts of the world: India and the USA and with the story of the tree-bride of Mishtigunj, Dhaka, now Bangladesh, reverberating in the background. The mystery and the non-familiarity of the small village of Mishtigunj is created early in the novel with a thread that crossed across the whole range of an outsider in the USA, living in a state of personal and emotional confusion with which an immigrant is always beset with. Tara, the narrator, says,

Bengali culture trains one to claim the father's birthplace, sight unseen, as his or her desh, her home. When I speak of this to my American friends --- the iron-clad identifiers of region, language, caste, and subcaste -- they call me "overdetermined" and of course they are right. When I tell them they should be thankful for their identity crises and feelings of alienation, I of course am right. When everybody knows your business and every name declares your identity, where no landscape fails to contain a plethora of human figures, even a damaged consciousness, even loneliness, become privileged commodities. (pp 33-34)

For the wife in Mukherjee's "A Wife's Story" (1988) loneliness has turned out to be a "privileged commodity". After returning back from a cinema show with her boyfriend she feels

light, almost free. Memories of Indian destitutes mix with the hordes of New York street people, and they float free, like astronauts, inside my head. I've made it. I'm making something of my life. I've left home, my husband, to get a ph.D. in special ed. I have a multiple-entry visa and a small scholarship for two years. After that, we'll see. (p 29)

Her husband visits her, who behaves like "an international business man at home in all the financial markets" (p 38). She wants to "pretend with him that nothing has changed" in their relationship but

In the mirror that hangs on the bathroom door, I watch my naked body turn...The body's beauty amazes. I stand here shameless, in ways he has never seen me. I feel, free, afloat, watching somebody else. (p 40)

The story of transformation toward freedom, in other words the story of adventure in to personal and cultural experiences of freedom, is different in *Jasmine* (1990) in which the main character Jasmine

begins her journey travelling through the underbelly of the immigrant trade route on forged papers, through the tiered bunks on the trawlers out of Europe, and ends up making good as a respected "caregiver" as opposed to the more servile Indian version of the "ayah" and then a wife. She moves from Jyoti to Jasmine and eventually to Jane Ripplemeyer, shedding personas like so many skins, eventually metamorphosing into a creature ready to fight fate and "reposition the stars". (Dutta Choudhary, Sonya "Between Memory and Desire" from *The Hindu*, Online Edition, Sunday May 02 2004 <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/lr/index/htm>)

Jyoti's widowhood and exile give her the potency of a goddess ("I feel so potent, a goddess." p 12) She becomes Jane for survival, "a fighter and adapter" (p 40). She is transformed into Sati-goddess, or a Goddess *Kali* or a sage with the third eye, the star on the forehead which throbs "with pain and hope and hope and pain" (p 225). Jasmine's adventures into personal and cultural experiences come to a close, for the time being, it seems, with the end of the novel when she whispers to the astrologer of her village "Watch me reposition the stars" and is ready to go with Taylor with the following feelings,

I cry into Taylor's shoulder, cry through all the lives I've given birth to, cry for all my dead.
Then there is nothing I can do. Time will tell if I am a tornado, rubble maker, arising from nowhere and entering into a cloud I am out of the door and in the potholed and rutted driveways, scrambling ahead of Taylor, greedy with wants and reckless with hope. (pp 240-41)

On the other hand, Tara, the central character in *Desirable Daughters* has a different kind of odyssey in the world of New York which is "seething with aliens" (*Jasmine* p 140). Tara's divorce from her husband, her association with her Hungarian lover, her upbringing of her gay son, and her homecoming to see her aging parents in India and to her grandmother's village Mishtigunj are different dimensions of an immigrant's journey, of what Bhabha says, "turmoil-rich hybrid space", the third space, a hybrid location of antagonism, perpetual tension, and pregnant chaos. (qtd. in Rath 2000) and Rath terms it a *Trishanku-like* existence, taking a myth from the

Ramayana, " a neither/nor condition parallel to that of Trishanku, as a metaphor for the modern expatriate/immigrant inhabiting the contested global/local space (Ibid). Home is a place in the geographic/cartographic sense but it is a realm, an imaginary construct circumscribed by cultural and/or historical boundaries. Tara's "homeness" and "hereness" of personal odyssey comes to a climax when her home is blown by a bomb and her divorced husband Bish saves her life at the end. She analyzes,

I don't know, or remember, or even care about my divorce. Bish had been with me, as he should be. He saved my life at great suffering to himself, as is the husband's duty. And now he is in rehab center learning to walk, which fulfils some larger destiny. Sometimes, *bishey bish khai*, the only antidote for poison is poison. Meaning I guess the harsh poison of the bomb is not, in the eye of God, any more tragic than the poisonous maya of attachment to making money. Bish's nickname is a cosmic pun waiting for a punch line. (p 304)

The story of alienation of Padma and Tara is dramatized on a canvas of home and exile: the repercussions of their actions of home in exile and the changes that took place while living in a country not their own, coming out of a Brahminical upbringing. Tara is a divorced woman, her sense of two lives, two worlds is reflected in the dramatic arrival of a young man proclaiming himself as the son of Padma from a previous affair. In a story entitled "The Tenant" Mukherjee unfolds another dimension of an immigrant's, a divorced woman named Maya Sanyal, adventures into personal and cultural experiences. Her encounters with Rab Chatterjee and Mrs Chatterjee make her "visible" the "mysteries" of a "contained planet" (p 104), their married life. Her temporary glimpse of the world of Mr and Mrs Chatterjee and their nephew Poltoo and she feels the "lostness" of the "confused world of the immigrant" (p 106). "Every place has something to give" (p 97) and "A person has to leave home. Try out his wings" (p 98) and she is not a "homesick aliens" (p 108). But while looking at the newspapers from India in the periodical room of the library of her college where she teaches Comparative Literature, she feels,

Out here, in the heartland of the new world, the India of serious newspapers unsettles. Maya longs again to feel what she had felt in the Chatterjee's living room: virtues made physical. It is a familiar feeling, a longing. Had a suitable man presented himself in the reading room at that instant, she would have seduced him.. She goes on to the stack of *India Abroads*, reads through matrimonial columns, and steals an issue to take home. (p 109)

And the "immigrant courtship proceeds" (Ibid) with another immigrant named Ashoke Mehta. In the new development of moving from one place to another, from one man to another,

She wants to tell someone how moved she'd been by Mrs Chatterjee's singing. How she'd felt in O'Hare, even about Dr Rab Chatterjee in the car. But Fran is not the person. No one she's ever met is the person. She can't talk about the dead space she lives in. (p 112)

Maya's adventure into the personal and cultural experiences can be compared to Lahiri's Miranda in her story "Sexy" whose affair with Dev results in an awareness of the feeling for Miranda that " it was not fair to her, or to his wife" (p 110). However, the wife in " A Wife's Story " of Mukherjee's is also aware of this new found freedom " a life... , led amid disorder' (p 32). They are like a mythical *Trishanku* who remains in his third space, the in-betweenness of home and exile, between memory and desire. But with a difference.

The difference will be understood more clearly in the discussion that follows when we look at the narratives of relocation of some more Asian American writers. I have chosen Kingston, Amy Tan from China, and Jessica Hagedorn from the Philippines. My selection of these writers is based not only on the availability of the primary and secondary source materials (which is one of the limitations of my paper) but also my interest in the poetics and politics of narrative and the thematization of place as a trope of displacement, identity, and what Naipaul (qtd in Prasad: 2005) says, dispossessed "rootedness" of particularly those human beings who are always on the move, "spiritual vagabonds..." (Dutta Choudhary: 2004). Or one might say " the travelling gods of diaspora" (Prasad: 2006) or as Pico Iyer terms self-reflexively as "the fast growing population of global souls who exist in many cultures all at once and so fall in cracks between them" (Iyer: 2000) trying to make sense of life by defining borders, extending them, not only in their diasporal movements, in their tensions of home and exile but also in their writings defying conventional genres, redefining traditional modes of creativity extending their borders, enriching their potentialities and possibilities, whether in prose or in poetry, telling their "angst-ridden account of the aspiring outsider" (Dutta Choudhary; 2004) fusing " multiple worlds" in the twenty-first century multicultural mosaic of the New World. It is no wonder the Buddhist lover of Tara in Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* talks of cracks and fault lines – the discovered and the undiscovered ones (p 47) of the immigrant's emotional landscapes and the title of Meena Alexander's memoirs is *Fault Lines : A Memoir* (1993) in which exploring the identity of an outsider, Alexander searchingly asks and analyzes the meaning of past in the present state of an immigrant:

In Manhattan, I am a fissured thing, a body crossed by fault lines.
Where is my past? What is my past to me, here, now at the edge of
Broadway? Is America a place without memory?

2.1.3. Abu-Jaber: Dialogics of cuisine, coincidence and culture

In Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* (1993) and *Crescent* (2003) the representations of home and exile have acquired a new dimension. *Arabian Jazz* narrates the story of displacement of the Jordanian family of Matussem Ramoud, a widower with his two daughters Jemorah and Melvina and his relatives and friends who frequently meet in their country of exile the U.S.A. which they call their "New Country" to sing "dirges in Arabic about their loneliness and aching hearts" (p 11). Their in-betweenness of cultural difference is expressed towards the end of the novel through the musings of Fatima, Matussem's sister as

[S]he lived among Americans, in places they had built, among their people, but despite this she wanted to keep herself, her family, and a few friends apart from the rest. She wanted what the Americans had, but at the same time she would never relax her hold on herself. It was not appropriate to mingle. Americans had the money, but Arabs, ah! They had the food, the culture, the etiquette, the ways of being and seeing and understanding how was meant to be lived. Her wish, always, no matter what, the sharp wish that cut into her center and had lifted her eye with hope was that her nieces should marry Arab boys, preferably in the family. (p 360)

Fatima's obsession was to find "Arab boys" for her brother Matussem's daughters: Jemorah and Melvina. Melvina is a dedicated nurse, "a miracle worker" at the hospital she works - "People flourished under her care" (p 179). Always daggers are drawn between Melvina and Fatima on the issue of marriage. Jemorah is different. Her loneliness and sense of exile is embedded with her father's behaviour who once his boss Mr Boink referred to as "the dirty sand nigger" (p 99) Jemorah

...wondered what language he [Matussem] thought in; his displacement was a feature of his personality. He wouldn't have been the same father, she knew, if he had stayed in Jordan and raised them there. His removal was part of that soft grieving light behind his eyes and part of the recklessness in his laugh. His eyes were so steady at times Jem they were taking in the whole of the world and all its expanse of loneliness....

Who was her father, Jem wondered, in this country without shadows? Matussem flickered thin in the family mind, every step always the first, poised over his drums, reveling beats through the air, telling story after story through them, like Shaharazad giving life. (pp 98-99)

The ambivalence of living a life of uncertainty amidst the opportunities of freedom and work in this adopted new country is expressed through the affair of Jemorah with Ricky Ellis, “[A] graceful shining boy on lightning hooves”, her mythical Pan, “[A] beautiful monster” (p 36) and Melvina’s with her patient-lover Larry Fasco. However, their assimilation into the culture of the “new country” is resisted by the pull of divergent threads of their own culture.

Abu-Jaber’s *Crescent* deals with the characters who are forced to be in exile. Like the characters in *Arabian Jazz* they also live by the memories of the past. But their past was haunted by political persecution by oppressive regimes not by cultural constraints of “furtive burials” of female children - the Iraqi exile Hanif and Sirine’s uncle in *Crescent* and Fatima in *Arabian Jazz* are respectively the victims of their past. The ethnic humor of *Arabian Jazz* is transformed into a discourse of cuisine and coincidence with which the novelist is working towards the same end to explore “what a painful thing it is to be an immigrant” (Abu-Jaber, Interview with Andrea Shalal-Esa 2002). When Sirine’s uncle takes her to an Italian restaurant he asked the waiter Eustavio who “brings them plates of dewy, rose-scented penne cotta”:

“Wouldn’t you say that immigrants are sadder than other people?”

Eustavio straitens up and closes his eyes. He answers Sirine’s uncle in Italian, then he says to Sirine in his accented English, “Sadness? *Certo!* When we leave our homes we fall in love with our sadness.”

Sirine’s uncle nods at Eustavio walk away, “You see,” he says.

Sirine draws her spoon through the thick banks of foam on her coffee.”What was it like? In your home town? (pp 142-143)

Sirine works at the restaurant of Um-Nadia whose comments, based on her observation of the people, mostly Arabs, visiting her restaurant reveal the pain of their loneliness which is created by their displaced identities:

The loneliness of the Arab is a terrible thing; it is all-consuming...It threatens to swallow him whole when he leaves his own country, even though he marries and travels and talks to friends twenty-four hours a day. (p 20)

Sirine, “the Iraqi-American chef,” while rolling out “dough early in the morning in her open kitchen behind the counter” and “discreetly” watching the exchange students and immigrants from the Middle East

Sipping coffee, studying the newspapers, and having arguments. Everything about these young men seemed infinitely vulnerable and tender: their dense curling lashes, soft round noses and full

lips.... Sometimes she used to scan the rooms and imagine the word *terrorist*. But her gaze ran over the faces and all that came back to her were words like *lonely* and *young*. (pp 22-23)

Sirine's uncle "in her room of imagined books" tries to forget his pain of homelessness and loneliness by telling fable-like ongoing tales which he calls his "moralless story of Abdelrahman Salahadin" (p 17) (which would put Shaharazad to shame) of Aunt Camille and her son, Abdelrahman Salahadin combining the elements of *Arabian Nights* bestowing magico- realistic fairy tale quality to the narrative, the "deeper levels of truth and insight" and by providing "the critical key to the characters own struggles and uncertainties." (Abu-Jaber, Interview with Luan Gains nd.) and "the flavor of the oral narrative" (Abu-Jaber, Interview with Robin E Field: 2006) .

The dialogics of cuisine, coincidence and cultural similarities and differences is being enacted on a territory far from home with a sense of nostalgia and agony, with a search for a place and emotional anchorage as in the very beginning of the novel Sirine's uncle tells her, " I would just like to see you with someone nice and charming all those things. That's all." (p 19) He meant by "someone" the Iraqi professor Hanif Al Eyad, "the new hire in the Near Eastern Studies Department at the university" who he described "like Ulysses" and "as a Cadillac." (p 18) Thus the novel points towards a love story between two immigrants. However, the ending of the novel Sirine mixes between Han and Abdelrahman Salahadin and she was not sure "if it was Han or Abdelrahman who loved her, if it was Han or Abdelrahman who dove into the black page of the open sea. Was it Abdelrahman who had to leave her, to return to his old home, or Han who was compelled to drown himself, over and over again?" (p 394)

The use of a discourse of conversation with Arabic expressions in English translations in *Arabian Jazz* and of cuisine in *Crescent* are potent cultural signifiers of emotional bond which they have with their home country even for a person like Sirine who has never been to her father's home in Iraq but she tries to search for her roots through making a blend of Middle Eastern and Western cuisine by announcing for An Arabic Thanksgiving "with rice and pine nuts and ground lamb in the turkey instead of cornbread, and yogurt sauce instead of cranberries" (p 206) and the famous Middle Eastern food items (like baklava, kanaffea, hummus etc.) as the most appealing person at Um-Nadia's Café "The Middle East in Westwood" (p 66), through digging into the memories of her uncle and her lover Han, and through the pages of the photo albums with the pictures of her parents and childhood friends.

Both the novels *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent* end with ambivalence reflecting the uncertainties and emotional confusion of an outsider in the " New Country"; the U.S.A.: in the former Jemorah "placing her head against [the] chaste" of Ricky

...could hear the sound of the drums through the movement of Ricky's chest, jazz and thrills of Arabic music, bright as comet tails, and through this, the pulse of the world. All round her, through the thin, high basement windows, the maple trees shook; she watched them, their leaves turning desert red and gold. (p 374)

and in the latter Sirine "almost calm among the papery bougainvillea – the madwoman tree and all its finery" goes to receive a telephone call, "Victor Hernandez is on the phone, saying Han's name and looking at her" at this moment the "trees and the bushes all start to sway and Sirine notices the pomegranate tree has finally borne the starts of a few fruits" and we are told after she tries to recognize Han's photo in the newspaper "she also couldn't quite remember" as she was sleeping when Han left her "she got confused and couldn't quite remember"

... if it was Han or Abdelrahman Salahadin who loved her, if it was Han or Abdelrahman who dove into the black page of the open sea. Was it Abdelrahman who had to leave her, to return to his old home, or Han who was compelled to drown himself, over and over again?(pp 393-395)

2.1.4. Kingston, Jessica Hagedorn and Amy Tan: Interpretation of dreams by crossing the boundaries:

Past and present, memory and desire, and the voice of a silent subjectivity have been dramatized on a complex, multi-layered, heteroglossic and quasi-fictional narrative canvas in Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* keep us moving back and forth across the divide between the two generations, the two continents and the two cultures (Schell, Orville, March 19 89) Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is about the identity of a Chinese American in American culture with a voice of a protagonist displaced from the centre of culture, gender and genre, voice that moves between biography and autobiography, fact and fiction and Asian talk-story and American memoir. It is the growing up of a girlhood among the ghosts both foreign and familiar, from home and in exile. Kingston's and Amy Tan's use of the ghosts as cultural constructs is an attempt to relocate their homes.

Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* and Amy Tan's *A Bonesetter's Daughter* are quasi-fictional accounts in which the author-protagonist relationships take a new turn creating a new genre in fiction, expanding its potentialities and possibilities. Mukherjee, a middleman mediating between home and exile, uses the aesthetic strategy, particularly in *Desirable Daughters*, inspired by a style of football made famous by Joe Montana, of using the width of the field of history, geography, diaspora, gender, ethnicity, language rather than the old-fashioned long, clean throw. (Mukherjee Interview " Bharati Mukherjee Runs the West Coast Offence" April 4 2002 by Dave Weich, Powel.com). "Obsessed with

addressing the issues of minority discourse in the U S (post-Vietnam era) and Canada," she speaks of her "Mughal-inspired narrative aesthetic of Akbari miniature paintings" and the cosmology of her characters and hers derived from the Puranic tales with an awareness of many universes and because of her unique position in a world there is a desire to write an autobiography rather than to mythologize the Indian national identity through the "quest narratives" (Mukherjee:1997). A comparative study of the Interpretation of maladies through the dialogics of cuisine and culture in Lahiri and Abu-Jaber is going to unravel the dilemma of an immigrant invariably encounters in his/her journey to a new territory. Lahiri and Abu-Jaber belong to two diverse cultural locations whose characters come to inhabit a common landscape and try to relocate the meaning of their homes in exile.

The story of Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, narrated in a postmodernist style, combining gossip, media, cinema and history of past and present – colonialism, postcolonialism and cultural imperialism – also examines the "notions of immigration, displacement, identity and history" (Ludice: 1998) *Dogeaters*, a mordant exploration of class and ethnic divisions, rampant commercialism, plutocratic machinations, revolutionary insurgency, and the varieties of corruption in a country caught in the grasp of a Marcos-like regime and laboring beneath the shadow of Western colonialism. *Dogeaters* is also noteworthy for its stylistic daring. Playfully splicing together book and letter excerpts, poetry, a gossip column, dramatic dialogue, and news items into a conventional storytelling frame, the novel explores the possibilities of combining postmodern narrative practices with a postcolonial political agenda... Just as her work resists easy categorization into "high" or "pop" culture, it seeks to cross conventional boundaries of self and country and of writing and art. (Uba, George, California State University, Northridge Lauter, Paul Gen. Ed. Online Heath Anthology of American Literature). *Dogeaters* is a distinctive account of Hagedorn's search for an identity of a home from a distance that expresses love for one's country through the trajectories of hate.

In *Tenement Lover* Jessica Hagedorn says, "When I think of home now I mean three places. San Francisco Bay area really colored my work. New York is where I live. But Manila will always have a hold on me. I really don't think of myself as a citizen of one country but as a citizen of the world" (qtd in Rath: 2000). Similar sentiments are expressed by Jhumpa Lahiri (2001) " No country is my motherland. I always find myself in exile whichever country I travel to. That's why I'm always tempted to write something about those living their lives in exile." Abu-Jaber in her novels attempts to make sense of her life through the metaphors of memory, cuisine, and orality combining them with magic realism as she says in an interview " when you leave your country, you don't really know what it is that's about to happen to you. What an incredible experience and journey it is. And how for a lot of people it can be a real process of loss" (Abu-Jaber, Interview with Andrea Shalal-Esa 2002).

Meena Alexander in her poem "Gold Horizon" (*Weber Studies* Winter 1997) poetically captures the "coruscating geography" of her diasporal self:

Place names splinter
 on my tongue and flee:
 Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozhencheri, Khartoum,
 Nottingham, New Delhi, Hyderabad, New York
 the piece work of sanity,
 stitching them into a coruscating geography,
 why a single long drawn breath
 in an infant's dream might do,
 ruined by black water in a paddy field.

3. Conclusion:

From the interpretation of maladies to the interpretation of dreams:

I would like to conclude with the words of Jessica Hagedorn quoted by Elaine Kim (1985) who has commented that

Asian American writers continue to contribute to the American literary mosaic as they celebrate the complexity and diversity of their experience. The spirit of this celebration is captured in Jessica Hagedorn's "Something About You" (# 57):

dancing
 the spirit shaking everyone
 your faces are flowers of darkness
 ...children of the jungle
 calling me to sing
 forget my nightmares
 mangoes staining my lips
 Something about you
 all of us
 with songs inside
 knifing the air of sorrow
 with our dance
 a carnival of spirits
 shredded blossoms
 in the water.

And again with Kim's comments on the Chinese Americans portrayed in Shawn Wong's *Homebase* (1979) which apply to all Asian Americans who are

like a wild plant commonly "condemned as a weed," a plant that survives to bear flowers, creating beauty and shade in the most difficult conditions. (Ibid).

Or what Ha Jin (1956-), a contemporary Chinese writer in exile, says of Chitra Divakaruni's stories can be applied to all the Asian American tales

Most of the stories illuminate the pain, loss and alienation of the immigrant experience and transform them into the drama of common human existence. (qtd. . from <http://www.chitradivakaruni.com>)

Asian American storytellers are [n]avigating the ocean of words to find the meaning of a unique experience with a feeling of "an indelible sense of otherness" (Schell: 1989) "knifing the air of sorrow" (Hagedorn qtd. in Kim). With a carnival of creative energy the Asian American tales are a celebration of the enigma of arrival and survival. This unique celebration takes place in a land where Mrs Sens are holding a home-made "blade that curved like a Viking ship, sailing to battle in distant seas" (p114), where Taras of today look back and look forward to find a space to live and die, where for Rakhis' mothers "[A] dream is a telegram from the hidden world" (see Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams*: 2004 qtd in <http://www.chitradivakaruni.com>), where Matussems, Fatimas, Melvinas, Jemorahs, Hans, and Sirines are trapped in their new worlds away from home as Nassir in Arabian Jazz says a world created by historians, a fractured world of " East sand West, chop, chop, to reassure themselves of their superior isolation..." (p333). To quote from Hamod's poem "Moving", they "move further away like lost/shipmates crying [to me] for help.../...I sometimes think about a life.../In some old country of time that I remember my father and grandfather/talking about..." (Hamod quoted in Majaj 1996: 273), where a woman becomes a warrior to voice the silence and search for identity among ghosts, where ghosts are invoked like Muses to tell the tale of self-discovery and individuality, assimilation and resistance, and like the *Arabian Nights* the stories will go on and on and on crossing the boundaries recreating borders pushing the frontiers of art of storytelling and the art of survival and crossing the limits of the American Dream. Evidently, the Asian American tales of the enigma of arrival and survival which I would prefer to call the "narratives of relocation" have immense potentialities as a countercanonical literary discourse in the diasporal world of the 21st century.

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