

# The Diasporic Imaginary and the Indian Diaspora

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# The Diasporic Imaginary and the Indian Diaspora\*

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“All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way” (Mishra 1996: 189). Diasporas refer to people who do not feel comfortable with their non-hyphenated identities as indicated on their passports. Diasporas are people who would want to explore the meaning of the hyphen, but perhaps not press the hyphen too far for fear that this would lead to massive communal schizophrenia. They are precariously lodged within an episteme of real or imagined displacements, self-imposed sense of exile; they are haunted by spectres, by ghosts arising from within that encourage irredentist or separatist movements. Diasporas are both celebrated (by late/post modernity) and maligned (by early modernity). But we need to be a little cautious, a little wary of either position. Celebrating diasporas as the exemplary condition of late modernity – diasporas as highly democratic communities for whom domination and territoriality are not the preconditions of “nationhood” – is a not uncommon refrain. In the late modern celebratory argument on behalf of diasporas, diasporic communities are said to occupy a border zone where the most vibrant kinds of interactions take place and where ethnicity and nation are kept separate. In this argument, diasporas are fluid, ideal, social formations happy to live wherever there is an international airport and stand for a longer, much admired, historical process.

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\*I wish to dedicate this paper to the late Boyd Anderson, with whom I shared many of my anxieties as a student in Weir House, Victoria University of Wellington 1964-66. Boyd last contacted me from Nadi on his way to Berkeley in 1968. I had returned to Fiji and was teaching at a high school there. Little did Boyd realize when he rang me that my school was on another island and I couldn't possibly reach him during his hours in transit. Years later I heard from Miles Fairburn, now Professor of History at the University of Canterbury, that Boyd had died young and in tragic circumstances.

I wish to thank Stephen Epstein for inviting me to VUW to deliver this lecture and for his editorial work on the published version.

The tension between this position and the earlier modern reactionary reading is evident in the classic Hollywood film, *Casablanca* (1942). In it, as Catherine Portuges has pointed out, the opening sequence presents the spectator with “polyglot crowds of hopeful refugees awaiting the miracle of an exit visa to a better world” (50). Placed against Hollywood’s own tendency to produce a cultural product that is homogeneous and unproblematically “American,” the “irreducible particularity of their [the characters’] ethnic and regional voices” (53) suggests that Michael Curtiz, the film’s director and himself a Hungarian émigré, was introducing a discrepant diasporic narrative, a discordant, dialogic eruption, into the film as a statement about diasporic labour in the formation of Hollywood filmic practice and about alternative, unhappy, irreconcilable narratives embedded in voices that *Casablanca* dare not interrogate. After all, it is in *Casablanca* that Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) when asked about his nationality replies, without any ironic intent, “I’m a drunkard.”

The narrative of *Casablanca* posits escape to liberty as the universal ideal, even if the ideology is encased in a mushy romance. Ideology by virtue of its connection with the aesthetics of romance (which is how the film *Casablanca* has been popularly received) deflects a fundamental aspect of diaspora: its irreducible complexity at the level of lived social and political expression. The point, hidden from the film’s diegesis, is that diasporas have a progressivist as well as a reactionary streak in them. Both forms of this “streak” centre on the idea of one’s “homeland” as very real spaces from which alone a certain level of redemption is possible. Homeland is the *desh* (in Hindi) against which all the other lands are foreign or *videsh*. When not presented in this “real” sense, homeland exists as an absence that acquires surplus meaning by the *fact* of diaspora so that Sikhs in Vancouver and Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto clamour for a homeland (Khalistan, Tamil Eelam) or, in some quarters, Muslims seek a pan-Islamic utopia in the European heartland. It is not unusual for the two versions (the physical and the mental) to be collapsed into an ahistorical past going back to antiquity. We need to make an important qualification though. This reading of the homeland must be placed alongside another truth about diasporas: as a general rule – and the establishment of a Jewish homeland is the exception and not the rule – diasporas do not return to their homeland. Throughout the dark years of South African apartheid, few Indians (the Mahatma is the notable exception) returned to

India. Neither have Fiji Indians returned, in spite of Fiji's current policy of institutionalized racism.

The intimations of theory are present in the outline of issues given above. Here I wish to reprise part of the argument, rework the archive, narrow the terms and, above all, offer a theoretical framework for the study of diasporas. The task is not made any easier, because diaspora is itself part of some other "cover" field (perhaps postcolonial or multicultural studies) in a segmentation that is problematic. The placement of diaspora in this larger "cover" field is for many historians of diaspora a recent theoretical issue, because not too long ago the study of diaspora, and the definition of the term itself, was relatively straightforward. Both, analysis and definition, implied a grand narrative of the history of the Jewish people. To invoke diaspora presupposed a prior understanding of a linear narrative of dispersal and return of the original People of the Book. Depending upon one's point of view, this narrative could be rendered in epic terms or in terms of the uprooted, aimless wanderer in search of home. In the latter exegesis, Jewish history was represented through narratives of retribution and loss symbolized, at least in non-Jewish narratives, through the iconography of a wanderer or wayfarer whom even God had rejected. Although Charles Maturin never explicitly refers to the Jewish experience, most readers of his classic Gothic work *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) have sensed that Maturin here uses the Jewish experience as his unspeakable intertext. In the *Qur'an* that history is presented as a failure by the Jews to uphold a primal contract between man and God.

When we turn to descriptive predication, that is, definitions, "diaspora" turns out to be a very culture-specific term. *The Oxford English Dictionary* refers quite explicitly to John vii, 35 ("the dispersion; ... the whole body of Jews living dispersed among the Gentiles after their Captivity") to make the connection clear. The *OED*, with its characteristic homage to the written word, locates the first use of the term in Deuteronomy xxviii, 25 where we find: "thou shalt be a diaspora (or dispersion) in all kingdoms of the earth." The recent opening up of the word to signify the lives of "any group living in displacement" (Clifford 1994: 310) is a phenomenon that probably marks a postmodern move to dismantle a logocentric and linear view of human affairs that connected narratives and experiences to specific races and to origins: the model here was that

of historical lexicography, of which the sublime example is the *OED* itself.<sup>1</sup>

The diasporic imaginary is a term I use to refer to any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously or through self-evident or implied political coercion, as a group that lives in displacement.<sup>2</sup> I use the word “imaginary” in both its original Lacanian sense (linked to the mirror stage of the ego, and therefore characterized by a residual narcissism, resemblance and homeomorphism<sup>3</sup>) and in its more flexible current usage, as found in the works of Slavoj Žižek. Žižek defines the imaginary as the state of “identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing “ ‘what we would like to be’ ” (1989:105). Žižek makes this point with reference to the question one asks the hysteric: not “What is his object of desire?” but “Where does he desire from?” (Žižek 1989: 187). In a subsequent application of this theory to the nation itself, Žižek connects the idea of what he calls the “Nation Thing” to its citizens’ imaginary identification with it. In this astute extension of the argument, the “nation” (as the “Thing” in Heideggerian parlance that “presences” itself<sup>4</sup>) is accessible to a particular group of people of itself because it (the group) needs no particular verification of this “Thing” called “Nation” (1993: 210-212). For this group the “nation” simply *is* (beyond any kind of symbolization); it is more than just an imagined community, even if it is constructed out of fantasies about a particular way of life that may be enjoyed by a particular community or race. The “way of life,” which may be defined by any number of things: pub culture, sportsmanship (rugby in New Zealand is a classic case), capacity to live life fully, liberal values, non-negotiable connections with the land, or something totally nebulous, which has meaning only when declared as an absence (“Why can’t they be like us?”), is seen to come under threat from the Other (multicultural community, diaspora), since the latter has ways of enjoying the Nation that do not necessarily mirror the forms of the nation’s enjoyment of itself. Nor do these alternative forms of enjoyment correspond to how members of the dominant community would like the nation to be (as a reflection of their own selves). Racist phobia, Žižek suggests, arises out of a proprietary sense of enjoyment of the “Nation Thing” that is the exclusive property of a given group, community or race. The politics of many right-wing parties (Jean-Marie Le Pen’s National Front in France,

Pauline Hanson's One Nation in Australia, Fijian nationalist parties) grew straight out of their racist phobia of (visible) minorities, both indigenous and diasporic (as in many settler nations), and diasporic (as in Fiji). The current anti-Muslim nationalist rhetoric in large parts of the world (Western and non-Western) is another version of the phobia: what if these *hijab*-wearing women are really enjoying their diasporic lives amidst us, and constructing the nation "Otherwise"?

But Žižek is not speaking in the abstract about this "Thing" called the nation. Drawing on Lacan's definitions of "enjoyment" Žižek attempts something rather different: he brings a corporeal element to definitions of the nation-state so that the nation is more than just a structure of feeling, an "imagined" construct, without any foundation in the *real*. Here is Žižek's crucial qualification made with an eye to definitions of the nation that have emerged in the wake of Benedict Anderson's influential work:

To emphasize in a "deconstructionist" mode that Nation is not a biological or transhistorical fact but a contingent discursive construction, an overdetermined result of textual practices, is thus misleading: such an emphasis overlooks the remainder of some *real*, nondiscursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation qua discursive entity-effect to achieve its ontological consistency. (1993: 202)

If the enjoyment of the Nation Thing is the property of a specific community, then the Other is always seen as someone who wishes to "steal [the nation's] enjoyment" (203). But the fact remains that, in this imputation to the Other of a property that we possess (and "we" here refers to those of us who own the foundational narrative of the nation), we repress the "traumatic fact that *we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us*" (203). Enjoyment is therefore always of the "imaginary" and we continue to impute to the Other what we ourselves wish to enjoy. In other words, the fantasies of our own enjoyment return to us once we have, negatively, imputed the same to the Other. In this respect, diaspora as Other has an important function to play in the construction of the fantasies of the nation-state as a Thing to be "enjoyed."

Žižek, it must be said, constructs his argument with reference to the disintegration of the East European communist bloc as his test case. Here the argument is that the rise of nationalisms in Eastern Europe mirrors a democratic process that, in the West, has lost all its

original vigour and excitement. These emergent nation-states as “Other” give back to the West its original democratic message in the typically Lacanian form of the speaker getting back from the “addressee his own message in its true, inverted form” (208). In diasporas, then, the nation-state sees the loss of an ideal, the loss of its own organic connection to the Thing, which it had always taken for granted. Diasporas signify a *Gesellschaft*, an alienated society without any “organic laws,” against the nation-state’s own *Gemeinschaft* or “traditional, organically linked community” (211). The nation-state sees in diasporas reflections of its own past, its own earlier migration patterns, its own traumatic moments, and its memories of settlement. In the extended form of this argument, it is the absence of diasporic enjoyment of the Nation Thing in the dominant group itself (and which enjoyment is the presumption upon which the nation-state itself is based) that gives rise to the exclusion of diasporas from the national imaginary.<sup>5</sup> The theorization of this fact remains incomplete since the psychology that underlies the enjoyment, an enjoyment ultimately predicated upon melancholia and loss, is never fully understood. The effects of the enjoyment are, however, clear enough. It is the diasporic enjoyment of the Nation Thing absent among the “proprietors” of the nation that gives rise to a range of responses, chief among them racist exclusion and cultural denigration, that in some sense attenuate, or even deflect, a psychology that underlies the (lost) enjoyment of the nation by the dominant community.<sup>6</sup>

It follows, then, that diasporas are embedded in nation-states that are already a “Thing” created out of a specific kind of (lapsed) enjoyment of it. For the dominant citizenry this “enjoyment” is a matter of retrospect, and exists in as much as it is owned and possessed by the dominant citizenry. For the latter, diasporas must have a homeland since only upon this presumption can the dominant group (or community or citizenry) define itself as a homogeneous entity.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, homeland as “[a] fantasy structure, [a] scenario, through which society perceives itself as a homogeneous entity” (Salecl 1994: 15)<sup>8</sup> is predicated on the construction of desire around a particularly traumatic event. The fantasy of the homeland is then linked, in the case of the diaspora, to that recollected trauma that stands for the sign of having been wrenched from one’s mother (father) land. The sign of trauma may be the “[middle] passage” of slave trade or Indian indenture. The “real” nature of the disruption is, however, not the point at issue



here; what is clear is that the moment of “rupture” is transformed into a trauma around an absence that, because it cannot be fully symbolized, becomes part of the fantasy itself. The Ukrainian famine for the Ukrainian diaspora, the Turkish massacres for Armenians<sup>9</sup> may be cited here, or the recent coups in Fiji may be seen as moments that trigger homeland fantasy by repeating the earlier traumatic moment for, after all, like Clorinda’s cry in Tasso’s epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*, when Tancred slashes at the tree which contains her spirit, it is the delayed act that compulsively repeats the original trauma: “Why should you once again hurt this poor trunk,/ where I am pent by my hard destiny?” (XIII: 42-43).

To think of diasporas in these terms, in terms of negation, in terms of discrepant or varied understanding of the enjoyment of the Nation Thing, also stipulates a consciousness of our own beings, and the necessity of intense self-reflection and finally recognition. If, for the dominant community, diasporas signify their own lapsed enjoyment of the Nation Thing, for diasporas to face up to their own ghosts, their own traumas, their own memories is a necessary ethical condition. To reformulate Derrida’s “spectres of Marx,” by which he meant the imperative of keeping the legacy of Marx visible even as we accept the imperative of globalization in a post-Soviet world order, what I believe is absolutely necessary for diasporas to do is to keep their own spectres of slavery and coolie life (and latterly graveyard shifts and work in sweatshops) firmly in place. There is, for the old Indian diaspora, a plantation history, a lived memory of the passage (*Chalo Jahaji* – “Fare forward, fellow voyagers” – is the title of a book by the leading historian of Fiji-Indian indenture, Brij Lal) that must be firmly kept in place. The reflection demands that we constantly revisit our trauma as part of our ethical relationship to the ghosts of diaspora. It also sends a clear signal that the idealist scenario endorsed by some diaspora theorists needs to be tempered by individual diaspora histories.

In the context of the degradations suffered by Sikh migrants in British Columbia, Sadhu Binning’s observations in a poem with parallel Punjabi/English original texts act as an important reminder of another difficult, often unspoken, history so as to evoke precisely that ethical relationship to one’s past:

we forget the strawberry flats we picked  
stooping and crawling on our knees  
we forget the crowded windowless trucks  
in which like chickens we were taken there  
....  
we forget the stares that burned through our skins  
the shattered moments  
that came with the shattered windows  
we forget the pain of not speaking  
Punjabi with our children  
....  
multiplying one with twenty-five  
our pockets feel heavier  
changing our entire selves  
and by the time we get off the plane  
we are members of another class. (1994: 41-43)

To understand diasporas necessitates tampering with idealist notions of the exemplariness of diasporas in the modern world. Against a celebratory rhetoric (which would miss Binning's ironic reference to the value of the Canadian dollar in India), the necessity of understanding a diaspora's agony, its trauma, its pain of adjustment (before people were unceremoniously ripped apart from their mother's wombs) with reference to other pasts and other narratives becomes decisive. And we need to accept that, contrary to idealist formulations about diasporas as symbolizing the future nation-state, diasporas are also bastions of reactionary thinking and fascist rememorations: some of the strongest support for racialized nation-states has come from diasporas; some of the most exclusionist rhetoric has come from them, too. Even as the hypermobility of postmodern capital makes borders porous and ideas get immediately disseminated via websites and search engines, diasporic subjects have shown a remarkably anti-modern capacity for ethnic absolutism. In part, this is because diasporas can now recreate their own fantasy structures of homeland even as they live elsewhere. The collapse of distance on the information highway of cyberspace and a collective sharing of knowledge about the homeland by diasporas (a sharing that was linked to the construction of nations as imagined communities in the first instance) may be addressed by examining the kind of work Amit S. Rai (1995) has done on the construction of Hindu identity. His research explores the new public sphere that the Indian diaspora now occupies as the diaspora itself becomes a conduit through which the conservative politics of the homeland may be presented as the desirable norm. In exploring six internet newsgroups (soc.culture.indian, alt.hindu, alt.islam, soc.culture.tamil, su.orig.india, and INET), Rai finds that many postings construct

India in purist terms, Hindu in nature and in which an anti-nationalist secularism appeases minorities. In their invocations of important Indian religious and cultural figures – Vivekananda, R. C. Dutt, and others – the subtext is a discourse of racial purity (“we must go to the root of the disease and cleanse the blood of all impurities,” said Swami Vivekananda) and the sexual threat to Hindus posed by the Muslims in India. The double space occupied by the diaspora (hysteria for multiculturalism within the US, and rabid racial absolutism for the homeland) is summarized by Rai as follows:

Finally, this textual construction of the diaspora can at the same time enable these diasporics to be ‘affirmative action’ in the United States and be against ‘reservations’ in India, to lobby for a tolerant pluralism in the West, and also support a narrow sectarianism in the East. (1995: 42)

Although Rai’s conclusions may be suspect – the postings need not lead to the correlation he discovers – it should be clear that diasporas construct homelands very differently from the way in which homeland peoples construct themselves. For an Indian in the diaspora, for example, India is a very different kind of homeland than for the Indian national.

At the same time, and as we have suggested above, the nation-state needs diasporas to remind it of what the idea of homeland is. Diasporic discourse of the homeland thus represents a return of the repressed for the nation-state itself, its pre-symbolic (imaginary) narrative, in which the nation sees its own primitive past. Thus, historically both the Jewish and gypsy diasporas – two extreme instances of diaspora – have been treated by nation-states with particular disdain because they exemplify in varying degrees characteristics of a past that nation-states want to repudiate. For Franz Liszt the gypsy diaspora was a “crisis for Enlightenment definitions of civilization and nationalist definitions of culture” (Trumpener 1992: 860).<sup>10</sup> The Jews, equally a problem but with an extensive sense of history and civilization, carried all the characteristics of an ethnic community (*ethnie*) and thus represented both an earlier condition of the European nation-state as well as its mythical nemesis (Smith 1986: 22-30, 117). In late eighteenth-century France, and in Germany (unified only in 1871), the Jews posed, for the European, a problem for an understanding of how races entered the logic of modernity. As Jonathan M. Hess (2002: 4) has pointed out, between Christian Wilhelm Dohm’s treatise on the

improvement of the Jews (*On the Civic Improvement of the Jews: Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 1781) and the unification of Germany, heated discussions on the “moral, political and physical ‘regeneration’ of the Jews” continued. David Michaelis (1717- 91) felt that the Jews were racially degenerate, by climate and physique quite incapable of standing up to the heroic German. To the French, hot on the heels of revolutionary fervour, the Jews were seen as “the ultimate anti-citizen,” a perfect case for a “thought experiment” designed to test (Hess 2002: 5) “revolutionary principles of the moral transformation of both individuals and the French nation as a whole.” Dohm had read the Jews totally negatively and seen their transformation into German enlightenment citizens as of utmost importance. It is not too difficult to read into this version of the modern citizen, as Zygmunt Bauman has done, a failure to tolerate difference (Hess 2002: 8), “in the quest for uniformity and universalism,” an attitude that Hess himself sees as a failure to understand the manner in which German Jewry negotiated (with considerable difficulty, given Christianity’s claim to “normative status in the modern world” and its supersession of Judaism) modernity from within by pointing out Judaism’s own enlightened principles.<sup>11</sup>

If the gypsies were read as the absolute instance of a nomadic tribe, the profound historicity of the Jewish people gave their diaspora a privileged position in diasporic theory. Diasporic theory then uses the Jewish example as the ethnic model for purposes of analysis or, at least, as its point of departure. But Jewish diasporas were never totally exclusivist – “not isolation from Christians but insulation from Christianity” was their motto, as Max Weinreich put it – and met the nation-state halfway in its border zones. Jewish “homelands,” for instance, were constantly being re-created: in Babylon, in the Rhineland, in Spain, in Poland and even in America with varying degrees of autonomy (Smith 1986: 117). Movement ceased to be from a centre (Israel/Palestine/Judaea) to a periphery and was across spaces of the “border.” Against the evidence, Zionist politics interpreted the Jewish diaspora as forever linked to a centre and argued that every movement of displacement (from Spain to France, from Poland to America) carried within it the trauma of the original displacement (such as that from Judaea to Babylon). In retrospect, one can see how readily such logic would erase the idea of nation as “palimpsestic text” and replace it with the idea of nation as a racially pure ethnic enclave. In a very significant

manner, then, the model of the Jewish diaspora is now contaminated by the diasporization of the Palestinians in Israel and by the Zionist belief that a homeland can be artificially reconstructed without adequate regard to intervening history.<sup>12</sup>

The theoretical problematic posed here is not simply Zionist. In no less a work of art than George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, the "Jew" enters the realist novel to take on world-historical questions of exile and what F. R. Leavis called the "racial mission" (1962: 99).<sup>13</sup> Here what seems like a more powerful sexual desire on the part of Deronda for Gwendolen has to be repressed (and even denied) once Deronda is made aware of his race through Mordecai, Mirah's Zionist brother, and comes to feel "he must glorify the possibilities of the Jew" (Eliot 1988: 405). In marrying Mirah and finally heading "East" (Palestine), Daniel Deronda affirms his place in a larger history that transcends both emotion (love for Gwendolen) and nation (England as the immediate home) in favour of a new "remaking," signaled by George Eliot in a chapter epigraph taken from Heine: "Despite his enmity to art, Moses was a great artist ... he built pyramids of men, he sculpted obelisks of men, he took a poor peasant slave and made a people that would last for hundreds of years. He made Israel (*er Schuf Israel*)" (637).

Years after George Eliot, we need to keep the Palestinian situation in mind in any theorization of diasporas, even as we use the typology of the Jewish diaspora to situate and critique the imaginary construction of a homeland as the central *mythomoteur* of diaspora histories.<sup>14</sup> The reason for this is that displaced Palestinians and their enforced mobility force us to distinguish between the Zionist project of Israel and the historically deterritorialized experiences of Jewish people generally. The latter point is made by Boyarin and Boyarin (1993). Echoing Max Weinrich, they reread the Jewish diaspora through a postcolonial discourse in which Jewishness is seen as a disruptive sign in the mosaic of history and an affirmation of a democratic ethos of equality that does not privilege any particular ethnic community in a nation.<sup>15</sup> Against the Zionist fictions of a heroic past and a distant land, the real history of diaspora is always contaminated by social processes and, in the end, by nationalist forces that govern diasporic subjects' lives. Indeed diasporas become more than just theoretical propositions once a morally bankrupt nation-state asks the question seen by Sartre as the nation's racist solution: "What do we do with them now?" In the

post-September 11 world order, that question is being asked about Muslims generally, diasporic or not. In that interrogative mood, diasporas too may be asked to declare whether they are “for us or against us.” For me, Sartre’s question remains what may be called the “transcendental signified” against which we compose a diaspora theory. To forget this fear is to ignore one of the principal lessons of modern history.

A recent echo of such a question was heard in Fiji when, soon after the George Speight-led coup in May 2000, the indigenous Fijians very loudly asked precisely the question “What do we do with them now?” of its own Indian diaspora. The idea of the lost homeland is triggered by the question in whatever form it is asked – or even when it is embedded in a statement such as Fijian Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase’s “Loss of political control and leadership is more than just an election result. It is a reflection of their [the indigenous Fijians’] worst nightmares” (*Time* 11 July 2005: 43). The question “repeats” the trauma, it reinforces the imaginary and darkens (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 713) “consciousness of a racial collective as one sharing space with others, devoid of exclusivist and dominating power.”

The generalist argument, however inelegantly presented above, acts as a template for a quite specific archive. To get my narrative right, to be able to say things about diasporas as exemplary as well as reactionary sites of late modernity, I want to speak about the 11 million strong Indian diaspora. Surprisingly, not much of a theoretical nature has been written about this diaspora. In the lead essay in the foundation issue of the journal *Diaspora*, William Safran (1991: 83-99), for instance, devotes a mere twelve lines to the Indian diaspora and, given his brevity, oversimplifies the characteristics of this diaspora.<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, the Indian diaspora as we understand it is a comparatively recent phenomenon, although it may be argued that the modern Indian diaspora has a longer history that is in fact contiguous with an older wanderlust, the *ghummakar* tradition, which took the gypsies to the Middle East and to Europe, fellow Indians to Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka as missionaries and conquerors, and traders to the littoral trading community around the Arabian Sea. Rethinking the argument that “it was poverty at home that pushed them [Indians] across the ocean [to Africa],” M G Vassanji writes in his recent novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2004: 17) “surely there’s that wanderlust first, that itch in the

sole, that hankering in the soul that puffs out the sails for journey into the totally unknown?" The Indian diaspora is, therefore, a complex social formation, in fact, an extraordinarily rich archive, which lends itself to theory and critical analysis.<sup>17</sup>

To explore the narrative of the Indian diaspora critically, we may want to read it as two relatively autonomous archives designated by the terms "old" and "new." The old (that is, early modern, classic capitalist or, more specifically, nineteenth-century indenture) and the new (that is, late modern or late capitalist) traverse two quite different kinds of topographies. The subjects of the old – "before the world was thoroughly consolidated as transnational" (Spivak 1996: 245) – occupy spaces in which they interact, by and large, with other colonized peoples with whom they have a complex relationship of power and privilege, as in Fiji, South Africa, Malaysia, Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam; the subject of the new are people who have entered metropolitan centres of Empire or other white settler countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the US as part of a post-1960s pattern of global migration. The cultural dynamics of the latter are often examined within a multicultural theory. There are, of course, Indians, part-comprador, part-indenture, with long histories in many parts of Africa, notably East Africa, whose life-worlds have been the subject of some very fine writing by the twice displaced Indian-Canadian writer M G Vassanji. As is clear from Vassanji's treatment of "Shamsi" traders of Gujarat who migrated to East Africa, the binary of the "old" and the "new" offered here is not meant to isolate communities or to situate experiences within non-negotiable or exclusive frames. It should be self-evident that the "old" has also become part of the "new" through re-migrations such as Fiji-Indians to Vancouver or Trinidadian-Indians to Toronto (one thinks of the transnational life of Ms Neela Mahendra of Lilliput-Blefuscu, the unhappy South Pacific isles inhabited by the Indo-Lilly, in Salman Rushdie's novel *Fury*) and that the old has not been immune to a general electronic media culture that has tended to redefine subjectivities along the different lines of what Manuel Castells has called the "net and the self." I keep the distinction of the "old" and the "new" not because the binary has to be defended or that the binary is incontestable; it is made because Indian intellectuals of the diaspora (Appadurai, Radhakrishnan and Bhabha, among many others) presume that the lives of the Indian NRIs (the "new" diaspora of "non-resident Indians") constitute the self-evidently legitimate archive with which

to explore histories of diasporic subjectivities. They have also tended to presume that the “new” presents itself as the dominant (and indeed the more exciting) site for purposes of diasporic comment.<sup>18</sup> The binary therefore has a strategic function: it recognizes an earlier phase of migration, the psychic imaginary of which involved a reading of India based on a journey that was complete, a journey that was final.<sup>19</sup>

The “old” and the “new” Indian diasporas (as I have called them) reflect the very different historical conditions that produced them.<sup>20</sup> The distinction between the old and the new becomes clearer when we note that the “new” surfaces precisely at the moment of (post)modern ascendancy; it comes with globalization and hypermobility, it comes with modern means of communication already fully-formed or in the making (airplanes, telephone, e-mail, the internet, videocassettes, DVD, video-link, webcam) and it comes, since 2003, with the gift of dual citizenship from India: the Indian Citizenship Act 1955 has been amended to allow the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Canada, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands and Italy to retain dual citizenship. In a thoroughly global world, the act of displacement now makes diasporic subjects travellers on the move, their homeland contained in the simulacral world of visual media where the “net” constitutes the “self” (Castells 1996), and quite unlike the earlier diaspora where imagination was triggered by the contents in gunny sacks: a Ganesha icon, a dog-eared copy of the *Ramayana* or the *Qur’an*, an old sari or other *deshi* outfit, a photograph of a pilgrimage, and so on.

Indeed, “homeland” is now available in the confines of one’s bedroom in Vancouver, Sacramento or Perth as networking now takes over from the imaginary. Presented in this fashion, this is a great, positive yarn, about extremely flexible human beings. But even within the “new” diaspora, this version is only part of the story. The Afghan refugee to Australia or the Fiji-Indian who is illegally ensconced in Vancouver is neither global nor (hyper)mobile. Her condition, unlike those of the upwardly mobile professionals in Silicon Valley, is not unlike those of people under indenture, for she has to work in sweatshops during graveyard shifts or, as in the case of the illegal, cannot leave Vancouver, as she has no access to a passport. It is this complex diaspora story that I would want to tell with some of the privileges of the critical and



self-reflexive native informant. But it is a story that is also a critique of an uneasy postmodern trend towards collapsing diasporic (and historical) differences.

An anecdote comes to mind here, an anecdote centered upon a question asked on my third journey to India in September 1994. The question was posed in Bombay, emblematic city, after Benjamin, of “marginal types such as the collector, gambler, prostitute, and flâneur” (Patke 2000: 12). In this city of cynics and slum-dwelling cinema buffs, people’s questions are not what they seem. So when the porter of the Bombay Radio Club (where once colonials came to listen to the BBC World Service over a chota peg) welcomed me with “Where are you coming from?” I prepared myself for an ironic response. But I need not have worried: Indians do not have a sense of irony; the porter’s question was no more than the Indian introduction, the Indian way of opening up a social space. I remembered an early V S Naipaul essay in which he recounts also being asked “Where do you come from?” “It is the Indian question ... [of] people who think in terms of the village, the district, the province, the community, the caste,” he had added (1984: 43). I explained to the porter at the Radio Club my history, my origin in the sugar plantations of Fiji, the fact that, though a Brahmin (my surname would have given that away), I was basically working class, and had my forebears not left the Indo-Gangetic Plains in the nineteenth century, I would probably be illiterate and begging in Allahabad.

But it is only now, as I write down that encounter, that I realize the meaning of this very Indian question (“where are you coming from?”) in the way in which Naipaul had understood it. Translated back into Hindi (*aap kahaan se aaye hai*) the question does not seek a full autobiography, but is instead only a means of “locating” the addressee, because in India you are where you come from, and that may also mean the caste to which you belong, the family you married into, and the social and economic grouping willing to embrace you.

In Fiji – the first of my diasporic homes, but a lot more, my “homeland” – “Where are you coming from?” (in the Fijian language) has a slightly different inflection, since it is rendered as “Where are you staying?” (*o vaka tikotiko mai vei*). But “staying” does not imply the here and now place of residence. It carries with it, as

in the original meaning of the Hindi question, the more specific sense of ancestral village or, in Fijian, one's *koro*. One may live in another place for generations, but the answer given to "*o vaka tikotiko mai vei*" is always the name of one's *koro*. Fiji Indians too would answer this question by referring to their plantation village, that is, the plantation to which their forefathers came in the first instance.<sup>21</sup> After the 1987 coup, when Fiji Indian identity was not deemed to be self-evidently connected to Fiji, the indigenous Fijian shadowed the question (*o vaka tikotiko mai vei*) with the idea of the *vulagi*, the foreigner, whenever the addressee happened to be an Indian. The Fijian historian Asesela Ravuvu (1991: 58-60), in fact, is quite explicit: if a *vulagi* (here the Fiji Indian) "does not comply to the host's (the *taukei*'s, the Indigenous Fijian's) expectations, then he may very well leave before he is thrown out of the house." Ask the question too often in any nation-state, and with the latter-day Fijian connotation, and you begin to produce the schizophrenic social and psychological formations of diasporas. A diasporic double consciousness comes to the fore once you link this question, finally, to the presumed ultimate solution of diasporas: "What do we do with them now?" In Bombay, where inter-communal relationship remained tense when I arrived, this question had indeed been asked with reference to the Indian Muslim community. As a student of diaspora theory I could see how easily a real or implied principle of exclusivism could "diasporize" a community that had begun to be read ambivalently ever since the partition of India in 1947 created a Muslim homeland with a fanciful name (Pakistan, "the land of the pure"). Where once "Where are you coming from?" implied the beginning of inclusion into a community, now that query is shadowed by "What do we do with them now?", which erupts into the social.

The question, with its shadow, is an "interrogative dominant" in the cultural logic of diaspora because the diasporic imaginary is so crucially connected to the idea of a "homing desire" (Brah 1996: 180), the idea that against one's *desh* ("home country") the present locality is *videsh* ("an other country"). Behind the use of *desh* stand ethnic doctrines based on exclusivism and purity, and linked very often to a religiously based communal solidarity of the *ethnie* (Smith 1986). Behind it stands the denial that the homelands of diasporas are themselves contaminated, that they carry racial enclaves, with unassimilable minorities and other discrepant communities, and are not pure, unified spaces in the first place. Even in the Jewish case

history that underpins readings of diaspora (by Safran, for instance), migration was largely from one in-between place to another and not from Palestine to a new land. Furthermore, historically Jewish homelands had been created wherever Jews had settled, in parts of the Middle East, in Poland, and elsewhere. Many Jews looked upon these enclaves as their homeland rather than to the Israel of the Book of Exodus. Their own diasporic episteme was located squarely in the realm of the hybrid, that is, in the domain of cross-cultural and contaminated social and cultural regimes.

Though Jewish history also gives us the only successful instance of diaspora nationalism, a term that Ernest Gellner uses to define a third species of nationalism beyond the Enlightenment/democratic and eugenic (Gellner 1983: 101-109), the lived experience of the Jews was not necessarily linked to a physical return to a homeland which, at any rate, is only possible with the return of the Messiah, as the members of the Neturei Karta maintain in Israel itself. It is thus the creation of its own political myths rather than the real possibilities of a return to a homeland that is the defining characteristic of diasporas. In a progressively multi-ethnic conception of the nation-state (in spite of the tragedy of the Balkan states and the breakup of the Soviet Union, which was a nation-state only through the politics of coercion), diasporic theory bears testimony to the fact that we live in a world “where multi-ethnic and multi-communal states are the norm” (Hobsbawm 1992: 179).<sup>22</sup> The partition of India, the demands of the Tamil separatists in Sri Lanka, and the recent tragedy of racial cleansing in the Balkan states are very special, indeed aberrant, cases. The memorial (and fictive) reconstructions of the ancient Jewish homeland, of the Armenian golden age in the era of the early Gregorian church, of the free city-state of Ayodhya under the Hindu God Rama, or of the community of the faithful under Prophet Muhammad become the sublime signs of the ungraspable in the complex psychology of diasporas. Against this kind of discursive nostalgia (not uncommon among terrorist groups) the material history of diaspora leads us to deterritorialized peoples with a history and a future. This future, at least as an ideal, is the affirmation of the idea of the Enlightenment/democratic nation-state currently threatened by racialized ethnic states.<sup>23</sup> For, as E. J. Hobsbawm (1992: 173) writes so lucidly, “Wherever we live in an urbanized society, we encounter strangers: uprooted men and women who remind us of the fragility or the drying up of our own families’ roots.”

The variable archives of diasporas notwithstanding, the Jewish diaspora is the fundamental ethnic model for diaspora theory and all serious study of diasporas will have to begin with it. But what we must now do is take away from that model its essentialist, regressive and defiantly millenarian semantics and reread it through alternative models much more attuned to spatio-temporal issues and to a diaspora's own silenced discourses of disruption and discontinuity. In this argument, the Jewish experience is simultaneously history's conscience, its allegory of the democratic nation-state (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 693-725), as well as a "model of European transnationalism" (Boyarin 1996: 110). We place under erasure a narrative that requires, at every point, a theory of homeland as a centre that can either be reconstituted (as actually happened with the creation of Israel) or imaginatively offered as the point of origin. We need to replace it with a narrative of social interaction in the border zones of the nation-state. A people without a homeland is not an aberration, but an already prefigured cultural "text" of late modernity. In other words, the positive side of diaspora (as seen in the lived "internationalist" Jewish experience) is a democratic ethos of equality that does not privilege any particular ethnic community in a nation; its negative side (which is a consequence of its millenarian ethos of return to a homeland) is virulent racism and endemic nativism. This is not to say that Jews did not suffer in enlightened nation-states; nor should the argument be seen as a denial of the right to self-determination. What the argument does, however, is emphasize that the religious fossilization of the community (*vide* Smith) is not its permanent condition. What the community undergoes is a process of social semiosis whereby the tribe from a particular "homeland" interacts with other cultures over a long period of time to produce diaspora. Against the fictions of a heroic past and a distant land, the real history of diasporas is always contaminated by the social processes that govern their lives. Indeed, the autochthonous pressures within diasporas, as discussed in the writing of Gellner, Smith and Safran, are of concern to diasporic subjects only when a morally bankrupt nation-state asks the question "What shall we do with them?" The unfortunate thing is that the question has been asked far too often (the Holocaust is the most obscene instance of the consequences of such a question) and continues to be asked even now.

As long as there is a fascist fringe willing to find racial scapegoats for the nation's own shortcomings and willing to chant "Go home,"

the autochthonous pressures towards diasporic racial exclusivism, the pull of the imaginary, will remain strong. Addressing real diasporas does not mean that the discourses that have been part of diaspora mythology (homeland, ancient past, return and so on) will disappear overnight. For after all, and as we have pointed out, diasporas remind nation-states in particular about their own pasts, about their own earlier migration patterns, about their traumatic moments, about their memories, their own repressed pain and wounds, about their own prior and prioritized enjoyment of the nation. In the end, diasporas should not be thought of through the simplistic logic of the binary. We need to think about them as “non-normative” communities, not necessarily locked into the binary of “exile” (the condition of a declared stand against a homeland’s policies and hence revered) and “diaspora” (Barkan and Shelton’s (1998: 4) “chosen geography and exile.”) We need to look at people’s corporeal or even “libidinal” investments in nations (as denizens or as outsiders); we need to read off a modernist “transcendental homelessness” against lived experience, and we need to critically think through diasporas located in both white and non-white nation states. The theory of the diasporic imaginary outlined here attempts to address these issues and is, hopefully, a theory worthy of critical investment and reflection.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jim Clifford is not alone in making diaspora a more fluid term to designate a late modern transnational formation that may be variously used to dismantle essentialist notions of social and national cohesion. A quick list of cultural theorists involved in critical diasporic politics would include Stuart Hall (black hybridity and diasporic empowerment), Paul Gilroy (diasporic flows and spaces), Homi Bhabha (diasporas as sites of a postcolonial counter aesthetic), Rey Chow (the Chinese diaspora and questions of translatability), Gayatri Spivak (subalternity and transnationality), Edward Said (exile as the intentional condition of being “happy with the idea of unhappiness”), the Boyarin brothers (diasporic deterritorialization as the exemplary state of late modernity), William Safran (diasporas as part of narratives of centre and periphery), Arjun Appadurai (diasporic mobility and migration as the condition of the future nation-state), Ien Ang (the productivity of the multiple perspectives that come from the position of liminality), Jon Stratton (the Jewish experience as symptomatic of the ambivalent space occupied by diasporas between race and ethnicity) and Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan (the presencing of a double consciousness in an ethnic definition of diasporas). This sketchy summary doesn’t take into account the massive studies of the construction of nation-states undertaken by E. P. Thompson, Ernest Gellner, Anthony Smith, Eric Hobsbawm, Partha Chatterjee, Benedict Anderson and many others. Nor does the summary even skim the surface of studies of race, identity and ethnicity with reference to visible diasporic minorities in nation-states. The extent to which an aesthetic version of postcolonial theory also began, essentially, as a theory of the diasporic experience of the “border” hasn’t been addressed seriously by scholars, although Arif Dirlik has implied as much.

<sup>2</sup> See Clifford (1994: 310). Ien Ang (2001: 75) opts for a more neutral definition with reference to the Chinese diaspora(s): “formations of people bound together, at least nominally, by a common ethnic identity despite their physical dispersal across the globe.”

<sup>3</sup> See J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis (1980: 210) where they add, “(Lacan) holds that all imaginary behaviour and relationships are irremediably deceptive.” The imaginary functions as one of three terms (imaginary, symbolic and real) and needs to be considered with reference to the other two. Here the real is a sort of substratum, the raw, primal state of the human organism (Lacan 1980: ix-x) and, I suggest, may be located in the realm of the corporeal, the body (where emotions are important), while the symbolic is the domain of culture where difference (linguistic, inter-subjective and so on) are decisive. The trope of the imaginary is metonymy. I read diasporic subjectivities as metonymic representations, fragments of imaginary wholes, which remain forever partial and incapable of retrieving the full image that the metonym elides.

<sup>4</sup> See Martin Heidegger, “The Thing” (1975).

<sup>5</sup> The Mauritian Indian case, on the face of it, presents itself as an exception to the rule, since the Indian diaspora has governed the island state since its independence on 12 March 1968. However, in as much as the prior, colonial, history of Mauritius created a cultural imaginary from which the Indians were largely excluded (a French-Creole cultural hegemony was prevalent), the Indian “enjoyment” of the nation (as a new, creative *jouissance*) fits into the pattern I have outlined. An international conference of the Indian diaspora organized by the Mahatma Gandhi Institute/Human Service Trust, Mauritius (21-23 August 1993) was made up of delegates almost exclusively from India. The conference’s excessively gennueflective treatment of things Indian indicated a new way of enjoying the nation through a celebration of the nation’s history of indenture past and its connections with homeland history.

<sup>6</sup> I want to suggest that this psychology manifests itself in postmodern racism (or “metaracism”), which often means that the demand for diverse cultural spaces and positions in a nation requires a politics of absolute difference as a means of organizing nations. In such a politics, diasporas then become victims of an epistemology of “otherness” in which exclusion principles and practices are put in place because it is argued that this is what diasporas want. The shorthand rhetoric of the postmodern racist is the following: “I am not a racist, indeed some of my best friends are South Asians, but they want to live their lives in that way, so why should I not support their right to be different?” This is the point at which a critical diaspora theory overlaps with a critical multiculturalism.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, in any nation, communities that have had little difficulty in becoming part of the nation's grand narrative through assimilation, cease to be diasporic in this sense.

<sup>8</sup> I thank David McInerney for drawing my attention to Renata Salecl's work.

<sup>9</sup> Marcella Polain, "The Third Collision: The Armenian Genocide and After." Paper presented to the Krishna Somers Foundation for the Study of Diasporas, Murdoch University, 13 August 2003.

<sup>10</sup> The Third Reich killed 600,000 gypsies, almost one-third of the total population of European gypsies. In Romania, Slovakia, Germany and Hungary they still exist in the margins of mainstream cultural life. See Katie Trumpener (1992).

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan M Hess's study considers at length the links between modernity and the problematization of Jewish identity. There were those like Abraham Geiger (1810 – 74) who read Jesus as a figure who "bequeathed to modernity" modern characteristics – such as enlightenment and critical thinking – by virtue of his engagement with Judaism. As Hess cites (2002: 91), in an unpublished note (March 1770) Moses Mendelssohn wrote: "And Jesus a Jew? – And what if, as I believe, he never wanted to give up Judaism?" Kant, of course, felt otherwise and denied that the "pure religion of reason" (Christianity) had anything to do with Judaism. As Hess argues (2002: 208), there was, in the end, something out of joint as modernity, in its attempt to create a universal subject, produced, from within its very principles of secular universalism, the language of anti-Semitism.

<sup>12</sup> In 1914 the population of Palestine was around 690,000, of which fewer than 60,000 were Jews.

<sup>13</sup> F. R. Leavis in his influential *The Great Tradition* writes about *Daniel Deronda* as two different books: one, the *Deronda* book, which is "the bad half" (94), and the other, "the good part," which he calls the *Gwendolen Harleth* book (100). To Leavis, George Eliot's Zionist inspiration results in an "emotional flow" which leads to writing that is self-indulgent and, in the end, insincere. At the level of art, I think Leavis correctly suggests that the moral insight that could have come only through a forthright engagement with the *Deronda*-*Gwendolen* side of the plot gets attenuated because of the imperative of a "racial mission" (a world-historical mission, after Lukács) that must insist upon the union, via a presumed love, of *Deronda* and *Mirah*, simply because the latter is a Jew and *Gwendolen* isn't.

<sup>14</sup> I follow Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (1980). I thank my former PhD student Maria Degabriele for drawing my attention to this work some years back.

<sup>15</sup> The difference between Ashkenazi and Sephardim (or Mizrahim, "Arab Jews") complicates a single narrative of Zionism. Further, the Holocaust or Shoah, "the defining negative event of Jewish exilic existence" (Arad 2003: 5), as it gets rendered in contradictory Israeli state discourses, cautions us against constructing an unproblematic diasporic metanarrative around the Jewish experience. In Gulie Arad's fascinating account, we read how the Shoah has shifted from conscious state-endorsed "disremembrance" (none other than the founding father of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, felt that Holocaust victims signified, in Gulie Arad's words, the futility of "Jewish existence in exile") to a sign of "Israel's collective identity." But where once "forgetting was essential to energize the task of creating a nation" (11), the new emphasis on the Shoah as "Israel's collective consciousness ... its political trope" (16), largely in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, prevents Israel from creating a "more inclusive counter-memory," and a less "one-dimensional people" (26). The point of Arad's persuasive argument is that diasporic memorializing (even of something as unrepresentable and obscene as Auschwitz and Treblinka) "is not sufficient for healing or for the prevention of future evil" (26). This latter ethical imperative should never be lost in diaspora theory.

<sup>16</sup> Although Safran concedes that the Indian diaspora is genuine in several respects (the characteristics imputed to this diaspora are, however, oversimplified: middlemen role, long history, integrationist and particularist foci), he does not take up many of its self-evident features, such as homeland myth, insecurity, memory as trauma and so on.

<sup>17</sup> The South Asian ("Indian") diaspora is conservatively estimated at 11million: Europe 1.5 million (1.3 million in Great Britain), Africa 1.7 million (1.1 million in South Africa), Mauritius 600,000, Asia (excluding Sri Lanka) 2 million (1.2 million in Malaysia), Middle East

1.4 million (largely guest workers in the Gulf States), Latin America and the Caribbean 1 million (largely in Trinidad, Guyana and Surinam), North America 2 million (1.2 million in the US), and the Pacific 800,000 (320,000 in Fiji). These figures, slightly modified, have been taken from Benedict Anderson (1994: 326-327, fn. 23). My figure of 11 million includes itinerant workers in the Middle East but not the Tamils of Sri Lanka, although it does include Sri Lankan Tamil migrants to the West. Anderson does not include the Tamils in Sri Lanka in his calculation either.

<sup>18</sup> The experience of the “new” and its vantage point as the determining condition of diaspora explains Salman Rushdie’s uncomfortably naïve understanding of the Fijian coup of 2000 and the meaning of “land” for indigenous peoples. In Rushdie one senses a dismissal of the necessity of historical research for the old Indian diaspora, which explains an error such as the following: “most of Fiji’s land, particularly on the main island of Viti Levu, is owned by Fijians but held by Indians on ninety-year leases” (2002: 301). In fact, only a very small percentage of this land (no more than 15%) is held by Indians on lease. See also Salman Rushdie’s novel *Fury* where the South Pacific island state of Lilliput-Blefuscu with its Indo-Lilly diaspora is modelled on Fiji.

<sup>19</sup> Very generally – and with the proviso that these distinctions are, in historical terms, very provisional – we can speak of the Indian diasporas as the old diaspora of exclusivism (of plantation or classic capital or modernity) and the new diaspora of the border (of late modernity or postmodernity). The old diaspora presents us with a case history that has been documented more or less from its moment of inception, as the Emigration Pass of each labourer contained detailed personal histories (caste, age, marital status, location, and so on). The late modern diaspora has been seen as a powerful source for postcolonial discourses of disarticulation (abandonment, displacement, dispersion, etc.) as well as a “site” for the rearticulation of an intercultural formation through which global migration, the positioning of identities, and the nature of the bourgeois subject (have diasporas been instrumental in decentering the bourgeois subject in the first place?) may be interrogated. However, the homogenization of all Indian diasporas in terms of the politics of disarticulation/rearticulation and networking with reference to Britain, America or Canada has led to the fetishization of the new diaspora and an amnesiac disavowal of the old. Though less visible these days than the new in the story of modernity, the old Indian diaspora nevertheless constitutes a fascinating archive that can be placed relatively unproblematically alongside the “normative” Jewish experience, because, in this instance too, a by and large semi-voluntary exodus of indentured workers began to read their own lives through the semantics of exile and dispersion.

<sup>20</sup> The new occupies a desired space, the dream-world of wealth and western luxury, and is referred to in India as NRI (non-resident Indians). But in this space a new form of racism (a metaracism) is on the ascendant and race and ethnicity get dragged into debates about multiculturalism. Writers and filmmakers of this diaspora, such as Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, M. G. Vassanji, Hanif Kureishi, Mira Nair, Deepa Mehta, Gurinder Chadha, Meera Syal and Srinivas Krishna among others, raise theoretical questions about ethnicity and often speak of a diaspora whose overriding characteristic is mobility. Where the diaspora of exclusivism transplanted Indian icons of spirituality to the new land – finding a holy Ganges, an odd lingam or other religious symbol in the new land – the diaspora of the border kept in touch with India, imported cultural artefacts that maintained the primal sanctity of the homeland intact. Diasporas of the border (so defined) in these western democracies are visible presences – “we are seen, therefore we are,” says the Chicano novelist John Rechy – whose corporealities carry marks of their hyphenated subjectivities (Castillo 1995: 113).

<sup>21</sup> In Italian the expression *mio paesano* (from *paese* a small town, village or an entire country) suggests that the speaker is from the same nationality as the person who asks the question. Antonio Casella (Murdoch University PhD student) informs me that the expression “evokes a stronger, more localized sense of fellowship, identification and commonality with another person.”

<sup>22</sup> Hobsbawm overstates the case. A number of Arab nation-states do not grant citizenship rights to foreigners, and some, like Saudi Arabia, do not permit the construction of non-Islamic places of worship. Germany presents an interesting example since there German identity is “defined not as affiliation to a state but to an ethnocultural nation” (Bammer 25). So Germans of ethnic descent living elsewhere are Germans (*das Volk*) while foreigners within Germany remain outsiders (*Volksfremde*).



<sup>23</sup> See Lionnet (1998: 197-216) for a fascinating account of reactionary responses to migration in France and how even among liberals (as represented in French poster art) “oppositional discourses are recuperated by the ideology of integration and citizenship, by a benign form of multiculturalism that insists on consensus and the celebration of differences with no room for the productive tensions caused by contestation and conflict” (200).

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