No-no to "Yo-yoing": An Apology for Bharati Mukherjee's Building Home Across the Hyphen with Special Focus on *Days and Nights in Calcutta*

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Abstract

After her year-long visit to India in 1973, Bharati Mukherjee's provocative decision to leave India as her home country (forever) and settle in North America is a significant event in the development of her assimilationist aesthetics. Instead of remaining a free-floating cosmopolitan/intellectual like her one-time mentor Naipaul, Mukherjee crosses the hyphen of the "Asian-/Indian-American," dismisses (eternal) internationalism, and eventually finds her (new) home in America. She has been severely criticized for turning her back on her native culture and overturning the postcolonial paradigm. This article focuses Mukherjee's 1977 autobiography Days and Nights in Calcutta, especially two "Epilogues", and attempts to acquit Mukherjee of the charge of compromising her postcolonial status. Furthermore, it credits her for nuancing/problematizing the postcolonial theorizing through her enabling use of the interstices between cultures. In order to bail out Mukherjee, this essay invokes Edward Said's concept of the (intellectual) exile.

Key Words: *exile, home, hyphen, assimilation/assimilationist aesthetics*

Introduction

This article is based on my unpublished doctoral research in which I have tried to explore how South and Southeast Asian diasporic academic women, working in American universities, inscribe (in their life narratives) their movements from their Third World native societies to America, and how they manage to achieve subjecthood and agency. Given the varying degrees of their resistance, appropriation, and assimilation, they are proportionately (and accordingly) nostalgic/dismissive of their home/host cultures. While living in the First World, they inhabit the imaginary liminal space between cultures

and, due to their un/belonging, exhibit diverse modes of appropriation/assimilation, in/voluntary, compulsive, and intentional. According to my study, Bharati Mukherjee's brand of assimilation is intentional and purposeful. In view of the *inviolable* postcolonial binarism, though her stance might be provocative, it is simultanously productive, unapologetic, and empowering, as my doctoral research proves (Khan, 2012).

Bharati Mukherjee initially constructs her assimilationist argument in her 1977 autobiography *Days and Nights in Calcutta*.[1] It is quite a different life writing in the sense that it is not written by Mukherjee alone. It is an informally co-written auto/biographical writing of Mukherjee and her husband Clark Blaise to give an account of their one-year stay in India in 1973, fourteen years after Mukherjee had gone to America as a graduate student. In this hybrid life narrative, Clark Blaise, gives an outsider's view of India in the first part. He is a white man living among the Indians of all sorts, and trying to give an opinion as to what real India is like. Mukherjee herself writes the second part of this collaborative autobiography, and gradually builds her argument that she punches home in her "Epilogues" at the end where she states to leave India as her home country forever and settle in North America (Canada). Mukherjee wrote her first "Epilogue" at the time of the first publication of *Days and Nights in Calcutta* in 1977, and she added the second in May 1995. Her narrative seems to be moving towards these epilogues which together, in my view, serve as her "assimilationist manifesto." Though Mukherjee's part begins with her (and her husband's) decision to leave Canada and go to India for one full year, it covers almost her life from her birth and childhood to her leaving for America, and also her racialized life in Canada.

In *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Mukherjee criticizes the conditions of life available for women, and dismisses their scripted roles in largely patriarchal India. With Marxist Naxalite movement rumbling in the background, she weaves her critique of women's subjection to prescribed lives into the development of her argument to depart from the possibility of leading a Sita-version of life in India. A natural consequence of her rejecting India (as her homeland) on the basis of fear and insecurity in it (because of the Naxalite movement) and women's oppression and centripetality (in the name of serving their husbands and taking care of home[s]) is the necessary quest for a new homeland. I argue that Mukherjee's parting ways with the accepted fashion of writing about Asian American immigrant experience is a

major intervention in the field of diasporic inscriptions of home and not-home.

Mukherjee's narrative, as she writes in her 1995 epilogue, was purported to be "a communal autobiography of the women of [her] age and [her] vanishing class who had stayed on in the riot-pocked hometown and made their survivalist peace with Marxist revolution" (*DAN,* p. 301), but, Mukherjee notes, "the 'real' story that I ended up writing—inspite of myself—was about North America, not about India; about the choice to stay away rather than to stay on" (*DAN,* p. 302). This statement may be taken as a summary of Mukherjee's narrative and her aesthetics of assimilation. Her writing about her interaction with her Loreto School friends and her observations on daily Indian life in the early 70s, with occasional comments on Partition and the ambivalence of her being/not being Indian, set the stage for her two epilogues that largely present her assimilational credo.

Mukherjee's Concept of Home

Mukherjee's concept of home is unique that hardly fits the contemporary diasporic notions of home. Unlike most diasporic people or immigrants, she carries no ambivalence about home. Her home is not constructed on the space between nostalgia and appropriation; nor does she carry her home in her memory. She has had many homes at different stages of life, but she has been on a quest for her "real," eventual "home" that she finds in America. Though, at the end of her Indian visit in 1973-4, she is forced to view herself "more as immigrant than an exile" (*DAN* p. 296), and it is hard for her to "give up [her] faintly Chekhovian image of India," she consoles herself that she would "invent a more exciting—perhaps a more psychologically accurate—a more precisely metaphoric India: many more Indias[…]" (*DAN,* p. 297). This testifies to the notion that in spite of leaving her biological home, she might still be able to inscribe home(s) in imagination. But that will not be a longing for the originary home, as is usually the case with diasporic writers. What makes Mukherjee's case different is that she "invents" India and the Indian culture not to show her un/belonging in America but to alter the course of mainstream American fiction so that it speaks to the rest of the world. This is like inverting the American Melting-Pot theory. That is why my argument is premised on the idea that Mukherjee is not locked in a "deathly embrace" with America.[2] She might well be an "American writer," but she has managed to carry her Hindu imagination and Bengali adaptability with her that color both her writing and inscription of home. So the questions "what is her concept

of home?", "how has it evolved and how does she inscribe it?", and "how is her concept of home related to her assimilationist approach?" need to be answered with reference to *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, especially two "Epilogues" where she mentions "the absolute impossibility of ever having a home" and "fashioning [new] 'home'… in a strange landscape" (*DAN*, pp. 299, 302).

Theoretical Perspective

In order to situate Mukherjee's concept of home in diasporic theorization, I prefer to foreground and invoke Edward Said's position(s) on exile expounded in his essays "Reflections on Exile" and "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals''. That would provide me a base to entangle her concept of home with the diasporic theorization of home and contestatory views of others like V. S. Naipaul. In his essay "Reflections on Exile'', Said goes over almost all shades of exile and ends his essay on quotes from Adorno and Hugo of St. Victor to drive home to readers the idea that exile is eternal human condition.

Discussing exile in contrast with nationalism, Said writes that "[e]xiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past … (and) feel an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people (2000b, p. 177). But, towards the end of his essay, he takes up the other side of exile, that of gain. Referring to German-Jewish Philosopher, Theodor Adorno's autobiography written in exile, *Minima Moralia*,[3] Said concludes that "Adorno's reflections are informed by the belief that *the only home truly available* [to an intellectual exile] *now, though fragile and vulnerable, is in writing"* (2000b, p. 184, emphasis added). Said quotes Adorno on home and writing in slightly different words in his essay "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals'': "For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live" (2000a, p. 377). Explaining Adorno's idea of "home" constructed through writing, Said underlines the necessity of being away from home and looking at home (and native culture) from the detached view of an exile to "break barriers of thought and experience":

> To follow Adorno is to stand away from 'home'in order to look at it with the exile's detachment ... The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. *Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond*

> *reason or necessity.* Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (Said, 2000b, p. 185, emphasis added)

It is notable in the stressed part of the quote above that Said's elaboration of Adorno's views (to which he seems to agree) is in line with Mukherjee's categorically stated position against the rhetoric of "purity" of culture. In analyzing and discussing Said's "Reflections on Exile" in detail, I am trying to make my argument that Bharati Mukherjee's otherwise provocative stance taken in her 1995 ''Epilogue'' in *Days and Nights in Calcutt*a ''about the choice to stay away rather than to stay on" (*DAN,* p. 302*)*, after her visit to Calcutta in 1973, can be related to this other side of exile that Said discusses towards the end of his essay. Mukherjee, in spite of earning scathing criticism from Asian American and other critics,[4] seems to subscribe to the view that we often defend our borders and territories *beyond reason or necessity*. What generates more interest for me to try to situate Mukherjee in terms of her building a new "home" away from home within the theorization of diasporic/exilic existence is Said's quoting Hugo of St. Victor's cosmopolitan view of exile:

> The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; *the strong man* has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his. (Said, 2000b, p. 185, stress added)

Said quotes the same paragraph in *Culture and Imperialism*. In his explanatory paragraph immediately following this quote in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said acknowledges that Erich Auerbach has cited this passage (I haven't quoted the full passage) "as a model for anyone—man and woman—wishing to transcend national or provincial limits" (1994 [1993], p. 407). Though the repetition and abundance of third person masculine-gender (genitive case) pronouns in Hugo of St. Victor's quote focus on man's experience, Said's explanation generalizes it to both men and women, and the universal appeal of his words are likely to have equal attraction for women also as long as they overlook Hugo's overtly gendered language. Hence the justification of my using his quote to construct my argument for Mukherjee.

Is she a Strong or Perfect [Wo]man?

In my opinion, Mukherjee is a pioneer South Asian American diasporic intellectual in North America who valorizes Auerbach's view and wishes to "transcend national or provincial limits." If we judge Mukherjee against the criterion set by Hugo of St. Victor, she seems to fall in the category of "strong" to which every soil is as (their) native one. In one of her interviews in 1987, a year before she was naturalized, at the question, "[h]ave you found where you belong now?" Mukherjee replies:

> I like New York City. It's the Calcutta of the Americans. *But I can make myself feel that I 'belong' almost anywhere*—I was happy in Iowa City, and I was very prepared to be very happy in Toronto and Montreal. Perhaps, it's because as a Bengali woman, I was brought up to be adaptable. (Hancock, 1987, p. 35)

Though she shows adaptability, she routes it through her Bengali background which indicates that she uses her imagination to "invent … more exciting … metaphoric India[s]" (*DAN,* p. 297) when she lives away from her original home. Perhaps what Auerbach means by "strong" is not without the implication of possessing the requisite imagination that makes you feel at home anywhere. Mukherjee's feeling at home in America (or elsewhere) nuances Auerbach's notion of the strong in terms of indigenizing the adopted homes through imagination. She remains true to her pledge with herself that she would, in the absence of her real home, create imaginative homes. In this way, she can transform New York into Calcutta on the basis of certain parallels that are of her own making. She says in her interview to Hancock:

> New York is my home now, and you know, in many ways it isn't too different from Calcutta. Like Calcutta, New York has a delightfully arrogant sense of itself as the literary and intellectual centre of the universe. And, of course, both cities have sizeable communities of homeless people living on sidewalks. May be it is the gradual *Calcuttaization of New York* that makes me feel so at home here. (Hancock, 1987, p. 31, emphasis added)

Mukherjee's "Calcuttaization of New York" reminds of how Jennifer Drake defends Mukherjee against Koshy's charge of her overcelebration

of assimilation and indifference to “the complexities of diasporic subject-formation” (Koshy, 1994, p. 69). Drake writes in her essay of 1999, "Looting American Culture: Bharati Mukherjee's Immigrant Narratives”, that “in order to confront the historical circumstances of ethnicity and race in the United States” and “the complexities of diasporic subject-formation”, Mukherjee *fabulizes America*, *Hinduizes assimilation*, and *represents the real* pleasures and violences of cultural exchange (1999, p. 61, emphasis added). So Mukherjee is “strong” not because she considers all places her home(s) but because she is capable of retrieving her original home and home culture by defining new home(s) through local imagination. That is why David Mura states that her art is all about “a discovery and a creation, as well as retrieval, of a new set of myths … and a history that has been occluded or ignored” (1994, p. 204). But the way Mukherjee has been able to override her affiliation with India makes for her possibility of falling in the category of “perfect,” as suggested by Hugo of St. Victor. But again, she does not neatly fit into the category of the “perfect” because, if we look at her aggressive preference for America, she is not the one who looks at the entire world as a foreign land. She neither extends her love to all the places, nor does she extinguish it completely. What keeps one from confidently calling her “strong” or “perfect” is Hugo’s own view paraphrased and explained by Said:

> Hugo twice makes it clear that the ‘strong’ or ‘perfect’ man achieves independence and detachment by *working through* attachments, not by rejecting them. Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with one’s native pace. (2000b, p. 185)

Mukherjee, however, falls somewhere between the categories of the “strong” and the “perfect.” She might not be drinking deep at what Said calls “the pleasure of exiles” (2000b, p. 186); she, nevertheless, tries to make the most of what her choice of living in North America has to offer. Downplaying the nostalgic aspect of her voluntary and willed exile, she accepts the challenge of first living in a race-conscious Canada and then friendly (for her) America. Though she had made up her mind to live in North America (Canada) forever after her 1973–74 visit to India, she could not live in that race-conscious place after 1980, and convinced her husband and two sons to migrate to the U.S. where she got ready acceptability both as a woman of color and a writer. Her not having a monolithic and orthodox view of “home” and “native culture” gives her in Said’s words “originality” and “plurality of vision” because in deciding to act “as if one were at home wherever one happens to be,”

Mukherjee comes to achieve "an awareness that … is contrapuntal" (Said, 2000b, p. 186).

Walking away from *Guru*

Mukherjee's concept of home evolves like her aesthetics. When her expatriate phase of writing starts after the publication of her life narrative in 1977, she prefers "to explore state-of-the-art expatriation" (Mukherjee, 1985, p. 3) and believes, like her *guru* (in those days) V. S. Naipaul, in the "absolute impossibility of ever having a home, *a desh"* (*DAN,* 299).[5] As she was living in Canada and experiencing its ethnic mosaic policy, she includes in *Darkness* "uneasy stories about expatriation" (Mukherjee, 1985, p. 2). But her romance with Naipaulian comprehensive rootlessness comes to an end when she prefers to be an immigrant rather than an eternal exile or expatriate. Her idea of home accordingly changes and she ceases to be fascinated with Naipaul's free-floating intellectualism and homelessness. She parts her ways with Naipaul in the Third phase of her writing life when she becomes a naturalized American. In one of her interviews in 1988, she defines her difference with him and backs out of her previous commitments:

> He writes about living in perpetual exile and about the impossibility of ever having a home. Like Naipaul, I am a writer from the Third World but unlike him I left India by choice to settle in the U.S. I view myself as an American author in the tradition of other American authors whose ancestors arrived at Ellis Island. (Carb, 1988, p. 650, stress added)

Mukherjee is therefore pleased to replace Naipaul with Bernard Malamud. In her interview with Alison B. Carb, Mukherjee shows her strong affinity with Bernard Malamud:

> I see a strong likeness between my writing and Bernard Malamud's in spite of the fact that he describes the lives of East European Jewish immigrants and I talk about the lives of new comers from the Third World. Like Malamud, I write about a minority community which escapes the ghetto and adapts itself to the patterns of the dominant American culture ... I also feel a kinship with Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov. But Malamud most of all speaks to me as a writer and I admire his work a great deal. Immersing myself in his

> work gave me the self-confidence to write about my own community. (Carb, 1988, p. 650)

Since Naipaul was a model for expatriate writing, Mukherjee, with her transition into immigrant writing, replaces his influence with that of Malamud, and her belief in "the absolute impossibility of ever having a home" gives way to an urge for "fashioning [new] "home. In accordance with her new ambition, she writes in her 1995 "Epilogue" in *Day and Nights in Calcutta*: "Leaving is easy in our new diasporic age, but staying away and fashioning "home" among hostile people in a strange landscape was, *even then*, my urgent subject" (*DAN*, p. 302, stress added). This "even then" means 1977 when *Days and Nights in Calcutta* was first published and she had firmly stated that India was not her home any more. At that time she was trying to "fashion a home" in Canada which ultimately was not possible for her. With this consciousness of "the existence of alternate realities" (Carb, 1988, p. 651) and radical shift in point of view, Mukherjee does not want any more to remain in a state of eternal homelessness and diasporic angst. She rationalizes her wish for "fashioning" a new "home" in America where her past can come back to her only "in little bits and pieces" and where she has little room for nostalgia. Talking to Desai and Barnstone in 1998, she says:

> But I am convinced now that you can't straddle the fence—that if you are going to not remain an expatriate, then there has to be a traumatic, painful kind of break with the past. After that you might reclaim little bits and pieces of it [past] and fit them into your new life in a different way, but there is no easy painless way to make the change; otherwise you are burrowing in nostalgia. (Desai & Barnstone, 1998, p. 141)

Therefore, instead of singing songs of "our universal civilization"[6] with what Bruce Robbins calls "free-floating intellectual" (1992, p. 172) like Naipaul, Mukherjee wants to stop somewhere and lay claims to some place. She can no more keep company with Naipaul whom Rob Nixon describes as "the ultimate literary *apatride*, the most comprehensively uprooted of twentieth century writers" who wants to mount his claim to a "secure, reputable tradition of extraditionalism" (as cited in Robbins, p. 172).

Crossing the Hyphen

Mukherjee might have uprooted herself wilfully from India and, then, Canada, but she does not want to stay "comprehensively uprooted" like Naipaul. Instead of "Dancing on the hyphen," to borrow Laila Farah's phrase[7], between Asia and America, she wants to cross it confidently and throw her lot with American people and writers with a consciousness that she has to pepper American fiction with her tales of the Asianization of the American dream. She is not for *straddling the fence*; she is for getting the Asian Americans their rights to be called Americans like Updike and Joyce Carol Oates who are basically Europeans: "For me, hyphenation is a very discomfiting situation ... You say, All right [sic], so this doesn't work: I am an Indian for the whites and an American for the Indians—a kind of fence straddling that is almost immoral" (Desai & Barnstone, 1998, pp. 142-43). She does not reject the hyphen for purely personal reasons; she takes issue with white Americans and African Americans who impose marginal position to Asians and Chicanos only:

> I am trying to get White Americans and African Americans to see how deliberately and cruelly or maliciously marginalizing it is to apply the hyphen only to Asian Americans, Chicanos, and so on—and to not routinely make Americans of the Updikes and the Joyce Carol Oates. It's as though they're saying there is one kind of America, and the rest of you because you're hyphenated—whether you want to be or not, we are insisting that you be hyphenated—are not like really like us. So that's why, in order to emphasize the two-way transformation, I'm saying either call everyone American or make everyone hyphenated. But I'm against the hyphen. (Desai & Barnstone, 1998, p. 143)

When Mukherjee writes second "Epilogue" to her life narrative *Days and Nights in Calcutta* in 1995, she has already crossed the hyphen and announced herself as an American writer. This is a huge shift from that naive girlhood belief, which was still intact when she had left for India in 1973, "that [her] 'Bengaliness' was erosion-proof; that the monolithic identity based on land and language ... would resist all wear and tear" (*DAN*, p. 301). She wants to indicate that her present (new) identity as "American" writer belies that monolith of the immutability of local identity she was nourished on in her girlhood. But one of her "unregistered disclosures" at the end of her life narrative is "that [she]

always suspected that "[Her] 'I' was made up of fluid identities" *(DAN*, p. 301). Her rapidly changing chameleonic "I," in her movements from continent to continent, has been looking forward more and backward less, and has finally been anchored in America. That is why *Days and Nights in Calcutta,* with its two "Epilogues," maps Mukherjee's fluid and migrant subjecthood moving from one to the other position. She admits that "[in] writing this accidental autobiography, [she] completed the painful, risky journey from exile to settler and claimant" (*DAN*, p. 302). It means that writing this autobiography became the beginning of long, arduous journey of challenges, discoveries, and multiple subjectivities. It is this "claimant" stage that enables her in 1988 to get across the hyphen with her thundering declaration "I'm one of you now" ("Immigrant Writing," p. 1). Before writing her ("Immigrant Writing") essay in 1988, Mukherjee expressed her wish of "settling-in" in her 1987 interview with Hancock: "Yo-yoing through continents [like Naipaul] isn't my goal; settling-in as quickly as possible is" (Hancock, p.35). This shows her resolve to find a home in the future, not in her past or memories. Therefore, instead of carrying her native homeland in her imagination, she makes a new one, just across the hyphen. She writes at the end of her second "Epilogue" in her life narrative: "We built our 'homeland' out of expectation, not memory" (*DAN*, p. 303). The quotes around "homeland" show that it is in America. Since there is a gap of about nineteen years between her first and second epilogue, one has to keenly observe how Mukherjee articulates her graduation from her expatriate position to her naturalization status.

Through a long trajectory of her essays like "An Invisible Woman" (1981), "Immigrant Writing: Give us your Maximalists!" (1988), "A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman" (1993), and "American Dreamer"(1997), the short story collections, *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988), and her novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971), *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1989), Mukherjee does her homework to tide over her diasporic angst and cultural nostalgia in an innovatively productive fashion. Though her essay "An Invisible Woman" is apparently a protest against her marginalization as a woman of color in Canada, she actually crusades against Canadian exclusivism in order to achieve agency and become an insider. When she gets her naturalization in America, she celebrates it through her famous essay "Immigrant Writing: Give us your Maximalists!" in which she lays out her agenda of how her being an American can be differential, subversive, and enabling. She unpacks the minimalism of the mainstream American writers who do not speak to the rest of the world. She laments the provincial approach of the American writers and

presents herself as one who can synthesize her Hindu Brahmin background and her role of an informant on Indian culture with the American art of fiction writing. She has already morphed from being a Naipaul's protégé into an admirer of Bernard Malamud. Therefore she is not a package for interminable internationalism any more. Since she wants to refurbish both American and Asian-American intellectual engagement, it is hard to label her as a translator of the American imperialism or an aspirant hitched to the American Dream bandwagon. That is why Mukherjee's going against the unidirectional (normative) diasporic representations of native culture, which are steeped in nostalgia, becomes simultaneously nuancing and productive both for her past and present (cultural) affiliations. The evolutionary changes in her fiction also support this idea.

If Tara Banerjee Cartwright, the heroine of *The Tiger's Daughter*, is the fictional representation of Mukherjee in *Days and Nights in Calcutta,* Jasmine, *Jasmine*'s heroine, is partly her fictionalized self of the late eighties. Therefore Tara Banerjee and Jasmine stand at two poles of Mukherjee's passage from expatriation to naturalization. It seems that she started developing a challengingly new assimilationist aesthetics in her 1977 autobiography, *Days and Nights in Calcutta,* and it culminated in her late eighties fiction and essays. It is there where her art gets in line with what Edward Said considers as "positive things" of exile (2000b, p. 186). At the end of her 1997 essay "American Dreamer", Mukherjee winds up her argument and writes: "Others who write stories of migration often talk of arrival at a new place as a *loss,* the loss of communal memory and the erosion of an original culture. I want to talk of *arrival as gain*" (p. 35, emphasis added). That is why her going home, as described in her memoir, is not "homecoming" in the traditional sense, as she notes in her 1995 "Epilogue":

> I looked forward to an exercise in nostalgia. I had visualized memory as a suspension bridge connecting my two separate cultural incarnations. But the 'real' story I ended writing—in spite of myself—was about North America, not India; about the choice to *stay away* rather than to stay on. (*DAN,* p. 302, stress added)

Conclusion

Although Mukherjee's building home across the hyphen upsets the postcolonial applecart in terms of overlooking its binarism, it is at once productive and subversive. Located in the zone of "culture's

hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38), it alters the American melting-pot instead of being altered by it, liberates the Asian-American diaspora from their shyness of inclusion, and constructively challenges the American exclusivism. In other words, if the cultural imperialism of America is replaced with the colonial discourse, Mukherjee becomes a mimic-turned-menace who disrupts its authority because colonial mimicry "'appropriates' the Other" and "poses an imminent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). To use Homi Bhabha's words, she is a different kind of "authorized version[ ] of otherness" who "articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial [read cultural] authority" (1994, p. 88).

By rejecting the normative version (informed with nostalgia) of the past ("memory") and embracing future ("expectation"), Mukherjee practices, in the true sense of the word, what Bhabha calls "the art of the present" (1994, p. 1), the art of living a life of continuous cultural exchange. Therefore when she writes in the second "Epilogue" that "we [Clark Blaise, her two sons, and herself] came 'home' to sweetness and light within" (*DAN*, p. 303), she refers to her new home constructed through writing and not to her residential address in America. Only that home can guarantee her "the requisite platform to operate as an intellectual because *the only home truly available* [to an intellectual exile] *is in writing*" (Said, 2000b, p. 184, emphasis added). Along with vindicating Paul Gilroy's article, "It Ain't Where You're From, It's Where You're At…" , Mukherjee's "home" built "out of expectation" also hints at what Regina Lee calls "the additional consideration" that could be made part of Gilroy's essay, that is, "where you're going" (in Goh & Wong, 2004, p. 55). That is why Mukherjee's relocation in America is "a positive act"[8] and her inscription of home gives a new direction to the diasporic articulations of Asian America and liberates it from its disenfranchised position. If she downplays the postcolonial binarism, she simultaneously energizes the "Third Space" in a constructive mode and nuances the theory by turning the static and imaginary "realm of the *beyond*" (Bhabha, 37, p. 1) into a pulsating and productive space.

Endnotes

[1]In this article, I've used *DAN* as abbreviation of *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1995 [1977]) for in-text citation. For complete reference of this text, see References.

[2]See Sheng-mei, Ma (2000), *The Deathly Embrace: Orientalism and Asian American Identity*, London: University of Minnesota Press. Ma looks at Orientalism and Asian American identity in a tight embrace and questions the assumptions of their mutual exclusivity. According to Ma's thesis, this "deathly embrace" takes a lot of forgetting of the past life, a conscious turning away from the imperative of remembering. Ma's phrase describes an Eastern woman's willful choice to live in America in a bid to establish an identity.

[3]Theodor Adorno (1951), *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Mutilated life* (E.F.N. Jephcott, Trans.), London: New Left Books. Because of the Nazis' excesses on Jews, Adorno (1903–1969) exiled himself from Germany and went to reside in various places like Oxford, New York City, and Southern California. He wrote his autobiography and other books during his exile in America.

[4]Many writers of South Asian origin have strongly criticized Mukherjee's "exuberance" of immigration presented through her writings. Among her severe critics are Susan Koshy, Debjani Banerjee, Anindyo Roy, Alpana Sharma Knippling, and Gurleen Grewal. See References for details.

[5]An instance of Mukherjee's fascination with Naipaul's views is her interview with him in 1981, "A Conversation with V. S. Naipaul." She did that interview with Robert Boyer. She openly supports Naipaul's "sense of being cut off from a supporting world." Let me quote Mukherjee's question and answer to Naipaul:

> B.M.: I am an extravagant admirer of your work and…
>
> VSN: What do you find in it to admire?
>
> B.M.: Well**,** you have articulated for people like me, for the first time, a post-colonial consciousness without making it appear exotic. Your writing is about unhousing and at the same time free. I not only sympathize with that condition; I want to share that sense of being cut off from a supporting world (Mukherjee & Boyer, 1981, p. 5).

[6] V. S. Naipaul (1991), "Our universal civilization," *New York Review of Books*, 22-25.

[7] See Laila Farah (2005), "Dancing on the hyphen," *Modern Drama*, *48*(2), 316-43.

[8]See Carmen Wickramagamage (1992), "Relocation as a Positive Act: The Immigrant experience in Bharati Mukherjee's novels", *Diaspora*. *2*(2), 171-200. Wickramagamage has convincingly defended Mukherjee's differential assimilation and looked at it as an admirably positive act. My defense of Mukherjee with reference to *Days and Nights in Calcutta* is significant in that her assimilationist argument articulated throughout her fiction is rooted in her 1977 life narrative in which she had boldly voiced her decision to leave India forever. Therefore this essay intervenes in terms of locating Mukherjee's life narrative in the trajectory of her assimilationist writings and also in contextualizing her decision to build her home across the hyphen.

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