TRAFFIC JAMS ACROSS BORDERS:
TRAVELLING, DWELLING,
AND THE CASE OF INDIAN CANADIAN FICTION[1]

Eva Darias Beautell
Universidad de La Laguna

ABSTRACT

This essay intends to bring together the theoretical dimensions of borders as trope for the condition of movement, physical and/or metaphorical, across nations and cultures and the field of contemporary Canadian diasporic fiction. It could be argued that Canada as a nation has been implicitly founded on the notion of diaspora. Its official icon of the mosaic (purportedly different from the American assimilationist melting pot) is explicitly diasporic in content, since it obviously depends on modes of social and cultural bonding that maintain identifications outside the national time/space. I intend to explore the implications of the contemporary emphasis on movement and border crossing for the notions of culture, identity and home. My discussion will draw on the examples provided by Indian Canadian fiction for it seems paradigmatic of the present transformation of the national literature as well as of the validity of applying border theories to the diasporic text in Canada and elsewhere.

KEY WORDS: Border theory, diaspora, globalization, national literature, Indian Canadian fiction.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo explora las dimensiones teóricas de "la frontera" como tropo para estudiar la presente condición de movilidad, real y figurada, entre naciones y culturas, así como su aplicabilidad en el campo de la narrativa contemporánea canadiense de la diáspora. La propia nación canadiense ha sido, de un modo implícito, fundada en esa noción de 'diáspora.' Su símbolo oficial, el mosaico (deliberadamente diferente al crisol americano), es explícitamente diaspórico, pues se basa en la existencia de agrupaciones sociales y culturales que mantienen identificaciones fuera del espacio y el tiempo de lo nacional. Este artículo analiza los efectos del énfasis contemporáneo en la movilidad y en el cruce de fronteras sobre las nociones de cultura e identidad. Mi estudio se centra en ejemplos de la narrativa indocanadiense reciente, pues parece paradigmática de estos cambios y de la validez de las teorías "fronterizas" en el análisis de los textos de la diáspora tanto dentro como fuera de Canadá.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Teorías de borde, la frontera, diáspora, globalización, literatura nacional, narrativa indo-canadiense.

The last quarter of the 20th century has witnessed the rise of what we now call border theories, a rich and promising area in the field of humanities, and one opened up by the confluence of spatial and temporal paradigms of the self. Monographs, collections of essays, special issues of journals have been dedicated to the multiple intersections between space and identity, space and culture, territory and national literatures, and other related topics. The work of James Clifford has been particularly significant and his collection of essays *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997) perhaps one of the most relevant. *Routes* explores the idea of travel as metaphor for the condition of culture, with "a view of human location as constituted by displacement as much as by stasis". The various essays "are concerned with human difference articulated in displacement, tangled cultural experiences, structures and possibilities of an increasingly connected but not homogeneous world," and deal with the applicability of the term 'travel' to refer to a variety of social, cultural, economic and political practices, as well as to the experience of subjects traditionally excluded from travelling (Clifford 1997, 2). By articulating the ideas of 'dwelling-in-travel' as well as 'traveling-in-dwelling,' Clifford breaks the traditional link of culture to place. The legacy of the imperial period and the still ongoing processes of decolonization, the displacing effects of the wars, and the restructuring activities of industrial and technological capitalism have all contributed to create an unprecedented condition for contacts between local and transnational powers. And this situation, in turn, has problematized the way we think of culture. "Indeed," Clifford writes,

> the currency of culture and identity as performative acts can be traced to their articulation of homelands, safe spaces where the traffic across borders can be controlled. Such acts of control, maintaining coherent insides and outsides, are always tactical. Cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locales. Stasis and purity are asserted —creatively and violently— against historical forces of movement and contamination.
> When borders gain a paradoxical centrality, margins, edges, and lines of communication emerge as complex maps and histories. (Clifford 1997, 7)

The complexities brought about by these changes are only beginning to be grasped. Border theories, and particularly the works of Chicano critics and writers, have challenged binary thinking by projecting a shifting subjectivity based on the undermining of identity as origin or essence by means of constant territorial, cul-

tural, gender, racial and class crossings.[2] Yet fuller articulation of the multiple inter-sections implied by border theories as well as further examination of the translat-ability of border theory to other circumstances of displacement or deterritorialization still need to be done. As Clifford has argued, in their emphasis on the critical im-portance of formerly marginal histories of crossing, border theories have much in common with diaspora paradigms. Borderlands presuppose, at least in a literal sense, and in their origin, a geo-political line marking two specific physical territories that are separated and policed as well as constantly crossed by illegal practices (practices from which border theories emerge). Diasporas, in turn, do not necessarily depend on the demarcation of physical territory. One of their defining elements may even be that they no longer entertain the idea of return to their lands of origin. They are dispersed communities with no necessary connection to a notion of 'home':

> It is worth holding onto the historical and geographic specificity of the two para-digms, while recognizing that the concrete predicaments denoted by the terms 'border' and 'diaspora' bleed into each other [...] [D]iasporic forms of longing, memory, and (dis)identification are shared by a broad spectrum of minority and migrant populations. And dispersed peoples, once separated from homelands by vast oceans and political barriers, increasingly find themselves in border relations with the old country thanks to a to-and-fro made possible by modern technologies of transport, communication, and labor migration. (Clifford 1997, 246-247)

This essay intends to bring together the theoretical dimensions of borders as trope for the condition of movement, physical and/or metaphorical, across na-tions and cultures and the field of contemporary Canadian diasporic fiction. It could be argued that Canada as a nation has been implicitly founded on the notion of diaspora. Its official icon of the mosaic (purportedly different from the American assimilationist melting pot) is explicitly diasporic in content, since it obviously de-pends on "forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifi-cations outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference" (Clifford 1997, 251).[3] I intend to explore the implications of that contemporary emphasis on movement and border crossing for the notions of culture, identity and

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[2] The production of Chicano studies in the last 30 years is immense, rich and varied. In what follows, I am just pointing out those works that I find seminal or representative of the large possibilities in the field. Anzaldúa (1987), Rosaldo (1989) and Gómez-Peña (1986) are pioneering studies and obliged references. Alarcon (1994) provides, with Anzaldúa's work, one of the most interesting instances of border/gender theory. The collection of essays edited by Calderón and Saldívar (1991) represents a good, comprehensive anthology in the field. Finally, Saldívar's book (1997) of-fers the latest directions in the area.

[3] A full discussion of this question in the context of recent Asian American poetry, and how this type of literature is exploding the assimilationist drive of national(ist) US ideology, can be found in Zhou Xiaojing's essay in this present publication.

home. My discussion will draw on Indian Canadian fiction which seems almost paradigmatic of the present transformation of the national literature and is certainly valid for probing the applicability of border theories to the diasporic text in Canada, and perhaps elsewhere as well.

The very notion of 'home' may provide an adequate starting point in this discussion. In fact, a significant number of contemporary novels in English have had an emphasis on the meaning of home and belonging. As Rosemary Marangoly George puts it: "The search for the location in which the self is 'at home' is one of the primary projects of twentieth-century fiction in English." And "[t]his project," George continues, "may get obscured or transcended as the narrative unfolds, but it is never completely abandoned" (1996, 3). One may argue that the search for roots, for one's origins, has always been at the heart of narrative writings since its first inception. And that would be certainly true of Canadian literature. Still, given the specific social, economic and cultural circumstances of the last turn of the century, the notion of home that most contemporary fiction seems to deal with is notably transformed and may no longer include the traditional attachment to territory and culture. As George herself explains:

> Homes are manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels. They are places that are recognized as such by those within and those without. They are places of violence and nurturing. A place that is flexible, that manifests itself in various forms and yet whose very reinvention seems to follow the basic pattern of inclusions/exclusions. Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. Home is the desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place. It is community. Communities are not counter-constructions but only extensions of home, providing the same comforts and terrors on a larger scale. Both home and community provide such substantial pleasures that have been so thoroughly assumed as natural that it may seem unproductive to point to the exclusions that found such abodes. (George 1996, 9)

In order for the ongoing search for cultural and national belonging to have any sense at all, it needs to be carried out on the basis of a fluid and flexible notion of 'home.' Displacement, in other words, does not need to be seen as a permanent condition. One of the crucial effects of globalization has, no doubt, been the 'normalization' of a detached experience of the world, at least in a material way. But that sense of detachment is counterpointed by an opposing sense of 'global' belonging. "Feeling global," as Bruce Robbins (1999) expresses it, may denote a more collective and engaged form of wordliness. Today, from our desk computers, we can enjoy an unprecedented access to the large world outside. But our locality is being transformed by that experience of globality as much as the world outside is being constantly modified by contact with the multiplicity of our local realities. In a wider social context, those forms of collaboration between the local and the global would characterize the situation of migrant subjects with cultural, historical, personal and economic links to two or more nation-states (Basch, Schiller and Blanc 1994, 7). As a matter of fact, transnationalism has produced a deterritorialized notion of the

nation-state, which is no longer based on the physical inhabiting of the territory. At the center of all these theories is a notion of identity no longer as a fixed product but as mobile, fluid and changing. We are witnessing, in other words, the disembodiment of home as attached to a physical place.

But how are we to define this form of identity if one of the basic defining elements is its mobile, changing nature? No longer fitting into the conventional definitions of national identities, contemporary forms of citizenship often approach the idea of nomadic identities, put forward by the French theoreticians Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 23-24) and explored by a great number of works from multiple perspectives. The blurring of the national borders that these contemporary forms of belonging entail is, not only in a physical but also in a metaphorical sense, obvious, for instance, in the case the dispersal of the East African Asian community following decolonization and political independence in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, whose scattered members now live in India, Britain, the United States and Canada. As May Joseph explains in this context:

> Gradually, there unfolded a peculiar condition for which theories of citizenship do not adequately account: that of nomadic, conditional citizenship related to the histories of migrancy and the tenuous status of immigrants. This notion of citizenship extends beyond the coherence of national boundaries and is transnationally linked to informal networks of kinship, migrancy, and displacement, opening up circuits of dependency between communities in Canada, Britain, or the States and communities in East Africa. (Joseph 1999, 92)

The growing presence of these communities in the West has significantly contributed to the transformation of the ways we think about national identity and culture. In their constant renegotiation of local and transnational forms of citizenship, they represent one of the most serious challenges (although by no means the only one) to the very concept of 'nation.' There is certainly much to be celebrated in the dismantling of the binary system that has traditionally sustained national identities. Yet the flow of people, goods and information creates uneven effects.[4] Moreover, these new conditions of being in the (Western) world are often marked by the trauma of dispossession and displacement, by fractured histories and the disrupting effect that they have produced on people often uprooted many times in a lifetime. The construction of diasporic subjectivities is thus permeated by that feeling of disjuncture resulting from the subject's simultaneous perception of mobility and stasis. Although the obsolescence of nation-states is far from clear, national identi-

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[4] As I write this, in June 2001, the antiglobalization movements are demonstrating outside the meeting of the Global Economic Forum in Salzburg. They are also organizing themselves for the coming G-8 meeting in Geneva in mid-July. Highly diversified groups are united under the common goal of demanding a better world and against the social and environmental side effects of economic globalization.

ties are surely experimenting a profound transformation as new heterogeneous forms of social and cultural belonging compel us to think postnationally (Joseph 1999). That is so because, as James Clifford puts it:

> The imagined communities called "nations" require constant, often violent, maintenance. Moreover, in a world of migrations and TV satellites, the policing of frontiers and collective essences can never be absolute, or not for long. Nationalisms articulate their purportedly homogeneous times and spaces selectively, in relation to new transnational flows and cultural forms, both dominant and subaltern. The diasporic and hybrid identities produced by these movements can be both restrictive and liberating. They stitch together languages, traditions, and places in coercive and creative ways, articulating embattled homelands, powers of memory, styles of transgression, in ambiguous relation to national and transnational structures. It is difficult to evaluate, even to perceive, the range of emerging practices. (Clifford 1997, 9-10)

In his search for alternative ways of thinking identity, Clifford puts forward the notion of "traveling cultures" (1997, 17-46). In the past, he argues, "[d]welling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes." Today, however, we are living an unprecedented transformation in the way we think about belonging, territory, and movement (1997, 3). Travelling cultures call for a comparative focus on the interaction between stasis and mobility, dwelling and travelling, in anthropological and ethnographic analyses of cultures. They acknowledge the importance of both roots and routes, which are no longer seen as opposing each other, but rather as mutually interdependent. Travelling cultures are not necessarily privileged. They may be forcefully migrant, escaping distinct forms of oppression:

> The project of comparison would have to grapple with the evident fact that travelers move about under strong cultural, political, and economic compulsions and that certain travelers are materially privileged, others oppressed. These specific circumstances are crucial determinations of the travel at issue —movements in specific colonial, neocolonial, and postcolonial circuits, different diasporas, borderlands, exiles, detours, and returns. Travel, in this view, denotes a range of material, spatial practices that produce knowledges, stories, traditions, comportments, music, books, diaries, and other cultural expressions. Even the harshest conditions of travel, the most exploitative regimes, do not entirely quell resistance or the emergence of diasporic and migrant cultures. (Clifford 1997, 35)

Clifford's theories are relevant for literary studies in that they allow us to look at national literatures in comparative perspectives as international literatures. This is an essential move in the analysis of contemporary North American literatures, which often draw on a cultural background other than the officially sanctioned as 'national.' More than one third of the fiction written and published in English Canada today exhibits an often self-conscious crosscultural framework of reference. The notion of 'borders' as a critical trope in the analysis of this literature, the border spaces defined by two or more different cultures, territories, traditions

and languages, seems particularly relevant and promises thus to be very useful. Additionally, Clifford's attention to the question of privilege would make room for the consideration of the very different circumstances under which immigrants to Canada and Canadian-born citizens live, travel and write.

Two important and related issues may be underlined as essential in the present discussion. In the first place, we should point out both the crucial role and the changing nature of what we call 'culture' today. On the one hand, globalization has seriously disturbed our way of thinking about culture, since the term has always been used to designate a fixed locality. Culture is a process of meaning construction usually linked to tradition, to society, to identity as a people and is often defined physically and politically by the demarcation of territory: "The connectivity of globalization is clearly threatening to such conceptualizations," writes John Tomlinson in this context, "not only because the multiform penetration of localities breaks into this binding of meaning to place, but because it undermines the thinking through which culture and fixity of location are originally paired" (1999, 28). On the other hand, a focus on culture is essential in order to understand the larger implications of globalization, or the degree to which our everyday actions are always culturally determined and may often have global implications. Our consumption habits or the way we dress establish our own cultural identity, and these in turn may relate us, in a huge variety of forms, to millions of other, often unknown, people, culture and places. The individual everyday decision of buying a certain product, for instance, may often have consequences for global economy, human rights and environmental conditions: "The way in which these 'cultural actions' become globally consequential is the prime sense in which cultures matter for globalization," Tomlinson argues. "To be sure, the complexity of this chain of consequences simultaneously entails the political, economic and technological dimensions of globalization. But the point is that 'moment of the cultural' is indispensable in interpreting complex connectivity" (1999, 26).

Contemporary Canadian fiction offers a rich ground for the exploration of those contradictory tendencies. Although often breaking the boundaries of the nation by showing that identity depends on temporal and spatial paradigms that are always in flux, a good number of recent Canadian novels are also, almost paradoxically, haunted by the construction of cultural identities. The process is complicated because it often involves an articulation of culture as part of both global and local contexts, and not in terms of movement alone but, rather, in terms of "the movement of culture outside the spaces of any (specific) language" (Grossberg 1996, 169). As many novels implicitly or explicitly suggest, the construction of a cultural identity in that incipient space of the border is a difficult task, and one fraught with important tensions and dangers.

In Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1989), the protagonist, an Indian woman of a peasant Punjabi background, travels through three continents before arriving illegally to Florida with the improbable mission of performing *sati* (the immolation of the widow on her husband's funeral pyre) on what would have been her husband's college campus. On the one hand, this unexpected transplantation of a strongly contested cultural practice in India itself may succeed in emptying it of

meaning, making it look absurd and unnecessary; on the other, the terrible violence surrounding her entrance to American land (a disturbing episode including rape and murder) would certainly undermine whatever expectations of progress the reader might be holding about the westward motion of the protagonist. Instead, the episode actually underlines the very violence involved in these (sometimes forced) transplantations of cultures across countries (Mukherjee 1989, 117-120).

Clearly located at the intersection between postmodern and postcolonial discourses and thereby exhibiting the elements of those fictional modes (multiple subjects, fluid, changing identities, self-conscious metafictionality, intertextual plays, fragmented, episodic form, and so forth), Mukherjee's novel denounces, nonetheless, the uneven effects of economic and cultural globalization. Take, for instance, the weird example of Professorji Vadhera, the person who lodges Jasmine when she arrives at Queens, in New York. Vadhera turns out to be an importer of Indian hair which he then sells to those making wigs, musical and scientific instruments, and to the U.S. Defense Department: "It was no exaggeration to say that the security of the free world, in some small way, depended on the hair of Indian village women," Jasmine ironically states (Mukherjee 1989, 152). In the transcultural framework in which the story is located, the odd discovery leads us to think about the nature and contradictions of mobility in the postcolonial world: "A hair from some peasant's head in Hasnapur could travel across oceans and save an American meteorologist's reputation," the protagonist wonders. "Nothing was rooted anymore. Everything was in motion" (1989, 152). As the ironic edge of Jasmine's words seem to suggest, the condition of instability characteristic of the postmodern and increasingly of the postcolonial times, is not always the celebratory event that one might expect, and presents, no doubt, as many problems as it offers new possibilities of looking at the world/text. In other words, the present conditions of movement and migrations may offer as much a rich perspective to analyse and dismantle dominant discourses as a covert mode to perpetuate such discourses, leaving the present relations of power untouched. The odd case of the Indian hair, in Mukherjee's novel, underlines the material (corporeal) side of globalization and succeeds in drawing our attention to its uncanny dimension.

Vassanji's award-winning novel *The Book of Secrets* (1994), however, provides an also complex but altogether different view of the effects of cultural globalization. Set on a border territory between the German and the British colonies of East Africa, the text is structured as a historical research work featuring, in its opening pages, a map of British East Africa at the beginning of the century, and a prologue in which the narrator, Pius Fernandes, a retired history teacher, is given the diary of Alfred Corbin, a former British Commissioner to the region. The narrator's research about this diary constitutes the corpus of the book, divided into two main parts and interspersing the contents of Corbin's diary with correspondence, historical documents and other miscellaneous information of the time presumably found by the narrator in his research. The book closes with an epilogue and a glossary of terms in Swahili and Indian languages. The novel succeeds in constructing a cultural identity which is both fractured (that is, made up of textual fragments) and connected (linking disparate times and spaces in the 20th century, India to East

Africa and tangentially to Canada). The time span, 1913-1988, is strategically framed by the double-voiced structure of a diary within a diary: Pius Fernandes's personal notebook in 1988 provides the story's outer framework and a contemporary perspective on colonial life, while Alfred Corbin's diary, written between 1913 and 1914, marks the story's point of departure around the events of World War I, a time which also saw the beginning of the end of colonialism.

Vassanji's story is set almost entirely in East Africa, and Canada only appears in passim because one of Pius's former students, Sona, now an active correspondent involved in the research of the diary, writes from Toronto. The characters are mostly African Indian Muslims, although there is the colonial British officer and the narrator himself, who is a Christian Goan. There is a subtle way, however, in which the history of these East African Indians becomes the history of Canada, for the 20th century has seen the second wave of Indian migration, from the East African ex-colonies to England and North America. Seen in this light, *The Book of Secrets* may be said to be about Canada, as it draws on important connections between national and international histories. Moreover, this type of fiction pushes the boundaries of what we call national literature, expanding it to include places and cultures out there, beyond Canada's borders (see Dyer 1995, 21).

It is that complex sense of connectivity that brings us to the second issue we need to consider, which concerns the fruitful intersection between the global and the local. Indeed, there are many different modalities of globalization: the flow of goods and information, the (forced or voluntary) movement of people across national borders, the new social and institutional relations established among people worldwide, the possibilities opened up by the rise of electronic communication systems, and so forth. But these complex processes are always set in a dialogical relation to the local dimension, which despite apparent pressures to disappear, continues to be the essential point of reference in any analysis of contemporary culture:

> 'Local life' —contrasted here with the transient 'global life' of the space of the air terminal (or indeed the computer terminal)— is the vast order of human social existence which continues, because of the constraints of physical embodiment, to dominate even in a globalized world. Local life occupies the majority of time and space. Although the increasing ability to move —physically and representationally— between places is a highly significant mode of connectivity, it is ultimately subordinate to—indeed derivative of —the order of location in time and space which we grasp as 'home'. Globalization is transforming this local order, but the significance of this transformation reaches beyond the technological accomplishments of communication and transport. Putting it simply, connectivity means changing the nature of localities and not just occasionally lifting some people out of them [...] [T]he paradigmatic experience of global modernity for most people —and this is not of course unrelated to the correlation between income and mobility— is that of staying in one place but experiencing the 'dis-placement' that global modernity brings to them. (Tomlinson 1999, 9)

Tamarind Mem, by Anita Rau Badami (1996), offers an interesting example of this irruption of the local into the global. The novel is typically structured in

the form of a double autobiographical account: the first part told by the daughter, Kamini, writing from Canada about her childhood in post-Independence India; the second part told by the mother in India, Saroja, who travels alone and without a fixed destination across the country, telling the stories of her life to the people she meets in the trains. Each of these main parts are in turn double, as they are each marked by a narrative present, textually signalled in italics, and a narrative past constructed by the recollection of each narrative subject. In a way, then, Badami's text may be said to be paradigmatic of what has been called 'diasporic' fiction, as the daughter's double narrative Canada-India explores the space between the local and the global not in terms of movement alone (the movement of Kamini from India to Canada), but most importantly, in relation to that ongoing transplantation of cultures outside a fixed territory. Yet the text insists on the importance of the local dimension of cultures. The anecdotes of the railway construction that the family father, a civil engineer, brings with him after his trips to the construction sites can be read, symbolically, as indications of the insistence on locality. We learn, for instance, that a horrible railway accident is caused by a bull elephant that, taking the roar of the old engine for a mating call, runs against a train (Badami 1996, 129). On another occasion, the workers refuse to destroy an anthill believed to be the home of two king cobras. "Nobody in their right sense destroys the home of a cobra," affirms the father:

> "Why?" [Kamini asks her father]
> "Because, *Noni*, it will bring a curse on your head, of sickness and sorrow. But my assistant said that he was protected from the curse by a boon which Vasuki, the king of serpents, gave to his ancestors. He said that manymany centuries ago, this ancestor had saved Vasuki, who was trapped in a ring of fire. He held out a staff to the mighty snake, who coiled around it and escaped certain death."
> "So did you destroy the anthill?"
> "No, we laid tracks around it, because the villagers did not believe my assistant's story." (Badami 1996, 43)

The global and the national curiously overlap here, since the unifying project of constructing a national railway acts as a global, centrifugal force against the small, centripetal realities of everyday local Indian life. Most importantly, these railway episodes implicitly suggest that the transformations implied by the nationalization of the Indian territory are never unilateral. The globalizing, national, and unifying project of constructing the Indian railway is obviously modifying the local order of the post-Independence Indian villages. Yet, at the same time, the local contingencies (the bull elephant) and beliefs (the king cobras) also transform the unifying project, forcing it to *shift positions* and change its original design.

It is in this context of the intersecting vectors between the global and the local that the trope of *deterritorialization* becomes very powerful and specially representative of the present approaches to movement. Deterritorialization is both a condition and a strategy that breaks binary structures of being and belonging, because it implies a move towards the Other—the other cultures, territories, the other selves, identities (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 11-12). This is obviously connected

to the notion of nomadic identities suggested above. Deterritorialization is the condition of nomadic identities, but the movement here implied is not necessarily *real.* Deterritorialization is rather a state of mind and can actually happen without physical movement taking place. It has become obvious that, as Tomlinson argues:

> complex connectivity weakens the ties of culture to place. This is in many ways a troubling phenomenon, involving the simultaneous penetration of local worlds by distant forces, and the dislodging of everyday meanings from their 'anchors' in the local environment. Embodiment and the forces of material circumstance keep most of us, most of the time, situated, but in places that are changing around us and gradually, subtly, losing their power to define the terms of our existence. This is undoubtedly an uneven and often contradictory business, felt more forcibly in some places than others, and sometimes met by countervailing tendencies to re-establish the power of locality. Nevertheless, deterritorialization is, I believe, the major cultural impact of global connectivity. And it's not all bad news. (Tomlinson 1999, 29-30)

The ambivalence of this trope of deterritorialization becomes evident in the field of the new technologies. Technological improvements like the internet and the cell phones have brought along an important rupture of the border between public and private domains, definitely breaking the imaginary protection of the home as shelter (from the outside world). This has also meant a trespassing of the house as the very body, the place of dwelling, and with it of the imaginary boundaries of the subject's own identity:

> So it is not merely the privacy of the bourgeois family life that is threatened by the penetration of the outer world into the inner: there is also an implied challenge to the 'boundary' which constitutes the self. This however has not necessarily have to be imaged as a threat to self-identity, but perhaps as a movement in the placing of the boundary between the 'private self' (say, the self of the insular family structure) and the self imagined in relation to a wider horizon of human belonging. The shifting of this 'threshold' produced by the penetration of the enclosed space of the house by globalizing technologies [...] thus becomes a way of thinking the ambivalent effects of deterritorialization on self-identity. (Tomlinson 1999, 118)

Since deterritorialization thus poses a potential threat to the very possibility of identitary constructions, it is often coupled by the opposing drive of reterritorialization. In this way, there is a constant pendulum-like swing between the organizing, signifying functions and the drives to escape definitions, which endows contemporary cultures with the principles of what Deleuze and Guattari have called "the rhizome," an alternative model of knowledge based on multiplicity and heterogeneity, connection and rupture (1987, 8-12): "Every rhizome includes lines of segmentation according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc.; but also lines of deterritorialization along which it endlessly flees" (Deleuze and Gauttari 1983, 18). A new border is defined by the interaction between these apparently contradictory tendencies, between the centrifugal and the centripetal forces of contemporary diasporic cultures. On the one hand, as Deleuze

and Guattari insist, this implies a notion of culture as *always already* in motion between the lines of connection and the lines of flight, thereby preventing the attempts at definition within the traditional binary structures of knowledge. On the other hand, it is also essential "to avoid overstating the cultural flux of globalization and losing sight of the tendency of cultural mixtures to re-embed themselves, however briefly, into 'stable' identity positions" (Tomlinson 1999, 148).

Instances of the latter process of re-embedment into fixed positions are always found, along with the process of deconstruction of master narratives, binary systems and privileged identities, in the writings of the Indian diasporic communities living in Canada. These writings are often seen as attempts to re-establish a home or to feel at home in the (new) territory. An important way in which they do that is through the fictional "production of locality," through an emphasis on the organization of space, the description of the dwelling places, the building of real and metaphorical passage connections, the naming of places, and the demarcation of territorial boundaries. According to Arjun Appadurai (1996), these activities are all part of an incessant process of spatio-temporal production of locality. Such process is enacted diacritically. It involves the production of ethnoscapes by opposition to Others, the codification of knowledge to create a recognizable social context different from others. The production of locality includes most everyday practices in a community and involves the daily transformation, through routines, of spaces into places. The production of locality thus works as a powerful reterritorializing force, contrary to the lines of flight. It also reveals interesting connections between the local and the global (the non-local against which the local takes place), since it is born in displacement and lives to reconstruct a sense of place.

The very structure of Rohinton Mistry's short story "Swimming Lessons" (1987) represents an interesting attempt of this kind since its double narrative form enacts that simultaneous move of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of identity. The tale moves back and forth between the Canadian apartment building, where the narrator lives, and Firozsha Baag, an apartment complex in Bombay, where the narrator's parents live. The connections between the two narrative frames happen at first by association: A phone ringing in Don Mills (Canada) is connected in the text to the sound of a doorbell in Bombay (India), or the aseptic waters of the public swimming pool where the narrator has registered for lessons act as a link with the polluted sea of Chaupatty beach in Bombay, where the narrator used to go to as a child. We could probably read the narrator's enrolment in these lessons as an attempt to combat his sense of displacement in the new land, that is, as an attempt at self-reterritorialization, for the swimming-pool waters seem initially to transport him to the place and time of his childhood. Yet this obviously fails, for the chemically clean waters of the Canadian pool turn out to have little to do with the filthy sea of the narrator's memory. Significantly, he almost drowns in the course of a demonstration and, as a result, gives up the lessons.

Later in the story, however, the narrator sends the parents his first book, a collection of short stories whose reading becomes then the subject of the Bombay narrative. In this way, we begin to read the parents' interpretation of the very book we are reading, concluding with the closing story, with which both our reading and

the text's reading of itself wonderfully coincide. Having failed in previous attempts, both the narrator and his parents seem now to experience a reterritorializing effect through the writing and reading of the stories. The text posits the impossibility of defining identity in terms of either cultural origins or assimilation into a new culture alone. But it also puts forward the need for the transcultural subject *to identify* the site of enunciation, however shifting. As it does so, Mistry's story illustrates the complexities involved in the negotiations of cultural dislocations, displacements, and transformations in both countries, India and Canada. As Ranu Samantrai puts it, this type of writing seems to explode the idea of a national identity,

> impossibly stretching its boundaries to include places, people, and memories conventionally excluded from the Canadian mainstream. The fact that Mistry's work is also claimed by Indian fiction and by Parsis as Parsi fiction suggests a breakdown and an overlap of nations such that it is unclear where India ends and Canada begins. Far from coherent, self-enclosed facts of nature, nations and cultures (which themselves fail to coincide) are revealed as interpenetrating, not distinct from each other but made by, and making, each other. (Samantrai 1996: 34)[5]

However disruptive of national ideologies, contemporary Canadian fiction of this kind also, and in a very important way, underlines the function of storytelling as a positive means of reterritorialization. Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), for instance, is literally constructed on the basis of such belief. Ondaatje's characters constantly read and write stories to one another as the only way to deal with their sometimes unbearable sense of dislocation and displacement. Thus, in the desert nights on their several expeditions in search of the lost oasis of Zerzura, they gather around the fire and tell or read stories aloud. Significantly, this is how Katharine Clifton and Count Almásy fall in love. They fall in love with the words, with the texts that they both share in the desert, that they tell each other about, that they write on, turning the material books of history, of cartography, of geography, into diaries, beautiful palimpsests of their lives.

Later, in the Villa San Girolamo, the house in ruins where a Canadian nurse, an Italian thief, and an Indian sapper live around the enigmatic figure of the English patient, the texts provide the sole link among the characters as well as the only ground, however precarious, for identity constructions. That is done through the novel's implicit establishment of a curious relationship between each of the characters and the books they read, typically well-known texts of our tradition, adding new dimensions to the stories, the protagonists or the plots. The English patient relates in this way to *The Histories* by Herodotus, which he has modified by adding personal experiences, cutting out whole sections or sticking paper clippings

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[5] A further analysis of Mistry's short story as well as of Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets* in the context of the transformation of the national literature can be found in Darias Beautell (2000).

on particular pages of the original book. Similarly, Hana engages and rewrites Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, and this in a very literal sense, for she takes to writing her experiences in the blanks, the gaps left by the missing pages or the flyleaves of the library books. This interactive approach to reading and writing seems to go hand in hand with the novel's positing of the reterritorializing power of story-telling, and becomes evident early in the story as Hana opens the copy of Cooper's book that she has found in the mined library of the house: "She entered the story knowing she would emerge from it feeling she had been immersed in the lives of others, in plots that stretched back twenty years, her body full of sentences and moments, as if awaking from sleep with a heaviness caused by unremembered dreams" (Ondaatjee 1992, 12)

By constantly reading to her patient, presumably the burned body of Count Almásy, choosing an extract at random, adding observations and writing on the blank spaces, Hana certainly participates in the intertextual approach to history and identity practised by Almásy himself in the desert. As the above quote suggests, they both share a corporeal relation to the books they read. As the body is traditionally thought of as the "house" of our subjectivity, these books offer them *a body of belonging*, the roots to their otherwise uprooted realities. The patient, disfigured and immobile in his death bed, offers a telling paradigm of symbolic deterritorialization, since his loss of identity in the narrative present is the result of the impossibility of recognition, of *identification*, of his burned body and not of the actual movement across unknown territory. Hana in her turn provides us with a literal example of nomadic identity. In San Girolamo, she takes to sleeping in a different room every night: "In the morning she rolled up her mattress and tied it into a wheel with string [...] Some nights she opened doors and slept in rooms that had walls missing" (Ondaatje 1992, 13). All the same, both characters find in the books the reterritorializing sites for their fractured lives. Symbolically, Hana repairs the house staircase by nailing library books to the floor and onto one another, thus rebuilding the missing steps (14). The books are thus seen as providing ground for their groundlessness in a very literal sense.

In contemporary Canadian fiction, then, the tendency to undermine stable positions is always counteracted by the opposing drive toward stabilizing alternatives. In its simultaneous articulation of routes and roots, this fiction both subverts traditional ideas of 'home' and posits new approaches to identity and belonging. And this is done, specifically, through the deconstruction of the opposition between travelling and dwelling, movement and stasis, an exercise which means, as Iain Chambers puts it, "to conceive of dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures, but as providing the critical provocation of an opening whose questioning presence reverberates in the movement of the languages that constitute our sense of identity, place and belonging" (Chambers 1994, 4).

This essay has focused on examples provided by the fictional texts of Indian Canadian writers because they seem illustrative, even paradigmatic of the present condition of dwelling-in-travel and travelling-in-dwelling. They do indeed address the present border conditions of cultures and implicitly define the border as the

specific place of hybridity and struggle, of subversion of binary thinking and nego-tiation of alternative forms of being. They probe, in other words, the validity of border theories to articulate diasporic experiences, and, in so doing, provide us with a useful trope for the analysis of contemporary Canadian literature as comparative literature. Other extremely interesting border paradigms are offered by Native Ca-nadian Literature, Black Settler Canadian or Asian Canadian literatures.[6] Canadian texts of this type are in a way *unhomed,* which does not necessarily mean 'homeless,' although they may also be without a home. "Unhomeliness," according to Homi Bhabha, impels the existence of bridges (1994, 9). As they exhibit and exploit their border conditions, these texts are also "floating the borders," as well as building new bridges, in Canadian literature today (Aziz 1999).

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[6] Three other essays in this present publication cover these specific paradigms. Coral Ann Howells's article deals with the conditions of internal diaspora in the fiction of the Native Canadian writers Tomson Highway and Eden Robinson. A discussion of the position of indigenous cultures in relation to the notion of diaspora and to the possibility of looking at those cultures as internal diaspora cultures can also be found in Clifford (1997, 250-254). Diana Brydon's contribution offers an interesting discussion of the situation of the black settler's tradition in Canada (see also Warley 2000). Finally, Rocío Davis's article explores the meaning of spatial and cultural borders in the con-text of two Chinese North American novels.

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