

cures for infertility³. Many of these maladies are cured by doctors nowadays. Several other midwives worked in the village after Barkate; her daughter-in-law Karmi too, who was a bit hard of hearing. She spoke in a low voice and sweetly too. But the kind of reputation Barkate enjoyed, she could not earn that. And nobody else could.

If Barkate had migrated to Pakistan, how could we have found Harnam Kaur!

Notes

1. The word 'Barkate' comes from the Punjabi word 'barkat' which means blessing, bounty, prosperity and gain. Thus the very name of the midwife 'Barkate' itself connotes that she was bountiful in bestowing her blessings.
2. 'Gurhti' is the first food given to the new-born baby in Punjab. It consists usually of honey.
3. Traditionally, these diseases were treated by midwives in the rural Punjab.

The exile

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The purpose of my presentation is to offer some discrimination in the use of terms such as 'exile' and 'emigration' used in the current discussion about race, gender, ethnicity and location, terms that often get confused in the heat of the debate and the battle of the books. I have found much post-colonial theory, well, rather inadequate in explaining and discriminating. I have found creative writing more useful and helpful. Therefore, as an admirer of that arch-maverick, Jesting Pilate, I may ask a few questions about theory, but shall not wait for an answer, because literary texts provide me with far more satisfying clues to our problems than the highly ambitious, willfully opaque and inane baroque theory with which some of us in the third world have become so lamentably besotted. My principal aim is to uphold the primacy of literature over theory in its present ersatz versions pedalled by self-dramatising mimic-men, hybridists, native informants and sundry other gods and godlings of small things holding forth in the western academy.

Exile and homelessness are not invented by post-colonial theorists, but have existed ever since the evolution of human societies. It was not for nothing that Heidegger designated homelessness as the permanent condition of humanity. Think of Prometheus in Aeschylus's play: "See what is done by gods to me/see with what outrage they racked and tortured me". Think what Cacciaguida warns Dante about in Canto 17 of *Paradiso*: "Thou shalt abandon each and everything/most dear to thee/that shaft that first ever the bow of exile looses from the string". Read what Lazlo Javer, the Hungarian exile, says about his state in his poem "Two Cities": "Here in your West I start and wake/Whose east remains a dream at most/oh ancient loving hostile place,/what pleasing torment it is to pace/a ghost upon my country's ghost". And ponder over Mahmoud Darwish, the exiled Palestinian poet writing in the poem 'We Travel Like Other

People': "We travel like other people/but we return to nowhere. As if travelling is the way of the clouds...we have a country of words. Speak, speak so I can put my road on the stone of stone. We are a country of words. Speak, speak so we may know the end of this travel." Or nearer home listen to the babbling of Toba Tek Singh, the hero of Manto's and in my view perhaps the best subcontinental story of exile which that self-anointed arbiter of contemporary Indian literature now to be known to us as Solomon Rushdie was charitable enough to include in his otherwise egregious anthology. That the mad Sikh dies neither in his own country nor in one to which he is drawn after his exile but in between speaks volumes about the ambivalences and uncertainties of exile.

One can go on quoting from world literature, say, from the Jewish figure Ahasuerus who was condemned to be the Wandering Jew for refusing to let Christ rest on his way to the Calvary, from Euripides's Medea: "Insult me, you have a refuge, but I am helpless, faced with exile" down to our own day in which Marina Tzvetava writes in a memorable essay titled 'Poet and Time': "Every poet is essentially an emigre, even in Russia".

Time now to raise the question of difference between exile and emigration. In his magisterial work on the subject, namely, *Anatomy of Exile* (1972), a book that hardly makes it to the bibliographies of post-colonial critics, Paul Tibori sums up the nature of the exilic experience: "An exile is a person compelled to leave or remain outside his country of origin on account of well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion, a person who considers his exile as temporary even though it may last a lifetime, hoping to return but unable to ...". The interesting aspect of Tibori's definition is that the exile always longs for home, is willing to return and lives a double-edged life of anticipation and desire and in fact is happy in his/her unhappiness. Here it is useful to know that the etymological root of the word 'exile' is pregnant with meaning. It derives from *ex* and *salire* which also is the root for the word exult. It is also rooted in *exul* which denotes a banished man and *solum* which denotes soil. Although the meanings of exiles, emigres,

displacement and diasporas keep shifting in different situational contexts, what remains constant is the tension between anticipation and refusal, between the desire to return to the original heimat and the compulsion to stay in the strange land. This double-edgedness is summed up by an Irish folk song used as an epigraph by Seamus Deane in his memoir, titled *Reading in the Dark*: "The people were saying no two were ever wed/but one had a sorrow that never was said". This also explains the title of my presentation. Whatever theory might say, the exile and his adopted country are never wed and the anguish of the exile can be expressed only in one's own language. And that of course suggests that a genuine exile writes in his/her own language, not in the foreign tongue. There is a strange relationship described by George Simmel in his celebrated 1908 essay 'The Stranger' between wandering and attachment. It is the constant tension between the two that generates the poignancy and raw emotion of exile literature. In language the exiled writer finds a stay against the coercion of his condition. In a recent note, Christine Brooke-Rose believes that exile is liberating, develops contrasting structures in the head, both lexically and psychologically. But hers is a voluntary displacement and not one coerced by circumstances. The exile finds both liberation and refuge in the nurturing power of his/her mother-tongue. I shall now try to illustrate my point by referring in some detail to two novels by exiled writers one of whom is Cuban-American who left Cuba under threat from Castro and settled in Florida and died a few years back. The other is a Palestinian writer who is an Israeli citizen, was a member of the Knesset and also of the Israeli Communist party but writes in Arabic about the exile of his people within their own geographical jurisdictions.

Reinaldo Arenas wrote his masterpiece *The Doorman* sometime before he was diagnosed for AIDS. Besides he had not yet established overtly his gay propensities. As a refugee from Castro's Cuba and among the numerous boat people who made it to Florida from Cuba, he suffered from a double ostracism under Castro, namely, as a political inconvenience and as a homosexual. His protagonist, Juan is caught in what Homi Bhaba in *Location of*

Culture calls a double frame in as much as he stands at the door of the apartment building of which he is the doorman, and the door also allows outsiders to gauge his condition as that of one standing at the threshold. The interesting point is that both the Cuban-American community who act as collective chorus in the story and Juan are exiles from their native Cuba. While collectively operating as frame and observer- participant they also act as third-person narrator allowing us to view Juan from inside and outside the door which, it needs hardly to be said, is a symbol rich in suggestion.

The collective chorus of ‘a million’ Cuban American acts rather stereotypically in suggesting that Juan is in New York only to advance his future, “Ten years ago Juan had fled from his native Cuba in a boat, and settled in the United States. He was seventeen then and his entire past life had been left behind: humiliation and warm beaches, fierce enemies and living friends whom the very persecution had made even more special....All things that just like his own being wee alien here.”

The choice of a collective chorus does raise problems of subjectivity, but Arenas sees in this both a limitation of the hold of the community on the individual and of Juan’s own attempt not to be typecast as a typical emigrant out here for his own good. The chorus makes it clear that Juan is dying of grief in New York because unlike them here for survival prospects, Juan has a deeper malady: for him the door is not simply a door to prosperity and assimilation, but a door to perception, to liberation. The chorus thinks Juan is dying of grief because he does not behave stereotypically, that is like one who cares only for his own god: “We are practical respectable citizens, many of us quite wealthy, a part of a nation that is still the most powerful in the world....It is the story of a young man, who, unlike us, could not or would not adjust to this practical world”. In this way Juan himself becomes a symbol, both of an irreconcilable exile who would not compromise, but also of the writer as exile who stands at the threshold, the border. Juan’s job is to open the door for the residents of the apartment building whom he knows closely, some

of them even intimately. The inmates of the apartment block are themselves exiles of some sort. Though natives of the city, they seem immured into their own worlds, intimate only with their pets who in turn are intimate with Juan. The symbolic exiles from the building make occasional forays out in their mechanized routine of going in and coming out from the symbolic door and being the subject of the doorman’s gaze. The apartment building recalls Gulliver’s Island of Laputa and the inhabitants look like the denizens of the famous academy of Lagado.

The door has many meanings. It is a portal as well as a port. It signals the passage across the waters and promises safe arrival. Here is the biggest irony for Juan. He can hold the inmates under his gaze and he does sense their own cooped up existence, but he knows that his own portal, his own threshold is beyond them. “Of course, not even Juan himself knew what this door was, or how to find it...but that he was chosen, elected, singled out from all mankind to ... show them the door of happiness.” What this passage tells us is that for Juan being in America is as much an imprisonment as the lives of its many inhabitants and their pets is. Thus the concept of exile is tied up with the urge to freedom. The door becomes a symbol in excess of its ordinary meanings. It also becomes an allegory of the fertility of the artistic imagination, of what our Lacanian critics would call the fertility and promiscuity of the sign. It is also an allegory of freedom and bonding beyond the immediate connections. And here another dimension of this suggestive novel comes to the fore, its fantasy element. All the pets in this book have an Aesopian role, that is, they comment uninhibitedly on the limitations of the humans. They are under several layers of unfreedom. They are enslaved to their owners who are enslaved to their own internal exile and who are under the constant gaze of Juan. But there is a sympathy between Juan and the pets and this is evident in several conclaves they hold in the basement of the building, to make plans for their eventual escape. At this point exile becomes a metaphor denoting the condition of humans as well as animals. That the later pages of this novel expand into a paen to the sea and to nature in general

also expands the meaning of freedom. The revolt of the pets against their masters foreshadows Juan's own attempt to revolt against his immobile position as the doorman as well as a kind of conscience-keeper for the microcosm of humanity that is exiled inside the apartment building. The chorus of Cuban immigrants vents its own suffering whereas Juan discovers that his own aspiration for freedom is a mirage. The novel ends on a poignant note: "At the end there would be a door for the dove to enter into the land of her dreams, where she would feel at home, anyway... yes doors of sunshine, doors of water, doors of earth, doors of flowering vines... would be awaiting the animals... where nobody could spy on them... And through these doors everyone finally would eagerly rush in. That is all except me the doorman, who on the outside will watch them disappear forever." The lyrical finale to the novel recalls the lyricism of Bulgakov's pages in his *Master and Margarita*, a novel which uses the animal fable to indict the Communist system in Russia.

In his autobiography *Before Night Falls*, Arenas says that he came to America "in order to scream". Scream he did in the parable of the doorman. There is no such luck for another exile, Emile Habiby's protagonist in his highly acclaimed novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed*, the ill-fated Pessimist. Habiby is an Israeli citizen but unlike his fellow writer Anton Shamas, who writes in Hebrew, Habiby writes in Arabic. This novel is about Saeed's exile amidst the occupation of the Palestinian land by Israel. Immiserated in the Zionist oppression, he begins his story with the alienated consciousness of one who is not part of the mainstream: "It is surely as weird as the story of Moses' staff, the resurrection of Jesus and the election of the husband of a lady bird to the presidency of the United States." Saeed does not fit into the mould of characters presented by other Palestinian writers. He lacks the stamina of Sameer, hero of Fadia Faqir's novel *Nishanit*. He lacks the stubbornness of Farah Houtini in the film *Futile Memory* whose list of daily grinding chores speaks more eloquently than Edward Said's theorizing on her behalf. Bereft of the awareness of communitarian living common among exile

communities, he stands apart, like Abu Habib in Shamas's novel *Arabesques*, who has of English "rather than songs of rebellion in Arabic". Opting out of the struggle for liberation, he sits in a stake and dictates his story to a celestial being. He is a characteristic exile since the stake is neither in nor out. He survives as an agent of the settler state of Israel. His exaggerated demonstration of loyalty to the Israeli state is used by the author as a device to expose the barbaric character of occupation. Habiby succeeds in laying bare its inhumanity and illegal power. For the most part a silent observer of the tragedy of his people, his pessimism, naivete and lack of tact become an indictment of the compulsive roguery of the Zionist rule. As a comic butt of everybody's taunt, he is a better vehicle of Habiby's views on Israeli occupation than a truly heroic character could have been. Staying within the comic-absurdist ambit, he exposes the tragedy of his displaced people. These are the weapons of the weak. They do not attack frontally, but from the flanks. They are the revenge of a displaced people in the absence of an armed combat. It is not that there is total acceptance of the occupation. The long sheltering of Abu Mahmoud's father against the extradition orders of the occupying forces is itself a sort of defiance and rises above the political stances of its author. Saeed's meeting with Yu'ad's son in Shatta prison does temporarily transform him. The book abjures revolutionary rhetoric but in the image of the stake captures the poignancy of exile and displacement. As a character points to the warder who assails him for holding a broomstick aloft, "If raising a white flag on a broomstick is an insult to the dignity of surrender, it's only because broomsticks are the only weapons you permit us."

Both the books, by Habiby and Arenas, represent what Deleuze and Guattari call "minor literature" in the best sense of the term. They carve out a space amidst the dominant rhetoric of power relations more or less in a depoliticised way. Such was the way of Kafka. Such is the way of genuine exiles. Without trying to appropriate the dominant rhetoric, without deterritorializing themselves into the dominant rhetoric of power

relations, they are happy to wander in a space that is still nomadic though it borders on the settled and the cultivated. Such texts travel always on the border, in flight. By weaving their own divided fragmented identities over that of the dominant power relations, they avoid the lure of co-optation and assimilation and keep their ears shut against the song of the sirens as the wise old Odysseus did when passing through their isle.

It is by allowing themselves to be co-opted that emigres, as against exiles, are exposed to the dangers of fake assimilation. In the past many years discussions of emigration made possible by large scale movement of populations and the advancing technology have brought about a juxtaposition of diverse cultures. The process of trans-cultural transaction has been studied by Arjun Appadurai who brings in his concepts of infoscope, ideoscope, ecoscope to bear upon the discussion of the interaction between different ethnicities, races and cultures. The key element in this transaction is what Homi Bhaba calls hybridity, the simultaneous dramatisation of multiple identities in the post-colonial situation. But before I handle hybridity, I would like to suggest that emigrants are voluntary exiles, not forced by political persecution or loss of homeland in war and other catastrophes. Emigrants form what has come to be known as diaspora, “a culture without a country, one experienced by numerous cultural critics with which they identify”. Hybridity, far from being the attribute of all displaced peoples is an attribute of this community, scattered as it is on western campuses. Here I would remind you of a crucial distinction made by R. Radhakrishnan between instances of metropolitan hybridity and post-colonial hybridity. The former, according to Radhakrishnan, are characterised by “an immanent sense of *jouissance*, the latter are expressions of agonizing dislocation”. In spite his surrender to the metropolitan academy and the peculiar nature of its discourse (as marked by baroque neologisms, and other oddities of an obfuscating prose style whose principal honour must go to Bhaba and Spivak), I find Radhakrishnan’s distinction useful. Partly, it is closer to my own distinction between exile and emigration. What I want to say at

his point is that metropolitan hybridity is what distinguishes the discourse of post-coloniality. The metropolitan emigrant pretends to have dissolved his subjectivity into multiple identities, and on close inspection you will discover even this dissolution is underwritten by the laboriously acquired dominant identity ordained by the west. Ensnared comfortably in the notion of a decentralised subjectivity, hybridity is nation-specific. You can’t just be a hybrid, feeling at home in all identities, you are an Indian and a hybrid, an American and a hybrid and so forth. In any case at the places of entry, the customs officer would not care for your hybridity, as V.S. Naipaul discovers in his books on Islam.

When Fukuyama celebrated the end of history, he was celebrating the advent of global capital which hides the American economic and social agenda for rest of the world. Similarly when post-colonial writers revel in their new-found hybridity, they are echoing the new mantra of globalised capital, as is clear in this statement of Homi Bhaba from *Location of Culture*: “There is no longer an influential separatist emphasis on simply elaborating an anti-imperialist tradition ‘in itself’. There is the attempt to interrupt the Western discourse of modernity through...subaltern or post-slavery narratives” (241). In actual practice this remains a wishful project because the grand narratives of the West are too pervasive to be wished away. There is not even the possibility of establishing what Gunter Grass in his novel *Call of the Toad* calls “the cemetery of reconciliation”. The metropolitan hybridity ends up being complicit with the dominant paradigm. I would like to use two final examples in support of my argument.

My first exhibit is Joseph Brodsky, the poet whose poetry changed its tenor once he arrived in America. From an anti-establishment poet and campaigner in the Soviet Union, he becomes the poet of the American establishment, a poet laureate and a Nobel-prize winner. While in internal exile in his homeland he posited an alternative to the oppression of the Communist regime in the form of what he calls an empire of St.Petersburg classicism which resists the falsehoods of Communist propaganda of which he was a victim. This classicism he shares with Osip

Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova and sums up in a poem called 'Lullaby of Cape Cod': "Like a despotic Sheik, who can be untrue/ to his vast seraglio and multiple desires/ only with a harem altogether new,/ varied and numerous, I have switched empires." The new empire is the adopted country where the poet survives for every day living and the old empire is that community of kindred poets writing in Russian which anchors poetry's enduring value. Homelessness with Brodsky is not a new phenomenon met in the USA, but a part of the Slavic sense of alienation about which the philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev has spoken eloquently. This inherent sense of exile is what makes him defensive about writing in English in the country of his adoption. In the English versions of his poems this quality is lost and since he wrote all his major poems in English, we cannot help detecting his gradual appropriation by the English and American poetic tradition, particularly Frost and Auden about whom he has written feelingly. So much for hybridity.

My second example is from Rushdie. *Satanic Verses* is a comedy postmodern in its sense of free play of signifiers and represents what he himself calls "hybridity, impurity and intermingling". Rushdie's characters are aware that in today's globalised world even private life is available as a spectacle, a performance. The London of this novel is a global marketplace where everything is for sale, even identities and cultures. According to Anthony Appiah, the third world writing, of which Rushdie is offered as a prime exemplar, far from offering an alternative to the self-reflexiveness of postmodern writing, incorporates its sophistication and freewheeling playfulness. I think of the character of Saladin Chamcha with his laborious effort to "construct a British, somewhat sour patrician face". Allied with his double-facedness (white upon black) is his effort to speak in different voices, which skill enables him to be known as "Man with a Thousand Voices"—in other words, a ventriloquist. With this capacity to change identities to suit the requirements of an advertising agent (a surrender to the West's mass culture), he manages to survive and like his fellow advertising woman Mimi

he makes a success of the Alien show. But soon his producer tires of him and he is left to fend for himself. In a moment of late self-realization, he warns Mimi of the perils of assimilation, but she is too far gone into it to care. He himself is too far gone to know that he has become a stereotype and calls his show "entertainment". It is only when he is about to perish in the blaze and is lifted by Jibril Farishta that a possibility of redemption offers itself. But by now the Islamic identity and its clamorous demands drown his attempts at self-dramatisation. The hybridity and impurity is shown to be a put-on.

So then how does an emigrant with his desire to assimilate, to be accepted, fare? The answer is provided by Navin, the hero of the North Vietnamese writer Ho Anh Thai's story 'The Indian'. This boy wants to make good in the world but is unable to shake his roots and carries his mother's ashes in a bag with him in England where he enters the service of an archaeologist. On a brief visit home he is arrested at Delhi airport for murder and hiding the evidence of it. To me this is the allegory of diaspora. However hard you try to forget the origin, you are condemned to carry it with you. This is why much of the Indian diaspora writing is obsessed with it. Hardly a post-modernist way of multiple selves revelling in their diversity.