
Introduction

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“We are all the same, people
coming overland through the
northwestern passages into the hinterland,
over air, into the northeastern passages—
coming to fill this vast
Diaspora.”
 (“Indian” in *Chiffon Saris*)

As a transnational immigrant with a speciality in Postcolonial literatures and writing, I have long read and taught novels and poems about migrations, movements and the creating of homes as diaspora peoples. Additionally I have written my own poems about living in the diaspora. The word diaspora has long been associated with the Jewish diaspora and its various immigrations, consequent upon the holocaust and the dispersal of the Jewish community. In the Introduction to *story-wallah* (NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), a collection I teach often in my Diaspora literature classes, Shyam Selvadurai writes,

The word diaspora (a term unfamiliar to many who are diasporic themselves) comes from Greek and implies a scattering of seeds. In its most classical sense, diaspora was used to define the experience of Jews expelled from Palestine and forced to disperse to the various parts of the earth. It is now broadly used to define other groups that have, through forced or voluntary migration, taken up abode in places other than the original centre. The Chinese, Irish, Turkish, Armenian, South Asian, and Greek diasporas are examples of this dispersal. Immigrant is often used to identify these groups (and, indeed the writers coming from these groups). The problem with this term is that the emphasis is on the act of arrival in a new land; it conveys a sense that someone is a perpetual newcomer, a perpetual outsider. The term immigrant does not leave much room for the process of becoming and changing and the dynamic cultural mixing that diaspora suggest. Diaspora also allows for the encompassing of a wider range of people and experiences. (4-5)

We South Asians, East Asians, Africans, and Chicanos are the new diaspora peoples. It is however wrong to say that we are the “new” diaspora peoples because

people from the ex-colonies have been migrating to the United States and Britain not only since the end of colonialism but before. Sikh farmers came to California in the early 1900s long before the Windrush Caribbeans came to the United Kingdom or before the migrant farmers came from Mexico to the United States.

It is the establishment of the forming of the Chicano/Mexicano community in the United States and the writing about it by Chicano writers that first developed the concept of “Borderlands Literatures,” particularly based on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa. I decided to open this issue with articles about Chicana literatures to represent the traditional beginnings of this field of Borderlands studies. Additionally, I did this because of my long years and the beginning of my scholarly career at the University of Texas at El Paso, where I was witness to the first establishment of the first centers for Border Studies and the beginnings of Border studies in Linguistics and Literature with the work of Drs. John Amastae and Jacob Ornstein-Galicia. It is with this interest that I included Melissa Birkhofer’s article on Norma Cantú whose work on growing up in the borderlands is so familiar to me as one who drove along the border every day from Las Cruces, El Paso to teach. Borderlands memoir, like the work of Gloria Stafford in *Growing Up in El Paso* and the poetry of Pat Mora, are the basics of Border Studies.

I realize that there were simultaneous currents in diaspora literatures in America and Britain as in the writing, for instance, of Bharati Mukherjee, Kamala Markandaya and other writers who were writing about the experience of making homes in foreign lands and amidst foreign cultures in the early 1950s: i.e, the lived experiences of those of us who have immigrated and attempted to adapt to new environments. This is “transnational realism,” the reality of finding homes and creating homes in new lands and representing those homes.

In an attempt to show how far and wide the literature of “Border Crossing,” extends, both geographically and historically, I have eschewed the longer scholarly essay in favor of the shorter essays representing a wider range of geographic and historical diversity. Yet, each of the essays is informed by the most current theoretical discussion and provides a fresh perspective both useful for the scholar and the teacher. I would hope that this volume would be of the greatest pedagogical value, as faculty at all levels embark on a search for material to include in classes, programs, and in research programs. Additionally the contributors range from Northern Europe to India, to Jordan. I have attempted to provide the widest possible range of material and perspective, failing only because of constraints of space to provide the farthest reaches such as even the border crossing of Okinawans to Hawaii and vice versa. And yet the essays here represent topics and authors that reach all the way from India to Hawaii to the US Southwest. The spatial and temporal expanse of transnationality is vast. We know this from Deleuze and

Guattari's *Mille Plateaux*, that tells us about the movements and migrations of peoples and the "location" of culture in a palimpsest. Indeed "Postcolonialism" itself is a palimpsest of colonization and migrations over time and place.

Taking as the epicenter our own geographic Rocky Mountain location, I have started with the Southwestern literatures and expanded all the way to "postcolonial" diaspora literatures from the ex-colonial writers, writing about South Asian immigration, as in the article on Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* and in Mark Bender's article about Borderlands literature from the Indo-China border.

Anuparna Mukherjee's article on the trauma of women attempting to create new homes after crossing the borders created by the partition of the Indian subcontinent draws our attention to how these borders were literally carved on women's bodies. Bapsi Sidhwa had drawn attention to these facts that "cracking India" had cracked the soul of women's lives like that of her character Ayah, in *Cracking India* (1991) forced into prostitution in the liminal space of the refugee camp. Mukherjee's essay describes such real world refugee narratives while also turning to Samarech Majumdar's acclaimed novel *Kalbela*. Nida Sajid's article on Aga Shahid Ali also addresses the cartography of India's northernmost border: Kashmir.

It is important to remind ourselves of the situation of the immediately ex-colonial, who moved to the colonizing "mother" country immediately after Independence. Like Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury* (1956), Anita Desai's *Bye Bye Blackbird* is one of those seminal novels that told us then, and tells us yet, of the racism that met the colonized "other" as he/she attempted to make a home in the colonizing center, believing ourselves to be assimilated and therefore possibly welcomed, an attitude that still pervades the increasingly cosmopolitan and metropolitan London. Wissam Khalid Abdul Jabbar's article on Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* addresses these same issues of assimilation, identity, and mimicry, all major components of "crossing borders." It is increasingly important therefore, as Bojana Gledic says, to reconsider how a text contributes not only to an understanding of the period it tells us about, but of our own contemporary context. Her article gives us a summary of the historical context as well as the theory concerned with postcoloniality and its effects, effects that are seen even today as of a result of recent reaction to "Islamic terrorism," in the United Kingdom.

The diaspora, both in the United States and in Europe has spoken in its own accent and inflection of the English Language and of the other linguistic communities, it has adapted into. This is one of the prime characteristics of what we now call "postcolonial literatures," that the writers vary the dominant language, whether English or French to reflect their own context. Starting even as early as Twain and Joyce, and going all the way to Salman Rushdie writers have attempted to adapt and vary English as Raja Rao said in his preface to *Kanthapura*:

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks mal-treated in an alien language. I use the word "alien," and yet English is not really an alien language to us.... We are all instinctively bi-lingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English, We should not.... Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. (vii)

World Englishes and the study of how the English language is "nativized," have suddenly made a resurgence in the analysis of the politics of a text and the ideologies it reflects. Border crossing writers introduce this issue to us as we attempt to understand their context and reasons for their uses of varieties of English. Regina Betz's article on the use of "Chicano English in Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street*, reintroduces us to this very important marker of postcoloniality, used in the attempt to establish independence from the hegemony of the dominant culture. She ties the assertion of the Chicano language "variety," to the expression of identity.

In my own *Interviews with Writers the Postcolonial World* (Columbia: University of Mississippi Press, 1992) I questioned several authors about their choice to write in English and for the most of them, however bi- or multi- cultural, English was in fact, their first language and mother language and language of creative expression, however they varied it. The article by Betz focuses on connecting style and rhythm to the expression of identity. Betz also considers the manipulation of language by various female characters and their relevant strengths as characters. Cisneros had said in that interview:

When I wrote *House on Mango Street*, I didn't know enough about mixing the languages. Also, I thought I was only a product of my English, but now I know how much of a role Spanish plays, even when I write in English. If you take *Mango Street* and translate it, it's Spanish. The syntax, the sensibility, the diminutives, the way of looking at inanimate objects—that's not a child's voice as it is sometimes said. That's Spanish!... What it does is change the rhythm of my writing. I think that incorporating the Spanish, for me, allows me to create new expressions in English—to say things in English that have never been said before. And I get to do that by translating literally. I love calling stories by Spanish expressions. I have this story called "Salvador, Late of Early." It's a nice title. It means "sooner or later" *tarde o temprano*, which literally translates as late or early. All of a sudden something happens to the English, something really new is happening, a new spice is added to the English language. (288)

The strengths of female characters and how they cross sexual and gender borders, along with geographical borders is the subject of both Karen Allison Fielder's

“Revising How the West was Won in Emma Pérez’s *Forgetting the Alamo or Blood Memory* (2008),” and Sissy Helff’s and Sanghamitra Dalal’s article on South Asian Trinidadian writer Shani Mootoo’s *Valmiki’s Daughter*. Borderlands are not just the physical borderlands of geography, but the psychological and sociological ones of gender. Fielder’s article considers negotiating these borders along with those of ethnicity and race so that Chicana scholars embed the term “Queer” in race and coloniality from a “decolonial, third space feminist perspective.” Again the issue of sexuality is closely tied in with spatial border crossing in the poetry of Aga Shahid Ali, Shahid, a close friend working out his identity in the crossing of many borders.

I wrote this introduction while my mother, who had lived in Hawaii for forty years was dying in a hospice in Albuquerque. I knew first-hand the pain of the displacement of and from a land that had become her *aina*, and yet not mine. I had spent a tortuous year of cancer and divorce, in what I thought was my second motherland. Péle rained fire and brimstone on me and made me a victim of Asian settler colonialism, the new palimpsest of colonialism wiping out both indigeneity and immigrant Kamaina-ness even for those of us who thought ourselves *Kamaiana*. Rebecca Hogue addresses this issue of identity and cultural mixing and migration in the now popular film and novel, *The Descendants*, and in Tara Brey Smith’s *West of Then*.

Safi Mahfouz’s article on the “Rhetoric of Self Expression,” nicely ties together the issues of crossing cultures and identity in a vast survey of U.S. ethnic playwrights, recapitulating all the issues of identity and adaptability.

In referencing myself often, with regard to border-crossing issues, I don’t mean to be self-referential or self-congratulatory, but to show how we “read” texts from our location and our interaction with the context of situation. After all, we acknowledge in contemporary literary theory that “validity in interpretation” comes from the location of the reader and his/her interaction with the text, so much so that we do indeed “write the texts we read.”

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