
RESCALING DISSENT IN SOME TRANSNATIONAL STORIES: SOME SPECULATIVE NARRATIVES BY MOOTOO, SELVADURAI, CHARIANDY AND DÍAZ

MARÍA JESÚS LLARENA-ASCANIO

University of La Laguna,
Mllarena@ull.edu.es

Received: 15-08-2019

Accepted: 23-12-2019



ABSTRACT

This paper interprets the way in which transnational writers use the Gothic to investigate concepts like time, space and cultural memory in their ancestors' culture which nowadays appears foreign to them due to the transterritorialization they suffer. This legacy appears in the form of unresolved memory traces resulting from diasporic migration and is readily figured as an *ostranenie* which haunts the characters of some South Asian-Canadian or Caribbean storytelling from within and without. The argument involves a revision of the notions of cultural identity and the changing nature of diasporic writing in the last thirty years. This essay tries to analyse these transnational stories which we will call hemispheric and which bear some resemblance in diasporic writing, for different political and traumatic reasons, in their cinematic deployment of the *homeSpace* horror, childhood memories and physical and psychological boundaries which chain us to our ancestors' memories.

KEYWORDS: Memory, the Gothic, identity, transterritorialization, diaspora, South Asia, Canada, the Caribbean.

RESUMEN *Reajustando la disensión en algunos relatos transnacionales: ficciones especulativas en Mootoo, Selvadurai, Chariandy y Díaz*

Este artículo interpreta el modo en que escritores transnacionales usan lo gótico para investigar los conceptos de tiempo, espacio y memoria cultural de sus ancestros que hoy pareciera extraña debido a la transterritorialización que sufren. Este legado aparece en forma de la huella que resulta de la migración diaspórica y el extrañamiento que persigue a los protagonistas de estos relatos. Este ensayo revisa las nociones de identidad cultural y la naturaleza cambiante de la narrativa diaspórica de los últimos treinta años. Intentaremos analizar algunos relatos transnacionales que llamaremos hemisféricos y que tienen similitud en el Canadá sudasiático y el Caribe por diferentes razones políticas y traumáticas, en su representación cinematográfica del espacio doméstico y en las fronteras físicas y psicológicas que nos encadenan a los recuerdos de nuestros antepasados.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Memoria, lo gótico, identidad, transterritorialización, diáspora, South Asia, Canadá, el Caribe.

In the 21st century we bear witness to an array of changes that compels us to re-think the meaning of diaspora in both South Asian Canadian and Caribbean literatures. The migrant narrative has become a major force in both literatures. Environmental catastrophes, refugee crises and political upheaval have forced human life to become far more precarious than in any previous era. A new hemispheric concept makes us re-think the overdetermined meanings of the global south and, consequently, the global north, so that we may interrogate the geopolitical recalibrations and vectors of power that produce diaspora in the present moment.

Writers born in Sri Lanka such as Michael Ondaatje, Shyam Selvadurai, or with South Asian ancestors such as Shani Mootoo or David Chariandy, were residents in the new countries and they could not be grouped together as having one discourse. This essay will try to analyze some transnational characteristics that define these writings which we will call *hemispheric*, drawing on Siemerling and Phillips Casteel's groundbreaking collection *Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Navigations* (2010). The hemispheric concept underlined in *Canada and Its Americas* challenges the convention that the study of this literature should be limited to its place within national borders, arguing that these works should be examined from the perspective of their place and influence within the Americas as a whole. This concept expands the horizons of American literatures, from north to south, and suggests alternative approaches to models centred on the United States, analyzing therefore the risks and benefits of hemispheric approaches to Canada. By revealing the connections among a broad range of Indian, South Asian, Canadian and Caribbean literatures, we believe such writing can be successfully integrated into an emerging area of literary enquiry. Globality thus reveals new ways for thinking about transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, border cultures, and the literatures they produce. We will try to see the hemispheric connections in some South Asians who left their native lands for political or family reasons such as Shani Mootoo, Shyam Selvadurai, David Chariandy's family or Junot Díaz.

There is an important group of *neofantastical* (Roas 2019) and alien creatures in the speculative fiction of both South Asian and Caribbean authors who depict a range of subversive metamorphoses of male and female bodies, body monstrosities or mental disability as an imaginative expression of cultural dissent. The uncanny and the Gothic, which are linked to the paradox of home and unhomeliness, are one of these

manifestations. Paul Gilroy's conceptualizing of the black Atlantic has been particularly useful to relate to the work of Latin American and Spanish theorists to produce a global approach to the literatures of the Americas (See Poblete 2018; Roas 2019; Alemany 2016, 2019). This mode of storytelling enacts and thematizes ambivalence, offering a possibility of mediation into real-world politics, since it "exposes the Gothic reality of modern identity, and by failing to represent an adequate solution it forces its readers to address them in real life, thus (ideally) using literature to encourage social change" (Sugars & Turcotte, 2009: xv). We will see how there is a diasporic articulation, a rescaling of the South Asian traditional anxiety which has turned into dissent in the last decades when dealing with their traumatic "glocal" histories, *writing back* to nationalist paradigms in order to challenge race, gender and class.

Since the 1990s, the discourses of multiculturalism, border studies, and diaspora studies have been invoked in various ways to help underwrite a transnational approach to literary studies (Paul Jay, 2010). Border studies in the Americas can thus provide a model for how to remap the geographical spaces of literary and cultural studies. Paul Jay links Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) to the transnational turn in English. It deals with a range of issues about mobility and displacement and thus shift the reader between multiple locations. It thus engages a new mode of migration characterized by that back-and-forth moving of people across borders, at once insisting on the importance of location and deterritorializing the aspects in which their characters operate (Jay, 2010: xi). The inherited Gothic is defamiliarized in these stories of dissent by being rendered reassuring and familiar. The Gothic and the uncanny are here used to effect different forms of postcolonial intervention, and their descriptions of the postmodern world rely heavily on the figure of the queer monster that inhabits speculative fictions (Martín-Lucas, 2017: 152). Queer unhappiness in these racialized bodies is a form of cultural dissidence. As we resist the notion of "general will" or heteronormative "happiness", which functions as a potent instrument of social control, "the unhappiness of the deviant performs a claim for justice" (Ahmed, 2009:11).

In this context, magic and folklore represent transgression, irreverence and defiance of the colonial influence and the imposed literary models. Writers belonging to the Indian or Caribbean diaspora use folklore and the Gothic as tools to investigate their past. This

is done to be reconciled with a history that in many cases haunts them due to the forced silences imposed by the previous generations to try to forget or hide certain traumatic experiences that marked their exile (Alonso, 2011: 15). Cynthia Sugars also argues that the Canadian Gothic uses the genre as a form of contestation, a *Gothic desire*, which manifests itself as an invocation of the Gothic as not only desirable, but also comforting and culturally sustaining (2011: 59). Not only do they obsessively summon and refute the Gothic presence but they also enable it to be conjured for very specific, revitalizing effects. This is used as a springboard to formulate how hemispheric storytelling positions itself in global cultural and historical terms and is then defamiliarized by being rendered reassuring and *familiar* in current Indo-Caribbean storytelling as a weapon to deconstruct the *homeSpace*.

These texts stage a form of meta-haunting, initiating an exposure of the Gothic effects that rescale the desire for authenticating national ghosts. These ghosts are given new life in the host country to articulate a postcolonial or transnational revisioning in the works of the South Asian Canadians Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), David Chariandy's *Soucouyant* (2007) or *Brother* (2017), Shyam Selvadurai's *The Hungry Ghosts* (2012), or the Dominican Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. All use a motif of haunting and monstrosity to get at the often repressed undercurrents that haunt the edges of nationalist paradigms, suggesting that the national ghosts are themselves haunted by other unacknowledged ghosts that linger into the present.

It is important to unveil such ghosted memories in the ruptured histories of many who inhabit the contemporary diasporic space. This is a key theme in Chariandy's *Soucouyant*, which moves through a paradox as the mother in the story reclaims the Gothic monsters of the past through a process of *memory loss*. As we read, "with this old woman, my mother, so entirely unwilling to admit that she has forgotten me. With both of us free from our past" (*Soucouyant*: 8). His "history is a creature nobody really believes in a foreign word" (*Soucouyant*: 137), which sees Gothic remembrance as a form of privilege accorded to those with more visibly accepted histories. This way the diasporic subject creates space for alternative ghosts and historical memories to make their presence felt (Sugars, 2011: 70), and the Gothic maintains its basis in the uncanny and the *unusual* (Alemany, 2016), since it is at once unsettling and sustaining in its different forms of postcolonial intervention: "I don't even know how Mother is reading me. As a stranger

who suddenly roams her home, or as her younger son who has mysteriously returned after discovering, two years earlier, just how impossible it was to live around her” (*Soucouyant*: 12). Amid her scattered memories are fleeting recollections of having seen a *soucouyant* while growing up near an American naval and air base in Trinidad. A *soucouyant* is a Caribbean folk creature akin to a succubus. Always female, she often appears as an old woman who sheds her skin at night and transforms into a flying ball of fire that drains life from those she encounters (van der Marel 2017: 18). As the novel unfolds, readers learn these memories allude to a more disturbing history: after their small plot is appropriated for the base’s construction, Adele’s own mother is reduced to working as a prostitute for the American soldiers. Adele’s memory of having seen a *soucouyant* references her memories of accidentally immolating her mother at the base when only five years old. Within the novel, the *soucouyant* “becomes a figure for the way historical trauma continues to haunt subsequent generations” (Coleman 2012, 55).

In Mootoo’s novel the figure of the *soucouyant* is connected with the representation of marginal women in certain contexts, while the work of Chariandy, Díaz or Selvadurai seem to go one step further and articulate the main plot so as to investigate the implications of time and history in second generation immigrant writing, as when we read, “thirty years and don’t know how to celebrate in this country” (*Soucouyant*: 15), and to revise certain episodes in their family that have been silenced in order to make trauma disappear. In diasporic literature, the figure of the *soucouyant* normally emerges in relation to women that carry some kind of cultural or family burden: “You know what a *soucouyant* is, child? Isn’t she an evil spirit? Someone who sucks your blood at night?” (*Soucouyant*: 23). These are alienated characters in a city which “was for me a place for forgetting” (*Soucouyant*: 30). Adele assures her son that she met a *soucouyant* in real life when she was living in Trinidad, her country of origin, while her son slowly reconstructs the private narration. Dementia is the catalyst to explore the fragility of cultural memory as forgetting is the strategy used to silence personal experience of abuse and violence. A *soucouyant* could be considered as the representation of the protagonist’s Caribbean legacy that happens to be unrelated to him as it does not represent him anymore: “[s]omething oily that saturated their skins, something sweet-rotten so dreaded that arose from past labours and traumas and couldn’t ever seem to be washed away” (*Soucouyant*:

70). Canada is here used to exemplify the migratory movements that characterized the last decades of the twentieth century showing that multiculturalism has not been as idyllic as official reports want to show: “He came to this city from Trinidad, and he is one of the first to take advantage of the New Immigration Act allowing coloured people into the country in greater numbers. He arrived hoping to find some job in carpentry or construction, and he has a lot of experience, but businesses and unions are both suspicious about his skill” (*Soucouyant*: 72).

One of the most interesting points in the novel is the destruction of the foundational myth by exposing the injustices on which the nation was created. For Chariandy a diasporic consciousness represents but one form of mobilization in a wider struggle to attain global social justice. The implication of crossover with other communities is clear and indeed can be made compatible with a cross-ethnic co-operative struggle by progressive forces and peoples of many different backgrounds (Cohen 18-19). Multiculturalism, as a liberal pluralist policy that chooses “culture” over “race,” diverts attention from the histories and social effects of racism rather than working as a challenge to politics of race and racial identity within the domain of the nation. Adele, “take[s] her hand and lead her back to the foreign nation that is her home” (*Soucouyant*: 131) In *Brother*, the male protagonist is also haunted by the memory as “we were losers and neighbourhood schemers. We were the children of the help, without futures. We were, none of us, what our parents wanted us to be. We were not what any other adults wanted us to be. We were nobodies, or else, somehow, a city. “We’re all just dreaming,” Francis said, “[i]t wasn’t ever going to work” (*Brother*: 157)

In Selvadurai’s work life in Sri Lanka has similarly haunted and misshaped the characters. The narrator wonders what the original story is and “where its own interpretation veers off from his ancestors” (*The Hungry Ghosts*: 18). The “hungry ghost” is the *peréthaya*, a creature that appears in a number of Buddhist and Sri Lankan myths. Its presence is overarching in the novel with versions affecting all three generations represented in the story. Its narrator, the son and grandson, Shivan Rassiah, explains how you can be reborn as a *peréthaya*, a hungry ghost, with stork-like limbs and an enormous belly that he must prop up with his hands. In Sri Lankan myth, a person is reborn a *peréthaya* because, during his human life, he desired too much. They represent our ancestors, and it is our duty to free them from their sufferings. The three generations represented in the novel all “desired too

much”, and each time they reach out to satisfy their desire they only find frustration and agony. Shivan’s grandmother Daya is a rich woman in Colombo who rejects her daughter Hema, Shivan’s mother, because she married a Tamil. Hema and her two children, Renu and Shivan, emigrate to Canada and bring grandmother Daya for her final years. As in Selvadurai’s previous novels, the Sinhalese-Tamil trauma and its atrocities are ever present: all three are equally concerned with generational, class and the narrator’s gay identity conflict, ever present in his writing. But what this novel has is the storyline of Sri Lankans living in Toronto, and how those coming of age in this new country cope with that new diasporic challenge, the exploration of the interplay between individual intention and the tragedy of a nation’s history. Shivan is a victim of emotional liminality and displacement, marginalized in his culture and experience not only by being both Tamil and Sinhalese, but more importantly, a Sri-Lankan-born boy who emigrates to Toronto as a refugee and eventually becomes a westernized Torontonians and later, a Vancouver resident, open and active in the LGBT+ community.

The ghost in Selvadurai’s novel is his grandmother Daya’s certainty that she was a *naked peréthi* “marooned on an island, surrounded by so much that is good but unable to enjoy it. Everything she touched, everything she loved, disintegrated in her hands” (*Hungry Ghosts*: 77). Selvadurai stages the hunger of these living ghosts as complex layers of desire readers must peel away to appreciate the complexities of their emotions. *The Hungry Ghosts* re-calibrates how we understand yearning with respect to memory, place, race, sex, belonging, and time. The novel reveals “the queer specters of home and its depleted children within the soul of us all in this mortal coil” (Gairola 2016: 243).

In Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the *fukú* has plagued the family for generations. It not only explains Trujillo’s dictatorship and its fearsome terrors but also functions as a figurative comment on the transnational *curse* that has afflicted the Americas since colonization and slavery. In this sense, Díaz’s text might be linked to Caribbean literature of the African diaspora as it also performs a re-reading of history by employing specifically spectral and relational narrative strategies: “*Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, *fukú* – generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically, the curse and the Doom of the New World No matter what its name or provenance, it is believed

that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world, and we've all been in the shit ever since" (*Oscar Wao*: 1).

Díaz uses the central metaphor of the *fukú* to represent the New World disorder of racism and displacement, a haunting presence that surrounds the confusing silences and harmful stories deployed by women. It becomes apparent that *fukú* has everything to do with the abuse of authority, "[e]verybody in Santo Domingo has a fukú story knocking around in their family ... no matter what you believe, fukú believes in you" (*Oscar Wao*: 5). As in *Cereus* and *Soucouyant*, this coming-of-age narrative explores gender hypocrisy as it moves over national borders and across generations. Bullying and precarity pervade these novels, and Oscar makes feeble attempts at fighting marginality: "Every day he watched the 'cool' kids torture the crap out of the fat, the ugly, the smart, the poor, the dark, the black, the unpopular, the African, the Indian, the Arab, the immigrant, the strange, the feminine, the gay – and in every one of these clashes he saw himself" (264). Part of Díaz's originality lies in his refusal to translate or italicize the words, which is a refusal to engage in translation for the benefit of the monolingual reader so the act of reading becomes an ethical task. He also critically engages genres such as the Gothic; the fantastical or the unusual in order to contest dominant historical narratives, and highlight the relationship between narrative, spectrality and ethical responsiveness when it comes to history and cultural memory. The narrator employs several strategies to dismantle a "single voice" informed by totalitarian categories of discourse, including the use of untranslated Spanish to challenge the assumed hegemony of English and the subversion of canonical history, in both the extensive footnotes and the main text, by interweaving factual and fictional material. Díaz creates a double narrative where the footnotes are like the voice of the jester, contesting the proclamations of the king, which exposes and criticizes the politicized nature of history (Rader 2012: 2).

Oscar's mother, Beli, is, as Adele, Hema and Mala, scarred for life but, in overwriting her past in order to create her own future, she is capable of regeneration and creativity: "she embraced the amnesia that was so common throughout the islands, five parts denial, five parts negative hallucination. Embraced the power of the Untilles [sic]. And from it, forged herself anew" (*Oscar Wao*: 259). Both first-generation Caribbean mothers, after having emigrated to North America, develop cancer and dementia and are dead by the end of the novels. Beli bears her "terrible scars on her back" (*Oscar Wao*: 103). Burns which were

caused by a foster father's pot of hot oil and, and by the later beating by Trujillo's subordinates. While her scars testify to her personal history, her deadly silence testifies to her trauma and powerlessness under the hyper-macho terror of the Trujillo regime (Rader 2012: 6). Haunted by the diasporic histories of their parents, the second generation protagonists must find ways to ethically heed the spectral apparitions of these pasts. The power of post-memory is a question of the power of trauma to cross generations. In these novels, not only do affect and memory filter down through family portraits, but traumatic experiences themselves tend to be repeated inter-generationally. Is it forgiveness or reparation that the narrator demands? As we read, "[b]y offering me her stories I could tell she was hoping I would start to forgive, and not let acrimony ruin my life I knew that by redeeming this expression of love from its history, she was trying to put me on the path to doing the right thing" (*Oscar Wao*: 334). The personal, family and cultural silences that surround these violent inheritances are what the narrative vision of the novel attempts to overcome (Mackey: 91).

In Mootoo's ethical vision, community broadens beyond the 'ethnos' or nation to encompass the human community. Mootoo calls for a concept of community that perceives difference as a vital, life-giving part of the whole. In *Cereus* Mootoo's conviction is that difference does not mean opposition but rather empathy; not instability but coherence; not the mechanical preservation of self but the compassionate triumph of survival. As such, the novel expresses a new poetics and praxis of inclusion, one that situates the local community within the wider frame of the global community. Mootoo writes beyond the limits of autoethnography by presenting individuals as members of a complex, diasporic, globalized "ethno-scape" (Ty & Verduyn, 2008: 21). As such, Mootoo's text appears to advocate an ethics of global citizenship, or transterritorialized citizenship, which considers the interdependent relationship of past and present hegemonies as they are, in turn, simultaneously (re-)constituted within local and global geographies and thus the text becomes meaningful both within and "beyond" the framework of its historical and cultural specificities (Pirbhai, 2008: 248).

Transgressive expressions of gender and sexuality also serve as metaphors for the hybrid nature of the ethnos itself. This is nowhere more pronounced than in the character of Otoh who, as a transgendered subject, is a reflection of his in-betweenness. The other twice-

displaced diasporic subject, Tyler, who shifts between multiple cultural and geographic locations, also comes to inhabit a contrapuntal framework that exposes the shifting and relative processes of “othering,” as his sexual orientation becomes the site of cultural alienation in a homophobic Caribbean (Pirbhai, 2008: 256):

After much reflection I have come to discern that my desire to leave the shores of Lantanacamara has much to do with ... wanting to be somewhere where my “perversion,” which I tried diligently as I could to shake, might be either invisible or of no consequence to people to whom my foreignness was what could be strange (*Cereus*: 47-8).

Tyler is aware of the signs of difference to which he, in particular, is subject (namely, colour and sexuality), together with the manner in which they are variously deployed in the politization and stabilization of identity. Tyler and Otoh counter an inherently exclusionary heterosexual/patriarchal discourse: they are depicted as diasporic beings whose positioning as transnational individuals displace rigid gender binaries. In *Cereus*, gender is represented as an unstable signifier and is used to critique biological truths and the naturalization of narratives that uphold them. This is perhaps most evident in the relationship that develops between Mala and Tyler, and their shared queerness. Only in front of Mala is Tyler first able to wear a nurse’s uniform and move beyond the feeling of being “[n]ot a man and not ever able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and nonexistence” (83). Tyler’s exploration of the ambiguities of gender is framed as an act of confidence that is made possible within the confines of Mala’s room, where gender is a malleable social system capable of generating multiple possibilities that extend beyond the division into male and female. Otoh, Tyler’s love interest, also participates in this act of resignifying gendered markers. Born biologically female but having discarded that identity early on in life, Otoh also exemplifies what Heather Smyth calls “an emphasis on ‘in-between’ identities, change, and process [that] indicates the mutability of sexuality in the novel” (1999: 148). After Mala’s mother, Sarah, and her lover Lavinia, are forced to leave Mala and her younger sister, Asha, behind as they flee to the Shivering Wetlands, Mala and Asha are repeatedly molested by their father, Chandin, who is what Bhabha calls a colonial mimic, one who fulfills the colonial “desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Pirbhai, 2008: 261).

Hybridity is used in Mootoo’s texts for its “emphasis on mutability and transformation, in particular on the instability of identity and its connection to place” (Casteel, 2003: 14).

This engagement also occurs in *Out of Main Street & Other Stories* (1993). In “A Garden of Her Own,” the narrator, Vijai, mourns the emptiness of her newlywed life in North America: “I must think of here as my home now [but] I know now that I will never fully leave, nor will I ever truly be here” (18). In “Lemon Scent,” the garden is an utopian space for the characters, Kamini and Anita, where they are able to engage in their affair without fear of being discovered by Anita’s husband (31). The samaan tree under which Kamini and Anita make love in this story signifies the dual erotics of secrecy and discovery. Hybridity (both botanical and cultural) represents a social-sexual space for germination (Pirbhai, 2008, 262).

In *Cereus*, Mala Ramchandin is subjected to a cruel social discrimination due to the terrible situation of incest she experienced at the *homeSpace*. The reader is presented with Mala’s traumatic childhood from the outset where the narrator introduces the sexual abuse that the protagonist suffers from her father very early in the novel through constant flashbacks. This has the effect of shifting the context from the present, where Mala is an old woman living in a geriatric hospital, right back to her childhood. The fairy tale turns into nightmare in the figure of Mala, who keeps her father’s deceased body rotting in the basement, and represents the marginal, what Sara Ahmed would name the unwilful woman who has been silenced in order to make trauma disappear. While the social response to child abuse is marginality, Mala is consigned to oblivion as the “diseased phantom, waiting to be revealed” (*Cereus*:170) lies downstairs, which favours her otherness and her labelling as a *soucouyant* who, according to rumour, whips across the sky at night to “track an offending child into its hiding place and tear out his mind” (*Cereus*: 113).

Through placing the novel in a fictional island, Mootoo displaces territoriality as the marker of Canadian identity, its place in-between, by the desire for escape and its transformations of identity. Bodies alive and dead are very important here, but issues about sexuality and gender are much more socially relevant. The elderly Indo-Caribbean Mala and her gay Afro-Caribbean nurse Tyler are marginalized by their unusual dysfunctionality, as “this novel translates the historical traumas of colonial resistance into domestic terms of dysfunctional families and damaged individualities (Howells, 2003: 149). Tyler was “trying to understand what was natural and what perverse ... for it was a

long time before I could differentiate between his [Mala's abusive father] perversion and what others called mine" (*Cereus*: 47-48). Tyler offers the possibilities of "feeling unsafe and unprotected, [and] either end up running far away from everything we know and love, or staying and simply going mad" (*Cereus*: 90). But neither Mala nor Tyler were mad, they were just showing "the symptoms of trauma" (*Cereus*: 13). This is the storytelling's restorative function, the attempt to reveal the hidden psychic damage of historical memory before venturing into new living spaces for the future. The *homeSpace* becomes the site for history's most intricate invasions, a displacement whereby "the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other" (Howells, 2003: 154). These novels look at the everyday practices, tactics of intervention, and histories of social and political upheaval that accompany the characters' dislocation: "global culture creates a postnational context for reimagining, organizing, and disseminating subjectivity through all the devices formally associated with literary (or cinematic) narrative" (Jay, 2001: 39). What makes these authors global is the sense of the cosmopolitan in their works. Their stories are often multi-located and multi-centered narratives (Ty, 2011: 101) as the theme of social marginality seems to reemerge as a recurrent topic related to the establishment of neoliberalism in the late 1980s and 1990s. Worlds are verisimilar in the representation of vulnerability: reified human relations, lack of solidarity, and an increasing feeling of loneliness appear to be recurrent topics that result from the conditions imposed, mainly, by neoliberal laws. Remarkably, this phenomenon repeats the *neofantastic* or, more precisely, *the unusual*, the reality depicted being far from magical but exacerbated by irony, violence and graphic language. The marginal subject is therefore presented as completely desubjectivized: s/he has lost all humanity except for his/her (fragmented and mutilated) body.

Diasporic writing thus starts anew within the context of a new diasporic spirit of dissent, which has substantially changed the field of identity politics, the very concept of ethnicity and the need for its redefinition, as well as the various cultural/literary practices of a collective and individual dynamic identity construction (Zorc-Maver, 2011: 119). This contextual broadening is always enriching in the treatment of the *homeSpace* which functions as both a site of identity construction and performance, and a site of disruption, resistance and alienation (Brydon, 2007: 6). The writers we focus on may contribute to

the possibilities of rethinking a hemispheric approach to the Americas, but there is a growing acknowledgement of the role of emotion, affect and sensorial flows as generative forces in larger sociocultural and political processes in literary studies (Poblete, 2018: 12).

With this purpose, these diasporic writers challenge their own bilingual self in the characters, as self fiction was a key component in narratives such as their groundbreaking predecessor *Running in the Family* in the eighties. Despite all our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal for a “we” for all of us who question our no-place in the world. The use of the Gothic, the *neofantastic* and the unusual can be menacing, but triggers our thoughts towards identity processes and depicts other ways of dissent: “what makes for a grievable life?” Butler wonders (2004: 20).

In the last thirty years of South Asian and Caribbean hemispheric storytelling, there has been a dialogue, with insights drawn from a broad range of feminist, intercultural, and post-colonial writing produced, a transversal discursive exchange which provides new insights into the growing contestation of its humanist claims, “as a consequence of the re-centering of the world away from other Europe-centred paradigms” (Braidotti and Gilroy, 2016: 3). These protagonists are portrayed as collective selves to the world they live in. Phantom bodies despite their hyper-visible materiality, in that “their deviance from the norm ... reduces their agency into merely haunting presences” (García-Zarranz 2013: 49). These malevolent spirits are “otherworldly duppies” or spectres of dissent. In a similar vein, the voice and tone destabilize, on the surface, the very notion of a national identity as an organizing principle of citizenship, sexuality and worldliness in their fictions, but, like the iceberg, we must plumb into the depths of these texts to flush out the queer and tragic spectres that circulate the narratives through persistent hauntings (Gairola, 2017: 19). Selvadurai and Mootoo, as Chariandy or Díaz do, make a critique of how contemporary societies are populated by troubled creatures whose experiences of embodiment and corporeality are depicted in terms of lack, trauma, and fear.

The supernatural emerges in *real spaces*, transforming into comfort zones for characters who must take refuge from the ugliness of the material world. These boundary crossings emphasize not only the multiplicity of identity, but also the decolonizing politics in the hemispheric landscape, a transnational ethics of place. Class, race, gender and sexual

orientations, age and able-bodiedness are more than ever significant markers of human ‘normality’” (Braidotti 2016: 36). This new war through renaming has made these authors express a painful narrative construct in which the *HomeSpace* serves as a repository of the past and its cobwebbed memories anchored in the present. The physical world shatters the notion of safe space, and identity is thus destabilized in a profound way. Our space is haunted by uncanny characters, ghostlike figures of our past. The unusual in hemispheric literary studies has undergone a dramatic and ethical transformation in Asian Canadian and Caribbean narratives, an ethical and transnational turn which can be considered the New American Narrative.

WORKS CITED

- AHMED, SARAH (2009). “Happiness and Queer Politics.” *World PictureJournal*. Vol.3:1-20.
http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_3/PDFs/Ahmed.pdf. Web.
- ALEMANY BAY, CARMEN (2016). “Narrar lo inusual: *Bestiaria vida* de Cecilia Eudave y *El animal sobre la piedra* de Daniela Tarazona.” *Romances Notes*. 56.1: 131-141. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rmc.2016.0013>
- ALEMANY BAY, CARMEN (2019). Prólogo. *Microcolapsos*. Cecilia Eudave. EOLAS Ediciones.
- ALONSO ALONSO, MARÍA (2011). “The Woman that Turned into a Ball of Fire and Whipped Across the Sky at Night: Recreating History and Memory in the Diaspora.” *Journal of English Studies*. Vol. 9: 13-28.
<https://doi.org/10.18172/jes.157>
- BRAIDOTTI, ROSI & PAUL GILROY (2016) “Introduction.” *Conflicting Humanities*. Rosi Braidotti & Paul Gilroy (eds). London: Bloomsbury. 1-7.
- BRAIDOTTI, ROSI & PAUL GILROY (2016). “The Contested Posthumanities,” *Conflicting Humanities*. Rosi Braidotti & Paul Gilroy (eds). London: Bloomsbury. 9-45.
- BRYDON, DIANA (2017). “Introduction. Canada, Brazil and Beyond: Extending the Dialogue.” *Canada and Beyond: A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 6: 3-8. <https://doi.org/10.33776/candb.v6i1.3075>
- BUTLER, JUDITH. (2004). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.

- CASTEEL, SARAH (2003). "New World Pastoral: The Caribbean Garden and Emplacement in Gisèle Pineau and Shani Mootoo." *Interventions*. 5, no 1: 14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698032000049770>
- CHARIANDY, DAVID (2007). *Soucouyant: A Novel of Forgetting*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- CHARIANDY, DAVID (2017). *Brother*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- COHEN, ROBIN (2007). "Creolization and Diaspora: The Cultural Politics of Divergence and Some Convergence." *Opportunity Structures in Diaspora Relations: Comparisons in Contemporary Multi-Level Politics of Diaspora and Transnational Identity*. Gloria Totoricagüena (ed.). Reno, Nevada: U of Nevada P. 1-27.
- COLEMAN, DANIEL (2012). "Epistemological Cross-Talk: Between Melancholia and Spiritual Cosmology in David Chariandy's *Soucouyant* and Lee Maracle's *Daughters Are Forever*." Diana Brydon and Marta Dvorák (eds). *Crosstalk: Canadian and Global Imaginaries in Dialogue*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012. 55.
- DÍAZ, JUNOT (2007). *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Penguin.
- GAIROLA, RAHUL K. (2016). Review of *The Hungry Ghosts*. *The South Asian Review*. 239-243.
- GAIROLA, RAHUL K. (2017). "Bastardly Duppies and Dastardly Dykes: Queer Sexuality and the Supernatural in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*. *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies*. Vol 18, Winter: 19-54.
- GARCÍA ZARRANZ, LIBE (2013). *Queer TransCanadian Women's Writing in the 21st Century: Assembling a New Cross-Border Ethic*. PhD. Thesis. University of Alberta.
- GILROY, PAUL (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- HOWELLS, CORAL ANN (2003). *Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction: Refiguring Identities*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- JAY, PAUL (2010). *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP.
- MACKEY, ALLISON (2011). "Apparitions of Planetary Consciousness in Contemporary Coming-of-Age Narratives: Reimagining Knowledge, Responsibility and Belonging." PhD Thesis. Ontario: McMaster University.
- MARTÍN-LUCAS, BELÉN (2017). "Posthuman Affect in the Global Empire: Queer Speculative Fictions of Canada." In: *BEYOND "Understanding Canada: Transnational Perspectives on Canadian Literature*. Melissa Tanti, Jeremy Haynes, Daniel Coleman, and Lorraine York (eds). Edmonton: University of Alberta Press. 151-171.

- MOOTOO, SHANI (1993). *Out of Main Street & Other Stories*. Vancouver: Press Gang. Print.
- MOOTOO, SHANI (1996, 2001). *Cereus Blooms at Night*. NY: Perennial.
- PIRBHAI, MARIAM (2008). "An Ethos of Difference, A Praxis of Inclusion: The Ethics of Global Citizenship in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*." Ty, Eleanor & Christl Verduyn (eds). *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Ethnography*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2008. 248-262.
- ONDAATJE, MICHAEL (1982, 1983). *Running in the Family*. London: Victor Gollancz.
- POBLETE, JUAN (2018). "Introduction: Twenty-Five Years of Latin American Studies." *New Approaches to Latin American Studies*. New York: Routledge. 1-13.
- RADER, PAMELA J. (2012). "'Trawling in Silences': Finding Humanity in the Páginas en Blanco of Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *Label Me Latina/o*. Vol II. Spring: 1-23.
- ROAS, DAVID (2019). *Tras los límites de lo real: Una definición de lo fantástico*. Madrid: Páginas de Espuma.
- SELVADURAI, SHYAM (2014). *The Hungry Ghosts*. Anchor Canada.
- SIEMERLING, WINFRIED & SARAH PHILLIPS CASTEEL (2010). "Introduction." *Canada and Its Americas: Transnational Navigations*. Winfried Siemerling & Sarah Phillips Casteel (eds). Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP. 3-28.
- SMYTH, HEATHER (1999). "Sexual Citizenship and Caribbean-Canadian Fiction: Dionne Brand's *in Another Place, Not Here* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*," *ARIEL* 30, No 2:141-160.
- SUGARS, CYNTHIA & ELEANOR TY (2014). "Introduction. Thinking Beyond Nostalgia: Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory." Cynthia Sugars & Eleanor Ty (eds). *Canadian Literature and Cultural Memory*. Ontario: OUP. 1-19.
- SUGARS, CYNTHIA & GERRY TURCOTTE (2009). "Introduction." Cynthia Sugars & Gerry Turcotte (eds). *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP. Vii-xxvi.
- SUGARS, CYNTHIA (2011). "Phantom Nation: English-Canadian Literature and the Desire for Ghosts." *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien*. Vol. 31, N° 2: 58-77.
- TY, ELEANOR & CHRISTL VERDUYN (eds) (2008). *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Ethnography*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP.
- TY, ELEANOR (2011). "Representing 'Other' Diasporas in Recent Global Canadian Fiction." *College Literature*. Vol. 38, N° 4: 98-114.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2011.0047>
- VAN DER MAREL, L. CAMILE (2017). "Amortizing Memory: Debt as Mnemonic Device in Caribbean Canadian Literature." *Small Axe*. 54:11. 18-39.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-4271953>

ZORC-MAVER, DARJA & IGOR MAVER (2011). “Guillermo Verdechia and the *frontera* in Contemporary Canadian Diasporic Writing.” *Acta Literaria*. Vol. 43: 119-126. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0717-68482011000200009>

MARÍA JESÚS LLARENA-ASCANIO is a Lecturer (Ayudante Doctor) at the University of La Laguna. Her postgraduate work has focused on the Anglo Indian Diaspora after working on Michael Ondaatje, M.G Vassanji, Shyam Selvadurai, Rohinton Mistry and Neil Bissoondath. She is currently working on Canadian authors David Chariandy, Sharon Bala and Shani Mootoo.