



Displaced Peripheries, Geopolitical Allegories: Roberto Schwarz, Rajinder Singh Bedi, and Colonial Legacies in India

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PART I: SOUTHERN DIALECTICS

Grafting Critical Theories from Peripheral Geographies

When the Brazilian sociologist and internationally celebrated public intellectual Gilberto Freyre (1900–1987) reflected on his travels to western India in 1951, he remarked that “a present-day Brazilian’s first impression of setting foot in India is a strong sense of déjà vu” (1974, 236). Freyre’s travels had been sponsored by the longstanding dictator of Portugal, António Salazar, who was concerned to shore up his country’s colonies in an era of impending imperial crisis. Yet Freyre’s Eastern sojourns took him some distance from the aims of his sponsor. Instead of firming up linkages between far-flung Portuguese colonies and Lisbon, Freyre’s

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ruminations drew stronger ties between the southern spheres. “Colonial Brazil maintained numerous contacts with the Orient, particularly with India,” notes Freyre, realizing that quotidian commonalities shared by India and Brazil were much more abundant than those adopted by the imperial center. “Far more than Portugal, Brazil adopted many features of Oriental culture to its style of life” (237). The commonalities that Freyre recognized extended from the exchange of tropical cash crops—cashews from Brazil to India, and palm trees from India to Brazil—to architectural styles—“techniques of decoration, if not of construction, of its houses and churches”—to everyday items—“verandas, Indian matting and Indian jalousies, palanquins, sunhats, fans, cool fabrics, prophylactic plants such as basil, concave tiles, church porches as shelters against violent rain, sun, and light, certain leaves and flowers to ward off the evil eye and the noxious vapors of ‘bad air’” (237). The encounter with India reveals in uncanny ways for Freyre the lost meanings of Portuguese words: in the festive uproar with which he was received alongside the Governor General of India in Queula in northern Goa, he understood “viscerally, for the first time, why we Brazilians call a wild party a *pagodeira*. And the thousand and one courteous attentions we are shown bring home to me in the flesh the original Oriental meaning of Portuguese words like *zumbaia*, *salamaleque*, *pagode*” (238). These uncanny semblances and overlapping patterns between ex-colonial societies suggest diffuse yet real imperial intermediations, ones that in turn have implications for not only how world literature is approached, but also how an adequate critical theory might be grafted from disparate imperial geographies. Roberto Schwarz’s critical oeuvre fulminates on the southern-dialectical horizon between different colonial legacies like silent lightning, illuminating not merely the ex-colonial worlds but the vast underlying interlinkages of the social system whose structure becomes, so to speak, the musical staff, or the order beneath the disparate cultural symbols of capitalism, to borrow one of Schwarz’s felicitous metaphors (Schwarz 2001, 2).

This “quiet (Brazilian) revolution in critical theory,” as Neil Larsen has dubbed Schwarz’s interventions over the decades, has only begun to be fathomed and explored with an eye to its “implications for Latin Americanism as a whole, and perhaps no less for a theory of ‘postcolonial’ culture and society” (2001, 77). I will follow the lines of Schwarz’s theoretical ramifications into the South Asian worlds of Urdu literature, with an eye especially to the narrative allegories of Rajinder Singh Bedi, a major innovator of the Urdu short story and novel in the era of anti-imperialist

mobilization, nationalism, and decolonization. But here at the outset it might be useful to tarry for a moment and survey the fissured and uneven critical terrain that impedes productive dialogue and sharing of theoretical models between, say, Brazil and South Asia. Larsen's reflections on these very obstacles are instructive and suggest possible ways of overcoming or circumventing them. While teaching as a visiting professor at the University of São Paulo (USP) in 1995, Larsen noticed the impediments that constrict the kinds of languages, histories, and normative sites for theoretical discourse that either make their way into or out of a place like Brazil. Whereas some bodies of criticism fly first class right into the curriculum of places like USP—Larsen mentions the fashionable nineties icons Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, for instance—others, even from neighboring Latin American locations, let alone from another continent, seem never to arrive. The reason for this, as Larsen realized, was the existence of a narrow passageway with gate and checkpoint governed by the hegemonic market of ideas in the Euro-North American metropolis. For a figure like Schwarz to make it to South Asia would, according to this cumbersome arrangement, require providing him with the correct papers for passage into the metropolis and institutional validation for reexport into India and beyond. No doubt this journey through the constrictive core of the imperial centers' institutions may mute, distort, or dull the critical edge of the theories that are permitted to pass through. The reigning slogans and catchphrases of “postcolonial” theory issuing from those of South Asian descent in North American locations may be as misplaced in the contemporary Indian context as anything imposed by colonial powers. For instance, how far does “hybridity” go vis à vis hardened caste hierarchies and religious boundaries under *Hindutva*? Given that, it may be worth wondering whether it might not be possible to bypass this entire arrangement and see if Schwarz could land in South Asia through some imaginary escape hatch.

My affinity for Schwarz may stem from my own wariness regarding the spiritless smorgasbords of undialectical “theory” on offer in my institutional milieu.¹ I too wince at how operations of applying pre-given paradigms to objects whose histories had been repressed (and thus resistance undone) could “reproduce cultural-political marginalization at a global level” (2007, 93). What I propose to do in what follows is escape,

¹ See, for instance, the discussion of instrumentality and interpretation in Sahota (2018, 18–19), *passim*.

if only momentarily, from this “factory of repression” and distance myself from the usual discrediting of the critical value of peripheral circumstances within hegemonic value structures (2007, 106). I wish to bring Schwarz into direct contact with the overlapping problematics of the colonial legacy in India, from one periphery to another. This mediation via the experience of the colonized in different regions under overlapping metropolitan powers has particular benefits, foremost among which is the possibility of grafting a critical theory that resonates widely within the lesser valued regions of world literature and sheds simultaneous light on the overarching structures and operations of global hegemony. This involves hearing resonances and being sensitive to common dilemmas facing those from peripheral locations; noticing the mismatch between hegemonic norms of metropolitan zones, such as those of classical liberalism, and the concrete social realities left in the wake of imperialism; measuring and accounting for the gap between the socio-historical advances in geopolitical centers and the non-normative course taken by peripheral zones; and seeing as well that these problems common to peripheral economies of the world system condition social relations (such as those of the genders) and their concomitant cultural forms. For modeling how to handle such an array of problems, one could do worse than retrace the critical steps of Schwarz, whom Perry Anderson has called “the finest dialectical critic since Adorno anywhere in the world” (2019, 82).

The task is akin to that imagined by Freyre with respect to the fruits and flora common to Luso-tropical cultures. Brazilian expertise regarding cashews, Freyre urges, should be made known in India; “conversely, Brazil would benefit from a knowledge of the modern Indian techniques... for improving mangoes through grafting” (1974, 237). Impressed by the heart-shaped Indian mangoes known as *afonsas*, *colaças* and *fernandinas*, Freyre urges their adoption in Brazil, knowing that this will require learning new techniques. By misplacing cultures of the periphery and grafting their experiences onto each other—Brazil onto South Asia, South Asia onto Brazil—it might very well become possible to gain critical perspective on the limitations of reified metropolitan views, such as those of Jürgen Habermas, who admitted that the silence of the Frankfurt School under his custodianship regarding the ex-colonial world was deliberate. Acknowledging that the Frankfurt School has generally neglected the peripheries of the capitalist system, an interviewer asks Habermas whether “conceptions of socialism developed in the course of

anti-imperial and anti-capitalist struggles in the Third World have any bearing on the tasks of a democratic socialism in the advanced capitalist world? Conversely, does your own analysis of advanced capitalism have any lessons for socialist forces in the Third World?" To this, Habermas replies: "I am tempted to say 'no' in both cases. I am aware of the fact that this is a eurocentrically limited view. I would rather pass the question" (1986, 183). By passing (and being allowed to pass on the question), Habermas does an injustice to the wider legacies of critical theory as well as to the struggles and predicaments of the ex-colonial world. The current effort of grafting a critical theory as rich and various as Indian mangoes is meant as a corrective, one that displaces a solipsistic center. Informed by Schwarz's own work, which opens novel horizons of critical and practical possibility—new locations, new panoramic vistas, new distinctions of taste even—this essay advances upon zones left overlooked, if not rendered effectively and unduly verboten, by the likes of Habermas.

*Splicing Candido and Adorno: Disjunct Critical Legacies
and the Dialectic of Generality*

What makes Schwarz's writing so generative for other peripheral locations such as those of mid-twentieth-century Urdu needs to be briefly expounded. This is his capacity to bring into dialectical intensity the disjunct critical legacies of his mentor Antonio Candido, on the one hand, and the potentialities latent in the works of Theodor Adorno, on the other. From Candido, Schwarz acquired a sensitivity to the predicaments of writers and critics in peripheral zones such as nineteenth-century Brazil. Here, as in India, the processes of underdevelopment necessitated by the expansionary dynamics of capital fail as a rule to reproduce the social conditions that would match the normative course of development and concomitant cultural forms of the metropolis.² In his seminal two-volume *Formação da literatura brasileira* (1959), Candido modeled for Schwarz how to follow the anomalous formal logics that issue from the distinct historical courses of development of peripheral zones, far from the institutions of bourgeois life prevalent in the imperial centers (Candido 1975). From an equally enduring engagement with Adorno, Schwarz became apprised of the potentialities of not enclosing oneself in metropolitan

² The general pattern is one in which the peripheries are subservient to the resource and fiscal needs of the commercial centers of a globalizing economy.

high culture (*a cultura canonizada*) (Schwarz 2012a, 50). (Adorno after all investigated debased popular forms more rigorously than banked on by the industrialists and marketeers of mass culture.) Instead of stuffy aloofness, Adorno urged one to be alert to the contradictory currents of culture in all its variety, especially the manner in which its formal consistencies and inconsistencies index “an unconscious historiography of our times” (Schwarz 2012a, 46). Spliced together, Candido and Adorno set Schwarz in motion toward some of his fundamental theoretical categories, most significant among which is socio-aesthetic generality. I will take each on in turn, laying out the implicit cues for reading Bedi in India, to whom I will turn in the second part of this chapter.

Schwarz’s spirited engagement and defense of his mentor’s critical legacy bring out the qualities that he values in not merely Candido, but in literary study more broadly. Rereading a variety of essays and interviews over his career, we can glean the key traits that Schwarz cherished and wished to propagate. Three in particular stand out, each imbued with what Schwarz recognized as Candido’s guiding “hatred of oppression” acquired from an intimate knowledge of two mutually contradictory spheres from his childhood in the early twentieth century, that of ex-slaves and their ostensibly civilized bourgeois superiors (Schwarz 2017, 50). All are marked by a sensitivity to the cultural predicaments of capitalist peripheries. The first trait then is a solid foundation of *integrative criticism*, one that drew together disparate everyday experiences in Brazil and built upon the insights of predecessors. Moreover, Candido incorporated into his designs for USP’s Department of Literary Theory critical developments from five major world centers—England, North America, Germany, Italy, and France—allowing him and his students to overcome a reigning provincialism and participate in international debates. This signature integrative approach culminated in Candido’s sociologically grounded retracings of a large-scale historical structure that signaled the gradual formation of a national literature distinct from the colonial order from which it had evolved. The second major trait Schwarz highlights in his reflections on Candido’s method is one that captures processes of *cultural accumulation*. Candido had an eye for tracing the manner in which an autonomous cultural bloc slowly evolves through forging continuities, reversals, and inversions of previous literary or cultural models, establishing a living tradition in the process. That is, Candido was able to grasp the actuality of the past in his literary subjects while exemplifying such an actuality for his present-day readership. This way of

capturing cultural specificity through a logic of accumulation opened the way toward an overcoming of reified understandings of particularity and universality stemming from metropolitan zones. This last quality can be organized under the rubric of *counter-hegemonic inversion*. Schwarz notes that in his most complex essays such as “Dialectic of Malandroism” and the still untranslated “De cortiço a cortiço” (“From slum to slum”), radical reversals are at hand. These “path-breaking texts in which forms and concepts from the Western tradition are examined in light of Brazilian reality, relativizing them and imparting to them the inflexions of a particular history” mark something radically new (Candido 1995, 79–103). As the “Western tradition measures Brazilian reality and in turn is measured by it,” Schwarz notes the dialectical fallout of this back-and-forth movement: “Brazilian experience becomes universal and identifies itself in its originality, which may be positive but negative too, or even hateful” (2017, 54).

With such dialectical provocations already present in Candido’s work, we approach the point at which Schwarz’s oeuvre begins to seamlessly splice in Adorno. Though their critical languages and backgrounds may differ, both Candido and Adorno concur in formulating critical models governed by the specificity, indeed even at times radical singularity, of the cultural artifacts under analysis. Furthermore, both thinkers assiduously seek to delineate points of articulation between cultural form and historical material. There is much that links Schwarz’s conceptual underpinnings to the extensive groundwork established by Adorno, but for present purposes I will underscore Adorno’s notion of the sociality of aesthetic form and its elaboration by Schwarz. Adorno’s aesthetic theory reflected down to its innermost tensions the social and political dynamics that define late capitalist times, bringing to a point of crisis the very notion and possibility of the work of art. With the thesis that “form is the locus of social content,” Adorno sees form as not a universal or transhistorical constant, but rather as imbued with socio-political dynamism (Adorno 1997, 230). Having embedded within it a potentiality to separate itself off from the workaday world and imagine a different one, the work of art for Adorno is charged with negativity: art is thus “the social antithesis of society” (8). The moment when art is in crisis, the possibilities of human freedom, including those of the imagination, are also likely falling under strain. This is merely one instance in which questions of form for Adorno reveal dimensions of sociality that otherwise do not (or cannot) attain expression. A social aesthetic that overlooks formal qualities or is content

with preexisting ones may stumble past and miss the true levers of social change, for “real denunciation,” as Adorno puts it, “is probably only a capacity of form” (230). Simultaneously an index of immanent potentialities for lessening social suffering and the spontaneous divulgence of a haunting *promesse de bonheur*, art for Adorno reveals itself as a ghostly artifact of social labor. Even in moments of total seclusion, the artist is not alone: “By constantly admitting into the production of his work an element of negativity toward his own immediacy, the artist unconsciously obeys a social universal: In every successfully realized correction, watching over the artist’s shoulder is a collective subject that has yet to be realized” (231). Such forceful ruminations on the social dimension of art captivated Schwarz’s interest from his early twenties, when he wrote to Adorno expressing interest in attending his lectures on aesthetic theory.³ In 2003, Adorno’s centenary, Schwarz expressed his indebtedness to the German critical theorist (as well as Candido) in an elucidating interview. Over the course of this conversation, Schwarz clarifies many salient points relating to Adorno’s enduring actuality, foremost among which is his theory of aesthetic form as expressed most powerfully in musicological metaphors.

Schwarz takes interest in a personal note, in which Adorno “admits to holding the conceit of comprehending the language of music just as of a hero of fairy tales comprehends the language of birds” (Schwarz 2012a, 46). The intriguing analogy is of interest to Schwarz for what it seems to suggest about form: “If we place ‘form’ where ‘music’ is written, we will have something of the attitude of Adorno as a critic, who in fact seeks to know what the forms are expressing, reacting to them as expressions of contemporary society regarding what is most problematic and decisive [*crucial*]” (Schwarz 2012a, 45–46). It is in Schwarz’s appreciation of “the care and analytical acuity with which [Adorno] scrutinizes the formal consistencies and inconsistencies of works of art” that we can make a connection with his notion of form as “the *structural reduction* of a social situation, external to literature, belonging to history” and what this approach has to offer the interpretation of the cultural forms emanating from the peripheral zones, where reigning metropolitan ideas are often out of place and where imitations of hegemonic forms or norms are likely to go awry (Schwarz 2012b, 13). Here attention to consistencies and inconsistencies of form may be most revealing. Indeed the

³ These letters have been collected in *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, no. 74 Dezembro 2019, 330–344.

“principle of generalization”—the point of mediation between the wider society and aesthetic form in Schwarz’s Marxist hermeneutics—helps to point out where reality and fiction both abide by a common logic, one that makes both society and art intelligible within themselves and with respect to each other (Schwarz 2012b, 14). How are the dirempted, incomplete, or inconsistent moments of cultural forms in the peripheries to be understood? What political or social meanings—or possibilities—find themselves transmuted into the particularities of peripheral forms? What are the circumferences of allusion and allegorization of these non-canonical developments in the hinterlands of capitalism? Of course, each situation will demand different kinds of investigation and suggest different answers. Yet, Schwarz’s attunement to these questions in the works of Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis are suggestive of possible matrices. With respect to *Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas* (1880/1881), the central object of study in Schwarz’s magnum opus *A Master on the Periphery of Capitalism* (1990/2001), the novel’s unusual formal qualities capture the structural implications of the historical picture: far from bringing Enlightenment notions to fulfillment, the periphery is the zone where they are purposely travestied, serving ulterior purposes. “Literary form and unjust social relations rigorously fit one another,” notes Schwarz, “so that investigating one of these poles implies fixing the dimensions of the other” (2001, 58).

Serving more as a model to allow for liberated forms of critique—ones that take their cues from aesthetic particularities—rather than a fully formed method to be bluntly applied to an objecthood void of distinctive qualities, we can turn now to the world of mid-twentieth-century Urdu literature to see whether a principle of generality obtains between the dirempted aesthetics of Bedi’s fiction and the peculiar course of development of his home state, Punjab, under British occupation.

PART II: GENERALITY AND THE SPLIT ALLEGORIES OF RAJINDER SINGH BEDI

Gender and the Janus-Faced Structure of Colonial Punjab

A fascinating interview with the progressive Urdu short story writer and scenarist of the Bombay film industry Rajinder Singh Bedi (1915–1984) sheds light on the predicaments facing the writer on the peripheries of the capitalist system from a variety of angles. Published in the journal

Mahfil in 1972, the conversation with Bedi traverses a range of topics (Bedi 1972). He candidly remarks in passing on the difficulties of making a living as a writer in the Urdu language, the variety of threats to artistic integrity coming from a highly politicized cultural arena, and the difficulties in the formation of the novel in Urdu, a crucial sign of reaching cultural modernity in the wider international arena. Relatedly, he comments on the tumultuous language politics in the new nation-states of India and Pakistan which have rent the once unified tradition of Urdu literature so thoroughly as to render it impossible as a medium of cohesive national expression. Added to this slew of problems is the menace of appropriation of one's work by hegemonic powers of the Cold War—whether the USSR or the USA—not to mention the distortions of one's literary voice on account of compromising translations into more dominant literary languages. Within this ambit of topics, he consistently asserts his keen interest in sharpening his capacities for an individual style and form best suited to capturing the predicaments of his own social milieu, the generally hidebound lower-middle classes of Punjab. It was this very desire for a freedom of expression that got him involved in the Progressive Writers Association, a loosely organized cultural front of the Left founded in colonial India. The incongruities of a radically modernist political aesthetics, on the one hand, and a fairly inert social habitus of the lower-middle strata of Punjabi society, on the other, make for particularly stimulating, even colliding, encounters between form and content. Bedi seemed to understand that the clash was inevitable, acute, and indeed, defining for his times. His intimate knowledge and insights into the inertia of familial structures, the habitus of patriarchy, and the apparent weight of custom would clash with the more transformative aspirations, ethos, and modes of representation espoused by himself and others in the progressive currents of the decades leading to and beyond Independence and Partition. Thus, the contrast between the inheritance of everyday domestic, especially female, misery, on the one hand, and the modernism of his voice, style, and formal experimentation could not be starker. As we will examine with reference to his story "Garhan" ("Eclipse") in the following section, embedded in his form is the potential or actual reversal of authority between men and women, which here presses up against traditional institutions and practices maintained and prolonged by the colonial power and succeeding neo-traditional authorities.

But for the moment, it may be instructive to step back and provide a small snapshot of the kinds of social contradictions that defined colonial rule in Punjab, if not India more broadly. The conflicting modalities of colonial statecraft—custom, stability, and order, on the one hand, and the potentially destabilizing imperatives of the civilizing mission, the market, social progress, and liberal freedom, on the other—impacted Indian society at a variety of levels and scales, reaching down into family structures and gender relations. The late colonial situation in which Bedi came of age can be described as diametrically opposed to that of ancient Rome. Hegel remarks in *The Philosophy of Right* that “in Roman law... there could be no definition of ‘man’, since ‘slave’ could not be brought under it – the very status of slave indeed is an outrage on the conception of man” (1952, 15). Whereas in Rome, slavery was widespread, thus negating the notion of general man, in India, the notion of equality was circulating, bringing into sharp relief the conditions of everyday life where servitude was deeply embedded. That is, in modern India, the idea of equality had currency, but only in contradistinction to the reality, both formally and substantively speaking. Once the idea of the human had attained a presence in late colonial politics, much of the immediate present could be experienced as an outrage, especially with respect to those in servitude—women especially, if not generally. To get a sense of the formal structures through which Bedi approaches the plight of women in his midst, we can briefly follow the social logic that left them entrapped within servitude in a moment of burgeoning discourses, possibilities, and indeed—with the expansion of the commodity-form—norms of equality.

Among the historians who have shed light on the Janus-faced nature of colonial rule in India, three in particular help to illustrate the fundamental concentration and its fallout: Andrew Sartori, David Gilmartin, and Neeladri Bhattacharya. Whereas Sartori’s work helps ground liberalism, indeed the very presence of liberal thought in the colonial hinterland, “in one specific dimension of capitalist society, the sphere of circulation,” (Sartori 2008, 73). Gilmartin’s account demonstrates how imperial rule thwarts the radicalizing potential of liberal property laws for the sake of stability, leaving liberal ideals in the colony merely ideational, yet persistent presences, before the fact of colonially sanctioned custom. Bhattacharya helps delineate the consequences of colonial customary law in Punjab for women.

From Sartori's account in *Bengal in Global Concept History*, we can glean a sense of apprehension and alarm among colonial officials as colonial experiments in social transformation took root with expansion toward Punjab. For instance, Sartori cites Sir Charles Wood, secretary of state for India, who stated the problem flatly in 1866: "I am firmly convinced that our permanent hold of India would be fearfully loosened if the cultivating population felt that their customary rights were in danger" (qtd. in Smith 1885, 420).⁴ The secretary's concern was shared by many colonial administrators in the wake of the implementation of the Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793 and the instability that its abstract notions of exclusive proprietary right over land had wrought for colonial rule. Sartori's work has illuminated the vernacular valences that began to absorb the new liberal dimensions of the market mediated by colonial rule. Not only did the theology of Advaita Vedanta become in Rammohun [Roy]'s hands "a doctrine of liberal egalitarianism," but the logic of commodification and legal codes of commerce penetrated deep into the fabric of Bengali cultural forms (Sartori 2008, 82). For instance, relatively autonomous groups such as the Kartabhajas and the Sahebhdhanis employed "the logic of commercial society to articulate a political, social, religious, and ethical imagination" (Sartori 2008, 73). Sartori picks up on the potential for the elaboration-in-travel of key abstractions intrinsic to the nature of liberal categories and their predication on the abstraction of exchange from use value. He elaborates: "Liberalism certainly did not have to await the emergence of a full-blown market society to find its voice. After all, liberal politics advocated as its central social, economic, and political program the extension of free exchange as a model of human interrelations at the expense of other dimensions of the existing forms of social organization" (Sartori 2008, 73). Considering the revolutionary havoc that the logic of the market could bring to colonial rule, colonial administrators in Punjab devised countervailing strategies. Henry Lawrence, C.L. Tupper, and Richard Temple in Punjab sought to buttress the mitigating customs of rural life. That is, they sought to shore up customary patterns to secure imperial longevity.

This antinomian structure of British colonial power comes to a head in the thrust of Punjab's Alienation of Land Act of 1900. Though scholarship on this significant piece of legislation is now fairly extensive, David

⁴ As cited in Smith (1885, 420). For broader historical context, see Sartori (2008, 97).

Gilmartin's *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* best delineates the conflicts underlying it and the consequences it foretold in terms of modalities of political mobilization in the late colonial period. He follows in the wake of observations such as those of David Washbrook: "The Anglo-Indian legal system was distinctly Janus-faced and rested on two contradictory principles with different social implications.' Whereas the 'public' side of the law encouraged the emergence of free market relations, personal law under the British encouraged the preservation of ascribed, 'traditional' status. In this regard, the law was an indicator of the conflicting purposes of colonial rule itself" (Gilmartin 1988, 13). The direct paternalistic style of administration of the Punjab school led to the redaction of customary law by Tupper and the production of "a class of rural leaders, tied closely to the administration, exercising its authority largely in a 'tribal' [i.e. "customary"] idiom" by the end of the nineteenth century (Gilmartin 1988, 22). Yet, over the same period, colonial policy in Punjab had introduced the market conditions for an undoing of customary relations, including potentially the overturning of the widely shared custom of prohibiting inheritance of land by daughters. Gilmartin explains: "A late-nineteenth-century crisis of indebtedness among Punjabi landholders precipitated the passage of the Alienation of Land Act in 1900. To many British officials, the large-scale expropriation by moneylenders of peasants' land struck close to the heart of British rule, undermining rural stability. Widespread land alienations, many feared, would lead to rural revolt. At its core, however, the issue hinged on the conflict they perceived between a stable agrarian society on the one hand, and the free working of natural economic laws on the other" (Gilmartin 1988, 28). The colonial state's ruling in favor of custom would have repercussions at every level of Punjabi psychic life, shaping a sense of disjointed time and place in the works of modern writers such as Bedi, as we will see below.

Neeladri Bhattacharya's *The Great Agrarian Conquest* covers the complex history that culminated in the consecration of the patrilineal principle in the customary law of Punjab, and how this rule of custom systematically displaced the rights of women. "Within closed exogamous patrilocal communities, the exclusion of women's inheritance was seen as necessary to sustain the cohesion of village society and the premises of its existence. To grant inheritance rights to women who moved out of the village was to threaten the control of the brotherhood over village land; it was to allow the transmission of property to an outsider" (Bhattacharya

2018, 256). Woman had effectively been rendered an outsider when it came to property rights relating what was most crucial in an agrarian economy: land. For the implications of this Janus-faced social logic for women, we can now turn finally to Bedi's fiction.

Generality of Myth and History in "Eclipse"

Published in 1942 as the title story of his second collection, "Garhan" ("Eclipse") thematizes the plight of a pregnant housewife of a joint family in contemporary India, evoking her longing for freedom from the routine abuse she suffers at the hands of her in-laws. But, as the events of the narrative coincide with a lunar eclipse, replete with ancient Hindu rituals and mythology, the story simultaneously evokes the eternally unchanging patterns of the universe. What is the relationship between these two levels of this unique narrative, which seems to move so seamlessly from the pole of history to that of myth that it is difficult to tell whether the concrete history is the allegory of myth, or myth the allegory of history? That is to say, the story raises the following questions through its own inner workings: What does it mean for the everyday concrete world of experience—of history where it hurts—to be enclosed so completely by myth? Or, to see it from the opposite point, how is the mythic able to encompass and completely encircle and entrap the realm of human agency and historical possibility? Will the mythic always eclipse female agency, or will that last only as long as an eclipse, as it only takes minutes before the planet the demon Rahu swallows to pass through his severed throat and back to its natural state? Considering this narrative against the backdrop of the social history in which Indian women's rights were eclipsed by the colonial rule of custom, it becomes possible to index the moment of generality, or the point at which narrative form and social form align.

"Eclipse" takes us immediately into the universe of Hindu culture in which, amid a routine of everyday drudgery, the domestic dramas between wife and husband or mother-in-law and daughter-in-law unfold in the minutest of ways with the grandest of consequences. At the center of the narrative is Holi, to whom we are introduced only after we are given the names of the four sons she has already borne to the clan to which she has been married off. She has another one on the way. About this, she is constantly hounded by her mother-in-law and others of her husband's family, who only see her as a *kulavadhu*, the traditional wife whose sole role is to produce male progeny. Her mother-in-law nags her

about all the superstitious restrictions posed by the looming lunar eclipse that is occurring that day: No permission, for instance, “to tear any cloth, lest the ears of the child in her stomach be torn as well.”⁵ The fact that she is forbidden to write even a letter to her parents back home in a village just some twenty-five miles downstream makes her long for their care and the company of childhood friends. When not being berated by her mother-in-law, she must fend off the brute advances of her husband, Raseela. As the eclipse approaches, she ponders the ugly image of the planet-swallowing demon, and is reminded of Raseela: “And how strange is Rahu’s visage! A black demon mounted on a lion, he appears so fearsome. Raseela also looks just like Rahu” (Farooqi 2008, 79). This identification makes Holi long for home all the more. That evening, amid the raucous ceremonies that accompany the eclipse along the town’s river, she is able to break free of her in-laws’ clutches and runs onto a small steamer set in the direction of her home village. Aboard she finds herself vulnerable among the employees manning the ship. Yet among the louts she recognizes a childhood friend, Kathoram, who promises to get her home so long as she stays with him in an inn for the night. Her spirits sagging, she acquiesces, only to have to run out into the night to escape his drunken lust. If Raseela is explicitly identified with Rahu, Kathoram is implicitly with Ketu. The story closes with Holi being pursued by two indistinct shadows, hounding her as the demons Rahu and Ketu go after the sun and moon.

If one were to trace the complex, indeed twinned, narrative structure underlying the story, in which the mythic eclipses the historical, and the historical the mythic, one would be led to the socio-historical reality underlying the impasses facing Holi. “Mysterious are the ways of the gods,” thinks Holi, as conveyed by the narrator, whose deep sense of irony signifies that he or she does not share in the worldview presented in the narrative diegesis. Holi recalls the myth surrounding the eclipse inherited from ancient lore: “Disguised, Rahu was blissfully savouring the divine nectar. The sun and the moon informed Lord Vishnu of this sacrilege and God Vishnu with his divine discus sliced Rahu into two pieces. The head and torso flew up into the sky and became Rahu and Ketu. Now twice every year, they wreak vengeance on the sun and the moon” (Farooqi 2008, 78–79). While the perspective on the pregnant wife’s quandaries and desires for escape establishes a liberal, even radical,

⁵ For the original, see Mahmud (2015, 164–173); for the purposes of the essay, I have made use of the excellent translation in Farooqi (2008, 77).

sensibility, the substance of the reality depicted, bound to myth and ritual, speaks of the customary structure maintained by the colonial order. The diegetical and extra-diegetical gap of the narrative—with its competing temporal planes in which human agency and mythical metaphysics remain in perpetual antinomy—begins to resemble if not encode the very real social logic that had begun to doubly bind the prospects of womanhood in colonial India: Holi cannot escape either way she turns: twin demons eclipse her freedom in both directions, whether the oppressive customary structure or the Illusory realm of liberal freedom.

CODA: CRITICAL INVERSIONS FOR SHIPWRECKED HUMANITY

In grafting critical theory from peripheral locations—like Freyre’s much savored Indian mangoes—it becomes possible to imagine a process of cultural accumulation beyond the borders of a nation. If, as Schwarz believes, “the possibility of being shipwrecked” appears “to be the destiny of the greater part of contemporary humanity,” making it no longer “a second-order of experience,” then the task of cultural criticism is to think about inversions of already existing nation-based and regionally tied accumulations for the sake of those widely dispersed *naufrágios* of the world (Schwarz 2015, 9). A critical theory that neglects to orient itself to those for whom previous accumulations have produced little fails to live up to its name. Perhaps the most appropriate way to read Schwarz then for world literature is as one who offers a methodology for deriving possible alternatives from within existing worlds—in other words, as one whose own accumulation leads, like that of Machado’s, “to a critical inversion” (Schwarz 2015, 9).

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