Abstract
The work of Sudesh Mishra, a contemporary Fijian-Indian-Australian poet, addresses the idea of the fragmented diasporic identities of Indo-Fijians and the ability to locate a ‘home’ amidst borders of history, memories, and intergenerational remembrance. There is an attempt at understanding the nature of the memories that sustain the ethnic borders that still exist in Fiji, and give rise to racial and ethnic tensions. Far from being geographical in nature, the borders in Fiji are mostly historical and psychological, and the history of colonization and indenture constantly reiterate the presence of borders that cannot be dissolved or reconsidered. In times of globalization and multiple border crossings, the study of the Indo-Fijian diaspora offers dislocated sites of contestation of the homogenizing forces of globalization. And it is precisely these sites of dislocation and instability that create possibilities of redefining a home for a diasporic community, a home that travels and traverses time and space to become more inclusive and comprehensive.

Keywords: Indo-Fijian, diaspora, memory, borders, home

Introduction

How do theorists of border studies and transnationalism capture a state of being that is fluid and exilic, and that attests to remembering, rather than forgetting, the anguish of the self? How do memories shape the consciousness of not just an individual, but also a nation that must come to terms with historical trauma and dislocation? In times where state and national borders are becoming increasingly elusive, fluid, and mobile, the positions...
of certain populations are shifting from disadvantaged and peripheral to become important participants in dialogue and expression. Such interfaces create new avenues for understanding the existence and perpetuation of the borders that run deep in a nation’s psyche, and deeply engage with memory studies as a tool for understanding how, and how much, a nation remembers. Fiji is one such site where memories of the borders and conflicts that emerged in the process of nation-building continue to thrive, affecting the political and cultural landscape of the nation.

This chapter seeks to understand the notions of borders, home, and belonging of the Indo-Fijians through the poetry of Sudesh Mishra, a contemporary Indo-Fijian-Australian poet. Mishra's poems engage deeply with the memories and postmemories of intergenerational remembrance that significantly contribute to identity formation and the development of a diasporic identity – especially in the case of Fiji, where borders of race and identity run very deep and are placed against the history of colonialism, indenture, and coups. In a constantly changing landscape shaped by mobilities and positionalities, the idea of a citizenship that is tied to the terrain and imagination of the nation-state is called into question (Anderson 1991: 6). Turbulent political conditions over the last 30 years have led to large-scale migrations of the Indo-Fijians, raising significant questions about the community’s citizenship and belonging to the land of Fiji. This chapter is an attempt to understand the nature of memories that sustains the ethnic borders that still exist in Fiji, thereby giving rise to racial and ethnic tensions. Beginning with a summary of the historical conditions of girmit (‘indenture’) in Fiji and a brief overview of the coups, this chapter explores the nature of memory, postmemory, and identity in diaspora, finally establishing that the possibility of envisioning a singular, stable home for Indians in Fiji is severely challenged by the constant movement, displacement, and borders inherent to a diaspora.

Sudesh Mishra is the author of five books of poems: Rahu (1987), Tandava (1992), Memoirs of a Reluctant Traveller (1994), Diaspora and the Difficult Art of Dying (2002), and The Lives of Coat Hangers (2016). He has also written literary criticism, including Diaspora Criticism (2006) and Preparing Faces: Modernism and Indian Poetry in English (1995); two plays, Ferringhi (2001) and The International Dateline (2001); and several short stories. His writing problematizes the nature and meaning of home, which is a dynamic and complicated process made more complex by the political instability of the nation. The nature of his conception of ‘home’ contradicts the usually understood notion that home is a stable, secure, fixed place of belonging that evokes beliefs of citizenship and nationality.
The Bitter Land of Fiji: Grappling with Internal Borders

I am of Feejee,
The bitter land of Feejee,
And hate is all we know,' cried she,
'Leap down that mango tree
And dance with me
In this bitter land of Feejee. (Mishra 1992: 19)

The year 2016 marked the 100th anniversary of the abolition of indenture in Fiji, a system under which the colonial government transported about 40,000 Indians to work on the sugarcane plantations on the islands. The Indian diaspora to Fiji can be described as following two waves of migration. The first wave began in May 1887, when the first ship carrying Indian indentured labourers arrived in Fiji, most of them from Uttar Pradesh, a North Indian province, and Calcutta, in eastern India. Indians ventured abroad in anticipation of economic gain, but what began as a hopeful quest turned out to be a never-ending journey of tyranny, disillusionment, and despair. These labourers signed a contract or an agreement (known as ‘girmit’, a corrupt form of the English word ‘agreement’), under which they continued to arrive in Fiji until 1920 when the system was abolished. After abolition, their living conditions improved. It is estimated that about 24,000 of the indentured migrants and their families returned to India, but the majority stayed in Fiji (Lal 2009: 89-109). The Fijians owned 87 per cent of the land and after the indenture ended it was leased out to Indians who earned their livelihood working on plantations, so that they could gradually work towards a better future. Indians eventually came to dominate trade and commerce in addition to agriculture; in particular, the free Gujarati migrants who arrived in Fiji from 1914 onwards established themselves as traders, and became the face of Indian commercial success (Mishra 2002: 154). While first-generation migrants were predominantly labourers, the second and third generations of Indo-Fijians established a strong economic and cultural base in Fiji.

1 Migration was never a part of Indian society; in fact, as historian Brij Lal states, most Indian peasants sent away to labour in fields, were bound to soil and would have never thought of leaving or exploring unknown lands, across the seas. During the late nineteenth century, however, rural India was undergoing profound changes due to the introduction of new land ownership regulations, increasing debts, and natural calamities such as droughts and famines. Out of the 60,000 migrants who came to Fiji at this time, 45,000 came from Uttar Pradesh, a state in Northern India that was most severely affected by drought and famine (Lal 2009).
The second wave of diasporic migration happened in the wake of the two military coups of 1987 followed by one in 2000 and the last one in 2006, when communities of expatriate Indo-Fijians formed in other countries. After the 1987 coups, some 70,000 to 80,000 Indo-Fijians migrated to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and United States. As the historian Brij Lal states, ‘Indo-Fijians, now fourth or fifth generation, are thought to be still regarded as outsiders in the land of their birth, threatened with the denial of equal citizenship and equal protection of law’ (Lal 2000: 180). The coups were an outcome of a deep-seated belief, in Lal’s words, that the taukei (‘Fijians’) regarded their neighbours the Indo-Fijians as vulagi (‘foreigners’), who were welcome to stay and enjoy their hospitality as long as they recognized that, as outsiders, they do not have a claim to the land. Indo-Fijians, now in their fourth and fifth generations, still feel threatened about being denied the rights of equal citizenship and protection under the law. This can be traced to the history of colonial rule, which ruled through racial and ethnic compartmentalization that lead to a lack of inter-group contact and ultimately resulted in a severely fragmented society. A culture of mistrust arose from the promotion of ‘ethnic-blocs’ by an alliance between indigenous Fijians chiefs and the European community, who opposed the Indo-Fijians who were pushing for independence. As a result, there was a clear polarization of the communities post-independence, and inter-group contact continued to be dominated by an ideology of indigenous paramountcy, without any effort toward inclusive nation-building, a national identity, or even equal citizenship. This eventually undermined the formation of a socioculturally plural society that recognizes the existence of diverse social, cultural, and sub-national groups and their significance for nation-building. Instead, the struggle for ethnic dominance and superiority led to racial violence and military interventions, belittling any attempts at meaningful inter-group dialogues and peaceful coexistence. This led to four coups over the span of twenty-one years, the first two against a multi-ethnic government in 1987, and one against the multi-ethnic People’s Coalition Government in 2000 and the final one in 2006, aimed at asserting indigenous hegemony over the nation and its politics. Widespread unrest and violence led to

2 While most political analysts/historians view the events of 1987 as comprising two coups d’état, one in May and one in September, others describe the situation as one coup that began in May and ended in September/October. Though the second military intervention in September 1987 did not depose a formally recognized government, I adopt the former position as the more commonly recognized one. Consequently, I refer to four coups in Fiji’s recent history: May 1987, September 1987, 2000, and 2006.
the delegitimation of the democratically elected government, constitutional values, and minority rights, sparking fear and insecurity for the Indo-Fijian minorities.

The study of borders in Fiji offers a prismatic understanding of the society and of the space that signifies home for Indo-Fijians. During all of these coups, particularly the first three, Indians suffered both economically and psychologically. Satendra Nandan, an Indo-Fijian writer and historian, encapsulates the Indo-Fijian experience thus: ‘As a migrant, stripped much of his history, his human dignity, his roots, once again uprooted by the coups, the twice-banished, thrice-betrayed, had to live by his wits’ (2000: 15). Nandan believes that the tragedy of Fiji is that Indians and Fijians have lived in separate cultural worlds, largely caused by colonial policies and continued by communal performances such as attending different schools and places of worship; practicing different lifestyles, rites, rituals, and ceremonies; speaking different languages (Nandan 2000: 14). The creation of such distinct boundaries is problematic because they impede any attempt for communities to integrate or even have the meaningful dialogues that are required to create homes. The coups were therefore an outcome of economic and political power struggles between the two communities, Indo-Fijians and Fijians – a struggle that can be traced back, again, to the colonial policy of apartheid. The Indo-Fijian scholar and literary theorist Vijay Mishra states that, although Fiji has been ‘postcolonial’ since its independence from Britain in 1970, for the native Fijian the coups signalled their moment of anti-colonial struggle by re-defining what indigenous people meant by rights and the social democratic notion of the common good. Curiously enough, this moment of postcolonial affirmation could only happen with demonstrable claims of indigenous Fijian supremacy over the migrant, albeit thoroughly Fiji-born, population of Indo-Fijians (Mishra 2007: 37). With multiple coups, the Indo-Fijians’ sense of exile and borders was perpetuated, invoking memories of indenture and their original displacement.

Seen as the remains of an old capitalist endeavour and symbols of imperialism, Indians remain aliens in the land of Fiji. In his poem ‘Feejee’, Sudesh Mishra expresses a state of disarticulation and dispossession which must be read against the history of the coups of 1987 and 2002, which were a grim reminder of Indo-Fijians’ status as outsiders on the island:

We have forsworn our landscape; there’s nothing
But the throng of disarticulate words
Searching for meaning in a barren skull.
Is this the madness of the deracine?
Or the confusion of some imbecile?
Both betray the mendicant’s way. Old man,
Who shall render our world meaningful?
Define our dispossession? Like primates
Sharing gutturals in a brittle cave,
We strive for articulation, shaping
Each vowel from the stiff bone of language.
And though words, like the affairs of the heart,
Are ephemeral, and will not redeem,
Ours is the simple faith in what is said. (Mishra 1992: 17)

The images of uprooting and the confusion brought about because of it, the struggle to articulate this state and the inadequacy of language to convey it, all express the insecurity and sadness of an Indo-Fijian community that has suffered threats of expulsion and ethnic cleansing, with the coups deepening the divide between the communities. Military rule, curbed rights, and minuscule representation at the political level have since led to large-scale migration of Indians. Since the coups, more than 100,000 Indians have left, especially professionals (Srebrnik 2008: 95). Fiji is a plural society where economic and social activities are clearly segregated and compartmentalized; homes created on such borders are unstable and uncanny, often giving way to confusion. Borders constantly define and negotiate the spaces that we know as home, blurring the boundaries between the mental and physical/geographical home, and oscillating between the past and the present.

Postmemories of Girmit

The generations of Indians in Fiji who descended from the *girmitiyas* (‘diasporic indentured labourers’) keep their memories of dislocation and pain alive through the intergenerational transfer of memory, known as ‘postmemory’ in the words of Marianne Hirsch. ‘Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created’⁴ (Hirsch 1992). The term originally referred

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⁴ First used by Hirsch in 1992 in her article on Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, this term falls under the large canopy of memory studies, a term she explored in greater depth in her 1997 study
primarily to the relationship between the children of Holocaust survivors and the memories of their parents. Since then, the term has been opened up to include the relationship that later generations or distant contemporary witnesses bear to personal, collective, and cultural trauma – of others, as well as the experiences they ‘remember’ only through stories, images, and behaviours. Through postmemory, events of the past continue to haunt the present. Collective national and family memories that are transmitted from one generation to the other through political, social, historical, testimonial, and documented memories create an understanding of home, which instils a sense of belongingness to the past and the present. However, in certain cases memories can also induce trauma caused by historical displacement and exploitation, as in case of Indians in Fiji. Geographical and temporal distance and the trauma of exile or expulsion make it difficult for diasporic communities to develop an integrated memory of their lost home. Postmemories of indenture and servitude play a significant role in shaping the worldview of the contemporary generation of Indo-Fijians, who have witnessed multiple political coups and racist tensions in the last thirty years.

Contemporary theories of borders engage in interdisciplinary approaches to studying postmodern identities and spaces of belonging. Understanding the border as a literal visual object such as a wall, fence, gate, and line on a map has been a traditional practice. Moving beyond understanding borders in terms of the territories that define nation, identity, and belonging, however, border studies engages with understanding the nature of borders in reference to the politics of representation and interpretation and the global movements of people. Often used interchangeably in literature, the terms ‘border’ and ‘boundary’ are distinct. While ‘border’ suggests a geographical space that divides different locations, ‘boundary’ refers to the cognitive divisions that exist between people. Questions about internalized borderlands based on history, caste, religion, gender, and ethnicity need to be addressed, redefined, reframed, and rediscovered. One way these questions can be addressed is by foregrounding the role of the memories and colonial discourses that shape the narratives of the self and community of a nation. Memories play a significant role in the formation of diasporic identities because transnational communities’ association with their homelands does not come from strong filial bonds, but through transgenerational memories – Hirsch’s postmemories. Consequently, it is not territories or borders that determine the formation of distinct identities, but instead postmemories, which also regulate and sustain these identities.

*Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory.*
For the second and subsequent generations of Indians in Fiji, the island is their homeland, the land of their birth. However, they also have postmemories of ‘imagined India’ handed down to them by the older generations and through religious texts and the popular media. While most of the Indians born in Fiji would never be able to relate to India as a homeland, they are constantly reminded that they are Indians in Fiji. The home they call Fiji therefore becomes a contested site, and raises questions of what exactly constitutes home. For instance, in his poem ‘Nightfall’, Mishra narrates the plight of a migrant haunted by displaced dreams:

Evening.
Mynahs are prunes moving against the sky.  
The diminishing light holds me together,  
Buttressed in retrospect:  
A Brahmin Nana rehearsing  
His father’s dream  
Exchanged Lucknow for a vision stretched miles into the ocean.  

The lawn is treed in shadows.  
Beyond the road sugarcanes inject the night with stars.  
The sky’s gourd leaks profusely, pigmenting  
The west with burgled colours—  
Of Madras, Bombay.  
Even when the scourge snaked over shoulders  
The mind stayed focused—  
Ayodhya was more real than agony or arkathi.  

It is different now, here, on this island;  
I glare with post-lapsarian orbs  
Stranger even to darkness. (Mishra 1987: 22)

This stanza invokes the postmemories of the girmityas who were recruited through fraudulence and deception, and who would never have dreamt of leaving their homes for unknown places. The poet reminisces about an old Brahmin from Lucknow against the backdrop of Fiji’s sugarcane

Arkathi means the recruiting agent, someone who unscrupulously recruited Indians for indentured labour in Fiji.
plantations, recollecting memories of his life in Ayodhya – revealing the blurred boundaries of past and present, belonging and un-belonging. The uncanny repetition of the pain and loss of a homeland give rise to postmemories of an indentured past that haunts the texts produced in the present. ‘A Well’, for instance, reminds Mishra of a palimpsest, with each generation adding layers to the ancestral experience, and attributing newer meanings to it. Farmhands working near the well echo the experience of his forefathers who dug through the sod with machetes and ploughs, and invoke memories of khol-eyed women snapping beans and gossiping. An old cartwheel rotted from its axle, rusted bolts, an old box standing like a milestone, all remind him of his ancestors. Standing there, he says,

I wish to unpack
The bracken-wrapped mandala of my ancestors,
Take up pitchfork and machete and plough,
And do what farmhands do, till clods of earth
Glisten for the ploughshare, and new generations
Of children, starting at night from humid dreams,
Wonder what ghost claps in our unlit catacombs (Mishra 2002: 42)

The well and the landscape surrounding it signify a space that reverberates images and sounds from the past. Mishra wants to unpack this ‘mandala’ or ancestral universe for the new generation that must relate to the past to make sense of the present, and this he does through his poetry. In another poem, ‘Dear Syd’, Mishra relives the nightmare of the Syria, a recurring historical trope in Mishra’s poems:

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5 Ayodhya is a city in Uttar Pradesh, India, that is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Rama and the setting of the Hindu epic Ramayana. Through the invocation of Rama’s banishment, his trials in the forest, the abduction of Sita, his victory over Ravana, and their final return to the utopian Ayodhya, the nineteenth century girmitiyas recast their narrative through ‘reverse millenarianism’. India signified Ayodhya, and by extension, the golden age that they forfeited through their crossing of kalapaani (‘the black waters’). The story of Ram resonated with the emotions of the Fijian Indians, who believed that like Ram, who was exiled for fourteen years without any fault of his (in their case they were misled and deceived by the arkathis who showed them a utopian picture of life in Fiji), eventually returned to Ayodhya, triumphing the good over evil. This myth consoled them and gave them hope of escaping indenture and returning to Ram rajya (‘the kingdom of Ram’), which signified India.

6 Considered the worst maritime disaster in the history of Fiji, the S.S. Syria was a ship carrying immigrants from Calcutta to Fiji that wrecked on 11 May 1884. An inexperienced crew had allowed the Indian immigrant ship to drift off course, and it was wrecked on the Nasilai reef at Nakelo in Tailevu at 8:30 PM. 497 men, women, and children were on board, and many had never seen water before they had embarked on the voyage. The unforgiving reef decimated the
And in nightmares the cries from broken Syria
Break me like no book—the splintering hull,
The seething ocean, the human struggle;
Afterwards the wash of sea and a silence.
These images won’t let me be, macheteing
Through my equanimity, sinking the coracle
Bobbing inside my archipelagic heart. (Mishra 1992: 27)

Though he neither witnessed nor experienced this event first-hand, the cries of people struggling against the unrelenting sea, followed by a long silence of amnesia, still haunt Mishra, filling him with despair and shaking his composure, even after more than a century.

The postmemories of trauma passed on through intergenerational narratives, prevent the possibility of forgetting such events that marked important times in the history of Indians in Fiji. Certain landscapes, such as the cane fields of Fiji, are reminders of a time from the past. These fields are the actual sites where the Indian *girmityas* sang songs of longing and mourning for a lost homeland, where the capitalist venture of the *girmit* (‘agreement’) to work was realized. These fields remind Mishra of not just one lost home – the one that the Indians left behind in India – but also the other lost home that he was born into, and which was ravaged by coups and racial tensions. The space of the fields, therefore, blurs the borders of time, memory, and history, where both bleed into each other and waver between different times of history:

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207-foot, 1010-tonne iron ship. By the time the shipwrecked passengers were brought to safety, 59 had drowned, and eleven more died within a week while being treated. Others were rescued by Fijian villagers.

7 ‘Bihari’ is a demonym given to the people from the state of Bihar in North India. Many migrants to Fiji hailed from Bihar.

8 Harappa was an ancient city in the Indus civilization (3300-1900 BCE), currently a part of Pakistan. Patliputra (built in 490 BCE) was an ancient Indian city near modern-day Patna, Bihar.
A part of the racial memory. (Mishra 1987: 23)

In this poem titled ‘Canefield’, Mishra traverses layers of memories and re-creates the images of estrangement that the Biharis would have experienced while working on the fields – a memory that continues to haunt him, though he did not experience indenture directly. By taking the readers through different temporal planes, the understanding of intergenerational memories gets extended even to ancient civilizations and the racial history of the Bihari labourers working on the fields. In ‘Glacier’, which was written during his travel to Aotearoa, South Island, the poet is asked by a stranger to describe the glacier in front of him. Instead of describing the glacier, he relives the pain of his ancestors who drowned at sea:

But I’d leap back in time by a hundred
Years, coolie-boy held in talons of fear,
While salt raged, riving the reef to Syria. (Mishra 2002: 54)

As important it is to remember the past because it is instrumental in shaping the present and future, memories are storehouses that are not fixed in time and space: they travel and change with time. As Daniel Levy states, ‘A shared sense of the past becomes a meaning-making repository which helps define aspirations for the future’ (2016: 291). They cannot be stored securely and neatly, and therefore cannot be retrieved without intervention, or without being processed. This reflects Hirsch’s discussion of postmemories as a set of recollections that take place through imaginative investment, rather than being directly connected to the past like memories are. ‘Full or empty, postmemory seeks connection. It creates where it cannot recover. It imagines where it cannot recall. It mourns a loss that cannot be repaired’ (Hirsch 2012). Mishra’s poems are an imaginative rendition of such postmemories that do not mourn the loss of an ancestral land in India so much as they mourn the dislocation and trauma that his ancestors experienced upon arrival and working in Fiji. For instance, when Mishra undertakes an actual physical journey to India, he pens these lines while waiting in a retiring room:

A brisk language connects me to India;
I’m my ancestor fleeing its famine.
Looking in the mirror I see only him,
The young girmityas departing India.
In India trying to get away from India.
I'd ride a reindeer to get away from India. (Mishra 1994: 42)

While journeying through India, Mishra can only imagine a young *girmitya* departing from his famine-ridden homeland. There is no sense of nostalgia, longing, or even satisfaction at having visited India, because he does not associate India with the idea of a homeland.

Diaspora as a social form is fluid and unsettled, historically linked to forgetting, remembering, and imagining an identity attached to ancestral land while simultaneously seeking membership in another host land. As opposed to the nation, which is defined by exclusive boundaries and fixed borders, diaspora is based on geographical dislocation or migration. There is distinct movement in terms of time, space, and location: a movement away from a place of belonging. When a community becomes diasporic, everything moves, including memories. The memories of a diasporic community also travel with them, becoming displaced from the point of origin and altering with time and space. Thus, when examined from the binary perspective of the nation and diaspora, national memory is natural, coherent, authentic, and homogeneous, while diasporic memory is hybrid, broken, and displaced. Therefore, Mishra challenges Hirsch’s presumption that a diaspora is always attached to a former territorial home by identifying himself as a transnational poet with a blend of multiple identities. The borders of a nation do not confine the identity of a multifarious poet like him, who articulates himself and his identity from several locations, moving restlessly between Fiji and Scotland, Australia and New Zealand, Malta and Italy (Mishra 2002: back page). For instance, in his poem ‘Venice’, Mishra oscillates between memories of Marco Polo in the spring of 1271, to those of Dante Alighieri in 1321, and then six centuries later to those of a runaway from a slum in Agra, India. As the long poem progresses, the historical characters live out their lives, while that of the runaway Indian transforms in hue:

Exhausted by memories, Kabir julaha
9 came to inside a vase-hipped trough
where matter changed to spirituous glass
without form, mass, weight, music,
so that everything was pure miasma:

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9 The Kabirpanthi Julaha are a Hindu caste mainly found in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The word *julaha* means a ‘ball of thread’ in Persian; their main profession is weaving cloth on handlooms.
warp, breath, camber, sag, texture.
in that hueless space he alone was hue. (Mishra 2002: 8)

The temporal shifts in the narration of the poem create temporal and cognitive discrepancies and ambiguities where meaning making is based on unstable fragments of memory, which leads to questioning the stability of the narrator’s identity. The distractions offered by these memories of different times and spaces make Mishra a multi-faceted diasporic poet, who, as Rosemary George believes, does not yearn for assimilation into the mainstream discourses of citizenship and belonging. She writes, ‘While the desire for assimilation into the mainstream is popularly read as the trademark of the immigrant experience, “feeling at home” may not require assimilation. At the same time, the process of making oneself at home is a project that may not be completed even by several successive generations’ (George 1999: 184). Mishra is not a migrant in Fiji; he was born and raised in Fiji. However, his ancestry is Indian, and time and time again he is made aware of it, and therefore questions whether assimilation in terms of ‘feeling at home’ can ever happen for the Indo-Fijians.

Conclusion: Fragmented Homes

Given this ambivalent relationship between Indo-Fijians and the land of Fiji, it becomes difficult to posit the idea of ‘home’ and ‘host’ – making conventional ideas about homeland and belongingness problematic. In the case of Indo-Fijians, the margins of home and non-home appear blurred as the ghosts of girmit and coups mingle with each other, giving rise to an acute sense of alienation and dislocation. The more borders are crossed, the more they seem to increase along the lines of race and ethnicity, and multiple coups reiterate this ambivalent state of being. These borders come to life through the everyday experiences of individuals and memory narratives expressed through different mediums of communication. With a fragile and chaotic history, it becomes interesting to study the effects of border crossings on Indian Fijians, for whom the experiences of immigration and exile constantly intermingle. Homi Bhabha, a contemporary postcolonial theorist and writes, ‘Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions – may be the terrains of world
literature'. This is precisely where one can locate Mishra’s work. Modern diaspora disrupts the apparent closure of home and generates transnational, translocal communications and communities, redefining new dimensions of home as a space of becoming rather than being. Even if one lays claim to being an Indo-Fijian, the idea of home transcends the boundaries of Fiji, giving way to a decentred, diverse expression of transition and belonging. For a diasporic poet like Mishra, different cultures constantly intermingle and engage with each other in a dynamic way, where each location’s history and geography create newer ways of thinking about nation, region, and territory.

This idea captures the essence of Mishra’s writing, the way his poetry is unstructured, broken, and erratic. His poems subvert the genealogy of structured time and expression, often making them obscure and difficult to comprehend, reflecting his state of being a wanderer, a nomad. In his poem ‘Memory of Jarek Woloszyn’, Mishra expresses,

A world that began with the drought in Basti,
Then forever turned molten as the Danube
Caught the trades at Kidderpore
And cut through the aspy addery braids of Kali.
Now I roam stateless, looking for the resolute world
In a world that is no more
Or no less than the sea (Mishra 2002: 42)

Boundaries survive through their presence. Like the phoenix, they constantly re-create themselves only to be broken down and come back to life again. In a fragmented Fijian society that oscillates between being a democracy and a military-run nation, multiple coups over twenty years have caused internal divisions of race and power to thrive and multiply. In

10 Bhabha borrows the concept of ‘unhomely’ from Freud and calls it a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, describing how the boundaries between the public and private spheres collapse, giving rise to disorientation. He discusses how the ‘unhomely’ informs the traumatic ambivalences of personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence. He believes that ‘unhomely’ is the condition of the modern world and, taking this as a point of departure, one can argue that Mishra’s works depict the state of the modern diasporic, transnational poet (Bhabha 1994:17).
11 Reference to the ship Danube, which had 149 girmityas on board on 15 June 1891. In 1892 she went missing, and her fate is still a mystery.
12 The constitutional crises started on Friday, 10 April 2009, when the Fijian President announced nationwide through radio broadcast that he was abrogating the Constitution of Fiji. He also announced emergency rule, which led to media censorship and increased police powers.
an essay describing the state of the society during the post-coup elections of 2001, Lal writes,

The fabric of national society has been strained. Although on the surface things look calm – people go about their business, intermingle in their workplace, on the sports field, around the yaqona\textsuperscript{13} bowl, more visibly in parts of Fiji not directly traumatized by the events of 19 May [2000] – but hidden behind the rhetoric of multiculturalism and reconciliation lie deep suspicions and raw prejudices, more widespread now than in Fiji’s recent past. (Lal 2005: 210)

Sudesh Mishra’s poetry holds a mirror to this unrest, giving voice to the people and events that are otherwise forgotten in everyday life. Through his narratives, the reader gets a sense of the fragmentation and dislocation that mark the lives of Indians in Fiji, and at the same time the hybrid nature of his poetry draws similarities between disparate forms that conjure the ghosts of the past, uniting the community through an invocation of postmemories. In his preface to Diaspora and Difficult Art of Dying, Mishra states that the structuring principle to that volume of poetry is founded on discontinuities, rather than continuities. This is brilliantly portrayed in his prose-poem of the same name, which spans different locations ranging from a village in India to a ship carrying girmits, to the lands of Fiji, Edinburgh, and Australia. The poet metamorphoses into different genders, characters, and professions to show the fluidity of borders (which is ironic, since borders have been established very strongly in Fiji) and diaspora. The text is one piece of prose, not broken by stanzas or breaks until the end to signify the end of the journey, which in turn, signifies the end of the text. Mishra’s prose-poem is sparsely punctuated, with diverse images, interspersed with Hindi and Fijian words and scattered with different thoughts, clearly indicating the state of Indo-Fijians. He says, ‘so it was little by little i went through another sea-change as my discovery of an oceanic present leaked into my memory of an indian past, until a time came when i could no longer think of machli\textsuperscript{14} as word and idea and culture had never existed prior to ika\textsuperscript{15}, prior to my life on this archipelago, and yet one was forever inside and around the other’ (Mishra 2002: 75). While Mishra laments the coup-ridden state of Fiji, he

\textsuperscript{13} Yaqona, or kava as it known, is a traditional national drink of Fiji associated with a social gatherings, festivities, and rituals. It is also presented as a traditional gift to visitors.

\textsuperscript{14} Machli means ‘fish’ in Hindi.

\textsuperscript{15} Ika means ‘fish’ in Fijian.
also celebrates the creative space that the exilic experience offers. The ability to write from within and without, as both insider and outsider, gives Mishra the perspective of a transnational writer, an approach that might best describe his diasporic state. In times that speak of global identities and transnational economies, the study of home breaks away from the conventional understanding of nation and nationalism. Henk van Houtum explains that the national border is a symbolic demarcation of an appropriated space, an imagined truth, that is reproduced symbolically, semiotically, and formally every day in time and space. Therefore, it is a fabrication – a fantasy to which communities seek belongingness. It is through seeking national membership that communities achieve a sense of being a part of the meaningful, collective making of national narratives. A nation thus creates borders that demarcate the rest of the world as the ‘other’, against which protection is to be sought and distance to be maintained. Borders are hence ‘partial, selective and opportunistic’, created to fill a void in one’s own rootedness and self and identity. Consequently, the dreams of a national utopia based on shared narratives, spaces, and fantasies create internal power struggles of control that are never-ending (van Houtum 2011: 56). It can be argued that, far from being geographical in nature, borders in Fiji are mostly historical and psychological and manifest through constant political, social, and psychological tensions between the two communities. The history of colonization and indenture constantly reiterates the presence of borders that cannot be dissolved or reconsidered. However, as van Houtum states, the border is Janus-faced, in that it offers the potential of mobility and freedom, a desire to cross over, as much as it reinforces national identity and homogeneity.

Study of the Indo-Fijian diaspora offers dislocated sites of contestation to the homogenizing forces of globalization, creating alternative discourses of borders by being the sites of dislocation and instability. These sites then create the possibility of defining a home for a diasporic community, a home that travels and traverses time and space to become more inclusive and comprehensive. The complicated borders of history and geography in Fiji find their representation through the intergenerational postmemories that extend the memories of one generation to subsequent ones, cutting across and establishing a relationship with the past. It is essential that memories of trauma, conflict, and violence be addressed rather than be forgotten, and silence be articulated instead of being suppressed under official censorship. Lal estimates that the Fijian coups of 1987 polarized a society that had the potential to be multicultural and inclusive, and instead generated violence, social instability, corruption, and censorship – including censorship of
history and culture (Lal 2000; 2009). To challenge state-controlled censorship that threatens to forget history and relegate it to the margins, it is essential for postmemories to thrive and raise questions of identity and belongingness, so that a possibility of envisioning a present and future can be created. Andreas Huyssen believes that ‘The form in which we think of the past is increasingly memory without borders rather than history within borders. Modernity has brought with it a very real compression of time and space. But in the register of imaginaries, it has also expanded our horizons of time and space beyond the local, the national, and even the international’ (Huyssen 2003: 4). The poetry of Sudesh Mishra transcends all borders, literal and metaphorical, to arrive at an understanding of home as multidirectional and transnational. His poetry is structurally disjointed, reflecting the nature of diasporic memories, and his engagement with postmemories of indenture bring to the fore the existing borders of ethnic and racial alienation in Fiji.

References


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