Locating (Im)migrant Identity in Urban Landscapes: From Postcolonialism to Globalization in the Indo-English Migration novels of Anita Desai

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The idea of city is never fixed, it is always in the "making" or "becoming". It is a metaphor for a life full of opportunities, freedom. However, it also leads to an ironic alienated self. This article deals with this metaphor to present urban geography through the eyes of an immigrant gazer. At the interface of (im)migrant and urban space, the (im)migrant is constantly de-territorialized. The emphasis will be on how the troubled and diverse urbanscape fashions contemporary human identity, development, creativity, mobility, etc., and how spaces and places (physical, imagined, dispersed and diverse) are depicted. The Whorfian hypothesis has attacked foreign languages depicting different spatio-temporal urban landscapes and the experiences of alienation within it. I will examine the author's difficult task in conveying the experiences of immigrants – the Jewish Diaspora and the citizens of newly-independent countries – in an alien megalopolis personified as an anthropoid inflicting a malevolent power "dwarfing the individual and reducing him to a speck of insignificant grime". I will also address cultural and architectural differences in Western and Oriental cities within the postcolonial cultural spaces that entail an identity crisis among migrants.

The main objective of this paper is to show how the postcolonial as well as global city spaces are portrayed in Desai's Fiction. In order to develop this, we employ metaphors, intended not just as language tropes, but also to compare and contrast the projection of different cities across the globe during different times into dichotomies such as Occidental versus Oriental urban spaces, Postocolonialism versus Globalization.

Turning to our novels we can see that from the sixties till today a number of novels written by Desai traces settlement patterns of twentieth- century (im)migrants with plots taking place in major cities across India, America, Europe and South America. The Cityscape is thereby related to migration across sea and mountains, linking it to dislocation of languages, displacement of characters and the re-writing of history through an individual perspective. The setting of Desai's novels indeed becomes a valuable source for pondering on cityscape as *topos*, as an anthropoid, as a cultural space, especially as regards its relation to individual identity in changing contemporary situations and the understanding of the evolution of Desai's style of writing as well as of Indo-English fiction in general.

Linking the cityscape to the immigrant characters of the novels, geographer Daniel Cosgrove asserts that landscape is also a social construction that includes the subjective ability of an observer to see different places: "Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world."[1] It is a medium "in which cultural meanings and values are encoded whether they are put there by the physical transformation of the place in landscape gardening and architecture, or found in a

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1   D.E. Cosgrove, Social formation and symbolic landscape, London: Croom Helm, 1984,   p. 13.

place formed, as we say, 'by nature'."[2] As a metaphor, it is widely recognized that 'City' hints simultaneously to a *topos* and its image, both to a lived place and its abstract presentation. The ambiguity in its meaning derives from the changing relationship of the (im)migrant to the city which I call an "immigrant gazer" of the city. It is possible to speak of a landscape only when there is a gaze that discovers it, that recognizes it and makes it live, arousing some emotions or some reflections. An immigrant gazer is one who is constantly re-constructing his own identity by developing his representation of the heterogeneous, shape-shifting and open-ended city that he observes for himself and for the people to whom he communicates his experiences. As a consequence, the gaze itself becomes important in articulating not only the sense but also the spirit of place, all along history. The representation and awareness of space therefore become intrinsic in the self-understanding and locating self in a spatial, psychological, historical and logical sense. The immigrant gaze is subjective as well as cultural. The act of seeing is also cultural, since the way we see and filter many observations reflects our socio-cultural background and our identity. This selective process becomes the mechanism of coping with and understanding the complexities of cityscape as *topos*. *Bye-Bye Blackbird* is a novel based on the lives of an Indian family who lives in London. Dev is a new arrival from India who describes the physical layout of London with detail. The Planned Architectural Pattern of London gives him a feeling of rationality, orderliness and predictability. Its winding lanes create a feeling of joy, fascination and aesthetic pleasure. Perceiving London as a mosaic of well known landmarks such as Hyde Park, Battersea Power station, etc., he finds in London "a vista suddenly opening out where he has expected nothing but city"[3]. During the course of the novel, the variety and richness of London becomes a source of knowledge for Dev. He attempts to grasp this new experience of space, through his familiar Indian experience. He interprets Battersea Power station as a shrine where Vedic hymns to fire are sung by priests in saffron robes and vestal maidens in white[4].

Constantly comparing Indian and British cities, he opines that British cities are "tight, insular, clusters built like fortresses" whereas the houses, streets and even windows are turned inward in an Indian city leaving no scope for the outside. Desai presents city experiences through multiple points of view. London is a tourist attraction for Dev, whereas for Sarah, who is a British wife of an Indian named Adit, it has an intricate pattern. Sarah sees London as a group of disparate districts which are separated by paths and edges that render urbanscape fluid, fragmentary, complex and abstract. As a walking gazer, Sarah observes subtle boundaries between two districts signaled by social and structural changes. Each district seems to be enclosed by an imaginary border, be it the Little India where she lives or the British school where she works. The Edge or the boundary that separates these two distinct districts is also discerned. As Sarah crosses the Common, she turns into the high street and confronts difference: "As she darted through their throng, they pretended not to notice her at all, but once she was across the road (into another district), she heard them scream "Hurry, Hurry, Mrs. Scurry!" and "Where's the fire, pussy cat?"[5]. As she crosses one district and enters into another, she confronts the scene of strangeness and different modes of behaviour of its residents.

The representation of the oriental city through the eyes of a migrant gazer is not different. In Desai's novel, *Voices in the City*, the city of Calcutta is seen through the gloomy

2   W.J.T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape", in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), Landscape and power, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 14.

3   Anita Desai, Bye-Bye Blackbird, New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1985, p. 149.

4   Ibid., p. 54.

5   Ibid., p. 32.

description of Nirod. The non-places[6] of Calcutta, such as the station, are described with a melancholic disposition. The station master is grimy, all stained with the sweat of haste and overwork; the air is acrid; the marriage party and the crowds disintegrate after the departure of the train emphasizing the chaos and sense of alienation. The topography of Calcutta is described like any other Indian city where the "open-drain is choked … bridges roar and rattle like a tunnel of bones and steel… Trams crashed murderously past, handcarts rolled recklessly, maniacally by"[7]. Other non-places, such as the coffeehouse, where human relationships thrive, present no less a picture of decay: "the damp and the soft, corrupt growth of mildew filled the brash hall with their own pluvial aura." Rain, which symbolizes nature, life-force and cheerfulness, becomes a metaphor of stink and nausea. In Nirod's words, "this blated rain. Like one hundred latrines flushing all around you." These statements evoke the frustration and disappointment of the city's inhabitants.

Similarly, in *Village By the Sea,* the city of Bombay becomes an embodiment of all that is foul and degenerate, both materially and morally. Bombay is seen bursting with the migration of populations from the villages. The positive perception of the city in the minds of villagers as a space of constant upward social and economic movement hides the other side of the city – a place where people undergo material privation and trauma. This ironic evil side of the city is exposed by the migrant gazer hero. On seeing this evil side, his utopian idea of the city is broken and the migrant hero suffers an identity crisis.

Fasting, Feasting is a novel set first in a small town of India, and then in Massachusetts. A global city of the United States is presented with its sprawling shopping malls, huge parks, gyms, etc.

Taking a holistic view of the city as *topos*, the oriental cities or the Indian cities such as Calcutta, Bombay in Desai's novels are seen as sites of appalling poverty, squalor and decay which impose a sense of loneliness, despair, and hopelessness in the characters. Whereas in the western cities, the immigrant characters are seen as mere observers: terrified and perplexed. Shut doors and glass draw a barrier between them and the city's inhabitants: "Here everyone is a stranger and lives in hiding. They live silently and invisibly."[8] However, in her later novels, as in *Fasting, Feasting*, the glass imagery in the western cities is absent. Closed houses are penetrated by the immigrant observer. One sees the private lives of its inhabitants, yet the narrator remains an outsider, a mere spectator, who is never allowed to be a participant. Thereby, in Desai's novels, the migrant's integration with the city's inhabitants becomes questionable.

Her latest novel, *The Zigzag Way*, is the story of a young American scholar, Eric, who travels to Mexico. As a foreigner, Eric thinks of Mexico City as "this great field of volcanic rocks from the ruins of the Aztec temples, the tricolour of Mexico whipped like a dragon in the wind from the mountains that ringed the city and were visible at the end of every avenue and street, benevolent and protective witches wrapped in dark skirts"[9]. Eric is enthusiastic to explore an "Alibaba cave of curiosities"[10], and behaving "Rabbit-like … [he] went out to meet the city, a city that strewed its sights before him as a carpet-seller might his carpet, a jeweller his gems."[11] However, the city remains impenetrable. He wanders around the city observing life in a distracted and unpremeditated way, but "Eric could not have enough of it. It was as

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6   Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, London: Verso, 1995. Also available online – *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marc_Augé* (accessed 20 October 1010): "Marc Augé coined the phrase "non-place" to refer to places of transience that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as "places". Examples of a non-place would be a hotel room, an airport or a supermarket."

7   Anita Desai, *Voices in The City*, New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1965, p. 9.

8   Desai, Bye-Bye Blackbird, p. 56.

9   Anita Desai, The Zigzag Way, London: Vintage, 2005, p. 25

10   Ibid., p. 29.

11   Ibid., p. 27.

though he had been starving throughout his northern existence and now, reborn a traveller, could feast and gourmandize without restraint till he was so replete…"[12]. During one of the lectures in Mexico City on Sierra Madre Oriental that he attends, the memories of his grandparents who had come there from Cornwall to work in silver mines in 1910 are ignited. It is only with the enthusiastic perception of a gazer that the interlinking of past and present can take place. He undertakes the journey to the Sierra with the hope of knowing more about his grandmother as an "explorer on the brink of discovery."[13] He reaches a small mining town on a hill on the night of the festive day of *los muertos* where he joins the procession of people to see "houses of adobe and tile that were clearly abandoned and in ruins, doors hanging from their hinges, barred windows opening onto scenes of fallen walls… Perhaps these were the houses where the Cornish miners had once lived?"[14] The passage of time in the city foregrounds its image as an archeological site with each layer having a history. His efforts to penetrate the past are like that of an archeologist's digging into "a mine that no light pierced and where no air circulated."[15] Life is in constant flux, but the past of the city is not lost. The past is present in the images, smells and colours of the landscape and is physically and psychically inscribed on him. It is preserved in his memories, even when it has been covered over with a layer of dust.

A space becomes 'physically inscribed' upon the person who has experienced it. A Space is above all a group of organic habits. In Desai's fiction, cities acquire an ontological meaning:

> (…) the city, mammoth and overpowering, dwarfing the individual and reducing him to a speck of insignificant grime, or poverty that makes a hovel seem desirable and a drink of milk quite unattainable, or injustice that deprives drought-ridden cultivators of water and victorious soldiers of victory. No experience seems pure, private, every one is complicated by forces over which the protagonists appear to have little control[16].

The city is personified as 'man-like', an anthropoid, 'resembling the human being' inflicting a malevolent power on its inhabitants. Different examples from Desai's Migration novels demonstrate the evil and destructive power of city anthropoids that it wrecks on the lives of individuals and particularly the marginalized ones.

In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, the labyrinthine ways of London like the brightness of the Tube Stations dazzle and blind Adit. Voices in the Tube stations have a sinister power on him. These voices are "profane and conspiratorial, like the laughter and voices of enemies and schemers"[17]. He feels that he is unable to decipher the different layering of the city thereby rendering him confused, weak, feeling out of touch with his ethnic customs and culture, thus uncertain about his 'self' and conscious of his state of mental flux. He realizes that in London "the eternal immigrants … are like strangers in enemy territory, frozen listless but dutifully trying to be busy, unobtrusive, and however superficially, to belong"[18], and despite all their efforts, they can never belong. Images of city brightness and richness are in stark contrast with the alienation and hopelessness that it exerts on its inhabitants. The city like a leech sucks all the vitality and stimulation from its immigrants to remain bright and dazzling.

Similarly, as Sarah sees the distinct districts of London, she becomes conscious of an inter-subjective space – the space between her 'self' and the 'other'. As a silent and sensitive

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12   Ibid., p. 28.
13   Ibid., p. 97.
14   Ibid., p. 161.
15   Ibid., p. 79.
16   Anita Desai, *Noon in Calcutta*, London: Bloomsbury, 1992, p. x.
17   Desai, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 181.
18   Ibid., p. 182.

observer, as she can see the fragmentation and layering of London, she also gets a glimpse of the fluidity and multiple division of her own existence.

The setting is London which, with its immenseness and its long history of being the heart of a colonial empire, comes in direct conflict with the postcolonial nationalist ethos of the migrants from newly independent countries. In an attempt to re-inscribe himself over the city – as a way to overcome the alienating experience that city causes- – Dev wages a superficial war against this city and its inhabitants asserting that he is all set to "interpret my country to them, to conquer England as they once conquered India, to show them, to show them."[19] However, all his efforts become futile. The anthropoid city makes Dev surrender his individual will and ultimately, he admits his subordination in an attempt to survive. During postcolonial times, imaginative assumptions of racial divisions and barriers still prevailed among the earlier colonials and colonialists, rendering life difficult within the heart of the colonial empire. Desai's use of vocabulary and sarcastic tones reflects the postcolonial world paradigm in this novel.

In *Voices in the City*, Calcutta is in a state of becoming, it acquires multiple faces which characters must discern in order to survive. Therefore the characters are never satisfied in their fixed domestic environments, they yearn for freedom from its shackles in order to gain an objective view of it and assert their identities. Nevertheless, unable to liberate themselves, their lives are in ceaseless physical and cultural flux and they become permanently rootless. As the title (*Voices in the City*) suggests, the city as an anthropoid possesses multiple voices which are reduced to meaningless noises that traumatize females like any other marginalized inhabitant resulting in a complete lack of communication. Monisha is disturbed by the cacophony of Calcutta, "a hundred radios invaded it, … with the mournful songs so beloved of the Bengalis, full of regret, sorrow and sighs." She discovers two faces of the city "one rapacious, one weary". The streets are crowded; outside the house there is a crowd, disturbances and violence, and inside the four walls of the house, she feels "locked in a steel container". She spends her life in Calcutta as a mere observer, a handicapped participant and in utter dejection. She identifies the city of Calcutta to Kali, the goddess of death: "Do you hear me, city of Calcutta? City of Kali, goddess of death. Not one word from you. Not one word from you, I said, not a sound. No shriek, no silence, no groan, no cry I come here for silence, my few moments of night silence, so cease your moaning and wailing awhile."[20] The experiences of other inhabitants are equally painful. Nirod too feels threatened by the city which is "as much atmosphere as odour, as much haunting ghost of the past as a frenzied passage towards early death"[21]. He describes his life in the city as "shadows, silence and stillness." Overwhelming emotions are aroused by the urbanscape in the human body in the form of sounds, smells, or sensory reflexes which lead to depression. Nirod shouts in panic: "I am a leper … leave me, do not come near. I am a leper, diseased with loneliest disease of all."[22] For Amla, the city is monstrous: "this monster city that lived no healthy, red blooded life but one that was subterranean, under-lit, stealthy and odorous of mortality, had captured and enchanted or disenchanted both her sister and brother."[23] It has a will of its own. It exerts pressure on its dwellers, making them alienated. The city as anthropoid is also experienced when the human characters in the novel discover the city's erotic power over its inhabitants. Dharma (the artist) has been mesmerized by the erotic power enveloping the city.

Desai's novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay,* is the story of a German Jew, Baumgartner, who escapes from the Nazi Regime to India. Arriving in Bombay, Baumgartner can see the two

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19 Ibid., p. 123.
20 Desai, Voices in The City, p. 137.
21 Ibid., p. 43.
22 Ibid., p. 40.
23 Ibid., p. 150.

sides of the city. One is of misery, chaos, "the street, the traffic, the noise," which seems to him "an all-devouring monster on the move", and the other side is of landmarks, richness and prosperity: "the sea, the ships, the rose-red arc of the Gateway of India." These two sides of the city make him feel that his identity is being "not merely opening up but torn open, hacked open."[24] For Lotte, his only friend in India, Bombay is a space of "the thieves, the cholera and the mosquitoes"[25]. In search of better employment prospects, Baumgartner moves to Calcutta. Calcutta is a megalopolis, a second city of empire, a City of Palaces, a city of richness, "of bars, dances, soldiers, prostitutes, businessmen, fortunes and fate."[26] This city too undergoes a drastic transformation on the advent of crisis. History leaves its everlasting marks on it. With the threat of Second World War looming, the fabric of life changes in the city. The city of Calcutta as well as the identity of its inhabitants become more precarious. Baumgartner can feel war looming in every corner of Calcutta: "War loomed behind every lamppost and bush in the form of soldiers, stinking with fear and unwashed clothes,"[27] making him uneasy and fearful. His only possibility of survival is to accept India, and the city of Calcutta as his home.

As World War II breaks out in Europe, the city also undergoes transformation. During the war, the famine of 1943 engulfs it. Calcutta is also a centre for preparations for attacks against the Japanese. The city is therefore littered with soldiers: "The railway station swarmed with Soldiers, and with coolies bent under tin trunks and olive green bed-rolls. The clink of army boots … they clipped British voices giving commands, the snapping salutes and whistles being blown"[28]. Hunger, squalor and desolation pervade the city while its inhabitants feel an existential pang: "this was how the world ended, there was no other ending."[29] One war finished, more wars follow; the struggle for independence and more – the Communal War between Hindus and Muslims:

> War within war within war. Everyone engaged in a separate war, and each war opposed to another war. If they could be kept separate, chaos would be averted. Or so they seemed to think, ignoring the fact that chaos was already upon them, and lunacy. The lunacy of performing acts one did not wish to perform, living lives one did not wish to live, becoming what one was not… A great web in which each one was trapped, a nightmare from which one could not emerge[30].

As the threat of partition impregnates the city, the lines are drawn between people based on their nations and religions. The impact of the Riots between Hindu and Muslim can be felt on the City. Scenes of death, decay and destruction are everywhere: "the street was like a tunnel, it was dark… Baumgartner peered to see but nothing was visible through the thick chocking smoke except the mottled walls, the gaping windows and darkened doorways in which beggars slept."[31] As violence impregnates the city, identity no longer remains the same. Inhabitants are reduced to specters: "Shrivelled, shrunken ghosts of people on the streets."[32] In the words of Habibullah, a Muslim, "India is finished. Don't you know every night they come and threaten us in our house? Every night they set some Muslim house on fire, stab some Muslim in the street, rob him too."[33] When the partition becomes a reality, the lines are drawn on the Indian sub-continent map to create two new nations – India and Pakistan, transfiguring the lives of all. The rise of a new nation brings with it abrupt changes: people are forced to dislocate their homes into other cities. Fear and suspicion loom over the

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24 Anita Desai, Baumgartner's Bombay, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989, p. 88.
25 Ibid., p. 80.
26 Ibid., p. 172.
27 Ibid., p. 94.
28 Ibid., p. 105.
29 Ibid., p. 166.
30 Ibid., p. 173.
31 Ibid., p. 166.
32 Ibid., p. 167.
33 Ibid., p. 168.

megalopolis creating an unfamiliar and menacing atmosphere for the individuals. Habibullah narrates to Baumgartner the havoc wrecked by its inhabitants on the city of Calcutta: "Leave this city. It is no good. The Japanese have bombed it. In the famine, thousands and thousands have died. The streets have been full of dead bodies, rotting. People had no rice to eat… It is still stinking of death Sahib, this city." Baumgartner opines on the changing urbanspace: "Done with the global war, the colonial war, only to be plunged into a religious war. Endless war. Eternal war. Twenty thousand people, the newspaper informed, were killed in three days of violence in Calcutta. Muslim killed Hindus, Hindus Muslims."[34] Trying to escape the misery and horror of riots in Calcutta, panic-struck Baumgartner leaves for Bombay. At the city's railway station, refugees are seen filling the train with their families and belongings, climbing in and clawing each other. Individuals and masses have viciously destroyed the city and imposed drastic alterations on it. The city Anthropoid takes its revenge by transforming its inhabitants as well as the migrants into savages.

On the eve of independence, Baumgartner becomes a witness to the atmosphere of Bombay. While the inhabitants of the newly-born nation smile and celebrate, he views apocalypses:

> (he) watched the fires that burnt in the city, their hot glow reflected by the smouldering mass of fog and smoke that buried them all and did not allow the flames to escape. At times there were screams to be heard in the dark and footsteps pounding along dark lanes just as in badly made thrillers for the cinema. Processions wound endlessly through the city, chanting slogans like dirges slipping into sudden outbreaks of activity, to overturn buses and set trams on fire… There were barricades in the streets, police with helmets and batons and rifles, mobs sullen or infuriated – one could never tell[35].

The cities of Bombay and Calcutta are seen in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, during partition, during the Second World War, as fashioned by history and religion through the point of view of diverse people. There is a transfiguration of the religion and the nation due to the de-territorialization of cityspace.

The representation of Venice as a city is a paradox in Desai's fiction. Venice is depicted as a territory-less space where the possibility of any concrete geographical marker defined by signs, markers and boundaries is washed away by the tidal waves of water. While escaping from Germany to India, Baumgartner stays in Venice for a week**.** Venice is depicted as a city of water, of process, movements, a city of networks, both futuristic and sometimes virtual (placeless space, between the physical and non-physical realm) An outsider and a homeless everywhere, he finally feels at home in Venice:

> (He) stood there, as entranced as he was alarmed. Venice was the East, and yet it was Europe too; it was that magic boundary where the two met and blended, and for those seven days Hugo had been a part of their union. He realized it only now: that during his constant wandering, his ceaseless walking, he had been drawing closer and closer to this discovery at that bewitched point where they became one land of which he felt himself the natural citizen[36].

Here, the traditional and fixed idea of cityscape is challenged by the natural forces. The city of Venice in Desai gains its identity as historically romantic and nostalgic.

A transnational writer is continuously depicting the local urbanscape in a foreign medium. The author's task becomes more precarious by the postcolonial resistance based on the assumption that English is a foreign and a colonial language which cannot convey the ethos of Indian settings:

> (Q)uestions regarding the use of English and the identification of the Indianness of the subject matter have been the main concern of the critics. Nationalistic rejections of English was coupled with an acceptance of the Whorfian hypothesis

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34   Ibid., p. 180.
35   Ibid., p. 172.
36   Desai, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 63.

that a consciousness conditioned by an Indian Language could not be conveyed through English[37].

Due to this criticism by Desai's fellow Indian writers and critics based on the Whorfian hypothesis, she was under constant pressure to convey the ethos of a specific culture. Desai herself was aware of difficulties in portraying the particular ethos of a place, the emotions, thoughts and situations linked to these spaces in a foreign language. A place is culturally specific and therefore has to be defined and understood with special reference to a specific socio-cultural context. Hindi Words and phrases were drawn from daily speech; mostly they were integrated directly into the text like gup-shup, buddies, Ashram, a Babu, etc., without employing any particular technique for developing a typically Indian character in an Indian context in her early novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird*.

Her transitional novel, *In Custody*, has made an attempt to convey the sounds and quality of Urdu language and culture by using her translated version of poetry to portray the ethos of Chandani Chowk in Delhi.

Alienation which is one of the characteristics of postmodern cities is aggravated not only due to geographical dislocation into the cities but also due to its particular language and its cultural codes. The experience of a German Jew, Baumgartner, in India in Desai's transitional phase novel, *Baumgartner's Bombay* is a good example in this respect. Referring to this novel, Elaine Y.L. Ho opines that:

> German is Baumgartner's first language, the language of his identity and cultural filiation. In the course of the novel, this Germanness, or what remains of it, is placed in relation to various language system - Hebrew and languages of India - which encode the values of the different cultures that Baumgartner encounters. The disharmonies that ensue are often rendered as miscommunication or an inability to communicate. Thus, Desai interweaves Baumgartner's German origin and his subsequent alienation from the cultures and societies he encounters[38].

Unable to completely decipher Indian Cities due to language problems ("Languages sprouted around him like tropical foliage"), Baumgartner has learnt to use broken Indian such as Chai (Tea), Pani (Water), jaldi, lao, etc.[39] This child language used by him in an alien context, plays a functional role in terms of surviving in this space, and establishing some communication with the alien participants.

Many radical movements that had emerged in the 1950s collapsed due to their inability to adjust to the emergence of new global structures. Although able to unite subaltern struggles based on the Whorfian hypothesis during its formative years, these movements lost their grip on the imaginations of adherents who found them increasingly unable to account for their lived realities. Global migration in contemporary times has "brought about transnational and translocal solidarities of taste, opinion and pleasure." Lingual and cultural barriers still exist but less than before. Still a foreigner can feel "like stumbling into a rabbit home – falling, falling, till all was a welter of strange words, strange names churning around"[40]. Yet, today, people are fascinated and are equally eager to learn about an alien culture and its language codes as much as their own.

Coming out of her cocoon of India and its migration portrayal, Desai today is exploring new and unfamiliar territories. She is employing a vocabulary from diverse languages, literature, charting diverse migration histories and showing its relevance at the time of globalization. In her latest novel, *The Zigzag Way*, Desai has employed Spanish lexemes to

37   Feroza Jussawalla, "Family Quarrels: Towards a Criticism of Indian Writing in English", in Dieter Riemenschneider (ed.), *Marginalizing The Centre - Centring The Periphery*: *The Reception of Indian Literature in English* (*Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 39, n°1, Spring 1993, p. 219).

38   Elaine Y.L. Ho, "The languages of identity in Anita Desai's Baumgartner's Bombay", in *World literature written in English*, 32, 1 (1992), pp. 96-97.

39   Desai, *Baumgartner's Bombay*, p. 92.

40   Desai, *The Zigzag Way,* p. 31.

portray family appellations, Mexican rites and rituals with their translation or meanings. Desai employs techniques of translation, or transfer of words directly from a native language to English. The contextualization of language, through the device of translation, becomes a process of nativization of language – when the local acquires global significance and vice versa in literature and in reality.

The city and its inhabitants share an intense relationship. The migrant becomes an actor and the city a stage on which the identities constantly play against one another. The power and the violence that city wrecks on its inhabitants erode the essentialist conception of individuality. The cityscape therefore, becomes a site of identity crisis.

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