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Un/Divided Loyalties in Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem*

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the tension between mobility, migration, and travelling, on the one hand, and settlement, stability, housing, and accommodation on the other, as a major theme in the South Asian Canadian diasporic author Anita Rau Badami's debut novel *Tamarind Mem* (1996). As seen, it is my contention that questions of loyalty and belonging arise from this tension, which manifests itself in the variously troubled relationships the two female protagonists have to their numerous homes, real or imaginary, during their migration inside or outside of India because for them, the home as such is always imbued with memories of the familial and communal past, as well as a sense of isolation and dislocation. The examination of questions of loyalty and belonging in relation to the home in such a context necessitates the use of diaspora criticism as well as the application of cognitive literary studies in the analysis to follow.

Keywords

migration, home, memory, belonging, diasporic writing, dehoming, Canada, India

The publication of *Tamarind Mem* in 1996 represented a landmark in the life of Anita Rau Badami since this was her debut novel, which catapulted her into a successful writing career. Coincidentally, the same year also saw the publication of a remarkable new book entitled *A Fine Balance*, by fellow South Asian Canadian novelist Rohinton Mistry. In 1996, books by other prominent Canadian writers of various ethnic backgrounds appeared too. Among these multicultural authors were Janice Kulyk Keefer of Ukrainian descent, the Afro-Caribbean Dionne Brand, the Indo-Caribbean Shani Mootoo, and Anne Michaels, of Polish-Jewish parentage. Books by authors like these, together with Badami's novel, presented from a gendered ethnic viewpoint, were indicative of a turning point in Canadian literature in the 1990s.

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Due to the growing diversity and complexity of the literary works published in Canada in which "so far voiceless groups came to be heard" (Kuester 1998, 5), a significant development occurred in the literature of the country in that decade, which some call decentring (Kuester 1998, 1), or destabilization; it followed the cultural nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s (Howells 2003, 4). Others describe the phenomenon as the pluralizing and globalizing of Canadian literature (Maver 2009, 25). Coral Ann Howells sums up the changes of the 1990s as follows: "1996 was the year when the new wave peaked, with new multicultural novels being published by the big international presses, symptomatic of the shift in Canadian fiction away from national to international focus and marketing. These novels may be representative of a trend, yet these writers speak from a wide variety of individual perspectives" (2005, 209).

The perspective adopted by Badami in *Tamarind Mem* is that of the South Asian Canadian diasporic subject. She belongs to the new, twentieth-century metropolitan Indian diaspora that Vijay Mishra refers to as border diaspora, in contrast to the old, nineteenth-century indenture diaspora (that is, displaced groups of labourers bound to their employment by enforced contracts), who settled in places like Fiji, Africa, or the Caribbean islands such as Trinidad (2008, 3, 18). Badami arrived in Canada with her husband and son in 1991 and settled in Calgary, the same city that serves as the Canadian setting of *Tamarind Mem*. Although this novel is obviously not a straightforward autobiography, the life-story of its younger female protagonist called Kamini is similar to that of the author in many other ways too.

Most importantly, Badami's father, like the fictional father figure, was a mechanical engineer working on the railroads, because of which both Badami's and her fictional character Kamini's family frequently had to relocate to new and often distant dwellings, without having the opportunity to be firmly grounded in any of the locations where they were obliged to take up residence. Although home and house are closely related, home is not confined to one house in such a situation, which has significant consequences for both Kamini and her mother Saroja as they struggle in vain to establish a stable, rooted identity. A further analogy between life and fiction here is that author and younger narrator alike arrived in Canada for the same reason as most members of the new border diaspora: they wanted to pursue studies, to create new opportunities for personal fulfilment.

In *Tamarind Mem*, where migration inside and outside India is the main source of tension, the exploration of the locations of the home, be they geographically specific places or imaginary homes of the mind, leads to the discovery of different

ways in which meanings of home and a sense of loyalty to it are constructed. In the following, it will be contended that these meanings often intersect in the parallel narratives recounted by the two protagonists of *Tamarind Mem*, in spite of the fact that they belong to two different generations and reside on two different continents: Saroja, the mother, remains in India, while her daughter Kamini establishes a new life in the diaspora in Canada. When scrutinizing how mother and daughter narrate experiences of their homes and their experiences with their families in these homes, it will be revealed that both women struggle with questions of loyalty and belonging arising from their variously troubled relationships to this special space they call home because it is imbued with memories of the familial and communal past, as well as a sense of isolation and dislocation. It will be argued that understanding the complexity of home is essential not only in a diasporic situation but also during one's internal migration in the country of her birth. Such an approach to the topic of home obviously necessitates the use of diaspora criticism in the analysis to follow, enriched with findings offered by the application of cognitive literary studies.

Although readers may first expect to discover easily identifiable binaries concerning the impacts their migrations make on the two women due to their age differences and spatial arrangements, diaspora discourse facilitates the analysis of the issues involved to reveal similarities in how their contradictory desires for freedom and belonging are expressed and the degrees to which they are fulfilled. As its etymology is customarily explained, diaspora, a word of Greek origin, "derives from the verb *diaspeirein*, a compound of 'dia' (over or through) and 'speirein' (to scatter or sow) …. In all of its various uses, diaspora has something to do with scattering and dispersal" (Kenny 2013, 2). While Kenny's explanation here focuses on the migratory aspect of the diaspora experience, Susheila Nasta emphasizes the idea of settlement and new beginnings as implied in the agricultural metaphor of sowing also present in the term's etymology (2002, 7). The tension between mobility, migration, and travelling, on the one hand, and settlement, stability, housing, and accommodation on the other, inseparable from one another in the concept of diaspora, also appears to be a major theme governing the lives of Badami's characters. Therefore, diaspora discourse is expected to lead to the discovery of unforeseen linkages in the novel. Diaspora's effect of destabilizing accepted notions of home and identity is enhanced in Badami's book by the fact that it is through memories, protean by nature, that much of the plot develops.

By focusing on intergenerational relations, another common theme of diasporic writing – and thereby giving voice to two women rather than just one – Badami

attempts to redress the omission or marginalization of these gendered age-groups in the creative literature of the past. Significantly, it is a mother – daughter relationship she depicts, which means that by presenting the daughter leaving home, she also presents the daughter leaving her mother, whereby the mother and the ancestral home are conjoined. Leaving both Saroja and India behind signifies that Kamini undergoes a process of individuation and identity formation, whose stages can be followed in the long-distance telephone conversations of mother and daughter, together with Kamini's inner monologues and memories in the first part of the novel. In her first-person narrative, she reflects on her present, isolated life in Canada filled with attempts to settle in. But she also expresses a longing for her mother and her country of birth as she recalls the familial past from her childhood to the point of her leaving India. From her memories, readers learn about her early impressions dominated by an angry mother and a gentle father, as she perceived them, along with numerous stories heard from the members of her extended family. Most importantly, the reader is puzzled, as she is, by her mother's mood swings and absences from home.

The second part of the novel is the mother Saroja's also twofold narrative, which likewise alternates between the past and the present, filling in the gaps in her daughter's story. She recalls her life experiences from her youth to the present to an audience first of three and then of four women travelling with her in a Ladies Only compartment of a train after the death of her husband, a journey that allows her to receive and add comments on the past. Dominant among her memories is how she was denied the freedom to choose in the various homes she occupied: in the parental home, she was not given the opportunity to go to university, but was instead entered into an arranged marriage. Subsequently, she finds herself in a dysfunctional family where, as a way out, she starts an affair that ends in tragedy. Her loyalty to her husband and her children is incompatible with the attachment she forms with a lover, which is the cause of her irritated remarks and her strained relationship with her husband. However, while narrating her story, she realizes her own mistakes as well and comes to terms with her painful past, which finally leads to a sense of liberation.

In diasporic writing in general, and in the literature of the South Asian Canadian diaspora in particular, the relationship of the diasporic subject to home, regardless of its specific location in a landscape or a mindscape, and its manifold implications, is a pivotal issue, which plays a significant role in the formation of diasporic communal as well as individual identity. The desire to belong to what one might call a home

of his or her own is more complex than a process of adaptation or a yearning to be accepted on the one hand, and on the other, a search for roots, nostalgia, a wish to remain loyal to the original home, and a hope to return to it or to have a homeland. To explore the intricate nature of this desire on the part of the diasporan, Avtar Brah's work is of the utmost significance. She published her major contributions to diaspora studies in the 1990s, the same decade Badami's novel came out.

Avtar Brah coined the term "homing desire" in contradistinction to a straightforward desire for a homeland (1996, 177). The newly minted term enables the theorization of the complicated position of home and the undermining of the binary of homeland and host society in relation to the contested notions of home and belonging, which contrary notions can lead to exclusions. In Brah's view, diasporans may choose to occupy different subject positions vis-à-vis their home depending on what political statements they want to make by asserting where they feel they belong and what their identity is. That is why "the concept of diaspora refers to *multi-locationality* within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries" (Brah 1996, 194). Brah also introduces the concept of "diaspora space," which she defines as "the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes" (1996, 178). For Brah, the employment of the term critiques fixity and essentialism as diaspora space is

> the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of "us" and "them," are contested. My argument is that diaspora space as a conceptual category is "inhabited," not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of *diaspora space* (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of "staying put" (Brah 1996, 205).

As a result, the notion of home "has to be redefined in the liminal spaces between two or more cultural dwellings" (Zhang 2008, 30). Due to the fluid and unbounded character of diaspora space and the multiple relocations and dislocations of the diasporan, the search for a home in this space "implicates a paradoxical, multilayered dehoming and rehoming process" (Zhang 2008, 31). If the wording of Zhang's observation brings to mind concepts of the *unheimlich* and its widely accepted English equivalent the uncanny, Laurel Ryan evokes the Freudian dichotomy of the homely and the unhomely even more explicitly when she states, "[t]he drive to find and go home presupposes a separation from the familiar and the homely. … There is no

home without a pre-existing dislocation from it. … Paradoxically, 'home' becomes an attempt to reclaim something that never was, to find something that did not exist before it was lost" (2016, 106). It is this search for a home and its meaning that features prominently among the themes of Anita Rau Badami's book *Tamarind Mem*. In this novel of several doublings, recognizing the presence or absence of the homely in the unhomely is of the utmost significance for the protagonists.

The name in the title, *Tamarind Mem*, with all its ominous associations, is bestowed upon Saroja, the mother character, by her servants because her sharp tongue can hurt like the sour-tasting fruit of the tamarind tree. "In my younger days, when I was a Railway wife, the servants called me Tamarind Mem for my acid tongue," remarks Saroja (Badami 1996, 260). Her daughter Kamini is not wholly unlike her mother in this respect. It is Kamini who, leaving her homeland and mother behind, immigrates to Canada, and it is by tracing her story that the author can explore the diasporic consciousness of a new arrival caught in the liminal space between two worlds. Reconstructing the ancestral home and her familial past in India through memories while coping with her sense of displacement in the society of settlement are key thematic features of this novel.

Like a true *Bildungsroman*, Kamini's narrative of her childhood begins, as may be expected, with a birth, but, unconventionally in this case, it is her sister's. The event also prompts reminiscences of Kamini's great-aunt about the birth of Kamini's mother, both events having taken place in the same ancestral home, the house of the protagonist's maternal grandparents in Mandya, southern India. These personal memories are entwined with details of, and comments on, other events from the life of the family and India's history, similarly to what can be observed in another Indian-born migrant writer Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1981). This is how somewhat later the same great-aunt recalls Kamini's birth: "The year you were born, the whole country collapsed," says the aunt, referring to Kamini's birth and the Indo-Chinese war of 1962 (Badami 1996, 14) – a coincidence of personal and national history much like Saleem Sinai's birth in Rushdie's novel occurring at the precise moment of India's independence and partition at midnight, 15 August 1947. Badami openly acknowledged her indebtedness to Rushdie, saying she was part of the tradition that began with Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the tradition she calls "the post-colonial-immigrant school" (BookBrowse). However, unlike Rushdie's book, which foregrounds questions of historiography, Badami's novel examines relationships that women form against the rich texture of life in India, where references to important moments in the history of the country function as

no more than chronological pointers. For Badami, the emphasis clearly shifts from *grand récit* to *petite histoire* or, in plain English, her focus always moves to the personal, the domestic, and the biographical.

Kamini remembers having listened to stories throughout her life, which are thus twice removed from reality as these stories are filtered through the storytellers' memory first and then hers. This dual distortion of narratives of events and descriptions of locations from the ancestral past reinforce a sense of ontological instability undermining any sense of a fixed home or fixed identity. The moments when Kamini's remembered younger self sits on her father's lap to listen to his stories each time he returns to the family home from his journeys for work on the railroads are as precious for her as his presents – if not more so. These tales foster a bonding between father and daughter without either of them deliberately aiming to strengthen their mutual relationship. These stories allow the daughter to enter the public world of the father too, from which the mother, constrained in the narrowly domestic sphere of the home, is excluded. It is also in this manner, from memories turned into stories told by her paternal aunt, that Kamini learns about her father's ancestral home. Kamini never actually gets to see her father's former home: it only exists in tales because the whole village is gone now, probably washed away by the sea. Much like this ancestral village of yore, Kamini's reality is constructed from and invested with meaning by her imagination.

Due to this mixture of fact and fiction, the question of veracity is openly addressed by various characters in the book: memories "are pictures we create in our hearts …. And each of us uses different sticks of chalk to colour them," says one of Kamini's aunts (Badami 1996, 71). "The past changes in the context of the present," remarks Saroja (1996, 254); "Memories were like ghosts, shivery, uncertain, nothing guaranteed, totally not-for-sure," comments Kamini (1996, 73). Kamini in Canada and several people in India ask the same self-reflexive question at various times: the question of whether anything in the world is a fact (1996, 66), which raises the issue of veracity onto a generalized epistemological level and elevates the novel above its immediate concern with growing up as a girl in India. This epistemological uncertainty also relates the book to the postmodern poetics of the 1990s, as well as the destabilized, fluid space of diaspora where identities and homes can be constructed and deconstructed.

Kamini's memories in Canada are often induced by her longing for a home, which, at the time she is first presented in the novel, she still locates in the India of her past. In her attempts to reconstruct this home, her recollections of her childhood

and youth are frequently tinted with nostalgia.[2] This nostalgia is reinforced by her mother's postcards from India, reminding her of what she lacks in Canada. There is one postcard with its sensory reminders, which is more special than the others. On this card Saroja has "rubbed the peel of a ripe Nagpur orange" (Badami 1996, 123) hoping that the smell will not fade by the time it reaches Kamini in Canada. This card conjures up the bright colour of the fruit and fills Kamini's mouth "with the tart juice of a burst orange" (Badami 1996, 124), evoking visual and gustatory memories that contrast sharply with her current Canadian experience and console her in her isolation.

In her diasporic position, Kamini has an emotional need to anchor herself, because in striking contrast to her life in India bustling with people and their stories, and possessing an abundance of smells and tastes, there is hardly any human presence in Kamini's Canada, which brings into sharp focus her alienation in the new country. The lack of pleasant olfactory and gustatory experiences in a predominantly cold Canada further emphasizes her estrangement from her new place of residence. To overcome this alienation resulting from her displacement, she relies on some precious visual memories of the home environment, because the emergence of its features in her Canadian setting makes the latter appear more familiar, thus making it easier for her to relate to it. In other words, in this case the effect of nostalgia inscribed in the term's etymology and its German-English equivalents is in a way reversed. Rather than inducing pain by reminding the subject of an absence, the evocation of memories related to the homeland alleviates the distress caused by the radical unfamiliarity of the new environment by imaginatively comparing it to the left-behind familiar. Nostalgic pain is thus turned into its opposite. The surfacing of such memories also allows Kamini not to have to choose between loyalties to either home.

The above ambiguity of *nostalgia* is in a way similar to the equivocal signification of the term *unheimlich*, which can mean both unfamiliar and not-hidden; that is, unveiled or familiar. The English translation of the German *unheimlich* reveals the problems connected with its multiple meanings hinted at above. Unhomely is the literal English translation of the German word, drawing attention to its negation of homely or familiar as one meaning of *heimlich*. It also implies "the awkward but

[2] As Walder explains, "[t]he word 'nostalgia' comes from two Greek roots, though it did not originate in Greece …. From 'nostos' – returning home, and 'algia' – pain or longing, the term was created by Johannes Hofer, in a 1688 medical dissertation for the University of Basel" (2011, 8). The Latinized Greek compound is a mirror translation of *Heimweh* in Hofer's native German, and so is the term's English equivalent home*sickness*, a semantic feature whose significance is referred to regarding Kamini's mental and emotional state ("Homesickness"). In its later interpretation, however, nostalgia "becomes a state of mind rather than a physical condition" (Walder 2011, 8).

suggestive 'un-housedness'" (Huddart 2006, 81). However, another meaning of *heimlich* can be translated as hidden, furtive, or secret, which is thus brought into play by *unheimlich*, too. This plurality in the *unheimlich* is further emphasized by Masschelein, who regards uncertainty, ambivalence and doubling as its core elements.[3]

Canada emerges as the *unheimlich* from Kamini's list of impressions at the beginning of the novel: she is enveloped in silence, freezing cold and thick snow in her present, unfamiliar place of residence. Her initial inability to emotionally bond with her new environment makes her blind not only to the geographical but also to the cultural similarities of the two places; most of the time she fails to recognize the familiar in the unfamiliar. In this particular case, the cultural plurality of Canada remains unnoticed by her, although she already became acquainted with an analogous phenomenon in her childhood in India due to her mixed education. Its informal part was made up of the local lore and the family sagas, while the formal part was provided in Christian convent schools. But Kamini is so preoccupied with coming to terms with her past that she does not yet notice that the culture of her mother country and that of her country of settlement are both hybridized (Pirbhai 2004, 391). Both countries are aptly labelled as multi-cultural and postcolonial.

Ironically, it is also the features of the home Kamini left behind in India, as well as her childhood experiences, that, by resurfacing through memory, make it possible for her to establish a connection with the new, alien land. The curious doubling of observations provides for an "oscillation between the strange and the familiar" (Crane and Mohanram 2000, x), not unlike the *unheimlich*, and facilitates her overcoming the sense of dislocation she is daily faced with. Gradually, Kamini provides a growing number of sensory details of the Canadian landscape, in which she recognizes some of the qualities of the Indian environment, which signals that Canada is becoming her new home because, as Mallett posits, "[b]eing at home involves the 'immersion of a self in a locality'. The locality 'intrudes' upon the self through the senses, defining 'what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers.' Equally the self penetrates the locality" (2004, 79).

Consequently, Kamini can make connections by relating some of her sensory experiences of her place of birth to those in the strange new country of settlement.

[3] Masschelein explores the problem of the *unheimlich* from the point of view of psychoanalysis to explain why there is no negation or contradiction involved here even when the *unheimlich* is translated as the uncanny: "The prefix 'un' is not merely a linguistic negation, it is the 'token of repression.' This entails that the uncanny is marked by the unconscious that does not know negation or contradiction; even when something is negated, it still remains present in the unconscious. According to this reasoning, the contradiction resulting from negation is not exclusive or binary: denying something at the same time conjures it up. Hence, it is perfectly possible that something can be familiar and unfamiliar at the same time" (2011, 8). In this argument it follows that the uncanny operates as a *mise en abyme* and affirms plurality.

For example, in the shape of the distant mountains, which must be, though unnamed, the Rockies around Calgary, she seems to visually recognize the Eastern Ghats, the mountains along the eastern coast of India. Later, the view of sprouting dandelions in Canada brings to mind the *besharam* plants that decorated her family's Ratnapura home (Badami 1996, 137). The images seen and the images remembered merge inseparably in the manner of a palimpsest, which marks the beginning of the complex process of adaptation to the new conditions and allows dehoming to be coupled with rehoming. Realizations like these in Kamini's life point to her immersion "in trans-national memories and histories newly located in a global and diasporic moment of exile and displacement" (Molnár 2013, 26–27).

Badami's experimentation with memory in her novel does not merely locate her in diaspora studies – the episodes depicted above also lend themselves to analysis in the framework of cognitive literary studies. Kamini, her narrator-protagonist, experiences some memory events through visual sensory stimuli similarly to Des Esseintes, the protagonist of J.-K. Huysmans' *A Rebours* or *Against the Grain* (cf. Nalbantian 2003, 56–58).[4] In her nostalgic, emotionally charged remembrance of a lost home and a lost past, food, in the form of an orange as seen above, also becomes "a vehicle for recollections of childhood and family" (Holtzman 2006, 366). While the gustatory stimulus does not make her re-experience her emotional past, it does create a forceful desire for her to imaginatively return to a home where she once belonged.

Yet Badami's novel is not without some small signs of rehoming, signs indicative of the breaking of the shell of Kamini's isolation, of her entering the fluid space of diaspora and the beginning of flux in her Indian identity. Noteworthy in this respect is the episode in which Kamini, while baby-sitting for her neighbour in Calgary, spreads out her mother's postcards from India to Claire, the small child of her neighbour. Together, she and the child "cook up wild adventures for the travelling mommy" (Badami 1996, 58). She also entertains the girl with stories about her stay-at-home relatives and their servants, reviving her inherited tradition of oral storytelling, and thus combining the atmosphere of her own childhood with that of the foreign land.

Though the few instances like the ones cited above suggest the possibility of rehoming for Kamini in the sense that she is able to construct a new home for

[4] The most famous sensory, albeit gustatory, experience triggering recollections of the past can be found, however, at the beginning of Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way*, when the narrator Marcel tastes his little madeleine and starts to remember his time spent in Combray. Additionally, no less prominent yet less well-known are the similar "key memory events represented in Huxley's novel [*Eyeless in Gaza*]" with the difference that they "are almost invariably focussed on smells" (Farkas 2021, 71).

herself in Canada without fully separating herself from the old home, it is her sense of dislocation, loneliness, and isolation both from the ancestral home and the host country, features of the expatriate experience (Kanaganayakam 1996, 205-6), that prevail as recurrent motifs in the narrative of Kamini's life. She is still predominantly concerned with coming to terms with her past, especially her mother's negligent behaviour when her, Kamini's, father is away on the railway lines. She notices that her mother does not pay attention to her servants' work and even disappears one night from their shared bed. It is only from Saroja's subsequent narrative that the reader learns of the reason for the mother's unusual behaviour, which is her affair with their mixed-blood, low-class mechanic, an act signalling her desperate attempt at a passionate relationship.

From Saroja's narrative it transpires that, in accordance with the age-old patriarchal traditions prescribing roles for women on the subcontinent, her family gave her away in an arranged marriage, disregarding her exceptional intellectual abilities and her powerful ambitions to become a doctor. After her marriage, Saroja is forced to live in alien houses wherever her husband is transferred by the railway authorities and has to set up a new home again and again. The home is constantly shifting, and her husband, the mainstay of the household, is frequently absent for long periods of time, so contrary to traditional expectations, the place is far from stable, and it does not provide emotional security for her either. If anything, she feels trapped in it, confined to this domestic area as though it were a cage. Paradoxically, although her home keeps shifting in terms of geographical locations, it always remains the same, fixed, bounded space for her because of the traditional societal rules set for the different genders that she is obliged to obey no matter where her current home happens to be located. After getting married, she has no choice but to loyally follow her husband, which means that her identity is determined by being a railway officer's wife; that is why the flexibility and fluidity of identity associated with migration and thought to offer a sense of freedom are denied Saroja. When she attempts to find some pleasure in the fact that her husband's work takes him to a variety of regions working on the railway lines and Saroja expresses her wish to join him, her wish is overridden by her husband. She is excluded from his public life since he maintains separate spheres for the two of them. Ironically, as a result, Saroja is dehomed, finding it increasingly hard to stay loyal to her husband and family, as she feels displaced in the geographically shifting homes in her very homeland, in a manner similar to her daughter in Canada, no matter how different the respective causes are.

Due to the ever-changing locations of her home, the mother, just like her daughter, has problems focusing her memories and, again like Kamini, she chooses to organize these recollections around houses she and her family once occupied, without following a strictly chronological order. The lack of such an order and the blending of stories into one another can be related to the traditional, often circular structure of Indian orature, permitting diversions in the manner explicated by Michael Gorra in his description of the similarly non-linear structure of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1997, 129). Saroja is quite aware of the difficulties involved in organizing her experience when she openly addresses the problem in a postmodern self-reflexive mode: "[W]hat is one to do with a life like mine, scrawled all over the country, little trails here and there, moving, moving all the time, and never in one fixed direction? … It is as if I live within a series of dreams. As long as the dream holds I know where I am. I try to fix myself in one place, a single context. Perhaps, in my childhood home …" (Badami 1996, 155–6). Consequently, loneliness and rootlessness are not the sources of her daughter Kamini's anxiety exclusively while occupying diaspora space, but Saroja's as well, deriving from her existence as a "Railway memsahib" (Badami 1996, 155) with an uprooted subjectivity, whose life is nothing but a series of disjointed events. The itinerant life imposed upon her determines her state of mind. It is best described using the vocabulary of diaspora discourse, which abounds in expressions related to the trauma of involuntary migration, as evident in the experience of a number of diasporic groups such as the Jews, the enslaved Africans, or the Armenians throughout history.

The novel ends with both narrator-protagonists' defiant self-assertion. After her husband's death and her daughters' departure to live their own lives in the United States and in Canada, respectively, Saroja rebelliously sets out to travel by train, adopting the male privilege of her husband, which she, as his wife, was denied. Interestingly, it is when she escapes from her apartment, abandons her fixed home, and is constantly on the move that she becomes independent and gains agency, because now she travels of her own volition. Ryan claims that "[s]he rejects the homes she was forced into as a railway wife in favour of a deliberately mobile existence" (2016, 115). While travelling and thus fulfilling a lifelong dream of hers, Saroja deliberately violates the set of rules established by her husband for such occasions: she does not wipe the windows clean or keep other passengers out of her compartment.

Although she surrenders the notion of a stable home and lives the life of a nomad, she is not without companionship, which is a more essential element of what a home

is for her. Her loneliness is alleviated, if only temporarily, as she tells her life-story to an attentive audience of women. Here storytelling once again appears as a means of asserting one's identity. She also admits that although it is painful for her to live without her daughters, they have to leave and make their own lives and "build [their] own memories" (Badami 1996, 263). It is also Saroja who "avoids surveillance of her daughter [Kamini] by symbolically breaking the umbilical cord that ties them together (in the form of a telephone cord), to be, at last, a free woman" (Cuder-Domínguez et al. 2011, 8). Saroja's choice of a migrant life in India provides her with the much-desired fluid and unbounded space; that expansive and unbounded space – not unlike Canada for her daughter – is what stands for her home, where she feels she belongs and where she can find personal fulfilment.

Without admitting it, Kamini turns out to be just as sharp-tongued and obstinate as her mother has always been. She becomes the one who fulfils her own and her mother's dream to study, to become a scientist, a wish Saroja was denied by her family on the basis of her gender. However, these instances of self-assertion occur when Saroja is at the end of her life, while Kamini can take advantage of the new possibilities offered by her new home not only because it is in a different country but also because with time passing the choices of this new generation of women have multiplied. Travelling within one's own spacious country or outside its borders also offers mobility to both mother and daughter, which eventually becomes a liberating experience for the two women. How successful Kamini will become is left undecided, though. However, the instances of rehoming mentioned earlier suggest a willingness to adapt to the new environment where it appears possible to create a home combining features of her familial past and her host country without having to divide her loyalties.

By focusing on South Asian women's attempts to create an accommodating home in the diaspora in Canada and in the ancestral home in the Indian subcontinent, and by drawing attention to their inseparable interconnectedness despite the disruptions transcontinental migration causes in their lives together, with the concomitant dilemmas of belonging and loyalty, *Tamarind Mem* anticipates several of the author's concerns in her later novels. This chapter has also demonstrated the value of Khachig Tölölyan's contention that "diaspora' is merely one of several kinds of dispersion so that, in a curious reversal, it has become a synecdoche, the part – diaspora – standing for the whole" (2019, 23). That diaspora can be seen in a *pars-pro-toto* relationship to the more general phenomenon of transnationality is largely due to the significant expansion of the conceptual horizons of both diaspora and diaspora discourse. As

a result, they have become appropriate means of investigating different migratory experiences including those of the two narrator-protagonists in Badami's *Tamarind Mem*. While exploring questions of loyalty in the context of dehoming and rehoming as part of the two main characters' experience on the move, it is possible to identify unexpected intersections rather than irreconcilable binaries in this novel where two lives and two countries are juxtaposed. The discussion of the ramifications of the concept of the home also allows new forms of intersections with various disciplines to be made beyond and apart from the abovementioned diaspora studies indicated by the fact that cognitive literary studies can also assist in the exploration of sensuous nostalgia in Badami's novel. As this paper has sought to demonstrate, these intersections offer new insights and interventions to construct and reconstruct the idea of being loyal to one's home.

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