



From Bengal to Scotland: Hybridity, Borders and National Narratives

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I first encountered *Tartan and Turban* (Fraser 2004) in an Edinburgh bookshop in 2006. At that time, I was intrigued by concepts of hybridity and liminality and was considering new research on intercultural writers from an anthropological perspective. This resulted in *Narratives of Place, Belonging and Language* (Nic Craith 2012) and *The Vanishing World of the Islandman* (Nic Craith 2020). *Tartan and Turban* did not feature in those volumes, which focused solely on memoir as a resource. However, it is now time for me to recapture my excitement at that first glimpse of Bashabi Fraser's volume of poetry. Moreover, since that time I have come to know Fraser as an academic and friend and have attended her poetry readings and book launches.

A contemporary poet, Bashabi was born in West Bengal in India. Some of her childhood was spent in London since her academic parents were geographers, doing research at the London School of Economics. However, they returned to India while Bashabi was still a child and she was sent to a Catholic boarding school in the Himalayas. An ambitious girl, Fraser subsequently qualified with a PhD in English literature. Some

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C. Fagerlid, M. A. Tisdell (eds.), *A Literary Anthropology of Migration and Belonging*, Palgrave Studies in Literary Anthropology,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34796-3_7

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of her doctoral research was conducted in Scotland. Fraser began her professional academic career in India but moved to Scotland to marry Neil Fraser, an academic at the University of Edinburgh. Until recently, Bashabi was professor at Napier University in Edinburgh and is now Professor Emerita there, as well as Director of the Scots Centre for Tagore Studies. As a Royal Literary Fund Fellow, she also enjoys an academic writing position at the University of Dundee. As well as publishing poems in other anthologies, Fraser has already published six volumes of poetry which reflect both her personal journey as well as an emerging sense of identity.

Bashabi Fraser is a “New Scot”—a term that is commonly used to describe post-1945 immigrants in Scotland. As a Bengali, her country was previously part of the British Empire. This chapter appraises Fraser’s exploration of her self-identity as a “new Scot” with roots in India. It asks how her collections of poetry creatively span the world she has left and the country in which she now lives. The analysis queries how this “new voice” represents the ongoing relationship between Scotland and Bengal—a relationship which has historical as well as contemporary significance (Bryant 1985; Buettner 2002). It has evolved over centuries from the key role played by the East India Company as an employer of Scots in India through to the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Six Scottish governor-generals and viceroys ruled India during this time. Scottish missionaries and advocates also played a highly influential role there. Scots were highly significant in the development of tea and jute industries in India (Sharma 2011; Stewart 1998). This contribution explores the narratives of hybridity, displacement and belonging that are represented in Fraser’s poetry collections and their relevance for the process of migration more widely. The chapter employs theoretical perspective of postcolonialism and draws on Fraser’s transnational positioning in her personal narratives as well as her academic work on Scottish Orientalism.

POETRY AND LITERARY ANTHROPOLOGY

Since the relationship between literature and anthropology more widely is the focus of this volume and the series as a whole, the debate will not be rehearsed here. Suffice it to say that the debate has many strands—(1) whether the works of anthropologists can be considered literary pieces and (2) whether literature is an appropriate resource for anthropologists. The focus here is on the second strand—with reference to poetry in particular. Poetry already has visibility in the field of anthropology. A number

of ethnologists are themselves poets and have expressed their anthropological concerns in verse—(i.e. strand 1). Well-known ethnographic poets include Michael Jackson (1989), Dell Hymes (1993), Stanley Diamond (1986), Renato Rosaldo (2001, 2006), Nathaniel Tarn (2002) and Natasha Trethewey (2006). The Society for Humanistic Anthropology routinely publishes ethnographic poetry and fiction in its journal.

In composing poetry, anthropologists are following in the spirit of Clifford (1986), who argued that anthropological texts are not simply accounts of fieldwork but works of art, even literature. This literary anthropology debate is commonly referred to as the “writing culture” debate which challenged the notion of anthropologists as “objective scientists”. A positivistic line of reasoning presupposed an “objective truth” which was “found” by anthropologists during their scientific fieldwork. The classic format for the presentation of this scientific research was the research monograph or a journal essay which followed rigid guidelines and portrayed the anthropologist as a neutral channel of transmission.

In a challenge to this perspective, Geertz (1973, p. 16) argued that all anthropological writings are fictions in that however objective the intention, the anthropological account is always interpreted from a human perspective. This was not to imply that such accounts were false. Clifford (1986) made a useful distinction between fiction and falsehood. Academics in the field of anthropology were not distorting the “truth”, but they were interpreting it (Nic Craith 2012). From Clifford’s perspective, anthropologists were presenting “partial truths”. This line of reasoning has been supported by literary anthropologists such as Dawson, Hockey and James, (1997) and Rapport (1997) who dismiss the representation of fact and fiction as opposite ends of a spectrum. Anthropologists and poets alike are presenting accounts in a form that “rings true” from a human perspective (see Fassin 2014; Nic Craith and Kockel 2014; Fagerlid and Tisdal, this volume). This is in keeping with Rapport’s argument (Rapport 2014, p. 247) that “reality is not other than the stories told about it”.

It is not an easy matter for anthropologists to describe the world in front of us. Doty (2010, p. 1) says: “It sounds like a simple thing to say what you see. But try to find words for the shades of a mottled sassafras leaf, or the reflectivity of a bay on an August morning, or the very beginnings of desire stirring in the gaze of someone looking right into your eyes, and it immediately becomes clear that all we see is slippery, nuanced, elusive.” More than anyone else, poets think carefully about the words they choose to describe reality. They are wordsmiths who perceive the world from a unique perspective, They understand that “[p]oetry is much

bigger than the poem. There is poetry to be found in all human endeavours to understand the world” (Behar 2008, p. 58).

Poetry imparts information in a manner that is often laden with emotions. Poets present their “truths” in poetic form. Verses are “truth stories” in a particular textual format. Poetry reflects many truths about the reality of everyday life and “poetry in this sense is at once ‘data’ for analysis and itself a body of generalisations about life that are at least as subtle as what the social scientist normally comes up with” (Friedrich 1996, p. 39). Poems can be “brimming with ambiguity, diffusion and personality” (Friedrich 1996, p. 39). It may be that the emotional nature of poetry renders it a particularly useful resource for anthropologists. Like culture, the nature of poetry is fluid and allusive. The way it is composed and received involves the emotions, cultural understanding and affect. From that perspective, poetry has much to teach anthropology.

Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor (2010, p. 4) reinforce this point with the argument that social realist poets “addressing cultural borderlands and tension through verse, have much to teach anthropologists about how poetry can illuminate and enhance our understanding of cultural and historical practices”. They point out interesting parallels between the rise of experimental writing in the field of anthropology and the decline of rigid orthodoxies. They write: “With the post-modern critique of ethnography, classic terms such as ‘pattern’ or ‘structure’ have given way to ‘disjunctive’ nouns like *pastiche* or *mélange*” (Maynard and Cahnmann-Taylor 2010, p. 4). In writing poetry, anthropologists are blurring the boundaries between personal voice and scientific truth—and de-privileging the traditional scientific monograph.

This chapter focuses not so much on whether poetry is a credible form of “raw data” for anthropology but what form of “raw data” it provides for anthropologists. In raising this question, one immediately hears two issues of concern. The first of these is the charge of “armchair anthropology” (Nic Craith 2012). The anthropologist has read literature rather than actually engaging with the field. However, this ignores the fact that most literary anthropologists supplement the reading of the text with participant observation. Nigel Rapport’s work on E. M. Foster (Rapport 1994) is a classic example of the “zig-zag methodology” between text and fieldwork. Moreover, as Ulf Hannerz (2016, p. 4) has pointed out, some of the best anthropologists were not fieldworkers in the traditional sense. Instead, they harnessed literature for their insights.

In this chapter, I am responding from an anthropological perspective to poetry composed by Bashabi Fraser. While my methodology has involved close reading of her six poetry collections (i.e. armchair anthropology), I have interviewed the author and attended many of her public readings and book launches—a technique which has been described by Ortner (2010) as “interface ethnography”. I have participated in Scottish-Asian cultural festivals in Scotland. The chapter has required physical engagement with the sites referenced in her poetry. In other words, it has involved both “armchair anthropology” and practical fieldwork. The crux of the matter in relation to poetry as a resource for anthropology is not just the fact that it is a literary source but more the type of literature that is encountered. Rather than social realist literature, the anthropologist is dealing with poetry—a text that can be personal, emotional or “value-laden”. This is the value of poetry as raw data. It offers personal perspectives on reality. It captures the emotional as well as the rational.

HYBRIDITY AND COSMOPOLITANISM

In her early poetry collections (Fraser 1997, 2004), Fraser is described as a Scottish-Bengali poet, which stresses an identity that is part-Scottish and part-Indian, reflecting the later and earlier phases of her life retrospectively. Her first collection of poetry (Fraser 1997) reflects on some of the different places in which Bashabi has lived. Titles of poems in this collection include “A Modern Deluge (Monsoon in Calcutta)”, “India”, “As a Little Indian Girl Listened” and “With Best Wishes, from Edinburgh”. There is a strong sense of Indian identity in these poems. In: “Take the Blue, but Leave the Red and White for Me”, the poet muses (Fraser 1997, p. 34):

So Ganga is our mother
Who eases her babe’s thirst
And we know that Indra answers prayers
When heaven in rage bursts.

There is a sense of Scottishness in some other poems, as noted in “Trekking in the Scottish Highlands” when the poet reflects on (Fraser 1997, p. 58):

Beating down the bracken beneath our feet
We tore glossy branches of holly
Dripping with the wetness of winter, promising snow...

Overall, the Indian identity dominates in this volume and there is no sense of fusion (for me at least) in this early collection.

The “Tartan and Turban” section in her second collection of poetry displays a sense of belonging that is more obviously hybrid than that in her earlier compositions. Bhabha (2012, p. 2) describes hybrid identities as “‘in-between’ spaces” which “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself”. From this perspective, Fraser is living in an in-between or liminal space that is not fully Scottish, not fully Indian but somehow a blend of both. In the poem bearing that title she writes (Fraser 2004, p. 76):

Give me your tartan
And I will imbue it with
The spirit of my race.

Another poem revels in the Paisley shawl—an iconic symbol of Scotland, which has been “brought from the Kashmir valley” (Fraser 2004, p. 77). Referring to Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland, the poet writes (Fraser 2004, p. 78):

Skyscrapers have marred its peripheral skyline –
But the straining streets remind me of Darjeeling

In Scotland, the poet pines for India and in India, she misses Scotland (Fraser 2004, 91):

I came back to Scotland
And longed for the monsoons
The flocks flying homewards
In the deep sunset glow.

In Fraser’s later collections, she is described as a “transnational writer whose writing traverses continents, bringing the East and West together in a blend that is distinctively her own” (blurb on back cover, Fraser 2017). This description signals a more cosmopolitan sense of belonging—a concept which has been much debated in recent years. Bhabha (2012, p. xiv) argues: “There is a kind of global cosmopolitanism, widely influential now, that configures the planet as a concentric world of national societies

extending to global villages. It is a cosmopolitanism of relative prosperity and privilege founded on ideas of progress that are complicit with neo-liberal forms of governance, and free-market forces of competition.” This is a form of cosmopolitanism that Bhabha (2012, p. xiv) rejects in favor of “vernacular cosmopolitanism”—a concept belonging to a family of ideas, “all of which combine in similar fashion apparently contradictory opposites: cosmopolitan patriotism, rooted cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan ethnicity, working-class cosmopolitanism, discrepant cosmopolitanism” (Werbner 2006, p. 496).

Given the extent of her travel, it is hardly surprising that Fraser’s identity is fluid—which is in line with Deleuze’s conceptualization of identity as being in motion. In recent years, postmodern thinkers have been keen to stress the fluidity of identity. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), identity is always coming into being or “becoming”. Sutton and Martin-Jones (2008) suggest that this stance places Deleuze in opposition to other philosophers who focus on “being” rather than “coming-into-being”—hence the rhizomatic image. “It is the simple fact of becoming that is behind the creation of the rhizome, since the rhizome exploits and enjoys continual change and connection, rather than seeking to fix or prevent it” (Sutton Damian and Martin-Jones 2008, no page number).

The rhizomatic nature of the migrant process is reflected in Fraser’s third collection *Ragas and Reels* (Fraser 2012). This volume gives insights not just into Fraser as a cosmopolitan in Scotland but also into the contemporary, wider South Asian community in Scotland and its intercultural and rhizomatic networks in the fields of medicine, education, business and so on. We meet a British Pakistani couple celebrating their wedding in South Asian style at Stornoway and the two young boys tucking into a Scottish breakfast before a Sikh wedding. We encounter the four Sikhs who have built business empires in Scotland as well as an Indian businessman who owns the Scottish traditional whiskey Jura business. The collection celebrates South Asian landmarks in Scotland such as the Madras College at St Andrews, Glasgow’s central Mosque and the Hindu Temple in Leith. Each poem in this collection is linked to a photograph by Herman Rodrigues (see Rodrigues 2012).

“Ragas and Reels”, the poem which gives the title to the collection features a dance company called India Alba. (*Alba* is the Scottish-Gaelic word for Scotland). The company was established in Edinburgh by a Bharatanatyam dancer, and the poem itself captures Indian dance to Scottish music in a manner which appeals to the imagination. The reader can visualize the Scottish-Indian dancers (Fraser 2012, p. 61):

The rollicking rhythm from Highland Springs
 Matched with classical Indian bells
 Lifts the mist from Burn and Brae

“The Laird of Lesmahagow” pays tribute to Baron Singh, who arrived in Scotland in 1987 and bought an island, which he named Burns Island in tribute to Scotland’s national poet. The image of a turbaned Scottish laird is particularly striking (Fraser 2012, p. 41):

The Laird lives and walks today
 With his dog along the bay
 A turbaned Sikh with his scabbard
 A warrior and a Scottish laird
 His clan tartan in green and blue
 Reflects a shared history now renewed.

Food is an important element in any migratory experience and can be a powerful evocator of homes both past and present. In one of the few poems written in Scots (a contested language in Scotland; see Nic Craith 2000), Fraser celebrates fusion Indian-Scottish cuisine. In “Suruchi for Guid Taste”, for example, she refers to the Scottish-Indian fusion cuisine which is presented in the Suruchi restaurant which was originally established by a Bangladeshi entrepreneur. Our taste buds can savor the vegetarian haggis and salmon tikka!! (Fraser 2012, p. 73):

For a guid taste o’ Scotland wi’ Indian sterter
 There’s vegetarian haggis in gram floer batter,
 Salmon tikka grillit wi spice tae flavour
 An skewer kebeb, in a braw feast tae savour.

This volume shows a high level of political awareness on a global scale and draws richly on Indian mythology. In all these collections, Fraser is at once both local and rooted as well as translocal and transcendent. Werbner (2006, p. 496) points to Appiah’s “cosmopolitan patriotism” (1998), which is entirely rooted but set in a context that is open to diversity and ethnic difference (a perspective that is mildly reminiscent of the Scottish Patrick Geddes’s motto: “think global, act local”) (Stephen 2015).

Ulf Hannerz (1992, p. 252) has distinguished between different types of cosmopolitans who are happy to engage with difference. Local cosmopolitans are (mainly) representative of specific territorial cultures. These

are contrasted with travelers who share “structures of meaning carried by social networks” (1992, pp. 248–9). Hannerz differentiates between those who travel in their professional capacity (such as journalists or engineers) and migrants or refugees who have little option but to engage with others (usually the host culture).

Clifford (1992, pp. 106–7) has reflected on the notion of cosmopolitanism and differentiates between elite cosmopolitans and those who are less privileged such as companion servants, guides and migrant laborers. He argues that these different types may coexist at any one time. Fraser’s cosmopolitanism is evidently that of a well-educated, articulate lady who moved for love—leaving behind a secure academic position in India for a new life in Scotland. Her poetry (in my view) expresses a minority perspective in that it reflects on the South Asian experience in Scotland. However, it is not a subaltern voice. Instead, it is a strong, distinctive female voice that speaks to the public in voice that is well-formed and articulate and in the language of the “host” nation.

BORDERS AND DISPLACEMENT

With reference to Salman Rushdie’s (1981) novel *Midnight’s Children*, which deals with India’s transition from British colonialism to independence and the subsequent partition of British India, Bashabi describes herself as a “post-midnight child”. She comes from a family that was displaced by the partition of Bengal in 1947 which was an integral part of the subdivision of India. The division was along religious lines. Hindu West Bengal was pronounced a state of India, while the Muslim east side became a province of Pakistan. Bashabi’s nation was divided (see Fraser 2008) and her family was “the Other in a divided nation” (Fraser 2004). Indian partition is strongly contemplated in “Ajodhya”. The metaphor of slicing India powerfully captures the hurt of partition as voiced by Gandhi as well as the devastation of the destruction of a mosque in the city of Ajodhya (Fraser 1997, p. 39):

So if you have to slice this woman India
You will have to do so, right down every village.
And they shot him [Gandhi], and our heritage,
Then and again on December 6th, 1992.

Borders and boundaries feature in many of Fraser’s poems. In a poem entitled “Tartan and Turban” the poet captures in poetic form the “Othering” process that is central to partition. One cannot draw a border

around any group without simultaneously engaging in a process of inclusion/exclusion. The final line captures the process of social construction that inevitably occurs when a new border is established (Fraser 2004, p. 45):

To demarcate the style between
 One group of characters and
 Another, to prove that we are
 Different – central or peripheral.

In a poem entitled “This Land of Mine”, the poet muses on different ways of belonging to a territory. This is expressed in the form of what I call “a mirror image” (Fraser 2004, p. 49):

This land is mine
 For I was born here
 This land is yours
 for you have made it home.

In “Sea Sound”, the poet reflects on migrant experiences of commonalities and differences between the land of birth and the new home (Fraser 2004, p. 55):

Why, I wonder
 Are my two worlds
 So different?
 A cold sea under a light sky
 And a warm sea underneath a night sky –
 One stops me at its brink
 The other lets me dive and sink.

At Sunday service, a Scottish lady asks the poet where she is from. When Bashabi responds that she lives locally in Edinburgh, the Scottish lady persists and asks again where she is really from. Bashabi’s daughter is not happy with her mother’s response. In the last two lines, Fraser provides a fascinating insight into the difference in attitude between first- and second-generation migrants (see Fagerlid, this volume) (Fraser 2004, p. 92):

In my voice as I said “from India”
 Which reassured her; but sparks appeared
 In my daughter’s eyes – dark and protesting
 Drowning my explanation, as they explicitly affirmed,
 That she was from *here* and not just there.

The pain of partition comes through strongly in *Letters to My Mother* (2015b), Bashabi’s fifth volume of poetry. Fraser says of her mother: “She came from a generation of Bengali women who found themselves displaced by the Indian Partition. Her family had to leave all their property behind” (Fraser 2015b, 10). The theme of displacement comes through in many of these poems. In a poem entitled “In London Where You Were”, Fraser addresses her mother in the following terms. Her poetic lines capture the cyclical (and sometimes ironic) nature of migration (Fraser 2015b, p. 25):

Your granddaughter is now a Londoner
 Just as you were half a century ago, my Ma

The nature of return migration is further rehearsed in a poem entitled “A Confluence”. To her mother Fraser notes (Fraser 2015b, p. 29):

Your knowledge had the breadth of the Ganga
 Your serenity in the face of my frustration, mirrored
 Your pragmatic calm of Tay on reflective days.

This is mirrored in the experience of her own daughter—her mother’s granddaughter. In poetic verse, Fraser captures her daughter’s transcendence of both Scottishness and Indian-ness in giving Scottish voice to Indian vocabulary (Fraser 2015b, p. 29):

As your granddaughter picked up the tone
 Of her Scottish comfort zone, and gave voice
 To Tay’s meditative volubility.

The absurdity of borders is captured in verse in many poems in *The Homing Bird*, Fraser’s most recent volume. The image of a knife “slicing” water is particularly evocative (Fraser 2017, p. 16):

This border that cuts like a knife
 Through the waters of our life
 Slicing fluid rivers with
 The absurdity of a new myth
 That denies centuries
 Of friendships and families.

The same wall that offers security to one person is a threat to another. The poetic image of wallers cementing fear is particularly resonant in contemporary times (Fraser 2017, p. 18):

So while walls shut out
 Suicide bombers, harvesters, employees
 Of the starving free, they shut in
 The waller who cements fear
 In brick and stone, in suspicion born,
 Of segregation that grows
 Without association with the Other –
 The unknown face of foe.

The Homing Bird (Fraser 2017) references the “home” cities of Edinburgh and Kolkata and displays the fluidity of relationships that migrants have with their different homes. In part 1, “Kolkata”, the poet queries (Fraser 2017, p. 5):

Kolkata do you miss me?

While in part 2, “Edinburgh”, the poet asks (Fraser 2017, 14):

Will you mistake me for a visitor?

The poet notes the change of pace as she moves from one city to another and evokes the emotions that accompany migrants on their physical journey from one location to another (Fraser 2017, p. 12).

So my pace has changed as I embrace
 Edinburgh, exchanging tropical abandon
 For temperate caution, adjusting my lens
 From streets that sagged with the weight of a populace
 To wonder where the people have all gone
 In Edinburgh.

REFRAMING SCOTLAND'S PEDAGOGICAL NATIONAL NARRATIVE

Homi Bhabha (2012, 145) suggests that every nation has its own pedagogical (or linear) narrative. He defines this as a narrative which identifies a fixed point of origin and traces a continuous history to the present day. He describes this narrative as “pedagogical” since it is used to legitimize the nation as a unit (or family) of people. The narrative is the story of the tribe from past to present and from the present into the future and can also be related to Anderson’s (1983) concept of an “imagined community”. Bhabha argues that pedagogical narratives are shaped by a “continuist, accumulative temporality” (Bhabha 2012, p. 145).

The reframing of Scotland’s linear narrative is evident in much of Fraser’s poetry but is especially prominent in *From the Ganga to the Tay* (Fraser 2009a). This is an epic poem of 2,050 lines. This composition consists of a dialogue between the Indian river Ganga and the Scottish river Tay. The poem is beautifully presented and the lines of poetry are flowing like a river. This epic poem adds a historic layer to Bashabi’s fused Scottish-Indian identity. It displays a strong historic consciousness as it traces the growth of civilization in both Scotland and India. Lines in this poem point to common shared experiences in both countries. It illustrates that although migrants may move from one geographical location to another, the country from which they departed may have encountered very similar historical experiences to the one in which they arrive. The geography changes but the collective memory has much in common. In other words, nothing is left behind. In this instance, the Indian river Ganga, for example, “speaks” of famine years in India (Fraser 2009a, p. 36):

As famine hit
my lower course
where bumper crops
of rice stood
and they were felled
swiftly, deftly reaped,
and sowed
in stores –
while millions wept
and millions walked
and millions groaned
and died unmourned, – of hunger and fatigue
on my fertile shores.

The Tay “responds” with a similar, albeit less harrowing, Scottish experience (Fraser 2009a, pp. 36–7):

I have not witnessed
 famine like you
 but I have seen
 my sons, who knew
 the sparseness of the Highlands,
 leave their home
 to seek abroad
 the wealth their land
 could not afford.
 The Highland Clearances
 drove them seeking
 sustenance elsewhere.

As well as famine and the highland clearances, a key feature of Scotland’s national narrative has been the Scottish Enlightenment (McFayden and Nic Craith 2020). The eighteenth century was a period of rich intellectual endeavor in Scotland which emphasized the ability of every individual to think for himself or herself (Davie 1961). Scotland made a distinctive contribution to the Enlightenment and shaped, for example, the impulse toward American independence (Berry 1974). Broadie (2001, 1) defined the Enlightenment in Scotland as “the demand that we think for ourselves, and not allow ourselves to develop the intellectual device of assenting to something simply because someone with authority has sanctioned it”. Moreover, the expression of that demand in the public domain would be without fear of penalty or retribution.

Just as India’s famine was mirrored in Scotland, Scotland’s renaissance was mirrored in Bengal. The British imperial project was the catalyst for the Bengali renaissance which Fraser reframes as having a positive impact. She views this project from what she terms a “pre-Saidian perspective”. In this she is referring to Said’s (1978, 1994) attacks on Orientalism as an enterprise which devalued the human dignity of the colonized and in which the primary concern was profit for the empire. Fraser’s view is that the educational and cultural reform introduced by Scottish officers in India facilitated an artistic, cultural, intellectual and social movement in Bengal—known as the Bengali renaissance (see Fraser 2005).

This favorable view on Scotland's participation in the imperial project has undoubtedly been shaped by Fraser's own family history. In the preface to the Ganga and Tay volume (Fraser 2009a, 9–12), the poet explains that her great-grandfather worked for a Scots sahib. There was a very fond relationship between the two of them. Unfortunately, her great-grandfather died when his son (Fraser's grandfather) was only about 12 years of age. The Scottish civil servant looked after her grandfather's education and helped him secure some work. When the Scotsman and his wife were returning to Scotland, they offered to bring Fraser's grandfather back "home" with them. Given that his mother was widowed and that he felt responsible for his brothers and sisters, her grandfather declined the offer. It was greatly appreciated however and the offer has never been forgotten by Bashabi's family.

Fraser, however, does not view the Scottish imperial project as a "one-way" process. While acknowledging the intellectual benefits that Scotland brought to India, she also highlights the benefits to Scotland of its encounter with India. In her *Ragas and Reels* collection, Fraser frames the encounter between India and Scotland as "a two-way process". She writes:

Moments and memories held layers of history which have not been a one-way journey and do not form just a recent phenomenon. The colonial skein weaves these stories together as place-names from the sub-continent find their way to villages, roads, houses, structures and even in an education system – that began in the east and was brought by the travelling Scot from India, to surprise the Scottish landscape with names that have their roots elsewhere. (Fraser 2012, pp. 119–20)

The two-way dimension of the migrant process features in much of Fraser's poetry. In a poem entitled the "Restauranter", for example, Bashabi explores the significance of curry as a national dish in Scotland. In another poem, she refers to the Indian Tata company, which purchased (and salvaged) the British steel industry at a time when its sales were flagging. Using a poetic metaphor, the poet muses on the "steel" links between two countries and merges metaphors beautifully (Fraser 2012, p. 69):

Metaphors mix, with the red heat
Of metal becoming the slogan
Of curries cooked for the host
Nation to its expectation.

Through Fraser's poetry, Scotland's pedagogical narrative has been enlarged, expanded and transnationalized. This also applies to Scotland's performative discourse.

REFRAMING SCOTLAND'S PERFORMATIVE NATIONAL DISCOURSE

As a poet, Fraser regularly recites and "performs" her own poetry and through her poetry Fraser also engages with Scotland's Performative National Discourse. The concept refers to the way that nationalist icons or symbols are constantly rehearsed in order to maintain a sense of camaraderie or companionship that is horizontal. Bhabha (2012, p. 145) writes that a national culture is performed over and over again: "The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture." The people are engaged in producing and re-producing the rituals, traditions and iconic figures of the nation. There are two elements in particular of Scotland's iconography that Fraser has set in a new context: the Scottish intellectual Patrick Geddes and the river Tay, which runs through Dundee.

Fraser's *From the Ganga to the Tay* (2009a) features the river Tay, which runs through Dundee in Scotland. In composing a conversation between the two rivers, Fraser is not just setting an important Scottish icon in a new context. She is highlighting the inextricable link between Scotland and India and the significance of rivers for the development of civilization in both their own countries and for each other's. Water is required for life and the rivers were a resource for many, including fishermen and those engaged with trade. "Rivers remain a symbol of life-as continuity and a rich source of inspiration for artists and writers" (Fraser 2009b, pp. 10–11). With this comment, Fraser is indicating the way literary narratives can contribute to shaping the physical landscape (see McLean 2009 and Bindi, this volume).

Beginning with Ganga the mother goddess and Tay—the masculine emblem of Celtic heritage, Fraser explores the shared history between the two rivers and the people who lived or worked on them. Rather than focusing on the Tay in an exclusive Scottish context, Fraser sets this river alongside the Ganga in a "conversation" that explores the commonality between them. Fraser's volume of poetry explores the historic association between the two rivers—as the demands of industry evolved. In conversation with Ganga, the river Tay muses (Fraser 2009a, p. 33):

Ganga: when my crops
 fed your factories
 and Dundee led
 the world trade
 processing fabrics
 from my raw jute –
 dull brown sheets
 matted from the rubric
 of golden yarn –
 a success story
 spun out in
 Cinderella splendour

In a few poetic lines, the poet has captured a wealth of shared history.

Nature, more widely, was a fresh source of inspiration for the twentieth-century intellectual Patrick Geddes (Boardman 1978). A key Scottish intellectual and urban planner, Geddes is much admired for his thinking on education and the environment and is well known for his triad folk, work and place (Kockel 2008). The Scottish Geddes (1854–1932) has been described as “[o]ne of the great social thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century” (Meller 2017). Fraser met Jeannie Geddes, Arthur Geddes’ widow, when she came to Edinburgh while in the early 1980s. Arthur Geddes was a friend of her parents, whom they had met in London in the early 1960s. Since her return to Edinburgh after her marriage to Neil, Bashabi became quite close to Arthur and Jeannie’s children—Claire and Marion. In *From Ganga to the Tay*, the poet creates a pen picture of a Scottish icon that we can immediately visualize (Fraser 2009a, p. 41):

I know this man
 with his penetrating eyes
 his stragglng beard
 and leonine mane...
 I have heard
 his footsteps
 echo and roam
 right down to
 Dwasashamedh Ghat
 when he touched
 my holy water
 and imprinted my loam
 on a historic visit
 to may ancient city.

Fraser captures Geddes' legacy with the following lines (Fraser 2009a, p. 41):

It just takes
one man
with vision
and synergy
to break
man-made dams.

Rather than emphasizing Geddes's role in Scotland, Fraser focused on this Scottish icon's relationship with an Indian Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, who engaged with Geddes both in person and by letter between the years 1918 and 1930—and so the mirror image continues—from famine to renaissance to intellectual figures). Both Geddes and Tagore rejected a mechanistic view of education which produced “sausages” rather than individuals. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, both characters emphasized independent thinking. They shared a strong respect for local grounding. As noted previously, the phrase most associated with Geddes is “think global, act local” (Stephen 2015). Tagore also emphasized the significance of locality, noting that “the perennial centre of European culture is sure to be in Europe” (Tagore 2017, p. x). Both characters had much in common and were convinced in the value of science for education but not in a way that separated technical science from human or social sciences. Instead, they advocated a holistic approach toward education. They were particularly enthused about issues of sustainability.

WRITING IN A MINOR KEY: ENGLISH (AND SCOTS)

The fact that Bashabi writes in English (and occasionally Scots) rather than in Bengali is sometimes queried. The implication is that Fraser should write in Bengali, since she was born there. Fraser herself (2004, p. 197) writes: “For a long time I was embarrassed about writing in English.... Then there was the criticism of writing in a ‘foreign language’ and a period when poetry was considered ‘unfashionable’. So there were years when I largely kept my writing to myself” (Fraser 2004, p. 107). The reality, however, is that Fraser first began writing her poetry in English as a child in London. It is the language in which her poems are expressed. One could argue that English has chosen Fraser rather than Fraser choosing English.

This is not an unusual scenario. In previous research (Nic Craith 2012), I interviewed many intercultural writers who publish in a language that is not their mother tongue. Many of these writers suggested they had little choice in the matter of the language of composition. They did not decide in which language to write. Instead, the language chose them. Although Polish was Joseph Conrad's language, he published in English, noting: "it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage, made me its own so completely that its very idioms I truly believe had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character" (quoted in Stavans 2001, p. 229). This is not unlike the Heideggerian notion of a great poet or a great artist as someone who is "being spoken rather than speaking". In this scenario, "the language is passing through the individual. In fact the language is much greater than the individual" (Steiner 2004, p. 205).

In composing in English, Fraser is writing in what Deleuze and Guattari have termed "a minor key". This major/minor key distinction is drawing on musical terminology. "A minor language plays the same tune as the major language, it just plays it in a minor key" (Sutton Damian and Martin-Jones 2008, pp. 51–2). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) cite the example of Kafka, a Czech Jew living in Prague but composing in German and making it speak in a new way (see Fagerlid and Tisdell, this volume). This "minor key" is part of the attraction of Fraser's work for me. Fraser has taken a language that is global and has forced it into a new shape—one that is neither British nor Bengali but Fraser. In speaking her own language, Fraser is expressing her own distinctive identity, which is neither oppositional nor destabilizing. Instead, she is inhabiting the system and changing it from within (Nic Craith 2015/6, Wulff 2018).

Fraser's distinctive use of English has been remarked upon in the introduction to *Tartan and Turban*. Jamieson (2004, p. 14) observes that "[s]he writes in an English that communicates strangeness in the subtlest of manners, like a charming accent upon the familiar, spicing her vocabulary with words from afar as subject matter casts them up". Jamieson draws on a dance metaphor to describe Fraser's unique form of English:

But the strangeness is there too, in the way that the language dances out. Even as syllables accrete English meaning, underlying her work we sense, there are other "logics" that are essentially rhythmic and melodic – and essentially Indian. Sometimes, as if driven by a table player, the syllables

dance quickly, keeping strict tempo: at others, swirling long lines suggest a classical Indian musician playing a raga, gathering key notes and improvising upon them, then returning to the silence of the margin and the white space. (Jamieson 2004, p. 14)

In his *Imagined Community*, Benedict Anderson (1983) recalls the significance of literature and the “print community” for the ongoing definition of a nation (Nic Craith 2003). Literacy or the promotion of literature in a particular language was a key tool of the colonial project (Nic Craith 1993). The British Empire, for example, promoted literature and literacy skills in English in countries such as Ireland and India. Fraser captures this in her poem entitled “Literature That Travelled East” in her *Ragas and Reels* collection. Her poetic verse captures the antiquity of Indian literature as well as the impact of English on its ancient philosophy (Fraser 2012, p. 51):

Macauley’s minute in 1835
Brought English as an imposition
On the history of a proud nation
With its 3000 year old literary life.

The literary project served at once to “civilize” the natives by “empowering” them to speak, read and write in the language of the colonizer. At the same time, it demoted native languages that had no visibility in the education system and lacked the status of a print language (Nic Craith 1993). However, the English spoken by the “natives” is not that which was brought over by the colonial project. As a result of her movement from one country to another and one city to another, Fraser has grasped the English language and reshaped it from within. She is no longer embarrassed by her use of English. Instead, she defends it and celebrates its arrival in India in poetic verse (Fraser 2012, p. 51).

And with it came the gift of words
That would open riveted doors
To philosophers and bards
Speaking from another shore

When discussing the title of the *Tartan and Turban* collection, Fraser says that she writes “in a language which *is* mine because I write in it” (Fraser 2004, p. 107). Fraser’s poetry has impacted on the English language

which is the majority language of Scotland but it is not just the language that has changed. Scotland has also been recontextualized as a result of the poet taking up residence here.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explored how Bashabi's poetry can be harnessed for the field of anthropology. The poems give us a unique insight into what it means to be Bengali in Scotland today. Fraser has given an insider's perspective on what it feels like to live in one country and long for another and to be a transnational Scot in contemporary society. Her thoughts are presented in a language that we can "feel" as well as hear. It also speaks to us more widely of the migrant experience which can involve different geographies and homes but similar collective memories and experiences.

The poet has expressed herself very distinctively in English or in what Deleuze and Guattari call "a minor key". In doing so, she surveys the hybridity of her own identity. As well as expressing her own hybridity, Fraser has reconceptualized the national narrative of her new home into a hybrid narrative. Just as Fraser's identity has been influenced by her physical and emotional journeys from Bengal to Scotland, the narratives of those territories have also been modified as a result of her poetry. Migration is a two-way process and impacts on the "host" community as well as the migrant. Bashabi's verse gives a unique insight into the fluidity of identity and national narratives—an insight which has much to offer the field of anthropology.

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