

IMAGERIES OF THE FRAGMENTED NATION(S) IN ANITA DESAI'S *BAUMGARTNER'S BOMBAY*

*Imagens da(s) Nação(ões) Fragmentada(s) em “Baumgartner's Bombay”,
de Anita Desai*

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ABSTRACT: Based on Benedict Anderson's (1982) understanding of the nation as an “imagined community”, in dialogue with Homi Bhabha's (1990) theorizing of the nation, this study seeks to investigate how Anita Desai employed different textual and performative strategies (Bhabha) to represent the fragmented nation(s) in the novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988). Desai represented the nation under the tension - stated by Bhabha - between the pedagogical and the performative forces that compose it. I am particularly interested in Desai's exploration of individual and collective experiences of the Second World War and the Partition, respectively in Germany and in India. As a fragment of the nation(s), Hugo, the diasporic subject, has a proper imagery to represent his hybrid condition as indicated by Stuart Hall (2007).

KEYWORDS: Indian literature; Nation; Imageries; Fragmentation

RESUMO: Este estudo busca investigar como Anita Desai utiliza diferentes estratégias textuais e performáticas (Bhabha) para representar a(s) nação(ões) fragmentada(s) no romance *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), de Anita Desai, com base na compreensão de nação de Benedict Anderson como uma “comunidade imaginada”, em diálogo com a teoria de nação de Homi Bhabha. Desai representou a(s) nação(ões) sob a tensão – apontada por Bhabha – entre forças pedagógicas e performáticas que a(s) compõem. Estou particularmente interessada na exploração que Desai faz das experiências individuais e coletivas da Segunda Guerra Mundial e da Partição, na Alemanha e na Índia, respectivamente. Como um dos fragmentos da nação, Hugo, o sujeito diaspórico tem uma imagética própria que representa sua condição híbrida, como indica Stuart Hall (2007)

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: literatura Indiana; nação, representação, escrita de mulheres

This study derives from research on Indian English Literature developed at Federal University of Paraná since 2017. Focusing on postcolonial women writing, that research provided opportunities to contact a literature that is scarcely present in English Undergraduate Courses, usually centered on European and North-American English Literatures. Therefore, this is an opportunity to make Indian English Literature widely known, especially the one written by one of its most representative novelists: Anita Desai.

Anita Desai wrote novels, novellas, short stories, and children's fiction. *Cry, the Peacock* was her first novel, published in 1963. Among many, three of her novels, *Clear Light of the Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984) and *Fasting Feasting* (1999) were finalists for Great Britain's Booker Prize. She taught creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, of the American Academy of Letters and Arts and of Girton College, Cambridge. It was to this institution that she dedicated one of her most notable works: *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988).

Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* was first published in 1988 but has kept its relevance to current days. The protagonist, Hugo Baumgartner, is a young Jewish man that runs away from Germany in the beginning of the Second World War and arrives in India to start a new life. This first argument is transformed into a narrative of dislocation, displacement, and exile. These themes are recurrent in Desai's writing but in *Baumgartner's Bombay* they reach wider complexity as the characters face the inexorability of historical events such as the Second World War and the Partition.

Desai's choice on exploring those historical moments consequently proposes discussions about both national identity and nationalism and the nation itself, as both events evoked idealized pasts of, respectively, Germany and India to justify atrocities committed on part of their own people. Fawzia Afzal-Khan, who wrote "Cultural Imperialism and the Indo-English Novel: Genre and Ideology in R.K.Narayan, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, and Salman Rushdie" (1993), argues that this novel presents Desai's option for a realistic perspective on life and literature. According to Afzal-Khan,

Anita Desai's position as a postcolonial writer, then, is clear: she has opted to remain within history, despite its ravages and cruelties. She has shown in novel after novel her moral disapproval of a stance that refuses to shoulder responsibility for the past and present and chooses to withdraw from a painful present reality into a romantic or mythicized past. (AFZAL-KHAN, 1993, p.96)

In fact, this study aims to investigate more precisely how Anita Desai represented the nation(s) in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. My proposition is that Desai expresses those

realistic and mythic perspectives through dialogue throughout the narrative by operating imageries that show nationalist discourses, which are based on that mythicized and idealized past, in contrast to the multiplicity, diversity and plurality of the real nation(s). Moreover, in my viewpoint, the protagonist, Hugo Baumgartner, plays a key role for both perspectives in so far as the narrative is focused on his trajectory and on how he experiences historical events and reacts to them as a diasporic subject.

In order to do so, I will apply some concepts discussed by Homi Bhabha in the essay “Dissemination: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation” (1990), in which he explores and questions Benedict Anderson’s concepts on the nation. I will also attempt to show how Desai molds the tension between what Bhabha calls “performative and pedagogical forces of the nation” (1990) when she describes spaces, events and even characters present in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. In order to achieve this, I will first contextualize the novel, focusing on the personal connection between Anita Desai and the cultural references portrayed in the novel and the historical events that compose the background for the plot of the narrative. Secondly, I intend to focus on the imageries created by Desai to represent Germany and India, demonstrating the way she explores the idea of fragmentation of both nations. Finally, I will discuss how the protagonist, Hugo, representing the diasporic subject, challenges the nation(s) through his hybridity, another fragmentation explored by Desai.

HISTORIES IN *BAUMGARTNER’S BOMBAY*

The novel is the story of Hugo Baumgartner, from his childhood in Germany until his death of old age in Bombay. As it is a nonlinear narrative, it starts with Hugo’s murder and immediately moves to different moments of his past. In his recent past in Bombay, he is known as “The Madman of the Cats”. Hugo spends his time wandering around the city markets, tea shops and restaurants so as to get scraps of food for the cats with whom he shares a small apartment. He had a unique friend in Bombay, Chimanlal, a businessman with whom he shared a race horse for a while. The horse won some races and Hugo kept the trophies after Chimanlal’s death. Those trophies came to be the cause of Hugo’s murder. A drug-addicted German hippie saw them and decided to kill Hugo and steal the trophies to buy more drugs. Moving back and forward in time, it is possible to rebuild Hugo’s trajectory. He was born and grew up in Berlin and his family was part of the Jewish community. When Hugo went to school, he started to get conscious about his cultural heritage after some religious events called his attention, especially Christmas. His father owned a furniture shop and was a successful businessman up until when Nazism

arose, and everything changed. People avoided doing business with him because he was Jewish. The situation worsened after he was detained for about two weeks in Dachau. He returned but was never the same. His mental health deteriorated and while Hugo and his mother were visiting friends, his father committed suicide. Nazism was stronger and the war was imminent. Hugo's mother insisted that he should leave for India, a place from where his father used to buy timber. So, he did. On his way there, he spent some time in Venice before arriving in Bombay and finally in Calcutta where he met Lotte, a cabaret singer and dancer. In Calcutta he started working but the war exploded, and he was taken to a detention camp as a war prisoner, not a refugee. There he was kept apart from the other German prisoners because he was Jewish. When the war ended and he was released, he found a chaotic Calcutta, impacted by the Partition. After looking for material things he left before sent to the camp, he found the letters his mother sent him until 1941. Letters he never answered. He knew nothing about what happened to his mother. He never went back to Germany, but he knew that there was nothing left there for him to go back. Again, he figured out that he had nowhere to go and decided to go back to Bombay. There he and Lotte met again and kept friends until his death. She is the only one who mourned him.

Baumgartner's Bombay is Desai's latest novel. Critics and researchers share the understanding that it presents the moment when the author better manages the duality that characterizes her style the most. One possible cause for that may be the cultural proximity Desai has with the theme as her personal history embraces somehow both German and Indian cultures. I am taking this personal history as a context that enlarges our reading of the novel.

Anita Desai was born to an Indian father and a German Immigrant mother, who met in pre-war Germany while he studied engineering in Berlin. She grew up speaking German at home and Hindi and English at school. Biographers and researchers point to the fact that Desai received a multicultural education thanks to her parents, who had friends from different countries. These cultural encounters are one of the most important themes of Desai's narratives whose characters must face the challenges of being immigrants, outcasts, or part of marginalized communities.

Another experience was responsible for this special connection to German culture: a close friendship to Ruth Praver Jabhvala – writer laureated with the Booker Prize and the Oscar – whose importance can be measured by Desai's words in *Anita Desai: my literary apprenticeship with Ruth Praver Jabhvala* (2017), an article published in *The Guardian*:

(...) One day she [Ruth Prawer Jhabvala] placed in my hands a copy of *To Whom She Will*, her first novel that had been published in faraway England, an unimaginable distance from Alipur Road, Old Delhi. Holding it, I felt I had touched something barely considered possible – that the scribbling one did in one's hidden corner of the world could be printed, published and read in the world beyond. Could our drab, dusty, everyday lives yield material that surely belonged only to the genius of a Chekhov, an Austen, a Woolf or a Brontë? Taking home the copy Ruth inscribed for me and reading it, I made the discovery that she had found, in this ordinary, commonplace world I so belittled, the source for her art, the material for her writing, using its language, its sounds and smells and sights with a veracity, a freshness and immediacy that no other writer I had read had. The message was like an electric current: yes, this is our world, our experience, it can be our writing too. (DESAI, 2017)

In the same article, Desai remembers Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's explanation about herself, "once a refugee, always a refugee". Both German women – her mother and her close friend - had their lives transformed by wars – Mazumbar, by the First World War, and Jhabvala, by the Second. Naturally, Desai's proximity to those women gave her enough material to create a rich imagery of Germany in *Baumgartner's Bombay*:

He tried to match his steps to his father's, and did not even noticed as they passed the familiar landmarks of their street – the apothecary's bow-shaped window in which sat a paste-pink denture and a jar of blue dentifrice; the bakery with its baskets of croissants and rolls dusted with salt or with poppyseeds, the tea cakes decorated with pieces of walnut or of orange; the dwarf in the white raincoat and the dark glasses who mumbled, '*Zigarren, Zigarretten*', in a monotonous undertone beside the newspaper kiosk which had buckets of flowers on its floor – and went further out of their own territory. (DESAI, 1988, p.23)

Anita Desai's style is remarkably pictorial. The figurative language, proper to literary texts, achieves a wider proportion as her goal is not on the construction of a realistic description but on the registration of a point of view that guides the reader into a symbolic universe. On her own words, available in the site Enciclopedia.com, "While writing my novels, I find I use certain images again and again and that, although real, they acquire the significance of symbols. I imagine each writer ends by thus revealing his own mythology, a mythology that symbolizes his private morality and philosophy". In order to construct those images, Desai uses a rich amount of sources, as the researcher Madhusudan Prasad, a specialist on Desai's work, explains:

On closer scrutiny, we notice that botany, zoology, meteorology, nature and color predominate as sources, and occasionally she also employs certain other stray images that, though answering immediate artistic experiences, operate on a minor level, focusing on the moods of certain characters and forming a sort of tonal chord in her novels. These minor images do not arise from what has gone before, though they do generally suggest a prefigurative pattern. (PRASAD, 1984, p.1)

In *Baumgartner's Bombay*, it is possible to observe those sources mentioned by Prasad, such as the one present when the protagonist, Hugo, moves into self-reflection:

Now the habits of a hermit were growing upon him like a crustaceous effluent; it required an effort, an almost physical effort, to crack it, to break through to the liquidity and flow and shift and kinesis of language. Crustaceous – crab – ungainly turtle: that was how he thought of himself, that was how he saw himself – an old turtle trudging through dusty Indian soil. (DESAI, 1998, p.11)

That reference to animals – crustaceous, crab, and turtle – points to zoology as the source used to create the image. It is, in fact, a frequent source in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Nevertheless, my interest is on how Anita Desai created an imagery of the nation(s) that forms that tonal chord (Prasad) of the novel. Thus, I will not bring examples of different sources that she uses throughout the narrative but instead, more ahead, I will follow the strategies used by Desai to create an imagery of the fragmented nation(s).

The second context I opted to highlight is the socio-historical one. Anita Desai constructed a narrative in which the protagonist moves through these two tragical historical events, the Second World War and the Partition. Both events are that “painful reality” that debunk the “romantic and mythicized past” discussed by Afzal-Khan (1993). They are a kind of answer to the moments when the protagonist contacts an idealized past.

The Second World War is a well-known event but in the novel Desai approaches it through a different perspective that enables her to retell the history. She takes the nationalist Nazi discursivity to create a complex position for the protagonist through the irony of been taken as a Nazi war prisoner instead of a Jewish refugee.

The Partition was an event promoted by the British Raj at the very moment of Independence. Pakistan and Bangladesh celebrate Independence on August 14th while India does it on August 15th. Based on religious differences, the British Raj sustained that Pakistan and Bangladesh were created to be safer places for Muslims. It came to be a very violent episode in India that caused a huge migration. The Partition is still a delicate and recurrent theme revisited in Indian literature.

Instead of taking these events apart, discussing them only as historical contexts for the novel, it will be better to articulate them to the study of the imageries created by Desai to represent the nation(s) in the next section. After all, both events were responsible for the fragmentation of those nations.

IMAGERIES OF FRAGMENTED NATIONS

Before presenting the imageries constructed by Anita Desai, I find necessary to bring the theoretical basis that guided my choices on this analysis. When discussing the nation, we usually conceptualize it in relation to the constitution of the Modern State. Benedict Anderson (1982) defined the eighteenth century as the moment when the ideas of nation, nation-ness and nationalism were created as a “modular” cultural artefact. This modular constitution made those ideas absorbable by different cultures and, of course, exportable to colonial contexts.

Anderson defined nation as an “imagined community”, imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (ANDERSON, 1982, p.49) This definition came to be the center of a debate around how the concept of nation - and nationalism and national identity as an extension – was part of a universalized project of Modernity, spread through Colonialism.

The Indian historian, Partha Chatterjee (1993), recognize the powerful influence of Benedict Anderson’s thought, but presents an objection to it as seen in this excerpt:

I object to this argument not for any sentimental reason. I object because I cannot reconcile it with the evidence on anticolonial nationalism. The most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the “modular forms of the national society propagated by the modern West. (CHATTERJEE, 1993, p.5)

Chatterjee explain anticolonial nationalism as a division of social institution and practices in two domains: the material and the spiritual. In this material domain, western superiority must be acknowledged, but in the spiritual domain resides the essential marks of cultural identity.

Homi Bhabha explore similar double formula to think postcolonial nation – and nationalism – that is, between the pedagogical and the performative forces:

The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects. In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation*. (BHABHA, 1990, p.297)

So “writing the nation” means to represent that “continuist accumulative temporality” which refers to the historical construction of the nation and its people, pedagogically informed by an authoritative – and sometimes totalitarian – discourse that produces a national identity, as well as “the recursive strategy of the performative” which refers to the daily life that gives subjects the opportunity to implement their meaning to the national experience. This double construction is central in Bhabha’s discussion, considering the “*metaphoricity* of the peoples in the imagined communities” (BHABHA, 1990, p.293) that demands what he calls “doubleness” in writing (the nation).

This imagining is also attached to Homi Bhabha’s (1990) proposition of nation as a cultural construction through which symbols are articulated via metaphors. This is the process operated by Anita Desai when constructing the imagery of the nation in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. She explores the differences, the local, the plural (Chatterjee, 1993), and the performative (Bhabha, 1990), portraying the nation(s) through its/their fragments, such as language, gastronomy, religious rites, art, landscape, architecture, and many other cultural elements.

GERMANY AND ITS FRAGMENTS

The narrative begins with a scene that presents the basic elements that will be expanded and unfolded throughout the narrative. The character Lotte has just arrived from Hugo’s apartment, where she found him murdered. She holds with her a pack of letters that belonged to him. The quotation ahead is part of that opening scene, in which Lotte’s reaction over the cards is portrayed:

(...) Yes, as was expected from the appearance of the stiff, brittle bits of paper, the dates were of long ago, the long ago that Lotte hardly remembered – thirty-nine, forty, forty-one – just as she thought, suspected. They made her bunch her fingers, clutch her neck, as if she were choking. Then she had to settle the spectacles on her nose, so she could read.

'Meine kleine Maus,' 'Mein Häschen,' 'Liebchen...' she murmured the familiar, unaccustomed German, those forgotten endearments, the antiquated baby-language, feeling them on her tongue like crystals of sugar. Her teeth shrank from impact with them. She read on and each line seemed like the other, each card alike: 'Are you well, my rabbit? Do not worry yourself. I am well. I have enough. But have you enough, my mouse, my darling?

Do not worry...' Do not worry, Lotte mocked, spitting out those pieces of sugar as if they were glass and cut her. With the spit came laughter, and sobs. Little Mouse, *Mäuschen*, do not worry, I am well, I am well. She began to the back of her hand against her mouth, rub harder and harder till it hurt, and through the pain and the cries the words continued to come: *Meine kleine Maus, mein Hugo, Geliebter*, I am well and do not worry...(DESAI, 1988,p.3)

This long citation brings that powerful image composed by the fragmented language, words that cut like broken glass. Those cards, written in German by Hugo's mother, carry the first element: language, the language of a childhood lost in time. Full of ambiguity, the mother tongue means at the same time pleasure and pain. The pleasure of the innocence of a childhood full of affection and security, and the pain caused by its loss. Her reaction is intense, at first characterized by actions, as described on this fragment:

When she pulled herself together and saw what she was doing, what she had done, she found everything in a mess, reflecting her face, reflecting herself. The coffee spilt, the cards scattered, the bottle emptied, the glass lying on its side. A scene, in miniature. Copying the scene at Hugo's that she had fled. (DESAI, 1988, p.3)

Her next reaction is emotional and points to the feelings she had for Hugo, the one with whom she shared the mother tongue. Again, the metaphorical connection between German words and sugar crystals is used.

Her teeth bit on the crystals and her nerves screamed at their sweetness. All the marzipan, all the barley sugar, the chocolates and toffees of childhood descended on her with their soft, sticking, suffocating sweetness. Enough to embrace her, enough to stifle her, enough to obliterate her. Sugary, treacly, warm, oozing love, childhood love, little mice and bunny rabbits of love – sweet, warm, chocking, childish love. Lotte wept and drowned. (DESAI, 1988, p.5)

Recollecting Prasad's argument, Desai operated on a "minor level", focusing on Lotte's mood, on her relation to the German language, to operate one of the most

important elements of the German's nation imagery present in *Baumgartner's Bombay*: popular lullabies and nursery rhymes in German, not translated. Mostly present in the second chapter and dedicated to Hugo's childhood in Germany, those texts are visually highlighted on the narrative as they were kept in verse form, such as this excerpt:

And Hugo bit the muddy flesh of his knee to keep from crying out when she sang, with such ineffable sweetness,

‘Lieber Vogel, flieg weiter,
Nimm ein Gruss mit, einer Kuss,
Denn ich kann dich nicht begleiten,

Weil ich hierbleiben muss.’(DESAI, 1988,p.29)

This use of a linguistic source will be connected to a literary source, references that are part of the German literary canon, such as *The Magic Mountain* (1924), by Thomas Mann, and “the volumes of Goethe, Schiller and Heine” (DESAI, 1988, p.27), present on shelves upstairs Hugo's house. Other two references deserve more attention: *Der Gutte Kamerad* and *Das Kaiserbuch* (on the novel, “the Kaiserbuch”) (DESAI, 1988, p.50). The first was a weekly illustrated boy's magazine that published serialized stories and curiosities about places in the East but was also the Nazi Era German Hitler Youth Magazine; the second was a six-volume project, a compendium on German emperors from 990 to 1250, written by Karls Friedrich Paul Ernst from the last decade of the 19th Century to the beginning of the 20th Century. Desai related them both to a particular moment of Hugo's life trajectory, as can be noticed by the image associated to *Das Kaiserbuch*:

“His mother gave him her own copy of the Kaiserbuch which she said had come out for the Emperor Franz Josef's coronation in 1906; she pointed out to him the gold-embossed portrait of the Kaiser, then closed its thick brown covers, ran her hand lovingly – even pridefully over the imperial motto in its flower scroll: *Viribus Unitis*. But when he took it in his hands, Hugo thought it looked and felt exactly like a coffin, the coffin in which they had closed his father. “(DESAI, 1988, p.50)

The opposite reaction to the book performed by Hugo and his mother enacts the tension discussed by Bhabha between the pedagogical and the performative. His mother operated the pedagogical force and Hugo gave a different meaning to the book, according to his own experience of life.

Concerning German nation representation, Desai illustrates another German identity that has a different narrative. Jewish people, once considered part of German

community, during the Second World War, were turned into enemies. So, when Hugo is sent to the camp where he would stay imprisoned with other German-born citizens until the end of the war, Desai represented the splitting of the pedagogical and the performative representation of the German nation narrating the tense relation between the different identities that were performing this “Germany outside Germany”:

Baumgartner watched how a certain group, a certain kind of German took over – and ran it efficiently, ruthlessly. Perhaps he had gone ‘native’ in his brief time in India, perhaps that was what made him aware for the first time of what was meant by ‘German efficiency’, ‘*Gründlichkeit*’. One had to admire it – the way everyone was kept occupied, how everyone and everything was put to use. The utilitarianism of the system – yet admirable. But with it went a authoritarianism that really came into its own, really triumphed on that hellish parade-ground under the summer sun. ...

On the parade-ground, it was not enough that they had to stand in a line, stand straight and sing ‘*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles.*’ Now the German flag was being flown, and now the order rang out: Raise your right arm, say ‘Heil Hitler!’ (DESAI, 1988, p.115-116)

As Hugo and the other Jewish men did not subordinate to that authoritarianism, they were separated from the rest and kept alienated from the camp routine until the end of the war. And with that end, everything around those in the camp collapsed. Germany was finished, Hitler was dead, and they had nowhere to go. The *Kulturabteilung* had organized a concert for the evening but, instead of playing Bach or Beethoven as planned, the orchestra kept silent and started singing the song *Ich hat ein Kamerad*, followed by the audience. This song is a national symbol because it evokes the death of a brother in arms. All of them feel defeated with Germany and Hugo, although in a different way.

Baumgartner stood, under the weight of their defeat, burdened by their defeat, finding it gross, grotesque, suffocating. He wanted to shout ‘Stop!’ He wanted to tell them it was their defeat, not his, that their country might be destroyed but this meant victory, terribly late, far too late, but at last the victory. Of course he said nothing, he stood helplessly, only aware how crushed and wrecked and wretched a representative he was of victory. Couldn’t even victory appear in colours other than that of defeat? No. Defeat was heaped on him, whether he deserved it or not. (DESAI, 1988, p.135)

INDIA AND ITS FRAGMENTS

When investigating the imagery of the Indian Nation in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*,

the point of view is a key element. It reminded me of Desai's famous quote "I see India through my mother's eyes, as an outsider, but my feelings for India are my father's, of someone born here". In *Baumgartner's Bombay*, India's imagery is constructed through different types of fragments. The first time Hugo heard anything from India was at the Friedmans', his mother's close friends, on the same evening his father committed suicide.

Frau Friedman described a strange Indian poet whose work she had been reading, a sage with a long white beard and long hair and piercing, hypnotic eyes. 'A sage from Bengal.' She explained to Hugo. (...) After the table was cleared, a book of poems was brought for them to see; it had a pale blue cover and its title was meaningless to Hugo – *Gitanjali* (...). (DESAI, 1988, p.48)

This first mention to Indian culture - through Tagore's poetry - leads us to that construction denounced by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, based on the way the West imagined the East: exotism, mystery, Hinduism, and so on. Although there are some samples of this misrepresentation, it is not the main topic of the narrative. In fact, ever since the first time Hugo arrives in India, Desai pictures his strangeness to the people themselves, to the crowd:

It had seemed bedlam when he disembarked and walked on to what he was assured was Indian Soil – the crowds, of Indians, Britons, Americans, Gurkhas – coolies carrying their luggage and gleaming with Brasso and boot polish – hawkers and trades scurrying around with baskets and trays – *mansahibs* and blonde children with lopsided basin-shaped tops on their bleached hair – Indian women in shapeless garments squatting passively with their baskets or babies – and over it all, congealing them into one restless, heaving mass, the light from the sky and the sea, an invasion of light such as he had never known could exist – and heat like boiling oil tipped out of cauldron on to their heads, running down their necks and into their collars and shirts. (...)

He would have wanted, on that day, to have a hand settled on his wrist, lead him. Or at least a signboard. In a familiar language. A face with a familiar expression. He could not read these faces, or their expressions – joy? agony? panic? He felt his own panic going out, mingling with theirs. Then his paralysis gave way, he made a move – when the crowds stopped swirling and began to drain through the gates to the city. The crowd had thinned so there were empty spaces between the people through which he could see a way, so he picked up his duffel bag and moved at last.

This was his entry into India. (DESAI, 1988, p.84)

The crowd is a recurrent image explored by Desai in many other moments of the narrative, usually in contrast to Hugo's loneliness when he gets into hotel rooms or in his flat in Bombay. The light and the heat are also frequently referenced when places are described. The dust is another important element when Hugo travels to trade throughout India. Desai explores these travels to bring to the narrative the vast variety of landscapes and natural events, such as the Monsoons, the Himalayas, the desert, caves, etc. Those images are never idealized. They come with the dust and the mosquitoes that bring tropical diseases as malaria.

In a first glance, in *Baumgartner's Bombay* one will find India divided into two worlds. Desai paints this double nation through the Partition, portraying the division of India between Hindus and Muslims. As she did when she elaborated Germany's imagery, the focus was not just the historical event, but how people lived in and through it. And, related to India, how Hugo perceived it. In chapter 6, on the moment he returns to Calcutta after six years as a war prisoner, he finds the city collapsed:

He made no attempt to find and return to the Calcutta life of before the war. He kept away from Park Street, from Chowringhee, from Flury's and the German Hotel and Prince's and the 300. The Calcutta he lived in now – the Calcutta that had seen the famine of 1943, that had prepared for a Japanese attack, that had been used and drained by the war and war profiteers and now prepared for the great partition – was the proper setting for this mourning. The Calcutta of the black back streets, the steaming rubbish tips, the scarred tenements, its hunger, its squalor, its desolation. The hopelessness of it seemed right to Baumgartner; this was how the world ended, there was no other ending. (DESAI, 1988, p. 165-166)

That was how the nation was fragmented. After that moment, Desai depicts a succession of dramatic events that took place in Calcutta reinforcing the collapse of the idea of a Hindu India against Muslims.

Nevertheless, India is also those "ten worlds". Desai explored this idea through long descriptions of the cities and its inhabitants, portraying life details of the dispossessed people that live on the streets or in need. "Exposed to violence, hunger, and poverty, they occupy the margins of the society. They are sided by people of the crowd, the crowds of Bombay" (DESAI, 1988, p.18-19). They come from many different places in India, or abroad; they speak different languages, pray for different gods or none of them. Desai's Bombay is a metaphor of the whole of India. This postcolonial India setting for such vast cultural diversity cannot be understood by the pedagogical and performative forces.

But Homi Bhabha's discussion on cosmopolitanism offers a proper perspective on it. According to him, different from the global king that generates a dual economy, responsible for exclusion, vernacular cosmopolitanism is based on the community. Commenting on V.S. Naipaul's characters, Bhabha says:

It was the ability of Naipaul's characters to forbear their despair, to work through their anxieties and alienations towards a life that may be radically incomplete but continues to be intricately communitarian, busy with activity, noisy with stories, garrulous with grotesquerie, gossip, humor, aspirations, fantasies – these were signs of a culture of survival that emerges from the other side of the colonial enterprise, the darker side. Naipaul's people are vernacular cosmopolitans of a kind, moving in-between cultural traditions, and revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language. (BHABHA, 1990, p. 316)

The same can be said about Desai's people in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, the street family, the sellers, people that simply pass by in Bombay, Calcutta or in another small place where Hugo had been. Hugo's neighbors in Calcutta, the Zoroastrian woman and the Marxist terrorist, Sushil, are more elaborated characters (176-178) that enact the communitarian experience that gives the opportunity to find equality in the differences (Bhabha).

THE FRAGMENTED SUBJECT OF THE DIASPORA

In Baumgartner's *Bombay* Desai pictures India as a nation composed by different diasporas, taking the Muslims as a major reference in face of the Partition. Germany is treated the same way as Jewish community is a major reference in face of the Nazi regime. Hugo's trajectory, characterized by exile and deterritorialization, kept him in diasporic condition; in Germany, as a Jewish boy, too dark to be German, and in India, as a *firangui*, too white Indian.

This diasporic condition was also experienced by Lotte in India. And besides her physical attributes she felt herself limited to bond to Indian culture, as is expressed on the rich imagery on this quote:

She stared at the view she faced everyday over her coffee, her gin – the building across the court, its grey concrete walls ribbed with black drain-pipes, the doors opening on to balconies hung with washing, stacked with tins and boxes. Right at the top, a layer of sky. A blank sky, as always, with neither colour nor form. Empty. Afternoon light.

Daylight. Perpetual light. And blankness. Even the sounds were perpetual, constant – the radio that blared, the woman that screamed, the children that played, the pots and pans that clanged. They made a wall themselves – of metal, always in commotion. (DESAI, 1988, p.4)

Differently from the images related to Germany, the words “blank”, “blankness” and “empty” suggest a difficulty in connecting to the Indian culture. Looking down to “avoid that sky, that window, that blankness, she tried to pick out the words from the spider’s nest of ancient writing” (DESAI, 1988, p.4). Lotte immediately found herself deeply connected to German culture, no matter how much she tried to avoid it.

It is Hugo, however, that perform the diasporic condition in all its complexity. Desai drew his trajectory and the strategies he developed to live his life alone in such a different country and culture in order to highlight the condition of displacement and alienation on immigrant faces. The same can be said about the way he solved the linguistic challenge:

He found he had to built a new language to suit these new conditions – German no longer sufficed, and English was elusive. Languages sprouted around him like tropical foliage and he picked words from it without knowing if they were English or Hindi or Bengali – they were simply words he needed: *chai, khana, lao, jaldi, joota, chota peg, pani, kamra, soda, garee...* what was this language he was wrestling out of the air, wrenching around to his own purposes? He suspected it was not Indian, but India’s, the India he was marking out of himself. (DESAI, p.92)

If Germany was inside Hugo, India is, consequently, perceived out of him. Desai – as before – leaves a trace on this excerpt that talks about the window of Hugo’s first hotel room that looked out on a concrete wall:

He stood by the window, studying the scene with great seriousness, knowing himself to be tricked. It was the first of India’s tricks. But was it a trick?

Was it not India’s way of revealing the world that lay on the other side of the mirror? India flashed the mirror in your face, with a brightness and laughter as raucous as a street band. You could be blinded by it. But if you refused to look into it, if you insisted on walking around to the back, then India stood aside, admitting you where you had not thought you could go. India was two worlds, or ten. She stood before him, hands on her hips, laughing that blood-stained laugh: Choose! Choose! (DESAI, 1988, p. 85-86)

Considering Hugo's trajectory, he never really had an option to choose, not because there were no options, but because Hugo changed for his life experiences: a Jew in Nazi German, an European trader in India and a German war prisoner in British India; always a *firanghi*. Living between different cultures, unable to choose one of them, Hugo was always part of a diaspora, condition explained by Stuart Hall:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (HALL, 2007, p. 136)

Inside Hugo, cultures co-existed although outside he could not occupy any fixed space. Always moving in-between. (Bhabha, 1990)

Finally, there is one last image that captures the synthesis of the novel and the interconnection of the imagery of Germany and India. It is Hugo himself, as the protagonist, that came to be the intersection of both:

Gradually the words ran into each other, became garbled. They made no sense nothing made sense. Germany there, India here – India there, Germany here. Impossible to capture, to hold, to read them, make sense of them. They all fell away from him, into an abyss. He saw them falling now, white shapes turning and turning, then going grey as the distance widened between them and him. He stood watching as they fell and floated, floated and fell, till they drifted out of sight, silently, and he was left on the edge, clutching his pyjamas, straining to look. But there was nothing to look at, it was all gone, and he shut his eyes, to receive the darkness that flooded in, poured in and filled the vacuum with the thick black ink of oblivion, of *Nacht und Nebel*. (DESAI, 1988215-216)

Hugo's life gently fades away and soon after this moment, Hugo is murdered while sleeping. The expression *Nacht und Nebel* refers to a decree of the Nazi Regime against the people who were members of the Resistance in occupied territories. When captured, they would be sent to Germany and would never return, thus transformed into fog (*Nebel*).

CONCLUSION

Baumgartner's Bombay is a story about not fully belonging to any nation. It is about people and nations that are fractured by history and by discourses that segregated violently and brutally the different. It is about “imaginary homelands” (Rushdie, 1991), no one can return to because they exist only in people's mind.

On this study, I investigated how Anita Desai created different imageries for both nations, Germany, and India, in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, under the perspective of an anticolonial nationalism (Chatterjee, 1993). Those imageries were constructed using distinct sources that represented metaphorically what Homi Bhabha defines as the pedagogical and the performative forces of the nation. Germany, fragmented by the war and by the Nazi regime and India, by the Partition. Those first fragmentations were expanded by Desai who created imageries for both nations using fragments of their culture highlighting the plurality and diversity of the nation and specially the postmodern nation. Nonetheless, Desai creates a wider imagery through the descriptions of cities and its inhabitants, especially underprivileged ones, better understood under Bhabha's vernacular cosmopolitanism. Hugo and Lotte, diasporic subjects are portrayed as fragmented characters, whose hybridity challenges nations and nationalist discourses that try to homogenize culture taking a specific module as a totalitarian reference. ,

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