

Mourning for the (M)otherland: "The Virtual Space of Spectrality" in Ginu Kamani's "Just Between Indians"

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Abstract

The present article is based on the major premise that the loss of a homeland (in the present case, Mother India) gives rise to such a long complicated mourning process that not only the first-generation diasporic subjects but also their second-generation offspring are afflicted by the infection of the original wound of departure. Synthesizing the trope of departure-as-death (a trope used here to compare the original departure from the *motherland* to a psychological death of a kind) and the trope of the dead mother (a trope used here to compare the dead-yet-living *motherland* and its cultural markers to the haunting phantom of a dead-yet-living biological mother), the paper argues that the diasporic subjectivity (in the present case, the Indian diasporic subjectivity) is a site at which a dialectic struggle between the two contending forces of the metaphoric death of the *motherland* and the constant desire for her is re-enacted. It is this same struggle, the present article claims, that is best illustrated in Ginu Kamani's "Just Between Indians," the penultimate story of her 1995 debut collection of short fiction *Jungle Girl*. As a story written by a second-generation Indian diasporic woman writer, "Just Between Indians" highlights the haunting quality of the absence/presence of Mother India in the lives of the second-generation diasporic subjects. Exploiting Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's notion of "the exquisite corpse" within a diasporic context, this article then not only throws into sharp relief the representational possibilities that "the virtual space of spectrality" has to offer for the literary signification of the trauma of displacement (or the diasporic trauma), but also brings to the fore the therapeutic and liberating force of the trope of the return of the dead mother. Creating an ethical space which can facilitate embracing the dead-yet-living (*m*)otherland on its own terms, such a trope helps both in re-constructing the desire for the homeland and in fulfilling a rather belated process of grieving for an apparently irremediable loss.

Keywords: Diaspora, Trauma of Displacement, Spectrality, Exquisite Corpse, Abraham and Torok, Ginu Kamani.

1. Introduction: "Departure-as-Death" and the Possibility of Mourning

Diasporic experience is laden with linguistic, social, cultural, economical, political, sexual and religious tensions which have long-lasting and destabilizing, if not traumatic, effects on the diasporic subjects, their sense of self, and their perception of the world around. No doubt, how traumatic this experience gets depends on a range of factors some of which have been highlighted by Salman Akhtar—including the age at which the move occurs, the depth of the attachment to

the homeland, the receptiveness of the adopted land, the degree of the voluntariness of the experience, the psychic wherewithal of the diasporic subject, as well as the magnitude of the cultural differences between the homeland and the adopted land (2011, p. 222). As Akhtar expounds in his *Immigration and Identity: Turmoil, Treatment and Transformation*, though, "even under the best circumstances, immigration is a traumatic occurrence; [and] like other traumas, it mobilizes a mourning process" (1999, p. 10). If the diasporic act involves mourning, it must then constitute the death of one kind accompanied by an ineluctable sense of loss. In case of the diasporic act, this death and loss, however, is not actual or literal, but is rather psychic and abstract—a claim that can be substantiated in the light of what Nouri Gana (2011) considers to constitute loss:

The loss for which mourning is the reaction does not solely involve the death of a beloved person (or object-cathexis), but it can involve the demise of a number of abstract ideas, ideals, politics, or human rights [...] as well as the loss of an era, a political regime, an economic system, a historical movement, a homeland to settler colonialism, a culture or a language to the forces of globalization, and so on. (p. 23)

Had Gana continued his list, he would have inevitably come up with the loss inherent in diasporic displacements as one of the major forces of globalization—a profound loss that has at its core a literal abandonment (a metaphoric death) of a wide range of familiar people, objects, and ideas.

Leaving one's country, one has to give up one's beloved family, relatives, and friends and foes; familiar food, music, landscapes, and social customs; a shared language, an earned history, and an unquestioned culture, and so on. There is no hiding the fact that in return for all this loss there also comes, upon arrival in the adopted land, a new range of people, objects, and ideas: a channel of new opportunities, renewed affiliations, different dictates as well as fresh codes, models, and ideals. It is, hence, not an absolute death. In fact, as David Cowart, picking up the metaphor of death involved in the process of changing countries, notes, the diasporic subject enters an afterlife, "a second infancy or childhood" (2006, p. 5). This rebirth and the array of promising to-comes and to-bes, however, can by no means eradicate the significance and relevance of the unresolved issues around which the present research develops: Can the promise of the acquisition of an adopted land as one's own (often with the promise of more success, ease, and comfort to come in the future) lead the diasporic subject to withdraw all their libidinal attachments to the homeland and to reinvest them in the new land? Can this displacement of libido be done without any severe psychological damage inflicted on the psyche of the diasporic subject? If, as Freud claims, "there are nearly always residual phenomena, a partial hanging back" (1937, p. 228) to loved-but-lost objects and ideals, must there not be a long and debilitating mourning process ahead of any subject who is involved in any kind of diasporic displacement?

Diasporic displacements (even in their most voluntary forms), hence, constitute mourning a metaphoric death of a kind since, upon departing one's homeland, the diasporic subject has to undergo the often distressing event of leaving behind family, friends, relatives, landscape, food, music, language, and a whole set of customs and lifestyle. It is, perhaps, the dominance of this same metaphoric outlook on the diasporic act that, as David Cowart asserts, has often been adopted by immigrant writers who have characterized "changing countries as death and afterlife" (2006, p. 5). In her illuminating study of the second-generation diasporic subjectivity in Lahiri's oeuvre, for instance, Delphine Munos cleverly uses the term "departure-as-death" in the context of her interesting observation regarding Gogol of Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Even the second-generation diasporic subjects, Munos claims, "inhabit modalities of dying with such a remarkable consistency, *even before they come to struggle with any personal loss*" (2013, p. xxxiii). Curiously,

then, even before having any relational encounter with death in space and time, the second-generation, via their first-generation predecessors, find themselves touched by the various forms and modalities of death. What gives rise to the issues discussed in the present paper as regards Ginu Kamani's "Just Between Indians," also, is the contention that the trope of departure-as-death is located in the very centre of the living diasporic subject's life to such an extent that any conception or negotiation of the diasporic subjectivity (even in its second-generation variant) can be made possible only if death and its various footprints are addressed. After all, the identity of every subject, Caruth posits, is "bound up with, or founded in, the death that he[/she] survives" (1996, p.2).

The notion of "departure-as-death," however, can never be terminal since in almost all kinds of diasporic displacements one kind of life dies for the sake of another to start. As Cowart's observation also hints, all displacements metaphorically constitute not only a primal death but also an "afterlife" (2006, p. 5) or a kind of rebirth into the new Symbolic Order (in its Lacanian sense). Despite this, the promise of new beginnings in the wake of displacement cannot enhance but only blights the prospects of the diasporic subject since while the physical distance between the death (of an old order) and the birth (of a new order) might be easily gauged, the psychic distance between the two can never be judged. Thus, it sometimes takes an extremely long time (if ever) for a physical departure to turn into a psychic departure as it takes a long time (if ever) for a physical arrival to turn into a psychic one over generations.

Metonymic representations of an apparently-dead old order and all its accoutrements persist in immigrants' lives long after the experience of displacement-as-psychic-death and haunt, even transgenerationally, the living diasporic presence in all shapes and forms. The diasporic subject, then, both in the wake of and long after being touched by the metaphoric experience of death, cannot still fully inhabit either the realm of the living or the domain of the dead. Unable to keep the two worlds neatly separate, he/she has no choice but to learn to live in the presence of the undead (parents, grandparents, homeland customs, and concomitant feelings of shame, pain, etc.). It can, thus, be well argued that the absence/presence of the living-dead is almost always obliquely present at the core of the diasporic life. Such presence, of course, induces a death-like atmosphere which pervades the living and turns them into haunted subjects who, even when unaware of who (or what) they are haunted by, are still fully alert of the absence/presence of the invisible but prevailing forces of death/desire embodied in the memory of the (un)dead and the legacy of the things past.

The domestic diasporic space portrayed in Kamani's "Just Between Indians," also, is tainted by the footprints of a dead-yet-living mother(land). Revolving around the uncanny return of the phantom of the dead mother, it represents the second-generation diasporic subject as a site of conflict between the two competing forces of death and desire whose enforced confrontation with the absence/presence of the dead (m)other—in both its literal and metaphoric sense as the biological mother and the *motherland* respectively—paves the way for the remembrance of things past and the acknowledgement of a hitherto unclaimed trauma of the loss of the homeland. Kamani's story, thus, illustrates, in its own subtle ways, the recuperative effect of "the virtual space or spectrality" opened up in the dialectic between the haunting death of the mother(land) and the still undead desire for her. It is worth noting, though, that this "virtual space of spectrality," a term first coined by Jacques Derrida in his *Spectres of Marx* (1994, p. 11), does by no means entail believing in ghosts. Rather, much in line with Derrida's consistent attempt at disrupting the metaphysics of presence, it entails a suspension of the distinction between a space of full presence and that of total absence. "The virtual space of spectrality," then, is used here to

refer to the haunting presence of absent entities (either concrete or abstract) who/which, despite their absence, are fully present by the intrusion of their memories. After all, it is only via addressing this virtual space of absence/presence and being/non-being that the second-generation diasporic subjects of Kamani's story (Daya and Sahil), confronting the rather mysterious forces which are silently circulating but imperceptibly disrupting their self-presence, are eventually led to the threshold of the acknowledgment and the acceptance of the transgenerational traumatic loss of their *motherland*.

As a story interweaving the two categories of trauma and diaspora as well as epitomizing the presence of "Eros in the house of Thanatos"—to borrow a term from Delphine Munos (2013, p. 40)—Kamani's "Just Between Indians," thus, can be best approached from the psychoanalytic standpoint of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's theory of the phantom. More importantly, though, being grounded upon a synthesis of both trauma and diaspora theory in relation to literary studies, the present reading of Kamani's story is an *interdisciplinary* reading of a tale that textualises, metaphorically, a range of experiences and a set of feelings linked with the trauma of displacement or what David Cowart refers to as the "travail of the displaced" (2006, p. 4). Growing out of a consistent dialogue between the psychoanalytic theory of Abraham and Torok (especially, their notion of "the exquisite corpse") and the theory of tropes (in particular, metonymy and metaphor), the present paper, then, is, above all, a critical endeavor to delineate the rigor of an interdisciplinary reading strategy as it is played off against Kamani's "Just Between Indians."

2. "Eros in the House of Thanatos:" Transmuted Desire for the *Motherland* in "Just Between Indians"

Ginu Kaman's "Just Between Indians" which, quite subtly, develops around the tropes of the death of and the ambivalence towards the *mother(land)* is the penultimate story of Kamani's 1995 debut collection of short stories *Junglee Girl* (a term used in Hindi to describe a wild and uncontrollable woman who stands her ground by breaking the restrictive codes of patriarchy). As one of the three tales of the collection (the other two being "Ciphers" and "This Anju") that together treat, in the words of Kavita Kamur, "the plight of the Indian-American woman"; "Just Between Indians" seems to have a straightforward plot at first glance. Kamur believes, for instance, that the story is simply "about a young woman's attempt to overcome her hatred of Indian men and her anger at being type cast into the role of a good traditional Indian girl." Such synopses, however, can by no means do justice to the two-fold narrative of Kamani's tale.

Firstly, there exists a major storyline which follows the third-person narration of the recent events in the life of Daya, a second-generation college student on a spring break, who, upon her parents' request, is paying a short visit to Rohit Pater (her father's friend) in New York. This short stay, however, coincides with a visit from Rohit's "relatives from London: his widowed brother Subhash and Subhash's two sons Ranjan and Sahi" (p. 152)—a visit which, as she soon learns, has not been a pure coincidence but an attempt at matchmaking to which her parents must have given their blessings in advance. Feeling betrayed by her parents and filled with anger fuelled by the awkward hints and moves of Ranjin (the elder brother), she does her best to assert herself not "as an 'eligible girl'" (p. 156) but as a modern independent "junglee girl" who will find a man on her own if she ever wants to marry. In the meantime, however, she is sexually attracted to Sahil (the younger brother) and is seduced by him into bed just the night before they all leave Pater's house—the place she disparagingly calls "a pick-up joint for Indian men" (p. 158).

Secondly, but more importantly for our present purposes, though, there exists an embedded secondary storyline which, despite being a motor-force that moves the primary storyline forward, remains rather enigmatic or phantom-like. This strand of the plot, driven by the suicide of Ranjin and Sahil's unnamed young mother some twenty years ago in this same house, briefly centers on how both brothers are still affected by shadows of an overwhelming past whose presence is still powerfully felt. It is this same pervasive presence of the past secrets and silences manifest through both brothers' mother-fixation (although in different ways) that, as we shall soon see, justifies certain events of the major storyline, uncovers the significance of the title of the story, and accounts for the sudden sense of comfort Daya feels post-coitally towards her Indian-ness.

In point of fact, the primary and the secondary lines of the story, both of which revolve around the question of ethnicity (of being Indian), are not totally disconnected but are rather closely interrelated. As the readers obliquely learn, the major storyline starts a day before the anniversary of Ranjin and Sahil's mother's death and ends abruptly in the morning after, which also turns out to be the morning after Daya and Sahil's one-night stand. Curiously, it is in this same morning after her erotic tryst with Sahil that Daya is placed on the threshold of mourning and renewal; of a final letting-go of her long pent-up anger towards and her ruthless rejection of anything and anyone Indian. It is on this same day on Fifth Avenue (Museum Mile) that she comes across a quizzing Greek hot dog vendor and an inquiring security guard whose continual questions on her ethnic origins soon force her to finally confront the unspeakable:

He [the hot dog vendor] looked Greek. He caught her eye and waved enthusiastically. His gaze was inquiring. Two blocks down he was there again. "You are Greek?" he shouted, arms in the air. "Come, come!"

Daya walked on.

"Armenian? Turkish? Palestinian?" he called frantically. She ducked into a museum.

The security guard at the museum [also] addressed her before she had even crossed the gate. "I am from Guyana. You are also from Guyana?"

"No!" Daya snapped at the guard and rushed in.

"Trinidad? Jamaica? Fiji?" he called after her. "I'm sure I know you!" (pp. 181-2)

Anger, frown, and scowl towards her ethnic origins, are not occasional, though. Rather, they are Daya's most common response to her origins all throughout the story. Early in the story, for instance, she would rather stay at "any place other than the home of conservative *Indian* immigrants" (p. 152); She is "incensed at the prospect of spending a whole week with this gang of *Indian* men" (p. 153); and she believes *Indian* men "could drive a woman to her grave" (p. 160). Later, also, she makes it clear that she does not "need *Indians* meddling in [her] private life" (p. 164), that she has long "denounced her ties to *Indian* men" (p. 153), and that she would rather "be dead than involve [herself] with an *Indian* man!" (p. 161). She dislikes her traditional *Indian* sisters-in-law whom she considers as "human sponges, ready to absorb all their husbands' demands as well as the commands of their mother-in-law" (p. 156); she derides all old-fashioned trite *Indian* traditions; and she has "nothing but contempt for family obligations" (p. 170). It is, thus, quite normal for Daya who, as Sahil mockingly says, "mustn't be *Indian*" (p. 170) to find any question on her ethnicity rather distressing and disheartening.

This time, however, there seems to be no escape route from facing the thorny question of her ethnicity since even her safe refuge in the museum as a means of evading the unspeakable proves to be futile—particularly when all the museum guard can also do is to echo the hot dog vendor's questions. Curiously, even the paintings which seem to be able to distract her temporarily simply turn out to be some uncanny reminders of Sahil's dead mother and the haunted room from which she has just fled in panic: "they were portraits of pale people" with marbled "expressionless" faces who "looked like they had been painted off cadavers," hence looking more dead than alive (p. 182). Daya, thus, has no choice but to face and to answer the vendor's question—an answer that, interestingly, brings her close to that which the present paper sees as the epiphanic moment of the story's ending:

"Isn't it *obvious* that I'm Indian?"

The hot dog vendor clapped his hands.

"Ah, Indian!" he repeated with delight. "India! Most beautiful woman in India. Most wonderful woman in India. I see movies. Happy, happy, dancing, singing!"

. . . Daya took a long look at the singing shaking jowls and the merry twinkling eyes. She started laughing . . . [and] drew in deep gulps of the warm spring air. . . . *This is what I came for, this is what brought me here.* . . . "Thanks for the reminder," she said softly. . . . *So many years of anger*, Daya mused, *and this man sees only beauty in my face.* She looked at her reflection in the window of the museum. Her smiling eyes shone back at her, gleaming with a mischievous light." (pp. 182-3)

As witnessed, over a brief exchange with the vendor, Daya sees her Indian-ness in a new light so that what has long aroused in her a sense of discomfort and a feeling of repulsion highlighted throughout the story becomes so suddenly a source of pride, beauty, and delight. Such an abrupt change, of course, is looked upon unfavorably by Sunil Iyengar (1995) who sees the story's ending as "sappy . . . [one] that only Bollywood could dream up"—a type of ending that undermines "an otherwise compelling plot." But what if Iyengar has been too quick to decide on the relevance of the ending and the so-called abruptness of the change? Is Daya's change, after all, as unprepared for as Iyengar thinks it is? What brings about this change? What truly triggers this epiphanic moment of reconciliation? What reminder is Daya thanking the vendor for? What makes "*so many years of anger*" eventually subside? Who has been a real catalyst for this change?

It can be well argued that the true catalyst/culprit/savior here is Sahil, a second-generation diasporic subject in his early twenties who also struggles with his sense of ethnicity, who has never had an *Indian* girlfriend and who, like Daya, seems to feel ill at ease with his Indian-ness: "I . . . uh . . . I wouldn't exactly call myself '*Indian*.' We were raised everywhere: Africa, Australia, Singapore, Canada, England . . . I've set foot on every continent" (p. 161, emphasis added). It is, however, this same resistant boy to anything or anyone Indian who finds Daya's "headstrong company" so pleasant that he confesses to enjoying every minute of being with an *Indian* woman who is "so committed to life" (p. 171): "I feel happy with you. Light. Something's opened up in me" (p. 175). What force draws him to Daya then? What has opened up in him? Why does their erotic encounter have such a wonderfully soothing influence on them both that it can be claimed to be spell-breaking for one and epiphanic for the other:

How many women had been condemned to that bed? Daya felt numb with grief. She waited for *the familiar anger* to rise through her once again, *but the memories of the previous night* were still locked in her groin, glowing like coals. The warmth in her body moved upward and outward, *comforting her*. She felt his gentle hands on her face. *And it was then*

that she understood. He'd had to do it. In some strange way, it had broken the spell that hung over him. (p. 181, emphasis added)

Such probing questions, of course, can be best answered in the light of Abraham and Torok's interpretive method of cryptonymy, especially their notion of "the exquisite corpse." In her study of "The Illness of Mourning and the Fantasy of the Exquisite Corpse" published in Abraham and Torok's *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (1994), Torok argues that melancholia or what she calls "the illness of mourning" is constituted around "an overflow of libido" towards the love-object at the moment of loss: that is, at "the least appropriate moment" (p. 110). This is to suggest that in "a desperate and final attempt at introjection" (p. 117) at the time of loss, the bereaved subject experiences "an increase in libido" proceeded by a hallucinatory moment of orgasmic pleasure (p. 107). The "untoward arrival of this kind of libidinal invasion" (p. 110) and the ensuing psychic orgasm, however, is explicitly condemned and severely repressed by the subject's ego which aims to immediately obliterate any trace regarding this taboo desire for the lost, dying, or dead love-object. Nonetheless, such obliteration is never entirely successful since, despite all attempts, there exists a "buried memory of an instant of illegitimate sexual delight" deep within the unconscious of the subject (p. 118)—a memory for which the ego assumes both the role of a guardian and an obliterator. After all, the ego's obligation towards this memory is somewhat contradictory: on the one hand, it is so sweet that it must be delicately preserved in the unconscious at all costs, and, on the other hand, it is so disturbing that it must be harshly repressed or else its presence "cripples the ego" (p. 116). The former mission, Torok posits, is accomplished by preserving the forbidden memory in the form of "the wish the ego can only represent as an 'exquisite corpse' lying somewhere inside it; the ego looks for this exquisite corpse continually in the hope of one day reviving it" (p. 118).

In Kamani's "Just Between Indians," also, the ambivalent sexual frisson that runs throughout the story, that reaches a crescendo towards its end, and that builds towards the final disruptive outbreak of sexuality between Daya and Sahil in "*his mother's deathbed*" (p. 180) on her death anniversary must not be counted as a futilely macabre liaison. Because it is something like an ambiguous seduction haunted, above all, by a subtext of an incestuous attraction with and a desire for the *mother(land)*. If, as Izabella Kimak notes, "Kamani's 'interest in desire is also always an interest in the social and cultural forces affecting the manifestation of desire . . . and that the erotic is wrested out of the realm of the private and placed within the domain of the public'" (2013, p. 37); there must then be a lot more to the erotic tryst around which the whole story revolves. After all, the tryst between Daya and Sahil takes place in a long-forsaken haunted room on whose ceiling there are water stains, in whose corners there are cobwebs, on whose window sills there are dust and rust, and in whose cupboards there are dozens of dated saris belonging to the dead mother (p. 178)—a derelict deserted room which, being the territory of the mother, is still marked by the metonymic presence of the *motherland*. The room which Daya occupies during her short visit at the Paters, thus, has once been the late mother's suicide scene; the bed in which she has sex with the first *Indian* man in her life has once been the late mother's death-bed; and the dead woman's old clothes which, quite uncannily, seem to fit her quite neatly and nicely can now fill her with desire for sexual intimacy: "She pulled out a green silk blouse and held it against her. *It looked like it might fit. She imagined Sahil's fingers slowly undoing each hook that ran down the front of the blouse. She wanted to feel the soft material against her flesh*" (pp. 177, emphasis added).

What draws Sahil to Daya in the first place then is her metonymic association with the dead-yet-living *mother(land)*. This, of course, is not to suggest that Sahil is by any means conscious of the shadow of incest that looms large over his love affair with Daya. Rather, he is like

"a character in the verse of Edgar Allan Poe" (referred to, by Torok, as a means of exemplifying her notion of "the exquisite corpse") who, roaming in "the misty mid region of Weir" on the very night that he had buried her beloved a year ago, is unconsciously led to his beloved Ulalume's vault. Sahil, hence, is set off on his erotic journey with Daya with neither a set plan nor a malicious intention on his part. It is simply "the fantasy of the exquisite corpse" that unconsciously nourishes his sexual arousal and leads him to a sexual encounter that comes close to a frantic displaced inversion of a reunion between a desired pre-Oedipal mother and her son. Locked in his work of grieving for his mother's loss and unable "to liquidate the dead" mother or to introject the nameless unacknowledged desire associated with her (Abraham & Torok, 1994, p. 111), Sahil entombs the memory of the fulfillment of his untoward excess desire for his mother in the wake of her death. Nevertheless, such a strong unconstrained desire continues to live in the form of the fantasy of an exquisite corpse whose enigmatic unleashed sexuality has an urge to tear apart the present symbolic order and to find secret pathways to come out into the open at any moment.

Hence, the haunted room—as the site of the repressed-but-desired libidinal outburst right after the mother's death—becomes the metaphoric psychic womb/tomb (the crypt) in which the exquisite corpse of Sahil's mother is lying, waiting to be exposed. It is only through the medium of an agent (Daya) acting as a metonymic stand-in for the desired-but-lost love-object (mother) that this repressed content can be finally revived—a revival that, above all, entails reliving the unforgettable moment of libidinal ecstasy first occasioned by the loss of the mother so many years ago. Perhaps, Daya's final interpretation of Sahil's heightened sexual desire for her and their passionate sexual intercourse in his mother's deathbed as a means of "accomodat[ing] the shadow figure of his dead mother" (Munos, 2011, p. 26) and breaking "the spell that hung over him" (p. 181) tacitly refer to her realization of the influential role she has unwittingly played in unbinding Sahil's quelled desire for the dead mother, "mediating the introjection" of that desire, lightening the load of his melancholia, and helping him to get closer to the probable acknowledgment and possible acceptance of the loss of his mother (Abraham & Torok, 1994, p. 114).

The magical psychic space opened up by Daya and Sahil's sexual encounter does not solely affect Sahil though. Daya also falls under the soothing spell of this recapture of an "instant of illegitimate sexual delight" (Abraham & Torok, 1994, p. 118). Unaware of the secret aim of her erotic journey, she, much like Sahil, is mysteriously led to the psychic tomb wherein lies the underlying cause of her "*so many years of anger*" at Indian-ness (p. 183). After all, the resentment Daya has long harbored against her ethnic origins is an act of incorporation in disguise—comparable to Freud's notion of melancholia or, in the words of Abraham and Torok, to a "refusal to acknowledge the full import of loss" (1994, p. 127). Daya's hatred of anything and anyone Indian, after all, is no less than an ambivalent melancholic attachment to an ideal image of a loved-but-lost *Mother India*, through which she has incorporated and, thus, indirectly preserved the absent presence of a desired-yet-lost *motherland*.

It is this same enigmatic desire of an infinite kind embodied in the haunting omnipresence of the phantom of an idealized *mother(land)* that is reawakened in the course of Daya's erotic tryst with Sahil—a tryst with "Eros in the house of Thanatos." Sahil, then, like Daya is conferred the role of mediating the introjection of an unacknowledged repressed desire for a loved-but-lost object; only that in Daya's case, the object is not the biological but the metaphoric mother (the *motherland*). Daya's confession to herself at the epiphanic moment ("*This is what I came for, this is what brought me here*" [p. 183]) as well as her final thankful comment to the hot dog vendor ("*Thanks for the reminder*" [p. 183]) both bear witness to her realization of the conciliatory role Sahil and the psychic space opened up by his presence have played in subsiding

her life-time hatred of Indian-ness. It is only after her first libidinal nourishment by the *Indian Sahil* that she seems enabled to bridge overnight the huge chasm at the core of her diasporic subjectivity. In other words, it is only after her symbolic tryst with Indian-ness that she seems to be standing on the threshold of what can be an equivalent to an entry into the metaphoric realm where the need to grapple with, to acknowledge, to express, and to accept loss, pain, and guilt of displacement becomes possible.

3. Conclusion

In the course of the first two decades of the twentieth-first century, the second-generation US-based women writers of the Indian diaspora—one of the largest diasporic communities with a population of more than 1.6 million in the US (Sahay, 2009, p.viii)—have made disparate attempts to bring, in a variety of guises, the literary representations of the complexities and the nuances of their diasporic experience into their (short-) fiction. In their literary productions, these authors often gesture to the problematic process of their negotiations of hyphenated subjectivities as Indian-Americans and provide diverse views on the struggles, joys, and also pains of navigating between the cultural codes of the homeland (in this case, India) vis-à-vis those of the host community (in this case, the USA). In point of fact, it is this same attention to the dull pain involved even in the second-generation diasporic experience, the unsettling problems it gives rise to, and the emotional turmoil or traumatic scars it induces that can account for the overall rationale behind the present article's critical focus on Ginu Kamani's "Just Between Indians." This seemingly trivial and generally over-looked story, after all, has a lot to say about the second-generation diasporic subjects' struggle to come to terms with their ethnic identity and to restore (if possible) their torn, if not tormenting, relation to the dead-yet-living *motherland*.

All in all, Ginu Kamani's "Just Between Indians" is a "haunted narrative," to borrow a term from Delphine Munos (2011, p. 23), which appropriates the psychic space opened up by the uncanny presence of the dead mother to textualise, to transfer, to release and to satisfy the quelled desire for the *motherland*. Thus, the sexual desire which initially seems masochistic and ghoulish turns out to be conciliatory and liberating. In fact, functioning as the necessary rhetorical means for objectifying that which cannot be represented otherwise, it becomes a means of resurrecting the haunting phantom of the *motherland*, voicing the evasive transgenerational silences, and probing the old forgotten wound of having been ripped off the metaphoric mother. Kamani's story, after all, is an encrypted allegorical tale of the diasporic subject whose defense mechanism of survival in the host land is distancing him/her from or keeping only an exilic attachment to the *motherland* and anything or anyone associated with it. This defense, however, proves to be totally ineffective as the excess, enigma, and ambivalence that the loss of the *motherland* embodies become a source of breach which will not be healed easily but will rather stay uncanny and demonic. Nonetheless, it is this same sense of ambivalence and enigma towards the phantom of the *motherland* that, when acknowledged, can become a source of momentum and excess desire in diasporic life. Kamani's story, thus, has optimistic undertones since, via its adroit exploitation of the dead mother trope, it not only finds a means to signify the trauma of displacement but also it highlights the liberating dimension of this trope as that which opens up a space for re-defining oneself as a desiring subject at an intersection which is metaphorically reached by every single diasporic subject: the intersection between the two forces of death and desire.

Whether (or not) the diasporic subject ever manages to struggle free of such forces and whether (or not) one of the two forces gains the upper hand, thus, seems to be less of a crucial matter than an attention to how the building-up of such a tension can become, per se, a source of momentum and excess desire in diasporic life. "The virtual space of spectrality," after all, not only brings about certain representational possibilities for the trauma of displacement, but also highlights its empowering dimension. This psychic space of being—marked by what amounts to an epiphanic ethical encounter between the self and its internal irreducible otherness (externalized in form of a phantom of a kind)—can both facilitate the unbinding of a hitherto stunted desire and the embrace of the irreducibility of otherness on its own terms, thereby paving the way for the recognition, acknowledgement, and accommodation of (i.e. mourning) the restless phantoms of all kinds (either of racial otherness, of occluded shame, of a sense of unbelonging, etc.). Of course, by no means does this suggest that accommodating such phantoms runs smoothly or that working through the trauma of displacement is definite. The diasporic subject constantly, though unconsciously, incorporates (rather than introjecting) the constitutive element of loss at the core of his/her subjectivity by activating a series of dysfunctional defense mechanisms (like melancholic attachment to one's ethnicity, denial of one's ethnicity, anger towards one's ethnicity, appropriation of an exilic self, and aggressive repression of one's sense of unbelonging). Nevertheless, the virtual space of the return of the phantom of the (un)dead as an abstract psychic space immune to the spatio-temporal logic always carries the seeds of healing and catharsis. It is worth noting that this psychic space is often created via the cathartic force of a new object of desire which, by facilitating the emergence of the interpersonal moments of the acknowledgement, metaphorisation, and acceptance of an oft-internalized sense of hate, rage, fear, shame, pain, and loss, endows the diasporic subject with a fair chance to (re-) negotiate her/his subjectivity in relation to her/his previously-repressed affects and helps her/him to stand on the threshold of healing—as fleeting and temporary as such healing might be.

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