NEGOTIATIONS OF THE DIASPORIC SELF AND COUPLES' LIVES

Lucia-Mihaela GROSU-RĂDULESCU[1]

Abstract

This article is dedicated to a discussion about the multivoicedness noticeable in some of Uma Parameswaran, Anita Rau Badami and Shauna Singh Baldwin's immigrant female characters. It will be shown that the authors describe this issue either as a source of tension or as a harmonious combination of Eastern and Western mentalities.
The present research relies on theories of acculturation and diasporic criticism, which form the starting point of the argument. The literary analysis will demonstrate that the negotiation among the often divergent selves of the selected characters shapes their relationships with their partners in intimacy, mirroring, to a certain extent, the difficulties immigrants face in their social encounters. For the purpose of this literary interpretation, the author chose two of Uma Parameswaran's short stories, namely "What Was Always Hers" and "Maru and the M. M. Syndrome", an exploration of Leela Bhat's struggles, one of Anita Rau Badami's protagonists in Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? *and an analysis of the heroine in Shauna Singh Baldwin's short story "Devika".*

Keywords: acculturation; immigrants; diaspora; dialogism; multivoicedness.

1. Acculturation and Dialogism in Diasporic Criticism

The present exploration of private lives and the impact of the immigrant subjectivity's dialogism regarding their perceptions of intimacy relies on the theoretical instruments offered by critics belonging to postcolonial and diasporic studies.

Bearing in mind Stuart Hall's thesis regarding the constant shaping and re-shaping of (immigrant) cultural identities (see Hall, 1993), we can easily assume that for the people who are inhabiting an in-between cultural space, a process of adaptation and adjustment of mentalities takes place. For critic Sunil Bhatia, diasporic subjects need be considered from the point of view of an intense process of negotiation between "their sense of simultaneously being in multiple cultures and their sense of being 'hyphenated' and 'in-between' cultures" (Bhatia, 2002: 62).

[1] Lucia-Mihaela Grosu-Rădulescu, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, lucia.grosu@rei.ase.ro

This complex standpoint is best understood if we use the social equation forwarded by Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan. He posits that in order to make sense of how diasporic people manage their multiple subject positions we must consider identity as "a normative measure that totalizes heterogeneous 'selves' and 'subjectivities'" (Radhakrishnan, 1996: 158). If cultural identity is a construct in permanent motion (see Hall, 1993), and if diasporic subjects embody a sum of heterogeneous selves, it is acceptable to assume that people in diaspora require good negotiating skills in order to manage their multiple selves.

It is this last assumption that Bhatia will use to build his thesis regarding the fluctuations among the multiple *I* positions a diasporic self is experiencing: "For the diasporic self, there is an ongoing, simultaneous dialogical movement between the *I* positions of feeling at once assimilated, separated and marginalized" (Bhatia, 2002: 69). For the critic, a dialogical model of acculturation is the ideal method to explain the psychological complexities of diasporic communities.

In the present research article, by taking a close look at selected characters from Uma Parameswaran's, Anita Rau Badami's and Shauna Singh Baldwin's prose, it will be illustrated that this process of negotiation among different voices of the protagonists stands for different subject positions. It will be demonstrated that, in their efforts of adjustment to the new adoptive country, the movement between their *I* positions is either a tense or a harmonious phenomenon.

2. "Moving and Mixing": Perspectives on Private Lives in Parameswaran's Short Stories

This section focuses on two short stories extracted from Uma Parameswaran's volume entitled *What Was Always Hers*, namely the short story that gives the title to the collection and "Maru and the M. M. Syndrome". In Susheela Rao's words, this collection addresses mainly Indians, but "the writings have a social value with an ameliorating effect" (Rao, 2002).

The chosen literary works are both focusing on female characters and the challenges they face in their private lives. If in "What Was Always Hers" the main character, Veeru, gradually passes from the innocence of a country girl to the strength of an independent woman able to face divorce and single motherhood, Maru, the protagonist in the second short story, is an educated middle-aged woman who emigrated to Canada over twenty years ago. Both stories are written from a female character's viewpoint, but they differ greatly in tone and outlook.

The further analysis will pinpoint those instances in Parameswaran's writing that entitle me to posit that her characters' private lives are described in a continuous process of negotiation between Indian/Eastern and Canadian/Western attitudes which stands for a permanent negotiation of their subject positions.

In "What Was Always Hers", we read the story of Veeru. From her arrival to Canada (to join her husband), we watch her learning the new Canadian ways, developing into a strong woman. Eventually, she is betrayed by her husband, Niranjan, who leaves her in order to marry Veeru's close friend, Jitin, the woman whom she was admiring the most. In this short story, Parameswaran writes a proclamation of women's strength to cope with change, with a new country, with divorce, the strength to "re-create" themselves from zero, to learn to become voices of the community.

From the very beginning, Veeru acknowledges that her husband's needs are not like any other man's in India. Canada has transformed him into a leader and she knows he needs her support and help.

[…] she would make herself his […] equal so that he could achieve his fullest potential, for she knew that he was made for greatness.[...] She did not swear that she would serve him and wait on him hand and foot, as any other woman in the village would have done. (Paramerswaran, 1999: 11)

The author presents Veeru's contact with the strange and new world of Canada as a stage in her personal development. Marriage is to her the opportunity to surpass the boundaries imposed on women in the native country. Here she can be more than a traditional submissive country wife; she must "craft herself" into a new kind of woman.

Coming to Canada meant for Veeru a discovery of not only an unknown place but of herself as well. If at the beginning her wish to grow was fuelled by her admiration and love for her husband, after their subsequent divorce she realizes that she had actually "become the woman she was born to be":

As she got into her Volvo after the meeting, inserted the key into the ignition and heard the purr of the engine as the car glided out, she felt power again, the power of how far she had come, how she had become the woman she was born to be, self-confident, energetic, a pro at the art of speaking, of sizing up her audience and speaking in their language: she had carefully crafted herself into the role by growing, growing to become the woman she was born to be. (Paramerswaran, 1999: 30-31)

Parameswaran's focus on the re-creation of Veeru in the host-land speaks about the author's preoccupation with the mechanisms of acculturation that immigrants experience when in contact with a different framework of mentalities and customs. In this short story, she gives numerous accounts of how the clashes between Eastern and Western mind-sets affect her main character. In an episode of Veeru's early days in Canada, when she expresses her fear about the possibility of her husband's infidelity, the other Indian-Canadian women in her group dismiss her doubts on account of Canadian/ Western social customs:

[…] at the beginning, she had been puzzled, upset at the way Niranjan turned to Jitin for everything, put his hand on her shoulder when consulting her. When she had hesitantly told one of the women about her fears, they had laughed it away. This is Canada, they said, and a man's hand on a woman's shoulder meant no more than on a man's. […] She is just one of the boys. (Paramerswaran, 1999: 26)

This kind of familiarity between unrelated men and women, unheard of in the Indian traditional society, is deemed irrelevant in the Canadian context. Paradoxically enough, Veeru's intuition proves to have been accurate later in the story when her husband announces he wants a divorce to start a new marriage to Jitin.

All through the short story we notice glimpses of the in-betweenness characterizing Veeru's decisions. She makes up her mind to learn and grow, out of an undying love and dedication to her husband which in itself is a twofold decision: on the one hand there is Veeru's pact with a goddess to whom she promises to better herself for her husbands' sake – a Hindu influence in her reasoning—, and on the other hand there is her desire to become a helpmate for her husband, his equal—a result of the Western ideas promoting the empowerment of women to which she was exposed in Canada.

Another illustration of Parameswaran's hybridized perspective on couple practices, which speaks about the characters' internalized multiple subject positions, is the final part of the story. After giving up their friendship on account of the man they both loved, Veeru and Jitin are once again reunited. In the final pages of the story we see the two women achieving a state of oneness, a unique bond.

The author's feminist views circle around principles of gender equality, women's empowerment and the unique relationship all women share (principles advocated especially by Second Wave feminist theories (Gamble, 2006: 25-35). One of the prominent figures of Western feminism, Simone de Beauvoir, talks in the Conclusion to her work, *The Second Sex*, about women's chance to undergo an inner metamorphosis which will lead them to achieving economic and social equality to men (see de Beauvoir, 1947). It is also a sort of metamorphosis that Parameswaran describes in the final pages of "What Was Always Hers". The encounter between Veeru and Jitin, years after they had renounced their friendship, is the best illustration of the bond that women can achieve.

When finishing "What Was Always Hers" the reader is left with the feeling that this narrative was mostly a story of emotional struggles and inner conflicts. The Canadian social backdrop appears at times as an inhibitor of old Indian beliefs (the example of the familiar attitude between Niranjan and Jitin), and at others as a catalyst for Veeru's budding efforts to grow into a strong independent woman, a desire first ignited by her faith in the goddess she worships but whose name is

never mentioned in the text. We notice that the author stresses in her prose, what she will announce later in her criticism of the diaspora namely that immigrants should try to overcome the third phase of their settlement in Canada – i.e. interacting mostly with other Indian-Canadians – and this can only be done when a balance is established between the Indian heritage and the Canadian setting (see Parameswaran 2007).

In "What Was Always Hers", this balance is achieved when Veeru and Jitin finally acknowledge that their identities rely not only on issues of race and social roles, but also on matters of the heart. By admitting their love for one another and deciding to build a future together they are not only defying their homeland's ancestral patriarchal norms, but also recognizing the freedom bestowed on them by the Canadian society.

"Maru and The M.M. Syndrome", the second short story discussed, is a narrative written in the first-person by a female narrator, Maru, who decides to resign her job and join her husband gone to do research in Ottawa. Her decision is motivated by her fear that the male menopause (m. m.) syndrome might strike and ruin their marriage. The story begins with Maru wondering about men's middle-life crisis, which seems to have affected the majority of the male faculty in the university where she works. Her comments and musings are both humorous and witty and allow the reader to see that Maru is a woman whose secretarial job is below her intellectual potential. The character herself is very honest about her positioning as an immigrant in the Canadian society:

If I ever had to go to a shrink, I guess she'd figure out that I've never reconciled myself to being a secretary; everyone in my family who went out into the working world, and my family is spread all over the globe, is a professor or executive. Had I married someone who lived in India, I'd have completed my Master's and joined the faculty, and then I'd have completed my PhD and become a professor by now; instead of which I am here, on this secretary's chair. The shrink might come to the conclusion that I resented all this, but let us face it, life is a package deal—you can't choose just parts. (Parameswaran, 1999: 83)

Having sacrificed her career to the benefit of building a family in a foreign country doesn't fill her with bitterness, on the contrary she is aware of the multiple facets of her self and rejoices in her own complexity: "True, my derriere has expanded over the years sitting on this chair, but that is just a little part of me, as are all the other parts of wife, mother, social worker. Me, the real holistic me, only I knew, and Siv [her husband] maybe, if he hadn't forgotten now in the throes of m. m." (Parameswaran, 1999: 84).

As the narrative unfolds, we understand this will be a story about Maru's efforts to find her voice as a writer. Uma Parameswaran paints the portrait of a mature

woman who realizes it is high time she returned to her dream of becoming a writer. It is in the privacy of her thoughts that we notice the way in which present and past influences come together in the process of creation: "But behind these recent echoes I heard the murmur of women's voices, a soothing sound that had become part of my life of late [...]" (Parameswaran, 1999: 96-97).

In the second half of Maru's story we witness her tapping into memories of the past in a less usual manner. Parameswaran resorts to magic realism to paint Maru's efforts to find her own creative force caught between a Western present and an Eastern past. The apparition of her aunt Chikkamma at her door one day is described as a natural occurrence, the reader finding out only later in the narrative that Chikkamma had been dead for a long time. Her aunt is the embodiment of Maru's subconscious struggles to merge her Indian heritage with her present Canadian life. Here are Chikkamma's words through which she tries to guide Maru in the direction of an awareness of her legacy:

"I see you are stumped for words. Not a good omen, one might say, to be losing your vocabulary. Writing your memoirs, I hear, but only about your life since you came here, from what I can see. For twenty years we feed you and teach you and tend you through mumps and measles and diarrhoea and whatnot, and bang-slam, you shut the door and write only about curling and Manipeg and your feminist friends." (Parameswaran, 1999: 98)

Through Chikkamma's words we understand that what Maru intends to achieve with her writing is a bridge between the two worlds she belongs to. She is to become the voice of the women of the past, be they silent and submissive, or rebellious and ambitious, those women who were once muted by a patriarchal society and who are now patronized by younger Western feminists. This is the actual stance of postcolonial feminist critics who have engaged in fighting both the motherland patriarchy and the oversimplified and generalized constructions of the third world woman by Western feminism (see Mohanty, 1991, 2006).

It appears that Parameswaran's character is trying to avoid this over-generalizing attitude toward women and to achieve through her memoirs the truthful rendering of a woman's life embracing her cultural doubleness and multivoicedness. What the memory of Chikkamma and of other women of her past teaches Maru is to embrace her multiple cultural facets and to discover the creative forces hidden beneath the continuous process of their interactions.

We have seen that both of Parameswaran's short stories, "What Was Always Hers" and "Maru and the M. M. Syndrome", focus on the very intimate experiences of the main female characters. We could argue that one of the author's aims was to capture the extent to which cultural markers influence and shape her heroines not only in their social interactions as immigrants in a foreign land, but also in their private lives.

Both protagonists, Veeru and Maru display the dialogical selves Sunil Bhatia discusses in his article "Acculturation, Dialogical Voices and the Construction of the Diasporic Self". We notice a permanent negotiation between the different *I* positions of the two characters. Their multiple voices resounding in Parameswaran's narrative (*the immigrant*, *the mother*, *the wife*, *the self-sufficient woman*) are not only generated by their displacement from their homeland, but also by their personal search for identity in a new land.

The East-West hybridized perspective regarding her characters' decisions becomes for Parameswaran a specific feature of her Indian-Canadian immigrant-characters. By focusing on their inner lives, rather than on their social interactions, the author presents the readers with unique insights into her protagonists' psyches.

Maru's and Veeru's thoughts, feelings and actions exemplify the on-going process of "negotiation, intervention and mediation" (Bhatia, 2002: 59) distinguishing an immigrant's search for a new (hybridized) identity in Canada. The heroines exhibit a cultural "moving and mixing" (see Berry and Sam 1997), culminating, in Maru's case, with finding her voice as a self-sufficient writer, and in Veeru's case, with a love relationship with another woman. As we have seen in our textual analysis, there is no clear demarcation between Eastern and Western mentalities in their actions, but rather a process of continuous negotiation leading to a unique cultural product.

3. Multivoicedness in "Can You Hear the Nightbird Call"?

In Anita Rau Badami's novel, *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?*, we can easily identify illustrations of Bhatia's dialogic self embodied by the character Leela Bhat. The writer introduces Leela in the homonymous Part Two of the book. We read the story of a hybrid girl, "the pale-eyed, thin daughter of Hari Shastri and Rosa Schweers, a half-and-half hovering on the outskirts of their family's circle of love" (Badami, 2006: 74). Her wish of being seen as a legitimate Indian comes true after she gets married to a man whose ancestry is very much esteemed in Bangalore: the Bhat family. Balu Bhat is, in the view of the matchmaker, "difficult to please". He displays "modern, western, strange notions about divorce and widow remarriage, the education of women and their inheritance rights" (Badami, 2006: 91). Leela sees Balu Bhat as her ticket to legitimacy.

By being more of herself than she realizes at that time, Leela achieves her goal of being seen as an authentic Indian by taking her husband's name and utterly dedicating herself to his family where, for the first time in her existence, she finds love and respect. It is not surprising that her husband's decision to emigrate to Canada is perceived by Leela as betrayal: "She was overcome by a sense of betrayal. She had married Balu because of his apparent stability. She loved his ancestors—purebred Hindu Brahmins, untainted either racially or in their religion

[...] " (Badami, 2006: 99). Together with their two children, Leela and Balu relocate to Vancouver where Balu has been offered a better job.

This female character is a complex one, especially because her personality encompasses two types of hybrids. On the one hand, she is an ethnic hybrid, daughter of a white German woman and an Indian man, and on the other, she is a newly hyphenated minority in Canada.

Rau Badami's descriptions of Leela and her life as an immigrant become illustrative for what the critic Bhatia described as the "simultaneous dialogical movement between the *I* positions of feeling at once assimilated, separated and marginalized." (Bhatia 2002: 69). Leela had been used to being seen as a hybrid since her early childhood, and her desire for purity ran deep in her veins. When she marries Balu Bhat her dreams of respectability and caste/race purity come true. Yet, when she is dislocated from her life in India and transplanted in the Canadian society where she is once again marginalized, Leela feels betrayed by her fate once again.

Nevertheless, in time, Leela becomes the perfect illustration of negotiating between her multiple subject positions. At a certain point in the narrative she becomes aware of her permanent shifting and dialogue among her different voices:

Hearing herself speak, she marvelled at the variety of tongues she had acquired—one that made her sound like Erin [her colleague], another soothing, in charge-of-things tone, for the customers who came to her like helpless children holding out pairs of shoes in confusion, a third for her home, the children, Balu, Bibi-ji and the wide circle of friends and acquaintances she now had. How enormous her world had become that she needed so many languages to negotiate it. (Badami, 2006: 305)

Author Rau Badami clearly suggests Leela's acquired skill, which allows her to switch from one voice to another, in order to suit her multifaceted self. This multivoicedness of Leela as an immigrant pictured during her acculturation process is not described by the author as a conflicting state[2], but as a slow acknowledgement of her own growing complexity. Her movement from one "tongue" to another becomes natural and her different selves seem to be in harmony with each other.

Towards the end of the novel, Leela realizes that after all, she has managed to look like she belonged to the place she thought would never accept her or that she would never accept as her own:

[2] According to Sunil Bhatia's approach to the dialogism of the diasporic self, there necessarily is an asymmetrical and conflicting power relation between the different *I* positions the immigrant subject experiences in diaspora (Bhatia, 2002: 73).

She felt idiotically pleased. A stranger had stopped her, Leela Bhat, originally from Bangalore, India, for directions. [...] And in that woman's eyes she had seen, not an awareness of her alienness, but a recognition of one who belonged, one who needed no maps to find her way. (Badami, 2006: 312)

We can infer that with the character Leela, Anita Rau Badami offers the readers her own belief in the necessity of building a complex subject position in the process of acculturation. Although Leela's tragic end could be interpreted as the failure of this woman to find acceptance either in India or in Canada, the insight in Leela's thoughts allows us to conclude that the writer supports Bhatia's theory of the constant negotiation of multiple selves in diaspora.

4. The Dialogical Self and Schizophrenia in Shauna Singh Baldwin's "Devika"

In the short story "Devika" (part of the collection *English Lessons and Other Stories*), Shauna Singh Baldwin condenses in just twenty pages the psychological turmoil of an Indian wife settled with her husband in Canada. Critic Coral Ann Howells believes the short story harbours a complicated pattern of diasporic life elements:

Focusing on some of the hidden (and not so hidden) subtexts within multiculturalism, Baldwin explores the complex interaction between immigration aspirations, systemic racism in the workplace, and the tragic effects of isolation on immigrant wives who may go quietly mad staying at home all day. (Howells, 2004: 152)

The narrative opens with Devika preparing for her husband's arrival from work and reading a letter from a high school friend, Asha. As she goes through her friend's news of the happiness of birth and the respect of her relatives for having a son, Devika is amazed at how much Asha has changed. She recalls a time when Asha believed in women's equality to men and when she promised never to submit to tradition:

Someone else must have written that letter, not Asha. Not Asha, with her "I'll never be happy being married to some rich fellow and having babies and servants to look after them." Not the Asha she remembered saying, "I'd never let anyone do a test on me—I'd like a little girl." The Asha she had known had sworn with schoolgirl sincerity to shun the rewards of complicity. That Asha could never have become this woman. (Baldwin, 2007: 170)

Devika is disappointed in her friend's transformation into a woman obeying the constraints of tradition and duty. In the following pages we learn about Devika's own personality, one suiting the long history of women's humble attitude in front of men, an attitude in line with what was expected of her: "That was her specialty.

To read others and to know what they expected. Then to do her best to satisfy, to choose as they would have her choose" (Baldwin, 2007: 172).

Devika's arrival in Canada to join a husband she had known in the short days of traditional marriage ceremonies before he left to go abroad is riddled with the woman's careful behaviour aiming to please and never disturb anyone. She shows the dutiful respect to his sisters, yet we see her amazement when finding out about these women's lives in diaspora.

She knew her father had no idea Vandana Di made her husband help with the children and the dishes. Or that Kavali Di's daughter worked as a model for a lingerie catalogue. In Canada, she found it more difficult to sort the good girls from the bad ones. It is important to have both, because if there are no bad girls, how would anyone know that girls like Devika are good? (Baldwin, 2007: 173)

This mentality of good vs. bad girls, which stands for submissive vs. rebellious women, is underlying Devika's subsequent psychological crisis. Having been brought up bound to duty and respect for a clear patriarchal hierarchy, Devika's contact with the liberated attitudes of Indian immigrants living in Canada will push her into a vortex of conflicting feelings. Munos believes the presence of an alter-ego allows the protagonist to question her position in the household:

[…] if Devika's doubleness in the domestic sphere empowers her to challenge culturally-inscribed gendered hierarchies, it also preserves and maintains a dichotomy between "good girls" and "bad girls" which is presented in the text as an essential frame of reference for Baldwin's character in terms of identity construction. (Munos, 2011)

Her identity crisis is fuelled by her husband Ratan's demands. His newly established relationship with his boss and the decision to invite him home for dinner comes with Ratan's desire to "adjust" Devika to the Canadian fashion and lifestyle:

Maybe she could make a few changes […]. Her clothes, for instance. […] he was moving in life now. He tried to imagine Devika in a black velvet skirt and a white silk jacquard blouse, like [his boss] Peter Kendall's wife. […] he decided Devika must wear a dress. And pantyhose, and no nose ring. (Baldwin, 2007: 174-175)

Devika's change in behaviour is quite sudden: she sets the table for three instead of two and from the moment she tells her husband they are joined at dinner by her friend Asha, Devika will see her materialized in her life. The reason for her hallucinatory appearance is made very clear by the author:

And then she was. Asha, filling an empty chair, making the unfamiliar empty space go away. Not reformed and docile Asha, not the Asha transformed by marriage, or the Asha so proud to have a son, but the old Asha, sitting right here in Toronto,

looking Mr. Right-Can-Do-No-Wrong Ratan with cynical amusement. (Baldwin, 2007: 177)

From this moment onwards, Devika will be always accompanied by Asha, "the imaginary figure who comes to symbolize all the things that Devika would secretly like to become as an independent woman in Canada" (Howells, 2004: 153). She has arrogant comments about Ratan's behaviour or about what he says, and she displays a rebellious attitude toward everything. In Munos's opinion, "[…] not only does Asha's ghostly company represent for Devika a diversion from loneliness, but it also comes to constitute a strategy for subverting her husband's patriarchal authority" (Munos, 2011).

Devika's alter-ego, this imaginary presence which will never leave her, behaves like the exact opposite of what a "good girl" is supposed to do: she smokes, she wears vulgar clothes, she takes driving lessons and she wants to climb the CN Tower. All through the narrative, we witness Devika trying to reason with Asha and convince her to slow down. But Asha is unstoppable. At one point the writer reveals the significance behind Asha's behaviour: "Because surely that was the real problem. Asha had become a woman who had made the mistake of believing she was somehow…*significant.*" (Baldwin, 2007: 184).

Devika's schizophrenic episode is clearly caused by her own inability to manage the two contradictory selves she was harbouring. In Howells's words "this paring [between Devika and Asha] dramatizes the struggle within Devika between two different cultural inscriptions of femininity (Indian and Canadian)." (Howells 2004: 153). It is only at the end of the story, after she is the victim of a car accident that this woman finally chooses a single voice to speak for her: "'How are you, Devika?' he [Ratan] asked. […] 'I am Asha,' she said, voice low and husky. 'Devika was afraid of living here, so she just… flew away.'" (Baldwin, 2007: 189-190)

Devika's story is a very good illustration for the conflict arising during the identity negotiations of a diasporic self. In Sunil Bhatia's opinion, the dialogism of the diasporic self has to be experiencing an "asymmetrical and conflicting power relation between the different *I* positions" (Bhatia, 2002: 73). Devika's psychological breakdown and her splitting into two opposite selves is an extreme example of Bhatia's theory. Not being able to bridge her two inner voices, Devika is pushed towards insanity until she decides who she really wants to be.

Coral Ann Howells also links Devika's schizophrenia to a double-voicedness caused by a desire to belong to the host-country. Here is her apt conclusion: "Baldwin's story recognizes the pain that may be involved in processes of cultural transformation, while ironically suggesting that the way to feel at home in a new country is to reinvent oneself as someone else […]. " (Howells, 2004: 154).

5. Conclusions

The starting premise of this article was that in selected works of Uma Parameswaran, Anita Rau Badami and Shauna Singh Baldwin we could observe how female immigrant-characters display a multitude of subject positions which determines a process of negotiation of their cultural identities. The three authors illustrate this shaping and re-shaping of their selfhood, at the crossroads of Eastern and Western mentalities, in the intimacy of their relationships.

We have seen that in "What Was Always Hers" and in "Maru and the M. M. Syndrome" Uma Parameswaran describes situations in which female characters refashion their lives in order to suit a more complex identity, which they adopt in Canada. There is a constant negotiation noticeable in the two main characters analysed. Veeru and Maru juggle with their multiple voices (*wife, mother, immigrant, self-confident woman*) in a search for an encompassing identity. The East-West hybridized perspective regarding her characters' decisions becomes for Parameswaran a specific feature of Indian-Canadians. Through their choices and behaviour we observe a merger of homeland and host-land mentalities.

Leela Bhat, Anita Rau Badami's protagonist in *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call*, displays such a combination of influences as well, yet we have seen that her double hybridity (white-brown and Indian-Canadian) is permanently hindering the process of finding her place in the world. Although her inner road to understanding herself is complicated, in the end Leela will acquire a multivoicedness illustrative for hyphenated diasporic people.

Shauna Singh Baldwin's short story, "Devika", concludes our analysis of the dialogism of selves in diaspora. The pathological experience of Devika, who is unable to manage her conflicting attitudes (one leaning towards the Indian tradition of women's submission, the other reaching for a freedom specific to the Western world) is illustrative for the author's take on life in diaspora. In "Devika", Singh Baldwin rules out a healthy negotiation between contradictory subject positions and supports the idea that the transplantation of immigrants is accompanied by radical change and the re-invention of selfhood.

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The Author

Lucia-Mihaela Grosu-Rădulescu is a Lecturer with the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication, Faculty of International Business and Economics of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. She holds an MA degree in British Cultural Studies from the University of Bucharest and an MS degree in English Language Education and Research Communication in Economics from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. In 2012, she received her PhD degree in Philology from the University of Bucharest for research in the field of Canadian female ethnic writers. Her thesis has been nominated for the Best PhD Thesis in Canadian Studies Award, ICCS, Ottawa, Canada. As a teacher and researcher she has participated in numerous national and international conferences and many of her critical essays have been published in Romania and abroad. Her academic interests range from socio-economy to social psychology and literary and cultural studies. Since 2009 she has been an active member of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies.