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Europe's Poisoned Kiss:  
Navigating Hybrid Space in Shauna Singh Baldwin's Fiction

by

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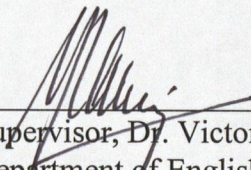
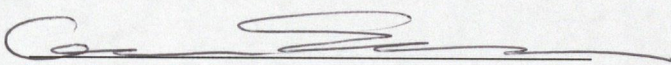
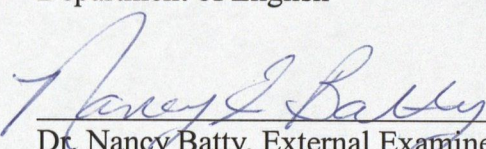
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Europe's Poisoned Kiss: Navigating Hybrid Space in Shauna Singh Baldwin's Fiction," submitted by Sharanpal Kaur Ruprai in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

  
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## Abstract

An examination of Shauna Singh Baldwin's fiction reveals an engagement with Homi K. Bhabha's theories on hybridity. Her novels and stories have explored three spheres of hybridity: first, the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western culture in which characters are caught between cultures and are required to blend customs and traditions; second, the overlapping of religious beliefs and the direct impact on South Asian women's bodies; and third, the effects of the overlapping cultures on the gender and sexuality of Indian women. An argument is made for hybridity as a disappointing yet sometimes successful position for South Asian women to challenge the boundaries of patriarchal, religious, and sexual social systems.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE “IN” TENSIONS OF HYBRIDITY

Indians coagulated  
in their religions—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh.  
A new country spawned  
its amoebic shape within the map

Shauna S. Baldwin, “The Night She Left Lahore”

As a woman I have no country. As a woman my country is  
the whole world.

Virginia Woolf, “Three Guineas”

It is the intersections of the various systemic networks of  
class, race, (hetero)sexuality, and nation, then, that position  
us as “women”

Chandra Mohanty, “Cartographies of Struggle”

Shauna Singh Baldwin is a Canadian-American writer of Indian origin. As an immigrant born in Canada, raised in India, and now residing in the United States, Baldwin’s diasporic movement has made her profoundly aware of, and affected by, the presence of cross-cultural experiences. In her fiction, she focuses on what postcolonial literary critic Homi Bhabha calls the “third space” or the space of hybridity. “Hybridity” is a term that has come to mean, within a cross-cultural context, a blending of two cultures. Bhabha offers a more complex definition, seeing cultural hybridity as

integrating notions of power and subjectivity and the creation of an inscribed third space. The inscribed third space is not a simply a “cross-cultural exchange” (Bhabha 119), but rather a site in which the dominant culture and the subcultures become interdependent. This thesis will concern itself with Baldwin’s collected works which examines theories of hybridity. Her fiction directly addresses and intimately describes the hybridity as it relates to South Asian women’s lives. She inquires into three spheres of hybridity: first, the common colonial site where characters (male and female) are caught between Eastern and Western culture; second, the religious juxtapositions of Hindu, Sikh, Christian, and Muslim practices; and third, the overlapping customs and traditions as they bear on gender and sexuality issues. Ultimately, Baldwin explores theories of hybridity in order to question the limitations (and occasional advantages) of hybridity on South Asian women lives.

Baldwin’s novels, published in Canada and United States initially, have won major prizes. Her first novel, *What the Body Remembers*, won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for best book in Canada and the Caribbean (2000). Her second novel, *The Tiger Claw*, was nominated for the Scotiabank Giller Prize (Canada) in 2005. She is read internationally; both novels have been translated into eleven languages and are included in Canadian literature courses as well as South Asian courses worldwide. Despite her success and recognition on university courses,<sup>1</sup> her fiction has gone largely unnoticed by academics in articles and books. There are a few reviews and a handful of articles<sup>2</sup> that address Baldwin’s work as the examination of Partition from a woman’s point of view. There are many South Asian women writers within Canada; for example, Himani Bannerji, Uma Parameswaran, and Lakshmi Gill<sup>3</sup> are writers who have gained a place in

Canadian literature. Baldwin is the first Sikh woman writer to address such issues as Partition, gender and sexuality, and religious conflicts from the point of view of a Sikh Canadian woman. Further, she is the first Sikh woman writer to write about the Sikh religion in relation to other Eastern religions. She stresses that the Sikh “religion is a hybrid – it takes from the Hindu and Muslim faiths” (14). Baldwin demonstrates the tensions between religions and the balancing act that South Asian women must maintain in order to survive within the hybrid world. By setting her short stories in various geographical locations such as Montreal, Rawalpindi, and Toronto, she begins to fill a gap in South Asian literature by creating work set in Canada that speaks specifically to the struggle of Sikh women within a Canadian cultural hegemony.

Baldwin presents her reader with the various tensions that exist between Canadian and Indian culture. She has to learn to adapt to her surroundings in Canada and the United States as a woman (gender), as a Sikh (religion), and a person of colour (race). This three-tiered identity construct begins to consolidate her own position within the multi-faceted scheme of hybridity. According to Bhabha, hybridity is not a “third term that resolves the tension between two cultures” (113); rather hybridity adds another “culture” to the mix. As a result, there are three cultures creating tension with the subject. As I understand the concept of hybridity, it is a site in which the subject is always being acted upon by culture, religion, and power. Moreover, these elements create tension for the subject, who attempts to balance the equation through weaving these elements together. It is within this interdependence that hybrid subjects find that they identify as “*neither the One . . . nor the Other. . . but something else besides* (Bhabha, 1988:13, emphasis in original). Therefore, hybrid individuals attempt to balance the binary by



taking from both sides of a duplicitous<sup>4</sup> cultural equation. In Baldwin's fiction, South Asian women are constantly trying to navigate within and balance the multiple cultures, religions, and genders so that they are able to survive and maintain their power within the hybrid space. This balancing act can result in the development of a fuller, broader understanding of their evolving identity within hybrid cultural milieus. The attempt to balance the equation becomes the space of hybridity and within this space new cultural codes and systems are constructed. Hybrid subjects may quickly realize that there are many contradictory characteristics within this attempted third space, and that they must frequently negate some characteristics in order to salvage aspects of their culture,<sup>5</sup> religion, and gender. For Bhabha, the hybridity is a site of resistance where "neither colonizer nor colonized is independent of the other" (95). Therefore, the resistance comes from the "ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourse as they articulate the signs of cultural difference" (94). Hybrid subjects therefore begin to layer culture formations in an attempt to perform both cultures. The subject begins to layer culture formations either consciously or unconsciously. Through Baldwin's characters, we see the impact of how some women consciously use hybridity to inform their lives.

The tensions at large between Eastern and Western customs are the driving force of Baldwin's short story collection, *English Lessons and Other Stories*. She explores South Asian women's lives, and the ways in which hybridity has contributed to their fight for independence within a patriarchal society. By juxtaposing East and West in her narratives, Baldwin maintains South Asian woman's visibility within both cultures. When South Asian women maintain their visibility, what is exposed is the double bind that

these women find themselves in – the colonizer’s discrimination against women as well as discrimination within their own cultural codes of patriarchal behaviour. This double bind reveals the hybrid world as precarious at best, and these women are often left to learn how to navigate through spaces of potential violence on their own, cast into frequently bleak, compromised spaces where their lives and livelihoods are literally at risk. South Asian women often endure violence in order to enter the hybrid world in the first place. Once they are in the hybrid world, violence becomes central to the space; thus the space must be monitored by the women. When violence erupts, three distinct positions are formed for women: some women fight back and gain awareness of their own strength; other women attempt to fight back but are unable to do so effectively and yield to patriarchal law; others yield to suicide. In this ultimate, final space, women who cannot fight back or do not want to submit to patriarchal law, physically and tragically remove themselves from their untenable situation. In Baldwin’s narratives, the pros and cons of each space are debated, and what is revealed is that “colonialism intensifies patriarchal oppression” (Loomba 142). Women bond within this space and create patterns – in a sense “guidebooks” – on how to navigate through ambivalent locations. As a result, these narratives are what second and later generations of South Asian women read as patterns of negotiating the hybrid space. These negotiations formulate the core of hybrid identities and become part of the discourse around South Asian women’s writing.

In examining Baldwin’s writing, one can see that this issue of how women’s lives are complicated by hybridity within various patriarchal societies is a dominant concern. Baldwin reveals how the hybrid space, under the umbrella of a patriarchal society, negatively and positively affects women’s social positions and relationships. Women

begin to realize that they must learn to blend into this duplicitous hybridity if they want to survive. The hybrid space is characterized by ambivalence and mimicry. Within Baldwin's work we can see how she utilizes ambivalence to articulate the struggle that South Asian women have in obtaining their freedom from a colonial patriarchy and from their own cultural and religious traditions. Ambivalence is defined as the "complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized" (Ashcroft 12). Through this attraction and repulsion relationship, the hybrid subjects are empowered because the subjects challenge authority by changing their "conditions of recognition while maintaining their visibility" (Bhabha 119). In the overlapping of two cultural traditions, each cultural tradition is set up against the other. Therefore the subject must choose one tradition over the other and as a result one tradition is favored, thus creating a hierarchy of traditions. In Baldwin's narratives, her characters do not choose one religion or culture over another; rather, she demonstrates that in order for South Asian women to survive within hybrid sites they must choose more than one religion. The result of participating in more than one religion is that South Asian women must inscribe their body with two or more religious symbols. They cannot merely choose one religion over another, but rather they must learn to manipulate religion to fit their needs. Their bodies become the site of a duplicitous religious site. For example, Roop, the protagonist in *What the Body Remembers*, wears a Kara (steel bangle) taken from the Sikh religion and she has her name tattooed in Urdu, a custom taken from the Muslim tradition. By inscribing her body with both religions, she is able to choose which one she needs at any given time. A second example is found in *The Tiger Claw*. Noor understands that if she reveals herself as a Muslim within France or Germany, she

will be shot dead. Therefore, she learns Christian prayers and customs to get her through her mission and make her an affective spy. Bhabha emphasizes that “the failure of colonial regimes to produce stable and fixed identities, and suggests that ‘hybridity’ of identities and the ‘ambivalence’ of colonial discourse more adequately describes the dynamics of the colonial encounter” (Loomba 92). Baldwin’s characters slowly learn how to inscribe multiple religions, cultures, and genders in order to survive the hybrid space and by doing so they maintain their visibility and hold on power. For Baldwin religion is another tool for women to use within the hybrid space and she does not hold on to notions of religious truth. Richard King stresses that when studying religion one must account for “the material and the political on the one hand and the cultural and the religious on the other as mutually imbricated dimensions of human existence” (King 61). Baldwin’s narratives weave together the cultural and religious elements, so that a complex interrogated narrative is created. When analyzing the various elements of religion in Baldwin’s work, what is revealed is how South Asian women’s bodies are duplicitous religious sites and, these women are dismantling and interrupting patriarchal societies.

Baldwin uses mimicry to explore how Sikh women access power by mimicking cultural codes, religious practices, and gender. By doing so, Baldwin opens up a space for discussion. When Sikh women characters “put on” masculine symbols, how is their gender read? When they “put on” these symbols, they also “putting on” a different gender? By putting on religious masculine symbols, are they also putting on religion? Bhabha asserts that mimicry is “the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power”

(86). Through mimicking gender, South Asian women are able to maintain or even to better their social position. Baldwin uses mimicry as a tool to construct her South Asian male characters as “*almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 86; emphasis in original). In Baldwin’s narratives South Asian women are required to mimic the men in their lives—the same men who mimic British or Canadian culture. Thus, women are mimicking British or Canadian culture through South Asian men. As Bhabha explains, “the discourse of mimicry is constructed around *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (86; emphasis in original). The slippage of mimicry is twofold for South Asian women. First, they are miming cultural codes as seen through the eyes of men; second, they are mimicking gender roles. What is revealed when South Asian women mimic South Asian men is the “*menace* of mimicry [in] its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 88). The authority of South Asian men is disrupted and challenged, as are the colonial culture and language. However, mimicry is not just a double vision or “a partial representation/recognition of the colonial object” (Bhabha 88). For women in Baldwin’s fiction, double vision becomes quadrupled and therefore blurred beyond duplicity into a multiplicitous social arena. It can become too complicated to mimic for the women, and they begin to see their oppression through a blurry haze. For example, once Roop begins to realize that Sardarji views English customs as his own, she realizes that she is trapped within both the British social structure and the Indian social structure. Once she recognizes that she is trapped, she begins to see the beauty and strength in the women around her. As a result, she turns inward and away from the blurred image, and toward other women. She learns, alongside them, about a

sense of power and freedom that does not include mimicking men. In comparison, in *The Tiger Claw*, Baldwin constructs a female character who eloquently mimics British men, Noor Khan. Through this character, we are able to see how a South Asian woman becomes entrapped and is forced to mimic at all costs, and as a result fails to maintain any identity. Baldwin accurately describes the hybrid space and its limitations, and by creating the perfect hybrid in Noor Khan she demonstrates how the space is able to aid diasporic subjects in their quest to become part of their new homeland.

Baldwin also explores how hybridity is maintained by women, and how they are often successful when they attempt to move beyond the hybridized sites when they explore issues of sexuality. In particular, she constructs a narrative around a woman, Satya who refuses to mark her body with multiple religions and is unable to mark her body through her gender by birthing children. She thinks to herself:

I am not a wife, for my husband has abandoned me. I am not a widow, for he still lives. I am not a mother, for the son he gave me is taken away; I am not a sister, for I have no brother. With no father, I am but a daughter of my Bebeji. And so I am no one. (*What the Body Remembers* 341)

Satya knows that within a patriarchal Indian and British society, she does not stand a chance against the second wife her husband has married. Her only roles are those of a daughter and a mother, roles with no power within both societies. Baldwin uses lesbian desire as an avenue to escape the confines of Satya's social position as well as the constraints of British-ruled India. Nevertheless, Baldwin use Satya's body as a marker for female queer desire but she does not allow for the full possibility of a queer female South Asian identity. She simply gestures towards this notion. Therefore "queer female desire



or subjectivity exists, crucially, outside the frame of the possible” (Gopinath 191).

Baldwin renders women’s bodies as central fixtures within a hybrid space. Moreover, these bodies are significant cultural markers of cultural and religious practices. The biological female functions as a site for re-coding and manipulating the tensions within the hybrid space. As Meghana Nayak explains, “Baldwin’s accounts of Sikh women’s struggles during Partition effectively reveal the social practices aimed at controlling and containing women’s bodies” (4). In Baldwin’s fiction, Sikh women in particular have to maintain both sides of this hybrid space as well as learn to layer and discard various cultural and religious practices, all the time balancing issues around both sexuality and gender.

Baldwin’s study of cultural hybridity, we shall see, is a complex arrangement of cultural, religious, and sexual signifiers that are “woven together, yet tense with a contained rebellion. You couldn’t pull one twig from those baskets without unraveling the whole” (*English Lesson*, “Nothing Must Spoil this Visit” 103). The basket image effectively describes how Baldwin’s stories and novels represent the challenging role of South Asian women within the spheres of hybridity: Baldwin constructs her individual literary narratives, inserting women’s lives like strong yet frequently tenuous “twigs,” and so provides the reader with an interlacing container that is inextricably held together by the tensions and the intentions of hybridity, particularly in the spheres of Eastern and Western customs, tradition, religion, gender, and sexuality.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For instance Professor Doris Jakobsh of the Department of Religion at University of Waterloo teaches Baldwin's short stories in the course "*Sikhism: Origin and Development*." Professor Ravishankar Rao from the Department of English at Mangalore University teaches Baldwin's novels in the course "Indian Writing in English Canada".

<sup>2</sup> Amit Chaudhuri states: "Baldwin does very well to make the two women and their family her main focus, rather than the history of events leading to partition and independence" (2). He continues his review and comments on the narrative form: "the narratives about fathers estranged from daughters, mothers from sons, husbands from wives, becomes a metaphor for the turmoil and flux we call history, without always speaking of that history directly"(2).

<sup>3</sup> Himani Bannerji's: *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (2002), and *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism* (1995); Uma Parameswaran's: *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* (2002), *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-wet Bodice* (2001), and *What Was Always Hers* (1999) Lakshmi Gill's: *First Clearing: An Immigrant's Tour of Life: Poems* (1972), and *The Third Infinitive* (1993).

<sup>4</sup> I use the word duplicitous to mean misleading or deceptive. Hybridity requires the subject balance multiple cultures, religions and genders therefore, the subjects begins to

evaluate these options. What can become deceptive is that the cultures are equal.

However this is not the case, when weighing out these options the subject begins to see how the cultural equations are set up against each other.

<sup>5</sup> However, when one enters the hybrid space, one often sees culture as fixed and therefore “identity is grounded in a fixed set of shared characteristics or experiences” (Henze 231). Hybridity uses parts of culture in order to construct new codes and structures within the hybrid space.

## CHAPTER ONE: REVEALING THE LAYERS OF HYBRIDITY

In Edward Said's view, culture is "all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure." Said continues to explain that culture over time "comes to be associated, often aggressively, with nation or the state; this differentiates "us" from "them," almost always with some degree of xenophobia (xiii). Therefore culture is directly linked to national identities which are, at times, separated along geographical lines. When those borders are blurred and two cultures are overlapped or layered upon each other, the result is hybridity. When peeling back the layers of culture, what is revealed is the negotiating process between "us" and "them," between two languages, between belief systems, between customs, between habits, and between values. "It is the 'in-between' space that carries the burden of meaning of culture" (Aschroft et al., 119). In this chapter, I explore the construction of the "in-between" in Baldwin's fiction. In particular, I address the negotiation process between a Sikh Indian culture (an Eastern culture) and Western culture. Sikh Indian culture is derived from a Sikh religious practice and life style. Moreover, this culture is rooted in India and more specifically in the state of Punjab, India. Eastern culture includes its own history before colonialism and imperialism. Western culture is defined as European or North American culture that is also steeped in history of colonialism and imperialism.<sup>1</sup> Baldwin presents readers with literature in which South Asian women are entering the hybridity one cultural layer at a time. Baldwin's South Asian women characters negotiate through a combined Eastern

cultural space and a Western cultural space and learn to navigate and survive an Eastern/Western cultural terrain.

Baldwin begins her short story collection, *English Lessons and Other Stories*, with “Rawalpindi 1919,” in which a mother is required to layer Western customs within Indian society. Throughout the story, the mother visualizes how her son will lose the Indian way of life once he leaves India for England. For instance, she understands that the simple act of meeting people will be different for her son: “But Sarup is a friendly boy and he will have Angrez boys as friends and he will learn the shake-hand instead of our no-polluting palms-together Sat Sri Akal” (10). The mother is clearly concerned about her son’s adapting to Western customs and forgetting Indian customs. She is anxious about her son’s physical appearance: “They would expect him to tie his beard, his long dark beard, up under his chin” (10). She is sure to do her motherly duty and provide her sons with “enough turbans to last two months on the boat and three years in England” (10). As a parent, all she can do is provide her sons with religious tools in the hope that they will not lose cultural and religious traditions. In order to create the balance between the customs of England and India, the mother layers the customs of both cultures. For example, she tells her husband, “You will need to buy chairs for this house when he returns . . . . And we will need plates” (11). The wife’s demand for chairs and plates signifies the understanding on her part of how she will have to make the house more “English” or “Western” for her son. She is not asking to completely change their way of life, rather she is demanding a small change that according to her will make the household more “Western.” It is within this moment of recognition that she engages with hybridity. By doing so, she protects herself from the changes that will occur because of

colonialism, and the effects that it will have on her family in the present and the future. The husband has been to England but, in this short story, he has not picked up any English customs other than sending his son to an English school in India and later to England. Sending the son to England to study is a point of colonization within the household. The father's sense of the future is different from that of the mother's. He has returned to India from England and has earned a living in India and has returned to his Indian customs, such as sitting on the floor. The wife recognizes that she will have to act as a catalyst for the layering of Western traditions with their Eastern traditions. She has to act as the catalyst because her husband, who has returned from England, does not see the need to layer customs and practices. With the added layer of Western ways within India in her Indian household, her position becomes even more complex, and demonstrates the duplicitous demands of specific hybridized identity. Sociologist Amita Handa outlines how the movement from one country to another is associated "with a sense of pride and accomplishment as with fear: fear about the modern world and its perceived social and moral ills" (35). Baldwin writes about this fear of the "new" country but she is able to illustrate the fine details of how the layering process of two worlds begins. Baldwin constructs a short story that focuses on the mother's thoughts and actions. She ends this two-page story with the mother demanding "chairs and plates" from her husband. By isolating these moments of hybridity, the reader is lured into the world of hybridity.

In contrast to "Rawalpindi 1919," "Montreal 1962," is a story set in Canada. In this story, the wife is required to maintain Eastern customs within North American society. She is successful at navigating the hybrid space because she knows which battles to fight. No matter how hard she tries to maintain her Eastern customs and beliefs, she is



required to layer them with a variety of Western customs. The wife does not necessarily want to work outside the home, but understands that she will need to do so in order for her husband to wear his turban and continue to live within Canada. The wife explains:

And so, my love, I will not let you cut your strong rope of hair and go without a turban into this land of strangers. The knot my father tied between my chunni and your turban is still strong between us, and it shall not fail you know. My hands will tie a turban every day upon your head and work so we can keep it there. (16)

The “Montreal” wife would rather have her husband working within Canada without having to compromise his religious beliefs. The husband is unable to secure a job because employers ask him to cut his hair and he refuses to do so. Baldwin successfully highlights the internal and external struggle of immigrant Sikh men and women.<sup>2</sup> In the opening of this short story, she explains how Sikhs who spoke English were enticed to come to Canada:

This was not how they described emigrating to Canada. I still remember them saying to you [her husband], “You’re a well-qualified man. We need professional people.” And they talked about freedom and opportunity for those lucky enough to already speak English.” (13)

Little did the Sikhs know that the jobs that awaited them came with a price: “‘You must be reborn white-skinned – and clean-shaven to show it – to survive.’ Just a few months ago, they called us exotic new Canadians, new blood to build a new country” (13). The

wife in “Montréal 1962” successfully navigates hybridity partly because she does not have to assimilate completely into Western notions of living. She continues to wash and dry her husband’s turbans. By maintaining specific cultural practices, she is able to retain a powerful connection to her Eastern heritage, and by doing so, she maintains a connection to her duties as a wife:

I place each turban in turn on the bubbly surface and watched them grow dark and heavy, sinking slowly softly into the warmth . . . . I leaned close and reached in, working each one in a rhythm bone-deep, as my mother and hers must have done before me. (14)

The wife finds new methods of drying the turban in the small sunless basement apartment as she ties the cloth to the curtain rod and allows it to dry. Through a combination of memory and daily ritual, the wife utilizes hybridity as she comes up with creative ways of attending to simple household chores.

In the short story “Dropadi Ma,” the character of the grandmother understands the tension between East and West. Her strong desire to see her grandchildren happy overrides her desire to uphold Indian customs strictly. By supplying her grandson, Sukhimana, with a gold bangle and telling him, “Jeeo Beta” (Live, my son), and then, “Khushi Raho” (May you be happy)” (19), she utilizes Indian tradition in a way that supports his decision not to have an arranged marriage. This blessing acts as a dual signifier. It partially upholds Indian custom; at the same time, it supports the grandson’s decision to resist tradition when he decides to abandon his family obligations by taking a flight back to Montreal in the middle of the night. The grandmother does not announce to anyone that she has given him a verbal blessing, or the financial means to run away, that

is, a gold bangle. When her granddaughter reveals that Sukhimama has left in the middle of the night, the grandmother's face tells all: "Her toothless smile was wide and joyous" (20). She does not want to see her grandson married against his will, and she applies hybridity by giving her grandson the means to make up his own mind.

The push from the grandmother in "Dropadi Ma" and from the mothers in "Rawalpindi 1919" and "Montréal 1962" suggests that when South Asian women are faced with hybridity, they recognize and act upon their position within these dual locations. They adapt and change their customs in order to utilize hybridity. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a feminist theorist, explains that within Western culture, some feminist texts view "the production of the 'Third World woman' as a singular, monolithic subject" (17). Mohanty outlines how "Western women studying women in the Third world" creates a kind of "objectification [that] however benevolently motivated, needs to be both named and challenged" (23-24). Baldwin challenges the idea of the "'Third World woman' as a singular, monolithic subject" by demonstrating how the mothers and grandmothers in her stories change the various traditions in order to survive in the multicultural world. The women in the stories utilize their knowledge of the Eastern traditions and add in elements of the colonial traditions in order to survive within the hybrid world. Baldwin, who was raised in India, understands the multilayered aspects of these women's lives:

I grew up with the stories of Partition refugees – my characters were real to me right from the start. And as I began to write and ask questions of older women, the political ideas and themes that had to be expressed became obvious. It helped that I've lived as a minority in different "post-

colonial" democracies – India, Canada, and the US, and for a short while as a child, the UK – so I'm rather aware of minority problems and the problems of East vs. West. (Patchsea 1)

Within Baldwin's narratives, the mothers and grandmothers never immediately reveal that they are favouring one custom over the other. Rather, they strategically use their navigational skills in order to move deftly through hybridized sites. This complex navigation arises from necessity. They understand that they are subservient to both Eastern and Western patriarchal societies. For the most part, these women are also helping the various males in their lives to work through these complex dual cultural narratives. The men in the short stories need the navigating skills of the women in order to help them move forward within multiple religious and cultural environments. Because of their status as married women, the mothers and grandmothers gain more agency within the household, but are still restricted to a site of domestic agency. They must carefully strategize between dual cultural and religious codes in order to preserve the evolving lives of their loved ones. However, the term "loved ones" takes on a specific gendered meaning once one realizes, that the navigational skills required are different for men than they are for women, and that these skills are often passed from the woman to the man through complex domestic behavioural patterns.

\*

So when the mothers and grandmothers employ hybridity, they gain agency within their household; nevertheless, they are bound to their domestic space. In contrast,

when unmarried daughters enter the hybrid space, the tension between the two cultures becomes even more complex. Daughters are still considered property and can bring shame on the family, appearing “too Western” in dress and manners. Baldwin illustrates this particular tension between Western and Eastern cultures in the short story “Toronto 1984.” Piya is an unmarried twenty-four year old living with her mother and brother in Toronto. She understands how important it is for her to “look the part” for her job:

Day Timer, lipstick, briefcase, skirt, slip, pumps – not too overstated, I’m training bankers today. Power blouse, though – black for authority. Pearls look Canadian, don’t they? But I can have ethnic individualism in my earrings. Let’s see . . . lucky I have fair skin. (61)

She needs both the power blouse and the pearls in order to pass for Canadian. She needs the added business suit to be taken seriously as a women manager. Her need to wear something ethnic suggests that she is neither Canadian nor white. Piya chooses to wear her ethnic earrings because she has fair skin, or in other words, white skin. In this moment, she reinforces the race hierarchy of both North America and India. To be white in North America means that you belong – that you are of European descent. In India, a whiter complexion means that you are of a higher class, and usually of a higher caste. By applying the caste system to her wardrobe preparations, Piya is able to move within a hybrid space in North American culture. She successfully navigates and maintains a balance between “acceptable” North American and Indian culturally coded standards. Throughout the short story, she is constantly balancing the scales between Eastern and Western cultural practices. By questioning her own appearance, she begins to create a space in which she intermixes her “Indian” identity with her “Canadian” identity,

therefore mixing cultural formations as well. Handa explains that within Canada, South Asian girls are “measured against the standard of a white Canadian girl” (9); moreover, the idea of being a Canadian is being seen as white (Handa 19). As the story unfolds, we learn that Piya successfully passes as a Canadian – or as white – because she has changed her appearance. It takes an act of rebellion for her to be outed as a Sikh. When Piya is at dinner with all her colleagues, they all stand up for a toast to the Queen.

My boss nudged me. I would not stand. Soon the entire room was full of men and women in business suits standing around white-shrouded tables and raising their glasses solemnly, saying, “The Queen.” My boss gave me another chance, hissing, “Stand up.”

She refuses to stand up, and her boss reprimands her angrily:

“What’s your problem?” he said. “I cannot stand for the British Queen.”

“She’s Canada’s Queen.” I know when a man is angry. “Maybe she’s your Queen, but she isn’t my Queen,” I said.

His subsequent remarks become racist:

“Where are you from?” asked my boss. “Why, India, of course.” I was surprised. The guy hired me. Surely he’d read my resume. “My Lord,” he said. “You’re a damn Paki.” He looked around at all the white faces at the table. “I would never have hired you if I had known you were a damn Paki.” (63)



In this moment, Piya is trapped in the hybrid world. On the one hand, she is read as a white person, but on the other, when she rebels, her whiteness is questioned, and she is called a “damn Paki.” Bhabha asserts that “hybridity intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to represent the unpredictability of its presence” (114). Piya’s presence is unstable, she may have been functioning as a white person thus far in the narrative, but she will not be read as white any longer. The next day, the boss refers to her as “our little Paki” (64). He is placating her as well as racially objectifying her in an insulting manner and attempting to afford her a very problematic position within a racist environment. This position is binding in two ways. First, Piya now represents the other, and she feels the weight of this when she exclaims, “I am not only myself, but I am all of India and Pakistan and Bangladesh. I am a million and a half people sitting in one small office in Mississauga” (65). Piya is recognizing her position as someone being placed in the space of “otherness.” Secondly, she indicates, through an act of appropriation, that she can only function in this space by taking up the name – the racial slur – “Paki” and celebrating it. By declaring “I wear a label and will take pride in being a damn Paki” (65), she is attempting to reclaim the inscribed label. Piya has in a sense, chosen to celebrate the racist environment. However, this act of radical appropriation, whereby the subject of racism attempts to take the power of racism away from the white abuser by using their verbal weapons as celebratory labels, points to the problematic nature, and ultimate impossibility, of Piya’s dual identity as both Indian and Canadian. Further, her reclamation of a racist term points to the somewhat paradoxical point cited earlier regarding “the impossibility of [a hybrid] identity” that ultimately reveals “the unpredictability of its presence” (Bhabha 114).

Although a powerful act on Piya's part and indicative of her strength and determination to make hybridity work for her in the workplace, this moment of re-appropriation is still tainted by the oppressor's use of the abject term. "Paki" becomes a dual signifier at this moment; it resonates with all the triumphs and failures of hybrid identity as it attempts to co-exist within complex racist environments where wardrobe, complexion, and allegiance to a British Queen all conspire to create a tapestry of late colonialist/postcolonialist enterprise. Piya's act of rebellion and appropriation around the use of the term "Paki" does work for her in the end. She gains confidence with each new obstacle that she confronts and overcomes. For example, when she has to ask her boss for a two-week leave of absence, she holds her own on the face of his authoritarian presence: "The boss's eyebrow rose. Personal reasons, I said. The silence was triumphant, but I got 'time-off'" (66). As well, she begins to see the other people of colour in her workplace in a new light: "The Chinese South African who works in the next office drops in for a technical discussion . . . and I am comforted. And as he is leaving, he says as if imparting a warning – work hard. I will. I will" (65). Baldwin concludes the scenes from Piya's professional life with her colleague's statement of warning and support. It punctuates Piya's awareness that she must work hard in order to prove herself in the face of a brand of racism that will challenge her every time she represents cultural difference in the workplace.

At home, Piya ignores Indian culture. Her mother, Bibiji, becomes upset with her for acting "too Western" and asks her son to do something about it: "Beta, I know they won't allow her to wear salwar kameez in her big company, but now she won't wear it in the evenings either. Says it is too much 'hassle'. I tell you, this is not good and something

has to be done” (62). Bibiji is determined to get Piya married before her daughter brings any more shame on the family, and begins the process of finding a suitable husband. Piya is too wrapped up in her situation at work to notice that her mother is plotting to find her a husband in India. When she is getting ready to leave for India, Piya is still unaware that the trip was designed, in part, to take her “home” and find her a good marital match. Piya states: “Maybe India is just what we all need” (66).

When the families receive the news that Indira Gandhi has been shot by a Sikh, they cancel their trip in fear of the Hindus, who, they believe “will be looking for blood” (66). At this point, Bibiji turns the whole situation around. She will not let go of the idea of finding a good match for her daughter. As they are cancelling their airline tickets and the taxi, Bibiji comes to understand that she does not have to travel to India to find a good Sikh boy. She realizes that there are a few good Sikh boys in Canada but she knows that she cannot be so secretive, and that she must let her daughter in on her plan by discussing specific options regarding marriage:

You know, daughter . . . that is not a bad family. They are doing well; I saw their son at the Gurdwara. Not a bad-looking fellow. He uses computers too, you know, for his business. I should think he went to college. I will ask his mother next time we meet – they have been here many years, but I think he is still a good boy. Not too much freedom gone to his head. You know, not become too Canadian. (67)

We do not get a reaction from Piya as she remains silent as her mother speaks, and we never hear Piya’s thoughts on the subject. Her mother considers her daughter’s day-to-day behaviour too radical and the result of becoming “too Canadian.”

Daughters have constant and complex navigational roles as they manoeuvre between Eastern and Western culture. Piya – at every moment – must examine all of her decisions and her actions from many perspectives – her mother’s, her brother’s, her colleague’s, as well as the broader Sikh Canadian community’s. As a woman she is placed at the centre of many sites that overlap and tug on various cultural formations. Piya is a woman who is successful because she has made her way through problematic sites; however, the terms of hybridity continually change, and she does not always account for these changes. Her silence at the end of her mother’s speech suggests that she is becoming aware of how the hybrid space works. After a racist incident at her workplace and the near trip to India, she likely understands that she is operating within a hybridized location regarding identity. At the conclusion of the story, we are left with the mother’s voice, not Piya’s, when the mother says, “Achcha, no more time for talk” (67). Piya is able to be somewhat independent; she has been allowed to go to school, get a job, buy a car, stay out late for work, and wear different clothes. This all occurs because of her family’s often tacit understanding that this is what Western women do in order to make money for the family. She is, in a sense, given partial permission by her family to behave “Western”. However, she never truly gets her independence. She must constantly negotiate her terms within a dual cultural location in which material necessity and traditional values meet within the single site of North American cross-cultural experience.

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So far, I have discussed women whose navigational strategies have been successful because they learn colonial practices. Baldwin also writes about women who

resist colonial practices. Through Baldwin's various narratives, it becomes clear that many women who resist the colonial customs are either physically harmed or commit suicide. A striking example of this is Devika, the newly immigrated wife, in the short story that bears her name as its title. When Devika arrives in Toronto, she attempts to be more "Canadian," but she is unable to commit to the change. She creates a character outside of herself named Asha in order to deal with day-to-day life in the city. She pines for India but at the same time attempts to understand how Indian women in Canada are layering the two cultures. By creating her alter ego, Devika splits her personality. Baldwin demonstrates that "colonial identities – on both sides of the divide – are unstable, agonized, and in constant flux" (Loomba 149). By using one body to house both personalities, Baldwin reveals how some South Asian women need to come to terms with the hybridity. The alter ego is engaging and fascinating as she is presented to the husband over dinner.

Devika puts a plate of food in front of an empty chair and her husband, "Who's that for?" "For my friend. Asha," said Devika. "She's hungry, too" . . . . "I don't see any Asha," said Ratan. "She's right here," said . . . . Devika. 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 at Mr. Right-Can-Do-No-Wrong Ratan with cynical amusement. (162)

Devika has to learn how to access power within a Canadian setting. Baldwin seems to be implying that Devika has always had an "Asha" within her. This "other" Asha is the more

playful and adventurous side of Devika. Devika had to learn that being docile and being proud to have a son were crucial elements of maintaining social status in India. However, in Canada she needs to learn to be independent and able to navigate the multiple hybrid sites that she feels compelled to occupy. The empty, unfamiliar space becomes Toronto, as the city represents her experience with Western living. Within this unfamiliar space, the familiar becomes present as “the old Asha” is given a position to take up again. A part of Devika that always existed as a repressed portion of her personality is given agency in this new environment. Not only is Asha able to speak assertively to her husband; she is also able to buy Western clothes and explore a Western city. Ratan encourages Devika/Asha to buy jeans and is relieved when she shows an interest in Canadian culture: “At last she was interested in something Canadian, so Ratan took her to Fairview Mall to buy them, she tried them on for Asha – ‘Asha and I are the same size’”(164). Devika, is simply exploring the new cultural terrain and has no intention of actually wearing any of the clothes. “But when they returned home, she locked them away in Asha’s closet in the little bedroom” (164). In a complex and contradictory manner, Ratan approves of this dual behaviour. He does not expect her to wear the clothes either:

He approved; he wouldn’t want strange men to see her dressed in those clothes. But she’d locked away the high-heeled black patent leather shoes and the lingerie, as well. She was wasting his money. (164)

Ratan’s patriarchal attitude is shown here. On the one hand, he wants Devika/Asha to embrace Canadian/Western culture; on the other hand, he wants to be able to set boundaries on what she embraces. Moreover, he wants her to embrace the customs, such



as wearing lingerie, that place Devika in an objectifying position, but he does not want this behaviour to affect the external world's perception of her as an obedient South Asian woman.

Ratan has lived in Canada longer than Devika, and instead of resisting the hybrid space, he has simply chosen to assimilate into Canadian culture. He experiences much racism in the workplace. This aligns him, to some extent, with the character of Piya in "Toronto 1984" within the context of Baldwin's body of work. However, as a man, Ratan operates within a different lexicon of power that is affected by both race and gender. Nevertheless, his experience in the lunchroom is reminiscent of Piya's refusal to stand up during the toast to the Queen. However, unlike Piya, Ratan chooses to ignore the racism and not draw attention to racial inequity in his professional life. At lunchtime, the boss tells him to sit at another table because "the smell of curry . . . was enough to make him sick" (159). Ratan ignores racist comments by his boss and is "quiet in all the right places, especially when the talk moved to 'foreigners getting jobs in Canadian companies, eh?' He'd hadn't responded when someone wondered 'why those immigrants don't leave their battles at home' " (159). At work, Ratan learns to become subservient to his boss. At first, he is uncomfortable in this position. However, he learns to play the subservient role over time. In the household, however, Ratan brings home his newly learned racism and projects it upon his wife. He demands that she should "learn some Chinese and Italian dishes," which seem to him to be more Canadian. Here we have a twofold hierarchy: patriarchy and racism. Ratan treats his wife the way he is treated at work, and he expects, perhaps unwittingly, that she will react to his racialized directives in the same way that he responds to racist remarks in his office. However, like Piya, she

does not react this way. Instead she challenges him. For example, when he demands that she make something other than curry, she fires back, “Why Chinese or Italian food? When they come, I will make them Indian food. I’m sure he’s never had proper curry” (161). Devika refuses to let go of the sense of pride that she has in being Indian. Ratan feels dominated by the women in his life and he feels that women’s spirit or “women’s shakti is dangerous unless harnessed or wounded” (172). He carries his patriarchal attitude from India to Canada, and the white racist hierarchy residing within Canada supports him in his choices to make demands upon his wife. The incident with the curry in the lunchroom, as it is transferred to the home, becomes a complex series of cultural signifiers that pit husband and wife against each other because of the racist responses by Ratan’s boss. Food takes on profound meaning within the struggle for multiculturalism in a country where “othered” identity is too often reduced to taste, diet, and cuisine represented or viewed as traditional.

When Asha is learning to steer hybridity, she does not have any role models other than her husband. In order to understand hybridity, she explores extreme aspects of Canadian culture. For example, she begins to smoke and use vulgar language: “One evening, there was the unmistakable smells of cigarettes smoke and all the windows were open. ‘Were you smoking?’ he [Ratan] asked. ‘Oh, no,’ Devika replied. ‘Asha likes a cigarette sometimes, it must have been her’” (164). She waits for a reaction from Ratan and by doing so is learning what his boundaries are, but he does not respond about the smoking. Therefore, Devika/Asha continues to smoke. Devika does not know how to respond to various situations. When Ratan asks her what Devika thinks of his getting a life insurance policy, she questions herself: “‘I?’” She was caught unawares. It was a

question he had never asked before” (171). When she begins to answer as Asha, Ratan stops her and insists that Devika answer the question: “No. Not Asha. What do you think?” (172). Devika refuses to answer and replies, “As you wish” (172). She does answer him but does not know how to answer as herself. Devika practices how to speak when she is Asha, and she is not ready to make the mental shift between her two personalities. When she is in the spare bedroom or Asha’s room, she locks the door and her husband hears her talking: “Talking both sides of the conversations, her high-pitched Lata Mangeshkar voice alternating with a lower, sexier, huskier tone. And an occasional laugh (he has never heard Devika laugh)” (166). Baldwin creates a woman and a situation in which the reader can physically see how the hybridity can affect relationships between assimilationists such as Ratan, and women who are attempting to survive not only the hybridity but also patriarchal society. Devika/Asha is attempting to operate within the same hybrid space. Ultimately, this becomes an impossible task, since the hybridized sites demands that a choice be made between the two personalities. Devika makes this choice only when she is physically harmed as Devika. When she is in the car with Ratan her *dupatta* is caught in the door. She opens the door on the 401 highway and is thrown from the car:

When he reached her, she had struggled to her knees, one hand covering her naked throat. And she was crawling, sobbing, dishevelled, towards the sodden shred of her duppatta. She was almost to it, scrabbling in the muck like a madwoman for any passing Canadian to see, and he heard himself snarl, “See what happens when you don’t listen to me.”

The moment of realization occurs for Devika when her husband does not help her when she is thrown from the car. Instead he scolds her for disobedience.

That stopped her, stopped her crawling and that awful, vulnerable whimper, and she lay quiet, shocked, along the melting snowbank. . . . She wanted her mother, her father, and at least twenty solicitous relatives telling her what to do, how to do it, how to live, how to be good, how to be loved. But here there was only Ratan, Canadian Ratan, sitting in the sterile whiteness watching the green glow of the digital display on the monitor . . . There was only Ratan, and Canada and herself. No one else. Ratan loomed over her. (172-73)

In this powerful dramatic moment, written in a style packed with metaphoric images constructed around symbols of whiteness as absence and presence, and configured within a scene of physical violence, Devika decides to be more Canadian. She moves into the hybrid space that only Asha can fully afford her:

“I am Asha” she said, voice low and husky. “Devika was afraid of living here, so she just . . . flew away.” . . . Then Asha closed her swollen eyes and felt Devika drift away as though she had never been. (174)

Only here at this point does Devika realize that she has to make a choice and must evolve into a single personality. She attempts to assert her Indian personality in the hospital, but she realizes that she is alone in her struggle. Devika learns that she has to let go of part of herself in order to survive. The alter ego in the end “wins” in order to save her life. She recognizes that she cannot fully realize and use her learned Indian traditions within

Canada. She is caught within an extremely dysphoric psychological state; her moment of recognition occurs when she sees that only the comfort of many familiar people – her mother and father and “twenty solicitous relatives” can help her through this hybridized state. (173). She cannot return home to India because she is a married woman and her family will not accept her. She is trapped in Canada because she is married to Ratan. This situation offers her a stifled cultural existence within a society in which she is just starting to learn how to strategize and manoeuvre through dual cultural codes. Baldwin constructs this moment in order to emphasize the physical pain that women’s bodies must go through in order to inscribe hybridity onto their bodies. Devika is successful at navigating though hybridity because she creates a passage through it.

Although Devika represents a character who successfully navigates unfamiliar terrain, and balances it with her knowledge of and love for Indian traditions, she does so in a way that reveals the potential for violence during this navigation. The incident in the car on the 401 takes the image of classic Canadian terrain – the “sterile whiteness” of the “snowbank” – and renders the scene both urban and pastoral. Snow and asphalt mingle in a single moment. By including the image of Devika’s *dupatta* in the scene, as it is literally caught within this chaotic, mechanized Canadian urban site, Baldwin creates both absence and presence simultaneously. The powerful term “sterile whiteness” evokes both existence and non-existence (absence and presence). This non-colour consumes Devika as she lays wounded in an unfamiliar cultural and geographic location. All of Devika’s struggles, Canadian and Indian, are brought together in one explosive moment of violence.

Baldwin uses the same idea of juxtaposing Western customs and Eastern customs in the short story "A Pair of Ears," set in India. Here, she explores how an elderly widow in India uses a "Western" idea to free herself from Indian traditions. Mem-saab, the elderly widow, is deaf and relies on her female servant, Amma, to do her hearing for her. It is through Amma's narration that we learn about the household. The mother uses "Western" ideas in order to empower herself as she attempts to protect herself from her son's greed. She takes the car to see a "lady-lawyer" (90) and wants to learn how she can remove her son and his family from her home. The lawyer explains what she is able to do for her:

"You say your son now owns twenty-five percent of your house?" . . .

"Yes" "Then, legally, he can occupy the premises." The lady-lawyer continues, "We can charge that he gained his rights by putting you under duress. And if you wish to stop him from building, we can ask the court to do that." (90)

The mother takes the son to court in order to stop him from building and to remove him and his family from the house. The court scene takes place in a colonial courtroom environment and becomes a site of complex cultural layering. The lady-lawyer represents both Indian female agency and white, English colonial assimilation:

[She] wears a black robe that covers the swirl of her sherbet-pink sari, and her voice, in English, is shrill and indignant for Mem-saab . . . . The judge is called Milord, just like in the Hindi movies we watch on Sundays. (91)

As Amma narrates the scene, she sees the Englishness in the courtroom and observes the complex patriarchal space populated by a mixture of Eastern and Western identities. “I think the judge listens more attentively to Balvir’s lawyer, a ponderous man with spectacles and plenty of uniformed peons to bring him notes and files” (91). Mem-saab wins the case; her son can no longer build on the estate. However, he will be able to live there with his family. Mem-saab is not satisfied about this and consequently her health declines. The final blow is struck when the renter downstairs, an Englishman, comes to visit to announce that he will be leaving for America and will not return. The English tenant was one of her lifelines. He provided her with money each month and she was able to live off his rent money and her widow’s pension. Amma explains that Mem-saab asked her “English-speaking son to place an advertisement in *The Statesman* saying ‘foreign embassy people desired’ so she didn’t have to lease to an Indian tenant. It takes a generation to oust Indian tenants, and they can never afford to pay” (93). Mem-saab’s freedom to live by herself heavily depends on the Englishman’s money. When these factors are removed, she is left helpless and cannot live within the confines of the patriarchal boundaries. The lady-lawyer has limited power within these boundaries and cannot provide Mem-Saab with any security. Mem-Saab is backed into a corner, and instead of fighting her son and the patriarchal laws, she takes her own life by ingesting sleeping pills. Amma uses Mem-Saab’s blood as paint to express her frustrations:

I cut her wrist slowly, as though I cut my own. I massage her arm from armpit to wrist with deep, powerful strokes of both hands to fill her silver water glass full of blood. . . I struggle to climb on a low table. I manage to stand, with the glass in my hands. Then I whirl. Round, with silver glass

aloft, I am a Kathakali dance-girl of twenty. Blood spatters on the gold silk sofa. On crystal. On fine Kashmiri carpets. On white walls, on the raw-silk shimmer of curtains. I bend and I twist in soundless fury, till there is only a little of her blood left in the glass. (96-7)

Mem-Saab's suicide empowers Amma and she sets a curse on the house:

At the door to Mem-saab's room, I dip the index finger of my unclean hand in what is left. I squat again. I paint slowly – for this is important – slowly I paint a rangoli design in my Mem-saab's blood on the white chip-marble floor. The design that says, "Welcome to this house and may you be happy." . . . I picture Balvir and Kiran waking, finding their treasure soiled and cursed. (96-7)

The images are both violent and sensual. When I read this moment both shock and understanding washes over me. The reader is asked to witness this sensual violence. Baldwin uses images of violence to suggest a rejection of a way of life – a life of service. In addition, Amma's rejection is also on behalf of Meb-Saab, a refusal to live in a patriarchal society. Amma leaves the household and goes to live with her daughter, Leela. A mother living with her married daughter is an arrangement that is frowned upon within traditional Indian culture. Women are expected to live with their eldest son, and if no sons are produced in a marriage, and the father dies, then the mother is expected to live with her eldest brother, or any surviving brother. Amma declares that Leela's mother-in-law will understand her situation because she is a woman (98). Amma leaves everything behind and takes pride in the fact that she was a faithful servant and fulfilled all her



duties. Although Mem-Saab was unable to navigate hybridity, the servant is empowered by hybridity. She is able to break with Indian tradition as she goes to live with her daughter who lives with her mother-in-law<sup>3</sup>. When Amma leaves the household for her daughter's, she pretends to be rescued by a famous Bollywood actor; "he winds a scarf about his neck with a flourish like Amitabh Bachhan and steadies the eager bounce of the scooter's green plastic-tasselled handles" (98). Amma is really rescuing herself and she navigates her own position within Indian society. Amma is moving from a traditional India – one that holds on to the idea of curses and traditional custom to a consciousness in which where women feel more empowered choose to live with their daughters.

The movement from one site to another is a transition from a patriarchal society to a more radical society in which women are trying to connect and take on different roles with each other. The upper class women in this story do not benefit from living in the hybrid. Mem-saab in particular does not benefit, in part because the lady-lawyer can only partially aid her in her fight. She gains freedom for a short while, but is ultimately unable to use that freedom to her advantage because of Indian customs – customs that have a similar structure to colonial structures, as they oppress women according to law and tradition. Although she is able to challenge and diminish some of her son's power over her, symbols of colonial patriarchy (the courtroom and the English tenant) serve to further disempower and ultimately defeat her. Her final victory – Amma's wilful curses – seems a very bittersweet, and largely symbolic revenge once her life has already ended. Baldwin's work here creates strong analogies between the two systems as she reveals how Indian patriarchal systems can become inextricably bound to colonial patriarchal systems such as the law. Mem-saab is forced to fight these systems simultaneously, and

only partially triumphs because of a complex series of events that leads her to the end of her life. Peopled by both Eastern and Western individuals who are trying to co-exist within a single colonialist structure, the story reveals the potential pitfalls that can occur, rendering one woman's life a somewhat haphazard and paradoxical chain of events that are never fully resolved in any truly harmonious way. Only Amma is able to find a viable position within this intricate web of colonialist practice as it mixes with Indian custom.

Amma is typical of a wealth of women in Baldwin's short stories who are attempting to navigate hybridity and are learning how to balance Western and Eastern cultural traditions. She attempts to present the reader with Sikh women from various locations – women who have had to live within extreme positions. She is successful in showcasing the struggle women have with hybridity. They frequently gain agency, more power, or both by using hybridity, and they learn how to maintain power within India, within North America, or both. Although the hybridity frequently requires these women to move within society and into a more comfortable space, it is difficult for them to find a position in which their identities can be fully realized. Rather, Indian women are often motivated by a lack of power and a lack of agency, and they explore the hybridity because of the illusion that it will provide them with more agency. Although hybridity challenges and changes the space of authority (Bhabha 1993), this authority is twofold for women as they confront both a patriarchal society and colonial power structures. Characters such as Devika/Asha, Amma, and Mem-saab represent the degrees to which women's lives are subjected to precarious hybrid locations. They stand as powerful testaments to the complex, at times bittersweet victories and defeats that mark women's

material existence as they struggle to survive within an often entangled mesh of hybridity.

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Baldwin's attempts to display women's struggles within various cultures emphasize that South Asian women are continually pulled and pushed through hybridity. And this includes learning to speak the master's language. In *What the Body Remembers*, Roop learns to eat and sit in the English manner and learns to speak English in order to win the heart of her British/Sikh husband. Roop is caught between the two worlds, but is unable to see that British customs are considered to be superior to Indian customs by her husband. Her husband has taken on the role of colonial patriarchy there-fore regards his wife position as "indicative of degenerate native culture" (Loomba 161). Moreover, he wants his wife to uphold the Western ideals of a family structure. The hybrid position that Roop occupies in the house is both clear and opaque at the same time. She is to be the second wife who provides Sardarji with children and with a new spouse whom he can groom to his own liking. In this instance, I am reminded of George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion. In the view of the colonial site of late Victorian England. This seems an appropriate reference to make in relation to Baldwin's work. In an introduction to Shaw's plays, Richard H Goldstone observes:

Shaw makes clear that class distinctions lose their force when a decent education can transform a street vendor into a "duchess"; that education made available to all those with the intellectual means of profiting from it would eliminate the outworn concepts of caste and class. (ix)

The age difference between Roop and Satya is twenty-four years. Roop is a teenager learning how to be a wife, a woman, and a mother; finally, she is learning how to be herself. She is forced to position herself within a hybrid space in order to survive within the household. Roop survives in part because she learns the English language. Her brother, Jeevan, explains to her that learning the English language will raise her value as a wife. Jeevan knows that for Roop to gain some power in the house, she has to learn to speak the “official” language. When Roop requests an English teacher for the children, she herself begins to learn how to read and speak English from Miss Hetty Barlow. Miss Barlow is an unmarried British woman who does not speak any Hindi, Punjabi, or Urdu, and refuses to learn these languages. Roop begins to realize that the English language is inextricably bound to the Christian religion<sup>4</sup>. Roop slowly understands that Miss Barlow’s customs are the product of dominant patriarchal methods of keeping women in their place: “Miss Barlow is warning her, warning of the danger of aspiring to more knowledge than a husband needs in a wife” (364). She learns the tools of colonial patriarchy as she learns English alongside her children. She is not able to teach her children Indian songs or verse because she is too busy studying the English language and English ways. By learning the “master’s language,”<sup>5</sup> Roop simultaneously recognizes and increases the colonial power over her and her children. She seems to think that she will be able to gain power within the household once she has learned English. She discovers that she is just like Satya and will be left with two options: to learn the English language and attempt to maintain her native language, or not to learn the language and end up committing suicide like Satya. Roop, Satya, and the women servants are fluent in Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu. Adding another language would not be that difficult. However,

simply learning the language is not what is being asked of Roop. She is also taught how to act differently, dress differently, and be more like Miss Barlow. She becomes a kind of Eliza Dolittle character from *My Fair Lady*. When Roop is able to understand English, and is able to use the language, she confronts Miss Barlow. One of these confrontations occurs when Miss Barlow attempts to give Roop's children English names by pacing placards around their necks that label them, in a symbolic manner, as good little English subjects. Roop is infuriated by this blatant act of colonization and draws a firm cultural line at this point. She constructs a cultural boundary around tradition through asserting that her children already have names. Miss Barlow is directly told to respect and to remember those names:

A red-hot anger that does not seem to be her own moves Roop to "Edward" first. She pulls the string of the placard over his turban. Then to "Joan," almost wrenching the cold stiff board off her daughter's soft neck. . . .She straightens, holds her head high as Satya would have done. Though her heart races as if a jade-hilted damascene sword is raised above her, she says with a just-a touch of Satya's arrogant tone, "Their names are Pavan and Timcu." Firmly, just as Satya would have, she adds, "Remember them." (412)

When Miss Barlow protests and explains that their names are "too difficult to pronounce," Roop responds, "Not as difficult as Miss Henrietta Barlow" (412). Roop gains strength when she has been put in a position in where she has to choose between various cultural formations. She has begun to realize that she must act independently from the women around her. Roop cannot follow in Satya's footsteps by choosing to die.

Rather, she feels complete and able to go on living because she has children. The naming scene I have just described is reminiscent of Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*. Early on in the play, Caliban gives up the name Caliban and wants to be called X, but Prospero never agrees to this name change. In this instance, Césaire simultaneously maintains and disrupts Prospero's control over language. Caliban's attempted agency – his desire to throw off the colonizing name that Shakespeare has given him – is thrown into high relief in Césaire's version. Once again, the colonizer keeps a stubborn grip upon his own tools even as the colonized attempts to throw them off. In Césaire's text, Caliban learns how to speak in the master's language and thus challenges Prospero. Caliban attempts to use "the master's tools" – in this case, the tool of language – in order to "dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 112). However, as James W. Coleman states, "Caliban cannot use the patriarch Prospero's language for his own. . . . Prospero has too much control over him and over the language for this to happen" (2). Césaire does allow Prospero to recognize Caliban's mastery of the English language, but Prospero's reaction is typically condescending: "Well, the world is really upside down . . . . We've seen everything now: Caliban as a dialectician!?" (Césaire 61). Césaire recognizes that no matter how well Caliban uses the English language, he will never be able to dismantle the master's house, because he has been colonized.

In comparison, when Roop uses the English language to challenge Miss Barlow, Miss Barlow's reaction is similar to Prospero: "My, we're not very grateful today, are we? . . . I really don't see the point you're trying to make, Roop, I really don't" (412). Miss Barlow is condescending and continues to hold power over Roop when she claims that she does not understand Roop's actions. The next day, when Miss Barlow resigns

from her nanny position, she once again exercises power over Roop. Roop is scared that she has not learned enough English, and that her children will be sent to English boarding-school. At every turn, Miss Barlow, as a representative of the colonialist patriarchy, is creating obstacles for Roop. Subsequently, Roop has to be quick to navigate through these obstacles. Roop almost gives in to the colonial space as she recognizes that her children are more English than Indian or Sikh. While she sits in the car with her children, waiting for her servant to get water, she and the children sing English rhymes. Roop has a heartfelt moment of recognition about her love of Indian tradition and her own past:

Her heart sinks a little further – her daughter doesn’t know “Mera vaid Guru Gobinda.” If she were dying like Mama, neither Pavan or Timcu could sing her that shabad to comfort her; their names might as well be Joan and Edward. *I am alone.* (458)

Roop is alone in the household as she realizes that her children will be more English than she will ever be. She will have to learn from them and from her husband; she will need to learn the English ways of life. Baldwin skilfully creates a character who slowly navigates through the complexities of hybridity. She eloquently and powerfully constructs complex images that evoke a conflicted emergence of multiple identities trying to co-exist within individual bodies.

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Though I have chosen to focus on the women Baldwin creates, I yet acknowledge the ways in which the male characters are crucial links within an insidious, constantly

evolving chain of colonialist enterprise. The chain wends its way around families and social networks (for example, in the work place and the marriage bed) and profoundly affects the lives of many South Asian men, women, and children. My specific purpose is to question and interrogate the particular ways in which women are affected along lines of both race and gender, and the ways in which misogyny and racism play interconnected roles within this colonialist project. Amita Handa addresses this issue as it pertains specifically to South Asian women, when she states that first-generation South Asian women,

in the context of colonial India, became enmeshed in discourses about (racialized) cultural difference. Not only was keeping women innocent a means to resolve some of the fears associated with modernity, but during the nationalist struggle for independence women became an important signifier in the East-West battle over political and moral power. They came to signify the Indian-ness of the nation. (165)

Roop's lack of "Indian-ness" is what allows her to navigate hybridity. Although she will learn as much as she can as she carefully navigates unfamiliar terrain, she will have to walk the fine line between being "too Western" and "too Eastern." Within Baldwin's novel the only path to success, survival, and life-affirming experience is found by entering the conflicted hybridized sites. The servants, Roop and Roop's children, will on some level inevitably enter this space by degree – depending upon their gendered positions – and be forced to navigate hybridized sites. They will all be expected to become complex versions of Shaw's "fair lady," whose behaviour is altered according to the colonialist standards of a kind of universal Pygmalion character. Like Shakespeare's



Prospero, this patriarchal force wields its power over men, women, and children through essential material needs such as language, dress, and food. Baldwin's work utilizes all of these signifiers and provides contemporary readers with pertinent and powerful examples of the struggles of everyday life in both India and North America.

# NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I use the term Western culture to reference culture and habits that are linked to British, France, and American customs. Edward Said states, “British, French, and American imperial experience is that it has a unique coherence and a special cultural centrality. England, of course, is in an imperial class by itself, bigger, grander, more imposing than any other. For almost two centuries France was in direct competition with it. . . . America began as an empire during the nineteenth century, but it was in the second half of the twentieth, after the decolonization of the British and France empires, that it directly followed its two great predecessors”(xxii-xxiii).

<sup>2</sup> In 1903 there were three hundred Sikhs in British Columbia working in lumber mills and struggling to gain acceptance in Canadian society. According to historian Darshan Singh Tatle, the Canadian government

“took several measures to stem the ‘tide of turbans.’ First, a bill disenfranchised all natives of India who were not of ‘Anglo-Saxon parents’. This was followed by an Order of Council in 1908, a ‘continuous journey’ clause for new immigrants” (52).

<sup>3</sup> Widows in India have a long history from issues of sati (widow burnings) to remarriages to “younger brothers of her deceased husband; failing him, the husband’s elder brother, failing him, his agnatic first cousin” (Jakobsh 76). Within the Sikh custom widows are considered property of the husband’s family. However when their husbands died they could be given back to their families (Kaur 46).

<sup>4</sup> I am separating the Christian religion from British customs and the English language. I will discuss the religious aspects of Baldwin's work in Chapter Two.

<sup>5</sup> She explores the idea of women using what Audre Lorde calls the "master's tools." During the Black feminist movement in the United States in 1970s, Lorde stated "in order for Black women to gain freedom from a racist patriarchy, they need to educate themselves regarding these "tools": It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde 112). In a sense, Lorde addresses the hybrid space, as she reveals an understanding of how that the master's tools of oppression – racism and patriarchy – will never successfully be used against the patriarchal white master. Using the master's tools can only change the players within a particular power structure rather than dismantling that structure itself and creating a new dynamic in which the idea of the "master" is destabilized and constantly re-defined.

## CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN'S BODIES AS RELIGIOUS MARKERS

As I stated in the introduction, the space of hybridity is characterized by ambivalence and mimicry. Ambivalence results in the subjects inability to pick one tradition – or one layer – over the other, thus creating a hierarchy of traditions. An examination of ambivalence towards religion inevitably requires looking at notions of religious truths or beliefs. Richard King examines the definition and concepts of the word “religion.” He utilizes an historical approach by analyzing the root word, *religio*, which is defined as the “ ‘lore of the ritual’ of one’s ancestors.” This term has links to in the “pagan” Roman Empire and was “virtually synonymous with *traditio*” (King 61). King suggests that if

we approach the study of religions (religious studies) as one would approach the study of cultures (cultural studies) rather than as an investigation of divergent truth claims (the theology of religions) one need not become especially concerned with the question of which religion, if any, has cornered the market on truth.<sup>1</sup> (57)

Baldwin does not attempt to locate the truth about the Sikh religion or any religion for that matter: rather she considers the impact of religious beliefs on South Asian women’s lives. Baldwin focuses on the Sikh religion as well as on Hindu, Muslim, and Christianity; she weaves these religions into fluid narratives in order to express the multifaceted space of hybridity. In her work, she creates South Asian women characters who follow many different religious traditions. These characters learn to mimic a variety religious rituals and customs. For South Asian women living in an ambiguous religious communities are highly successful because they are able to move and shift between

patriarchal demands. By using many religions in her novels, Baldwin emphasizes how “religion can be interpreted to help in liberating women and can be interpreted in a way that increases their oppression” (Saadawi 135). One way that religion increases women’s oppression is by using women’s bodies as the site of religion. Debali Mookerjee-Leonard explains that during the Partition the “destabilization of community alliances resulted in the treatment women’s bodies as a site for the performance of identity.”<sup>2</sup> According to the same patriarchal logic that resulted in the mass rape of women from the “other” religious community (Muslim), the “purity” of Hindu and Sikh women became a political prerequisite for their belonging in the new nation”(35). Further, South Asian women were “regarded as crucial makers of cultural difference” (Loomba 161), and the women understand that they cannot be a “pure” Sikh, Hindu, or Muslim because the rules that the men lay out for them are arbitrary and inconsistent. Therefore, these women learned how to inscribe their bodies with two or more religious symbols in order to navigate through a patriarchal society.

In *What the Body Remember*, Baldwin uses the image of a braid to symbolize how all the religions within India are connected:

Roop is a new Sikh, then, an uncomprehending carrier of the orthodoxy resurging in them all. Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, they are like the tree strands of her hair, a strong rope against the British, but separate nevertheless. (6)

This is a significant and powerful image (like the image of the woven basket in my introduction), as the braid stands as a symbol that represents the linking of strands that can be separated. The Sikh religion<sup>3</sup> is a movement that has included customs from both

Hindu and Muslim traditions.<sup>4</sup> Years leading up to Partition, Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus began to carve their religious and cultural identities. Historian Darsham Singh Tatla explains that after the Partition, Sikh religious leaders “reacted by attempting to weed out all remnants of Hindu practices and the Sikh faith, inventing new rituals and ceremonies for various uses.”(17) However, the Sikh people continued to practice Hindu ceremonies and religious rituals. As a result, the Sikh religion is a hybrid, with a tradition of layering and blending that ultimately creates alternate traditions. Baldwin pushes the boundaries of this space further as she writes about the effect of the layering of the Hindu and Muslim traditions on women. Roop’s braided hair represents the connection between all Indian women – their women’s body.

Religion is the driving force behind the rules about women’s positions within the household; it governs what they can and cannot do with their bodies. Very early on, we see how Roop is treated differently from the other girl children she knows. Her next-door neighbour, Huma, a Muslim, has to “drape her chunni across her face before walking through the bazaar with her father” (34). Roop recognizes the way women are treated differently within the two religions when she asserts: “*I’m not like Huma. Papaji doesn’t make me learn namaaz prayers or cover my whole face with a chunni or a burqu as Muslim girls do*” (34: emphasis in original). Roop has to cover the top of her head, but not her face, with a chunni (scarf). Baldwin describes how Sikh and Muslim girls are divided and segregated along religious lines and how the process of othering is linked to religion and patriarchal control. This control is truly understood when Roop’s marriage is arranged. Her father arranges for Roop to be married to a British-Educated Sikh landowner who is already married. In the Sikh religion, a man can only be married to one

woman at a time. In the Sikh Scriptures, it states: “It is to woman that we get engaged and then married . . . . On her death a man seeks another wife” (Cole 149). This has been interpreted by many Sikhs to mean that men can only marry once.<sup>5</sup> Roop’s father is aware of the scripture but he chooses to ignore the Sikh religious traditions because he needs the dowry money. Roop is taught how to be an obedient daughter and wife rather than an obedient Sikh.

In her husband’s home, Roop is ordered to wear undergarments like the English women and Mani Mai, her maidservant, is the one who teaches her how to wear these garments:

Sardarji has provided a brassier-bunyaan and panties instead of a *kachcha* for her – like the ones English women wear. Mani Mai demonstrates how she should cover her small breasts with brassier’s cones and twist her arms behind her back to fasten it. (160)

Sikh Indian women do not wear panties. Usually they wear homemade underwear called *kachch*, signifying “modesty, moral restraint, and continence” (Cole 134). Roop has been raised to be an obedient wife rather than an obedient Sikh. She happily wears the English panties because her husband has demanded that she do so. Mani Mai explains to Roop that certain customs are not to be followed in Sardarji’s home:

“No bindi on your forehead; Sardarji says that’s a Hindu custom. No vermilion powder in the parting of your hair – he doesn’t like it. No mangalsutra pendant will be given to you to be worn about your neck; Sardarji says that is a Hindu custom, too. No nose rings, those are for Hindus, or Muslims like me.” And she taught Roop to brush her teeth with

toothpaste and a brush in place of neem, because Sardarji prefers  
women's gums pale. (170)

Mani Mai learns the ways of the British in order to teach Roop. Her character represents a complex literary construction that utilizes aspects of culture and religion in order to problematize and ultimately illuminate the complexities of multiple subject positions living within a single site. Mani Mai shows how these positions – specifically the position of South Asian women – learn from each other as they individually and collectively occupy a series of multilayered sites for identity to evolve within. The customs seem to be arbitrarily defined by Sardarji, who is picking them up from British ideas of which traditions are related to each religion. The restraint placed upon Roop is twofold; she is to obey the patriarchal commands of her husband and she is to obey the rules of Sikh religion and Indian culture.

Even though Roop obeys the commands of both her husband and the rules of the Sikh religion, she still takes it upon herself to learn other religions. Roop becomes a multi-layered religious site by the end of the novel. Further, as the novel progresses, she learns how to master each religious symbol to her own advantage. A striking example occurs on the night of the Partition. Stuck on the side of the road with her children and Jorimon, a Muslim servant, Roop can hear the Muslim men chanting for Sikh blood. She sends the Sikh driver and her children to hide in the sugar field because her two boys and driver wear turbans, symbolizing the Sikh religion. When she realizes that she has left the Guru Granth Sahib – the Sikh holy bible – in the car, she returns for it and is caught by the Muslim rioters. Jorimon, her Muslim maidservant, comes to help, but Roop thinks that Jorimon might expose her as a Sikh. However, she quickly realizes that they are both



in danger:

Jorimon will tell these Muslim men Roop is a Sikh. Why should she not?

What has Jorimon in common with Roop, except that they are both women? . . . No longer are they mistress and maidservant – for this moment, they are just two women, equally vulnerable. (462)

Roop recognizes three layers of vulnerability present in this situation. First, she is not Muslim; second, she is alone; and third, she is a woman within a patriarchal society. Jorimon has three layers of vulnerability as well. She is Muslim but is not wearing a burka; she is alone without a Muslim man to account for her; and finally, like Roop, she is a woman within a patriarchal society. When the men pull both women out of the car, Roop fights with all her might and screams in Urdu at the men. When the men stop attacking, she thinks, “If men treat a woman they know to be of their quom in this cruel way, can any woman be safe?”(464). Roop now understands that she will have to play the game in order to survive, so in order to prove that she is Muslim,

she extends her unclean arm, her bared left arm from the window till her upturned inner wrist falls in the spotlight from the torch. Her tattooed name, in Persian script, floats on the bronze of her skin. “See?” Her almond eyes say, praying silence will save her; praying he will not ask to see her right wrist, circled as it is by her steel kara marking her as a Sikh. (465)

The men leave without harming her and Jorimon. Roop’s body has been inscribed with both religions and she survives only by embracing both in a complex manner. When

Roop tattooed her name in Urdu, she knew she had violated her body with Muslim script “Urdu is a language only Muslims use” (56). Roop’s tattoo is a bodily symbol that does not correspond to the rest of her Sikh body. By physically exposing one religious symbol and concealing the other, she uses the duality to save her own life. She begins to define what sins her Sikh god will forgive her for when she tells herself “Veheguru [god] will understand” (466). Roop realizes that she must be aggressive and take charge of her life in order to survive. She has never been in a role in which she is in control and giving orders. Roop gains agency when she is placed in a position where she has to struggle between very different ways of life. With Roop’s character, Baldwin is able to emphasize how women learn to manipulate their surroundings in order to survive in a complex patriarchal world.

Baspsi Sidhwa uses women’s bodies as markers for religious identity in the novel *Cracking India*. Sidhwa, like Baldwin, begins the novel with a look at India before the Partition. She weaves her story around Lenny, an eight-year-old Parsees girl and her Ayah, or maidservant. Lenny’s family is Parsees, a religious minority within India. The Parsees remained neutral during the Partition and Lenny is surrounded by a variety of religions and religious conflicts. Lenny’s Ayah is Punjabi but she does not wear the traditional Punjabi style of dress, the *shalwar-kamize*. Instead, she wears a sari, because she knows that she would receive “half the salary” (38) if she were known as a Sikh. The Ayah claims that she “not so simple” (38) when it comes to understanding how the world works. She marks her body as a Hindu in order to make more money and feels no guilt in using religion as a tool for making more money. Both Baldwin and Sidhwa use girl bodies that become the bodies of hybrid women by the end of the narrative. Both authors

utilize religion as a tool to free the women from violence, patriarchy, and cultural traditions.

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At the hands of devout religious men, South Asian women are killed in the name of honour. Honour killings have plagued South Asian communities: “Reports submitted to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights show that honor killings have occurred in Bangladesh, Great Britain, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey, and Uganda” (Mayell 56). Many articles and books discuss how Indian women are killed because of dowry issues;<sup>6</sup> however, few books discuss how women during the Partition were killed at the hands of their family members. Movies such as *Pinjar* and *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*, depict scenes in which Sikh women are given poison or are killed by family members. As well, novels such as Baldwin’s suggest a need for further investigation into honour killings at the time of Partition. Baldwin details how women’s bodies are mutilated at the hands of religious men. Roop’s father and her brother, Jeevan, do not shift their religious views; as a result, Roop’s father murders his son’s wife, Kusum. Kusum’s death is explained to Roop by her brother and again by her father. Her brother who looks for his wife and children and finds his wife already dead, “each limb severed at the joint. This body was sliced into six parts, then arranged to look as if she were whole again” (490). Jeevan explains that Kusum “looked accepting . . . almost as if she had been dismembered by her own hand” (490). Jeevan looks at the body for clues to a message because “rape is one man’s message to another: ‘I took your pawn. Your move’” (490). Jeevan discovers that Kusum’s uterus

has been “ripped out” (491) and he understands the message that has been sent: “We [the Muslims] will stamp your kind, your very species from existence. This is no longer merely about izzat [honour] or land. This is a war against your quom, for all time. Leave. We take the womb so there can be no Sikhs from it, we take the womb, leave you its shell” (491). Here Baldwin stresses how South Asian women’s bodies are used by men – the women are considered as possessions and are used “as vehicles of communication between men.” In addition, the violence used by the men “reduces women to the site of reproduction upon which each side could target its desire both to vanquish and to eradicate the other” (Hai 20).

Moreover, Baldwin does not simply cast the Muslim men or Hindu men as murderers; she casts Sikh men as murderers as well. When Roop’s father approaches her and begins his story about Kusum, Roop listens carefully to the second telling. He speaks of the day of the Partition when Roop’s family village was under siege by Muslim men and Sikhs were forced to convert by cutting their hair or by eating meat. Roop’s father recounts his actions in some detail – I think it is worth reproducing in full since it reflects his ambivalence towards women whom he dominates but protects:

I had to think very quickly, quickly it became clear: Revati Bhua [Roop’s grandmother] was old, if her izzat [honour] went, what man would feel dishonoured? Gujri was already a widow, long past childbearing age. But I had given your Nani [Roop’s maternal grandmother] my bachan, so long ago I gave her my word, that I would protect Gujri . . . . So I told Gujri, “Leave everything and go! Understand? Run! Hide in the fields!”

The father feels obliged to protect the female family members, but he fails to see the consequence of his actions.

But Kusum, she was my responsibility . . . I said to myself: Kusum was entrusted to me by Jeevan, she is young, still of childbearing age. I cannot endure even the possibility that some Muslim might put his hand upon her. Every day I had been hearing that the seeds of that foreign religion were being planted in Sikh women's wombs. No, I said: I must do my duty.  
(499)

Roop knows what her father is about to reveal and understands that her father, like Sardarji, only sees women "from the corner of [his] eyes" and knows "women only as bearers of blood" (499). However, Roop demands that her father "tell this story, just one story of so many. Say what he did" (500). Her father relates to her the following incident, which again is worth reproducing at length to show his adamant patriarchal attitude and values:

I called to Kusum . . . I took her into my sitting room and I told her what Sant Puran Singh [Sikh priest] said we Sikhs must do, and I had to do it now. She understood. Always she made no trouble. . . . In your mama's room, I said the first lines of the Japji [prayer] to give me strength, and to guide my kirpan . . . . I raised my kirpan high above her head. Vaheguru did not stop it; it came down. Her lips still moved, as mine did, murmuring, Vaheguru, Vaheguru, as her head rolled from my stroke.  
(500)

Kusum is surrounded by men who do not shift their religious views and it is her life that is sacrificed. Baldwin exposes how male honour is tied to women's religious purity. Menon and Bhasin identify three features of violence towards women during the Partition: "their brutality, their extreme sexual violence, and their collective nature" (45). In the example above, both father and son agree that Kusum had to die in order to save her honour and in turn their honour as well. Kusum does not enter multi-layered religious spaces. Rather she obeys and follows not only the Sikh religious rules but also the rules of the patriarch. Roop listens to her brother's and her father-in-law's versions of the story; Roop does not know which version to believe, but it does not matter, because what comes out in the telling of both stories is that Kusum did not run away, did not fight for her life. Rather she "turned her back . . . took off her chunni to bare her neck" (500). Roop questions her sister-in-law's actions by saying, "Why does a woman choose to die?" In contrast to Kusum it is Roop who learns that she has to sacrifice bits and pieces of herself in order to navigate her way to freedom and survival. We have read of Roop's coming to consciousness around particular female subjectivity throughout this text. She comes to an understanding of her position and South Asian women's positions within the larger scope of Partition and their daily lives. Baldwin's narrative expose the brutal forms that purity of religion demands from women.

The Ayah's body in *Cracking India* is not physically dismembered like Kusum's body. However, as the Ayah is taken away by the angry mob of Muslim men, Lenny, the narrator of the novel observes: "The last thing I noticed was Ayah, her mouth slack and piteously gaping, her disheveled hair flying into her kidnapper's faces, staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide-open and terrified eyes" (195). As Hai explains,

“With this central image, the dismemberment of Ayah into body parts, into empty spaces, is begun – both in and by the narrative – as her speechless mouth underscores the unspeakability of what she will undergo, and her eyes can report only that they wish themselves absent” (12). Women’s bodies become the central image of both these texts as a way to describe how South Asian women are central to religion. Hai suggests that the “Ayah’s body becomes an allegorical figure (and indeed reduced to only a figure) for a nation that is brutalized and ravaged, in a narrative that seems unable to (re)cast that history in an alternate discourse” (20). In comparison, Kusum’s body symbolizes the patriarchal religious system that demands that women obey at all cost. Her body becomes static and fixed within the religious system. Baldwin provides the reader with alternate discourse through Roop’s character. The alternate discourse requires a body that is inscribed with two or more religions and does not subscribe to religious purity.

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In Baldwin’s second novel, *The Tiger Claw*, she continues to layer one religion upon another. She depicts how some South Asian women break with religion but maintain a spiritual connection to one faith. Noor Khan, a Muslim woman, is a resistance agent for the British during the Second World War. As Noor learns how to navigate and become the perfect chameleon for the British, her religious faith is compromised. In terms of religion, she maintains her beliefs throughout the novel, and we see glimpses of how she breaks with these beliefs in order to navigate to survive. Noor eats ham, which is considered a sin in the Muslim faith, “Plainly, a test lay on the plate before [her]. It’s ham. Eat the ham. With every disgusting morsel that passes her mouth” (103). Noor

knows that she must eat the ham in order to fulfill her duties as a spy for the British.

She has to convince people that she is French. She toys with the idea of telling her French counterpart that she is African Muslim:

What was she? The one question for which Noor didn't have a ready answer. Should she tell Renee the olive tone of her skin and shape of her nose were East Indian and American, but not Jewish? . . . African Muslims were familiar to the French, but Indians might be far from her [Monique's] experience. (99)

Noor assumes many different names: Noor Khan, Nor Baker, Anne-Marie Regnier, Princess Noor, and most frequently, Madeleine. She is never completely comfortable with any of the names and the various identities that they represent. When Noor is being tortured, she becomes confused within her many identities. She appears to sustain her devotion to the British throughout the novel for the sake of her occupation as a spy and the political importance of that role. In her mind, she does not feel tied to a country or state. My epigraph to this thesis from Virginia Woolf resonates here: "As a woman I have no country. As a woman my country is the whole world." When Noor is executed, she does not mention her nationality. Instead, she prays: "Allah, for which country do I die? Be with me now. Let me be true to you, now and always. Send my father to meet me in spirit, send my child to greet me . . . Armand, I wait for you always. Allah! I evolve to spirit, withdraw from known to unknown" (538). She ties her final moments to religion and laments the clear definition of religious beliefs in her life, opting for an elegiac plea to her dead loved ones. Noor simply identifies herself as a lover, a mother, and a disciple of the Muslim faith.



Nevertheless, Noor is executed and her body, which was constantly shifting from one religion to another, is unidentifiable among the other bodies in the mass grave. Baldwin suggests that even if some South Asian women learn to navigate from religion to another, the result is death. The only way for Noor to survive is by claiming an identity. However, she is caught in a dilemma. If she declares that she is French, British, or African Muslim, she will be killed by the German soldiers. Because she refuses to claim an identity, she becomes a hero<sup>7</sup> in the eyes of the British. Noor, like Satya, becomes a bodiless voice at the end of the novel. Her lover, Rivikin, states, ““When I believed I had no one, nothing to live for, I felt her love, her spirit urging me to live”” (562). Like Satya, Noor does not physically survive the narrative; however, both have spiritual ties to the loved ones they left behind. Consequently, Baldwin ends up displaying how religious South Asian women’s lives are not valued.

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Miss Barlow represents a complex example of an Christian woman who is seduced by colonial patriarchy and subsequently is used by colonial patriarchy. Miss Barlow’s initial reason to go to India was that she was influenced by all the stories of Indian women told to her by her brother and her Bible group:

. . . terrible, horrible stories of India and the tracts and pamphlets her Bible reading groups gave her about Indian women . . . she felt her dear departed mother’s thwarted ambitions taking root in her own breast . . . determined to bring Indian women and their little brown babies to Christ, and certain that earlier missionaries failed precisely because they brought

the Church in their suitcases, wore it on their sleeves. Miss Barlow, however, came well persuaded of her calling, but disguised in a governess costume. (334)

Miss Barlow<sup>8</sup> goes to India “disguised as a governess,” and she draws on a Christian Bible as her text to teach the English language. Although we do not receive a lot of information about Miss Barlow, Baldwin makes a point to stress how South Asian woman and British white women have been divided along religious lines. Miss Barlow’s sole purpose in coming to India was to convert the women and especially the “little brown babies.” She understands that the only way to do this is through teaching English to the wealthier class in India. Baldwin layers Miss Barlow’s character with Western feminist struggles. For example, Baldwin creates Miss Barlow as a middle class woman from England who discovers that “her small inheritance went a great deal further in India – especially since the war began – and that she was much better off than women bombed, blitzed and struggling on rationing in England. Miss Barlow braved the Lahore heat for the creature comforts a woman of her means could never buy at home” (334). Miss Barlow could never buy a home on her own in England and therefore moved to India where she gains status as a British woman. Miss Barlow represents the women in England who struggle to maintain social status within England. English women could maintain their social standing by marrying, thereby accessing the social contract of marriage and inheritance in order to survive. There is a link between Roop’s situation and Miss Barlow’s, as they both need to participate in the colonial patriarchal social systems. However, Miss Barlow is able to avoid the Sikh patriarchal social system because of her education, her whiteness, and to some extent, her religion. “Miss Barlow teaches English

without knowing a single word of Punjabi – she says Punjabi sounds ugly, hard, and rasping.” (366), Miss Barlow does not see past her position as nanny and missionary and does not connect with Roop or any other Indian woman in the novel. Miss Barlow does not learn any Punjabi or Indian cultural ways. For example, she has all her food imported and locked in her bedroom; “the governess craves food that has been squashed or condensed into tins – meat, fish even milk . . . hoard[ed] in her cupboard, enough to set up a government ration-shop” (336). In a sense, Miss Barlow and Roop are connected through their entrapment within patriarchal structures that affect particular women. Like the strands of the single braid cited earlier, they are woven together as women struggling to survive within a colonialist structure. They are however, separated into very different strands by their respective positions within opposing systems of patriarchy that are distinguished by differing religious and cultural traditions.

Baldwin presents readers with another white Christian woman in her short story, “Nothing Must Spoil This Visit.” In this short story a son, Arvind, has returned home to India with his white girlfriend, the only character in the story who openly questions Indian traditions. She behaves with an air of superiority over the other women in the short story, much as Miss Barlow in *What the Body Remembers*. The white women in Baldwin’s work tend to promote their religious ideologies and carry a sense of superiority or self-importance. At the end of this short story, the white woman is made to feel inferior because she is the one who has chosen a husband who cannot have children. In comparison, Miss Barlow leaves India during the Partition and returns to England. We are not told what happens to Miss Barlow, and as readers, we are left to believe that she has gained some social status by living in India. She was successful in bringing the

English language to Sardarji's home and in teaching Roop and the children Bible stories. However, she was unsuccessful in converting Roop and the children to Christ. Nevertheless, Miss Barlow maintains her power over Roop right up to the time until she leaves India.

Roop realizes that Miss Barlow has all the power within their relationship because Miss Barlow has the knowledge of the English language, a tool Roop needs in order to survive within the household. When Miss Barlow begins to teach the children the Bible story of Eve, Miss Barlow tells Roop, "All women's pain began there, from Eve eating an apple herself instead of offering it to her husband, Adam, first, and asking his permission – such a selfish woman, Eve was. That garden was where the first seed was sowed in the first woman so that the first sons would be born" (364). Roop has a sense that the Bible stories she is being told are not appropriate for her children. However, she has to choose her battles carefully because of the subservient position that she is in. In her mind, she is slowly working out her own beliefs when she states, "if Satya were there, maybe she could have told Miss Barlow right to her face, "your Eve was also a colony, just like the rest of us" (264). Satya's fundamentalist views become a source of power and knowledge for Roop and she understands that Miss Barlow's Bible "stories are not told for the telling, [they] are told for the teaching" (364). She depends on Miss Barlow to teach her and the children. Miss Barlow represents a tool for Roop to use as she navigates the hybrid space and takes what she needs in order to survive (the English language) and leaves the rest behind (Christianity). Thus, she utilizes colonial patriarchy to her advantage, yet retains aspects of her spirituality for the sake of her own faith and that of her children.

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Roop uses the English language to increase her value as a wife and mother; similarly, her husband has increased his value by going to school in England. Sardarji understands that the British only give respect to Indians who have learned English. When he returns to India after his studies, he is welcomed into the British fold. However, he has accepted that the British will never leave India. He argues with Satya when he says "the English will never completely leave. . . . Can a chemical reaction be run backwards? Indians can progress to a dominion, or a union, or a federation. . . . But they need the English for their betterment, and the English will always need India labour"(328). Sardarji ignores Satya's comments about his inconsistency with religion; Satya is the only person in the novel who points out the inconsistency of his actions. Sardarji claims to be an orthodox Sikh because he wears a turban and keeps his hair long. However, Satya makes it clear to him that "long hair . . . does not guarantee a man will follow the Gurus in all ways. Guru Nanak has but one wife" (327). Sardarji ignores religion in order to have a son and cement his roots in India by marrying a second wife in the hopes of having a son.

Sardarji separates Christianity from British traditions. He uses British traditions, such as wearing a wool suit in the heat, taking high tea with English biscuits, and attending British social functions to increase his value as a British-Indian. Sardarji does not pray or go to church with the other British men. Baldwin is able to create a character that is "between mimicry and mockery" (Bhabha 86). Sardarji's character attempts to

become an authority on British culture; however he fails to maintain this authority because of his desire to create a new “race” of Indians; he states his “sons will start a clear race, their blood uncontaminated by the past. A new race from the Best of Both Worlds. They will be progressive Indians, Indians with No Mr. Cunninghams inside, able to cope with all the Mr. Timothy Farquharsons of this world” (148). Baldwin accomplishes two ideas with this character and his situation. First, as stated earlier, the Sikh religion is founded on the “best of the both worlds” – from the various Hindu traditions and the Muslim traditions. Therefore, when viewing this character from a dual religious perspective what is revealed is the link to the Sikh religion. As Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi explain, “Guru Nanak was a reformer speaking and acting against the caste system and working to improve the status of women; a religious synthesizer attempting a blend of Hinduism and Islam in his own cult”(13). Guru Nanak was successful at gaining his own cult of Sikhs, as some traditions or customs can be traced back to either Hindu or Muslim origins. Baldwin creates a character that aims to create a new race of Sikhs who graft British customs onto Indian customs and the Sikh religion.

Secondly, Sardarji understands that the relationship between England and India will result in the creation of a new “race.” When he attended school in England, he presented “himself [as] flexible and reasonable and adaptable, able to absorb the scientific method” (146). Sardarji has to maintain various balances between his English mannerisms and his Indian mannerisms at all times. Baldwin further complicates the notions of mimicry. Baldwin demonstrates how ambivalence and mimicry work at creating a compounded imitation of the British. Sardarji mimics the British and his “sons” will mimic their father. As a result, this new “race” will be mimicking a mimic.

This is, of course, what Bhabha calls a “partial presence” (88). The repetition of British customs becomes a way in which to challenge and disturb “cultural, racial, and historical difference” (Bhabha 88). Each time one of Sardarji’s sons repeats a British custom, there is a slippage produced, and the fixed colonial authority becomes unstable and the transforms into “something else besides” (Bhabha 13). Baldwin does not provide any real alternative for Sardarji’s character at the conclusion of the novel; we are led to believe that Sardarji will continue to work for an Indian government and he continues his British ways by wearing “European shoes polished to elegance” (514).

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Richard King continues to examine religion as a field of study within the academy. I have chosen not to address this, as it would take the discussion in an alternate direction.

<sup>2</sup> Mookerjea-Leonard continues her discussion around how the Indian government attempted to “recover” Hindu and Sikh women from Pakistan and return Muslim women to their state. She argues, “the process of repatriation objectified the women as only bodies marked by religious affiliation, and placed these bodies under the protection of the state” (3). However, when these women returned to their “rightful owners” there were not accepted and many of them faced violence at the hands of their families.

<sup>3</sup> Guru Nanak, considered the founder of the Sikh religion, was born to Hindu parents (1469) cast off various religious ideas at an early age. He was considered to be a spiritual man by those surrounded him and he preached about God’s word every night to a congregation. As W. O. Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi explain, the Sikh religion began when Nanak “made the enigmatic pronouncement: “there is no Hindu and no Mussulman so whose path shall I follow? I shall follow God’s path. God is neither Hindu or Mussulman and the path which I follow is Gods” (Cole and Sambhi 10). It was documented that Nanak made this declaration when he reappeared after being missing for over three days.

<sup>4</sup> Owen Cole and Piara Sambhi have outlined Sikh customs that emerge from Hindu or Muslim traditions. For example, vegetarianism is a “Hindu doctrine of non-violence”



(148) and “many Sikhs will not eat any form of meat, rejecting fish as well as eggs” (148). Cole and Sambhi explain that within the Sikh Scriptures, it is unclear what the gurus have instructed. Therefore, Sikhs who chose to eat meat choose to not to “eat meat slaughtered according to Muslim practice . . . and eat meat killed at a stroke and not bled to death” (148). Another example of shared customs is the Divali or New Year celebration. “For Hindus it is a festival of light and deliverance” tied in with stories of Ram and Sita. However, for Sikhs the festival is linked to the story of the Sixth Guru, Hargobind, who was “imprisoned by officers of the Emperor Jehangir . . . for non-payment of the fine imposed on his father” (136). He was released and Sikhs illuminated their houses in order for Hargobind to find his way back home.

<sup>5</sup> The Sikh Scriptures states “Another person’s property, another’s man’s wife, talking ill of another, these are poisons. The touch of another’s man’s wife is like a poisonous snake” (Cole 122). The next verse reads “All else I let pass. All relationships I have found false. I cling to you, my GOD (Cole 123). These verses are interpreted to mean that Sikh men and women can only marry once. However, men and women can remarry once their spouses are deceased. Jakobsh emphasizes that many Sikhs saw it necessary to follow in the British custom of remarriage because of the stigma of the Hindu custom of sati. Polygamy was outlawed in India in 1956 for Hindus and Sikhs. However, it is still allowed for Muslims.

<sup>6</sup> Julia Leslie concludes that in India women’s deaths which are classified as suicides are not suicides but are the result of dowry harassment. Leslie concludes “the problem was

the harassment of wives; 'dowry death' and 'bride-burning' were real. The cause was dowry" (24).

<sup>7</sup> "Noor Inayat Khan was posthumously awarded a British mention in dispatches and a French Croix di Guerre with Gold Star. Khan was the third of three World War II F.A.N.Y. members to be awarded the George Cross, Britain's highest award for gallantry not on the battle field" (Hamilton 26). Baldwin would have acquired this information when researching the biography of Noor Khan.

<sup>8</sup> "Within the homes of prominent Indians [education of women] was carried out almost exclusively by missionary women" (Jokobsh 130). Jokobsh outlines how Missionary women devoted most of their time to educated Indian women. British men applauded these missionary women in the women's efforts of religious conversion because the British saw this as "compelling evidence and direct manifestation of their exemplary influence upon Indian society." (Jokobsh 101)

### CHAPTER THREE: GENDERING HYBRIDITY

When Sikh women in Baldwin's novels identify themselves as Sikh and begin to wear Sikh religious symbols, they implicate themselves in a complex web of hybridity. The Sikh women attempt to perform their religious duties and wear all the Five Ks – which includes a turban, a predominantly male Sikh religious symbol, as well as Kangha (comb), Kirpan (sword), Kara (steel wrist bangle), and Kachera (loose, hand sewn underwear). As such, these women are now considered Amritdhari<sup>1</sup> Sikhs. Once they become an Amritdhari Sikhs, they experience resistance and antagonism within the Sikh community. This resistance centers on the fact that Sikh women are now wearing turbans. When women put on turbans, they mimic Sikh men. In Baldwin's work, this wearing of turbans by female Sikhs, that is, the mimicking of Sikh men, resulting in the disruption of patriarchal authority constitutes one of the shifts and changes of gender. Baldwin also shows that Sikh women form alternate identities outside of the mimicking of Sikh men. In this chapter, I will examine Baldwin's treatment of these issues of gender and hybridity. I begin by contextualizing the female appropriation of the turban with a brief account of the turban and its relationship to Sikh women. I will explore one other central issue of gender and hybridity: female queer identity within Baldwin's work.

In Chapter Two, I discussed how the Indian men mimic British men and how the Indian "sons" would then copy their fathers. Therefore, the sons are mimicking a mimic and the result of this – ironically – is that the British authority is threatened. I will now apply the idea of mimicking to gender and look at the effects on South Asian women. Judith Butler, a theorist who questions institutionalized power, gender, sexuality, and

identity claims, “gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure” (282). She argues that gender can be a fluid variable that shifts and changes within different contexts and historical positions. Wearing a turban ties men to the Sikh religion and marks them as Indian or Sikh. Historically, the turban is a male symbol within the Sikh religion. However, there is a controversy concerning how the Sikh Scriptures have been translated, specifically concerning how the Guru Granth Sahib has been translated, and the use of the pronoun “he” more commonly than “she.” “God, according to Sikh teachings, is beyond the categories of male and female. They are attributes of the creation, not the creator<sup>2</sup>” (Cole 69). Some Sikh women argue that gender does not play a role in the Five Ks and that all “baptized” Sikh, should be wearing the five Ks. Some Sikh women need to feel that they are equal participants in their religion alongside Sikh men. Women in Sikh communities as well as in North American culture are not recognized as a Sikhs in the same way that Sikh men are recognized and defined by wearing a turban. The issue of identity for women in Sikhism is a continuous struggle. Baldwin is able to show this struggle by showing how Sikh women are drawn to wearing a turban. For example, the mother in the short story, “Montreal 1962” or Roop’s character in *What the Body Remembers*, both women find strength in tying turbans and washing them for the men in their lives. Baldwin presents the reader with an array of women who are struggling with their Sikh identity. Baldwin also highlights how Sikh women and men also have the added pressures of North American society. I mentioned the short story “Devika” in chapter one of my thesis. This is a prime example of how the pressure to fit into a North American culture is central to the identity crisis that Sikh men and women struggle with on a daily

basis. In addition, children that grow up in a North American culture find it difficult to balance the two cultures.<sup>3</sup>

As Sikhs began to live in other parts of the world other than India, they faced racism and intolerance, which lead them in one of two directions: clinging to their religion and culture, or letting go because of the pressures of local or Western culture. Sikh women have gone through a mixture of identities because of this migration. They have had to become the breadwinners for the family because the men who did not want to cut their hair could not find work because of racist attitudes. However, as Baldwin demonstrates in the short story, "The Insult," Sikh men who cut their hair are seen as below men who do not cut their hair. The mother is insulted when her friend suggests that her daughter marry a boy without a turban. There is a sense that wearing the Five Ks makes a Sikh more of a Sikh. However, many Sikhs (turbaned or not) would argue with this idea. Women who wear a turban "wear it for their own reasons, but they also wear it in defiance of that stereotype and in solidarity with their brothers, who face discrimination on the basis of it to a far greater extent" (Mahmood and Brady 76). The Sikh men, according to Mahmood and Brady, suffer from discrimination—"to a far greater extent" (76); however, that statement is a bit misleading because Sikh women suffer from a kind of racism from Sikh men and also from attitudes they have been forced to adopt by Western culture. The Sikh women wear the turban in order to show support for Sikhism, however, the Sikh women then must deal resistance within the Sikh community.

Moreover, when examining literature from Sikh-Canadians, the main focus is identity. For example, in *Dharma Rasa*, Kuldip Gill touches upon the idea of returning to

the “homeland.” In the poem “Homelands-India, 1972,” the female narrator goes back to her village in India and questions her place in the village:

As well as I could. But what must I do  
to belong in this place, here and now? Perhaps,  
grow out my hair, wear a salwar/kamiz,  
laugh less loud, change my walk. Dress and adornment  
count – learn the ways – stay at home,  
cook, become a malan and all of that?  
And what about that Kanada side? (63)

Gill presents the homeland like a dream that cannot be easily entered but she has a “Kanada side” now, a Western side that demands that she dress like a Westerner and leave the household to make money. Gill highlights how Indian women’s identities have to reshape according to surrounding cultures. The mother in Baldwin’s short story “Rawalpindi 1919” is also in a similar dreamlike state when cooking chapattis and thinking about the cultural loss that her son and her family will go through once they return from England. This cultural loss is something that many cultures go through when migration occurs. The act of moving from one place to another causes people to adapt and change to their surroundings. Cultural loss occurs when people are unable to access material things such as clothing, food and spices, language, books, and so forth. In the short story, the mother knows that her son will eat nothing but “boiled food with not a single chili” (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 10). There is a strong link between religion and culture in the Sikh religion and this bond creates a great deal of anxiety among Sikh people, especially those born and raised in North America. In the collection

entitled *pappaji wrote poetry in a language I cannot read*, Rajinderpal S. Pal writes the English words in italics and writes Punjabi in standard text. For example

*i am vilaithi babu*  
*angrez in angrezi topi*  
*hometown boy returned*  
*the prodigal nephew*  
*come back to reclaim*  
*language and space (50)*

The effect of this typesetting recognizes and recuperates the loss of the mother tongue because it physically shows how the norm is the English text and how Punjabi is considered a secondary language. Pal is using creative means to represent what Sikhism is struggling with in terms of language loss. Baldwin, Gill, and Pal all are writing about the lack or loss of Sikh identity and the pull between the Sikh religion and Western culture. These writers are describing how they have experienced the loss of culture and religion, and how their adaptation to a North American way of the life has contributed to these losses. There is recognition in Sikh communities that the Punjabi language is dying within North America, and that something must be done in order to keep the religion and culture alive.

Baldwin and Gill also write about how Sikh women struggle with identity in relation to the Five Ks. Sikh women feel the need to explore a religion and culture. I am going to expand on this point because it is important to note that both the creative writers and the sociologists are exploring the idea of Sikh women's identity within North America. For example, Cynthia Mahmood and Stacy Brady interviewed Sikh women living in North America and discussed what it means to be a Sikh woman. All the women

touch upon the idea that a true Sikh is an Amritdhari Sikh who has “special responsibilities and obligations, and take[s] lifelong vows to follow the Sikh tenets” (Mahmood and Brady 28). Following the Five Ks is a hard spiritual journey that not every Sikh is capable of taking. Mahmood and Stacy point out that the turban, for many of the women, was central to their identity as Sikh women:

For these women the turban, the Khalsa identity, and Sikhism were inextricably linked with their personal identity. When Jasjit responded to the question, “What is Sikh identity?” she said:

“It is more than just being religious; even if you are *amritdhari* on the inside, you can’t always tell from the outside. I think that we women have to fight hard to know our Sikhi. Unless I wear the turban, I will never be recognized as a Sikh” (50).

The idea of being “recognized as a Sikh” is very important to a Sikh woman’s identity. Sikh women address how Sikh boys are trained at defending and maintaining their Sikh identity at an early age, whereas the Sikh girls can skim the surface by existing precariously between identities. The daughter in the short story, “The Insult” finds it “easier to live in Chicago without a turban” (*English Lessons and Other Stories* 145). Baldwin shows how some Sikh women do not want to “stick out” as a Sikh. Sikh women begin to lose their Sikh identity at a very early age, and therefore are not recognized as Sikhs. Some of the women speak about their teenage years, when the pressure to fit into a Western culture profoundly affected their identity. They subsequently chose to break the ties to their Sikh identity because they were not used to defending their beliefs. Some of the women talked about going to a Sikh camp and having other Sikhs around them in



order to strengthen their beliefs. Taranjeet is a woman who in her late teens stopped cutting her hair and stopped shaving her legs because “Khalsa Sikh are prohibited from cutting any hair on the body” (Mahmood and Brady 66). She underwent a spiritual change in her teen years that gave her the strength to resist Western notions of beauty. Taranjeet equates her hairy legs with the turban: “I feel like with a guy, you know they have turban, they have their identity, and they have to deal with it, so I think it was my way of making up for not having the turban” (Mahmood and Brady 67). When Taranjeet decides to wear a turban, she is not supported by her family and experiences a new form of discrimination that can exist within the Sikh community. Taranjeet is now considered an Amrithdhari Sikh, meaning she has been reborn into the Sikh religion. Taranjeet explains how her mother and grandmother cried and wondered how any Sikh man would marry such a religious woman once she started wearing a turban. Taranjeet expresses her anxiety, which is reflective of what some women undergo when they decided to wear a turban:

... once I put that turban on, I wasn't viewed as a person anymore. I  
 ... didn't have an individual personality anymore, I was a representative of  
 something else. I felt like I couldn't swear or be the person I was before.  
 I had to be an ambassador for Sikhism, but being an ambassador for  
 Sikhism meant that I had to follow someone else's rules. There was none  
 of my own identity left. (Mahmood and Brady 72)

Once a woman decides to maintain her Sikh identity, she can run into obstacles within the Sikh community. Because the turban has been a male symbol in the Sikh religion, women who decide to wear the turban are being “negatively stereotyped within

their own communities as either religious zealots or radical feminists – this seemingly paradoxical duality – just for wearing the *dastaar*” (Mahmood and Brady 56). Women who decide to wear turbans have to defend their choice to western society and to their own communities. Many of the women have had to defend their decision to wear the turban. For example, Rajvinder explains, “people want to know why I wear it [a turban] and what I am trying to prove. I say I wear it for the same reason any man wears it, because I am Sikh” (Mahmood and Brady 57). Rajvinder is forced to educate other Sikhs as to what it means to be Sikh. Sikh women who wear a turban must battle with patriarchal notions from both Western society and from the Sikh communities. Western notions of beauty that include shaved legs, different hair styles for each season, and different clothes each week cause Western women to feel trapped and overwhelmed.

Young Sikh women are now using traditional symbols in conjunction with their own individual identities, and combining the two to create their own understanding of Sikh religion. Through these individual identities, Sikh women will continue to have diverse and multi-layered identities – a more equalized Sikh identity for both men and women. Some women wear all Five Ks, including the turban, and by doing so have upheld the identity that Sikhs should be wearing the Five Ks. However, Sikh women in North America are now exploring their own spirituality. Sometimes that spirituality includes a turban, and sometimes it does not.

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Furthermore, in Baldwin’s collection of short stories, South Asian women frequently use religious symbols in order to challenge religion and culture. For example,

in “Montreal 1962,” the wife prepares her husband’s turbans and ties on a turban on herself:

I . . . began to tie it [a turban] as a Sardar would, one end clenched between my teeth to anchor it, arms raised to sweep it up to the forehead down to the nape of the neck, around again, this time higher. I wound it swiftly, deftly, till it jutted haughtily forward, adding four inches to my stature. (16)

When she sees herself in the mirror she recognizes a union between the men in her life and herself – her own body: “In the mirror I saw my father as he must have looked as a boy, my teenage brother as I remember him, you [her husband] as you face Canada, myself as I need to be” (16). Baldwin demonstrates that Sikh women feel the need to be seen as equal to their husbands; they need to carry the weight of culture or religion like their husbands, in the form of a physical symbol such as the turban. The wife in “Montreal 1962” does not feel the need to wear a turban in India. However, in Canada, her gender shifts and she realizes that she needs to be more masculine. In her view, wearing a turban is more masculine, but also more religious. She finds power in mimicking her husband, and she experiences “anxiety and pleasure” (Bhabha 85) in doing so. As Bhabha explains, the “discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (86). “Montreal 1962” sets the couple up against Canadian culture, and the slippage within mimicry that Bhabha insists is required in order to be effective, is the slippage of gender roles. The wife does not wear the turban on a daily basis. Instead, she comes to the realization that she will have to work outside the home

because her husband is unable to find work. Here the slippage is two-fold. First, the wife will have to work outside the home because she looks more “Canadian” than her husband does. For Sikh women, this is empowering and unbecoming – unbecoming because the values of Sikh women are different from the values that women in North America hold. Sikh women value the home and see it as their space to dominate and control. While the mimicking reveals that, the woman understands she must move outside the home, her perception is that she is being asked to take on a Sikh masculine role. When a North American woman works outside the home, she is not seen as taking a masculine role. Baldwin highlights how the Sikh women need time to adjust to the cultural change when they step into the North American working world. Sikh women then need to learn how to transition between work and home.

Many Sikh men and women have had to cut their hair in order to find work and to fit into the surrounding society. A fear of violence stemming from racism and ignorance has caused fear among many of these men and women, leading them into acts such as hair-cutting in order to feel safe. By doing these acts, they are breaking with the tradition of following the five Ks that Guru Gobind Singh founded. At first, the men were the focus of these symbols. However, some women during this time also adopted all or some of the five Ks. Much like the men, Sikh women had, and still have, mixed feelings about wearing the five Ks and being recognized as Sikhs by society. In addition, Sikh women are also struggling with patriarchal notions within the Sikh communities, and within a patriarchal North American society. For a woman to have long hair and keep it uncut is difficult within a North American culture that prides itself on the latest fashion trends and hairstyles. Baldwin uses the symbol of the turban as reclamation of women’s power and

agency within patriarchal religious codes. However, very few women actually choose to wear the turban, because it is identified as a Sikh male symbol. There still exists today a conflict between Sikhs who wear the Five Ks and Sikhs who choose not to wear these symbols. Baldwin touches upon the idea that the turban is a symbol of sacrifice. The wife in "Montreal 1962" chooses to tie a red turban, suggesting the image of blood, or the sacrifice of Sikh religious leaders: "Then I chose my favourite, the red one you wore less and less, and I took it into the bedroom. I unfurled the gauzy scarlet on our bed and it seemed as though I'd poured a pool of the sainted blood of all the Sikh martyrs there" (Baldwin 15). The turban has become a strong identity symbol for Sikh men; Baldwin presents the idea that Sikh women want to wear a turban and feel the pride that it takes to do so within a cultural environment that often discourages and even disallows this practice within the workplace. Baldwin attempts to tell the stories of the women still living in India. Baldwin is able to move between the two countries as she exposes the ways in which Sikh women become trapped in patriarchal social constructions that point toward a clash between Third World feminism and Western feminism.

Chandra-Talpade Mohanty has warned that there is a danger in applying "western feminist discourse" to third world women:

The status of 'female' or 'woman/women's' experience has always been a central concern in feminist discourse. After all, it is on the basis of shared experience that feminists of different political persuasions have argued for unity or identity among women. . . . Gender is produced as well as uncovered in feminist discourse, and definitions of experience, with

attendant notions of unity and difference, form the very basis of this production. (70)

Mohanty concludes that “experience must be historically interpreted and theorized if it is to become the basis of feminist solidarity and struggle, and it is at this moment that an understanding of the politics of location proves crucial” (82). She asks feminists to locate themselves within their own personal history and within a global history. Baldwin, who, as we have seen, has lived in India, Canada, and the United States, casts her narratives far and wide in order to capture her politics of location. Baldwin is first-generation Sikh Canadian as well as an immigrant to Canada. She is able to move effectively between these countries and histories as she vividly presents the many facets of the lives of the women in her stories. She clearly shows her reader that various patriarchal structures are at the centre of various women’s experience, whether they are in India or Canada.

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Baldwin pushes the idea of gender, and how women are forced to see past their gender roles and take up other roles and identities. In her first novel, the scenes in which Roop understands that she must move past cultural and religious restraints reveal that she must learn not only how to be a Sikh woman but also how to be a Sikh man. This is further complicated by the fact that the man she attempts to emulate is her husband, a man who has been colonized by Western tradition. Roop’s lesson in becoming a woman starts at home, as she watches her mother and grandmother working in the house. She learns at an early age to use her charm to quell her father’s anger over her tattoo rendered in Muslim script. Roop learns very early on that in order to succeed, she must use her

attractiveness and charm. When these social tools do not work in her husband's home, – partly because Satya refuses to befriend her – she is at a loss as to how she might survive. When she returns home after marriage, she explains her situation to her sister-in-law Kusum. Kusum explains that saying “no-ji” (293) to her husband or father-in-law is not the way to get things done. Rather, Kusum explains to Roop,

“You listen to Papaji so seriously. I don't understand why you can't hear his wishes and say 'achchaji' and 'yes-ji', and then do whatever you feel is right for the family.” This is a new idea for Roop – or a woman to say yes-ji and not obey immediately, perhaps continue doing whatever she needs to do. (293-94)

Roop begins to learn how other women are surviving. Roop learns from these women that to come out and tell the truth can often be the wrong way to do things. Rather, women should obey and then go about their business as they see fit. When Roop tells her sister-in-law that Sardarji's first wife, Satya, tried to poison her, Kusum explains that Roop's life is not as important as their “Papaji, izzat [honour]” (294). It is through her talks with Kusum that Roop “understands now, like simmer coming to boil; Pāpāji will not protect her. His duty to Roop ended the day of her marriage” (292). She thinks to herself:

Their advice is women's half-right advice, what any daughter-in-law or cousin-sister should say But saying “achchaji” and “yes-ji” to Papaji, going back to Sardarji now or going back later will only delay Roop's fate. Delay will not answer her need to see her children again, or help her stay alive to do it. . . . I am not like other good-good, sweet-sweet Punjabi girls.

I have one bad ear that does not listen. So sometimes, it cannot obey.

(298)

Roop only half listens to the women's advice and only half listens to her father's advice as well. She disobeys by staying at her father's house without permission from her husband. Roop begins to understand that she is acting on her own and that in order to truly survive. She will have to learn how to negotiate between her husband and Satya. As well, Roop will have to begin to negotiate between Indian patriarchal order and colonial patriarchal order. Roop delays going back to her husband's house and she does not write back to her husband. Instead, she writes to the servant woman and lies, saying that the children are required for a family wedding. Roop is learning that in order to get what she wants, she will have to learn how to protect herself and make it look as though she is doing everything in the name of her husband's honour. This act empowers her to continue to listen to herself and to move outside the socially constructed boundaries of gender roles.

Roop begins to use her charm and her sexuality to enhance her status with her husband...She knows that Sardarji-likes to be the teacher, and to appear more knowledgeable than Roop, so she lets him believe that she is still learning English:

Roop has become careful to learn slowly. On after-dinner walks with Sardarji through Lawrence Gardens . . . her rehearsed mistakes so prettily, continually reassuring him. (364)

Roop becomes increasingly aware of how her situation is slightly different from that of Sardarji's first wife. She has to deal with a first wife, learn English, and respect the ways of her husband in order to please him. In order for her to gain status within the household,



she must make small changes. She begins to drink tea the British way and learns English with her children. All of these changes suggest that she is learning how to reinvent herself with each interaction. Through the character of Roop, Baldwin is demonstrating how women must constantly change roles and positions as a means of survival. As well, through Roop's narrative, Baldwin showcases how a Sikh woman may "[locate] her internal and social agency in relation to the gaze of the Hindu [Sikh] man, whose eyes reflect those religious ideals that paradoxically produce her as subject and commodity, and whose gaze is somewhat regulated by the paternal gaze of the British colonialism" (Gairola 309).

In *The Tiger Claw*, Baldwin demonstrates how Noor, the female protagonist, is able to move beyond religion and gender roles and begin to navigate through these spaces. As readers, we follow Noor as she successfully navigates through, but at the conclusion of the novel, Baldwin chooses to maintain Noor's ties with religion and gender roles, and Noor is seen as Armand's lover and as a British agent. Baldwin creates a character who shifts and blurs the lines of religion and gender, but there is always a tie to the British. Noor dresses herself as a man more than once in order to gain information for the British. On one occasion, she forgets that she has dressed as a man and is panicked that the Gestapo will be looking for a "woman in a beret wearing a white shirt and black trousers" (305), but when she is mistaken for a "monsieur" on the bus she realizes that she has dressed appropriately. Noor forgets how she looks to the outside world, as she is constantly changing clothes, redoing her make-up and altering her appearance in order to fit into her surrounding environment. When she changes into a dress and lets down her hair, "the disguise released her from herself; she was calm again"

(305). Noor is never comfortable as a man or as a woman. She is only comfortable in a disguise that does not reveal her gender, nationality, or religion.

The only disguise that works for her is dressing up as a white European so that she can be mistaken for a French or German person. She becomes so caught in trying to be a white European that she sets aside her gender and attempts to wear clothes that are formless and shapeless. The only piece of clothing that reveals something of herself is her headscarf that she keeps in order to pray. When she is caught with it, she is able to relegate it to the status of handkerchief. Noor fluidly moves from one gender to another, from one nationality to another, and even from one race to another. She becomes the perfect hybrid and is able to step into and out of her various identities. Noor is not seen in a sexual light. Although we read about her love for Armand, she is never sexualized. Similarly, in *Madeleine* by Jean Overton Fuller, Noor is not seen as a sexual object, but rather is painted as a hard worker. Fuller's physical description of Noor is blatantly de-sexualized as it infantilizes and objectifies her physical presence:

[She] was very small, with indefinite brown hair, and the largest possible wide brown eyes. They were very eloquent; both timorous and trusting, they made me think of a deer. But the most singular thing was her voice . . . it was exceedingly gentle, high and faint . . . for it had no 'body' at all.

(45)

By objectifying Noor, Fuller gives her the "the manners of a 'little girl'" (45). He writes her story as that of a woman placed on a pedestal by an author who ignores both her religious beliefs and her presence as a fully developed and sexual woman. Baldwin at least takes into account Noor's religious beliefs and attempts to write about her desires.

Baldwin's novel is not a biography but rather a story that was inspired by real life events. As Baldwin was researching this novel she discovered that Noor's life story "has been exoticized, eroticised, blamed and glorified, her tale told, embellished and retold in terribly Orientalist fashion" (*National Post*). She was attracted to this character because of "her hybridity, and that like me, she was a second-generation diasporic Indian with strong emotional ties to India, though her actual time in India was really very short" (Pereira 5). She therefore wanted to write Noor's story from a South Asian women's hybrid perspective.

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In the novel *What the Body Remembers*, as we have seen, Baldwin returns to India just before the Partition in 1947. By locating the narrative in an Indian landscape, she suggests a need to examine how Indian women began to navigate and maintain the multilayered religious space as well as multilayered gendered space. Baldwin creates characters who are polar opposites in social position, class status, and political ideology. These women have to decide if they are going to use the tools of patriarchal power – tools that go in hand with the colonizer and his tools – in order to gain agency. The two main Sikh women narrators in *What the Body Remembers* are married to the same man, thus creating a triangulation of characters that pushes the boundaries of hybridized religious sites. According to Sikh scripture, a man is allowed to marry only one woman. Baldwin blurs the lines between religious scripture and practice at the beginning of the novel. Satya, is the first wife of Sardarji, and the only character in the novel who is unimpressed by the presence of British influence in India. The British landed immigrants

in India have shaped her life by destroying her father's wealth and power. She powerfully and concisely illustrates this point when she muses,

The man who could best protect her, her father, lost his power. . . .When the British turned land rights to paper, he could prove nothing, not even fitness for working! He lost the land. . . .In the end he locked himself in a room with all the British-supplied gin he could muster and drank himself to death. (9)

For Satya, her father is the only person who could help her when her husband decides to take a second wife because of Satya's inability to have children. Satya explains to her husband that she will find a second wife for him, but she is unable to find a "woman ugly enough for Sardarji to marry" (9). Satya's father would have been able to find another wife for Satya's husband or would have been able to persuade Sardarji to take another course of action. The British play a huge role in Satya's life. Satya only steps into a hybridity in order to expose how hybridity has negatively affected her. She is the only character who speaks against the British, and when she does so she only speaks against them to her husband, a highly placed Sikh landowner who has lived in England and is considered an "England-educated Indian" (15). Her husband's success is inextricably bound to the dual colonialist signifiers of being Sikh, and being educated in England:

[The] British preferred people from smaller quoms – people like Sikhs, Parsis or Muslims – from whom elevation in His Majesty's Government would bring more gratitude than the largest quom, the Hindus, could muster. (15)

Satya does not support her husband's dealings with the British; she refuses to attend any English social functions because she does not speak English and the British women think that she is a servant. Satya makes a point of not learning English or English customs. She refuses to use the tools of the oppressor – the “master” – thereby refusing to give in to patriarchy. She demands that she be treated with respect by her husband. When confronting her husband, she shows her anger, something that is not typical for a Sikh Indian wife; “Tired of my shouting? You don't want me because I tell you what you have become. I tell you what I see inside you, that's why you throw me away” (15). Satya does not celebrate her husband's promotion in the Irrigation Department. Rather, she explains how his position does not help India:

After hearing his news, Satya had said quietly, “This posting and your new position are another bone the British can throw before Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, hoping to appease the non-cooperators and all the self-rule agitators, justify the blood spilled and pain endured by protesters . . . you may be excellent at engineering, but you may not be worthy of the freedom fighters'-sacrifices.” (171)

Satya's politics are clear. She does not think that her husband is working towards the freedom of India. Rather, she feels he is working for the British and for his own selfish ambition. Satya cannot keep quiet about the politics of India. She compares her relationship with her husband to the story of Ram and Sita from the Ramayana epic tale. As she says, “remember the untold story, Sardarji, The part of the Ramayan story the Ram-Lila reenactments do not tell. No matter how perfidious was Ram, Sita outdid him in doing her duty, even at the cost of her life” (343). Satya knows that the Ram and Sita

story has been told and retold in many versions and that it has become an Indian folktale.<sup>4</sup> Many versions of the tale exist and it can be concluded from them that Sita is more powerful than Ram. When Sita is kidnapped by Raven, Ram does rescue her, but cannot stomach the fact afterwards that she might have voluntarily slept with Raven or might have been raped – one and the same, according to Ram. He orders Sita to walk through fire in order to convince him that she is pure. She walks through fire and is successful. However, he stills banishes her from the kingdom because his subjects do not believe that she is pure. She leaves the kingdom and goes to live in the forest, where she raises her twin sons. When her sons are of age, Ram returns for them, and asks his wife to walk through fire again. She refuses to walk through fire for a second time. Like Sita, Satya will not follow her husband any longer, and will not stand by as he ignores Indian culture and people and gains his wealth at the expense of Sikh people.

Throughout the novel, Satya confronts her husband about various issues within the household, and when the second wife (Roop) enters the picture, Satya clearly defines her territory and demands that any children that Sardarji and Roop have will be hers to raise. By doing so, Satya attempts to hold on to some form of power within the household. However, because she does not keep ties with any women, she finds herself alone and unable to regain her position as first wife in the house. All the connections she has had with women are connections that she has discontinued because these women were not supportive. For example, she fears her sister-in-law, Toshi, because Toshi advised Satya's husband to find another wife who could bear children. When Sardarji sends Satya to attend various prayers ceremonies and consume "child-inducing potions and pippal fruit" (10) with Toshi, Satya does not consume them, for fear of poison. As

well, her mother is no help at all when she reminds Satya “a woman is merely cracked open for seeding like the earth before the force of the plough. If she is fertile, good for the farmer, if not, bad for her” (11). The women who surround Satya have all understood and maintained the various male-dominated cultural formations. Satya is attempting to move outside of this hybridized structure, but she cannot do it alone.

When Satya plans her death, she does so in a way that will not harm Sardarji’s reputation or her own. She sends for her cousin-sister Mumta, who has tuberculosis, to stay with her and visit. Mumta is the only woman who has come to Satya’s aid. Earlier in the novel, “Satya calls on Mumta to join her for the night” (45); when Saradji stops coming to her bed for pleasure. The two cousin-sisters decide to follow Nihan Sikhs who are making their way from gurdwara to gurdwara on a religious pilgrimage. Satya does not listen to Mumta who explains that it is bad luck to travel on a Tuesday or Mangal. The religious juxtapositions of Hindu and Sikh practices are presented here. Satya, who does not attend to any one religious practice, affirms to the reader her disregard for religious practices when she says, “Let Mangal do its worst. The worst is what I yearn for” (344). Satya is prepared to challenge all religious superstitions as she convinces herself that she wants to commit suicide. When Satya leans in and kisses Mumta, the scene is both violent and sensual:

... Two old women lean close and remember together, holding one another’s bent knees, telling stories of much worse things that happen to poorer women, all the time, all the time.

“Don’t worry, Mumta.” She moves closer to her so their thighs are separated only by the thin muslin of their salwars. She takes Mumta’s

chin, turns her face to her own. She drinks it from Mumta's lips.

Pleading, first, then fiercely, tasting the harshness of Mumta's shock, but permitting no pulling back. Not in Mumta. Not in herself. She parts Mumta's lips, takes her poison by a European kiss, and she is thinking of Sardarji as her lips touch Mumta's, remembering how he taught her this when he returned from England, taught her to kiss. It is the only way.

(349)

This kiss is sensual, full of power, passion, and violence. Baldwin powerfully defines the tools that Satya uses to kill herself – poisoned European kiss, a master's tool. Mumta has tuberculosis, and Satya knows this when she kisses Mumta: "*Tuberculosis, I am yours. Claim me. Sardarji, I begin death from this moment*" (349; emphasis in the original).

Mumta does not pull back and Satya's desire for death is clear and unforgiving. Mumta, an innocent victim in the narration is shocked:

Satya has taken poison. Mumta knows it.

Mumta jerks away, her eyes wide with horror, a hand cupped over her mouth. "Satya!" She covers her head. Her shoulders shake, she coughs and spits blood. A smile of triumph stretches Satya's lips. She trembles with daring. There is a long, long moment till a nature of pity, sorrow and understanding dawns in Mumta's eyes. (349)

Up to this point in the story, Satya does not use patriarchal tools. By ingesting tuberculosis through a European kiss, Satya is cast as a victim of illness, which becomes a tool of patriarchy and her body is colonized by both illness and paternalistic rule. This moment represents the only time that Satya uses the tools of colonial patriarchy and it



ultimately becomes a stepping stone toward her death. Satya is infected with tuberculosis and she dies a tragic slow death that represents a complex interweaving of her bond with other South Asian women as well and her desire to violently remove herself from the oppression of a dual patriarchal structure. Mumta's lips become a symbol of compassion, violence, and sensuality in one powerful moment, as Satya exercises her final moment of very conflicted power as a woman torn apart by both British and Indian patriarchal codes. By implicating another woman in this act and lamenting the "stories of much worse things that happen to poorer women, all the time, all the time," Satya makes a tragic and powerful gesture towards all South Asian women caught within a similar trap. As she lies dying, Roop and Sardarji come to visit her in the hospital and Satya is forgiving: "Forgive me, Roop. I wish you had come to our house as my daughter instead of as my sister" (356). Satya knows that Roop is also trapped within colonial patriarchy and that Roop has to play the game in order to survive.

By inscribing the "poisoned kiss" scene with layers of compassion and desire, as well as European influence, Baldwin evokes a form of powerful, yet conflicted lesbian desire as an avenue through which Satya can escape male heterosexual desire, and can also escape a British ruled India. Baldwin also uses this desire to ultimately further Satya's suicide plans. The image of the two women's "thighs . . . separated only by the muslin of their salwars" gives the reader a subtle yet vivid image of a potential lesbian continuum largely unavailable to women surrounded by heterocentric forms of sexuality. The presence of Satya's "fierceness" and "pleading" during the encounter, followed by her "tasting the harshness of Mumta's shock" renders the scene sensual, violent, and tragically liberating. Satya kisses, Mumta, her cousin-sister, Mumta – "a Hindi word for

the all-encompassing love that parents feel for their children” (Choudhary 3). Baldwin gestures towards a lesbian continuum. Feminist theorist Adrienne Rich coined the term “lesbian continuum.” She states:

If we consider the possibility that all women – from the infant suckling at her mother’s breast, to the grown woman experiencing orgasmic sensations while suckling her own child, perhaps recalling her mother’s milk smell in her own . . . to the woman dying at ninety, touched and handled by women – exist on a lesbian continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not.” (54)

Baldwin sheds light on a lesbian continuum and on a queer South Asian female identity; however, she also casts a shadow on lesbian desire. Ultimately, Satya’s sexual desire is for her husband. Further, South Asian women’s bodies continue to be a site for an Eastern and Western cultural battle and that “cultural authenticity and cultural preservation are inextricably tied to the history of regulation of women’s sexualities” (Handa 55). Satya’s suicide plans are successful, and at the end of the novel, we are left with heterosexual desire in colonial India. We are left with a narrative that upholds Roop and Sardarji’s marriage, a marriage that heavily favors Sardarji’s wishes and desires. Baldwin use Satya’s body as a marker for female queer desire. Satya cannot conceive children and therefore cannot be a marker for heterosexuality as is outlined by an Indian patriarchy order. She is therefore in a place of exile where her body becomes her own and she is able to mark it how she pleases. Satya’s body is an excellent example of a “queer diasporic body [that] is . . . a place riven with contradictions and the violences of

multiple uprooting, displacements, and exiles” (Gopinath 4). She marks it with a kiss from Mumta and infects herself with tuberculosis. By so doing, Satya removes her body from the narration; however, Baldwin uses Satya’s consciousness throughout the rest of the novel. Roop hears Satya’s voice when she learns to understand how to navigate the hybrid world and leaves behind aspects of Indian life. This occurs, for example, when she and her children learn English stories and nursery rhymes instead of learning Punjabi and *Shubits* (Sikh religious songs). Roop learns from Satya’s rebellion against the British: “If Satya’s were here . . . she could have told Miss Barlow (the English Teacher/Nanny) right to her face, “Your Eve was also a colony, like the rest of us” (364). Baldwin uses the memory of Satya as a starting point for Roop to learn and gain voice against the British nanny. Roop takes small steps of rebellion against the British nanny, but not against her husband’s wishes. Roop learns that in order to survive and live she must learn to use her body to please her husband and have more children. She feels that the English she knows and the few British customs she has learned are enough to please her husband and his British friends. At the conclusion of the novel, it is Roop, not Satya, who has successfully navigated her way through various hybrid tensions.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> When individuals are baptized into the Sikh faith, they are now called Amritdhari Sikh who have “taken *amrit*, which means that they have undergone the ritual of imbibing the sacred nectar bequeathed by Guru Gobind Singh” (Mahmood 28). An Amritdhari Sikh is a Sikh who wears all of the Five Ks, and a turban, and prays twice a day.

<sup>2</sup> The Sikh Scriptures states: “The wise and beautiful Being (*purukh*) is neither man or woman or a bird” (AG 1010). “God, the one, dwells within all but is revealed only to those who receive grace” (AG 931).

<sup>3</sup> Many texts deal with second-generational issues. For example, Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake*, which was recently turned into a film. Rishma Dunlop has written many articles on diasporic identities. For example, her essay “Memoirs of a Sirdar’s Daughter in Canada: Hybridity and Writing Home” weaves in poetry that tie together first generation stories with second-generation Sikh women.

<sup>4</sup> Researching this story is a difficult task, as there are many retellings, and versions that Baldwin could be referring to. As a child, I remember being told that Ram and Sita were banished from the kingdom and Sita was kidnapped. Ram saved her and they returned to the kingdom and the people helped them by lighting candles that would show them the way home.

## CONCLUSION: SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN: WRITING THEIR OWN STORIES

Baldwin skillfully demonstrates the complexities of a hybridity. She engages with Eastern and Western cultures, religions, and gender and sexuality to highlight and question the limitations of the hybridity on South Asian's women lives. In addition, Baldwin pushes the boundaries of the hybrid space and reveals the hidden dangers for women who attempt to become "authentic" subjects. South Asian women in particular have to maintain both positions as well as learn to layer and discard various cultural and religious practices, all the time balancing issues around both sexuality and gender. Her female characters learn to navigate through this precarious world in order to survive within a two-fold patriarchal society. The various obstacles that they navigate reveal that South Asian women frequently have to play the roles that men have created for them – roles such as the obedient wife and the loyal servant. As these roles are woven throughout Baldwin's work, we sense that the writer is challenging traditional roles for women and thereby pushing the boundaries for South Asian women's lives.

When women in Baldwin's work attempt to challenge or usurp traditional roles, they frequently end up being harmed physically. Baldwin's narratives layer cultural practices and what is revealed is that women are required to participate in the hybridity. Baldwin outlines how women from India and those from the diaspora begin to participate in the hybridity and are required to continue to participate, or else face physical harm. These women learn to compromise and negotiate within a complex set of cultural practices. By placing women's bodies as central fixtures within her narratives, Baldwin renders these bodies significant cultural markers of particular religious practices. The

biological female functions as a site for re-coding and manipulating the tensions in hybrid sites. Nayak further explains that women's bodies are "fleshy signifiers of morals and values, 'holding up half the sky,' and securing the sanctity, spread and survival of a community with the purity of their bodies" (5). By marking Roop's Sikh body with a Muslim tattoo, Baldwin further complicates Sikh women's bodies by inscribing them with dual religious markers. Noor and Roop come to a similar space of understanding about religion. The fact that they are able to pick and choose when they use religion to their advantage aligns them as characters caught within a similar mode of identificatory practice and survival. Religion becomes a tool for women to wield within the patriarchal worlds that they inhabit. Roop uses her body as marker for hybrid identity that she is learning to navigate. In comparison, Noor's body cannot be read; she slips through the hybridity identities of nationality and religion. Consequently, Noor is brutalized by others who are attempting to find out her "true" nationality and religion. It can be concluded that women's bodies are ultimately marked and even destroyed when they enter religious hybrid spaces. In Baldwin's work, women's bodies and psyches become the physical and spiritual receptacles for these multiplicitous moments of recognition, at times tragic and at times life affirming. Ultimately, her work instills in the reader the desire to acknowledge and respect the challenge many South Asian women face as they lead these many faceted, culturally fractured lives.

By inscribing her female characters with dual identities and nationalities, she skillfully complicates and pushes the boundaries of identity for South Asian women. In doing so, she opens up the possibility for multiple identities. However, this opening up also reveals, paradoxically, that the struggle that often accompanies this double bind can

lead some South Asian women to a tragic end such as suicide or murder. This fatal scenario reveals the danger inherent in women's bodies entering into a hybrid world that may include the potential for violence. Nevertheless, Baldwin's narratives attempt to reclaim women's bodies as they move through these risky sites. In the epilogue, Satya is reborn and she "opens [her] new mouth and screams" with "her eyes wide open . . . with whole lungs to scream and a body that remembers, remembers the thoughts, remembers the un-thought" (*What the Body Remembers* 517). Baldwin demands that her readers take up Satya's voice and body, thereby moving beyond the pages of the book and into a performative meta-narrative that may allow them to imagine themselves as free from the potential dangers of hybridity. Baldwin explains, "South Asian women have to fill in the gaps of each other's story because so far we have not been in the position to be writing our own stories" (Patchsea 4). In *The Tiger Claw* she leaves the narration with Kabir Kahn, Noor's brother, when she writes, "But Pir Kabir Khan would tell the story of Noor for the rest of his days, re-create Noor that she might live on in the world's memory. *Imagine that*" (565). This moment signals the memory of a woman's body that will be carried forward by a brother through re-telling and re-creating. However, Noor's body does not represent one nation but a multiplicity of nationalities.

By creating the character of Noor Khan in *The Tiger Claw*, Baldwin presents the reader with a perfect hybrid who is able to move between identities along lines of race and nationality. When Noor is able to appropriate many different identities and nationalities, she is both successful and unsuccessful in the ambivalent space. Noor is placed in a double bind at the conclusion of the novel when she is forced to claim a particular nationality but refuses to do so and she is killed. Had Noor claimed her

Muslim-British identity, she would have been murdered by the German soldiers for being both Muslim and British. Through this character, Baldwin reveals that “the *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 88). Baldwin accurately describes the hybrid world and its limitations, and by creating the perfect hybrid in Noor, she demonstrates how hybridity is able to aid diasporic subjects in their quest to become part of their new homeland. Noor attempts to become the perfect hybrid; she learns about various cultures – the politics and social customs as well as many languages. She speaks German, French, Urdu and can read Sufi script. She is able to navigate between gender stereotypes as they exist in these culturally constructed arenas of thought and practice. Her role in the novel is to navigate between cultures and gain as much information as she can by mimicking the culture. In order to do so, she must operate as a chameleon-like hybrid mix. The perfect hybrid knows when to shift and move between identities, and when to stop and maintain a single identity. She is able to read and predict people’s reactions to her conduct. This makes her a better hybrid because she not only mimics various cultures; she also knows when to mimic which culture, depending on whom she is with at the time. She has learned how people behave around each other. As a woman of mixed race, she is able to step into each position. For example, she is able to see from a white woman’s perspective; she also is able to perceive the world around her as an Indian woman. Baldwin is successful at creating a hybrid character that moves swiftly and fluidly through the rough terrain of the hybrid world. By creating a character that successfully maintains multiple identities Baldwin has “rupture[ed] the discourse” (Bhabha 86) around ambivalence.



In terms of sexuality, Baldwin's scope is limited. However, she does attempt to push the boundaries in *What the Body Remembers* when she has Satya kiss her cousin/sister in order to infect herself with tuberculosis. In this instance, Baldwin gestures towards the potential for a queer South Asian female identity. However, she fails to address a fully realized sense of South Asian lesbian desire because she shrouds the incident in fatalistic notions centered on escape and ambiguous representations of physical intimacy. Baldwin also constructs sexuality and desire around instances of arranged marriages, which in turn place the women in subservient subject positions. Baldwin's female characters deal with the issues of arranged marriage, and learn how to use the subservient subject position to their advantage. Some women are successful at maintaining this position. However, the women who desire to move outside this position are forced to remove themselves from the narrative by committing suicide. In the body of Baldwin's work the only woman who survives without being physically harmed or required to completely ignore her needs is Roop, from *What the Body Remembers* and Amma from the short story, "A Pair of Ears." Roop successfully learns to navigate the hybridity by simultaneously pleasing her husband and fulfilling her own needs. Roop, however, does all of this at the expense of Satya, who does not survive the narrative and whose needs are never met. Amma successfully survives the narrative because she is able to position herself between colonialist practices and Indian custom. Baldwin is exploring how South Asian women manage to cope within cultural traditions that are layered with both religious practices and the effects of a diasporic movement.

Baldwin maps the lives of South Asian women as they fit into the overall construction of hybrid worlds containing complex layers of power, patriarchy, and

colonial attitudes. In her stories and novels, she uses multiple female voices in creative configurations in order to explore the relationships between women from various backgrounds. All of her characters, in a sense, become aspects of a single symbolic diasporic female figure struggling for agency and power within a dual oppressive structure of colonialist (British and North American) and Indian patriarchal traditions. I began this thesis with a quote from Chandra Mohanty "It is the intersections of the various systemic networks of class, race, (hetero)sexuality, and nation, then, that position us as 'women'." This quote sums up Baldwin's narrative strategies as she creates complex characters who engage with hybridity. She constructs layered and complicated female characters that have to interact with their immediate community as well as the larger community of a constantly evolving global landscape.

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