

Love in Transit: The Plasticity of Love in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Sharon Bala's *The Boat People*

Abhisek Ghosal

Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, India

Abstract

This paper is an analysis of the plasticity of love and its appropriation as an effective strategy for those in power to deal with the refugee crisis. It contends that a contextualization of love is needed to point to some of the ways in which love's plasticity is employed to combat refugee uprisings. Through an analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Sharon Bala's *The Boat People* (2018), this paper demonstrates how the ruling governments, of different contexts, either overtly or covertly, resort to politicizing love in order to defuse tensions between refugees and "insiders".

Keywords: Love, borders, refugee politics, plasticity of love, "contingent positionality"

Introduction

Love, broadly speaking, is a multidimensional phenomenon, whose manifestations are an outcome of the subjective intentions of the person who loves. What we can know of love also changes, following changes to its socio-cultural configurations. This means that manifestations of love in any given spatio-temporal locale have to be comprehended with the fluidity of these socio-cultural parameters kept in mind. Love's contingency thus lies at the heart of what I refer to as the plasticity of love, wherein love can be adapted to political use and exploitation by those in authority, as seen in the context of refugee politics. I borrow Anthony Giddens's notion of plastic sexuality in *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, where he explains "plastic sexuality" as "decentered sexuality", being cut off from "its age-old integration with reproduction, kinship and the generations" (Giddens 27). In the same way, I conceptualize plastic love as that which can be severed from the conventional notion of love as personal relationship between two individuals and argue that it can be put towards collective ends. Plastic love is the sort of love which is politically exercised by the ruling government towards the common masses. In this regard, I turn to Martha C. Nussbaum's observation on the relationship between citizens and their governments in *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, where she asserts that "different people think differently about the nation's relationship to them" (208). It suggests that the relationship between citizens and the nation-state is highly nuanced, and I argue that such a relationship is grounded on plastic love. Plasticity of love as exercised by the ruling government is experienced by the common masses from different points of view.

This article underscores the political nuances of plastic love in the context of refugee politics, to evaluate the ways in which love's plasticity is exploited, often subtly and cunningly, as a political strategy to quell heated confrontations between rival ethnic communities. To demonstrate this politicization of love, I refer to two South Asian fictional narratives — Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Sharon Bala's *The Boat People* (2018). I am interested in studying the role that love might play in refugee politics, particularly in the context of political confrontations between refugees and ruling governmental authorities. In doing so, I consider the potential of love, especially its plasticity, to serve as a theoretical standpoint to further understand refugee politics.

II

Increasing global connectivity has meant that borders separating nations are now more porous than ever, leading to a rise in incidents of border crossings. This has sometimes led to different ethnic groups being at loggerheads with each other. The rise of refugee movements across the world has also pushed state authorities to bring about changes in their state policies. While border security is justified as a means to apprehend those who cross illegally, security officials often deny the basic needs of refugees. Sometimes, in order to conform to legalities, justice is denied to refugees, who are not treated according to humanitarian principles. As Jennifer Hyndman argues, "Humanitarianism is an increasingly well-funded and politicized process of balancing the needs of refugees and other displaced persons against the interests of states" (3). It means that humanitarianism is at bottom a political process through which the political interests of both refugees and the state are balanced. In order to ease the tensions between citizens and refugees, state authorities often devise flexible governing strategies so as to maintain the socio-cultural *status quo* within the nation-state. Lying at the heart of refugee politics is the role that borders play, an issue central to both Hamid's and Bala's novels. The notion of borders is problematic not only because it rests on the convergence of two adjacent territories but also because it serves to restrict the free movement of human and non-human capital. The existence of a border between two adjoining nation-states sometimes impacts border people living on either side of the border, as was the case with Partition in the Indian subcontinent. In "Introduction: Resistance in the Borderlands", Paula Banerjee and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury observe:

The present state system in South Asia, in particular the state system of the subcontinent, is a result largely of the partitions in the eastern and western parts of the erstwhile united India, giving birth to three states - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The borders dividing these countries are markers of past bitter history, current separate, distinct and independent existence, and the sign of the territorial integrity/disintegration of these states. The bitterness of the past, the lack of mutual confidence at present, the security concerns of all these states, at the same time the existence of

thousand and one linkages make the South Asian borders unique, both spatially and metaphorically, and it also makes this space or borderlands more complex. (XV)

This excerpt draws attention to how physical borders impinge on the lives of border people. The Partition of India in 1947 not only bifurcated an undivided land into two halves, but also created a huge number of refugees who strove to survive as they crossed the border. Drawing the border between two nations cannot always spilt up cultural spaces into two halves; rather, it problematizes the negotiations between border people living on either side of the border. Innumerable displaced people who are categorized as “refugees” keep making desperate attempts to get rooted in a specific territory. In *Borderlands: La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldua provides another powerful description of the border, which resonates with what Banerjee and Chaudhury say, but also reflects the refugee crises depicted in Hamid’s and Bala’s novels. In her book, Anzaldua, a Chicana woman who has herself existed as a border person, specifically describes the US-Mexican border, where:

. . . the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over or go through the confines of the “normal.” (25)

The border is a dividing line and an official marker of territorial difference, the separation of the safe from the unsafe, and “us” from “them”. The borderland is understood as a slightly wider terrain inhabited by border people, who are, as Anzaldua tells us, the outcast and the persecuted, but more importantly, they are the abject, seen as those that threaten the very security promised by borders.

I argue, however, that the existence of borders, designed to separate, can also play a significant role in the practice of love, particularly ethical love. Borders, I contend, are the very condition of love itself, in the way that borders, being the convergence of two different territories, and therefore of “us” and “them”, brings “us” into an encounter with “them”. As Alain Badiou notes in *In Praise of Love*, love “contains an initial element that separates, dislocates and differentiates,” (28) a separation guaranteed, in this case, by the existence of borders.

Badiou goes on to explain that dichotomies such as self and other/ us and them are “Two [that are] particularly marked out”, but upon an encounter with one another in love, what results is “a construction, a life that is being made, no longer from the perspective of One but from the perspective of Two” (29). Badiou, therefore, points out that in love, the two – us and them, self and other – must remain Two, in order for an ethical love to exist. In other words, in ideal love, there can never be a total fusion, of two becoming one, in the way, for instance, that Aristophanes describes in *Symposium*.

Drawing on Plato’s theory of ideal love, wherein love is the desire for something which we lack, which is embodied in the other, one may argue that love, understood this way, in fact exposes one to the impossibility of knowing the other. Love is therefore defined and conditioned by the absence of either an individual or an attachment to an unknowable other. As explained by Diotima in *Symposium*, love, being the desire for what we lack, is therefore motivated by lack/desire. Lack thus works as an impetus, pushing one to engage the other. The irony, however, lies in the fact that apart from bringing two singular beings together, love cannot in fact *unite* two singular beings. Although love possesses the cohesive power to bring together self and other, it at once keeps two singular beings asunder because of the underlying lack. Certain questions can be raised at this point to delve deeper into the meaning of love, or what moves us to love: does the final realization of love therefore imply that one is finally in possession of that something or someone which or whom one has been craving? Does one’s indulgence in love also imply that one derives pleasure out of the pursuit of that someone or something, which exists as a deferred reality? In *The Reasons of Love*, Harry G. Frankfurt contends:

Love is often understood as being, most basically, a response to the perceived worth of the beloved. We are moved to love something, on this account, by an appreciation of what we take to be its exceptional inherent value. [...] We begin loving the things that we love because we are struck by their value, and we continue to love them for the sake of their value. (38)

Frankfurt claims that loving someone depends on the value that the object of love carries. It suggests that loving someone is meant to lead to some valuable gains: “If we did not find the beloved valuable, we would not love it” (38). This observation can be contested by arguing that prioritizing value over anything else in a loving relationship actually discounts the possibility of viewing love as an openness to possibilities. It means that a love relationship cannot always be weighed in terms of its productivity; rather, the worth of a love relationship lies in its openness to a wide range of possibilities. For instance, in the context of refugee politics, love is moulded by the ruling authorities as a way to deal with refugees. It connotes a sort of love relationship which is not

characterized in terms of sexual productivity but in terms of its plasticity, and this plasticity of love can be understood if one ceases to prioritize value over other dimensions.

Love is often marked out as an expression of emotion and is supposed to have a single dimension. But the realization and actualization of love are contingent upon socio-cultural specificities. Stevi Jackson, for instance notes: “love has no pre-existing essence that we can ‘know’ [...] we only have access to the ways it is socially and culturally manifested [...] how these meanings guide everyday practices and interactions and how they are applied to specific activities or relationships” (35). With this in mind, it can be argued that practicing love in a given context cannot simply be understood as a commonplace activity; rather it involves the political motives of the lover. It needs to be made very clear that love as praxis is relational and stands contrary to love in abstraction because the manifestation of love confirms the relationality of love as praxis. In *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change*, Adam Kahane views love and power as complementary to each other in the sense that power contributes towards making love generative and vice-versa. Kahane observes:

Power has two sides, one generative and the other degenerative. Our power is generative and amplifying when we realize ourselves while loving and uniting with others. (26-27)

And later:

Love has two sides, one generative and the other degenerative. Our love is generative when it empowers us and others: when it helps us, individually and collectively, to complete ourselves and grow. (50)

Kahane explains how the generative power of love can be regulated by the exercise of power. Because of love’s generative and transformative nature, it must be thought of as located and situated. As such, I suggest that the manifestation of love is not constant across space and time, which is what makes it plastic. In the context of refugee politics, loving the other is certainly a political act which reflects the political sensibilities of the person who loves. In other words, in any loving relation, both parties negotiate contextual specificities. For instance, in the context of refugee upsurge, governmental authorities often resort to the practice of love to appease tensions between natives and refugees in a given space and time.

The concept of “plastic love” is also apparent in the way that all the manifestations of love as praxis can be viewed as instances of a dynamic relationality that is sometimes politically exploited to deal with ethno-national, religious and cultural heterogeneities. As many scholars have argued, there is an inherent connection between love and politics. Geoff Pfeifer attests to the political intricacies within love in “Politics, Solidarity and

the (Dis)Location of Love”, saying that “a certain type of love could (and maybe should) form the foundation of an emancipatory or revolutionary politics and political movements”; he further contends that “a political notion of love can be the outcome of, or emerge in such a politics and it is this emergence that can come to condition further action” (177). Taking the cue from Pfeifer’s observation, it can be argued that politics is inherently entwined with love. To put it in other words, the plasticity of love is manifested when the political dimension of love is taken into account. Colleen Murphy also advances a similar idea in “Love and Political Reconciliation”: “we can link love with political reconciliation by interpreting conditions for the possibility of reconciliation as conditions for the possibility of love” (177). His argument can further be worked out in this way: that conditions for the possibility of reconciliation between two rivals pave the way for the praxis of love. As far as the plasticity of love is concerned, the politicization of love has to be taken into consideration to explore the possibilities of love.

Keeping this argument in mind, it can be contended that the plasticity of love can be politically used to ease tensions between two ethnic groups. To put it precisely in the context of refugee politics, plasticity of love can turn out to be a useful strategy to get into the political tension between refugees and citizens of a nation, for plasticity of love plays a pivotal role in settling the political normativity of a given situation.

At this point, one may be reminded of Nussbaum who has cogently argued in *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, that:

all political principles, the good as well as the bad, need emotional support to ensure their stability over time, and all decent societies need to guard against division and hierarchy by cultivating appropriate sentiments of sympathy and love.

[...]

The other related task for the cultivation of public emotion is to keep at bay forces that lurk in all societies and, ultimately, in all of us: tendencies to protect the fragile self by denigrating and subordinating others. (2-3)

Here, Nussbaum means to say that in the sphere of politics, cultivation of emotion in the public cannot be underestimated, for it is needed to give weight to the importance of political principles. Nussbaum is of the view that public emotions are instrumental in guiding one to mete out justice, and that love is at once an important public emotion as well as a constitutive element in different public emotions. More importantly, Nussbaum draws attention to how these emotions and sentiments can be cultivated. Thus, taking the cue from Nussbaum, one may argue that in the context of refugee politics, love plays a pivotal role as far as the nation’s engagement with refugee

politics is concerned because the government of a nation employs politics while meting out justice to them. At this critical juncture, one may feasibly argue that the plasticity of love can be exploited for the negotiation of refugee movements, to deal with complex socio-cultural issues like refugee politics. The plasticity of love connotes the shaping and reshaping potential of love which is often put to use by the authority of a nation-state to serve its political interests. Here, one may ask: can the plasticity of love put an end to the refugee problem? Does a state authority use plasticity of love judiciously? Is plasticity of love an effective political strategy which can be resorted to in different contexts? In the following section, textual evidence from the two selected works will be used to prove that ruling governments often fall back on love's plasticity to negotiate refugee uprisings. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of the exploitation of plasticity of love cannot be denied. This contention may appear quite perturbing when one delves deeper into the next question mentioned above. Plasticity of love could be seen as a "one-off" strategy for different contexts but the ruling authority often uses it judiciously so that it does not trigger hatred among people of one ethnic group for another. Here, one may argue that the plasticity of love is exercised in such a way that the refugees cannot figure out that 'love' is politically exploited by the ruling authority so as to diplomatically deal with refugee politics. The plasticity of love in the context of refugee politics turns out to be an important alternative to the conventional rough and tough attitude towards refugees. In addition, practice of the plasticity of love means that transnational judicial bodies do not have the room to question the tolerance of the ruling authority towards refugees. In the next section, I intend to foreground the relevance of the plasticity of love as a conceptual framework in construing the nuances in refugee politics, with particular reference to two South Asian fictional works.

III

Mohsin Hamid is a British Pakistani novelist whose oeuvre includes several award winning novels, such as *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Moth Smoke*, and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. In *Exit West*, Hamid explores the nuances of refugee politics in the context of ethnic unrest that has erupted in an unnamed city. He employs two protagonists who represent the pragmatic problems faced by refugees in order to demonstrate how governments temper refugee uprisings by means of negotiating the plasticity of love. On the eve of the ethnic riot in their home city, the two protagonists, Nadia and Saeed, suddenly discover that there are magical doors in the city that serve as portals to other locations. These magical doors are openings through which the protagonists can meet up with people living in the outer world. These magical doors at once differentiate the inner world from its outer counterpart and at times work as connecting links between them. It is during their travels through these doors that Saeed and Nadia, being transitory migrants themselves, come to experience and witness the excruciating pangs of survival experienced by refugees. It is however in love's plasticity, subtly exploited by

ruling authorities, that one finds some kind of hope and the possibility of the construction of a new world. This suggests that love is politically exploited to restructure and refashion the customary understanding of the encounters between refugees and the people in authority. The two protagonists travel from one location to another and witness how refugees struggle to settle down on the fringes of the sovereign terrains, until ‘natives’ protest against their settlements. Having traversed a number of refugee camps, the protagonists choose to return to their home city as they have heard that the ethnic riot that was imminent when they left the city has been quelled by the government. Having landed in the city, they find that “the lives of cities [are] [...] far more persistent and more gently cyclical than those of people” (227). This points to the present political scenario where the political tensions have calmed down to an extent. They also agree to revive their amorous relationship because the ruling government has been able to restore the political *status quo* in the city. When ethnic riots were imminent in the city, the government did not aggressively react to the intrusion of refugees in the city but instead shrewdly and prudently employed certain political measures including the subtle implementation of love’s plasticity to restrict refugees to the margins. For instance, the ruling government shrewdly allows refugees to occupy the margins of the city instead of taking violent measures to oust them from the city. What is striking here is that the government does not directly confront them face-to-face, anticipating that the refugee upsurge might turn worse. As Hamid’s work is a work of fiction, not everything is explicitly stated and thus one has to exploit his/her intuitive faculty to understand that the use of the plasticity of love is expressed through the government’s dealing with refugees. One of the political measures the ruling government employs is the curfew on the streets so as to preclude refugees from entering into the heart of the city.

Sharon Bala, a Sri Lankan-Canadian fiction writer, has engaged in an in-depth examination of the sufferings and miseries of Tamil refugees in *The Boat People*. This novel details how, under tremendous psychological and political duress, Tamil refugees leave Sri Lanka for Canada, in the hopes that the multicultural policies adopted by the Canadian state might allow them to seek asylum in Canada. Upon reaching Canadian shores, the refugees are intercepted by Canadian authorities and put into detention camps, as they are not carrying the legal documents required to enter Canada. The Tamil refugees, however, think that incarceration in different detention camps is a better alternative to living in the middle of the clashes between two rival groups in Sri Lanka. In the detention camps, the Tamil refugees experience different types of torture and torment perpetrated upon them by officials of the Canadian Immigration and Deportation departments. With the passage of time, with the help of Priya, a Sri Lankan-American legal adviser, Mahindan and his fellow detainees engage in a series of legal battles against the Canadian authorities, which ultimately leads to the intervention of a transnational judicial body to mete out justice for the Tamil refugees. The Canadian authorities desperately try to prove that the Tamil refugees

were intercepted on Canadian shores on suspicion of carrying smuggled items, of having connections with terrorist outfits, of not possessing valid legal documents and of harbouring criminal intentions, among others. Resorting to testimonials and documents, Priya proves that the Tamil refugees do not bear affinity with any terrorist outfit. Rather, they have been coerced into seeking asylum in Canada. Heated altercations between Priya and her counterpart who works on behalf of the Canadian government continue, until the judge finally pronounces that the Tamil refugees have to be deported back to Sri Lanka. This verdict is at once a triumph for Mahindan and his co-detainees, for the judge orders the Canadian authorities to release them from detention, and at the same time a defeat for them, because they are repatriated back to Sri Lanka from whence they began their journey. This brief summary of the novel suggests that Canadian governmental authorities shrewdly resort to a number of political measures in the implementation of plasticity of love to deal with the refugee problem ; on the one hand they provide detention camps in which the refugees can settle down for the time being, but on the other hand they initiate legal proceedings to repatriate them, thus perpetuating torture and torment upon them. One may refer to another textual reference to underline the political use of love. Although Mahindan is locked up in a separate detention camp, his son is properly taken care of: “Good news is, you both have the same lawyers. We are going to meet her next. Listen. This is not Sri Lanka. I promise you, the boy is safe. Already, he will have been given food and a wash. About your son [. . .] there is nothing to worry” (26). What is important to note here is that instead of being overtly cruel to Tamil refugees, the Canadian authorities actively take part in the actualization of the plasticity of love to be in a politically and legally advantageous position. The Canadian authority does not want to give the refugees any chance of finding flaws in its governance, but wants to appear politically and legally upright instead. The politicization of love, which leads the Tamil refugees to engage in a legal battle is, to an extent, intended by the Canadian authorities as a way to exert power over the Tamil refugees.

Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* demonstrates different dimensions of love to demonstrate how love can build new worlds, based on the recognition of difference, and can therefore be a subversive strategy in the ruling authorities’ manipulation and exploitation of love. These other forms of love include the amorous affair between Saeed and Nadia and the parental love relation between Saeed and his father, among others. Hamid’s examination of the refugee situation reminds us of Badiou’s description of how love initially involves “separation and disjuncture based on the simple difference between two people and their infinite subjectivities” (Badiou 27). For instance, Hamid describes how “refugees had occupied many of the open places in the city, pitching tents in the green belts between roads, erecting lean-tos next to the boundary walls of the houses, sleeping rough on pavements and in the margins of streets” (Hamid 23). However, understanding the ‘other’ by means of love can help both refugees and permanent residents of a sovereign locality arrive at mutual decisions on various issues. For instance,

love plays a decisive role both in bringing refugees and permanent residents at loggerheads, and in sustaining a healthy camaraderie between them. Love, as we see, brings two groups together, thereby giving each side a good opportunity to understand each other, and can make a meaningful contribution to the tension between the two rivals. In Hamid's narrative, one can see how 'natives' work hand-in-hand with migrants at different construction sites: "But natives did labour alongside migrants on the work sites, usually as supervisors or as operators of heavy machinery" (176). This excerpt does not refer directly to governmental intervention, but does connote that the coming together of both 'natives' and migrants reflects the attitude of the government to refugees. It suggests that instead of putting restrictions on the interactions between 'natives' and refugees, the ruling government lets natives extend a helping hand to refugees, which is an expression of love at its nascent stage. As the novel is written in the third person, no direct governmental response can be traced in it. But the actions which the government takes up to curb the refugee upsurge, are expressed through third-person narration. For instance, although the ruling government has beefed up internal security, there is no evidence in the text to show direct clashes between refugees and government. It points to how the government subtly evades direct confrontation with the refugees.

What seems more interesting is that plasticity of love is implemented by the ruling authority to tackle the "refugee problem" Here, one may put forward that only the plasticity of love can keep the hopes of both sides alive. It can also be argued that the plasticity of love alone cannot help both sides deal with political, economic and cultural issues. It means that there are numerous other factors including the questions of transnational justice and 'contingent positionality'², among others, which cannot be comprehended only by means of love. For instance, in Hamid's *Exit West*, Nadia and Saeed's experiences are a reflection of how refugees suffer from economic and cultural limitations while migrating from one location to another for survival: "To have a room to themselves [...] seemed incredible good fortune, and Nadia was tempted to unpack, but she knew they needed to be ready to leave at any moment, and so she took out of their backpack only items that were absolutely required" (Hamid 120). This implies that a sense of precariousness looms large over their existence, which forces them to confront the threat of forced displacement. Nadia and Saeed are apprehensive of a backlash from natives and are not acquainted with the socio-cultural configurations of the place where they dwell. They are unable to transcend the lacuna between the culture of the hostland and that of the homeland. Both the protagonists are victims of transnational justice in the sense that no transnational judicial body intervenes into the wretched condition of the protagonists. On the other hand, one could argue that the plasticity of love equips both sides to listen to each other and to give room to work on the gaps between them. It can also be argued that it is because of the plasticity of love, that both the protagonists stay together even at the end of the narrative. Both of them are forced to witness

hard situations and have to rely on love's plasticity to get rid of pragmatic problems. Apart from this, when the protagonists return to their home city after a long time, they can sense how the ruling authority has tempered the tension between the refugees and the permanent residents of their home city by spreading love among all.

Sharon Bala's *The Boat People* gives an account of Tamil refugees seeking asylum in Canada, hoping that the Canadian government will accommodate them on humanitarian grounds. One may argue that it is not their responsibility, and that the Sri Lankan governmental authorities are liable to ensure the security and safety of Tamil citizens living in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government needed to intervene into all sorts of domestic turmoil, including the Civil War, to make sure that no legitimate citizen was deprived of security and safety. But, instead of taking full care of all their citizens, the Sri Lankan authorities left it up to the citizens to look for security on their own in a time of socio-political and economic turmoil. Tamils, who are a persecuted minority community in Sri Lanka, were forced to flee Sri Lanka, often as refugees. This shows that Sri Lankan governmental authorities are reluctant to express love in the form of care and security for every citizen, thereby forcing Tamil refugees to head elsewhere. It could be argued that it was impossible for the Sri Lankan government to ensure security for every citizen of the nation, and that because the Tamil refugees were unable to come to terms with the Sinhalese natives, they had to depart. At this point, one may contend that the Sri Lankan authorities could have exercised plasticity of love to lower the intensity of domestic disturbances like the Civil War, for example by making attempts to stand by the victims of the Civil War.

As soon as Mahindan and the others reach the shores of Canada, they are immediately apprehended and put in detention camps for a variety of reasons. First, the Canadian Immigration and Deportation authorities assume they are illicit infiltrators who might have links with terrorist outfits: "Send the illegals back! Go home terrorists!" (Bala 16). The Tamil refugees hope that their miserable existence in the world will be ameliorated in the detention camps, where they might get food and shelter: "Mahindan had always thought of Canada as a country of whites, but now he saw dark eyes too, Chinese and Japanese and blacks and others who might have come from India or Bangladesh. Here was a place for all people" (Bala 12). While the Canadian Immigration and Deportation authorities are reluctant to pay heed to the yelling of the Tamil refugees, and do not want to ensure their basic human rights, the refugees still hope that their cries for help will be heard and they will be accommodated in the asylums:

As far as the law is concerned, you have no status. To stay here, you must first become a refugee, and this is a little complicated [...]. The first step was to prove their identity. The government would inspect their documents. There were many forms to fill. There would be a review to decide

if they could leave jail, then a hearing to determine if they could ask for refugee status. And then another hearing to see if they would be *given* refugee status. It was a process, and the process would take time. No one could say how long. (Bala 25-26)

This excerpt suggests that the Canadian authorities have certain grounds to justify their indifference to the sufferings of the Tamil refugees who, in turn, rely on humanitarian grounds to convince the Canadian authorities. Here, one may argue that the Canadian authorities could have paid attention to the poignant cries of the Tamil detainees on the ground that they have come to Canada in search of asylum, for Canada has established multicultural policies to accept people from around the world. Mahindan says: “This was Canada—clean with straight lines. A promising country to make a new start” (Bala 24). This suggests that Mahindan sees nothing wrong in turning up on the shores of Canada and seeking asylum. The Canadian authorities, however, respond to such actions in this way: “Canada is a sovereign nation, Minister Blair had said. We will protect our borders from thugs and foreign criminals and those who seek to abuse our generosity” (Bala 46).

Underlining fictional space as a rich site for epistemological contestations, one may possibly argue that love’s plasticity could be held as a reliable political tool to settle the standoff between the Canadian authorities and the Tamil refugees. In other words, instead of showing a rough and cruel attitude to the Tamil detainees in the camps, the Canadian authorities exploit the plasticity of love so that Tamil detainees will not be able to bring a charge of intolerance against them:

Two guards hauled back the doors to reveal a sprawling prison complex dominated by an eight-story building with blue-tinted windows. Mahindan was relieved when they drove around back and stopped at a smaller, friendlier-looking construction.[...] Sri Lankan horrors washing away in Canadian waters, disappearing down Canadian drains. (Bala 20-22)

This does not imply that the Canadian authorities are supposed to water down their immigration and deportation policies, instead solely relying on compassionate treatment of the Tamil detainees on humanitarian grounds simply because they were not carrying arms and ammunition. Instead, Canada makes the political choice to drag Tamil refugees into legal snares which leave the Canadian government in an advantageous situation. This strategy precludes Tamil refugees from making complaints against the Canadian authorities. Instead of taking violent steps instantly, Canadian authorities instead apprehend Tamil refugees and put them in detention camps. But there are lapses and gaps that reflect badly on the Canadian authorities, and lead the lawyers of the Tamil detainees to consolidate their legal contentions: “These people have literally fled a prison camp to come here. The men [...]

are in a separate jail, but locking the women and children up with actual criminals! It's inhumane" (Bala 48). The point is that the Canadian authority sometimes takes recourse to the politicization of love and at times commits unforced errors which induce Tamil refugees to underline gaps in state governance. In order to point out the unforced errors of the Canadian authorities, one may cite from Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

...

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

...

Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. (UDHR qtd. in Jain 172)

Based on the Declaration of Human Rights from UDHR, one may argue that the Canadian authorities have grossly violated the human rights of Tamil refugees by herding them into detention camps³ where some of them are forced to stay with hardcore criminals. What seems to be more interesting is that the transnational judicial body fails to comprehend the arguments of Priya, the lawyer of the Tamil detainees, and instead upholds the contention that the detainees are potentially dangerous to the internal security and safety of Canada. In addition to this, the judge declares that Tamil refugees must be deported back to Sri Lanka. This pronouncement, in a way, questions the applicability of the multicultural policies adopted by Canada. Here, one may raise a question as to why the judge fails to explain why he chooses to be silent on the human rights violation of Tamil detainees by Canadian authorities. Does it imply that the judge simply rules out the pleas of Tamil detainees, in order to work in compliance with the dictates of the powerful state? Does this critical situation attest to the need for plasticity of love to compensate for the violation of human rights? Here, one may readily object to the last rhetorical question by arguing that the judge should not yield to the political might of Canada and has to stand unbiased to two opposing groups. But this contention could be refuted on the ground that the consideration of the politicization of love in the context of a refugee uprising does not suggest that the judge is likely to compromise his equity while meting out justice to the victims of the torture and torment inflicted by Canadian authorities. Rather, it leads the judge to reckon with his rational faculties instead of being a puppet in the hands of Canadian authorities. In other words, the plasticity of love, in a given context, has more to do with one's rational and intellectual faculties than emotional ones.

The Canadian authorities draw the attention of the Immigration and Refugee Board to the detention of Tamil refugees, and leave it to the Board to take the final decision. The final verdict of the Board is in keeping with the Canadian government's inclination to deport them back to Sri Lanka: "Deportation orders are permanent. [...] Once a person is deported, they are barred from ever returning" (Bala 278). What is important here is that the Board approves the deportation of Tamil refugees and subsequently rules out the demands of Tamil refugees. More importantly, the Board does not take punitive action against the Canadian government for detaining them in different camps, which proves that Canadian authority's politicization of love to deal with the refugee upsurge is eventually tenable.

Notes

1. In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah expounds on border theory while elucidating different facets of the border. Brah also argues that the politics of location has to be comprehended as "locationality in contradiction" (201) and as a "position of multi-axial locationality" (201) inasmuch as the existence of borders complicates one's simultaneous situatedness in various gendered locations.
2. Brah proposes the idea of "contingent positionality" to refer to the "simultaneity of positionality" (148). Brah means that the formation of identity is consequent upon the intersection of a number of cultural, political and social factors.
3. In *Human Rights and Social Justice in a Global Perspective*, Susan C. Mapp provides an insightful observation: "Three main barriers exist that prevent full access to human rights and the fruits of social development. These barriers are poverty, discrimination, and lack of education" (23). This is true in the case of Sri Lankan refugees who have had to suffer a great deal, first because they had financial constraints, second because they were not well educated, and finally because they belonged to a "Third World" nation and, were discriminated against.

Works Cited

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: La Frontera*. 4th ed., Aunt Lute Books, 2012.

Badiou, Alain. *In Praise of Love*. Trans. Peter Bush. The New Press, 2009.

Bala, Sharon. *The Boat People*. Doubleday, 2018.

Banerjee, Paula, and Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury. "Introduction: Resistance in the Borderlands." *Women in Indian Borderlands*, edited by Banerjee and Chaudhury, Sage Publications, 2011, pp. xv-xxv.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge, 1996.

- Bush, Peter, translator. *In Praise of Love*. Written by Alain Badiou and Nicolas Truong, Serpent's Tail, 2012.
- Frankfurt, Harry G. *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton UP, 2004.
- Giddens, Anthony. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Polity Press, 2013.
- Hamid, Mohsin. *Exit West*. Penguin, 2017.
- Hyndman, Jennifer. *Managing Displacement Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism*. Minnesota UP, 2000.
- Jackson, Stevi. "Love, Social Change, and Everyday Heterosexuality". *Love A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Anna G. Jonasdottir and Ann Ferguson. Routledge, London and New York, 2014.
- Jain, Rashee. *Textbook on Human Rights: Law and Practice*. 3rd ed., Universal law Publishing, 2016.
- Kahane, Adam. *Power and Love: A Theory and practice of Social Change*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010.
- Pfeifer, Geoff. "Politics, Solidarity and the (Dis)Location of Love." *Can Philosophy Love? Reflections and Encounters*, edited by Cindy Zeiher and Todd McGowan, Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2017, pp. 175-189.
- Mapp, Susan C. *Human Rights and Social Justice in a Global Perspective: An Introduction to International Social Work*. Oxford UP, 2008.
- Murphy, Colleen. "Love and Political Reconciliation." *The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy*, edited by Adrienne M. Martin, Routledge, 2019, pp. 169-179.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2013.