KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETY AND THE CONDITION OF THE EXILE AS REIFIED AND HYBRID SUBJECT

Cristina Emanuela DASCĂLU[1]

1. Assoc. Prof., PhD, Dept. of Communication, Public Relations and Journalism, "Apollonia" University of Iaşi
Corresponding author: cristinaemanueladascalu@hotmail.com

Abstract

My research places three contemporary novelists, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee and V. S. Naipaul within the framework of post-colonial literary theory. By comparing the works of these authors to some of the most important theorists of the post-colonial situation, my paper stakes out an important place for the value of literary interventions in the political arena. Rather than use what these authors say as a starting point—as many studies have before—I chart in my work the symbolic and discursive trajectory that concepts of the post-colonial take throughout their works. The three writers, even more than recent theorists, capture the uncertain dialectic that works between a person's identity and the discourse and ideology that made him or her, between who someone is, and where that person came from. My paper traces the movement of this dialectic between people and places and draws from that movement conclusions about the political and ethical stance of the novels' authors. It explores important theoretical and practical implications of exile across national, generic, and ethnic boundaries. Bharati Mukherjee, V. S. Naipaul, and Salman Rushdie contribute to a notion of the colonial subject as the site for the exploration of difference and alterity; the exile opens up the notion of a reified subject and a reified culture. The condition of exile as reified and hybrid subject opens up closely held notions of never exhausted continuity of play. Together, these novels provide both a view of the post-colonial world and a politics by which individuals can live within it while, at the same time, being able to perform some sort of act of resistance. Such an act would be characterized by both playing out the roles of colonial discourse and subverting them—by creating distance between the role-players and the roles they take on. It would contain an attempt to make sense of their own subjectivity through the landscapes they come into contact with (their past, the country of exile, their new "home," the history of their people, and their own his-story) and a realization that, though the subjectivity lies between all these poles, no combination of them will fully complete a singular and stable self. It would, in a simultaneous move, consist of the alteration of the landscape by the subject in a dialogue of diverted presence, a contretemps, in which neither subject nor landscape could achieve resolution but would always be open to the changing motion of play. Most of all, it would contain the denial of any role, land, discourse, or ideology that would seek to limit free play, that would demand that the exile say, "This (definitively) is who I am, this (definitively) is where I come from, this (definitively) is where I am going." Within the colonial context, play is both a force for the confrontation with power and that which will assure that identity can never be found. These novels have a double purpose: to document the impossibility of completeness, the inevitability that the exile must continue his or her wandering, and to make explicit the opportunity that this provides. These novels document both the pain of loss, and loss's place in the struggle for liberation.

Keywords: *Alterity, Boundary, Colonial, Colonialism, Dialectic, Difference, Discourse, Ethics, Exile, History, Homeland, Hybrid, Hybridity, Identity, Ideology, Journey, Land, Landscape, Loss, Migrant, Mimicry, Narrator, Nation, Nationalismm Ambivalence, Oppression, Orientalism, Politics, Postcolonial, Postcolonialism, Reification, Reified (Subject), Role/Roles, Subject, Subjectivity, Violence*

Bharati Mukherjee, V. S. Naipaul, and Salman Rushdie contribute to a notion of the colonial subject as the site for the exploration of difference and alterity; the exile opens up the notion of a reified subject and a reified culture. The condition of exile as reified and hybrid subject opens up closely held notions of never exhausted continuity of play. Within the colonial context, play is both a force for the confrontation with power and that which will assure that identity can never be found. The novels of Bharati Mukherjee, V. S. Naipaul, and Salman Rushdie have a double purpose: to document the impossibility of completeness, the inevitability that the exile must continue his or her wandering, and to make explicit the opportunity that this provides. These novels document both the pain of loss, and loss's place in the struggle for liberation.

What is central to all three writers is the important role they give to the structural place of the exile in affecting, intervening, and changing the discourse on identity and coloniality. Despite the differences in their pasts and the variations of their current contexts,

Rushdie, Mukherjee, and Naipaul are all able to write about the notion of displacement with the power and the resonance that their backgrounds (as exiles) can produce. They all enact structures of freedom and play that—despite historical divergences—constitute a single, general narrative. Indeed, their fiction seems to play out this narrative in the weave of their novels' textuality, forming out of their texts the uncertainties and lacunae that develop because of their characters' geographical (and the resultant psychological) displacement. Their fiction imparts the questions of the subjects who are caught up in the post-colonial situation: Who is the exile? What is his or her importance? What movement does exile cause them to play out?

Who, then, is the exile? The exile lives in a foreign country, a culture that is not his or her own, one that is alien, "other." The exile's existence, therefore, is underpinned constantly by a sense of his or her geographical displacement. To fit in with the dominant culture, the exiles most often appropriate expectations that are alien; the exiles assimilate the roles and expectations of "the Other(s)" among whom they find themselves. In the process, the exiled displace who they are. This is iterated repeatedly in the novels of Rushdie, Mukherjee, and Naipaul. Each of these writers, in his or her own way, undermines their central character's right to be just that: a character, a stable entity, a full subject. More often than not, the characters in these three authors' novels are very much aware that they are creative products, not of the author's fiction, but of the fiction of the colonial self, the discourse on the "foreign" and the "alien."

This is the central tenet of these writers' fictions. They are not simply producing an artistic product in which the characters can be considered fictional representations and the plots merely narratives that are rolled out for the entertainment and aesthetic pleasure of the readership. These writers represent the real world: their novels interact with history—particularly with the history of post-coloniality—in an attempt to reach out to the truth of the world. This is why Rushdie deals with characters against the backdrop of twentieth century Indian history (*Midnight's Children*), why Mukherjee delves into the origins of the English economic colonization of India (*The Holder of the World*), and why Naipaul writes of the decolonization process in a fictive version of his own Trinidad (*The Mimic Men*). The characters in these novels are not merely the creations of fictions, but representations (in no matter what fractured form) of real people who are made real by their interaction with history. Their actions are not merely component parts of fictional narratives; their respective progressions are not merely a means to the end of the completion of the novels' stories. The life stories that these novelists present are also metaphorical representations, allegorical passages of subjectivity in general, and depictions of the effects of exile on the man or woman who is cut adrift from any sense of a stable self.

The main intervention in a post-colonial thought in Rushdie, Mukherjee, and Naipaul's novels comes about through the individual and individual journeys, or the individual's close proximity to historical events. In a way that Said's transcendental viewpoint could not manage, these novelists deal with the actual way that subjectivity negotiates the contradictions of a discourse that is created by "the Other" (i.e. the West). This in turn brings into question the possibility of the characters being able to form a full subjectivity. For example, the central character in Naipaul's *The Mimic Man* sees himself taking on many roles: the exotic colonial in London, the wealthy and married man who returns to the island of his birth, and, later, the revolutionary who fights for a world free of colonial oppression. Nonetheless, he finds that each of these roles is still a construction of and by the West; even the role that has him fighting Western colonialists is a construction of Western discourse. Therefore, he comes to realize that the world of the colonized has no "internal source of power, and that no power was real that did not come from outside" (246).

By playing these varied roles and by inhabiting the parts he plays *inauthentically*, he comes to realize that that is all they are: simple roles that have been written, constructed for him in the epic colonial drama. So, by analyzing

Said's notion of *Orientalism* (or, at least, the creation of colonial discourse, because he does not come directly from the Orient) on the level of human interaction and the individual subjectivity, Naipaul's work dissolves the very notion of subjectivity itself. By holding onto the notion that there was a *real* person beneath all the roles, the central character of *The Mimic Men* might have been once more pulled back into the play of discourse that would mean he still was the oppressed, the *colonized*. Naipaul, through the narrator, reveals the post-colonial man as a "mimic man": "We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing for life, we mimic men of the new world" (*The Mimic Men* 175). However, it is precisely this pretence, the "unreality," that enables Naipaul to achieve a critical position and to lay bare the fictionality of the West's colonizing discourse.

Mimicry plays a large part in all the six novels, and for good reason. As we have seen, the novelistic approach (as opposed to theorists who take a transcendental view) concentrates on the way that individuals try to negotiate their subjectivity within the discourse created by the West. Mimicry becomes a central part of that negotiation. For if colonial power is to use all the coercive force of textuality, language, ideas, and appearances, then it is exactly within these realms that the individual must attempt to form his or her subjectivity and, if possible, stake out a claim to the means of resistance. This is also the central theme of one of the most important theoretical contributions to the post-colonial debate, Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture.*

Far more than Said's *Orientalism,* Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* works profoundly on the level of strategy and negotiation. Bhabha is concerned with the notion of subjectivity in the colonial situation and in that way owes a lot to the writings of Frantz Fanon. What concerns Bhabha is precisely the operations that we have seen occur within all the six novels: the work of subjectivity in a position that creates and multiplies the difficulties associated with radical difference:

It is in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationality, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated.[1]

That is, it is within the overlapping and cross-cutting threads of cultural discourse that the creation of all the solid edifices that we have seen the six novels call into question (self, the nation, community, culture) are created *as* realities and can be changed and deformed. In other words, as Bhabha also seems to imply with his suggestion, the book is the "measure of mimesis and mode of civil authority and order."[2] It is the linguistic and textual threads—imaged here by Bhabha as "the book," the good book, or the book of law—that implicitly enforce the *status quo* and that contain the possible dangers that difference or "Otherness" might present to order or to colonial power. Why then, speaking with particular reference to the colonial situation, might we hold that the exile threatens order and the *status quo*? As Said points out, albeit viewing the situation from his limited perspective, the reason why there is a creation of a static field of discourse which describes and circumvents the difference of "the Other" (the reason why the notion of "Orientalism" becomes a reified reality that gains the status of "truth") is because of a need by the West to consider itself whole, and to vanquish from itself the difficulties inherent in admitting difference. Bhabha takes up this theme, but casts this particular aspect of Western culture in terms of psychoanalytical categories—the West is suffering from precisely the problem of the child who must dislocate itself from the world (during "the mirror stage"—in Lacanian terms) in order to feel itself whole. In other words, the reason for the creation of colonial discourses that emphasize the absolute alterity of "the Oriental," the Indian or the *foreigner,* is to better enable the West to create an Imago of the self. In the Lacanian sense, again, the production of colonial discourse is an attempt to form an "*Imaginary self.*" However, where Bhabha diverges from Said's analysis (and where he is more in keeping with the three novelists we have been discussing) is that he does not believe that there is an essential self that lies beneath discourse who is a victim of oppression perpetrated by discursive practices. For

example, in his treatment of the stereotype, Bhabha makes very explicit that

The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is simplification because it is an arrested, fixated representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negations through the "Other" permits), constitute a problem for the *representation* of the subject in signification.[3]

The stereotype is not simply an act of violence because it twists and distorts the truth "on the ground"; Bhabha's argument is not one of the ideological misrepresentation of the truth. The reason a stereotype is an act of violence against the people whom the stereotype comes to represent is because it limits the possibility of their difference; it is a closed form that will not offer itself up to the deformative effects of play. A stereotype is forever, always will be, precisely the same image as it always was. Not only that, it limits the movement of individuals through the world, it reifies *them,* sets them into the shape of the mould that stereotype provides.

The narrator of Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* correctly understands this point. He has come from his native Trinidad to become a writer. As such, he takes on all the mannerisms and does all the things that he believes writers should do; he, thus, fulfils the stereotype of the writer. However, he comes to see the poses that he strikes as false, something of an inauthentic nature: "I had to pretend to be other than I was, other than what a man of my background could be" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 134). It might seem as though the narrator understands that as a man of Indian ethnicity, he cannot be the white writer and, consequently, should return to the kind of life where a man of his race and color belongs. This is not the case at all. The operative word in this quotation is "could"— rather, by becoming what he thinks a writer should be, the narrator is dissolving the possibilities that he, as a writer, can perform. His background, far from being a limit to the freedom of his action, increases that freedom. By being "the writer," he is denying his background (for example, he does not write about racial difficulties when he composes the story about his journey to England from Trinidad). The fact that he is foreign does not limit his ability to be a writer. Rather, the fact that he is neither of England, nor of Trinidad, the fact that he is an exile, allows him to extend the possibilities of his backgrounds and the cultures he has passed through. It is important to note that when the narrator plays the role of "the writer," he is not on the wrong path because the character is not *who he is*. Rather, it limits what he *could be.*

This is the power that the migrant, the one in-between, the hybrid person has: the enormous opportunity for resistance. For when the migrant interacts with stereotypical postures, with reified categories of being, then he or she begins to deform these categories precisely by the fact that the migrant's varied backgrounds cannot be contained by them. What they *could be* bursts out of such simple constrictions. Migrants interacting with stereotypes are a particularly marked feature of Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. This novel explicitly states that the operation of stereotypes occurs through the descriptive power of the West, the "Orientalism" that is created by the Western perspective: "They describe us. That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct" (*The Satanic Verses* 168).

In *The Satanic Verses*, Chamcha immigrates to England and wants to fit in with the dominant hierarchy of power; he wants to be considered "English." To this end, he changes his name, the new Saladin sounding much more Anglo-Saxon, and he does absolutely everything he can to fit into the new community in which he finds himself. In other words, he is attempting to live out a stereotype (just like the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival*) that would be too constrictive to the opportunities that reside in him, what he *could be.* Due to this act of mimicking the colonial oppressor, and, thus, deforming the possibilities of his own existence, Chamcha is transformed into a monster, part-goat, and part-man. In one way, the transformation can be seen as an attempt by Western discourse to re-inscribe Chamcha into the stereotypes that have been propagated since the very beginning of colonial times. This "Other," who attempts to be like Us,

has been punished for his pretension by appearing just as he should and, thereby, succumbing to the pictures that they construct—a monster, a strange hybrid. The notion of the colonial subject as in part, animalistic, has an extremely long-standing history in western discourse; it even goes back to the time of Shakespeare. When Othello speaks of "goats and monkeys,"[4] (in Act IV, Scene 1, Line 261), his Elizabethan audience would most certainly have recognized the implicit reference to a bestial side of Othello that would prove his undoing.

This transformation can, though, be seen in a different light. For it is important to note that Chamcha becomes part-man, part-goat—what the biogenetic field would call "a hybrid." It is this position as hybrid that constitutes Chamcha (and all exiles) and it has a particularly potent force. For by mimicking the colonial master, Chamcha has set off a kind of disjunction in the hitherto seamless discourse of oppression and objectification. By being "the Other," but claiming some kind of identity, Chamcha has—to borrow a circumlocution favored by Bhabha—turned his mimicry to mockery. The monstrous within Chamcha (at least as far as Western discourse is concerned) is not the actuality of his physical form, but the opening he creates in the unbreachable solidity of the Western Imago. It is "a hybridism, a difference 'within' a subject that inhabits the rim of an inbetween reality."[5] This "rim," this hyphenated "in-between reality" mocks the seeming certainty of the West's image of itself. It is mirrored in the magical realism of Rushdie's prose, which is neither wholly fantastical nor wholly real, but a kind of in-between worlds. It dislocates and interrogates the West's stability, its wholeness. This is the monstrous visage that Chamcha shows to the Western world. It is not necessarily the monster that the West believes the colonial to be, but the monster that has been locked away in the recesses of the collective imagination, the notion set in play by the exile, but not residing in him or her, that the very fabric of our reality is open to flux, play, and to difference.

Returning to a consideration of the function of the central characters of Rushdie's, Mukherjee's, and Naipaul's novels, we see that they have two very different roles. They are both victims of a discourse by which and against which they must always measure themselves, always facing a norm that they either must resist or assimilate themselves to, and the means of fracturing the discourse that oppresses them. Such an ambivalent role is precisely the material that the personal narratives presented in these novels are woven from. For it is the function of art not to teach but to present. While Said and Bhabha may be making an attempt to explain the motions of difference that invade and disrupt the unitary discourse of the West, Rushdie, Naipaul, and Mukherjee present it. They succeed, by the disruptions, deformations, and discontinuities in the linguistic objects, in presenting just how these deformations work both in collective history and on individual subjects or individual his-story. They try, as the narrator of *Midnight's Children* says, to give voice to "the myriad tongues of Babel; they were the very essence of multiplicity, and I see no point in dividing them now" (274).

This journey into "multiplicity" and this attempt to capture speech in "myriad tongues" is bound to lead to a certain amount of ambivalence. This ambivalence, towards the country, the tongue, and the people that the exile has left and towards the new land in which the exile finds himself or herself, is manifested in the personal journeys of the main characters. These characters do not have any certainty; rather, they often find it difficult to negotiate the many different worlds in which they find themselves. As the narrator of Mukherjee's *Jasmine* points out, "My genuine foreignness frightens (Bud). (…) It frightens me, too" (26). The exile is in a frightening world in which he or she must mimic the manners of the new, as well as keep within himself or herself such aspect of the person the exile was. This is why the novels are what one might call "novels of self-discovery." *Midnight's Children, Jasmine, The Mimic Men* and *The Enigma of Arrival* all fit this category. Their narrators attempt to find themselves; the progression of their narratives is less influenced by the forward motion of an

outward plot than an innerscape that must be traversed to reach the goal of finding a meaningful self.

This is the goal for Saleem of *Midnight's Children*, who takes the reader through the entirety of a novel and most of Indian history in an attempt to try to find himself: he desperately desires to place his life in a context that will make it meaningful. Indeed, he finds himself altering the narrative that he is writing (and the factuality of history: for example, the date of Ghandi's death) precisely because he wants to forge some kind of meaning out of his life: "Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything, to re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?" (*Midnight's Children* 198). He is desperate at all costs, to avoid "absurdity" (4). Yet, it is exactly in this endeavour, by attempting to construct his life out of the historical situation that was laid against his background, that he becomes shaken, impotent, and, by the end of his novel, ready, like his grandfather, to "crack," to let his various parts scattered to the wind.

He has the same difficulty as the central character in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men.* Like Saleem, Naipaul's narrator wants to embrace the full gamut of colonial history, to understand its movements and its meanings. This is the background to his life, the very thing that has made him who he is. Again, like Saleem, he is unable to get hold of this history, and, in the process, he is unable to grasp of himself. He says, "I am too much a victim of the restlessness which was to have been my subject" (*The Mimic Men* 38). The correspondence of the individual to history in these novels almost always ends in the dissolution of the subject into his or her many constituent parts which, like the parts of Saleem, may be scattered in the wind. Their attempts seem to be very much akin to the gestic motion suggested by Spivak concerning the attempt to find the truth of subjectivity. They are acting out a "reaching and un-grasping."[6]

These novels seem to indicate that in the search for self, there are many different voices, many different impositions, and many different cultural influences. Therefore, it is problematical for all these various components to inhabit one, singular self or one unitary presence. In fact, what these novels seem to suggest is precisely the findings of post-modernism, with its emphasis on de-centered subjectivities and a self that is invaded by the disquietudes of difference. For instance, let us consider the various kinds of exile that make up the cast of characters within *Midnight's Children, The Satanic Verses, Jasmine, The Holder of the World, The Mimic Men,* and *The Enigma of Arrival.* All these novels concentrate on the personal nature of the central character's exile. In a number of cases, the novels are narrated from a first-person perspective, taking on the literary genre of the traditional faux-biography. They inhabit the biographical form all the better to examine the nature of subjectivity and exile's effect upon it. Some—and I am thinking particularly of Saleem of *Midnight's Children* and the narrator of *The Mimic Men*—have very definite and important links with the history of the country from which they come. In the former case, Saleem is born on the first day of Indian independence; in the latter, the central character is one of the leaders of a movement for independence in the British-dependent Caribbean island of Isabella. However, these connections with history occur only tangentially; they are always events that seem to slide past the characters in the stories, creating a spark of creative light, but then disappearing once more.

Nonetheless, this is not because history is unimportant to the novelists. The specter of history always seems close to appearing over the largely unhistorical surface of the prose. The novelists involved are not trying to write "histories." In fact, it is explicitly stated in *The Mimic Men* that a history of "the restlessness, the deep disorder (...) the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples" is not possible (*The Mimic Men* 38). What these novels emphasize is the strange co-dependence of the individual and the movements on a larger scale: the clash of nations, the cleavage of religions, and the desperate battle between and within cultural difference(s). Like

the central character of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine,* these novels are trying to portray individuals who connect to the worlds in which they live, in a way that is far from concrete and is more spectral. They attempt to "phantom (their) way through the continent" (*Jasmine* 101).

This idea of movement and of tangential connection with their surroundings (both literal—the people they speak to, the lives they lead—and metaphorical—the history played out around them) is also expressed in the notion of journeying. For instance, Ralph Singh, the central character of Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, journeys across continents traveling to England to seek himself, Beigh Masters of Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* attempts to travel through time using a sophisticated reality recreator invented by her boyfriend, and Gibreel Farishta in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* journeys interiorly by passing through dreams that paint a strange and distorted religious-scape. Motion and a feeling of movement are central to each novel.

However, these variations on the theme of journeying cannot be conceived as normal journeys. For one thing, there is a feeling within each individual journey that there is no conclusion, that "arrival" is not a central tenet of setting off. Just as it is for the ancestors of the people of Jahilia, so it is for the characters in these novels: "journeying itself was home" (*The Satanic Verses* 94). This is why so many of the novels refuse to arrive at any kind of categorical conclusion. The main character in *Jasmine*, who has spent a large part of her time standing still, trapped in a marriage that is stifling her, decides in the final stages of the marriage (and final pages of the novel) to go forward and continue the journey. This is not simply an attempt to eschew the little arrival of settling down and building a home. Rather, it is a refusal to accept the "arrival" of herself to herself, the settling down in a single character—that of a browbeaten wife. Jasmine is continuing her travels not merely to change her geographical location, but to change herself to accept all the possible characters that she can become. Likewise, at the end of *The Enigma of Arrival,* the narrator seems to "have arrived home," back where he started, in his native Trinidad. Nevertheless, in the last paragraph, this arrival is seen as less as "a return home" and more as a second starting out. The journey he is about to start out on is, once more, a personal one, and is, once more, an attempt to change himself. He is about to return to England, in order to write the book that we are reading, a book that presents his life, alters and edits it, and recreates him as an individual.

In dealing with how the subjectivity of the exile reacts when placed in close proximity to these concepts, it might be worth remembering the question posed by Foucault on this point: "Departing from what ground shall I find my identity?"[7] His question is rhetorical, but it is a question that seems to resonate through the work of the three authors under consideration. This point becomes clear in Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*. The narrator has already attempted to define himself against the colonial past, which failed him —it was the "restlessness," which meant he was unable to close the gaps in his being. In a similar way, he tries to put a seal on the authenticity of the self by changing his surroundings.

"(I)t was now that I resolved to abandon the ship-wrecked island and all on it and to seal my chieftainship in that real world from which, like my father, I had been cut off...I was consciously holding myself back for the reality which lay elsewhere." (*The Mimic Men* 141)

This attempt fails, just as all the other characters in the five other novels fail to orient themselves against their backgrounds. Whether it is Hannah's attempt in *The Holder of the World* to become whole by taking on the roles of the Puritan society that surrounds her, or the narrator's attempts in *The Enigma of Arrival* to travel to England to become an English writer like the rest of those who make up the "canon" of literature that he so admires, they all fail. The key to their failure is the idea expressed in *The Mimic Men,* that "the real world" was something that "lay elsewhere." This is not a simple expression of the distance of desire; it is rather a part of a system of "imaginary homelands." Every central character sees the world in which

he or she is living as unreal. Yet, the character could be whole if only he or she were in a real world. In spite of this, it soon becomes clear that such a "real world" is always and necessarily elsewhere.

Homelands are, these novels seem to suggest, necessarily "imaginary." Indeed, like the India of *Midnight's Children,* they are dream worlds in which semi-magical things can occur that disrupt and distend a singular notion of history. Saleem says that the one thousand and one children who were born on the day of Indian independence were "also the children of time: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of a dream" *(Midnight's Children* 137). Of course, Rushdie is commenting on the strange historical position of India, as a newly freed country, a nation that has never really been a nation because of its pre-colonial division and colonial subjugation. But he is also commenting on the inability to see India (and India's history) as a solid reality. Rather, it is a dream, and a dream that is dreamt up, like the entire novel, within the master dreamer, Saleem himself. He says, on discovering his mistake over the date of Ghandi's death, "in my India, Ghandi will continue to die at the wrong time" (*Midnight's Children* 197). The emphasis here is on *my* India, the India that *I* have created, and in which the idea of a history that is factual (and singular) need not apply. Ghandi dies to suit the individual who is constructing the landscape and history for himself. As Jameson comments about the nature of the post-modern notion of history, "the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether."[8]

In the words of the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival,* then, "Land is not land alone, something that simply is itself. Land partakes of what we breathe into it, is touched by our moods and memories" (*The Enigma of Arrival* 301). Far from being a possibility that the drifting of an individual's subjectivity can be anchored to a stable landscape, the landscape itself is de-centered and movable, and the individual subject takes a large part in that process. The landscape is dependent on the person who stands within it, but the "person" who stands within it cannot achieve full personhood without reference to a stability that does not exist. What this constitutes is a shuttling, a dialectic of incompleteness, that invades both the notion of a stable subjectivity and the notion of a singular reality. Both the subject and the landscape can be altered simultaneously, simply through the creative power of their contact. Take for example, the return of Saleem's grandfather: "Now, returning, he saw through travelled eyes. Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley circled by giant teeth, he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and so utterly enclosed" (*Midnight's Children* 5). The landscape is altered under the eye of the subject who has himself been altered by other landscapes and, on seeing it, the subject changes once more. For that reason, Saleem's grandfather feels enclosed, despite being at home. This interplay continues throughout the trajectories of both the subject and the landscape; each alters and invades the other, and neither of them is able to reach completeness. There is always a "distance from any clear-cut identity or notion of home."[9]

This distance does not mean that there can be no positive aspect to the interplay of self and landscape. Though this mutual creation and re-creation cannot end in either achieving a single, stable identity, the creative process can do some good. For example, the interplay of landscape and subjectivity bring together the two central female characters in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* into a unity that does not attempt to suspend or erase difference. The characters go through a somber ceremony of re-naming: "She wasn't Hannah any more; she was Mukta, Bhagmati's word for 'pearl.' And she gave Bhagmati a new name: Hester, after the friend she had lost" (*The Holder of the World* 271). This simple sentence manages to include within its structure all the paths of difference that have been plotted throughout the novel and that have gone into constructing these two different women. They include within them the landscapes of the Puritan world and of India—

thus, the power of the exotic (in the use of the name "pearl"), as well as the power of memory. The landscapes that Hannah has traversed visibly engrave themselves on her in the interchanging of names, a vocal demonstration of the changes that have occurred. Of course, these two women will also make a large change on the landscape as well, being at the very center of the changing power of history.

Reality, these novels suggest, does not necessarily need the things that once validated it for the rational mind: stability and singularity. Rushdie writes in *Midnight's Children,* "Reality can have metaphorical content; that does not make it less real" (240). This is the wonder of the metaphorical method of approaching these issues. As opposed to a purely theoretical approach, the artistry of these writers makes a more important impact on both the post-modern concerns of subjectivity and discourse construction, as well as on the dominant discourses in the world of post-coloniality. These authors do not attempt to negotiate with the subject or the world as factual entities; rather, they can put in process a negotiation *within* the subject and the world. They can already begin to alter the constitution of those very notions that theoretical discourses are trying to analyze and explain.

This interplay of landscape and subjectivity and the acceptance of them both as open entities will have an enormous effect on what has come to be known as the "politics of post-coloniality." These novelists, because of their place in the Western canon—and also, one might add, due to their acts of distancing themselves from the countries they are in exile from—have come to be described as apolitical. As I have tried to argue throughout, though, their novels are far from apolitical and they provide a very potent possibility for resistance. However, we must be quite clear what this resistance entails. It is certainly a very different concept to some of the revolutionary Marxists who opened up the possibility of a post-colonial world with their resistance to oppression, and quite a different kind of politics to the nationalist party politics that loom over the countries that have freed themselves from oppression. However, this politics is *not* conservative, nor is it conciliatory. It is very much in the radical vein, perhaps more radical than many of the other proponents of the politics of post-coloniality.

Those who are not interested in the mixture of ideas and the coming together and parting of the play of differences are those who are opposed to the mixing of cultures. While Marxist post-colonialists see the beginning of post-colonial movements as a positive step on the road to freedom, the three novelists see them as retrograde, regressive, and equally as contemptible as the nationalistic justifications given by those who perpetrated the crimes of colonialism in the first place.

This is the point made by Naipaul in *The Mimic Men* when his narrator, Ralph Singh (or Ranjit Kripalsingh, before changing his name to fit in at school) without any real desire to do so, becomes the head of the movement for freedom from colonial oppression in his fictional homeland. Ralph does not feel connected with the process and says that all this new breed of politician does is put himself in the position of "borrowing phrases" and that such action is "part of the escape from thought" (*The Mimic Men* 237). The political phrases are borrowed from the class that once ruled them. These politicians are, just as he and his classmates were at school, the "Mimic Men" of the title. This is the result of the clash between the Ethnocentric West and the rest of the world: it is a fight between a man and his reflection in the mirror. Colonialism has occurred; it is a fact of history; and there is no return (despite what some post-colonial thinkers might wish) to a state of innocence in which the subjects of colonialism can act freely outside the discourse to which they have been subjected. There is no outside to the post-colonial situation, the three novelists seem to suggest, and the future and any politics of post-coloniality that seeks to forge it must negotiate within the system. This politics must produce, at the very center of discourse, an outside of the inside, an inner rim. It must follow, like the central characters in the novels, the trajectory of the exile.

One of the most important sentences in any of these three novels is one of the simplest. It is a statement by the central character of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*. In Mukherjee's novel, the central character takes on many roles and many names; she has assimilated into the dominant discourses of whatever land she has been a part of and has met the expectations of the men who offer her protection. At the first level of interpretation, Mukherjee's *Jasmine* seems to be a simple story of victimhood, in which an illegal immigrant who is also a woman (both of whom are the classic victims of the West's view of the world) has to change herself to fit in with the world. Nonetheless, at the very center of the novel, there is an affirmation of this behaviour as an ethical stance, and one that could have serious political ramifications: "I changed because I wanted to" (*Jasmine* 185).

This simple statement is anathema to much of the politics of post-coloniality that sees resistance to the discourse of colonialism as a matter of confrontation. Change, particularly the kind of change that could be considered assimilation or collaboration, is a betrayal of the central core of post-colonialism's values. However, as Mukherjee makes quite clear in the progress of the central character through the novel, her changing is neither assimilation nor collaboration. In fact, the ability to change, to open one's own subjectivity up to all the various degrees of cultural difference, is a progressive step that satirizes the dominant discourse (the discourse of the exotic Indian migrant) without positing a second discourse to take its authoritarian position. This tactic can actively change the discourse to which the subject can subscribe. It can make not only a personal but also a historical difference. As the central character says at the end of the novel (which for the progress of ever-openness is actually one more new start), "Watch me re-position the stars..." *(Jasmine* 240).

This ethics is very much personal in Mukherjee—though it has definite implicit political ramifications. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children,* the personal and the political are almost simultaneous. And because Saleem was born when he was, becoming as he did, a symbol of the newly freed India, his openness to textual deformation actually shows a way of making an intervention in the dominant discourse without creating a new authoritarian viewpoint. Ghandi dies, in Saleem' s India, while he is watching an Edenic scene on the projection screen—and by this seemingly coincidental co-occurrence of events, a whole new notion of Ghandi's death as being the fall from innocence is set in motion. However, as Saleem later admits, the co-occurrence was not coincidental at all; it was rather motivated (albeit subconsciously) and it was a formation that relied on an intervention to change history. It is important that, after Saleem realizes his mistake, he, nevertheless, does not rectify it, but holds firm to his "fictional" view of events. What is more important than factuality is that Saleem has made an intervention in the course of history, and, thus, in the dominant understanding of Ghandi's death as "an event." By starting a whole new chain of significations—between Ghandi's death, the story of the fall, and all the cultural connections that these events set off —Saleem is changing the dominant discourse that surrounds Ghandi's death while refusing (by explicitly stating its fictional status) to proffer it as a more authoritative narrative.

Naipaul, perhaps even more than the other two writers, confronts the accusation that the "retreat" into a textual post-colonial stance is somehow apolitical. For he has both the narrator of *The Mimic Men* and the narrator of *The Enigma of Arrival* (who is almost an exact biographical representation of himself) see that the end of the question is writing. In both these novels and through their narrators, Naipaul uses the narrative device of ending the stories by having the narrator writing the book that the reader has been reading. In the case of *The Mimic Men*, he actually has the narrator give up a career in politics to sit in a hotel in England and write his own "his-story."

Indeed, it could be argued that both novels, if read in a cursory way, are actually tales of disengagement in which someone avoided the political questions of the day to concentrate on his own introverted narrative. But, this is not the

case. Naipaul faces up to the enormity of the confusion of the post-colonial situation and rather than seeing it in the black-and-white terms of many theorists, decides to make the intervention that is not only possible but also ethical. The narrator of *The Mimic Men,* while he is performing his political role as playing a part, goes along with the discourse into which he has been written. When he chooses writing as an affirmative and powerful way to resist the oppressive power discourses, he feels more freedom. This freedom comes not simply from transcending his situation, but from being able to understand and negotiate the different roles and discourses into which he has been inscribed.

There are certain threads that run throughout my argument, just as they run throughout the novels that I have attempted to analyze, to deconstruct, and to locate within the matrix of post-colonial thought. One thread is the necessity of mimicry and its possible power to subvert the dialogic but suspended synthesis of the open subjectivity and the imaginary landscapes that are both constructed by and contribute to the construction of the notion of the post-colonial. A second is the ambivalence of the subject towards these landscapes, a third is the importance of the ethic of the exile, an ethic that reverberates through these texts and poses a new form of politics. These various threads or themes interweave and interact, just as the texts of the novels do themselves. They are implicit in but not constitutive to the three novelists and their work. In their juxtaposition emerges a kind of meta-text, lines of similarity and difference that seem to arise from within and between these texts as they interact within the wider context of post-colonial thought. None of them contains the whole of my conclusion; no single novel or novelist can be demonstrated to have expounded the view of the exile and imaginary home that has emerged. Some of the insights they have provided come from explicit authorial suggestion, others from characterization, still others from treating the figures that emerge from the texts as allegorical forms that play out the drama of post-colonialism as though in a kind of dumbshow. None of these interpretative techniques would I like to present as the only legitimate interpretations, nor would I render any of them invalid. They have evolved from an open reception to the text and to the movements that occur within.

What has arisen is a blueprint, a sort of general gesture, towards a view of post-coloniality that is shared by all six texts. Together, these novels provide both a view of the post-colonial world and a politics by which individuals can live within it while, at the same time, being able to perform some sort of act of resistance. Such an act would be characterized by both playing out the roles of colonial discourse, and subverting them—by creating distance between the role-players and the roles they take on. It would contain an attempt to make sense of their own subjectivity through the landscapes they come into contact with (their past, the country of exile, their new "home," the history of their people, and their own his-story) and a realization that, though the subjectivity lies between all these poles, no combination of them will fully complete a singular and stable self. It would, in a simultaneous move, consist of the alteration of the landscape by the subject in a dialogue of diverted presence, a *contretemps,* in which neither subject nor

landscape could achieve resolution but would always be open to the changing motion of play. Most of all, it would contain the denial of any role, land, discourse, or ideology that would seek to limit free play, that would demand that the exile say, This (definitively) is who I am, this (definitively) is where I come from, this (definitively) is where I am going.

Although the apex of the historical colonial moment has probably passed and although much independence has been won, oppression and violence have not ceased altogether. There is an opening—an opening that Rushdie, Mukherjee, and Naipaul all exploit—that would allow the suspension of oppression and violence (for it will never truly cease), whether it manifest itself in the form of colonial power, the hegemony of discourse, or even in post-colonial thinkers who take on the mantle of the colonials to whom they are opposed. Through the

literature of exile that these authors write, through their fiction (for it is only in fiction that such an opening might appear), we gain access to this opening and might use it, tactically, strategically. These writers give us the space (within violence, within oppression) to put up a resistance, a space that we might (though only provisionally) call (a) "home." It is the only home worthy of exiles. It is an "imaginary land," a landscape that exile makes possible, one that will never be closed off, completed, or fulfilled.

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