

'THE ENIGMA OF ARRIVAL': HYBRIDITY AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE GLOBAL SPACE

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In this chapter I want to explore some recent theoretical developments in Cultural Studies that deal with the specific place of migrants in the production of culture, and valorise hybridity, syncretism, in-betweenness, and the creativity or cultural innovation inherent in migration. Since these theories themselves have been developed through a reading of literary texts written by migrant settlers, I intend to examine two such texts, V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. As an anthropologist I need first, perhaps, however, to justify my recourse to literary texts as a basis for research on migrant culture, before pointing, in due course, to some of the limitations of this approach.

From its inception, it has been Anthropology's disciplinary privilege to use the concept of culture. This, however, has been a mixed blessing, given the unwieldy nature of the term and its licensing of imaginative musings about more or less anything and everything. Historically, Raymond Williams (1960) reminds us, the use of the term 'culture' in English changed in the course of the Industrial Revolution from the 'tending of natural growth' to 'a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual' by the first half of the nineteenth century. Culture came to be used as a reflection on the momentous societal changes of the period, and – like industry, democracy and class – it received new meanings which reflected on modernity and industrialisation. While Williams restricts his historical analysis to England and English writers, and forgets about empire, for Anthropology, which arose in tandem with imperialism, the use of the concept of culture – holistic, just as Williams indicated

always had a particular direction: an attempt to locate and define modernity by contrasting it to its non-Western, non-modern Other. Through contrast, Anthropology could illuminate the unique nature of 'modern culture'. It did so not only by positing a universalist notion of culture as a distinguishing feature of the human species but also by conceiving of a plurality of cultures as totalities with clear boundaries, confined to their localities.

Moreover, as Arjun Appadurai has argued, each cultural type tended to be globally located: the honour-and-shame complex in Mediterranean societies, segmentary lineages in Africa, caste in India, and cargo cults in Melanesia. This conceit of Anthropology could, perhaps, be seen as a reflection of the colonial encounter itself, but also, more broadly, of the systematising tendencies of modern thought. The colonial project located its subjects by mapping territories and populations in the context of military expansion and political centralisation. The geographical mapping went together with a classification of peoples and customs through censuses and gazetteers. Colonialism also *dislocated* people through its imperial organisation of migrant labour and soldiering. One of the striking examples of colonial dislocation was, obviously, the institution of African slavery, which was succeeded, in the nineteenth century, by the system of Indian indentured labour. It is important to note that these dislocations did not constitute 'free movement', but a 'middle passage' from one boundedness and bondedness to another. Free movement of persons and commodities, a dogma of economic liberalism, was in many places restricted to the enlightened, Western coloniser.

Hence the *location* of culture has been a concern that Anthropology and colonialism had in common, yet post-colonial developments have made culture increasingly difficult to locate. There are three aspects to this difficulty. First, with the crumbling of European colonialism and the subsequent proliferation of nation-states, the national cultures of Western and non-Western societies have acquired, at least in principle, equal status as objects of research. This has enabled the growth of an Anthropology of complex societies, focused on the United States and Europe. The evident complexity of cultural formations in complex societies challenged any unitary view of culture that stressed boundedness, continuity and homogeneity (see also Wicker, Chapter 2 above). Leach's proposal that society and culture were not interchangeable terms, and Barth's that ethnic groups manipulated cultural emblems for collective interests, obviously acquire renewed force when they shift from a focus on rural research among frontier people, far removed from urban centres, to Kachin or Swat Pathans living in London or New York City.

Along with the study of the West has come a shift in anthropological

theory from 'system' to 'practice', accompanied by an interest in agency, actors and the actor's point of view. This has resulted in a further dismantling of the notion of the 'cultural whole'. This refocusing has been associated with a distrust of unifying, homogenising forms of anthropological writing, a distrust expressed cogently in a series of reflexively critical anthropological texts of which *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) is, perhaps, the most outstanding example.

A third feature of this changing intellectual terrain has been the interest in post-colonial migration to the West from the former colonised South. Non-Western cultures are no longer located outside the West, but form an increasingly important social element of the Western cultural scene itself, especially in metropolises like London, Amsterdam, Paris, New York City and Los Angeles. The honour-and-shame complex and all the rest are no longer confined to an elsewhere, outside the West; indeed, there is no easily identifiable 'inside' and 'outside' any more. Along with migration, the study of power relations between a variety of centres and peripheries has challenged the prior stress on national cultures or nationalism, so that anthropologists today increasingly find themselves having to come to grips with the meaning of global culture and transnationalism.

Such highly complex developments in Anthropology form the backdrop to the problem anthropologists face: what to do with the concept of culture in this changing global scene. Rather than address this question in a highly abstract manner, I want to reflect upon the intriguing fact that just when culture has been problematised for anthropologists, it has been hijacked by a relative newcomer to the academy, Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies itself is not a unitary whole. As Stuart Hall suggests, it encompasses multiple discourses and is the product of several historical trajectories. A brief glance at a 1990s' Cultural Studies collection suffices to prove that any serious attempt to describe the discipline is futile. This is particularly true for the American branch of Cultural Studies, which has left even Hall himself speechless ('I don't know what to say about American Cultural Studies. I am completely dumbfounded by it' - 1992: 285).

In this chapter I choose to focus on a specific subcategory of critical theory within Cultural Studies that deals with colonialism and the post-colonial predicament, including migrant culture - both subjects of some interest to anthropologists. The scholars promoting this critical project - Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Anthony Appiah, Homi Bhabha, Sarah Suleri - are all exemplars of the very phenomenon of displacement, migrancy, exile and transnationalism that they attempt to understand. Together these scholars form a vanguard of critics of Third

World cultural products (films, art, literature) mostly produced by settler-migrants such as Naipaul, Rushdie or Mira Nair. Distinctively, they bring to bear upon these aesthetic texts a knowledge and cultural experience which, ultimately, also feed back into the texts themselves.

Since the late 1980s, there has been a discernable *rapprochement* between American Cultural Anthropology and this type of Cultural Studies. The very title of collections like *Writing Culture* indicates the interest in the process of writing and in forms of ethnographic narrativisation, an interest that brings these anthropological critics close to literary theory. The subtitle of James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture*, 'Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art', refers to the juxtaposition in the book of chapters on Conrad and Malinowski, Aimé Césaire, museums, and Edward Said. Similarly, a co-authored book by Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi (1990) juxtaposes Qur'anic recitation, Irani poster art, Irani migrants in Houston, and the Rushdie affair. It seems evident that Anthropology and Cultural Studies are finding common ground by abandoning the old ideological distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture, between literary production on the one hand, and orality and performance on the other. The collapse of the old distinctions, however, does not revive the old cultural whole. Instead, there is a privileging of the cultural fragment - literary, cinematic, or otherwise.

There is also a shared interest in migration and travel, in movement as opposed to stasis. James Clifford begins his essay 'Travelling Cultures' with a quotation from the Caribbean writer C.L.R. James:

Time would pass, old empires would fall and new ones take their place. The relations of classes had to change before I discovered that it's not quality of goods and utility that matter, but movement, not where you are or what you have, but where you come from, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there. (1992: 101)

Clifford argues specifically for a rethinking of anthropology in terms of travel, so that 'constructed and disputed *historicités*, sites of displacement, interference, and interaction, come more sharply into view' (ibid.). The same interest may be found in the postmodern philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, who propose a new turn in philosophy which they term nomadology. It is a Nietzschean *Umwertung aller Werte*, a nomadic de-territorialisation and deconstruction of the familiar, of the Law of the State, an adventurous guerrilla war against fixed norms, conducted from the periphery of settled societies.

These ideas are developed by the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti in an essay entitled 'Nomads in a Transformed Europe: Figurations for an Alternative Consciousness' (1993). Braidotti conceives of herself as a

nomad, since she was born in Italy, raised in Australia, educated at the Sorbonne in Paris, and is now teaching in Holland. She celebrates the polyglot, the speaker of many languages, against the God-given seriousness and foundational value of mother tongues:

In this new Europe that witnesses all of its old problems, in a wave of return of the repressed that is disconcerting, to say the least, in this ethnocentric fortress, the concept of the mother tongue is stronger than ever. It feeds into the renewed and exacerbated sense of nationalism, regionalism, localism, which marks this particular moment of our history. The polyglot surveys this situation with the greatest critical distance; a person who is in-transit between the languages, neither here nor there, knows better than to believe in steady identities and mother tongues. (Braidotti 1993: 32–33)

An anthropologist may be forgiven for expressing some scepticism about this extremely romantic notion of 'nomadism', and some puzzlement about the way this phallogocentric trope *par excellence* (from Lawrence of Arabia to Thesiger) acquires a new use in feminist philosophy. Nevertheless, much is clearly expected from living on the margins of society, from migrants who are nomads and who refuse both nostalgia and the comforts of assimilation, who are actively, creatively 'in-between'. And if one looks to at least one indicator of literary success, the nomination for the Booker Prize in Britain, one is indeed struck by the extraordinary contribution of migrants to contemporary English literature.

In English post-colonial literary theory, it is Homi Bhabha (1994) who – somewhat like Braidotti, but more subtly – celebrates,

the borderline work of culture [which] demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (Bhabha 1994: 6)

Bhabha's claims for the role of such art are huge. He speaks about 'cultural interstices that introduce creative invention into existence'; about the 're-creation of the self in the world of travel'; the 're-settlement of the borderline community of migration' (ibid.: 9). He makes claims for a 'political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause [note that the rebels are not without a cause], coming from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective' (ibid.: 3), and argues that 'this interstitial passage *in-between* fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (ibid.: 4).

What I find striking about these statements is that they seem to invoke the traditional romantic trope of the 'self-made individual' who invents himself in the marginality of the American frontier. There is inherent here a notion of almost total innovation, of new subject-formation in 'in-between' sites, inhabited by migrants as pioneer settlers. In an essay with the telling title 'How Newness Enters the World', Bhabha refers to the philosopher Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*. Taylor argues that 'the supposition that I could be two temporally succeeding selves is either an overdramatised image, or quite false. It runs against the structural features of a self as a being who exists in a space of concerns.' Bhabha counters that 'such "overdramatised" images are precisely my concern as I attempt to negotiate narratives where double-lives are led in the post-colonial world, with its journeys of migration and its dwellings of the diasporic' (Bhabha 1994: 213). Yet Taylor's aim, arguably, is precisely to show that it is modernity, from Locke and Hume onwards, which defines the modern individual self as neutral, outside any essential framework of moral questions, outside a discursive tradition, outside a narrative which shapes a subject's life as a whole – in relation to a moral idea of the good, achieved in conversation with other selves. Bhabha and Taylor are both, in their different ways, examining the sources of the self. Bhabha emphasises the potential of migrants to reinvent themselves continuously in the post-colonial situation of cultural hybridity; Taylor emphasises the continuity of selfhood in relation to the larger conversations in which it takes part. Since, in modern culture, it is art and literature that are the sites of self-fashioning *par excellence*, I want to examine these issues through a contrastive reading of the two migration novels by Naipaul and Rushdie, both of South Asian origin, both settlers in contemporary Britain.

The title of my chapter is derived from Naipaul's novel about an Indo-Trinidadian novelist, V.S. Naipaul, who rents a house in the English countryside, near Stonehenge, a site that is an almost paradigmatic symbol of prehistoric England. The house is also near Salisbury, which was the first English town apparently known to Naipaul on his faraway tropical island – his third-standard English reader contained a picture of a Constable painting of Salisbury Cathedral. Cultural knowledge about the metropole, acquired in the colonial setting of Trinidad. How casually Naipaul brings up this major theme in his work: the life in a colonial backwater and the desire to arrive (both spatially and socially) in the metropole. But in England one has arrived fully only when one has arrived in what might be quintessential to Englishness, the English landscape.

Naipaul is quite frank about the hardships of coming to England from Trinidad, of having high ambitions to be a writer. He had dreamed of

coming to England, 'but my life in England had been savourless, and much of it mean'. Now he seems to have arrived, both as a writer and in the English countryside, but one recalls that the title of his novel is *The Enigma of Arrival*. This title refers to a painting of a wharf by de Chirico, a detail of which appears on the book's cover. Naipaul describes it:

in the background there are two figures, both muffled, one perhaps the person who has arrived, the other perhaps a native of the port. The scene is of desolation and mystery; it speaks of the mystery of arrival. (Naipaul 1987: 91-2)

And he gives the outline of a story he wants to write, based on the painting:

The newly arrived person would enter there and be swallowed by the life and noise of a crowded city.... Gradually there would come to him a feeling that he was getting nowhere; he would lose his sense of mission; he would begin to know only that he was lost. His feeling of adventure would give way to panic. He would want to escape, to get back to the quayside and his ship. But he wouldn't know how.... At the moment of crisis he would come upon a door, open it, and find himself back on the quayside of arrival. He has been saved; the world is as he remembered it. Only one thing is missing now. Above the cut-out walls and buildings there is no mast, no sail. The antique ship has gone. The traveller has lived out his life. (ibid.: 91-2)

Here, in effect, is a description of a migrant's nightmare. In a sense, the novel is the fleshed-out version of the story seen by Naipaul in the de Chirico painting. It is a book about death. On the first page we find a dedication: 'In loving memory of my brother Shiva Naipaul, 25 February, 1945, Port of Spain 13 August 1985.' The book ends by recording the period of writing: October 1984 to April 1986. There is almost no mention of Shiva Naipaul, but his absence is marked in the final episode when V.S. Naipaul describes the mortuary rites of his younger sister in Trinidad. Every chapter records a death in Naipaul's environment, ending in the final chapter with the death of his sister. The book itself is a mortuary ritual. And, as always, when one reflects upon the death of others, one realises one's own mortality and makes up the balance of one's life.

Naipaul sees his life as a version of the story told in the de Chirico painting. The steamboat journey from New York to Southampton is full of racial slights; his arrival in London is pathetic; he lives in a poor boarding-house in Earls Court and is very lonely, greatly disappointed in the city he had dreamed of coming to. But the point is that after all these trials, he has now finally arrived in the English landscape. The move to the countryside makes Naipaul nervous:

There was no village to speak of. I was glad of that. I would have been nervous to meet people. After all my time in England I still had that nervousness in a new place, that rawness of response, still felt myself to be in the other man's country, felt my strangeness, my solitude. And every incursion into a new part of the country – what for others might have been an adventure – was for me like a tearing at an old scab. (ibid.: 13)

After a while he meets a farmer, Jack, about whom the narrator fantasises that this man, at least, is genuine, rooted, fitting the landscape: 'I saw him as a remnant of the past (the undoing of which my own presence portended' (ibid.: 19) – very different from the unanchored, uprooted Naipaul, who discovers gradually, however, that Jack himself 'lived among ruins, among superseded things', was a man out of place; that, indeed, his entire image of the unchanging countryside was wrong. Jack dies, his wife leaves for the city; other people come without a shred of feeling for the countryside. The perfection of the countryside, of a well-rooted way of life, disintegrates as soon as he starts to probe it. This disintegration suits the temperament of a man who, as we know from *A House for Mr Biswas*, had, as a child, always lived in great uncertainty, in half-ruined houses, constantly on the move. Perfection might have existed fifty years before, when the estate on which his cottage stands had been created by the wealth of Empire. But he realises that in that period of perfection there would not have been a place for him, the grandson of an Indian indentured labourer.

The arrival of an Indo-Trinidadian novelist in the English landscape makes this landscape appear in a particular light. The estate is not just an estate; it was acquired at the very period in which Naipaul's ancestors were shipped from India to Trinidad to work on rather different estates. Naipaul's reference to Empire is just as casual as Jane Austen's in *Mansfield Park*. As Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism*, the perfection of Mansfield Park involves a plantation in Antigua. Fanny marries her cousin Edmund, the rich heir of Mansfield Park, whose father, Sir Thomas Bertram, has become rich thanks to Empire, to the slave trade. Already, Austen has made a connection between the civility of Mansfield Park and the brutality of Empire, but with Naipaul this connection is evoked more directly, in terms of post-colonial feelings of decline and decay. The owner of the manor suffers from accidia, a word I had to look up in the dictionary. It is a disease of monks in the Middle Ages, caused by solitude and sloth. Such a disease appeals to Naipaul, the writer: a monk in modern times. The descendant of the plantation worker and the descendant of the plantation owner both partake in the decline of Empire.

Decay and decline do not set the tone of the novel entirely, though.

Naipaul confesses a great love for the beauty of the gardens and the landscape; and, in a bitter aside, he remarks:

That instinct to plant, to see crops grow, might have seemed eternal, something to which the human heart would want to return. But in the plantation colony from which I came – a colony created for agriculture, for the growing of a particular crop, created for the great flat fields of sugar-cane, which were the point and explanation of everything, the houses, the style of government, the mixed population – in that colony, created by the power and wealth of industrial England, that instinct had been eradicated. (ibid.: 215)

Here, however, the colonial rediscovers a human instinct which to this reader, at least, seems more English than universally human. There is a long English literary tradition of devotion to the countryside and to gardening, and Naipaul certainly stands in that tradition. As Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City* (1973), the modern English attitude towards the country (which means, in English, both the national territory as a whole and part of the 'land') has to be related to the Industrial Revolution which very early transformed the nature of the rural economy as a result of rapid urbanisation. Dependence on domestic agriculture was very low in Imperial England. In an ironic way, Naipaul's experience shows the other side of the English love for the countryside – its dependence on the colonies. The post-colonial predicament collapses these two sides in a nostalgia for the heyday of Empire, shared by both ex-colonised and ex-colonisers.

The novel's final chapter, appropriately entitled 'The Ceremony of Farewell', describes the mortuary rites performed for his sister Sati. It is a surprisingly mild and rather touching description by this often cynical observer of religion. Moreover, it highlights an important development in contemporary Caribbean Hinduism. The ritual by which the ghost of the deceased is transformed into a benign ancestor has to be performed in the manner prescribed by the ritual manuals. The Brahman priest and his counterpart, the sacrificer [*jajman*] – here husband and sons of the deceased – are entirely immersed in what Naipaul calls 'the physical side of the ceremony'. It has to be done correctly, 'this pressing together of balls of rice and then balls of earth, this arranging of flowers and pouring of milk on heaps of this and that, this constant feeding of the sacred fire' (ibid.: 313). However, there is a new demand for theology here. The husband of the deceased asks whether his wife will return on earth and whether they will be together again, and the priest answers that she might return, but in that case he would not be able to recognise her. Here Naipaul makes the important observation that the rituals had always been partly a mystery, but his family could no longer easily surrender to them.

They had been rendered self-conscious by education, travel and history, transformed by wealth. A quest for personal experience and meaning had been added to the earlier emphasis on 'correct practice'.

There is a good deal of nostalgia in this final episode which again celebrates rural life, the countryside. The story is one of progress, social and spatial mobility, accompanied by loss. Progress accompanied by decay – and even a nostalgia for the Empire, all politically very incorrect. But everyone already knows how politically incorrect Naipaul is, so it came as a relief to find in Sara Suleri's *The Rhetoric of English India* (1992) that it is once again OK to read him. Indeed, Naipaul is one of the strongest believers in the Enlightenment tradition, in rationality and modern progress. In a recent lecture to the Manhattan Institute, he rejects religion on the grounds that it prevents people from pursuing knowledge. The alternative to religious tradition, he argues, is the idea of what he calls 'universal civilisation, born in Europe but now truly universal, stripped of its racial taints'. At the heart of this civilisation is the idea of the pursuit of happiness, which contains

the idea of the individual, responsibility, choice, the life of the intellect, the idea of vocation and perfectibility and achievement. It is an immense human idea. It cannot be reduced to a fixed system. It cannot generate fanaticism. But it is known to exist, and because of that, other more rigid systems in the end blow away. (Naipaul, *New York Times*, 5 November 1990)

Well, at least one thing seems to be clear: this post-colonial writer is not postmodern.

Naipaul, it seems to me, is definitely also not in favour of Bhabha's multiculturalism, but in favour of what multiculturalists would label 'white culture'. Indeed, he could be called an arch-conservative and a protagonist of assimilation in his celebration of the English countryside. Clearly, although it is produced at the cultural interstices, his work runs counter to the very claims made for it by post-colonial Cultural Studies. But this is only one level of Naipaul's work. At another level, he expresses the extent to which his experience of England is inflected through his childhood experiences in Trinidad.

What Naipaul seems to show is the continuity, the wholeness of his life. In the English countryside he sees Trinidad. Death and decay are part of both, and his particular understanding of that decay in England comes from his colonial experience. So, indeed, England is appropriated in a very literal sense. The novel disrupts the fake notion that those English people a migrant may encounter in the countryside are more 'rooted' than the migrant him-/herself. Migrancy, uprootedness and death are common experiences of modernity. This may sound like the ultimate

assimilation in the face of death; but again, there is the response to death in Hindu mortuary rites, and a new quest for theological meaning in the old practices. Clearly, I am not claiming that Naipaul is ultimately, beneath it all, a Hindu. This would be an unwarranted, essentialising move. But religion seems to be a habit of the heart which continues to form part of the cultural conversation from which even Naipaul cannot entirely escape. This is a novel not about hybridity but about anxiety and grief as a universal human condition.

Let me now turn briefly to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. It was published a year after Naipaul's novel, in 1988, but it received a great deal more critical attention for well-known reasons. I shall therefore be much briefer here. Naipaul's and Rushdie's works inhabit entirely different worlds. Whereas Naipaul is a modernist, a realist, Rushdie is a postmodernist, a magical realist. Naipaul has a Caribbean-Hindu background; Rushdie an Indian-Muslim one. Yet they also have Britishness and an Oxbridge education in common, and they share a theme: that of South Asia and the South Asian immigration to Britain. But whereas *The Enigma of Arrival* records with great calmness the reflections of a solitary immigrant in the English landscape, *The Satanic Verses* plunges into the cauldron of illegal immigration, racism and anti-racist activism in London. Which is more realistic? Which is more magical? – one may justifiably ask.

The 'carrier' of this theme is one of the key characters in the novel, Saladin Chamcha. When he loses his faith in his father and, thereby, in his religion, he decides to change his identity. He invents himself as an English gentleman, but, typically, can find a living only as an imitator of voices on television, for example in 'The Aliens Show'. Believing that accent conveys social identity, he marries a British wife with an upper-class accent, despite her attempts to get rid of her background. This is the world of make-believe, of an attempt to assimilate, but reality is different, as Chamcha realises when he falls from the sky on the English coast. The story that he has safely floated down from a jumbo jet that has been blown apart above the English Channel is laughed away by the policemen who come to arrest him as an illegal immigrant. Because he has fallen on the coast instead of landing at Heathrow, his carefully constructed identity falls apart. He becomes, quite literally, a devil with goatish features, 'demonised' by the police, who treat him brutally. His wife does not want him back, and so he ends up among 'his own people' in Brixhall (Brixton and Southall), where he witnesses how the police create racial riots. Thatcher's England is a long way from what he had imagined as his new homeland. In the end, he decides to make it up with his father and become Indian again. The migrant has to redefine

himself, but it is not entirely a self-definition. Others redefine him, and in many cases in a racist manner.

I would like to draw attention to the fact that Rushdie seems to indicate that the prior self – the relation with one's childhood, with one's father – remains a significant part of the transformation of the migrant. A central element of this prior, original identity – as it were – is religion. And unlike Naipaul, who neutralises his Hinduism by universalising it, Rushdie engages with religious discourse directly by making a comparison between literary and religious inspiration, between Prophet and novelist ('What kind of idea is he?, What kind am I', the text asks – Rushdie 1988: 111). The result of this comparison is that both religion and fiction are portrayed as products of the imagination. Although this is blasphemous from a religious point of view, it does not in itself denigrate Islam; Sara Suleri puts this straightforwardly: 'Rushdie has written a deeply Islamic book' (1992: 191). One might say, indeed, that the book is obsessed with Islam, and wonder why an English novel written for a Western audience is to such an extent about issues that its readers do not have the necessary cultural background to understand. What functions does this exoticism have for a Western audience? Rushdie's previous novel, *Shame*, announced itself as a novel of leave-taking from the East, but *The Satanic Verses* shows, inadvertently, that Rushdie is not yet done with the leave-taking, especially from Islam.

'What does the narrative construction of minority discourses entail for the everyday existence of the Western metropole?' This is the question raised by Homi Bhabha (1994: 223), which he tries to answer in his analysis of *The Satanic Verses*. In his view, the novel deals with the indeterminacy of diasporic identity, and this is the secular, social cause for what has been represented as the 'blasphemy' of the book. 'Hybridity is heresy',

Blasphemy goes beyond the severance of tradition and replaces its claim to a purity of origins with a poetics of relocation and reinscription.... Blasphemy is not merely a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular; it is a moment when the subject matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation. (ibid.: 225)

Again, however, one must ask: for whom is it translated, and to what purpose? The angry reactions of South Asian Muslim immigrants expressed their justifiable feelings, I believe, that the novel's passages on the rise of Islam and the Prophet were intended to lampoon their beliefs and practices. These immigrants, who are already socially and culturally marginalised, are thus doubly marginalised in the name of an attack on 'purity' and Islamic 'fundamentalism'. The novel's depiction of the sexual

behaviour of the Prophet is felt as a deliberately provocative sneer, and, as we know, Muslims in Bradford responded to this sneer by burning the book. This, in turn, provoked the immense outrage of the secular English elite, and particularly its liberal intelligentsia, an extreme example being Fay Weldon's pamphlet (1989) in which she argues that 'The Bible, in its entirety, is at least food for thought. The Koran is food for no-thought. It is not a poem on which society can be safely or sensibly based' (!). In other words, so-called Islamic fundamentalists are not merely 'purists' who abhor hybridity: they are fundamentally immoral. The upshot of the affair has been not only the threat to the writer's life; just as serious, race relations in Britain and elsewhere in Europe have suffered a considerable setback. If this is how cultural work on the borderline brings newness into the world, we are in for some stormy weather. According to Bhabha, the migrant's survival depends on this form of cultural transition and translation, but one could as well argue that survival depends on the very opposite of this kind of 'newness'.

The celebration of hybridity, syncretism and multiculturalism in Cultural Studies needs to be examined critically. Bhabha's claim that one can bring newness into the world, that one can reinvent oneself when one is writing from the cultural interstices, is a conceit of the literature-producing and consuming world. Literary texts are the very sites of self-fashioning in modern, bourgeois culture. Literature has replaced religious texts as a source of elevated reflection about the nature of the self. Rushdie's thematic takes part precisely in that displacement. What is remarkable, however, is the extent to which his hybrid self-fashioning feeds on Islamic traditions. It is this engagement which leads to a reading of his text not only by those who valorise the invention of culture in art, but also by migrant-settlers who are very differently placed in relation to those traditions.

These Muslim readers are not necessarily fundamentalists at all; their religious ideas are just as hybrid and syncretic as those of the author. They, too, are migrants, but the sources of their identity are authenticated not by profane literary texts but by what are to them sacred religious traditions. It is ironic, therefore, to find that migrants who are at the vanguard of political resistance to the assimilative tendencies of the nation-state, who have their own cultural project for living hybrid cultural lives in a non-Islamic nation – expressed, for example, in a demand for state-funded Muslim schools or the extension of the blasphemy laws – are condemned, while the postmodern hybrid novelist is celebrated by liberals and the state, extolled for his struggle against that very oppositional resistance, against the supposed 'backwardness' of the 'fundamentalist' British Muslim community.

It is also striking that the difference between Naipaul's novel and Rushdie's novel – between the modern and the postmodern, if you wish – is not between an endorsement of Enlightenment values and a critique of them. The difference lies, rather, in the radicality of Rushdie's endorsement of the Enlightenment project – to engage and refashion the religious tradition in which he received his early socialisation, while simultaneously, in his very textuality, constantly to depend on the difference of that tradition. Naipaul emphasises the commonality of the human condition, the fiction of roots. He is an advocate of assimilation to a universal Enlightenment culture which has its origins in Europe, but is now part of world culture. His position resembles that of the historian Arthur Schlesinger in *The Disuniting of America* (Schlesinger 1992). Naipaul does not engage Hindu tradition in order to refashion it. It is part of his childhood upbringing, and he neither rejects nor endorses it. More clearly than any writer I know of, his identity is fashioned by literature, by the production of fiction; as such, his past is only a limited, aesthetic resource for his narrative.

One could, perhaps, argue that post-colonial Cultural Studies fails to examine critically the status of art and literature in the ideology of modern bourgeois culture, endorsed in its continuous emphasis on individual creativity, invention and the fragmentary nature of culture. Despite their radical stance against racism and discrimination, these scholars leave out of their elaborate analyses the question of how the novel and the novelist are socially situated *vis-à-vis* the constituencies they supposedly represent or write for. The critics thus erase the crucial dimension of power through their very textualisation of it. Both Rushdie and Naipaul embrace Enlightenment traditions. This is not very surprising if one considers that – educated as they were in Oxford colleges – they write English novels for an English-reading cultural elite, by and large living in the West. Most Muslim and Hindu immigrants in Britain are, however, workers. Many live in provincial mill towns in northern England. They have very different class origins, and valorise quite different aesthetic traditions from those of Naipaul and Rushdie, or Bhabha, for that matter (see Werbner 1996). The reading of literary texts as a gateway to the analysis of migrant culture may thus have severe limitations. I am not arguing that such literary texts constitute an invalid tool of cultural analysis; merely that it is crucial to go beyond the analysis of literary discourses and representations to the social, political and economic contexts in which they are embedded. There may be nothing outside the text, as Derrida proposes, but there is certainly something outside the literary text. The Rushdie affair is a painful reminder of that simple but important fact.

The move from a stress on holism to fragment in the interpretation of culture is, in my view, a salutary one. That hybridity, diversity and syncretism are integral dimensions of cultural change is, it seems to me, beyond doubt. It remains important to recognise, however, the tension in modern society between a politics of difference and the totalising cultural project of the modern nation-state; between the drive towards integration, on the one hand, and individualisation and differentiation, on the other. This is reflected in the modern tendency to relegate religious expression to the private sphere, rendering it equivalent to a difference in literary taste. Religious faith and other forms of cultural difference are thus not obliterated, but transformed, and – as Talal Asad (1993: 266) reminds us – comfortably accommodated by urban consumer capitalism. From this perspective, the hybridity celebrated in Cultural Studies has little revolutionary potential, since it is part of the very discourse of bourgeois capitalism and modernity which it claims to displace.

Novelists as different as Naipaul and Rushdie are part of that modernist project. One should, at the same time, recognise that there are alternative projects to the totalising and individualising tendencies of the modern nation-state. These include religious movements, some of them 'fundamentalist'. If one wants to find revolutionary potential in the migrant situation, one can surely find it in these movements. Although they are totalising, their discourses on individuality and hybridity are, of course, rather different. Officially, they emphasise that anti-modern-sounding concept of sacred tradition. Yet this does not, in fact, mean that they are only reactionary or conservative. There are innovative and creative dimensions to these discourses. A truly comprehensive study of migrant culture would need, therefore, to go beyond migrant literary texts, such as those by Naipaul and Rushdie, to examine a wider range of textual interventions, including those articulated by migrant-settlers in a religious idiom, as these are played out in the West.

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