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The Poetics of Displacement:
Rethinking The Categories of Nation, Gender and Postcoloniality

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November 1995

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines representations of nation, race and gender in three postcolonial texts: Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children; Meena Alexander's autobiographical memoirs Fault Lines; and Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi's collection of short stories entitled Imaginary Maps. All three texts reconfigure conventional accounts of nationhood by positing fictions based on what I am calling the poetics of displacement. The diasporic perspective provides Salman Rushdie's novel with the ability to suggest hybrid identities arising from the experience of cultural migration. In Meena Alexander's autobiography, displacement is figured in terms of both a diasporic and feminist vision that allows for the deconstruction of masculinist narratives of identity and nation. Mahasweta Devi's short stories, by contrast, represent displacement in terms of the violences and dislocations suffered by the Indian subaltern as a result of ecological degradation and cultural uprootment. In looking at these differential articulations of displacement, this thesis thus attempts to illustrate that what is often seen as an unified body of postcolonial literature emerges from a heterogeneous set of textual practices which are the products of varying social, cultural, political and economic contexts. In this way, this thesis rethinks the categories of nation, race and gender in order to consider the bases upon which people make claims to identity along with the boundaries of inclusion or exclusion often invoked by such claims.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse examine les représentations de nation, de race et de genre dans trois textes postcolonials: Midnight's Children de Salmon Rushdie; Fault Lines, le mémoire autobiographique de Meena Alexander; et Imaginary Maps, une collection d'histoires courtes de l'écrivain bengale Mahasweta Devi. Ces trois textes questionnent les comptes conventionels de ce qu'est une nation en proposants de nouvelles versions que je nomme les poetiques du déplacement. La perspective diasporique donne une abilité au roman de Salmon Rushdie du suggérer de identitées hybrides qui apparaissent de l'expérience de la migration culturelle. Cedependant, dans l'autobiographie de Meena Alexander, le déplacement est présenté comme étant une vision féministe et diasporique qui permet de démanteler la narration masculine de l'identité et de la nation. Finalement, les histoires de Mahasweta Devi représentent le déplacement au sein de la violence et du délogement souffert par les Indiens subalternes en raison de la dégradation écologique et de la déracination culturelle. En examinant ces différentes articulations de ce qu'est le déplacement, cette thèse démontre que ce qui est souvent perçu comme étant un corps de litérature postcolonial unifié qui ressort de textes différents, sont les produits de divers contextes sociales, culturels, politiques et economiques. C'est en cette manière que cet article repense les catégories de nation, de race et genre dans le but de considérer les bases sur lesquels le gens font des revendications d'identité en plus des fontières d'inclusion ou d'exclusion souvent invoquées par de tels revendications.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most remarkable course of events in the twentieth century has been the formal dissolution of colonial empires and the subsequent granting of independence to previously colonised countries around the world. Anticolonial resistance took various shapes and forms: in some countries, the battle against imperialism was waged on philosophical or ideological grounds, whereas in other countries, such as Kenya and Algeria, the path toward decolonisation involved violent revolution and war. Nearly all campaigns of anticolonial resistance, however, were based on explicitly nationalist principles. The nation-state was viewed not only as the primary site of decolonisation, but also as the only space within which a truly postcolonial culture could be fashioned. For this reason, the majority of the newly independent countries devoted their energies to the singular task of restoring a lost or obliterated history, recovering national myths and renewing national pride. By creating and developing a sense of identity apart from that of the colonial power, these countries looked forward to a properly postcolonial era.

In the case of India, the winning of independence in 1947 after a century-long struggle signified the dawning of a new age. In his famous independence day speech, Jawaharlal Nehru promised that India's "tryst with destiny" included not only the guarantee of political and economic self-reliance, but also a commitment to the ideals of democracy and secularism. While Nehru's promises of economic independence were made primarily to the Indian bourgeoisie, the promises of democracy and secularism bore the marks of a double gesture: they could be read as the authorisation of those political and cultural changes that would support the growth of a new commercial class, or they

could be interpreted as a pledge to the Indian people as a whole.[1] Such were the contradictions which typified the Indian state, with its apparent compact with business interests and its coinciding responsibility toward ensuring a just, egalitarian society.

By the late sixties, however, tensions began to surface, as plans for industrial growth, agricultural development and social reform met with various problems. Much to the frustration of the local bourgeoisie, the rural classes resisted changes that they perceived to be working against them. Major peasant rebellions emerged and spread throughout the country. The earliest and perhaps most spectacular of these protests was the Naxalite Movement, a series of decentralised revolts, dating roughly from 1967 to 1971, in which tribal and landless peasantry led armed resistances against the landlords and the government.[2] The early seventies also witnessed several riots over food shortages, railway strikes, anti-price agitations along with campaigns protesting violence against women.[3] Significantly, all of these crises constituted a variety of alternative voices which had been effectively silenced during India's transition from colony to nation.

In response to these different movements or implosions, an obviously threatened and disturbed central government reacted with increasingly repressive measures, ultimately declaring a state of emergency in 1975. Headed by Indira Gandhi, the government of India postponed elections and suspended civil liberties, all the while insisting that its

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[1] For a brief history of the early years of post-Independent India, see Rajani Kotari, Democratic Polity and Social Changes in India: Crisis and Opportunities (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1976).

[2] See Sumanta Banerjee, In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement in India (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1980) for a detailed account of this movement.

[3] See the collection of essays in A Space Within the Struggle, ed. Ilina Sen (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990) for some accounts of these struggles. See also Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, Introduction, Women Writing in India: Volume II: The Twentieth Century (New York: The Feminist Press, 1993).

extreme actions were necessary to the maintenance of order and social justice. The various activists from the revolutionary campaigns were among the first to be arrested; hundreds of rebels were imprisoned, several urban settlements were annihilated overnight and the movements were either broken or driven underground. In 1977, the Emergency was finally lifted and elections were held, with the result that, for the first time in Indian history, the Congress Party was voted out of office.

The years that followed thus marked an important turning point in the history of the Indian nation. The late seventies and eighties witnessed the rise of a powerful Indian commercial class in a changing international scene that was increasingly marked by the pressures of a global capitalist economy. In the cultural domain, the decentralisation of state control and the opening up of markets led, paradoxically, to a centralised regime of cultural production. This is particularly noticeable in the massive expansion of the national press as well as in the narrative and visual languages authorised by television and film.[4] The globalisation of markets and the resulting transformation of the Indian state thus required that new identities had to be forged for both state and citizen. The nation, once again, had to be imagined anew.

But, what does it mean to imagine a nation? While political theorists have tried to convince us of the central importance of the nation as a political and economic unit in the modern world, the actual concepts of nation and nationality remain ambiguous. Categories such as race, language and culture are often invoked in order to identify nations; yet, these categories are themselves shifting and unstable. In his provocative and ground-breaking

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[4] See Ashish Rajadhyaksha, "Beaming Messages to the Nation," Journal of Arts and Ideas 19 (May 1990): 33-52 for a discussion of the effect of a multinational world economy on state cultural production, especially in film and television.

book, Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson thus attempts to explain this particular ambivalence inherent in a concept of the nation by putting forth an idea of the nation as an imagined political community. He writes:

> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest of nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. . . . The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. . . . Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. (7)

For students of literature, the implications of Anderson's argument are indeed interesting: the geography of the nation is not only territorial, but also inventive. The nation is not seen simply as a fixed, determinate geographical or sociological structure; rather, it is conceived as a cultural or imaginative construct of a particular kind. Arguably, literary narratives, along with various other artefacts, serve to fashion the nation's identity such that literature is also a politics, playing an important role in the shaping of our society.

To say, however, that the nation is "imaginary" is not to ignore the institutional forces through which national boundaries are made material and enforceable. If nationality is indeed an abstract structure, its concrete manifestations have often been the source of very real oppression and exploitation. Even in its capacity as an organising

discourse enabling a subjugated people to rise up against colonial domination, the nationalist narrative has risked reproducing the same structures of imperialist logic that it initially sought to contest. The invocation of any type of cultural nationalism based on the concept of the nation as an ethnically homogenous object is therefore problematic, especially when one takes into account the sheer heterogeneity of postcolonial cultures. Despite nationalism's declared rupture with the colonial power, the nationalist project more often than not repeats the violence and violation of the colonialist enterprise.

Some of the reasons for nationalism's ultimate failure as a liberatory politics are discussed in Partha Chatterjee's recent study, The Nation and its Fragments, which takes as its theme the emergence of anticolonial nationalism and the postcolonial state in Indian history. In this book, Chatterjee argues that nationalism may be seen as continuous with colonialism to the degree that both of these formulations proclaim their unity by declaring all other subjectivities as fragmentary and subordinate. Both colonialism and nationalism rely on what Chatterjee defines as a certain practice of differentiation. But, while anticolonial resistance began in India by basing itself upon a difference with the imperial order, the postcolonial nation-state eventually consolidated its power by establishing difference with "an arena of subaltern politics over which it must dominate and yet which also had to be negotiated on its own terms for the purposes of producing consent" (13). These subaltern communities, consisting of women, children, religious minorities, tribals and outcastes, were then relegated to a space that was considered peripheral or even alien to the normative codes established by the nationalist narrative.

Postcolonial nationalism may then be seen as operating within a colonialist system of logic wherein the imaginative geography of the nation deals with those spaces whose laws we know and understand as opposed to those other laws which are rendered unintelligible by the regulative power of the nation-state. Chatterjee claims that the aim of nationalism was thus one of cultural normalisation, with the result being that "autonomous forms of imagination of the community were, and continue to be, overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the postcolonial state" (11). The task facing the postcolonial critic is consequently that of tracing the tensions and cross-currents between the hegemonic project of nationalist modernity and the numerous fragmented resistances that this project both encounters and engenders. In effect, we now need to imagine new forms of community that will call into question the universality of the nation-state as the primary model for political and social affiliation. In this thesis, I argue that this labour also demands a thorough rethinking of the categories of race and gender along with a careful reconceptualisation of post-Enlightenment notions of identity and subjectivity.

Taking its lead from Chatterjee's formulation of the nation as a category that establishes itself through a process of differentiation, my present study proceeds to examine certain inscriptions of postcoloniality that fall within the peripheries of the nationalist narrative. These texts include: Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children; Meena Alexander's autobiographical memoir, Fault Lines; and a collection of short stories by the Bengali writer, Mahasweta Devi, entitled Imaginary Maps. Each of these three texts disturb and reconfigure representations of nationhood from a perspective that has been either displaced or disavowed from the boundaries demarcated by the nation-space. In

this sense, these works challenge conventional accounts of nationhood, mobilising instead what I am calling the poetics of displacement. To elaborate, all three texts engage in the profoundly difficult labour of representing and reconstructing subjectivities which have been dislocated by the forced of cultural migration, historical relocation or societal indifference. Accordingly, all three works exhibit a certain critical perspective that has been previously denied by the metropolitan centre. To this extent, the fictional worlds that are depicted in each of these texts offer a critical re-examination of the categories of race, gender and nation. In so doing, they help to chart affiliations that transgress our normative nationalised conceptions of collective and individual identity.

However, if the similarities mentioned above allow us to read these three texts together as representative postcolonial fictions, the three works also need to be differentiated with respect to their specific literary, political and sociohistorical configurations of displacement. For this reason, one of the main purposes of this thesis will be to illustrate the crucial differences that distinguish texts in which displacement figures as a central trope in the construction of a postcolonial sensibility. This particular strategy of reading is deployed to make evident that what is often seen as an unified body of "hybrid" postcolonial literatures emerges from a heterogeneous set of textual practices which are often the products of varying social, cultural and economic contexts. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes, cross-cultural scholarship needs to pay attention to these differences if it is to address "the urgent political necessity of forming strategic coalitions across class, race and national boundaries" (65). Only by doing so, can we conceive of alternative forms of community that see beyond our current exclusionary practices.

I choose to begin this discussion with Rushdie's Midnight's Children both for the reason that this work plays an important role in the inauguration of postcolonial literary studies and for the way in which it reconfigures the space of the nation from the critical perspective of the diasporic imagination. When Rushdie's novel first appeared in 1980, many readers saw his work as emblematic of a newly emerging body of postcolonial fiction. Yet, the exact cultural values coded in such a literature was the source of a dilemma. Some readers interpreted Rushdie's text as symbolising an evolving pluralistic and international culture. Others viewed it as embodying a distinctly national culture or "Indian" style of aesthetics. The particular ambiguities that manifest themselves in Rushdie's text, I suggest, are reflective of his unstable position as a diasporic writer and his resultant project of reconfiguring the nation from the perspective of the migrant.

Writing as an exile and expatriate, Rushdie himself reflects upon the postcolonial diasporic's unique sense of displacement in his book entitled Imaginary Homelands. Here, he reveals how the migrant individual is perpetually haunted by an awareness of his own "discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being elsewhere" (12). Rushdie's fiction may then be viewed as foregrounding an aesthetic in which the experience of displacement following from a process of cultural relocation challenges not only conventional accounts of the nation, but also the structures of hegemony and unilinearity. As a result, Rushdie's text has been interpreted as providing a paradigm for the institutionalisation of postcolonial literatures. But, at the same time, this paper argues that Rushdie's diasporic writing must be read as working within the

strictures of imperialism and modernism such that its conflation of postcolonialism as internationalism complies with the ideological demands of the dominant world order.

Like Rushdie's novel, Alexander's Fault Lines draws upon a postcolonial diasporic vision in order to critique notions of uniform nationalistic identity. Having undergone a series of migrations or cultural relocations, the writing subject of Alexander's text also finds herself mediating between different geographical and literary terrains. However, Alexander's fiction is significantly different from that of Rushdie, since its articulation of displacement is indicative of not only a diasporic imagination, but also a specifically feminist perspective. In fact, while both texts posit hybridity and displacement as crucial aspects of a postcolonial subjectivity, in Rushdie's novel, this hybridity is locked within the grids of a patriarchal world order. By contrast, Alexander's conceptualisation of hybridity seeks to expose the violence not only of imperial rule and national resistance, but also of patriarchal domination. By problematising the uniformity of any single gendered, racialised or nationalistic identity, Alexander's fiction can be seen as partaking in a poetics of difference and displacement. This particular style of writing may be then be attributed to her location within a ground claimed by postcolonial feminism.

While both Rushdie and Alexander represent displacement in terms of a cultural migration, the short stories found in Mahasweta's Imaginary Maps register the displacement or dislocation of India's tribal peoples from within the very boundaries of the nation-space.[5] In fact, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes, the experiences of the migrant artist, political exile or postcolonial intellectual that are variously articulated in the

[5] Following the Bengali custom of referring to public figures by their first name, I use the name Mahasweta throughout this thesis when addressing the works of Mahasweta Devi.

previous two novels are becoming increasingly familiar within the matrices of English cultural studies; by contrast, the work of non-English writers "still linger in postcoloniality and even there in the space of difference on *decolonized terrain*" (Outside 77). Mahasweta's figuration of tribal subalternity as the appropriate site of resistance to a narrative of nationhood, as well as an imperialist history, thus constitutes a critical challenge to current institutional configurations of postcoloniality. By inscribing this particular space of displacement, her fictions then serve to trouble existing paradigms of decolonisation. For this reason, her stories also reveal the lines of complicity between certain formulations of postcolonial theory and an imperialistic world order, thereby exposing the limits of post-Enlightenment categories of knowledge. At the same time, Mahasweta's fictions reveal how an acknowledgement of limits may allow for the kind of critical innovation or epistemological revision needed to think of new forms of community.

The three textual examples that follow are consequently located historically, politically and discursively as a series of rhetorical moves that allow for the elaboration and refinement of our understanding of postcoloniality. Each new example effects a conceptual displacement of the terms deployed by preceding arguments. While Rushdie's articulation of postcolonial identity has served as a model for the canonisation of recent postcolonial literatures, both Alexander's and Mahasweta's texts provide critical points of departure from institutionalised definitions of postcoloniality based upon an unexamined celebration of hybridity that elides serious gender, class and caste questions. In reading these three texts together, then, this thesis aims to disclose the heterogeneity of the

postcolonial subject in an effort to counter an understanding of postcolonial society as either discrete, fixed or homogenous in any way.

The suggestion that the social terrain is open, plural and dynamic then permits us to reconsider our conceptions of cultural hegemony and the way it operates in the modern world. This thesis hopes to suggest that hegemony is not simply a form of political domination, but rather, as Antonio Gramsci has noted in The Prison Notebooks, a dialectical process through which different groups determine the cultural fabric of a society. Thus, while a specific hegemony may be dominant for the moment, it is never absolute or conclusive, since within any hegemonic order there are always communities whose histories are fragmented and whose formulations necessarily exceed the very boundaries of that order. These "subaltern" communities then have the ability to call into question the universality of the dominant power and thereby transform the very composition of a particular society. From this perspective, history itself may be envisaged as a series of displacements or shifts in power relations, since it is based upon a phasic, rather than a teological or progressive, model.

The academic critique of hegemony consequently entails a process of seizing and displacing certain institutional systems of knowledge-production in order to suggest an alternative rhetoric that is more appropriate for our contemporary situation. This process involves what Spivak has described as "an incessant recoding of diversified systems of value" (Outside 61). In moving from what I see as a high modernist to a feminist to a non-English text, my study attempts to effect such a recoding by displacing the centrality of the western, white, male, bourgeois subject whose universality has until recently

avoided the unfolding of the issues of nation, race, gender and class. However, my particular reading strategy is also an attempt to engage in a critique of current forms of identity politics that willingly accept the terms of the dominant logic by organising racial and national diversity into a binary scheme of self and other. This kind of essentialisation of identity, I argue, inevitably reproduces an imperialistic violence to the extent that any unified notion of identity, postcolonial or otherwise, only serves to disenfranchise other non-dominant groups or displaced spaces. Consequently, this thesis rethinks the category of the postcolonial and other related categories such as nation, race and gender as entities whose boundaries are the sites of a dynamic process of contestation and renegotiation.

To rewrite postcoloniality in this manner is to attempt to open up the term to future and readings and revisions from perspectives that it may presently exclude. I write, then, to point toward identities and representations that do not, as yet, exist. That I look to literature and fiction when attempting to think about such "impossible" subjects is also of no small consequence. As Jacques Derrida has argued, literature consists of more than simply traces of a past; it also contains a promise of the future: "Memory stays with traces, in order to 'preserve' them, but traces of a past that has never been present. . . . Resurrection, which is always the formal element of 'truth,' a recurrent difference between a present and its presence, does not resuscitate a past which had been present; it engages the future" (Mémoires 58). From this perspective, the acts of reading and writing are engagements that are profoundly ethical in nature. By making the impossible into a condition of possibility, literature allows one to catch a glimpse of that which lies beyond our present institutions of knowledge and meaning, thereby enabling one to catch a

glimpse of the future. As a powerful critical and imaginative tool, literature can then serve as a basis for political and legal transformation, even as it acknowledges the impossibility of any full political justice. Paradoxically, it is precisely this awareness of the impossible completion of our task that makes the work of the postcolonial critic all the more urgent and necessary; in the end, it is this awareness of the impossibility of full justice, coupled with the enduring need for equity, that paves the way for future work and struggle.

CHAPTER ONE

Writing Diaspora: Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children

Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children has often been celebrated as a text marking the emergence of a new postcolonial aesthetic upon the contemporary literary scene. Yet, since the novel first made its appearance in 1980, the exact measure of the work's postcoloniality has been the source of a dilemma. On the one hand, Rushdie's novel has been read as a national allegory which not only traces the history of post-Independent India, but also initiates a specifically "Indian" form of narrative through its invocation of myth and folklore. On the other hand, it has been acclaimed for its hybrid or "cosmopolitan" outlook and has therefore been placed within an international tradition of high modernist and postmodernist aesthetics.[6] This particular uncertainty regarding the text's precise location is no doubt reflective of Rushdie's own position as a postcolonial diasporic writer who traverses the categories of the national and the international. Accordingly, it is Rushdie's very experience of translocation which allows him to participate in a postcolonial project of challenging the structures of hegemony and unilinearity. By foregrounding a narrative technique that is fragmentary and hybrid in nature, he is able to posit fictions of transit, migrancy and dispersal as opposed to narratives of stable origins. In this way, his writing embodies the poetics of displacement

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[6] For examples of this debate, see Timothy Brennan's Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation; Fawzia Afzal-Khan's Cultural Imperialism and the Indo-English Novel: Genre and Ideology in R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, and Salman Rushdie; and Aruna Srivastava's "The Empire Writes Back: Language and History in Shame and Midnight's Children."

as it fissures the imagined unity of the nation and reimagines the nation-space from the perspective of the diasporic or migrant artist.

In particular, Midnight's Children captures the postcolonial nation in the process of its making, birthed by the idealism, imagination and heterogeneity of its leaders and people. The novel is, above all, the story of Saleem Sinai, who is born along with 1001 other children during the first hour of India's independence from British colonial rule. By virtue of their births, all of the midnight's children possess special magical powers, which in the case of Saleem is mental telepathy. India's new national leaders celebrate the arrival of the children, and Prime-minister Nehru personally writes to Saleem, bestowing upon his life a destiny akin to that of the nation. "You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young," writes Nehru in his letter, "We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own" (143). As a result, Saleem describes himself as "handcuffed to history," realising that his future is "indossolubly chained to that of his country" (3). Having been born at a pivotal moment of Indian history, Saleem consequently claims a certain representational status such that his own life story reads partly as a national allegory.

Indeed, as he writes his autobiography at the age of thirty, Saleem notes that all of the crucial points in his life correspond to nearly all of the main events in India's national history, including the Partition of 1947; Nehru's first Five-Year Plan; the Bombay language riots; the India-China war of 1962; the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965; and the Indian Emergency of 1975 when the Congress government led by Indira Gandhi suspended all civil rights. Thinking that he alone is responsible for the whole of Indian

history, Saleem describes himself as the personification of India itself. He says, "The feeling had come upon me that I was somehow creating a world; that the thoughts I jumped inside were *mine*, that the bodies I occupied acted at my command; that as current affairs, arts, sports, the whole rich variety of a first-cl.. , radio station poured into me, I was somehow *making them happen.*" By the end of the novel, he actually believes that his special mental powers give him the ability not only to see into the minds of others, but also to control their very thoughts and actions. Claiming to be the imaginative source of Indian history, he remarks that he has "entered the illusion of the artist" by thinking of the "multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of [his] gift" (207). By envisioning himself as unifying and encapsulating the whole of India within his own imagination, Saleem therefore partakes in a kind of artistry that embodies the singularity of nationalistic discourse in its form.

However, this vision of coherence that is represented through the unifying power of Saleem's narrative is also continually haunted by alternative images of fragmentation and mutilation, which serve to disrupt space of the nation. In his book entitled Imaginary Homelands, Rushdie attributes his predilection toward a fragmented aesthetic as resulting from his experience of translocation or cultural displacement. He writes:

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge--which gives rise to profound uncertainties--that our physical alienation from India almost

> inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

Persistently haunted by both the desire to construct originary narratives and the knowledge of the impossibility of such an act, the diasporic writer must find an appropriate form for the doubleness that defines him. Hence, the fictions that are born out of the migrant experience often serve to displace an image of the nation by ironically reimagining it from an international perspective.

For this reason, Rushdie describes postcolonial diasporic writers as "wounded creatures" who find themselves perceiving the world through "cracked lenses," since they are "capable only of fractured perceptions." The fictions that they write are equally fragmented so that "meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, and old films" (12). Indeed, this is expressive of Midnight's Children's form, in which some of the most significant events are conveyed to us through either the newspaper headlines, popular film songs or billboard advertisements that we find scattered throughout the text. In the end, the force of fragmentation is so great in this novel that even Saleem believes he is about to crumble into millions of pieces of dust. "I have begun to crack all over like an old jug," he says as he describes to us his "poor body" which has been "buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons," causing him to literally to disintegrate and "com[e] apart at the seams" (37). Accordingly, the narrative is also disjointed and fast-paced, occupying what Homi Bhabha

calls "the incommensurable movement of the present" (153). It is in this way that Rushdie's novel also aims to fracture the idea of the nation by translating it into the space of diaspora and displacement.

Rushdie's fragmented, diasporic vision makes itself evident early on in the novel. The story itself begins in the uncertain territory of Kashmir to where Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, has returned after a long period abroad studying medicine. While Aadam attempts to rediscover the customs of his childhood, he finds himself afflicted by the memories of Germany and the secularism of his Western friends. At this point, Aadam suffers from a loss of identity:

> At one and the same a rebuke from Ilse-Oskar-Ingrid-Heidelberg as well as valley-and-God, it smote him upon the point of the nose. Three drops fell. There were rubies and diamonds. And my grandfather, lurching upright, made a resolve. Stood. Rolled cheroot. Stared across the lake. And knocked forever into that middle place, unable to worship a God in whose existence he could not wholly disbelieve. Permanent alteration: a hole. (6)

It is in this passage, then, that Rushdie describes the original experience of migration as that which forces his characters into an ambiguous and seemingly permanent "middle place." At the same time, this particular space is characterised as a metaphoric exile, since it allows Aadam to belong neither to the Western, secular city of Heidelberg nor to the small Kashmiri village. Migration therefore becomes the source of an ontological as well as an epistemological crisis and is equated with fragmentation, namely "a hole." It is this

vision of fragmentation and dismemberment that then pervades the rest of the narrative, beginning with the perforated sheet through which Aadam first views his wife and ending with the forced sterilisation of the midnight's children during the Indian Emergency.

Yet, as Rushdie maintains in Imaginary Homelands, this fragmentary or disjunctive narrative form is not necessarily the mark of a pessimistic or nihilistic vision. He says, "Having been born across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained" (17). According to Rushdie, the crucial intervention that the diasporic writer makes in the nationalist narrative is in using a fragmented aesthetic as a means of disturbing those myths of origin that are restrictive in the formulation of identity. "Our identity is at once plural and partial," he remarks, "Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy" (15). Functioning as a critical consciousness, the experience of translocation therefore has the ability to make us aware of the links between the different cultures and histories within the modern world. By pointing to the plurality of all self-identities, the diasporic writer exhibits a poetics informed not only by displacement, but also by hybridity.

In Midnight's Children, this hybrid vision manifests itself most obviously in Saleem's mixed parentage. He is the biological son of William Methwold, a departing Englishman, and Vanita, a Hindu woman belonging to the urban poor. However, he is raised by Ahmed and Amina Sinai, and as a result, claims their middle-class Muslim heritage. Furthermore, throughout the novel, various other characters serve as surrogate

parents to Saleem, including the Christian ayah Mary Pereira and the Sikh snake-charmer named Picture Singh. Saleem draws upon each of these identities to fashion his own sense of self and his own narrative. In this way, Saleem's autobiography becomes an amalgamation of several different histories crossing, and sometimes contradicting, one another. As a result, the novel does not present identity simply as the determinate product of a set of given sociological conditions; rather, it is conceived as a cultural or imaginative construct of a particular kind. As such, it is not a fixed entity, but a process which is conditioned to perpetual modification or reformulation. In fact, at the very end of his narrative, Saleem himself remarks, "The process of revision should be constant and endless, don't think I'm satisfied with what I've done!" (549). In this sense, Rushdie can be seen as employing the postcolonial diasporic's hybrid imagination to deconstruct all at once the nationalistic perspectives, normative conceptions of race and ethnicity, narrative closure, generic determination and concepts of truth.

Hence, the particular worth of the experience of displacement lies in its ability to give rise to a critical consciousness that necessarily resists homogenising discourses and absolute concepts of identity. Equally sceptical of colonial domination and the nationalist agenda, the displaced writer exhibits an aesthetic which is marked by doubleness, hybridity and fragmentation. It is a type of artistry that Stuart Hall describes as being grounded in a "dialogic relationship" between "the vector of similarity and continuity" and "the vector of difference and rupture" (395). In calling for an international as opposed to a national perspective, the migrant writer is essentially asking whether or not literatures, as well as persons, can so easily be designated by national or cultural boundaries that typically give

claim to unified notions of identity. As Bhabha says, "Colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities--wandering peoples who will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse are themselves the marks of the shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" (164). Consequently, these postcolonial individuals are able to reconceptualise decolonisation such that it is no longer confined to the nation-space. The diasporic experience and its resulting narratives of displacement are thus able to extend the project of decolonisation to the realm of the international.

However, having said this, the point now needs to be made that while many postcolonial writers and critics often deploy migrancy and hybridity as metonyms for postcolonial resistance, the metaphoric usage of these terms all too frequently elides the substantive political realities of cross-cultural exchange. Observing the increasing demand for the new "cosmopolitan" literatures within Western academic institutions, Timothy Brennan reminds us of the economic and historical forces shaping the production, consumption and dissemination of postcolonial discourses. "In the interplay of class and race," he notes, " the cosmopolitans have found a special home, because they are both capturing a new world reality that has a definite social basis in immigration and international communications, and are at the same time fulfilling the paradoxical expectations of a metropolitan public" ("Cosmopolitans and Celebrities" 9). Following Brennan's line of argument, we must remember that concepts such as displacement and diaspora need to be examined not only in symbolic terms, but also in terms of their precise historical, social and economic bases. This latter method of analysis is in fact crucial for

the critic who seeks to claim postcoloniality both as a rhetorical phenomenon and as a particular strategy of resistance, agency and change.

In order to understand the political implications of Rushdie's novel, it then becomes necessary to situate it in relation to specific developments within Indian history during the colonial and postcolonial periods. In particular, British colonialism in India served to create and establish a certain national intelligentsia which had issued primarily from the upper and middle castes. This national élite belonged to those professions such as administration, law, commerce, journalism and education which were contiguous with the regulatory mechanisms of the colonial state. As the members of this new social class came to acquire power and prestige as mediators between the new imperial power and the indigenous peoples, they learned that their success depended upon their ability to integrate the variously differing cultures within their own personalities. Viewing themselves as the representatives of a newly emerging cosmopolitanism, the members of this national intelligentsia came to symbolise what Aijaz Ahmad has characterised as a "great tradition of bilinguality and polygot ease in communications" (76). In postcolonial India, it was the members of this class who inevitably occupied positions of authority and who were responsible for defining India's national culture through their institutional powers.

Therefore, as Ahmad notes, the typical migrant writer or postcolonial intellectual comes to the metropolitan West from "a *nation* which is subordinated in the imperialist system of intra-state relationships but, simultaneously, from a *class*, more often than not, which is the dominant class within that nation" (12). As a result, the majority of these translocated individuals come not to do manual labour and join the working classes, but to

set up commercial enterprises, to take up managerial positions, to do highly specialised technical work, or to join the professional and academic vocations. And while there is, undeniably, a working-class segment amongst the South Asian diaspora of the West, the cultural rift between this group and the university intelligentsia is significantly large. Furthermore, with new technologies, easily available air travel and improved telecommunications, it has become easier than was ever possible for these postcolonial immigrants to retain links with their home. Conversely, postcolonial intellectuals living in India now have greater access to and visibility within the international sphere. Emerging out of such reorganisations of capital and communications is a new transcontinental partnership between the national intelligentsia within India and the postcolonial diasporic intellectual in the West.

It is not difficult to see that the advent and subsequent institutionalisation of postcolonial studies are themselves, in part, a result of the politics of displacement, namely the rearrangements of capital installed by imperialism and the newly forged relationship between the national and the international that follows from this instalment. As Ahmad writes, "This is the first time large ethnic communities from various ex-colonial countries have gathered in metropolises in such a way that considerable segments are making historically new kinds of demands for inclusion in the salaried, professional middle class and its patterns of education, employment, consumption, social valuation and career advancement" (81). The increasing visibility of minority cultures and literatures has thus led, on the one hand, to the effective questioning of eurocentric canons and imperialist ideologies within western universities, usually under the rubric of postcolonial studies. On

the other hand, the persistent privileging within such institutional networks of the metaphor of exile can be seen as existing in relation to current configurations of capital and communications. With respect to the hegemony of the western scholarly establishment in the production and dissemination of texts, it becomes increasingly urgent to scrutinise theories of postcolonialism and their relation to the larger economic and ideological praxis.

In response to some of these concerns, Arif Dirlik suggests that we look at postcoloniality in terms of its connection to an era of late-capitalism and the particular power structures that this entails. Dirlik asks us to consider the idea of the hybrid, postcolonial diasporic as one who "lives in the borderlands, the literal borderlands of national boundaries as well as the metaphorical boundaries of social categories" (87). But, according to Dirlik, this sense of hybridity felt by the postcolonial individual is not only an ontological condition arising out of the experience of translocation, but also a symptom of the way in which economic and political structures serve to organise the modern world:

> In the age of flexible production, we all live in the borderlands. Capital, deterritorialized and decentred, establishes borderlands where it can move freely, away from the control of states and societies but in collusion with states against societies. . . . Regions within nations, sometimes entire nations, seek to make themselves into free trade zones; free for capital, that is, with those left outside its motions free only to consume the products of capital if they can afford to do so.

> Borderlands take over from centers, and life is to be lived out as one endless conjuncture of different times and different spaces. (87-88)

In light of such an assertion, the aggrandisement of migrancy and internationalism within postcolonial studies and literatures must be re-evaluated. While it is true that theories of hybridity have often sought to resist homogenising or totalising notions of nationalism, more recently it is best to recognise that certain kinds of internationalisms also arise out of the circuits of imperialist capital. Indeed, the new internationalism being inaugurated by postcolonial diasporic literatures must be considered from such a perspective and therefore must be viewed in relation to the forces which manage the production and consumption of this fiction.

Occupying a paradigmatic role in the inauguration of postcolonial literary studies, Rushdie's Midnight's Children serves as an important site of inquiry from which to view the processes of production, dissemination and consumption of postcolonial fictions. In particular, as a text that traverses the boundaries between the national and international, it partakes of the precise historical moment when an old colonialism gives way to a new imperialism. The paradoxical position of Rushdie's text consequently allows it to be both symbolic of an evolving metropolitan pluralism and representative of an emergent national culture. For this reason, the text is acclaimed at once for its mastery of European narrative techniques and for its reproduction of traditional indigenous forms. Accordingly, it appears to inhabit a location that implicates itself equally with postmodernist and postcolonialist formal renovations. Thus, on the one hand, diaspora and displacement enable Rushdie to critique homogenising notions of national identity; on

the other hand, the text's conflation of postcolonialism and internationalism resonates with the ideological demands of its dominant world order.

Consequently, the vision of migrancy and hybridity that Midnight's Children presents cannot simply be interpreted as an idealised plurality. On the contrary, it must be read in relation to the contemporary phenomenon of multinational capitalism and the resulting inequalities that this engenders. As a product of the newly emerging transnational class, the novel's conceptualisations of nationalism, internationalism and postcolonialism, as well as its articulations of class, race and gender, must be located within the strictures of imperialism. This becomes especially evident in the problematic manner in which the novel fashions a modern, urban, male, middle-class Indian identity by displacing a figure of the subaltern woman, who is in turn constructed and reified within the text as the static container of a rural, indigenous traditionalism. In this sense, Rushdie's novel is embedded not only in imperialistic discourses of class and gender, but also in a high modernist aesthetic tradition that is rooted in an imperialist economy.

As Susan Koshy explains in her dissertation entitled 'Under Other Skies': Writing Gender, Nation and Diaspora, a particularly problematic relation between gender and modernity is constructed early on in the novel during a conflict between Aadam Aziz and his new wife Naseem. When Aadam first gazes upon Naseem behind the perforated sheet, she appears beautiful and seductive. However, soon after their marriage, there develops a tension between them when Aadam insults Naseem by demanding that she move more "like a woman" as they make love (32). In this scene, what we see is Aadam confronting Naseem with certain codes of femininity. Naseem's reaction to Aadam's comment is, of

course, a defensive one: she claims a superior moral position for herself by distinguishing her own behaviour from that of "bad" Western women. Aadam quickly re-draws the boundaries of the debate by telling her to "forget about being a good Kashmiri girl" and instead to "start thinking about being a modern Indian woman" (35). In this last instance, India is invoked to signify modernity, but, as Koshy remarks, Aadam's statement "denies a continuity between being Indian and being Kashmiri for a woman" (123). Thus, the novel renders spatial or regional difference as a temporal disjunction by creating an opposition between a modern, urban, Indian identity and what is seen as rural traditionalism.

In effect, what this scene reveals is the way in which the postcolonial nation-state was instrumental in the establishment and enforcement of a new patriarchy based on class and regional distinctions. In her recent book Real and Imagined Women, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan provides a detailed analysis of the methods by which the postcolonial nation secures the kind of patriarchal structure that Rushdie's novel both documents and exemplifies. She explains, in particular, how the emergence of this new patriarchal order involved the construction of the "new Indian woman" through the media and other official national discourses. Sunder Rajan notes that this new image of woman was fashioned such that it was seen as being intrinsically modern and liberated. It was also based upon a pan-Identity that evaded regional, communal and linguistic specificities. As a result, this new conception of identity provided not only an idealised self-image for Indian women, but also a normative model of citizenship. In actuality, however, Sunder Rajan points out that this idea of woman was largely "the class provenance of the upwardly mobile Indian" such that "the image of the 'new Indian woman' is of course derived primarily from the

urban educated middle-class career woman" (130). Consequently, this conception of Indian identity must be seen as grounded within narratives of imperialism and modernity which rely not only on the mythical passivity of the "traditional" Third World woman, but also on an emancipatory belief in capitalism and secularism.

The questions, then, that must be asked of Rushdie's novel are these: to what extent is Rushdie's postcolonial narrative invested in the very structures of imperialism and modernism and their attendant constructions of nation, class and gender? What particular aspect of the text can be seen as lending itself to an appropriation by these eurocentric discourses? And how is it then possible for this novel to enter into the international market at the same time that it is seen to represent a specifically indigenous aesthetics? A clarification of these questions can in fact be provided through an analysis of one of the central metaphors of the text: that of "chutnification." The metaphor of chutnification--the preservative process through which chutneys, or pickles, are prepared in India--is used by Rushdie to describe both his vision of history and a particular method of narration. In this novel, chutnification signifies an Indian art form, as well as hybrid or multicultural style that is cosmopolitan in nature. Chutnification is therefore a metaphor which allows Rushdie's text to mediate between the national and the international, but as we will see, this is a negotiation which ultimately occurs upon and through the body of the subaltern woman.

In Midnight's Children, the story is being narrated by Saleem, of course, as he is sitting in a pickle factory. By day, Saleem watches the female labourers in the factory produce various flavours of chutney; by night, he tells his autobiographical tale to Padma,

one of the workers in this factory. Each segment of Saleem's story corresponds to a specific flavour of pickle. Moreover, these flavours constitute the different chapter headings of the novel such that each flavour coincides with a particular moment of Indian history, as well as with a specific incident in Saleem's life. As a result, the process of chutnification is inextricably connected to a concept of memory and story-telling as preservative functions. Saleem notes while he watches Padma swallowing the palatable pickle: "Green chutney on chilli-pakoras, disappearing down someone's gullet; grasshopper-green on tepid chapatis, vanishing behind Padma's lips. I see them begin to weaken, and press on. 'I told you the truth,' I say yet again, 'Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind'" (253). In this context, the traditional Indian labour of pickling is used to represent a specifically indigenous aesthetic by denoting a process of remembering, recovering and preserving both a personal and a national history through the act of story-telling.

Yet, this invocation of memory through the senses of taste and smell recalls a narrative technique originated by Marcel Proust in his Remembrance of Things Past. By indigenising Proust's Madelaine, Rushdie thus grounds his novel within a tradition of high modernist aesthetics. At the same time, by invoking an assortment of spices and aromas to describe his narrative technique, Rushdie is successful in conveying the idea of an artistry that is fertile, eclectic and excessive such that it is concurrent with contemporary notions of postmodernism. For example, Saleem describes his artistry as reflecting the "intricacies of turmeric and cumin, the subtlety of fenugreek" and "the myriad possible effects of garlic, garam masala, stick cinnamon, coriander, ginger" (549). Through this

evocation of different spices and seasonings, Rushdie is able to use the metaphor of chutnification to connote the diversity and hybridity that internationalism breeds. In this way, Rushdie's novel mediates between the terrains of nationalism and internationalism, allowing its own entry into the international market and, at the same time, sustaining a view of itself as an indigenous art form.

However, Rushdie's reliance on ideas such as hybridity and excess must also be seen as indicative of a larger ideology that developed in relation to a colonial economy. In an imperial economic structure, the élite artist believes that he can draw from a whole range of cultural artefacts from around the globe. Speaking of the vast archive of texts from the Third World that has accumulated in metropolitan universities through such a process, Kumkum Sangari writes:

> Ironically, the 'liberating' possibilities of an international, oppositional, and 'revolutionary' modernism for early twentieth century 'Third World' writers and artists came into being at a time when modernism was itself recuperating the cultural products of non-western countries largely within the aesthetic of the fragment. The modernism they borrowed was already deeply implicated in their own history, being based partly on random appropriation and remodeling of the 'liberating' and energizing possibilities of their own indigenous 'traditions.' Not only have the critical practices which have developed around modernism been central to the development of an assimilative bourgeois consciousness, a powerful absorptive medium for transforming colliding

> realities into a cosmopolitan, nomadic, and pervasive 'sensibility,' but the freewheeling appropriations of modernism also coincide with and are dependent on the rigorous documentation, inventory, and reclassification of 'Third World' cultural products by the museum/library archive. (182)

Modernism, postmodernism and now postcolonialism, as they exist, all participate in the accumulative process described above. Moreover, this process and the resulting archive of the third world are inconceivable without the political and economic relations of imperialism.

Making a similar point, Ahmad states that "the project of mining resources and raw material of Third World literature for archival accumulation and generic classification" is best seen as belonging to "a late age of capitalism in which the most powerful capitalist firms, originating in particular imperialistic countries but commanding global investments and networks of transport and communication, proclaim themselves nevertheless to be *multi*nationals and *trans*nationals" (130). In this sense, Rushdie's multicultural aesthetic must also be seen as rooted in an imperialist and high modernist culture. From this perspective, the metaphor of chutnification is synonymous to what Ahmad describes as an idea based upon "the availability of all cultures of the world for consumption by an individual consciousness" (128). In its fixation with excess, migrancy and mobility, Rushdie's novel further betrays an affiliation to the philosophies inherent in the kind of multinational economy that Ahmad describes above.

However, the fact that the kind of mobility and migrancy that Rushdie celebrates is often enabled by a category of subaltern peoples exploited and burdened by the current global economy is something which is entirely overlooked by most critics of this novel. This particular evasion is made clear, once again, by examining the metaphor of chutnification itself. In this novel, the figure of the subaltern is represented by Padma, the illiterate working woman who labours to produce the chutneys and whose labour is then appropriated by Saleem for the construction of his autobiography. It is therefore by displacing Padma's narrative, while appropriating her labour, that Saleem is ultimately able to fashion his autobiography along with his own self-identity. Significantly, Padma's representation is constructed in such a manner that she functions as a mark of difference both in terms of an international élite and in terms of a hybrid Indian middle-class.

In fact, from the very beginning, Padma is seen in terms of an opposition to Saleem. She signifies the rural and the local, while Saleem inhabits the cosmopolitan world of Bombay. Her "ignorance and superstition" thus serve as "necessary counterweights" to Saleem's own "miracle-laden omniscience" (177). And while Saleem is impotent, Padma is construed within the text through a set of sexually overdetermined imageries: she is "plump Padma . . . but definitely a bitch-in-the-manger. She stirs a bubbling vat all day for a living; something hot and vinegary has steamed her up tonight. Thick of waist, somewhat hairy of forearm, she flounces, gesticulates, exits" (21). In this sense, Padma is constructed as a figure of alterity in terms of caste, gender and region. Thus, the representations of Padma provide a fixed and immovable binary point of

departure from where Saleem can define himself as the privileged site of hybridity. She is the stable, riveted anchor whose very stasis that allows for Saleem's own mobility:

> How I admire the leg-muscles of my solicitous Padma! There she squats, a few feet from my table, her sari hitched up in fisher-woman fashion. Calf-muscles show no sign of strain; thigh-muscles, rippling through sari-folds, display their commendable stamina. Strong enough to squat forever, simultaneously defying gravity and cramp, my Padma listens unhurriedly to my lengthy tale; O mighty pickle-woman! What reassuring solidity, how comforting an air of permanence, in her biceps and triceps. (325)

While at first Saleem may appear to disavow any discourse which allows the reader to construct a stable identity of himself, the reification of class, gender and ethnicity through an image of Padma only serves to reinscribe the same discursive strategies that he painstakingly deconstructs elsewhere.

Furthermore, the character of Padma is used throughout Rushdie's novel as a framing device. On the one hand, she is a figure for the reader, asking questions that allow Saleem's tale to continue. In this capacity, she is also an auditor whose comments and criticisms are incorporated into the story. On the other hand, Padma's own narrative is never allowed to enter into the text. In fact, when Saleem recalls the story of his ayah, Mary Pereira, the curious Padma strongly identifies with this character and subsequently urges Saleem to reveal more about Mary's life. Saleem, on the other hand, feels outraged that Padma should take more interest in Mary's story than in his. Consequently, he

forecloses a disclosure and decides rather hastily that he will be "making no more revelations tonight" (338). This gesture suggests Padma's tangentiality within the text. Even though her contributions appear to be crucial to the unfolding of the novel, in the end, they do little to challenge Saleem's authority in any significant way. The hierarchical relationship that is developed between the two thus serves to undermine Padma's role as reader and critic. Ultimately, Saleem's reliance on Padma is a simply a matter of assertion, since her own responses only serve to legitimate and authenticate Saleem's narrative.

The power to shape and give meaning to events is retained by Saleem. Historical production remains within the confines of an essentially patriarchal and patrilineal model, wherein continuities and legacies are established primarily through the men in the novel. While Padma appears to be the initial receptor of this tale, ultimately it is Saleem's son, Aadam Sinai, who inherits the fiction. As a result, it is the son who represents not only the future of the family line, but also the future of India as " a member of the second generation" and "a second mirror" to Saleem's own self-identity (534). The appearance of the son at the end of the novel thus ensures that Saleem's story will continue to be told even in the next generation, and this gives Saleem comfort during the last days of his life.

Such a reading of the representation of the subaltern woman in relation to the kind of middle-class male hybridity that is constructed within Midnight's Children calls for a reconsideration, and perhaps even a revisioning, of the category of postcoloniality itself. One of the most important and notable contributions of postcolonial theory, as it has been constituted in Western academies, is its persistent critique of monologic discourses and totalising notions of identity. Much of the work in this area has indeed been instigated by

displaced or diasporic writers such as Rushdie, who because of their experience of translocation, have learned what it means to live with multiple, and often contradictory, notions of the self. As Kumkum Sangari notes, "The hybrid writer is already open to two worlds and is constructed within the national and the international, political and cultural systems of colonialism and neocolonialism. To be hybrid is to understand and question as well as to represent the pressure of such historical placement" (181). As a powerful critical tool, the diasporic or transcultural consciousness consequently has the ability to deconstruct restrictive notions of race and ethnicity, pointing instead to the way in which all identities are interrelated, interdependent and subject to constant change.

However, one of the difficulties surrounding the institutionalisation of postcolonial theories and literatures has been the tendency to privilege translocation as the only site of heterogeneity. To quote Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A conflation of migrancy with post-coloniality lets drop the vicissitudes of decolonization and ignores the question: Who decolonizes?" (afterword, Imaginary Maps 202). In other words, if migrancy and translocation are taken to demarcate the entire experience of postcoloniality, then what we have is simply the creation of another universal narrative, in which a singular discourse becomes so expansive that international imbalances of power remain effectively blurred. For this reason, Midnight's Children's current position as a postcolonial classic is questionable, since its privileging of migrancy and internationalism occur at the expense of other important local subjectivities. This aspect of the novel all too often goes unnoticed in the case of Rushdie's novel, since is easily mimes and reinforces the stance of the postcolonial critic, displaced as he or she is likely to be in the Western academy.

The task of representing some of these alternative postcolonial subjectivities is the aim of the texts considered within the next two chapters. Alexander's Fault Lines interrogates Rushdie's delineation of postcoloniality from a feminist perspective, while Mahasweta's Imaginary Maps attempts to do the same from the viewpoint of the subaltern. Consequently, both Alexander and Mahasweta proceed to install what Sunder Rajan calls a "resisting subject" within the pages of their fiction. According to Sunder Rajan, such a subject is "one who will be capable of the agency and enabling selfhood of the 'active' earlier subject, while at the same time acknowledging the politics of difference" (11). The act of generating and installing new, more complex and necessarily contingent subject positions may then be interpreted as an act of political appropriation such that the feminist and subaltern identities that I have located within the texts comprising the following chapters are not only strategic interventions, but also scenarios of change within the dominant and critical discourses of nation, race and gender.

CHAPTER TWO

Feminist Revisions: Meena Alexander's Fault Lines

In Meena Alexander's Fault Lines, the terms of feminism and diaspora offer a critical interstitial location from which the masculinist narratives of identity and nation are dismantled so that new forms of consciousness and community may be re-envisioned. Traversing India, North Africa, England and America, the writing subject of Alexander's autobiographical novel finds herself mediating between different cultures and geographies, the result being that "home" in this novel comes to signify a rather tenuous or precarious position no longer locatable in any one place. From this perspective, Alexander's Fault Lines provides an interesting comparison to Rushdie's Midnight's Children. Both texts emerge from a personal experience of migration such that their narrative styles are fragmentary, disruptive, multilingual and palimpsestic. Like Rushdie, Alexander expresses herself through a rhetoric of dismemberment and dislocation, viewing the world through the lenses of diaspora and challenging notions of cultural hegemony. To this extent, both Rushdie and Alexander can be seen as invoking the idea of displacement in order to critique an uniform nationalistic identity and also to construct a postcolonial sensibility.

However, while both authors contest myths of origin by foregrounding the hybrid quality of postcolonial histories, in Rushdie's novel the relationships that engender this hybridity are ultimately situated within a patriarchal structure such that cosmopolitanism is viewed as solely belonging to a male subjectivity. Women in Rushdie's text are represented in terms of a static or immutable traditionalism that can only be recorded as the sign of the unrepresentable. For this reason, Midnight's Children must be understood

as operating within the confines of a certain logic of identification in which subjectivity is accorded to a male, middle-class positionality by specifically excluding or erasing the body of the subaltern woman. Thus, despite its intentions, Rushdie's novel works to reinscribe the formula of the nation and to preserve the violence and violation of imperialism through the reification of gender, class, caste and ethnic identities.

The underlying difference between Alexander's and Rushdie's narrative styles lies in their respective treatment of identity and character development. Like Rushdie's novel, Alexander's memoir is structured through memory: the memory of places, of feelings attached to childhood experiences and of relationships with family and friends. But while Rushdie's invocation of memory ultimately functions to ossify events and identities, Alexander's work resists all such tendencies by insisting upon both a politics and poetics of difference. Although Alexander's text is a memoir or autobiography of sorts, it does not proceed in terms of the kind of narrative development that traces an unified subject's progress toward a clear and stable sense of identity. Rather, the text defies the core values of an aesthetic realism based on a mimetic notion of art or writing. Often broken and disrupted, Alexander's text combines autobiographical fragments, biographical elements, photographs, essays and poems in a discontinuous narrative. Consequently, Fault Lines troubles literary categories and conventions by blurring generic boundaries and unsettling the authority of any single discourse.

Alexander's work also challenges the reduction of racial and gender categories. Unlike Rushdie's novel, Alexander's work continually thwarts the reader's desire to construct an abstract notion of either gender or ethnicity. Bearing the multiple inscriptions

of woman, postcolonial and racial minority, Alexander's narrator positions herself at the junctures of various intersecting social categories or "fault lines." The novel consequently articulates a concept of self in which the metaphors of race, gender, sexuality and geopolitical dislocation are simultaneously invoked to describe an individual marked by heterogeneous impulses and desires. In this way, Alexander problematises the uniformity of any single gendered, racialised or nationalistic identity, thereby exhibiting a feminist and postcolonial aesthetic of displacement, which is able to expose the violence of not only imperial rule and national resistance, but also patriarchal domination. Alexander's reconceptualisation of racial and gender categories, then, acquires a double edge: she insists on grounding her writing on these missing categories of inquiry at the same time that she questions the modalities of analysis which appeal to these terms.

The complexity of Alexander's project emerges, in part, from her location within a ground claimed by what may be identified as postcolonial feminism. In her seminal essay "Under Western Eyes," Chandra Talpade Mohanty defines some of the main tasks of a postcolonial feminist critique. In particular, she criticises Western feminism's tendency to "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world" (197). In response to what she identifies as Western feminism's construction of Third World women as singular, monolithic subjects or cultural others, Mohanty calls for a "mode of local, political analysis which generates theoretical categories from within the situation and context being analysed" (208). Following from Mohanty's work, an increasing number of critics are now beginning to emphasise the important links between feminisms and postcolonialisms by mapping the inextricable

relations between national, racial, gender and class oppressions.[7] All of these writers emphasise the fact that one's affiliations are necessarily multiple and contingent. Postcolonial feminism thus calls for a kind of analysis in which we attempt to understand the complexities inherent in women's self-locations such that accurate theoretical models, along with effective political actions, may be devised for each of our particular situations.

That Alexander's writing emerges out of a commitment to postcolonial feminism becomes evident within the context of her autobiography. Throughout her novel, she locates herself within a community of feminist and postcolonial writers, scholars and activists, including: Audre Lorde, Claribel Alegria, Sarojini Naidu, Susie Tharu, Gauri Viswanathan and Kamala Das. In many senses, Alexander looks to these women as providing both the impulse that motivates the writing of her autobiography and the community that eventually receives her work. For example, reflecting upon a time when she was given the opportunity to listen to a poetry reading by Kamala Das, she writes, "I think that poem was within me when I looked backwards to my grandmothers, forward to my son and daughter" (75). By defining herself through a commitment to a particular feminist and postcolonial struggle, she thus escapes from being trapped within an essentialist notion of identity based upon homogeneous national, racial or gender categories. Instead, her subjectivity is represented as a site of constant negotiation of both

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[7] I am using the term postcolonial feminism to describe the kinds of critique undertaken by writers such Gayatri Spivak, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Kumkum Sangari. While the perspectives of these individual writers are diverse, they all share a common interest in theorising the simultaneity of gender, racial, national and class oppressions. More recently, the work of theorists such as Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis have also extended our understanding of the way in which gender and racial experiences are tied to the institutions of sexuality. The struggle to generate appropriate critical models to account for this complexity is what binds all of these writers together and also what allows for their appropriation into both feminist and postcolonialist discourses for the purposes of this chapter.

the personal and the political. For this reason, her writing is also perpetually shifting, metamorphosing and thus embodying what I am calling the poetics of displacement.

Alexander's novel opens with a particularly self-reflexive moment, as she describes to us the situation under which her book was first conceived. It all began, she recalls, when a woman friend asked her to write a memoir to be published by a feminist press. In response to this request, Alexander begins a process of self-examination:

> What might it mean to look at myself, see myself? How may different gazes would that need? And what to do with the crookedness of flesh, thrown back at the eyes? The more I though about it, the less sense any of it seemed to make. . . . That's it, I thought. That's all I am, a woman cracked by multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times she can connect nothing with nothing. Her words are all askew. And so I tormented myself on summer nights, and in the chill wind of autumn, tossing back and forth, worrying myself sick. (2-3)

For Alexander, the kind of analysis or reflection that the act of writing entails effects a certain emotional and conceptual displacement. Suddenly, she feels as if she has become dislodged from a place where she once "felt safe" to one where she now feels unsure as to whether she is "sinking or swimming" (1). In order to ease this feeling of dislocation, Alexander attempts to construct a fictional space that bestows upon her a sense of comfort and belonging. She calls this space a "homeland, a sheltering space in the head" (193). In effect, she begins to fabricate a point of origin from where she can situate herself.

At first, the form that Alexander's account of her origins takes is that of a postcolonial and feminist historiography. For instance, she returns to her childhood home in Tiruvella, a small town in Kerala located on the west coast of India. Here, she finds comfort and shelter in the gardens of her youth, which she sees as composing "the dark soil of self" (23). As she traces and records her own family history, she creates for herself a specifically postcolonial history by positioning herself in relation to a homeland through certain family linkages. In a similar fashion, Alexander attempts to delineate for herself a type of feminist genealogy by claiming a site of genesis in her mother and by finding continuity in the story of her foremothers. She writes, "I was born out of my mother, and her mother before her, and her mother, and her mother, and hers. Womb blood and womb tissue flowing, gleaming, no stopping" (21). Likewise, she recalls how her mother's "large belly" provided her and her sisters with their "first home" (24). In this way, she is able to compensate for her feelings of dislocation as a woman who has been uprooted from her geographical home as a consequence of colonialism's aftermath.

However, as soon as Alexander constructs her originary narratives, she is beset by certain anxieties, realising that behind each nostalgic memory lies a history of oppression. She admits that her ideal pictures of Kerala and her mother serve only to confer a false sense of legitimacy. They are not only fictions, but also the products of a restrictive desire. Moreover, their constant efforts to imitate their own idealisations can never be finally or fully achieved. Recognising the specific repressions that were required by her previous claims to an unified history, she now writes:

> In the inner life coiled within me, I have sometimes longed to be a bud on a tree, blooming in due session, the tree trunk well rooted in a sweet, perpetual place. But everything I think of is filled with ghosts, even this longing. This imagined past--what never was--is a choke hold. I sit here writing, for I know that time does not come fluid and whole into my trembling hands. All that is here comes piecemeal. (3)

In this passage, Alexander expresses the inadequacy of any singular or fixed history to convey the complexity of her present being. For this reason, she turns toward the poetics of displacement in order to express the dissonances within her own psyche. In so doing, she troubles the very borders and boundaries of identity, writing herself instead as the site of an active and constant struggle.

Consequently, Alexander's autobiography effects a type of double movement such that it constructs originary narratives, but also breaks them down. Alexander herself becomes aware of her double vision, admitting that "sometimes [she] is torn apart by two sorts of memories, two opposing ways of being towards the past" (29). On the one hand, she feels as if she is living a life of certainty: one which is scripted or "already written, already made" (30). On the other hand, she notes that there are moments when she feels as if she "has no home, no fixed address, no shelter" (30). During these times, she is a "nowhere creature" (30). She sees herself as the site of a contradiction, thereby calling into question the possibility of any coherent, historically continuous and stable identity. Realising the fictive or illusionary nature of any concept of home, she shows instead that identity is always shifting and transitional. While Alexander may have begun by

constructing originary narratives, in the end, her fiction questions the ability of normative criteria such as nation, race or gender to provide an adequate basis for self-positioning.

In this context, Alexander's memoir exhibits what Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have described as a familiar tension found in the autobiographies written by women who cannot easily assume a particular home within any one community. They explain that in these narratives, the contradiction between "being home" and "not being home" becomes apparent in each location that the autobiographical subject. This, then, works "against the notion of an unproblematic geographic location of home" (196). Each station of the narrative becomes a site of political and personal struggle, yielding the realisation that "home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself" (196). To Martin and Mohanty, the very nature of women's personal history demands a series of successive displacements such that each new position generates both an analysis and a deconstruction, although not necessarily a repudiation, of identity. In this manner, the experience of displacement inevitably entails a transformative rewriting of oneself with respect to shifting contexts.

For a brief moment, this new understanding of identity as transitional and transmutable affords Alexander a sense of freedom. She writes, "My voice splintered in my ears into a cacophony: whispering cadences, shouts, moans, the quick delight of bodily pleasure, all rising up as if the conditions of being fractured had freed the selves jammed into my skin" (2). For if identity is not fixed, but always shifting and mutable, thinks Alexander, then surely it can be voluntarily made or unmade. However, as Alexander

contemplates these initially liberating ideas, she soon comes to understand the limits of her newly acquired freedom, namely the capacity of the law to produce and secure for every body a gendered and racialised position:

> I can make myself up and this is the enticement, the exhilaration, the compulsive energy of America. But only up to a point. And the point, the sticking point, is my dark female body. I may try the voice-over bit, the words-over bit, the textual pyrotechnic bit, but my body is here, now, and cannot be shed. No more than any other human being can shed her or his body and still live. (202)

Similarly, she notes that ethnicity "comes into being as a pressure, a violence" so that it "is and is not fictive" (202). Alexander thus acknowledges the complexity of racial and gender categories, especially the contradictory sense in which their boundaries are elastic and yet constraining.

The difficult and often contradictory process though which racial and gender identities come into being is explicitly staged in a section of the novel called "Kerala Childhood." Here, Alexander narrates a particular moment of gender and racial consciousness that serves as a formative incident in her life. In particular, the narrative provides us with an account of an especially memorable encounter between the five-year old Alexander and her paternal grandmother. As soon as the grandmother arrives for her visit, Alexander is forced to leave the garden where she is playing; she must clean herself off and appear presentable in front of her grandmother who is described as embodying

"the whole of beauty" (49). It is at this point that the grandmother proceeds to deliver an unforgettable speech to the young girl:

> Never forget the pure blood that flows in your veins. . . . The point is you are so dark. You take after your mother's side in that. . . . Look child, you are dark enough as it is. How will you ever find a husband if you race around in the sun? Now it's time to stop and do a little embroidery and let one of the maids plait your hair properly. See how terribly dry it is? Let her braid those velvet ribbons into it. She placed two dark velvet ribbons in my hand. I trembled with pleasure, in sheer surprise. Her words never left me. (49-50)

Alexander notes that her grandmother's speech confers a certain racial awareness upon her: she feels, by her grandmother's side, "a different race altogether" (49). At the same time, the speech confers a particular gender awareness. Alexander writes, "I had to learn how to grow up as a woman. I had to learn my feminine skills, labor hard to grab on to what beauty I could" (50). It is in this way, then, that the psychic force of social regulation is brought to bear upon her life.

A few things are of particular importance in Alexander's account of her racial and gender awareness. Firstly, it is crucial to note the way in which racialised norms are not only existing alongside gender norms, but are articulated through one another. As Teresa de Lauretis explains, these systems of oppression are "not parallel but . . . interlocking and mutually determining" (134). For instance, according to the grandmother's words, the guarantee of racial purity can only be secured through the enforcement of certain gender

ideals within the strictures of marriage and the institutions of heterosexuality. Significantly, it also requires the idealisation of bourgeois family life. Because it is no longer possible to make sexual and racial difference into fully separable axes, Alexander's subsequent experiences of race and gender are also imbricated by one another.

The second important fact to note about Alexander's experience of racial and gender consciousness is the way in which this awareness is brought about by a particular repetition or rehearsal of heterosexual norms. The grandmother's recitation of heterosexual norms, of course, is only one example of the many performances of race and gender that Alexander endures in her life. These performances range from Alexander's early experiences of her grandfather's tales, in which the punishments of non-conforming women take the shape of a liturgy, to the highly ritualised ceremonies of marriage and childbirth. Each case serves as a process of socialisation or acculturation through the inscription of a gendered and racialised body. Accordingly, Judith Butler notes that the categories of race and gender are themselves manifestations of certain "highly regulatory practices" through which an ideal is "forcibly materialized through time" (1). For this reason, Butler calls race and gender "performative" categories set into motion through "the forced reiteration of norms" (94). In this sense, the categories of race and gender impel a certain performativity, which is not simply free play, as Alexander had at first imagined, but is itself a constitutive constraint.

That the institution of heterosexuality is instrumental in the enforcement of gender and racial norms is perhaps best demonstrated through Alexander's own discussion of marriage within the text. On the one hand, Alexander notes how marriage signifies a

fulfilment of a particular gender norm associated with an idealised and romanticised concept of home. She even admits, "I have imagined being a dutiful wife, my life perfect as a bud opening in the cool monsoon winds, then blossoming on its stalk of the gulmohar tree, petals dark red, falling onto the rich soil outside my mother's house in Tiruvella" (2). On the other hand, the novel also figures marriage as a parting or a condition of exile. Alexander writes, "For a woman, marriage makes a gash. It tears you from your original home" (23). In effect, what Alexander seems to imply is that the heterosexual institution of marriage confers gender identity at the same time that it estranges women from aspects of their own sexualities. It is therefore a ritual of purification through which identification comes only at the cost of certain repressions, exclusions or denials. In this context, any achievement of identity that takes place within the gendered and racialised matrices of heterosexuality must also be doubled by its very loss.

However, if such rituals as marriage and childbirth entail a particular loss for Alexander, then it is the act of writing which is able to recover and represent, through parodic repetition, this loss without necessarily reifying it. In fact, in the chapter entitled "Crossing Borders," Alexander herself notes that her poetry seems to obsessively repeat the patterns of loss experienced during her first sea voyage from India to North Africa. "That moment of parting," she tells us, "repeated time and again as we returned to Tiruvella, only to leave again, became my trope of loss" (63). Accordingly, Alexander's style of writing brings about a certain loss of the subject as it is defined in language: she notes, "Sometimes I think I write to evade the names they have given me" (73). While this loss may appear detrimental to names and identities, it registers within the text as a

constant disturbance of meaning by means of a heterogeneous otherness. In many ways, then, Alexander's poetics of loss and estrangement can be likened to a process of displacement that continually exceeds and interrupts the fixity of the self.

This language of loss and displacement, moreover, works against the ossification of concepts and identities such that the process of writing constitutes for Alexander a praxis of transformation. For this reason, Alexander believes that the "disclosures that a writing life commits one to" are quite the contrary to "the reticence that femininity requires" (113). Indeed, for Alexander, the process of writing involves a type of revelation, which is at the same time a transgression of normative social categories. Similarly, she remarks that "there was a connection between how I came to use language and what it meant to be cast out, unhoused" (113). As such, the act of writing is metaphorically connected to cultural displacement or the crossing of geopolitical borders.

This crossing of borders is then further linked to a certain bodily experience: "Somehow, in my mind's eye, the crossing of borders is bound up with a loss of substances, with the distinct pain of substantial loss: the body that is bound over into death, with the body that splits open to give birth" (140). In this sense, the act of writing comes to signify for Alexander a crossing of borders which implies a particular inscription of the body as a figure of loss; yet, this inscription also implies a certain transgression of bodily constraints. She writes, "I felt for an instant as if I had metamorphosed, become another thing. . . . [M]y life split, then doubled itself, in a terrible concupiscence" (63). In this way, Alexander engages in a feminist and postcolonial poetics of displacement that

emerges, paradoxically, from Alexander's experience of dislocation and also from her conscious disruption of those borders that serve to instil this feeling of dislocation.

Furthermore, Alexander's figuration of writing itself as loss marks the very incommensurability of the writing subject to any categorical ideal. In fact, while the text mimics the repetition of hegemonic forms power through its own ritualised telling of her life's experiences, it constantly reminds us of the ways in which it fails to do so loyally. For instance, Alexander says, "But the house of memory is fragile; made up in the mind's space. Even what I remember best, I am forced to admit that what has flashed up for me in the face of present danger, at the tail end of the century, where everything is to be elaborated, spelt out, precariously constructed" (4). In this way, Alexander's autobiography resists the tenets of an aesthetic realism based on a mimetic notion of art, effecting what Bhabha has described as the "distanciation and displacement between the event and its spectators" (243). As a result, meaning and utterance become estranged in this text, marking the radical distance between signifier and signified so that Alexander's subjectivity is always the site of an aporia.

It may even be that Alexander's autobiographical writing emerges from this essentially catachrestic experience. In fact, as a genre, autobiography is marked by the oscillatory movement between typicality and particularity such that the autobiographical subject signifies a self who is at once singular and general. For this reason, Nancy K. Miller identifies the autobiographical act as that which stages a "crisis over representativity" (20). In other words, it dramatises the contradictions inherent in conceiving oneself as replaceable example and as irreducible being. As a singular moment,

the autobiographical act cannot be subsumed under any totality and therefore it can be seen as reflecting the very singularity of individual experience. And yet, as Alexander herself remarks, "The literal is always discrepant, a sharp otherness to what the imagination conjures up as it blends time, emotions, heartbeats" (31). From this latter perspective, the autobiographical narrative bears a discontinuity with individual experience, which in turn may be conceived as marking the very limits of autobiography. In this sense, the motivating impulse behind Alexander's writing may be seen as paradoxically emerging out of the productive crisis that is generated between experience and its representation through writing.

Following this line of argument, we can postulate that it is the felt experience of dislocation that occasions Alexander's self-reflection in the form of an autobiography. To this extent, her novel can also be said to foreground the contradictions of an identity logic that subscribes to a developmental narrative. As a text that continually asks the writing subject to reconsider and recast its own relation to itself, it is a narrative that is marked by the fissures or "fault lines" of its own narration. The various linguistic discrepancies, displacements and excesses within this text may then be interpreted as indicative of what de Lauretis has called an "eccentric discursive position" to describe a subject who exhibits "resistance to identification rather than unachieved identification" (127). In this sense, Alexander may be viewed as participating in a kind of poetics in which displacement signifies the disjuncture between meaning and being. In effect, Alexander's poetics exposes the incommensurability of forms to their referents--an incommensurability which also must mark a certain critical distance.

Alexander's writing thus effects a defamiliarisation, or what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have termed "deterritorialization" to describe a particular type of discourse that has the potential to "express another potential community, to force the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (188). By disclosing the impossibility of any fictional totality, the text engages in a critique of individual and social equivalence, disclosing not only the colonised subject's antagonism to empire, but also the racialised subject's discontinuity with the state; the gendered subject's resistance to the strictures of heterosexuality; and finally the writing subject's unstable relation to its own language. In Alexander's own words, hers is the kind of writing that is "dangerous" in its efforts to "rupture the fine skin of decorum, threaten hierarchy, the accustomed flow of the household, even public order" ("Piecemeal Shelter" 621). Indeed, in its resistance to any single discourse, Alexander's writing has the ability to trouble not only normative social categories, but also the literary categories upon which canonisations depend.

Yet, according to Jacques Derrida, every text participates in one way or another in the act of generic coding. Despite even Alexander's attempt to resist generic classification, her text can be and, in fact, is being classified during this very moment. For this reason, Derrida asks, "Can one identify a work of art, of whatever sort, but especially a work of discursive art, if it does not bear the mark of genre, if it does not signal or mention it or make it remarkable in any way?" ("The Law of Genre" 211). This is a particularly important question to ask of a text such as Alexander's, since it is a text that seems not to be written within the limits of any one genre, but rather to be written with the aim of disrupting the very limits of genre. Thus, Alexander's text self-consciously dramatises the

way in which all texts participate in one or several genres, and yet how this participation never amounts to full belonging. In this sense, Alexander's text ironically stages its own failure to be subsumed by any categorical ideal.

In doing so, however, the text also presents a critical problem for the emergent fields of postcolonial and feminist studies, particularly in relation to the way in which its deconstruction of race and gender seems to contradict an identity politics which has served as the basis for the majority of feminist and antiracist movements. The question must be raised: if we refuse to affirm a specifically feminist or postcolonial subject, then how do we provide valid grounds for claiming agency on behalf of subjugated groups? And yet, I would like to suggest that while Alexander's conception of the subject may be the site of a contradiction, it also has the potential for critical innovation. In particular, the text's critique of identity questions the extent to which a notion of unified feminist or postcolonialist membership does risk in reproducing the power structures of an imperialist system of logic. As Martin and Mohanty note, by unreflectingly affirming an identity politics, we are in fact participating in the same practices of "exclusions and repressions which support the seeming homogeneity, stability, and self-evidence of 'white identity,' which is derived from and dependent on the marginalization of differences within as well as without" (193). For this reason, I am suggesting, via Alexander, that the understanding of both feminist and postcolonial communities must be reformulated in order to incorporate and express a set of individual experiences whose constant renegotiation of both the personal and political domains require that the boundaries of their communities

must also be continually shifting. In this sense, communities must be defined on the basis of active, political struggle rather than on an essential notion of identity.

What is required of a feminist and postcolonial theoretical model is therefore not a commitment to any simple version of identity politics, but rather what Donna Haraway calls "a commitment of mobile positioning" (192). In this context, the deconstruction of gender and racial categories must not be seen as a bankruptcy within feminist and postcolonial political theories. Instead, it should be viewed as the kind of critical position which has the ability to generate complex subject positions as well as new coalitional strategies. As Karen Caplan notes, "The challenge at this particular time is to develop a discourse that responds to the power relations of the world system" since "any other strategy merely consolidates the illusion of marginality while glossing over or refusing to acknowledge centralities" (189). This particular approach to feminist and postcolonial theory thus involves a kind a self-displacement: what de Lauretis has described as the "leaving or giving up [of] a place that is safe, that is 'home,' physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically--for another place that is unknown and risky" (138). But while such a displacement may involve an initial uncertainty or indeterminacy, it is currently the only method of thinking about change that allows us to rewrite the connections between different parts of the world, as well as between the different aspects of the self. Only in this way can we begin to be able to imagine new forms of consciousness and community which are less exclusionary than our existing models.

In moving from a discussion of Alexander's feminist aesthetics to a consideration of Mahasweta's subaltern politics, this thesis therefore once again attempts to usher us

away from the comfort of any "safe" location to one that is necessarily "risky." Unlike Rushdie and Alexander who critique the category of the nation from a position that is located geographically outside of its borders, Mahasweta fractures the nationalist narrative from a perspective that has been displaced from within its very boundaries. In Mahasweta's works, displacement functions to indicate not simply the kind of nomadic imagination brought about by cultural migration, but the very real violences and dislocations that are suffered by Indian tribal peoples as a result of ecological degradation. In the end, Mahasweta's inscriptions of subalternity function to unmask the inextricable relations between knowledge and power, thereby exposing the way in which any global formulation of identity operates by proclaiming epistemic privilege over other local and often incommensurable knowledges. To this extent, Mahasweta's text helps not only to interrogate normative notions of nation, race and gender that are constructed by a metropolitan culture, but also to critique the very methods of postcolonial theory when it finds itself allied with that centre. As such, the following chapter marks the limits of a particular discourse of postcoloniality at the same time that it opens up this discourse to new readings and new revisions.

CHAPTER THREE

Subaltern Politics: Mahasweta Devi's Imaginary Maps

In a critique of metropolitan culture, the historical transition from colony to nation is frequently presumed to enact a complete transfiguration of imperial structures. However, as the fictions of Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi reveal, the political aims of the postcolonial nation-state are often dependent upon imperialist institutions of logic such that there is always a space in the new nation that is excluded from this process of transformation. In Mahasweta's stories, this abject or peripheral space belongs, by the logic of exemplarity, to that of the Indian tribal. Having no established agency, the tribal shares neither in the narrative of nationhood nor in the culture of imperialism. It is therefore by inscribing this space of displacement that Mahasweta's fictions operate to fracture an image of the nation and to redefine the terms of decolonisation. In effect, her stories demonstrate that if the hegemony of nationalist discourse is to be contested, it can be done most thoroughly through an understanding of the tribal or "subaltern" as a necessary site of postcolonial resistance and even incommensurability.

The use of the term subaltern to describe the subordinate classes enters into critical discourse primarily through the work of Antonio Gramsci. In The Prison Notebooks, Gramsci appropriates the military term, originally used to designate the inferior-ranking soldier who marches at the foot of an army, and it applies to both subordinated peoples and subjugated systems of knowledge. By Gramsci's definition, the history of the subaltern is necessarily fragmented and episodic; because of the subaltern's radical heterogeneity, subalternity appears as a violence at the interstices of the dominant culture.

At once subordinated by and resistant to the hegemonic order, subaltern philosophies mark the discontinuity between thought and action. According to Gramsci, it is this contradiction between theory and practice that gives rise to social and political change.

More recently, a group of Indian academics who call themselves the Subaltern Studies collective have employed Gramsci's notion of the subaltern to define their own project of recovering and rethinking South Asian history from the perspective of subjugated groups. Finding the Marxist idea of the proletariat inappropriate for India's heterogeneous rural-based population, the Subaltern Studies group use the term subaltern to describe those individuals subordinated along the lines of class, caste, ethnicity, age, language and gender. According to Ranajit Guha, a founding editor of the Subaltern Studies collective, the aim of the group is to "rectify the elitist bias characteristic of much research and academic work" (vii). Consequently, the work of the Subaltern Studies group may be read as an intervention in South Asian historiography during the wake of the growing crisis of the postcolonial Indian state.

By using the term subaltern in relation to Mahasweta's writing, my thesis aims to emphasise both the subject matter that informs this fiction and the experience of political activism out of which these stories arise. Indeed, the majority of Mahasweta's literary works emerge from her direct involvement with the various agrarian movements and tribal uprisings that shook Indian history during the late sixties and early seventies.[8] As a close observer of these peasant revolts and other grassroots organisations, Mahasweta is able to draw upon the philosophies and mechanics of such struggles to fashion a style of writing

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[8] See Mahasweta's Introduction to her novella Bashai Tudu (translated by Samik Bandopadhyay) for an accout of for an account of Mahasweta's own involvement in the various peasant movements.

that assaults normative accounts of nationhood. Her unique style of writing involves a type of experimental prose in which various inflections of Bengali, Hindi and English coexist with different tribal languages and dialects. As such, her stories are illegible in any one given language; the multiplicity of voices often interrupt one another, causing for a text replete with frictions, disruptions and dislocations. Ultimately, it is this structure that defines Mahasweta's own poetics of displacement and that distinguishes her rhetorical strategies from those of either Alexander or Rushdie. For Rushdie and Alexander, linguistic displacement functions as a means of expressing the experience of cultural migration. For Mahasweta, the rhetoric of disruption is synonymous with a politics of activism that reflects the patterns of tribal insurgency and warfare. In this way, her writing provides an alternative account of decolonisation from the perspective of the subaltern.

As a result, one of the dominant themes found in the collection of stories entitled Imaginary Maps is that of ecological degradation and the subsequent displacement of the peoples of the Fourth World. In the first story "The Hunt," this theme of displacement registers itself as the destruction of the Sal forests and the profound loss of both resources and knowledge that this entails for the subaltern population. "Once there were animals in the forest," the narrator writes, "life was wild, the hunt game had meaning. Now the forest is empty, life wasted and drained, the hunt game meaningless. Only the day's joy is real" (12). Similarly, in the short story "Pterodactyl," we find traces of a tribal song that looks back to a time when the land and the forests were abounding with life, only to lament the way in which it all "vanished like dust before a storm" (119). The complete devastation of the land is further highlighted in the image of the pterodactyl itself, which

signifies the extent to which the tribal has been pushed back in order to make way for our current systems of meaning and knowledge. Likewise, in "Douloti," Mahasweta dramatises this devastation in terms of the literal erosion of the subaltern woman's body after years of prostitution and bonded labour. In this way, she makes explicit who it is that bears the greatest burden of displacement in our current world system.

Through these different images of displacement, Mahasweta is then able to make us aware of the intersecting lines between imperialism, nationalism, capitalism and patriarchy and their relation to a global system of exploitation that maintains itself not only through the colonisation of women and the Third World, but also through the constant degradation and destruction of the earth. In fact, according to ecofeminists Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, it is precisely this cumulative displacement of the planet's ecological systems, caused by the double forces of colonialism and global capitalism, that has "made homelessness a cultural characteristic of the late twentieth century" (98). But, of course, while the diasporic postcolonial or transnational professional is homeless in terms of being mobile on a world scale, the tribal is physically and violently uprooted from his or her original home, living in either refugee camps, resettlement colonies or reserves. In representing this displaced space of the tribal postcolonial, Mahasweta's fictions therefore aim to counter a notion of history that posits the process of decolonisation simply as a chronology of progress. Instead, her stories function to reveal the story of India's transition from colony to nation not as a narrative of emancipation, but rather as a saga of continuing domination. Consequently, these fictions force us to realise the ultimate

violence inherent in certain liberal notions of nationalism, secularism and capitalist development which render displacement and dislocation in both real and imaginary ways.

In particular, one of the main ways that Imaginary Maps discloses the violence described above is through its metaphoric representation of imperialism and nationalism as a violation or rape. In the first story entitled "The Hunt," this is done through the story of Mary Oraon, the child of a tribal woman who has been raped by a white coloniser. Mahasweta writes, "Once upon a time whites had *timber plantations* in Kuruda. They left gradually after Independence. Mary's mother looked after the Dixon's bungalow and household. Dixon came back in 1959 and sold the house, the forest, everything else. He put Mary in Bhikni's womb before he left" (2). Mary's story is thus seen as a parable for her village's larger history and even for the entire experience of the Indian subcontinent. In this parable, colonialism is represented as a metaphoric rape of both the land and its people. Moreover, in the postcolonial period it is the national élite or local bourgeoisie who continue to act in accordance with the exploitative structures set up by colonialism. This is demonstrated, for example, through the character of Tehsildar Singh, who is depicted as a rapist not only in the way that he exploits the forests, but also in the way that he attempts to violate Mary. In this sense, Tehsildar is symbolic of a larger imperialistic and patriarchal system founded on rituals of violence and exploitation.

In the short story "Douloti the Bountiful," the idea of imperialism and nationalism as rape is made even more explicit through the many images of bonded prostitution. In particular, this short story tells the tale of Douloti, the daughter of a tribal bonded labourer, who is taken away from her home and then sold into prostitution to repay her

family's loans. Like the previous tale, the story of Douloti also posits the body of the subaltern woman as the primary site upon which the intersecting systems of patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism and nationalism all work out their particular violences. By the end of the story, Douloti is depicted as crippled and disfigured after being raped and abused for years as a prostitute: her body is described by the narrator as being "hollow with tuberculosis, the sores of venereal disease all over her frame, oozing evil-smelling pus" (91). By representing in such a graphic and forcible manner that which is usually excluded or displaced by normative accounts of the postcolonial nation, Mahasweta's story offers a trenchant critique of nationalistic and imperialistic violence.

The last story "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha" portrays rape not only as the imperialistic violence enacted on the land or on the people, but also as the violation inherent in an ethnographic model of writing and representation. The main protagonist in this short story is therefore a male, middle-class journalist name Puran who is on an investigative mission. Although Puran tries to help the tribals according to his liberal notions of justice, the fiction ultimately depicts Puran's journey to the tribal village of Pirtha as an attempt to satiate his own desire for knowledge and journalistic achievement. Throughout the story, Puran thus serves as a foil for both the reader and the author, since he is at once an interpreter and recorder of the events he witnesses in Pirtha. As a result, this last story may be read as Mahasweta's own self-reflexive exploration of the violences and dislocations inherent in her own task of representation. Similarly, as readers of this tale, we must come to terms with our own positions in a hierarchical system of knowledge production that often leaves huge gaps or sites of ignorance between the production,

transmission and interpretation of cultures. In this sense, this last story registers the violence of an imperialistic logic that functions to render subaltern knowledges as either fragmented or episodic to the degree that they have become unintelligible within our current institutional systems of meaning and knowledge.

Mahasweta's stories consequently represent displacement not only in terms of the destruction of entire ecological and cultural communities, but also in terms of the particular dislocations or discontinuities within the experiences of individual characters that result from the destruction of subaltern knowledges. In the short story "The Hunt," it is the figure of Mary Oraon whose subjectivity is the site of such a dislocation. By representing Mary as a half-white, half-tribal woman and the very embodiment of an imperialistic rape, Mahasweta is able to create an individual who exists at the juncture of various intersecting social categories or "fault lines." For example, the narrator describes Mary as "eighteen years, tall, flat-featured [with] light copper skin. . . . You wouldn't call her a tribal at first sight. Yet she is a tribal" (2). In this passage, Mary is depicted as a representative figure of postcolonial heterogeneity; but it is important to note that Mahasweta's figuration of heterogeneity is significantly different from the kind of postcolonial hybridity that is emblematised by Rushdie's text. In Midnight's Children, hybridity is construed along the class lines of an international plurality which posits the figure of the tribal woman as imperialism's radically different "other." By contrast, Mahasweta's construction of Mary as half-white and half-tribal foregrounds what Robert Young has called "the West's own internal dislocation" which is "misrepresented as an

external dualism between East and West" (140). It is in this way that she is able to deconstruct an imperialistic system of logic that is based upon absolute notions of identity.

Consequently, Mary's figuration in this text is at once the site of an aporia, a contradiction and an impossibility. This fact is acknowledged by Mary herself. At one point in the story, as she is joking with a young tribal man, she refers to her unusual predicament by claiming, "Big white chief! Puts a child in a woman's belly and runs like a rat. My mother is bad news. When you see a white daughter, you kill it right away. Then there are no problems!" (5). Then, when the young man asks her what would have happened if she would have been killed, Mary replies "I wouldn't have been." In claiming such an abject status, Mary thereby emphasises her own singularity. For this reason, Spivak calls Mary an "individual who is and is not," since she "completely undoes the binary opposition between the pure East and the contaminated West" ("Interview" 84). Indeed, Mary appears to be a character who at once belongs to many different social locations and yet to none at all. Because she is the illegitimate daughter of a white father, the narrator says that "the Oraons don't think of her as their blood and do not place the harsh injunctions of their society upon her" (6). At the same time, she is cast out of both Indian tribal society and white imperial culture. It is in this way, then, that Mary's representation in the text can be viewed as a kind of displacement that operates to critique the logic of normative representational categories.

The discontinuities inherent in Mary's characterisation become significant once again in the ending of the story through Mahasweta's staging of the murder of Tehsildar Singh. In this part of the narrative, it is important to note that it is the festival of the

Oraons which helps Mary to transform from her role as victim to her role as hunter. Mahasweta explains the significance of this tribal ritual to us in the preface: "The tribals have this animal hunting festival in Bihar. It used to be the Festival of Justice. After the hunt, the elders would bring offenders to justice. They would not go to the police. In Santali language it was the Law-bir. Law is the Law, and bir is the forest" (xviii). In this context, Mary's actions can be seen as a means of politicising tribal rituals such that she assumes a certain representative status through her appropriation of this festival. By arranging to meet with Tehsildar Singh on the day of the hunt, Mary stages her conflict with Tehsildar Singh as the larger struggle regarding the erosion of the forest. Yet, Mary's actual murder of Tehsildar remains a singular and isolated act due to the nature of its execution and therefore cannot in any way be seen as a programmatic plan for instituting postcolonial change. In this way, Mahasweta creates an individual who is at once singular and representative so as to emphasise the very discontinuities inherent in any subaltern politics. As a result, the story reveals the way in which political acts may not be able to function in any fully representative manner.

Like Mary, the principal character, Douloti, of the second short story is the site of a discontinuity since she too does not belong fully to any community. Having been torn away from her home at a very young age and sold into bonded prostitution, Douloti is shown to have been disengaged from the possibility of any collective sociality. As Spivak notes, Douloti's psyche undergoes a particular displacement since her "ego splits at her first rape and stays split until nearly the end." In this way, Douloti represents a "real aporia" because she is neither an "intending subject of resistance" nor an "intending

subject of victimization" (Outside 92). In figuring Douloti as the site of a contradiction, Mahasweta then creates a particular dilemma for the reader. On the one hand, the story exposes a system of bonded labour that has as its foundation an ideology based on the affective coding of a notion of home which inevitably serves to reap the benefits from the labour produced by the subaltern woman's body. On the other hand, the story operates to create within the reader a sympathy for Douloti whose subjectivity is coded by such an ideology. It is precisely by staging such an aporia that Mahasweta's representation of Douloti is able to critique a system of imperialistic logic and thereby, as Saumitra Chakravorty says, to "break through traditions of home and hearth" (23). In the end, this deeply disturbing story remains a problem and a site of anxiety for the reader.

The way in which Mahasweta's negative critique functions becomes even clearer at the end of this story. Here, Mahasweta shows Douloti as leaving the house of prostitution in order to journey back to the village of her youth. The images of "home" and "family" that Douloti envisions are invoked by Mahasweta through a language of sentimentality. However, in the end, Douloti's journey is broken as she ends up dying in the middle of a schoolyard late at night. The final irony of this story takes place when the rural school teacher and his students discover Douloti lying on their schoolyard the next morning. Her body has fallen on a map of India that the teacher has painted on the grass to teach the rural children about the upcoming Independence Day:

> Filling the entire peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies *bonded labor* spread-eagled, kamyia-whore Douloti Nagesia's tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease, having vomited up all

> the blood in its desiccated lungs. Today, on the fifteenth of *August*, Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan for planting the standard of the Independence flag. What will Mohan do now? Douloti is all over India. (93)

In this graphic representation of the subaltern woman's body inscripted on the nation's map, Mahasweta once again reminds us of the intersecting systems of patriarchy, imperialism and nationalism, as well as those bodies displaced or excluded by these very systems. In the Bengali language, the word *doulot* can mean either "wealth" or "excess." Douloti's name in this last passage therefore serves to ironically remind us precisely of those bodies upon which the wealth of the modern world is built and yet which must always remain in excess or outside of its borders.

Interestingly, the reader here is figured as Mohan, the schoolteacher, who is sympathetic to Douloti, yet complicit in her oppression. The final question with which the story ends thus emphasises both the urgency for action and its impossibility. As such, the story stages the kind of aporetic relation between thought and action that accounts for the difficulties and complexities of a subaltern politics. As in the previous tale, justice itself is staged as kind of aporia, recalling Derrida's words that "there is apparently no moment in which a decision can be called presently and fully just" (Glas 209). As readers, we are caught in a paradoxical and perhaps even paralysing moment. In this way, the short story exposes the fault lines of institutionalised systems of meaning and knowledge.

The discontinuity and difficulty that is inherent in the task of representing the subaltern subject is once again taken up by Mahasweta in the third story "Pterodactyl,

Puran Sahay and Pirtha." When the story first opens we are introduced to the character of Puran, who is described as being born into a family typical leftists intellectuals. In this sense, he is very much like Mohan of the previous tale: a middle-class individual who is part of the national élite and yet sympathetic to the situation of the tribal. However, in this last story, Puran takes centre stage as the protagonist who serves as foil for both the reader and author. Accordingly, Puran's main aims are to investigate, record and report tribal cultures such that he is a producer and interpreter of subaltern knowledges. In particular, this story shows Puran journeying to the village of Pirtha, where the tribal population has mysteriously claimed to have sighted a prehistoric bird. Puran's journey thus represents a sort of pilgrimage in search of knowledge and fulfilment.

Ironically, the very lesson that Pirtha will teach Puran is the impossibility of such fulfilment. From the very beginning, Puran's journey is met with only the deferral of knowledge, which he then begins to understand as the futility of his particular quest. For example, when he meets the Sub-Division Officer, Puran is immediately told that, in Pirtha, "there's nothing there. There's nothing more to be seen" (99). Likewise, when Puran first hears about the peculiar bird sighting, he is puzzled and does not know how to interpret this information: "What is it? Bird? Webbed wings like a bat and body like a giant iguana. And four legs? A toothless gaping horrible mouth" (102). Moreover, when the Officer finally tries to disclose the information that he knows about the supposed "pterodactyl" sighting, Puran can only note that "there's a tremendous communication gap" between himself and the officer, and that "one is not understanding the most urgent

message of the other" (102). This lack of comprehension that Puran experiences early in the story will then be repeated again in his encounter with the pterodactyl:

> From the other side of millions of years the soul of the ancestor of Shankar's people looks at Puran, and the glance is so prehistoric that Puran's brain cells, spreading a hundred antennae, understand nothing of that glance. If tonight he'd seen a stone flying with its wings spread, would he have been able to speak to it? The creature is breathing, its body is trembling. Puran backs off with measured steps. (141)

Unable to grasp the pterodactyl's meaning, Puran must leave the village of Pirtha without any further knowledge about the pterodactyl and also without the story for which he was initially searching. Ironically, the word *pirtha* means "pilgrimage" in the Bengali language. Yet, in Mahasweta's story, the journey to Pirtha must be interpreted as simply one phase in Puran's life and not as any final destination.

Puran's journey to Pirtha produces partial and inconclusive knowledges, since he has no explanations for what he has witnessed. For Puran, the pterodactyl remains an ontological puzzle which leads to an epistemological crisis. At one point, Puran says to the pterodactyl, "I do not wish to touch you, you are outside my wisdom, reason, feelings, who can place his hand on the axial moment of the end of the third phase of the Mesozoic and the beginnings of the Cenozoic geological ages?" (156). Puran continually feels that he is unable to "read the message" of the pterodactyl, and therefore he comes to the conclusion that "nothing could be known" (180). In this way, Puran's usual ethnographic style of journalism is deconstructed as is his desire for any concrete knowledge about the

pterodactyl. What Puran begins to know, by the end of the story, is not any empirical fact, but rather the limits of his own ability to know.

However, as Spivak pointedly explains in the afterword, the central narrative in this tale is not the story of Puran; rather, it is a "story of funeral rites" (204). By the end of Mahasweta's fiction, the pterodactyl dies, and Bhikia, a young boy who has been strangely struck mute by this occurrence, buries the soul of his ancestor. Acting as the bird's guardian, Bhikia allows Puran to accompany him deep into the underground caves, where the darkness itself receives and guards the secret of the pterodactyl. Above all, then, Mahasweta's tale is a story of loss. As Puran himself notes, the encounter with the pterodactyl signifies a lost possibility. "We suffered a great loss," he remarks, "yet we couldn't know it. The pterodactyl was *myth* and *message* from the start. We tremble with the terror of discovering a real pterodactyl" (195). Mahasweta thus engages us in the impossible task of mourning as we remember the remains of the pterodactyl.

For the postcolonial critic, then, the difficulty of subaltern politics registers as a double bind. On the one hand, we must be wary of producing subaltern groups as the objects of our knowledge; on the other hand, we cannot simply disavow intellectual responsibility toward them. Like Puran, we are left in a position where we must come to terms with that which marks the very limits to our understanding. The act of writing and reading subaltern histories becomes what Spivak calls a "real aporia" or "the undecidable in the face of which decisions must be risked" (Outside 93). As readers of translated text that has become available to us through the global networks of postcolonial studies and the international workings of capital, we must come to terms with our own positions in a

hierarchical system of knowledge-production that often leaves immeasurable gaps and sites of ignorance between the production, transmission and interpretation of cultures, especially those cultures toward which our knowledge-production ostensibly promotes good-will. For this reason, we must also learn to be wary of the protections and simple politicisations that our "knowledge" so often brings.

Yet, as Mahasweta notes, this crisis should not be seen as a sign of paralysis, but rather as the point of a creative junction and as a call to action. At its best, an encounter with subaltern knowledges should allow for the opportunity for epistemological revisions from perspectives that it has previously denied. But as Spivak explains in the preface to Imaginary Maps, learning this kind of attentiveness is a difficult labour, one which involves a commitment akin to that of establishing ethical responsibility with another human being:

> We all know that when we engage profoundly with one person, the response comes from both sides. This is a responsibility and accountability. We also know that in such engagements we want to reveal and reveal, conceal nothing. Yet on both sides there is always a sense that something has not got across. . . . This is why ethics is the experience of the impossible. I am not saying that ethics is impossible, but that it is the experience of the impossible. This understanding only sharpens the sense of the crucial and continuing need for political struggle. For collective struggle supplemented by the impossibility of full ethical engagement--not in the rationalist sense of doing the right thing, but in the more familiar sense of the impossibility of "love." (xxv)

Accordingly, Mahasweta's texts take on the profoundly ethical task of assuming political responsibility for the subaltern subject, while not presuming to speak on its behalf. In the image of the pterodactyl, Mahasweta reminds us to care for difference and to develop a kind of generosity that does not attempt to grasp what is other as one's own. Above all, her fiction makes us aware of the dangers of certainty; therefore, it teaches us how to be open to loss and to risk the chance that we might be wrong.

CONCLUSION

The understanding of literary inquiry as a deeply political and cultural phenomenon has been at the forefront of what is now known as postcolonial theory. One of the principal aims of this field of study has been to expose the methods by which literature has been persistently called into the service of a widespread and devastating system of imperial domination. In his ground-breaking work Culture and Imperialism, Edward Said thus argues that imperialism's main battle was fought on the grounds of fiction, with the novel as the primary aesthetic object through which imperial attitudes and experiences took shape: "The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (xiii). From this perspective, it may be argued that the institutionalisation of English as an academic discipline and the spread of imperialism are intricately related such that one of the determining features of colonial rule is control over language. As a medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, literature became a most effective means of securing and maintaining the authority of the imperial power. Through the establishment of certain categories of discourse and knowledge, literature was not only able to regulate codes of behaviour, but also patterns of thought.[9]

One of the major challenges facing the postcolonial writer and critic is therefore the project of decolonising normative codes of language and literature in an effort to interrogate the hegemony of imperial power. Most frequently, this struggle toward

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[9] See, for instance, Gauri Viswanathan, "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India," Oxford Literary Review 9.1, 1987.

decolonisation has taken the shape of an identity politics that has emphasised either racial or national origins as the basis for postcolonial intervention and transformation. To the extent that colonialism has the effect of destroying the cultures and institutions of a colonised people, it has often been the aim of nationalism to recover these lost or obliterated traditions. However, even in its capacity as an organising discourse enabling a subjugated people to rise up against domination, the narrative of nationhood has risked reproducing the same structures of imperialistic logic that it initially sought to contest. Fictions which posit an unified national identity inevitably rely upon a manichean aesthetic that asserts not its difference, but rather its dependence on the categories and features of the colonising culture. Moreover, the invocation of cultural nationalism based upon a concept of the nation as an ethnically homogenous object becomes especially problematic and politically charged when we take into account the sheer heterogeneity of postcolonial cultures. Consequently, the nationalist project, even in its declared rupture with the colonial power, repeats the violence and violation of the colonialist enterprise.

As an alternative to the nationalist narrative, the three texts discussed in this thesis disturb and reconfigure representations of the nation by positing new fictions based upon the poetics of displacement. In Midnight's Children, the diasporic perspective gives Salman Rushdie the ability to suggest alternative identities formed from the experience of migration coincident with the birth of a new nation. In Meena Alexander's Fault Lines, displacement is figured in terms of both a diasporic and feminist vision that allows for a questioning of the patriarchal narratives of nation and identity. By contrast, Mahasweta's Devi's Imaginary Maps represents displacement through the inscription of the tribal

subaltern as a site of postcolonial difference. Accordingly, all three texts employ narrative styles that are fragmentary and multilingual, thereby disrupting conventional language patterns. In this sense, these texts serve to delineate new cartographies of affiliation that challenge the nation as the primary form of community. In doing so, they also rewrite normative identity categories such as nation, race, gender and postcoloniality.

The reconfiguration of racial, gender and national categories, however, takes different forms in each of these fictions. While all three writers treat hybridity as a historical and cultural legacy of empire that challenges the purity of nationhood, in Rushdie the relationships that engender hybridity are ultimately situated within an oppositional structure such that cosmopolitanism is represented through a male figure and traditionalism through a female figure. For this reason, Midnight's Children must be understood as operating on the premises of a certain logic of identification in which subjectivity is accorded to a male, middle-class positionality by specifically excluding or erasing the body of the subaltern woman. Although Rushdie's articulation of displacement may allow for a critique of homogenising notions of national identity, it is important to look at the way in which his conflation of diaspora with postcolonialism fulfils the demands of the dominant world order. The novel's institutionalisation as a paradigmatic postcolonial text must then lead to a questioning of postcoloniality as it has thus far been conceived, especially since the text's privileging of hybridity occurs only through the displacement of certain meaningful and critically important subjectivities.

The task of reconstructing some of these other displaced subject positions is precisely the aim of Alexander's Fault Lines and Mahasweta's Imaginary Maps.

Alexander's text, for example, presents a challenge to Rushdie's masculinist fictions by deconstructing identity narratives from diasporic and feminist perspectives. As a result, Alexander's articulation of displacement operates to disclose not only the colonised subject's resistance to empire and the racialised subject's discontinuity with the state, but also the gendered subject's contestation of the structures of patriarchy. Mahasweta, on the other hand, presents a challenge to both Rushdie's and Alexander's diasporic fictions by inscribing the subaltern as the figure of incommensurable difference. From her perspective, it is the tribal who occupies a space of double displacement, sharing in neither the narrative of nationhood nor the culture of imperialism. In her deployment of subalternity as a counter-narrative to an imperialist history, she provides an alternative interpretation of the authoritative discourses of race, nation and identity.

Thus, while Rushdie's aesthetic of displacement serves as a model for the canonisation of recent postcolonial literatures, both Alexander's and Mahasweta's texts provide critical points of departure from the institutionalised discourse of postcoloniality. Alexander's destabilisation of racial and gender categories, for instance, poses a problem for an identity politics that has in the past provided the only legitimate means of claiming agency on behalf of subjugated groups or individuals. Similarly, Mahasweta's inscription of subalternity exposes the inseparable complicity between knowledge and power, thereby disclosing the ways in which any coherent formulation of identity functions by asserting its epistemic privilege over all other local, plural and often incommensurable knowledges. In this way, these other fictions reveal the complicity, however apparently remote, between the institutionalisation of postcolonial theory and the power lines of imperialism.

Furthermore, both Alexander's and Mahasweta's texts point to sites outside of normative configurations of identity based upon homogenous or unified concepts of race, gender or nation. In doing so, they also make evident the specific exclusions and erasures that institutionalised discourses of postcoloniality maintain by invoking an identity politics as the only method of postcolonial change and resistance. As such, both Alexander and Mahasweta can be viewed as exhibiting what Spivak has called a "philosophy that is aware of the limits of knowing" (Outside 25). Rather than constructing a totalising concept of the self, these authors then show that identity is produced through the constant negotiation of power lines and the perpetual redrawing of boundaries. In this sense, subjectivity itself may be described as the product of a series of displacements such that the self must be narrated as the site of an open and unarticulated relationship to that which lies outside of its borders and therefore to that which marks the very limits of our knowledge.

To this extent, Alexander's and Mahasweta's fictions draw our attention to the limits of the humanist subject. As Etienne Balibar explains, post-Enlightenment notions of subjectivity centre around the definition the subject as citizen, a political and juridical concept that arises with the age of empire. Prior to this, the subject of western philosophy was one who was literally a subjected being, a passive being under the divine rule of God. According to Balibar, the contradictions inherent in this particular notion of subjectivity is subsequently dissolved by the appearance of the nation-state as a legal and political unit of power: the power of the state is exercised by the law at the same time that it belongs to individuals who exercise their own power over the law. The citizen-subject is therefore primarily a legal subject who enjoys certain rights and freedoms grounded in a notion of

equality. Yet, as Balibar notes, this predication of equality as a new universal that serves as the basis for any democratic society is itself constitutive of an antimony: "The existence of a society always presupposes an organization, and the latter in turn always presupposes an element of qualification or differentiation from equality and thus of 'nonequality' developed *on the basis of equality itself*" (50). Consequently, a society is necessarily a society only because of certain exclusions or denials. The subject as citizen can be identified only if there exists a body of subjects who are, by definition, non-citizens.

Following this line of argument, we may conclude that both Alexander's and Mahasweta's fictions tell the story of impossible subjects. Both authors write of subjects who are not, and cannot be, citizen-subjects. Accordingly, their fictions expose not only those individuals who are marginalised within the community of the nation-state, but also those persons who are excluded from the law. In so doing, these texts also disclose the violence inherent in a logic that establishes a particular community through a set of laws and boundaries that, by necessity, leave some out. However, the works of Alexander and Mahasweta also reveal what can happen when these impossible subjects become the focus of action and agency. As such, their writing functions as a means of political and legal transformation by suggesting an openness to previously unimagined possibilities. Consequently, we may view literature as a powerful critical tool that enables us to catch a glimpse of that which lies beyond our present institutions, since it helps us to conceptualise new ethical relations and political configurations that do not necessarily centre upon the enlightenment subject.

Hence, the deconstruction of post-enlightenment notions of subjectivity should not be seen as a failure of postcolonial politics to claim identity for subjugated groups. Rather, as Drucilla Cornell powerfully argues, deconstruction as "a philosophy of the limit" functions to "keep open the 'beyond' of currently unimaginable transformative possibilities precisely in the name of Justice" (182). Indeed, it is by being aware of the limits of our discourse that we can rethink postcoloniality in light of those challenges posed by domains that are presently unrecognisable according to our institutional systems of meaning. In the absence of an awareness of the hegemonic structures of our theoretical models, our writings can all too easily function as a means of securing neocolonial relations, although in the name of something else. The point, then, is to attend to the institutional authority of those practices which recover subjugated forms of knowledge with a kind of ethical responsibility that is at once a critical constraint and a condition of agency. The political critique that is enabled by postcolonial discourses can then enable us to imagine not only new coalitional strategies, but eventually new forms of community.

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