Mythologies of Migrancy: Postcolonialism, Postmodernism and the Politics of (Dis)location

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A NEW TYPE OF "Third World"[1] intellectual, cross-pollinated by postmodernism and postcolonialism, has arrived: a migrant who, having dispensed with territorial affiliations, travels unencumbered through the cultures of the world bearing only the burden of a unique yet representative sensibility that refracts the fragmented and contingent condition of both postmodernity and postcoloniality. Journeying from the "peripheries" to the metropolitan "centre," this itinerant intellectual becomes an international figure who at once feels at home nowhere and everywhere. No longer disempowered by cultural schizophrenia or confined within collectivities such as race, class, or nation, the nomadic postcolonial intellectual is said to "write back" to the empire in the name of all displaced and dispossessed peoples, denouncing both colonialism and nationalism as equally coercive constructs.

The ideological lineage of this itinerant postcolonial intellectual is typically hybrid because postcoloniality, as Kwame Anthony Appiah observes, "is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery" (348). These cultural mediators are invariably dependent on and inevitably influenced by Euro-American publishers and readers, Western universities, and Westernized élite educational institutions in Asia or Africa. Not surprisingly, then, the first generation of postcolonial novels largely reflected the belief held by both "Third World" intellectuals and the high culture of Europe—that new literatures in new nations should

be anti-colonial and nationalistic. For instance, Indian subconti-
nental as well as African novels of the 1950s and 1960s frequently
are represented as the imaginative re-creations of a common
historical/cultural past crafted into a shared tradition by the
writer in the manner of Walter Scott: "they are thus realist legit-
imations of nationalism: they authorize a 'return to traditions'
while at the same time recognizing the demands of a Weberian
rationalized modernity" (Appiah 349).

Since the late 1960s, however, such celebratory novels have
gradually faded away.[2] Their place was taken by novels that aimed
to expose corrupt national bourgeoisies that had championed
the causes of rationalization, industrialization, and bureaucrati-
zation in the name of nationalism and nativism, only to keep the
national bourgeoisies of other nations in check. In addition to
stridently opposing nationalism and nativism, the novels of the
1970s and 1980s strongly repudiated the realist novel because it
naturalized a failed nationalism. Appiah observes:

> Far from being a celebration of the nation, the novels of the second
> postcolonial stage are novels of delegitimation: they reject not only
> the Western imperium but also the nationalist project of the national
> bourgeoisie. The basis for that delegitimation does not derive from a
> postmodernist relativism; rather it is grounded in an appeal to an
> ethical universal, a fundamental revolt against oppression and hu-
> man suffering.   (353)

It is precisely as spokespersons for the dislocated and the disen-
franchised that postcolonial immigrant intellectuals have gained
legitimacy in the international media-market.

Thus, from his distinct (dis)location within the metropolis,
Salman Rushdie declares, "to be a migrant is, perhaps, to be the
only species of human being free of the shackles of nationalism
(to say nothing of its ugly sister, patriotism). It is a burdensome
freedom" ("The Location" 124). A whole mythology of migrancy
and a concomitant oppositional politics, of course, has been
formulated by Rushdie, who sees the development of the "mi-
grant sensibility" to be "one of the central themes of this cen-
tury of displaced persons" (124). Not only does Rushdie endow
the migrant sensibility with the freedom and facility to construct
its own (contingent) truths, he makes it a singular repository
of experience and resistance as well. Like the Afghan refugee

in Bharati Mukherjee's story "Orbiting" (in her collection *The Middleman and Other Stories*) who is forced to circle the world, camping only in airport transit lounges, Rushdie's migrant is a fractured yet autonomous individual, segregated from the collective sites of history.

By focusing attention on Rushdie, I do not mean to imply that he is somehow unproblematically paradigmatic of the postcolonial (exile) writer. However, it cannot be denied that he stands foremost among those "spokespersons for a kind of permanent immigration" (Brennan 33) who have been elevated by global media-markets and metropolitan academies as the preeminent interpreters of postcolonial realities to postmodern audiences. With the cultural productions of "cosmopolitan celebrities" (Brennan 26) such as Rushdie increasingly forming the critical archival material of alternative canons in the metropolitan academy, the language of migrancy has gained wide currency among today's theorists of identity and authority. Thus, for instance, Edward Said's essay "Third World Intellectuals and Metropolitan Culture" foregrounds the "exile figure" as the most authentic embodiment of the postcolonial intellectual. In a more recent essay entitled "Identity, Authority and Freedom: The Potentate and the Traveller," Said has suggested that "our model for academic freedom" should be "the migrant or traveller" (17). James Clifford's travelling theory goes a step further, metaphorizing postcoloniality into a restructured relationship between anthropologist and informant and casting the theorist in the role of "traveller."

The critical centrality migrancy has acquired in contemporary cultural discourse raises important questions about the nature of postcolonial "diaspora," the role of "Third World" immigrants, and the function of metropolitan academic institutions. How has the uprooting of postcolonial populations helped to generate a vocabulary of migrancy? What part has the "cosmopolitan," "Third World" intellectual played in the manufacture of "diasporic consciousness"? How have metropolitan discourses framed contemporary conceptions of hybridity and migrancy? Has the mythology of migrancy provided a productive site for postcolonial resistance or has it willy-nilly become complicit with

hegemonic postmodern theorizations of power and identity? To answer these questions, we must consider the nexus of historical, political, economic, cultural, and ideological forces affecting the construction and consumption of postcolonial realities and representations.

The figure of migrancy indeed has proved quite useful in drawing attention to the marginalized, in problematizing conceptions of borders, and in critiquing the politics of power. However, it also appears to have acquired an excessive figurative flexibility that threatens to undermine severely the oppositional force of postcolonial politics. The metaphorization of postcolonial migrancy is becoming so overblown, overdetermined, and amorphous as to repudiate any meaningful specificity of historical location or interpretation. Politically charged words such as "diaspora" and "exile" are being emptied of their histories of pain and suffering and are being deployed promiscuously to designate a wide array of cross-cultural phenomena. For instance, the editor of a recent collection of essays subtitled "The literature of the Indian diaspora" argues that the term "diaspora" can be used legitimately to describe not only "those Indian indentured workers who braved long voyages on ill-equipped ships to Mauritius, Trinidad, and Fiji during the nineteenth century" but also "young subcontinental scientists, professors, surgeons, and architects who now emigrate" to the West as part of the brain-drain (Nelson x). Refugees of any brand take the wind out of the sails of even those intellectuals who have been forced to become real political exiles; what then can be said for the inflated claims of upper-class professionals whose emigration fundamentally has been a voluntary and personal choice?

The compulsions behind such claims are not only enormous but actually symptomatic of the discursive space in which many "Third World" intellectuals who choose to live in the "First World" function. The entry of postcolonialism into the metropolitan academy under the hegemonic theoretical rubric of postmodernism obviously has been a powerful factor in determining how the "Third World" is conceived and consumed. All too frequently, the postcolonial text is approached as a localized embellishment of a universal narrative, an object of knowledge

that may be known through a postmodern critical discourse. Analytical attention is focused primarily on the formal similarities between postmodern and postcolonial texts, while the radical historical and political differences between the two are erased (see Sangari 264-69). The complex "local" histories and culture-specific knowledges inscribed in postcolonial narratives get neutralized into versions of postmodern diversity, allowing "others" to be seen, but shorn of their dense specificity. Class, gender, and intellectual hierarchies within other cultures, which happen to be at least as elaborate as those in the West, frequently are ignored. Thus Fredric Jameson's paradigm of postcolonial literature as national allegory uniformly constitutes all "Third World" intellectuals, regardless of their gender or class, as marginalized insurgents or as nationalists struggling against a monolithic Western imperialism. Difference is reduced to equivalence, interchangeability, syncretism, and diversity, while a levelling subversive subalternity is indiscriminately attributed to any and all.

Given that metropolitan attitudes towards the postcolonial are caught between Orientalism and nativism, between unmitigated condemnation and uncritical celebration of Otherness, identification with subalternity and commodification of the "Third World" often seem the only assured means to authority for many "Third World" intellectuals. The very modes of access to power are thus rife with the risk of reification and subordination under such currently popular theoretical categories as cultural diversity, hybridity, syncretism, and migrancy. However, if postcolonial politics is to retain its radical cutting edge, what "Third World" intellectuals must confront is not our "subalternity" or even our "subalternity-in-solidarity-with-the-oppressed," but the comparative power and privilege that ironically accumulate from our "oppositional" stance, and the upward mobility we gain from our semantics of subalternity. As Arif Dirlik points out, to challenge successfully culturalist hegemony, it is not enough to concentrate exclusively on the unequal relations between nations, such as those between the "First" and the "Third" worlds, but to include an investigation of the unequal relations *within* societies as well (37). We therefore must face up to the fact that

any mythology of migrancy that fails to differentiate rigorously between diverse modalities of postcolonial diaspora, such as migrant intellectuals, migrant labour, economic refugees, political exiles, and self-exiles, exploits the subordinate position of the "Third World," suppresses the class/gender differentiated histories of immigration, robs the oppressed of the vocabulary of protest, and blunts the edges of much-needed oppositional discourse.

A myopic focus on migrancy also may potentially shut out alternative figurations of postcoloniality by marginalizing the visions of those who may not be (dis)located within the metropolis or who may be dislocated in ways not recognized in metropolitan circles. Thus to argue that "the ability to see at once from inside and out is a great thing, a piece of good fortune which the indigenous writer cannot enjoy" (Rushdie, "A Dangerous Art Form" 4) or to declare that "the contest over decolonization has moved from the peripheries to the center" (Said, "Third World Intellectuals" 30) seems to militate against postcolonial struggles for greater inclusiveness by reinscribing the binary opposition between centre and periphery in the very discourse that seeks to contest such a dichotomy.

The problematic discourse of diaspora and exile in contemporary critical discourse clearly calls for a systematic examination of the material conditions and ideological contexts within which migrancy has emerged as the privileged paradigmatic trope of postcolonialism in the metropolis. Attempting such an examination, this essay considers such factors as the circulation of "Third World" populations, the peripheral position of the "Third World," the pedagogic presence of the metropolitan academy, and the influence of its poststructuralist/postmodern theories. The first section traces the historical patterns of immigration from the Indian subcontinent in order to bring out the heterogeneous and uneven nature of that "diaspora"—a fact that, as I try to show, is strategically marginalized or neutralized by Salman Rushdie. Based on a critical review of Rushdie's formulation of migrancy, the second section explores the ideological intersection between postcolonialism and postmodernism. My discussion reveals that the rhetoric of migrancy in post-

colonial discourse is not only accessible and acceptable but also assimilable to dominant postmodernist theories. The irony of this exchange becomes evident in the simultaneous elevation and subordination of the immigrant intellectual in the metropolis. Throughout the discussion, I draw very selectively from Rushdie's writings, for I intend my comments less as exhaustive interpretations of this individual author's works and more as symptomatic pointers towards a larger ideological field. The essay concludes by arguing that the overblown rhetoric of diaspora and exile in vogue today calls for a vigilance over the excesses marginal discourses accrue in the very process of theorizing the obsolescence of marginality. In addressing the issue of migrancy from a location within the circuits of metropolitan power and knowledge, I take up Gayatri Spivak's contention that "even as we join in the struggle to establish the institutional study of marginality we must still go on saying 'And yet . . .'" (154).

II

The rhetoric of migrancy, exile, and diaspora in contemporary postcolonial discourse owes much of its credibility to the massive and uneven uprooting of "Third World" peoples in recent decades, particularly after large-scale decolonization in the 1960s. As the euphoria of independence and the great expectations of nationalism gave way to disillusionment and oppression, emigration increasingly became the supreme reward for citizens of impoverished or repressive ex-colonies. Millions of people dream of becoming exiles at any cost, and many government officials make a living helping or hindering the fulfilment of this mass fantasy.

The rhetoric of migrancy in contemporary postcolonial discourse, however, does not stress the economic and political forces behind immigration. Salman Rushdie thus observes:

> the effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves—because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves.   ("The Location" 124)

This passage employs an almost spiritual or mystic vocabulary to describe the formation of the "migrant sensibility." By emphasizing mental or psychological processes over sociological or political forces, Rushdie de-materializes the migrant into an abstract idea. The insistent and pervasive use of such terminology tends to obscure or at least minimize the material and historical contexts of "Third World" immigration. It fails to account for two fundamental factors that fracture immigrant experience: the exigencies of neo-colonial global capitalism determining the dispersal of "Third World" peoples, and the distinctly class- and gender-differentiated nature of immigrant experience.

The historic pattern of Indian emigration since the 1960s alone is quite revealing. Until the last decade, women formed but a small percentage of immigrant populations and often subsisted in conditions of complete dependency if not abuse and exploitation.[3] In addition, there is a distinct class character to the current pattern of Indian emigration. The vast majority of Indians emigrating to the United States and, secondarily, to Britain are members of the commercial or professional bourgeoisie and typically have little to do with the working-class inside or outside India. By contrast, the oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf, and to a lesser degree Britain, attract a predominantly working-class population (the trade to the Gulf being as much a traffic in female flesh as in cheap labour). Lured by unscrupulous job-recruitment agencies and victimized by greedy travel agents, these working-class immigrants frequently end up as little more than indentured labourers subsisting on the margins of alien(ating) societies. Their dehumanized condition casts an inescapable shadow upon the exuberance that characterizes metropolitan perceptions of migrancy. Clearly, the grim realities of migrant labour inflect the notion of migrancy in ways that make it difficult to link consistently freedom and liberation with movement and displacement.

By contrast, what takes place for many postcolonial intellectuals is a transition to an industrially advanced capitalist society with the latest word on individual liberty on its lips. Taking this route, in many ways, is like going home because it brings one closer to a world that one had imagined all along. As Rushdie

observes, "[i]n common with many Bombay-raised middle-class children of my generation, I grew up with an intimate knowledge of, and even sense of friendship with, a certain kind of England: a dream-England. . . . I wanted to come to England. I couldn't wait" ("Imaginary Homelands" 18). Edward Said therefore is quite correct in describing the migration of the superior scholar from the non-Western "periphery" to the Western "centre" as a "voyage in" ("Third World Intellectuals" 31).

Once they find themselves within the belly of the metropolitan beast, immigrant intellectuals indeed do face the grim facts of racism and Eurocentrism. For most, however, what Bharati Mukherjee calls "loss-of-face meltdown" ("Prophet and Loss" 11) rarely involves floundering around among disempowered minorities. In fact, Mukherjee's fiction typically casts immigrant aspirations in terms of class expectations: "Great privilege had been conferred upon me; my struggle was to work hard enough to deserve it. And I did. This bred confidence, but not conceit. . . . Calcutta equipped me to survive theft or even assault; it did not equip me to accept proof of my unworthiness" ("An Invisible Woman" 36, 38). Indeed, class origins and professional affiliations open up an adversarial kind of assimilation into metropolitan institutions. Thus Rushdie is able actually to use his class privilege as a platform to chastise English society for failing to live up to its promise of "tolerance and fair play":

> England has done all right by me; but I find it difficult to be properly grateful. I can't escape the view that my relatively easy ride is not the result of the dream — England's famous sense of tolerance and fair play, but of my social class, my freak fair skin and my "English" English accent. Take away any of these, and the story would have been very different. Because of course the dream-England is no more than a dream. ("Imaginary Homelands" 18)

In this passage, an acknowledgment of class privilege is countered neatly by an indictment of England's racist/classist attitudes. The author's refusal to be "properly grateful" for the advantages he has derived from his class position rhetorically aligns him with the less privileged members of the immigrant population and thereby helps to legitimize him as an authentic spokesman for whole groups of dispossessed migrants.

Self-conscious contextualizations of class privilege through parody or irony are not difficult to find in the writings of such astute writers as Mukherjee and Rushdie. However, these rhetorical gestures rarely add up to anything more than momentary indulgences in self-pleasuring destabilization. Ultimately, they offer little radical challenge to metropolitan methods of thematizing diversity in ways that make "difference" a mere matter of adding new labels or categories to an ever-expanding pluralist horizon. As such, they can neither form a firm basis for historical awareness nor constitute an adequate confrontation of the heterogeneity of postcolonial/immigrant experience.

Rushdie's self-fashioned public persona, of course, is intertwined inextricably with his own ambiguous status as migrant postcolonial intellectual writing for a predominantly metropolitan readership. It therefore may be necessary to remind ourselves that, like Rushdie, most immigrant intellectuals, especially those from the Indian subcontinent, are not forced exiles but voluntary self-exiles. (Rushdie's status, of course, has been transformed into a grimly real exile by the Ayatollah Khomeini's ominous *fatwa*). Unlike the prolonged pain of exile, the anguish of self-exile is usually more accommodating. Often no more than a longing for the imaginary homeland's sensuous characteristics, it is easy to summon up, especially if emigration has turned out to be a financial and professional success. Words such as "exile" or "diaspora" barely describe the moment of departure; what follows is both too comfortable and too autonomous to be called by these names, which suggest so strongly a comprehensible and sustained grief.

It is not my intention to question the motives of any "Third World" immigrant—motives that are always heterogeneous and personal, ranging from political persecution and economic desperation to professional ambition and cultural preference. Nor do I mean to imply that class privilege alone necessarily delegitimizes one's testimony against the injustices of bourgeois racism, colonialism, or nationalism. What I wish to do, however, is to draw attention to the complex historical and material context within which a highly charged mythology of migrancy is being fabricated to legitimize a particular public (literary) per-

sona. Clearly, if "diasporic consciousness" is fundamentally "an intellectualization of [the] existential condition" of dispersal from the homeland (Safran 87), then we must acknowledge the fact that this consciousness has been shaped not so much by the haphazard accidents of history as by the material and ideological realities of immigrant intellectuals.

III

The image of the postcolonial writer as migrant, of course, is central to Salman Rushdie's politico-aesthetics, which regard the experience of multiple dislocation—temporal, spatial, and linguistic—to be crucial, even necessary, for artistic development:

> It may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity, of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being "elsewhere." This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal.
>
> ("Imaginary Homelands" 12)

The passage, which begins by presenting immigration as a metaphor for a common human experience, quickly proceeds to privilege the geographically/culturally displaced writer as someone uniquely equipped at once to reclaim the faded contours of a specific lost homeland and to speak of things that have "universal" significance. In contemporary corporate parlance, we might say the migrant writer combines "local touch with global reach."

The experience of dislocation apparently gives the writer an enhanced ability to self-consciously reflect on the constructedness of reality: "The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature" (Rushdie, "The Location" 125). Yet, if "to see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier" (125), for Rushdie, the frontier seems to be a movable line going wherever the writer goes:

> I mean there're all kinds of dislocations.... First of all as you say, I live in England and I've written about India. That's one dislocation.

> Secondly, my family went to Pakistan so that's three countries anyway.
> ... Then Bombay is not like the rest of India. People who come from
> Bombay anyway feel different from the rest of India and quite rightly.
> On top of that, my family comes from Kashmir and Kashmir is not
> like the rest of India. So that's four or five separate dislocations.
> ("An Interview" 353)

Moving geographic borders around with dexterity, Rushdie
makes his dislocation from the Indian subcontinent appear to be
a mere extension of his many dislocations within the subconti-
nent itself. What he erases with one hand, he redraws with the
other, for the notion of border, after all, is critical to Rushdie's
literary persona/project.

Indeed, it is precisely along the border that Rushdie, in an
explicit gesture of exclusion, opposes the migrant to the non-
migrant, privileging the former over the latter: "the ability to see
at once from inside and out is a great thing, a piece of good
fortune which the indigenous writer cannot enjoy" ("A Dan-
gerous Art Form" 4). Surely, however, such a binary distinction
between "migrant" and "indigenous" is quite obsolete unless we
allow for an excessively literal recuperation of the opposition
between "inside" and "outside." If, on the other hand, we read
the frontier as a metaphor for the margin, as Rushdie does when
he wants to present migrancy as a shared existential condition,
we could include "internal exiles" such as women living within
patriarchy, minorities living on the margins of hegemonic cul-
tures, or oppressed majorities living under occupation, thereby
undermining the migrant's claim to an exclusive uniqueness.
This discursive "contradiction" may be seen as a result of a
strategic process of exclusion-inclusion through which Rushdie
represents the migrant writer as atypical as well as representative,
unique yet universal.

The proliferating and shifting definition of borders in Rush-
die's writing is linked intimately to the ideological issue of
control:

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatri-
> ates, 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.   ("Imaginary Homelands" 10)

Inscribed in this passage is a notion of margins waiting to
be destroyed, replaced, expanded, and incorporated as new ter-
ritorial acquisitions, as novel "fields" of inquiry. The migrant
writer's project is defined as one of drawing new or imaginary
borders, of re-creating and reclaiming new or imaginary territo-
ries. Although fractured, the migrant imagination is an imperi-
alizing consciousness imposing itself upon the world. As the
narrator of *Shame* declares, "I too, like all migrants, am a fantasist.
I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones
that exist" (92).

From this brief overview of Rushdie's formulation of migrancy,
two variations on the theme may be detected: one invokes an
existential condition of homelessness with a concomitant atti-
tude of autonomy and detachment as the privileged locus of
imaginative experience; the other validates multiplicity and hy-
bridity of subject positions, generating a feeling of belonging to
several, even too many, homes. These conceptions of migrancy,
Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out, have much in common with the
philosophical positions of poststructuralism/postmodernism
and the literary traditions of modernism. The overlap is hardly
surprising, since the discourses of European bourgeois human-
ism and anti-humanism are available to (and perhaps even con-
stitutive of) the postcolonial writer. The image of the intellectual
as an embattled figure of exile is not new; all the major icons
of modernism—Conrad, Joyce, James, Pound, T. S. Eliot—em-
body and represent exile as a painful yet exquisitely enabling
experience for the artistic consciousness (Ahmad 134). What is
novel and decidedly postmodern, however, is the de-linking of
distress from dislocation and the attendant idea of belonging
everywhere by belonging nowhere:

> What is new in the contemporary metropolitan philosophies and the
> literary ideologies which have arisen since the 1960s, in tandem with
> vastly novel restructurings of global capitalist investments, communi-
> cation systems and information networks—not to speak of actual
> travelling facilities—is that the idea of belonging is itself being

abandoned as antiquated false consciousness. The terrors of High Modernism at the prospect of inner fragmentation and social discon- nection have now been stripped, in Derridean strands of postmoder- nism, of their tragic edge, pushing that experience of loss, instead, in a celebratory direction. . . .   (Ahmad 129)

In modernism, exile is an inexorable double-bind, signify- ing both loss and gain, deprivation and surplus, alienation and unity. Fragmentation is never quite disjoined from pain and ter- ror. Postmodernism, rather than being terrorized by the frag- ment, celebrates the impossibility of totality and valorizes the partial, plural nature of human consciousness. De-legitimizing the self-privileging affirmations of bourgeois humanism through its ironic negations, postmodernism has transformed the world into a vast playful text and legitimized the pleasures of non- attachment and non-commitment.

The change from a comparatively modernist to a more post- modernist interpretation of exile may account, in part, for some of the differences between writers such as Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul—a point implied in Bharati Mukherjee's assess- ment of the two authors: "one of Rushdie's most appealing notions (which I hope is not an unfounded flattery) is that immigration, despite losses and confusions, its sheer absurdities, is a net gain, a form of levitation, as opposed to Naipaul's loss and mimicry" ("Prophet and Loss" 11). Although it is the creative impulse of exile that generates novels such as *The Mimic Men* and *Mr. Stone and the Knights Companion*, exile, especially in Naipaul's early works, is often an experience of division and defilement, alienation and isolation, frustration and futility. Instead of dis- covering new and exciting worlds in the mode of the imperial explorer, Naipaul's postcolonial traveller frequently ends up in the same arid place from which he has been physically but not quite psychologically unmoored. In the end, Naipaul's appar- ently "objective" eye tends to leave the observer as maimed as the observed. A markedly different view is evident in *The Satanic Verses*, which offers a whole typology of postcolonial migrancy. Rushdie's narrative divides the postcolonial into two basic identi- ties: the migrant and the national, as polarized most sharply in the figures of Saladin Chamcha and the Imam, respectively. While Saladin as postcolonial migrant seeks to assimilate into

the metropolis, the Imam lives segregated from the metropolis within the metropolis. Although Saladin's definition of migrant as metropolitan is not endorsed unequivocally by the text, its condemnation of the Imam's view of migrant as (fanatic) national is far more stinging and forthright: "Exile is a soulless country" (*The Satanic Verses* 208).

If Naipaul's position may be characterized as one of eternal exile, Rushdie's may be defined as one of permanent migrancy. Unlike the painful condition of eternal exile, the state of permanent migrancy emanates an exuberance that dissipates the pain of multiple dislocation and translates migrancy into a positive and prolific idiom. Instead of disempowering the self, dislocation actually opens up an abundance of alternative locations, allowing the individual to own several different homes by first becoming homeless. Notwithstanding these differences, however, there is one feature shared by both paradigms: a de-territorialized consciousness freed from such collectivities as race, class, gender, or nation, an unattached imagination that conveniently can become cosmopolitan and subaltern, alternately or simultaneously.

In emphasizing a de-territorialized postcolonial consciousness, the views of Indian immigrant writers such as Naipaul and Rushdie depart from the positions taken by many African writers who, in the wake of colonialism, have sought to re-territorialize rather than de-territorialize themselves. Comparing African with Indian postcolonial writing, Meenakshi Mukherjee observes:

> All the major writers in Africa today who write in English — including Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o — have powerfully articulated their critical norms and defined their positions regarding life and literature, assuming the centrality of Africa to their experience. This is very different from the situation in India, where there is generally much more cultural acquiescence, a greater acceptance of literary and critical fiats issued from the western metropolis and a wider separation between political engagement and literary or critical pursuits. (45)

The obdurate presence of the "local" seems to have made the territorialized narratives of African writers comparatively less compatible with hegemonic postmodern theories. Thus, for instance, the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* conclude that "na-

tionalist and Black criticisms" fail to offer "a way out of the historical and philosophical impasse" of imperialism because they continue to assert a localized postcolonial identity based on essentialist notions of purity and difference (20-22, 36). Obviously, the practice of challenging imperialism by asserting and affirming a denied or alienated subjectivity does not accord with the postmodernist project of deconstructing the coherent, autonomous subject.

Notwithstanding the authors' avowed intention to avoid collapsing the postcolonial into the postmodern, the preferred model of postcolonialism in *The Empire Writes Back* is a decidedly postmodernist one: it provides "a framework of '*difference on equal terms*' within which multi-cultural theories, both within and between societies, may continue to be fruitfully explored" and offers a "hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world" (36-37; emphasis added).[4] Bracketed thus, the polyglot, multiracial world envisioned by a writer such as Salman Rushdie becomes increasingly visible as a veritable supermarket of identities in which difference, instead of being a complex codification of power, manifests itself as a plethora of alternatives jostling one another in entrancing fluidity. Such a postcoloniality indeed can seem seamlessly postmodernist.

The possibility of locking postcolonial practices into postmodern positions has made postcolonialism aesthetically and formally accessible to postmodern audiences. For instance, the fact that the postcolonial novel is in a way "post-realist," allowing the author to borrow, when needed, the techniques of modernism, which are often the techniques of postmodernism as well, frequently elides the very different motivations behind postcolonial post-realism and postmodernist post-realism (Appiah 350). In addition to such aesthetic or formal assimilation, postcolonial practices are ideologically and politically domesticated to dominant postmodernist theories. Postcolonial repudiations of fixity and purity, for instance, cease to be potent political strategies of subversion within specific historical contexts by being bracketed as playful postmodernist rejections of transcendental unities. Thus, many postmodernist defenses of *The Satanic Verses* minimize, if not ignore, the destabilizing political argu-

ments and culture-specific allusions in the text (such as the "420" reference) by invoking notions of postmodern parody, alterity, and multiplicity.[5]

Varying conceptions of marginality, lack, victimization, and subalternity are assimilated indiscriminately into the figure of migrancy without regard to the elaborate socio-political (class, gender, intellectual) hierarchies of postcolonial cultures. As a result, metropolitan readers continue to view Salman Rushdie primarily in monochromatic tones as a champion of the oppressed "Third World" (especially of "Third World" women), while the classist and sexist biases of his fictions remain inadequately problematized.[6] Thus Timothy Brennan accepts the overtly textualized "feminist" intent of *Shame* at face value, proclaiming women to be "*Shame*'s only rebels" (Brennan 126). What Brennan's study overlooks, however, is the demeaning and offensive manner in which women are sexualized systematically in the text. Even in the comparatively more generous novel about India, *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie almost always links in overdetermined ways the women and the working class to sexual prowess, while connecting upper-class male impotence (as embodied in Saleem) to intellectual capability. Further, in *The Satanic Verses*, in which so much else is challenged or subverted, an unquestioned gendered sexual code continues to serve as the ground on which postcolonial male desire is played out. Ironically, the highly charged erotic register employed by Rushdie ultimately undermines his anxiety to write woman into postcolonial history.

Metropolitan perceptions of Rushdie are complicated further by the commodification of the immigrant writer as the ultimate authentic representor of subcontinental affairs. Of course, Rushdie himself has played an active role in promoting his public image as the itinerant insider-outsider endowed with a unique, although splintered, sensibility. Thus the narrator of *Shame* confesses he has "learned Pakistan in slices" and must therefore reconcile himself to "the inevitability of the missing bits" (70-71). What exactly are these "missing bits" to which the immigrant must reconcile himself? On what basis does a writer decide to include/exclude a particular "bit"? These questions do

not trouble us when we frame Rushdie's reclamation project within the postmodernist epistemology of the fragment. We can then see the migrant's fractured vision as an affirmation of the partial nature of all perception, conveniently overlooking the ideological choices that determine what "bits" get included or excluded. Calling attention to dangers underlying such critical omissions, Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out that the "missing bits" in Rushdie's narratives are precisely those aspects of life that the immigrant's absence inevitably shuts out: the resilient texture of everyday life, the healing quality of ordinary friendships, and those commonly shared experiences that provide people with secret spaces of refuge or even subterranean sites of resistance (139).

Rushdie's novels are most astute and insightful when the author uncovers the delusions and distortions of the paternal ruling class with which he is closely acquainted. Combined with the candid observations of an immigrant, his intimate knowledge of bourgeois society enables Rushdie to write alternative histories that offer many moving accounts of the frustrations and failures on the Indian subcontinent. Yet this field of vision inevitably is circumscribed by the material facts and ideological lures of migrancy. As a result, Rushdie's "imaginary homelands" almost always are wrapped in a miasmic atmosphere of guilt, complicity and folly in which individual resistance seems futile, and collective resistance practically inconceivable. Belying the exorbitance of their fictional forms, India and Pakistan thus collapse with a frighteningly predictable finality at the end of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*.

Immigrant writers gazing back at their "imaginary homelands" often seem unable to recognize or accept the healing balm from within that gradually fills up the wound left by their departure. I am reminded here of another immigrant writing in another context—of Milan Kundera, who, upon deciding not to return to Prague, wrote an article in which he attempted to attract the attention of the West to the predicament of Czech culture in general and that of the Czech intellectual in particular. The article, which appeared in *Le Monde*, described Czechoslovakia as a cultural desert where everything had died and everyone was

stifled. Kundera had only recently emigrated and was full of good intentions in writing such an article, but the response he got from Czechoslovakia horrified him. He was taken to task for presuming to think that everybody had died just because he had left the country!

IV

Immigrant postcolonial writers indeed have offered us some profound insights into culture and society, but unless we alert ourselves to the specific realities within which their works are manufactured and marketed, we are likely to grant their formulations much more than they can, or should, rightfully claim. The embarrassingly absolute, even exclusive, centrality currently commanded by "cosmopolitan celebrities" such as Rushdie in the emerging metropolitan counter-canon of postcolonial literature often obscures the material conditions and ideological contexts of their cultural production/consumption. Consequently, the public persona of the postcolonial writer as an autonomous and exuberant exile uniquely equipped to mediate "Third World" realities to "First World" readers has remained inadequately problematized.

Resisting the lures of "diaspora," we must recognize that the mythology of migrancy decontextualizes "Third World" immigration in order to minimize or obscure differences of class and gender. The mythology also exploits the peripheral position of the "Third World" to conflate falsely personal convenience with political persecution. Moreover, by decontaminating the migrant of all territorial affiliations and social affinities, the mythology of migrancy ironically re-invents, in the very process of destabilizing subjectivity, a postmodernist avatar of the free-floating bourgeois subject. Once this autonomous and unattached individual, this migrant, exiled, or nomadic consciousness, is legitimized as the only true site of postcolonial resistance, all other forms of collective commitment automatically get devalued as coercive and corrupt.

Clearly, not all "Third World" literature is produced by immigrants; and as Kwame Anthony Appiah has pointed out, neither is all cultural production in the "Third World" post-

colonial in ways recognized by the postmodern West (348). If both postmodernism and postcolonialism are, to an extent, space-clearing gestures seeking to reject and replace prior practices that claimed a certain exclusivity of vision (modernism and colonialism, respectively), many areas of contemporary cultural productions in/from the "Third World" are not in this way self-consciously concerned with transcending or going beyond coloniality: "Indeed it might be said to be a mark of popular culture that its borrowings from international cultural forms are remarkably insensitive to, not so much dismissive of as blind to, the issue of neo-colonialism or 'cultural imperialism'" (Appiah 348). Yet in the international marketplace, such cultural commodities do not attract the kind of attention and respect currently reserved for the more "proper" postcolonial productions.

The uncritical privileging of immigrant writers prevents us from seriously considering figurations of postcoloniality that may be grounded in alternative strategies for change. If postcolonial politics is to retain its radical cutting edge in dismantling the dichotomy between margin and centre, we can hardly afford to indulge in self-legitimizing mythologies and self-aggrandizing manoeuvres that dilute efforts towards decolonization.

NOTES

1 The term/category "Third World" obviously has little theoretical validity. I therefore use quotation marks to indicate its political rather than sociological signification.

2 Neil Lazarus's *Resistance in Postcolonial Fiction* (especially 1-26) offers a useful periodization of African fiction in relation to the "great expectation" of the independence era and the "mourning after."

3 For instance, before the law finally was repealed in 1992, female Indian nationals did not have the right to pass on citizenship to children born overseas.

4 For an extensive critique of *The Empire Writes Back*, see Mishra and Hodge.

5 For examples of such readings, see McLaren; Watson-Williams; Malak.

6 These attitudes continue to prevail despite the efforts of such immigrant scholars as Spivak, Suleri, Grewal, and Ahmad to focus on issues of class and gender in Rushdie's writing.

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