In Search of the Comprador: Self-exoticisation in Selected Texts from the South Asian and Middle Eastern Diasporas

Mohammad Shabangu

Thesis Presented for the degree of Master of Social Sciences in the Department of English at Rhodes University (Full Thesis)

Supervisor: Professor Sam Naidu

Dedication

For Lumumba Mthembu who, without even knowing it, unleashed the possibility**.**

Acknowledgments

Finding a suitable title for this thesis was for a long time the bane of my existence. But recently, I had the honour of meeting my academic role model, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, with whom I shared some of my frustrations about using 'the right theory' in my thesis. After a valuable conversation in which she wisely cautioned me against 'instrumentalising theory', she very kindly signed my book, addressing it "In Search of the Comprador…" So momentous were those words that I could not resist making them the title of the project and I am, here, grateful for that. The art of gratitude, and expressing sincere thanks, is too difficult to be contained within the limits of an 'acknowledgments' page. This thesis was only possible because of the help and support of many people, too many to name. Although it is not possible to name them all, I feel I must nevertheless mention those who made themselves available throughout the writing process. I am first and foremost sincerely grateful for my supervisor, Sam Naidu, without whom this thesis would really have been a hodgepodge of incoherent thoughts, at best. I have learned so much from her interventions which were *always* constructive. I was instructed by her guiding hand, which was always gentle but also always firm, forcing me to interrogate some of my untested positions, and I am better for it. I should mention that I am also very grateful for all the help and support I have received from Mike Marais. I've had the special privilege of being taught by him both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and I will forever remain influenced by the impact he had on me. Thank you also to Sue Marais, who, after having the misfortune of supervising my honours long paper, encouraged me to look into the topic of exoticisation on a much larger scale. I cannot even begin to explain how indebted I am to Lynda Spencer who was always there to lend an ear to my ramblings and to help me navigate through some of the 'first-world problems' I faced throughout the writing process. Lynda, without even knowing it, has been a bright rainbow during some of the cloudy days, and her words of wisdom continue to inspire and motivate me. Tina Steiner very kindly exposed me to some readings which were so useful in Chapter Four of this thesis, I thank her for that. The people in the English Department at Rhodes contributed to making the project a delightful one, and I must register my sincere gratitude to them all. Thank you for the wonderful conversations in your offices as well as in the quad. I must confess, I have long been flirting with the idea of compiling a booklet on some of the grotesquely beautiful conversations that emerge from that space. I must thank all my friends, with a particular mention to Brendan Ward, who was always willing to read various draft versions of this thesis, and on whom I could always rely. I have benefited immensely from conversations with Luke Cadden, my closest. And I thank him here for the unsolicited but always welcomed distractions, and for always taking time out to listen to my complaints. The financial assistance from the Rhodes University Guy Butler Scholarship is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and not necessarily to be attributed to Rhodes University or the donor. Finally, once again, thank you very much indeed to Sam Naidu, whose thorough, methodical and fine-toothed comb approach to supervision forces me to take responsibility and confess that whatever mistakes remain are my own.

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with transnational literature and writers of the Middle Eastern and South Asian diasporas. It argues that the diasporic position of the authors enables their roles as comprador subjects. The thesis maintains that the figure of the comprador is always acted upon by its ontological predisposition, so that diasporic positionality often involves a single subject which straddles and speaks from two or more different subject positions. Comprador authors can be said to be co-opted by Western metropolitan publishing companies who stand to benefit by marketing the apparent marginality of the homelands about which these authors write. The thesis therefore proceeds from the notion that such a diasporic position is the paradoxical condition of the transnational subject or writer. I submit that there is, to some degree, a questionable element in the common political and cultural suggestions that emerge upon closer evaluation of diasporic literature. Indeed, a charge of complicity has been levelled against authors who write, apparently, to service two distinct entities – the wish to speak on behalf of a minority collective, as well as the imperial 'centre' which is the intended interlocutor of the comprador author. However, it is this difference, the implied otherness or marginality of the outsider within, which I argue is sometimes used by diasporic writers as a way of articulating with 'authenticity' the cultures and politics of their erstwhile localities.

This thesis is concerned, therefore, with the representation of 'the East' in four novels by diasporic, specifically comprador writers, namely Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. I suggest that the 'third-world' and transnational literature can also be a selling point for the transnational subject, whose representations may at times pander to preconceived ideas about 'the Orient' and its people. As an illustration of this double-bind, I offer a close reading of all the novels to suggest that on the one hand, the comprador author writes within the paradigm of the 'writing back' movement, as a counter-discourse to the Orientalist representations of the homeland. However, the corollary is that such an attempt to 'write back', in a sense, re-inscribes the very discourse it wishes to subvert, especially because the literature is *aimed* at a 'Western' audience. Moreover, the template of the comprador could be used to explain how a transnational post-9/11 text from an Afghan-American, for instance, may be put to the service of the imperial machine, and read, therefore, as a supporting document to the U.S. policy on Afghanistan.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Abstract

The East as a Profession: An Introduction **1-6**

Chapter One – Compradorial Positions and Problems of Representation 7-33

Chapter Two – Writing Back? Salman Rushdie and *Midnight's Children* 34-56

Chapter Three – Irresolvable Oxymorons in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* 57-78

Chapter Four – The 'Good Muslim' and Self-Exoticisation in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* 79-94

Chapter Five – The First World's Third World Expert in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* 95-112

Towards Positive Complicity: A Conclusion **113-116**

Bibliography **117-123**

The East as a Profession: An Introduction

The Indian author and literary critic, Amit Chaudhuri, has noted with frustration the increasingly prevalent questions put to Indian writers who write in English. He mentions that the first question to be asked, or a variation thereof, is "which audience do you write for?" while the second question he has had to endure, directly related to the first is "are you exoticising India for a Western audience?" (85). At the outset, Chaudhuri contends that this line of reasoning belongs to the arena of "the politics of representation", naively proposed by those whose principal preoccupation is "political questions" rather than attending to "the definition of literary practice" (86). He concludes that there is no point in asking this question, since those who warn against exoticism do so with the primary assumption that the Indian writer in English, by virtue of the fact that she employs an elite language, is removed and distanced from that about which she writes.

For Chaudhuri, this notion is predicated on "[a]n Arcadian vision of Indian history" (87) which is grounded on the assumption that 'an Indian audience' is monolithic. At any rate, the Indian audience is not, he correctly mentions, a homogenous entity. It is stratified at all levels, including political and intellectual levels. Chaudhuri believes that because of this fundamental stratification, the distance between the writer in English and those about whom she writes is inevitable. This distance, it follows, is also inevitable for the writer who employs regional languages too. I begin this thesis with Chaudhuri's questions and comments because they properly point to the position of self-exoticisation by comprador authors. One of the central problems with comprador authors, as I argue throughout the thesis, is not that they register a dissonance between the writer and their target "audience", as Chaudhuri wrongly suggests, but that there is a dissonance between the writer and her *subject matter*. Of course, as Nivedita Majumdar points out in her study of the East as a career, there is "usually little social dissonance between the Indian Anglophone writer and [her] audience" since the writer is typically like the audience themselves, has access to upward social mobility, belongs to the middle or upper-middle class, is well educated and urban, both at home as well as abroad (4). Chaudhuri's focus on the space between the author and her "audience" rather than the space between the author and the *subject matter*, quite properly ignores the fact that it is this very audience, with whom the writer is imbricated, which opens up the possibility for exoticisation to take place. About such an imbrication, Majumdar has eloquently maintained that:

> [t]he phenomenal success of the [Eastern novel] in the West is deeply related to a cultural affinity between [the comprador writer] and their

> audience. [The comprador's works] are in circulation in a West where often a facile multiculturalism makes them very acceptable. It is the kind of multiculturalism, very prevalent in the affluent sections of Western metropolises, that promotes a superficial and comforting familiarity with foreign cultures. (4)

In arguing that writers have a tendency to exoticise their cultures in their novels, this thesis takes as a point of departure this very notion that the author's comprador position is ambivalent, at best, and at worst, contrived. I propose that the figure of the 'comprador' is a useful theoretical template in accessing writers from the South Asian and Middle Eastern diasporas and their representations of their former 'homelands'.

According to Hamid Dabashi, etymologically speaking, the Portuguese word 'comprador' has its roots in the mid-eighteenth century and was used to refer to a Chinese agent "engaged by European business interest in China to oversee its native employees and to act as an intermediary in its business affairs" (39). Not long after, the term was extended to include any "native servant in the service of a colonial commercial interest, someone 'employed by Europeans in India and the East'" (39). This thesis maintains that the figure of the comprador is always acted upon by the very fact of its ontology, so that diasporic positionality often involves a single subject which straddles and speaks from two or more different positions. The analogy of the Chinese agent is significant for its explanatory powers. The agent is co-opted by a Western force that subsequently uses the agent for commercial gains by cashing in on the fungible cultural capital that comes with agential affiliation. Similarly, the comprador authors can be said to be co-opted by Western metropolitan publishing companies who stand to benefit by marketing the apparent marginality of the homelands about which these authors write. The thesis therefore proceeds from the notion that such a diasporic position is the paradoxical condition of the transnational subject or writer.

On the one hand, the comprador author writes within the paradigm of the 'writing back' movement, as a counter-discourse to the Orientalist representations of the homeland. However, the corollary is that such an attempt to 'write back', in a sense, re-inscribes the very discourse it wishes to subvert, especially because the literature is *aimed* at a 'Western' audience. Moreover, the template of the comprador could be used to explain how a transnational post-9/11 text from an Afghan-American, for instance, may be put to the service of the imperial machine, and read, therefore, as a supporting document to the U.S. policy on Afghanistan.

The thesis takes into account the representation of the 'homeland' in the diasporic literature of authors from the regions about which the texts are written, namely, the Middle

East and South Asia, to suggest that the 'third-world' and postcolonial literature or transnational literature can also be a fungible point for the transnational subject. Therefore, I propose to engage with the following texts, cognisant of the fact that the named texts are by no means an exhaustive inventory, and that they each negotiate – with varying manifestations of their compradorial function – the tensions that come with contiguity. For the sake of feasibility and as a necessary guard against gross oversimplification, it will be useful to draw a distinction between what I shall simply call 'early formations of diasporic subjectivities' and 'later formations of diasporic subjectivities'.

The first category includes diasporic writers who write from the mid to late twentieth-century, or those whose writing emerges soon after independence, the aphoristically called 'post-colonial', 'decolonised' space and so forth. However, the latter category is comprised of contemporary diasporic writing about the Middle East and Islam. This comes out of the twenty-first century, and it emerges post-9/11. The suggestion that the thesis makes, if only implicitly, is that the former category begins with the intention to write back to the so-called 'imperial centre', but ultimately reinforces the very discourse it wishes to undermine. The latter category, however, begins not out of the need to subvert older Orientalist stereotypes, but in fact with the view of confirming from within, the preconceived ideas of a Western metropolitan audience. Indeed, it is the very nature of the comprador's position, the in-between space which writers are forced to straddle, which creates the conditions of possibility for self-exoticisation in the first place. Of course, that there is a cultural 'divide' strictly separated into an amorphous 'centre (West) and periphery (East)' is itself contingent on a rather invalid and outdated[1] centre-periphery binary which is by definition nebulous and untenable for a transnational subject.

Nevertheless, I proceed from the idea that the diaspora is both an enabler as well as the birthplace of self-exoticisation in literature. In Chapter One, I lay down the theoretical framework for the entire thesis, commencing with a description of the scope of the literature to which I am attending, how it varies in style, genre and form, but also suggesting that all these differences notwithstanding, the novels have a common strategy of exoticisation by virtue of the authority of the writer's diasporic locations. I note in detail that while the writers under evaluation emerge from different socio-economic backgrounds, they are brought together by their 'political orientation' and what could be seen as a criticism of their religion of Islam, even

[1] Although, for instance, Rushdie would have written his collection of essays about the perceived 'masters', *Imaginary Homelands,* in the early 90s, at which point such a notion would not have been necessarily outdated, the themes of cultural transplantation have shifted somewhat in the globalised world. However, it is the condition of the comprador, the in-between status that he faces as a result of such a notion of West and East, which is central to my argument.

though the novels do not signal an overt disinclination towards it.

I also suggest that stories which represent the ubiquitous oppression of women, the unreasonably backward culture or religious dogma, the timeless and static 'Orient', the irrational or sexually lascivious Muslim man and the sudden emergence of corrupt governments are typical literary subject matters or themes. The thesis examines three authors and four novels: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and finally, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Chapter one also outlines some of the conceptions of diaspora and then provides a detailed account of the processes of Orientalism and self-exoticisation, demonstrating how these two entities link to conceptions of power, knowledge and hegemony. In this chapter, I also place Rushdie and Kureishi within the first category of early compradors. The category of 'later comprador' is designated for Hosseini (and other post-9/11 writers I parenthetically mention). At this point, I ask the leading questions which will be answered throughout the rest of the thesis: what price do writers pay for their commercial success? To whom is this type of representation targeted in the first instance? Is there a way in which writers participate in a growing trend of an "alterity industry" (Huggan 413)? Subsequently, the chapter posits that the affirmative Euro-American reception of the novels speaks to a broader issue – namely, the 'Western' consumer culture which creates the market for the chosen narrative and the manner of representation in the first place. This very notion of 'the West' will also be dealt with in Chapter One.

In Chapter Two, I argue that Rushdie is an example of an 'early comprador', in keeping with the description provided in Chapter One. His diasporic subjectivity means he has one foot in the 'East' and the other in the 'West'. Overall, I find it necessary to problematise Rushdie's position as a writer who writes, apparently, with knowledge of India, arguing that the writer cannot absolve his political standing in the West. It is in this chapter that I have chosen to briefly discuss and apply Frederick Jameson's account of the political unconscious to insist that ultimately, Rushdie is interpolated as a transnational subject – that is to say, because he is a transnational subject he cannot avoid self-exoticisation. I argue that while the novel has admirable intentions, its narrative style, especially that it is autobiographical, is problematic. This chapter also draws a link between synecdoche and the staging of exoticism, where the individual's representations are a key way of making an isolated part belong to and represent a whole. Quite simply, then, I suggest that if as the protagonist, Saleem Sinai's 'part' is spoken about in exoticised language, then the whole is represented, too, in such a language. Importantly, I note in Chapter Two that the exaggerations and the language of magic which

abound in the text, seem to pander somewhat to Western notions of the East, even as they might be strategic. Such peppering of the exotic in the novel can overwhelm the text in a way that renders the entire project of the early comprador contradictory.

Still on the subject of the novel which registers an ironic self-reflexivity, Chapter Three, discusses Hanif Kureishi as, perhaps, the best example of the comprador author's folded togetherness with the systems of global capital and cultural commodification. This chapter argues that while Kureishi begins as a writer who is 'writing back' to the empire, his comprador position means that he is, in fact, just as Rushdie**,** unable to escape the double-bind of his subject position and the *consequence* of writing back in his chosen manner. Just like Rushdie, even if satire is intended to subvert, Kureishi creates a self-conflicted novel whose success inevitably relies on the very essentialisms it wishes to do away with.

In addition, the fourth and fifth Chapters respectively reflect a necessary shift from the compradorial positions which I believe, when all is considered, contain a modicum of political integrity. Moving on, I focus on the writing that is less politically aligned with the interests of the representation of the people about whom the novels are written – Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* as well as *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. To this extent, the remaining chapters focus on what I note as contrived representations of the East, targeted at a specific audience, perhaps intended to perform a particular political function in post-9/11global politics. Contrary to Chaudhuri's suggestions about literary criticism as tending to impose a political reading, the novels dealt with in this thesis can at least be said to favour a social position which Mahmood Mamdani has called "the good Muslim".

Chapter Four therefore focuses on Hosseini and suggests that he is an example of what we can call a 'later comprador' figure, one who emerges after 9/11 and writes about the post-9/11 situation. As an illustration of such a comprador, I argue that Hosseini contributes to the Euro-American imperial project to the extent that his works propagate ideas such as "the clash of civilisations" which is, in essence, the dichotomisation of 'Islam and West' or 'centre and periphery' and – lately – 'the West versus the Rest'. Exoticisation is the means by which these ideas are presented. I therefore suggest that Hosseini, unlike Rushdie and Kureishi does not begin with the intention to write back, and therefore use exoticisation strategically. What he does, contrarily, is abuse his heritage for commercial gains by indulging pre-conceived ideas about the Orient which Euro-American readers may hold. Chief among these is the idea of the violent and brutal savagery of the East. By analysing the texts in light of some important contemporary political philosophy, I then posit that despite their author's professed intentions, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reiterate and reinforces Orientalist and neo-

Orientalist representations of the Islamic world, all the while eliding the specificities of Afghanistan's heterogeneous and conflictual history. It is my contention too that, ultimately, these representations justify American cultural and military intervention in that country.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I consider another of Hosseini's texts, this time, one that focuses on the female experience in Afghanistan. Now, about the early comprador authors (Rushdie/Kureishi), I argue that writers are complicit, albeit accidentally, with the functions and structures of power and hegemony. Here, however, I argue that the writer is not merely accidentally complicit, but is in fact in cahoots with the imperial machine in the form of Euro-American political apparatuses. This chapter extends and drives home this point about Hosseini and his novels, using yet another of his texts to support this claim.

I argue that *A Splendid Suns* is replete with unspeakable misery, villainy and violence towards women, even more sentimentally narrated than *The Kite Runner*. In this book, Hosseini makes up for the absence of the female voice in his first novel. It will be important here to ask a leading question, given the strong focus on the exoticisation of women and gender representations as alibi to interventionist strategies. Does the novel suggest that Western mediations and intentions are essentially philanthropic? Furthermore, does it imply that cultural or military interventions are necessary for the stability of the Middle East? The novel, for instance, appeals to the touristic reader, from the very front cover. All publications/versions have variations of the following depiction: A veiled woman, against the backdrop of an ancient, dusty city, complete with roaming cattle. Typically, the veil reveals only the eyes, with a covering across the face, in keeping with representations of such places in mainstream media.

True to the style of exoticism, which is discussed in Chapter One, Hosseini also uses untranslated yet understandable terms and expressions, "*Salamalikum*" (384), "*harami*"(1), "*mashallah*" (32) etc., and provides in-text translations for exotic sounding words that are not immediately recognisable. I conclude the chapter on Hosseini by suggesting that, against his own intentions, the author does not represent or speak on behalf of his former locality, but rather, *imagines* it in the image of Euro-America, exotic and pre-given. The thesis concludes by reinforcing the idea that there may be an inescapable double-bind for comprador authors whose transnational subjectivity forces them to stand astride.

Chapter One: Compradorial Positions and Problems of Representation

Contextualisation

This thesis is concerned principally with transnational literature and writers of the Middle Eastern and South Asian diasporas respectively. It argues that there is a burgeoning trend of self-exoticisation in fiction and semi-autobiographical fiction which, while it aims to articulate particular experiences, may serve to re-Orientalise the 'homelands' of the diasporic authors. Two of the writers with whom I am concerned have immigrated, in early childhood, to Europe or America, or indeed, in one case, had residency in both these regions. The other, Kureishi, was born and raised in England, but has Pakistani parentage.

There is a great deal of scholarly inquiry into such writers and their works, although much of it concerns itself with either the *literary* significance of the books, or the structural aspects of form – magical realism, fictionalised autobiography, sentimentalism or iconoclasm, for instance – which ultimately supports their author's artistic efforts and cements their works into the literary canon. In the process, this uneven inquiry pays little or no attention at all to certain underlying ramifications of these writers' representational inferences, the unintended consequences and implications of their chosen manner of representation. Many of the thematic concerns that are the focus of this type of literature are common in most writings that fall under the category of transnational literature: the conceptions of exile; homeland, migration and diaspora, for instance, and the ways in or extent to which identity is shaped or influenced by these factors. Using the English language as their primary mode of expression, these texts are targeted at a 'Western' audience and are often concerned with the image of the writer's homeland abroad.

The thesis argues that the affirmative Euro-American reception speaks to a broader issue – namely the Western consumer culture which creates the market for the chosen narrative and the manner of representation. Although it would make, admittedly, for a more nuanced approach, the thesis stops short of highlighting the problems associated with the gender of the authors who produce these bestselling works in their diasporic locations. While the writers under evaluation emerge from different socio-economic and political backgrounds, they share what, at first, seems to be a common position in their political orientation. They are, in addition, connected by the artistic articulation of what could be seen as a criticism of the religion of Islam, even though the novels do not signal an *overt* disinclination towards it. To be sure, the writers with whom this thesis is concerned have all expressed their disavowal of religion, in this instance Islam. The scope of their literature varies in style, genre or form, from what is

often described as postcolonial magical realism in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980), to the increasingly popular and somewhat organic style of memoir to be found, for example, in Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003). [2] In other instances, writers such as Hanif Kureishi have opted to mount a critique of culture in what appears to be a more palatable and less debateable form and structure, satire or comedy in the form of representational realism,[3] terms which have been used to describe his novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), although the novel has proven to transgress these classical categorisations, even, in some cases, marketing itself as fictional autobiography.

On the other hand, writers such as Khaled Hosseini have taken advantage of the political conditions which give credence to their work and consistently make use of Sentimentalism, a specific aspect of form which emphasises the tearful distresses of the virtuous and heroic characters who defeat the odds under devastating conditions (Abrams 328-329). His highly acclaimed novels, *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), are a couple of examples. However, based on their subject matter, emphasis and artistic purpose, all these novels may arguably be categorised as narratives resembling a *Bildungsroman*, in which the maturity of the protagonist's mind and character, through an enlightenment of sorts, is the centripetal concern of the author (Abrams 229).

But is there a price that writers pay for their commercial success (Huggan 413)? After all, among this inventory of writers, one has received the Booker Prize as well the Best of the Bookers; another remained on *The New York Times'* bestseller's list for over one hundred weeks. To date, three of the novels have been adapted into award winning screenplays. In addition, Rushdie and Kureishi appear on the top of a number of exalted lists: "The Fifty Greatest British Writers Since 1945", for instance. What do the discrepancies of the critical reception of the novels in Euro-America, South Asia and the Middle East reveal? All these writers have declared, in one way or another, their intentions to write in order to give a voice to certain voiceless peoples and spaces. In light of this, what contradictions are there between the anti-colonial stance of these writers and the neo-imperial market schemes that are at work?

[2] Although this novel will not be analysed in any significant detail in this thesis, it is parenthetically mentioned here and elsewhere as an important and intermittent example of the nascent trend of self-exoticisation.

[3] I borrow the term "representational realism" from the South African-Israeli theorist, Louise Bethlehem, who describes certain works which are predicated on "the trope of truth" (1). This is the notion that authors and cultural critics are always propelled by the need to demonstrate how "literature and life maintain a one to one relationship, and that mimetic writing is capable of providing unmediated access to the 'real'" (Herman 108). Interestingly, not only is such literature, genre irrespective, under the obligation to 'tell the truth' about a society or a group of people, but this trope of truth is itself underscored by an equally dominant investment in *"the trope as truth"* (original emphasis 108).

This chapter lays down the theoretical framework within which to consider these questions, which will be answered in subsequent chapters.

Locating the Middle East and South Asia

Of course, that these writers speak about the Middle East and South Asia is an important feature that runs through the fabric of their diasporic literature. However, there are contending visions of what constitutes the Middle East and South Asia, regions loosely defined as 'the Orient' by some critics and reviewers. It has already been noted, as Zachary Lockman has argued, that these descriptions tend to account for the region in a way that ordinarily assumes it is a homogenous zone, geographically, culturally as well as politically (Lockman 30). The Middle East, for instance, is sometimes used to refer to the collective countries which have a predominantly Muslim majority, their geographical locations notwithstanding, so that even countries on the African continent, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, North and South Sudan, Morocco and recently, Somalia, are not excluded from modern conceptions of the Middle East and 'the Muslim world'. Whereas, historically, one would use the term Middle East as a geographical marker which distinguished 'the West' and 'the East' along ethnic and racial lines rather than religious or political lines (Lockman 33).

A number of scholars from across a range of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, philosophy and history agree that it has become difficult to conceive of the 'Orient' outside of the 'Occident' or what has become known as 'the West'. These terms, themselves in need of historicising, are the point of departure in any discussion about East and West. The theoretical foundations of this thesis are, therefore, interdisciplinary, drawing from fields as diverse as anthropology, sociology, philosophy and literary theory, rather than privileging any one disciplinary or methodological approach.

To start with, it is important to note that, as a historical signifier, 'the East' simultaneously denoted 'Western civilisation's' advancement and progression in contrast to the stagnation and placidity of the "Saracens", a Greek word, introduced in the seventh century, for "tent" to imply that those originating from outside Europe were 'tent-dwellers' (Lockman 34). In her book *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*, Maria Rosa Menocal, following Edward Said's *Orientalism*, outlines the origins of the term Middle East. Our modern-day understanding of the West as we know it, she argues, is in many ways heavily indebted to the term Middle East or "the Arab world" as it was constructed many years ago (Menocal 1). To substantiate her argument, Menocal observes that:

> The most general, and in many ways the most influential and pervasive, image or construct we have is that of ourselves [Westerners] and our culture, an entity we have dubbed "Western", a clearly comparative title. Whether it is spoken or unspoken, named or unnamed, we are governed by the notion that there is a distinctive, necessary, and fundamental opposition to non-Western culture and cultural history. (1-2)

For Menocal, the West comes into being in an oppositional way, an idea that is echoed by many of her predecessors. The idea that a geographical landmass, the Middle East, is a conceptual construct is itself contingent upon the "myth of Westernness" (2) which, Menocal warns, must not be underestimated.

Indeed the West has often been described as always having been 'great', invoking civilisations of classical antiquity – Greek and Roman – as a means to claiming a continuity of prominence that has produced an unbroken chain of cultural and hegemonic status. And yet to claim an eternal existence would imply that the West has had, and indeed continues to have, something at its core, some essence which has never been ruined and remains basically unchanged and intact for time immemorial. This 'essence', it could be presumed, is not to be found in other nations or civilisations across the world. It follows, then, that the countries and nations which would be seen as non-Western were characterised by their lack of this 'core value' or trait which, had they possessed it, would accrue onto them a modicum of the political and economic prowess that spans every successful Western nation.

As Europe's geographical and cultural horizons began to expand with the voyages of "discoveries" in the fifteenth and sixteenth-century, its identity simultaneously became rigid and fixed into an imaginary which was influenced by the increasing conquest of foreign lands (Lockman 38). This, as one might expect, gave weight to the brewing notion that global empires are formed by the innate strength of the West which allows it to assume its position as the superpower, conquering weaker nations as a result. And thus emerged the identity of the 'West', constructed as antithetical to an 'East' as a way of identifying "who they *were* in relation to who and what they *were not*" (Lockman 57 *original italics*). This produced an entire discourse through which Western civilisations drew distinctions and contrast between what had gradually become known as non-Western. These distinctions, Lockman has observed, "delineated those characteristics and virtues which Europeans were coming to see as unique to Western civilisation [...] and which they thought accounted for their power, wealth and knowledge" (57).

To be sure, the 'other' nations and societies' 'inherent weakness' made them predisposed to, and in fact justified and facilitated, their domination by Western rule. To this day, variations

of this genetic or cultural deficit theory form the bedrock of Western understandings of the 'East' in some scholarship.[4]

In view of the trajectory of the construction of the West and its 'lesser other', a notion sustained through a number of discourses including literature, political studies, as well as anthropology, it becomes easier to describe some of the *representations* of the cultural codes that are found in diasporic literature that has a specific target audience. Although these countries have different political orientations, this thesis is concerned, primarily, with the *cultural cache* to which writers of the South Asian and Middle Eastern diasporas owe their success.[5] That is, the material conditions which they fluently recount and the presumed general commonalities in cultural practices across these countries, representations of which are abundant in diasporic literature which is aimed at a metropolitan audience. Made manifest, such representations may typically include tropes of arranged marriages, at an early age especially, as well as polygamy. Representational realism in diasporic texts might also be underpinned by the trope as truth, so that other common ideas such as entering into marriage in honour of one's parents and accepting a woman's subordinate position to her husband are seen as accepted practice among 'Easterners'.

In general, reproductive heteronormativity is also a representational feature in much diasporic literature (not only of South Asian and Middle Eastern literature, but also of African literature) aimed at a Western metropolitan centre. We might think of the contemporary popular novels by Muslim writers in the West. Amulya Malladi's *The Sound of Language*, for instance, is that which best demonstrate the importance of the *trope as truth* in diasporic literature. And still, thematic concerns which are anchored by reproductive heteronormativity in which childbearing is the common topic, often represent the woman as being frowned upon for her inability to produce a male child. While the East also comprises other religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism to name a few, my focus on Islam and 'the Muslim world' is deliberate. It is grounded in the growing interest on 'Islamic fundamentalism' after the event of 9/11. Such an interest directly informs popular understandings of that religion and its followers. For this reason, popular 'Western' struggles such as gender equity, for instance,

[4] Bernard Lewis's or Ibn Warraq's ideas about the East as inherently culturally or militarily inferior, forever at odds with those of, say, Edward Said, are a good example of the way in which this discourse continues to live in this day (Varisco, *Defending* Review 178).

[5] I only use the Middle East as a specific example of the construction of an 'Other' to the West. South Asia is also included as an example of the result of the constructive powers of discourse, to be discussed in specific details momentarily.

become the alibi for military and cultural interventions in the Muslim world, a phenomenon that has become known as the 'war on Islam'.

The Import(ance) of Diaspora

Drawing on the abovementioned repertoire of Oriental signifiers,[6] those practices and items which are 'foreign' to the West, migrant writers may be said to have access to a particular exoticist representational modality which is given authority by their status as migrants who come from these 'othered' zones. And so, the term 'comprador' has been used to define those who occupy and have connections with a space that is 'here and there' or, indeed, a space that is *neither* here nor there, so that one is Indian-British, British-Indian, Afghan-American and so on, always hyphenated and belonging at once to two or more nations. Thus the historian James Clifford notes:

> The empowering paradox of diaspora [and so migration] is that dwelling here assumes a solidarity and connection there. But there is not necessarily a single place or an exclusive nation. How is the connection (elsewhere) that makes a difference (here) remembered and articulated? (322)

It is almost obvious in transnational literature, this tension that forces writers to straddle their locations or attempt to negotiate a coherent imaginary that seeks to articulate their malleable identity. Anthropologists Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen have for many years observed the condition of migrants and globalisation and have offered a particularly useful account of diasporic subjects in their book *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*.

According to them, it is "incontestable" that the three broad themes indicated in the title of the book are "intuitively linked" and form a complex "triadic relationship" whose practicalities they proceed to unpack (Vertovec and Cohen xi). They begin by charting the trajectory of traditional forms of migration to contemporary forms of migration, noting how, particularly since the communist world collapsed, different forms of flows, migration of various enterprises such as capital, goods and ideas, have "undermined the autonomy of the nation-state" and since "threatened" attempts at "nation-building" (xi). Meanwhile, a new pattern of migration has emerged in which diasporic populations, socially as well as culturally, demonstrate a form of de-centeredness which raises plausible questions about the ways in which they are tied "neither at their places of origin nor at their places of destination,"

[6] As will become clearer in the later part of this chapter, such a repertoire takes the form a specific discourse, which consists of specific elements of self-exoticisation on the part of the diasporic writer.

prompting scholars to consider whether these "homeless" subjects ever really existed ('home' as ideological) or whether or not 'home' can be multi-locational (xi). Related to diaspora and transnationalism, are the contemporary forms of migration, facilitated by and large by new forms of technology. These forms include electronic communications, trade and investment which have created "cultural inter-dependence" and have provided ways for diasporic subjects to maintain links and networks with their 'homeland', giving them "multiple localities" as well as "multiple identities" (xvi). Rather than describing any community which is "deterritorialised" as a diaspora, I align my argument with Vertovec and Cohen who highlight three meanings which they believe encompass the concept of diaspora, namely, diaspora "as social form, 'diaspora' as a type of consciousness, and 'diaspora' as mode of cultural production" (xvii).

The first, diaspora as a social form, is characterised by a "three-way relationship" in which ethnic groups undergo a process of self-identification, although they are globally dispersed (xviii). However, they also use "the territorial states and contexts" in which they reside as well as "their homeland states and contexts whence they or their forbears came" as a basis for identity making (xviii). The second, diaspora as type of consciousness, refers to "a state of mind and a sense of identity" that gives one "a particular kind of awareness of multi-locality [which] stimulates the need to *conceptually* connect oneself with others, both 'here' and 'there' " (xviii *my emphasis*). Of course, being a state of mind, and since the mind functions in different ways, various manifestations of diaspora as consciousness play themselves out.

One of these, as Arjun Appadurai points out, is memory. Diaspora consciousness, however it is viewed, is bound to betray memory since "diasporas always leave a trail of *collective* memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and of attachment" (Appadurai 1 *my emphasis*). The term collective memory may initially be misleading, since it must not be assumed that these memories always function as a consolidation of identities and different collectivities. Rather, diaspora consciousness consists of memories which are 'fractured' and therefore may produce a "multiplicity of histories, communities and selves" (Vertovec and Cohen xviii) as is the case with the varied responses to the literature that is produced by diasporic writers. Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, for all its controversies, can be seen, for instance, as a function of Rushdie's memory as a diasporic subject while, at the same time, the response of diasporic Muslim communities' in Euro-America may also be seen as a function of their own memory about Islam, the homeland and culture, exposing the fissures in the memory of diaspora consciousness. Appadurai can again be employed to extrapolate this point:

> Diasporic texts produce their own disjunctures. [On the one hand] Rushdie's dialogue with Islam is at least as much a product of his travels through India and Pakistan to England, and his memories of an Islamic childhood, as it is a product of a displaced adult confronting Islamic fundamentalism and British racism. Reacting to him, on the other hand, are diasporic Muslims, in the cities of India, Pakistan and England, the United States and elsewhere, whose memories are more directly caught up with the anguish of diasporic reproduction. An artist's right to doubt, on the one hand, and a group's right to believe, on the other, both dilemmas of diaspora. (iii)

Diaspora consciousness, then, can also be seen in terms associated with a type of double consciousness, a term used by W.E.B. Du Bois to describe his struggles in negotiating being both American and Black. Paul Gilroy, via Du Bois, appropriates this term to describe the "black Atlantic diaspora" in Britain, to suggest, using metaphorical conceits in ways anomalous to social scientific inquiry, that "diaspora is ambivalent about organicity, but it comes closely associated with the idea of sowing seed" (208). This is, he continues in the same vein, "a disputed legacy and a mixed blessing. It demands that we attempt to weigh the significance of the scattering process against the supposed uniformity of that which has been scattered" (208). In this way, it "posits important tensions between here and there, then and now, between seed in the bag, the packet or the pocket and seed in the ground, the fruit or the body" (208-209). At any rate, Gilroy echoes what Appadurai, Vertovec and Cohen also see as a diaspora of consciousness.

Finally, the third type of diaspora is to be seen as a mode of cultural production in which "back-and-forth transferences" are constantly negotiated so that hybrid identities are formed as a result of the "production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena" (Vertovec and Cohen xix). The ontology of diasporic subjects reflects what James Clifford describes as "the sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes homeland, not as something left behind, but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity" (311). Concerning the 'triadic relationship' between migration, diaspora and transnationalism, Stuart Hall provides an encapsulating account:

> [D]iaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other peoples into the sea. This is the old, the imperializing, the hegemonizing form of 'ethnicity.' [...] The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence of purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference, by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (235)

While I can recognise and agree that there exists a type of heterogeneity in diasporic subjects, their identity being constantly fluid and hybrid, I submit that there is something suspect about the common political and cultural suggestions that emerge upon closer evaluation of their diasporic literature. These political and cultural suggestions, I argue, gesture towards some shared aims, or at least a cohesion, in the minds and identities of diasporic subjects. Indeed, a charge of complicity has been levelled against authors who write, apparently, to service two distinct entities – the wish to speak on behalf of a minority collective, as well as the imperial 'centre' which is the intended interlocutor of the agent or comprador author. It is this difference, the implied otherness or marginality of the outsider within, which I argue is sometimes used by diasporic writers as a way of articulating with 'authenticity' the cultures and politics of their erstwhile localities. This thesis is concerned, therefore, with the representation of the East in four novels by diasporic, specifically comprador writers, namely *Midnight's Children*, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. I take into account the representation of the 'homeland' in the diasporic literature of authors from the regions about which the texts are written, namely, South Asia and the Middle East, to suggest that the 'third-world' and postcolonial literature and transnational literature can also be a point fungible for the transnational subject.

Therefore, as earlier mentioned, it is beneficial to draw a distinction between, on the one hand, "early formations of compradorial positions" and "later formations of compradorial positions". The first category includes diasporic writers who write from the mid to late twentieth-century, or those whose writing emerges soon after independence, the aphoristically called 'post-colonial', 'decolonised' space. It also includes those writers who are influenced by the trials and tribulations of cultural hybridity as first generation immigrants in the West. On the other hand, the latter, later formations of compradorial positions, is comprised of more contemporary diasporic writers of the twenty-first-century, whose writing occurs after 9/11, an event which should be considered pivotal in the reception of the literature produced by such writers. As far as the later comprador is concerned, although I only examine one such a writer in this category – Khaled Hosseini – I analyse two of his novels, both highly successful and both of which deal with different thematic concerns, thereby covering a range of representational issues.

The ideas submitted about the 'complicity' between the literature produced by diasporic writers and the forces of globalised capital are, of course, by no means pioneering, and have been covered by scholars, old and contemporary. From Gayatri Spivak's work on the 'Native Informant' (1983), Graham Huggan's on exoticisation (2001), to Hamid Dabashi's unforgiving

criticism of post-9/11 discourse in diasporic literature (2006), all these scholars are mindful of the "interface between two apparently incompatible systems – the oppositional system of postcolonial resistance and the profit-driven system of the transnational culture industries and global trade" (Huggan 216). These scholars are also suspicious of what seem to be modern-day incarnations of Orientalist discourse.

My approach is more modest than that: I wish to explore the irony of the outsider within, how such a figure has an uneasy relationship with 'marginality', 'authenticity' and 'resistance' which are at once the blessing and the curse of diasporic writers of transnational literature (Huggan 83). Also, I wish to explore and identify the nature of 'Orientalist' discourse as "a created body of theory and *practice*, designed, consciously or unconsciously, to serve the interests" of Euro-American neo-imperial powers (Macfie 6 *my emphasis*). One of the ways in which this is done is through a process of self-exoticisation. I will begin first by discussing the subject of Orientalism as proposed by Said, then work towards an effective description of neo-Orientalism, a specific element that is found in the texts of the selected Middle Eastern and South Asian diasporic writers. Finally, I develop a type of theorisation on self-exoticism and, in later chapters, employ this theory in understanding the Euro-American reception of the four novels under evaluation.

Orientalism in Theory

Edward Said, one of the most preeminent literary scholars of his generation, published his seminal text *Orientalism* in 1979 in which he examined some of the untested assumptions that underlie Western attitudes towards the Middle East and South Asia or the region known as 'the Orient'. Said identified Orientalism as a "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident' " (2). That is to say, the conceptual paradigm within which the East is conceived, in academia and conventional forms of knowledge production, always takes as a starting point the basic distinction between civilisations of the West and those of the East, thereby establishing a dichotomy which is said to be fundamental. This, Said warns, is the reason why, even though Orientalism does not survive as it once did, it lives on through means of knowledge production and knowledge consumption in academia and public discourse (2).

Of course, Said himself notes that he is not the first to offer a critique of Orientalism as a learned study. Antonio Gramci (1957), A.L. Tibawi (1961) and Anwar Abdel Malik (1963) had all begun discussions concerning the power relations of the West vis-a-vis the East. Much of the work produced on Orientalism before Said's elaborate account operated under (or tended

to accept wholly) the notion that it was indeed possible to achieve *an* objective, real and 'authentic' truth about the Orient and the Muslim world, its culture, its people, its mind-set and so forth. This idea of truth as an accessible end would, according to some scholars, be achieved by using the "analytical tools of political economy, thereby eschewing the cultural essentialism that characterised modernization theory" (Lockman 211). So, while there was significant work that was in place before his contribution to the field, Said can be credited with introducing the idea of *representation* in understanding different cultures and in particular, the relationship between East and West.

Power, Knowledge and Discourse

The relationship between power and knowledge, as Michel Foucault demonstrates in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, is insidious in ways that are revealing. Reading *Orientalism*, for instance, this relationship becomes clearer to comprehend. Historically, any knowledge produced about the Orient by Westerners, as an academic discipline, reveals more about those writing or producing it than it does about the investigated subjects or peoples it claims to understand. Said's criticism, and the critique of Orientalism in general, is founded on Foucault's theorisations of power and knowledge (Said 3). While Said himself scantly explicates his employment of Foucault in *Orientalism*, the French theorist is certainly worth re-examining for the purpose of this thesis. According to Foucault, it was only long after the Renaissance period that people began to question the sociology of objects. Until then, it was assumed, as in the Enlightenment view, that language reflected reality and that objects reflected things as signifiers simply reflected things signified. In the late nineteenth century, language came to be seen not as a reflection of reality but as, to borrow from Alexander Macfie, a type of "transparent 'film' which is dissociated" from language. Through this dissociation, it becomes "possible to identify words and statements not as signs, representing objects and things, but as events, floating in a space, field or episteme" (Macfie 41).

Foucault is concerned with exposing the scientific concepts and methods of understanding which claim to produce a form of objectively "true knowledge of the world" (Lockman 184). Contrary to this view, Foucault argues that our understanding or perception of 'truth' is always mediated by ways of 'seeing' and representing reality, a type of 'discourse', which is in essence a "structured system of meaning" which influences our perceptions, thoughts, and therefore our understanding of 'truth' (184). Here, I borrow a rather sharp analogy from Lockman to help elucidate the dialectic of power and knowledge and bolster the Foucauldian concept of 'a discourse' which is central to my use of Orientalism and the ways in which diasporic writers

exoticise their homelands through their narrative strategies by relying on conventional discourses about the East.

For Lockman, discourse is analogous to a pair of imaginary spectacles that one might unconsciously wear, which act as a filter of sorts, influencing what we see, or in fact do not see. These spectacles, by foregrounding certain things and rendering invisible others, may determine what these things mean to the perceiving eye. In the Foucauldian view, there is no transcendental way of getting to a reality which is "out there" by wearing these spectacles (185). There is, therefore, nothing that stands in the way of "reality" and the knowing/perceiving human subject, as the spectacles metaphor suggests, as if the rational and autonomous being can transcend such obstacles to achieve this objective truth, reality or knowledge. Indeed, even the axiomatic idea of individual autonomy, an acosmic being with the intuition of the transcendental, is *itself* a product of a particular type of discourse.

This view, then, undermines the accepted idea that there can be a way of achieving 'objective truth' (Lockman 185). What Foucault and Said call a discourse, which is in essence a *particular* way of seeing, is not a "*mis*representation" (185) or what might be called, a false or "distorted perception of reality" (185), since, according to this view, "no truth, no "accurate" representation of what really exists was possible in the Enlightenment sense of objective knowledge of reality" (185). In effect, what one has is:

> only alternative representations, different discourses, each of which had its own (usually implicit, unacknowledged and unexamined) premises, its own claims to truth, its own rules and conventions, and each of which in effect created the very object it purported to be studying. (185)

The idea of a specifically mediated perception of the world is important, of course, as it lays the foundations upon which Said will later mount a critique of Orientalism as not only influenced by systems of knowing, but – indeed – as being a *constructed* and highly sustained discourse.

As functions of discourse, knowledge and truth have a few important traits which characterise them, the most important of which, according to Foucault are:

> centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses

> (university, army, *writing*, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and *social confrontation* ('ideological' struggles). (131)

Simply put, discourse, knowledge and truth form a nexus that operates in a circular motion, produced by systems of power which both maintain and distribute this nexus for general consumption. Certainly, for Said, Orientalism was very much a discourse in the same way envisioned by Foucault in a sense that it was replete with systems of power relations which, in various forms and degrees, validated, sustained and induced meanings and knowledge about the Middle East or the Orient which was shaped by pre-existing ideas and notions (Said xiii). It was also, following Foucault, a *particular type* of discourse in a sense that it took as an object of study, 'the Orient', and examined it under previously conceived rules and conventions or certain claims to 'truth'.

Discourse and knowledge, of different cultures and peoples – the Orient – is what "makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (Said 36). If, for instance, Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, as a product of the broader discourse or circular nexus, is taken as a source of information about the condition of women in the Middle East, the Euro-American centre is able to use the effects of this narrative strategy and take advantage of this dialectic of information and control. The effect of such a novel is that its content, the 'information', serves to substantiate the Euro-American imperial impulse. Regarding those diasporic authors who write about the Middle East or South Asia, Azar Nafisi, Khaled Hosseini, Hanif Kureishi and Salman Rushdie, for example, it can be argued that their representations, consequently, are always informed by an archive or body of knowledge as Foucault and Said insist.

Orientalism Re-visited

In Said's postulation, the Orient does not exist *ex nihilo*, as some free-floating region that is merely 'there', waiting to be explored. Far from being an innate fact of nature, the Orient is, according to him, a "man-made" concept (Said 5), since history is itself a human invention, insofar as what can be known is really what has been made, and subsequently attributed to geography. It follows, then, that "as geographical and cultural entities," the Orient is as much 'an idea' as is the West (4-5). This 'idea' has "a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that gives it reality and presence in and for the West" (5).

A caveat must be noted. It would be erroneous, as Said correctly warns, to conclude that the Orient is simply or "*essentially* an idea or a creation with no corresponding reality"

since, indeed, there are nations and cultures with peoples whose lives have "a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West" (5). At any rate, the main point of Said's study is to explore the relationship between the Occident and the Orient as one which is characterised by the Foucauldian power-knowledge equation earlier adumbrated. In view of this dialectic, there emerges a sustained and intricate hegemonic system or form of domination, culturally speaking, through the operational discourse of Orientalism. By examining Orientalism as a discourse, Said hopes to create the enabling conditions for one to consider and "understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3).

For the most part, Orientalism is so pervasive that Said insists that "no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism" (3). So how does one define Orientalism and its scope so that the persons, groups, institutions or the modes and functions which are being referred to under the term Orientalism become clearly understood? One of the foremost criticisms that Said and his study have had to endure, spanning three decades, is what detractors see as an inadequate account of the meaning of Orientalism.

In his introduction to the study, Said mentions that "by Orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion, interdependent" (2). Of course, the readily understood definition is rooted in academia, Orientalism as an academic discipline or institutional framework that commissions and advances scholarly inquiry into the Orient. Therefore, anyone who, according to Said, "teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient – and this applies whether the person is an anthropologists, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism" (2). While this description rests on an ostensibly broad-spectrum, it does not include scholars who live and work in the 'Orient' and who are themselves 'Orientals'. The main thrust of Said's study, and this thesis by extension, lies in the interest in the "dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the three great empires – British, French, American – in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced" (14-15). Having moved to the 'West', and perhaps by virtue of the diasporic positionality earlier discussed, writers such as Rushdie, Kureishi, Nafisi and Hosseini can be considered as part of the cohort of authors whose writing was produced in the 'intellectual and imaginative territory' of the imperial centre.

Since many of Said's critics take issue with what they argue is his offering of a loose and,

therefore, too broad a definition, some of the pertinent issues of *Orientalism* get deflected in their dismissal. Daniel Martin Verisco has said in, perhaps, too *ad hominem* a tone:

> The imprecise stretching of "Orientalist" to include virtually anyone who has anything to say about the Orient is hard even for Said to maintain. His admiration for Raymond Schwab, a French historian who wrote a survey on the growth of professional Orientalism in Europe, is a case in point. (44)

Since this thesis is concerned with a particular definition of Orientalism, my purpose here will only be to tacitly acknowledge such criticism and propose a definition of Orientalism for the purpose of this thesis, that is, Orientalism as related to the construction of a mythical Orient. This Orient has unchanging characteristics which are viewed in opposition to an ever progressive Occident. Insofar as Euro-American culture aggrandised its identity "by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (2) Orientalism, the learned study, can at least be said to support an exaggerated image of the East as a place – since antiquity – of dangerous romance, rampant violence, exotic cultural practices, backwardness, ghostly memories, uncivilised codes of conduct and generally remarkable experiences.

The Author, the Text and Meaning

A useful point put forward in the theory of Orientalism has to do with methodological devices which writers use in writing about or speaking on behalf of the Orient. Two critical contrivances emerge, the notion of a "strategic location" and that of a "strategic formation" which writers use when describing the Oriental material which they encounter. Writing about the Orient requires a type of positioning on the part of the author – strategic *location* (Said 20). This location will determine the kind of "narrative voice" and device which the writer employs, the structure of the text and the types of images, themes and motifs that abound in her text. She will, as a result of the enmeshing of these factors, develop a certain manner of "addressing the reader", at all times aiming at "containing the Orient, and finally, representing or speaking in its behalf [sic]" (20). In this way, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, and Khaled Hosseini take up a position in history, not in an abstract way, but in a real sense of writing based on previous knowledge about the Orient,[7] referring to such knowledge at times, and forever relying on it.

For these four authors, the Orientalisation of their homelands does not manifest itself in some abstract way. It is present on the *surface* of the text, the "exteriority" of that which it

[7] Of course, they also draw from their own lived experiences. The point here is that the language which is used to describe such experiences in these texts is informed by discourse.

describes or conveys rather than that which is hidden as in some allegorical device. Said suggests that Orientalist material is "premised upon exteriority", which, for him, means that it is founded "on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West" to *know* – or more precisely, to confirm its ontology (20-21). Since the Orient is represented in *Midnight's Children* or in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, for example, its representation must be taken *as representations* rather than as the 'natural' or 'truthful' depiction of the region and its people. In that case, regardless of the 'correctness' of the representation, evidence of Orientalism must be sought *not* in the extent to which the texts are faithful to some original 'truth' or image of the Orient, but rather in the way in which these texts register their "style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances" (21). To support this view, a reader might note for instance that Saleem Sinai, Rushdie's protagonist in *Midnight's Children*, is constantly compelled to narrate his version of history and truth. While he is well aware of the discrepancies in his representations of history, Saleem articulates the need to see representations of India as representations rather than as claims to 'truth' and knowledge about India. Early in the novel, he advises his reader:

> There are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles, places, rumors, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me,
> you'll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me. (Rushdie 9)

Although he declares himself a representative of multiple histories and stories, a heterogeneous zone, Saleem inevitably contradicts himself by providing the reader with a singular perspective, his own claims to truth which he flavours and manipulates to suit his narrative. It is important to note that Saleem speaks about understanding India and his stories in terms of consumption: "*swallowing"* and ingesting India. The purpose of his narrative, thereafter, is to provide an appetizing (perhaps exotic) view of India with deliberately distorted 'truths'.

Also of importance in Orientalism is the paradox of exoticisation. Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is a good example of the ways in which Orientalism will "vacillate between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in – or fear of – novelty" (59). Much of the rhetoric in the novel embodies this irony. Since Hosseini's novel integrates new and untranslated words in relaying much of the experiences in Afghan society, one may reasonably conclude, bearing in mind his ethical imperative to speak for Afghans, that he employs the

process of appropriation by which the language is taken "and made to bear the burden" of his own experience or "to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own" (Ashcroft 39). However, the question to ask with regard to such texts (Kureishi and Rushdie included) is: does the structure of the text, the appropriated and arrogated words, help redefine Western perceptions while simultaneously acting as a tool to express different cultural experiences? It must be understood that Hosseini's novel is written precisely for the non-Afghan – specifically 'Western', reader. Hence, in the early chapters of *The Kite Runner*, the protagonist, Amir, recalls a time in his early childhood in the following way:

> I remember one time Baba took me to the yearly *Buzkashi* tournament that took place on the first day of spring, New Year's Day. Buzkashi was, and still is, Afghanistan's national passion. A *chapandaz*, a highly skilled horseman usually patronized by rich aficionados, has to snatch a goat or cattle carcass from the midst of a melee, carry that carcass with him around the stadium at full gallop, and drop it in a scoring circle while a team of other *chapandaz* chases him and does everything in its power – kick, claw, whip, punch – to snatch the carcass from him. (Hosseini 17)

While the above passage may seem to represent the position of the diasporic subject, in that it pretends to "negotiate a gap between worlds" (Ashcroft 39), the foreign sounding words in the texts are, arguably, not there to create a new kind of language that aims to challenge the dominant Euro-American culture. Instead, these words may be seen as functioning as a marker of the exotic. This notion would explain why such terms and concepts need to be translated or explained for the Euro-American centre which would otherwise not have expressed as much interest in the novel had they been immediately understandable and commonsensical. Since Afghans do not need to be told what a '*Buzkashi'* is or even what Afghan national passion is, it would seem obvious that the novel has a target market that is inquisitive about the distinctions between themselves and the 'othered' cultural experience that the novel presents (Biskamp and Willaert, 2010).

Therefore, the impetus behind a novel such as *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* can be traced back to what Said calls a "textual attitude" (92). For the purpose of this thesis, textual attitude refers to the diasporic writers who represent the East under the assumption that readers will prefer their schematic representations in such texts, fully convinced of the evidentiary legitimacy of the author's narrative, instead "of direct encounters with the human" (93). Said proposes two instances in which a reader may rely on a textual attitude. In both situations, the reader is acted upon by her presuppositions. She may even experience the unsettling case of having her expectations about the unknown, distant and exotic other disappointed or unfulfilled. In such a case, Said suggests that the reader will have recourse

not only to "what in [her] previous experience the novelty resembles", but also to that which she has read about it in her past (93).

And this is also true of travel and adventure novels about the East, *Midnight's Children* being a case in point. Indeed, it is common to hear a traveller say of her journey that it was not what she expected it would be, which is really to say, having never encountered the East, that it was not what a text of a particular *historical discourse* said it would be. To be sure, the purpose of a travel book or an adventure book such as *Midnight's Children*, in view of the exotic elements in the text, is to convey the ontology of the place about which it writes (the 'Orient'); to suggest that it *is* a place of such and such a constitution, that it has *this* type of culture and so forth.

It is no wonder, then, that even in the marketing of some transnational literature, the appeal is to adventure-seeking and touristic readers. To consider, for instance, an article about Hosseini's *The Kite Runner,* aptly titled "Travel the World Through Words", published in the widely read *Library Journal Magazine*, is to better understand that the literature is produced with a specific audience in mind. The article in question suggests that "just as a picture is worth a thousand words, the reverse is equally true. Works of fiction can vividly paint landscapes" (Wyatt para 2). The same article, which provides readers with a list of "seven must read novels", has this to say about the landscapes: "Step into the following titles and undertake a cultural journey. Enter different lands, explore the rich history and geography of other countries, get an inside look at their traditions and taboos, and experience other lifestyles and value systems – and all without ever leaving your home" (Wyatt para. 2).

While this is only a sample of a plethora of such descriptions, the textual attitude is evident in the manner in which certain ontological complexities about a society and culture are rendered plain in a text which is taken to be authoritative by its reader. The second condition which favours a textual attitude is more interesting and relates directly to the study of this thesis. It occurs when the expectations of the reader are definitely met, thereby necessitating further writing from the author. If, for instance, the reader reads an account of South Asia and finds, upon sojourning there, that her experience impressed upon her everything that she had suspected about the place, the likelihood is that she will return to the author as an authority figure on the subject of South Asia, there to find her 'truth' about the place and its people. There is an interesting, although obvious, logic of reinforcement at work in such a case. This is also true of memoirs; *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is again a good example which necessarily percolates this chapter, where personal statements of one human turn into professional accounts, making its author an 'expert' of sorts since she imparts knowledge of a place, Iran.

If the Middle East is a mysterious treasure box as per Orientalist fantasies, then Azar Nafisi holds the keys to this cache which she willingly hands over to the reader. To the extent that institutions, be they academic, government or media, accrue to the author a sense of authority, then her text becomes implicated in the power-knowledge system mentioned earlier, the discourse explained by Foucault.

Self-Exoticisation

It is important to mention that the study does not *assume* that a writer such as Salman Rushdie or Khaled Hosseini is by default in cahoots with the system of Orientalism, since of course that would be a grave undermining of their authorial intention. Rather, the detailed account of Orientalist processes I have described above is intended to determine the theoretical framework within which it may be possible to study what Graham Huggan, in his book *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, has called the "varying degrees of complicity between local oppositional discourses and the global late-capitalist system in which these discourses circulate and are contained" (Huggan vii).

Given the writers' positions as diasporic subjects, their transnational subjectivities, it would not be erroneous to suggest, as Kwame Anthony Appiah puts it, that writers in the transnational literary scene are modern day cultural brokers of sorts, "mediating the international trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery" (149). Perhaps, there is an extent to which diasporic writers are driven by the demands of a metropolitan audience to produce works that seek to explain, account for, and *make known* the other as a means of *cultural translation* (Huggan viii). The diasporic writers that are examined in the thesis have all at some point in their careers expressed a desire to 'speak on behalf' of a community or group which they consider to be voiceless. As part of the narrative strategies employed by writers, exoticism emerges as "an aestheticising process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar" (Huggan vii) as with the Saidian concept of strategic formation, leading to the acquired textual attitudes. All three authors dealt with in this thesis have been perceived as marginal or coming from places outside of the West, although many of them have lived in the West since their formative years. Two of them, at any rate, come from affluent families or backgrounds in their home countries, the other, Kureishi, is born in England.

In reality, while Kureishi and Rushdie may identify as British-Indian, and Hosseini as Afghan-American, their diasporic position confers on them the role of the comprador, so that they are agents and 'representatives' of both localities, as earlier detailed in the section on

diaspora. This compradorial position becomes the force for what Huggan refers to as a form of "staged marginality", which is at the behest of the 'Otherness industry', that profits on exotic myths, much in the same way that the Euro-American centre profits from Orientalism. Moreover, similar to the way in which old-school Orientalism is at pains to validate writers, thinkers, experts or 'professionals' of the Middle-East and Asia, these authors are often in need of literary legitimacy in order for their works to prove successful. This legitimacy comes in many forms, the "agents of legitimation" as Huggan points out, "include booksellers, publishers, reviewers and, not least, individual readers and 'valuing communities' " and I would add, awards and prizes (5). Indeed, the diasporic community gives rise to the comprador figure, always having to inhabit the culture of imperialism, if only to critique it. Thus, the transnational subjectivity of such a writer as Hosseini, is "the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers" who mediate these two cultures (Appiah 149).

To say that *Midnight's Children* or *The Buddha of Suburbia* has a tendency for self-exoticism is not to exaggerate the point since, without belabouring the argument, the exotic is that which is *understood* and perceived, rather than that which is an innate fact, there to be *found* in distinctive entities, objects or peoples. By exoticism, therefore, I borrow from Huggan, in meaning that it is a function of "rende[ring] people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery" (13). Like the Orientalism of those who 'speak on behalf of' a people, exoticism, in my use of it here, is contingent insofar as it may serve different parties at any one time. And very much akin to the paradox of Orientalism, exoticism is "a kind of semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity" (13). As with Orientalism, this blend of the familiar and the strange is important, since it "functions dialectically as a symbolic *system*, domesticating the foreign, the culturally different and the extraordinary so that the phenomena to which they [...] apply begin to be structured in a way which makes them comprehensible and possibly predictable, if predictably defiant of total familiarity" (13-14).

Insofar as it describes a particular aesthetic practice, exoticism must also be seen as a *political* practice. Seeking to break from the established diagrams of centre/periphery, exoticism is now shifting, with the rise of neo-Orientalism, to an ever more "global mode of mass-market consumption" (15). For this reason, one can easily "travel the world through words" as the *Library Journal Magazine* demonstrates, by picking up a paperback in the local shop to learn about another culture, better still, from 'the horse's mouth.' *From Cannibals to*

Radicals: Figures and Limits of Exoticism, a detailed study by Roger Célestin, makes clear the accessibility of exoticist representations in the West:

> Centre and Periphery are increasingly conflated in our present [...] [A] new movement of goods and capital, [a] new, diffuse origin of products, is accompanied by massive movements of population leading to the hybridization of culture itself. When Juan Goytisolo writes that 'it is no longer necessary to take a plane to Istanbul or Marrakesh in search of exoticism, [that] a little stroll in the streets is enough,' he is referring to those millions of 'Peripherals' who have made their way to the Centre. The presence of these 'exotics' in the West is not a result only of the internationalization and acceleration of economic flows; their arrival is also the result of the crumbling of imperial centres that created affinities that must be reckoned with in the postcolonial era. (220)

It is striking that people who wish to defend exoticism, may argue that the inclusion of the marginalised into the centre is indicative of the increasingly transnational lines that cut across borders, thereby enabling people to experience different cultures. While the *cultural consumption* in these cultural exchanges, literal and symbolic, is to be found in transnational links, it is always in an uneven way (Huggan 16).

The West, as it has always occupied a privilege-bearing position in relation to its constructed Other, is in an economically advantageous position to circulate the signifiers of 'exoticism' and therefore perpetuate the one directional flow of cultural capital so that 'exoticism' is innate to the Other, while Western cultural codes continue to assume the normative benchmark to which all other cultures ought to aspire. This is why comprador authors such as Hosseini are said to have come into contact with the transformative powers of the West (their *Bildungsroman* reflects a rational move from the immaturity of the East to development in the West), thus demonstrating their criticism of that which is aberrant, yet strangely familiar.

It is beneficial to connect Samuel Huntington's philosophy of the 'clash' of civilisations to an understanding of cultural translation by the comprador author. In his article, "*The Clash of Civilisations?*" (1993) commissioned by the Council of Foreign Affairs in the United States, Huntington provides what could be used as a framework for understanding Hosseini's novel. The article initially appeared in the journal called *Foreign Affairs* with a question mark: 'The Clash of Civilisations?', only three years later to be developed into a book of the same name, without the question mark, presenting itself as a declarative statement rather than an explorative one. In it, he hypothesises that "world politics is entering a new phase" and proposes a vision of what such a phase might look like (1).

Huntington suggests that the world will witness "the end of history" a statement inspired

by the American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, in his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), which proposes that the world will no longer fight social or economic battles since all nations will concede to democracy and capitalism in the near future. Huntington, following on from this notion, proposes that "the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (1) emphasising that "nations states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilisations" (1). This latest phase, as he saw it in 1993, will "dominate global politics" so that "the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future" (1). This idea does not merely proceed from the assumption that West and East are, by their very essence, culturally different, a rather redundant argument to undertake. Rather, what is important to my thesis is Huntington's insistence that such difference necessarily results in an unceasing clash between 'the Occident' and 'the Orient'. However inadvertent it may be, texts by the comprador authors may very well function to validate such a view and may even result in coagulating popular assumptions about the East.

In that case, Célestin rightly concludes his study on textual representations by observing that the West is the larger consumer in cultural exchange, commenting that "in the postcolonial period, the West is becoming increasingly the *reader* of the product of its own colonialism" (220). Cultural voyeurism, then, is in partnership with exoticisation in that it may push writers to tokenise themselves. Karim, Kureishi's protagonist in *Buddha*, together with his father Haroon embody this tokenism as they are constantly expected to "put their work at the service of the social group to which they are supposed to belong" (Moore-Gilbert 18). Both these characters, as it will be made clearer in Chapter Three, cannot escape the demand for self-exoticisation although they recognise their marketability. At any rate, the two character's strategic use of exoticisation can emphasise the author's folded-togetherness with the systems of the new forms of Orientalism, especially if we read the novel as being ironic or critical of exoticisation.

The Comprador and neo-Orientalism

The literary theorist, Hamid Dabashi, in his manipulation of Fanon's *Black Skins White Masks*, has, in the form of a ground-breaking study, provided a new lens through which to view diasporic 'authors' such as Rushdie, Hosseini, Nafisi, and Kureishi. His book *Brown Skin, White Masks*, focuses on the authority of the comprador and the power vested in her to speak on behalf of a nation and to act as the 'informer' to the West. In Dabashi's view, diasporic representations of the Middle East and South Asia may sometimes transform the cultures of

'the East' into anthropological units in order that those who inhabit these regions are presented as acting in a particular way which is deemed suitable by the Western spectator. The native informer, according to this theory, has been trained in the "deep colonial grammar" of her discipline so that she may properly satisfy the curiosity of the imperial powers she serves (13).

Dabashi deliberately employs the term *informer* as opposed to 'informant' because for him "informant credits comprador intellectuals with the knowledge they claim to possess but in fact do not, informer suggests the moral degeneration specific to the act of betrayal" (Dabashi 12). By betrayal, of course, he means that their texts, far from being accounts of an individual experience, have a compradorial function, as the 'emotional addendum' or, what one might call, a supporting document, to the Manichean thesis of 'the West' and 'the Rest'. It may be beneficial to use, as a theoretical template, the figure of the comprador, one who speaks from two positions. Such a position, as Dabashi correctly intuits, enables one to acknowledge yet at the same time deny one's Muslim origins so as to be in good standing in the adopted homeland, the site of the Euro-American ideological machinery (i.e. Foucault's discourse).

It seems that the role of the comprador serves to corroborate the demagoguery efforts of the Euro-American states by relying on discourse. Such demagogic efforts are pecuniary rather than overtly political. If the reader is exposed to messages that advance the idea of the "clash of civilisations", for instance, and if she is constantly reminded that the West needs to triumph over barbarism, then, the comprador's text may very well convey a consensual message, the authorial voice as synecdoche, crying for help. Following the lead of imperial state apparatuses, the message then becomes: "Just look at the condition of women in the Islamic Republic (or Afghanistan or Iraq) [...] they can't even read a masterpiece of Western literature like Lolita in peace! [...] We have to liberate these young women from their bondage!" (18). It is important to mention that I do not suggest that there are no social struggles which Middle Eastern and South Asian people have to confront. Fully cognizant of some of these daily and ongoing struggles, I merely problematise the discourse and rhetoric which is employed when discussing these regions. There is an interesting sense in which the supposed marginality of the native informer is a useful instrument for the centre. Making specific reference to Azar Nafisi, Dabashi quite irritably mentions that the comprador, by virtue of her transnational subjectivity, provides consensus "within the suburban, SUV-swollen comfort of the imperial home front in Fairfax and Chevy Chase, where they support the belligerent powers through the liberating languages of human rights and women's rights" (23).

While this thesis attempts not to reproduce the type of polemical (dare I say, provocative) language that Dabashi would advance, it must be clear to the reader that it seeks to find a

coherence between older forms of Orientalism and the ways in which the transnational subjectivities of some diasporic writers may support the imperial adventurism or variations of the 'civilising missionary' impetus that has emerged in the modern era. Gayatri Spivak in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* comments on the role of the native informant or comprador figure, observing her as "a certain postcolonial subject" who has "been recording the colonial subject and appropriating the native informant's position" (ix). She continues, "Today,[8] with globalization in full swing, telecommunicative informatics taps the native informant directly in the name of indigenous knowledge and advanced biopiracy" (Spivak ix).

The aim of Spivak's work in *Critique* is to "track the figure of the Native Informant through various practices: philosophy, literature, history, culture" (ix). Throughout, she suggests that transnational subjects can, "when they concentrate only on representation of the colonized or the matter of the colonies" produce representations that "serve the production of current neocolonial knowledge" (1). Because Dabashi and Huggan's points are worth reiterating, it must be noted that the essentialising gestures and neo-Orientalist tropes of the texts often take on the 'mask' of a just cause – women's rights, democracy or education, but may function to, as we shall see, aggrandise the centre and assist Western powers in their interventionist strategies by suggesting that such interventions are themselves an unquestioned good. It is for this reason that Coli Fitzpatrick offers a reading of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Lolita*, observing that tales about the Middle East and South Asia respectively, are fraught with "violence, oppression (by religion, by men)" and that "violations of human dignity have been so successful from a market perspective as to essentially define the boundaries of the genre of fiction and memoir" (Fitzpatrick 246). If these texts are not demagogic, then they are, nevertheless, worth exploring because of their ability to normalise assumptions in popular culture and, through that textual attitude, promote the intentions of the Euro-American centre, even if only economically determined in the contemporary moment.

It will be clearer through the later chapters, that the transnational authors central to this thesis can be seen as a theoretical model, demonstrating the move from early compradors– Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, to the contemporary cultural brokers, the 'native informers' – who are all, by virtue of their positionality, in the business of selling 'Otherness' to the centre. The degrees of complicity vary, with some assuming the position of a "strategic essentialism", inhabiting the imperial centre so as to critique it. This involves a special

[8] Although published in 1998, this point is all the more relevant now at its zenith, sixteen years since it was noted by Spivak.

packaging of the book. Spivak's idea of strategic essentialism accepts that it is difficult to discuss human identity without falling into the categories of essentialism. Furthermore, that it may be difficult to make sense of the social and political world without sometimes assuming an essential position in which the writer or activist can speak 'truth to power'. Spivak then proposes the "strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak, *Outside*, 205).

However, earlier compradors such as Rushdie and Kureishi, often read in a postcolonial framework in which 'the empire writes back to the centre', become – even through strategic essentialism, susceptible to the pull of exoticisation, even though Kureishi takes great pains to critique tokenisation of minority subjects in a metropolitan centre.

Contrarily, Hosseini uses his position as a native informer, specifically using post-9/11 rhetoric, as a service to the imperial centre, confirming the East to their Euro-American readers, so that it is indeed as they expected it would be: backwards, violent, unable to come to terms with modernity. This thread is systematically taken to its logical conclusion if the reader considers the importance of the events of 9/11 in representations of the East. The September 11 attacks of the World Trade Centre resulted in the most casualties and fatalities of any terrorist attack in history (Enders & Sanders 260), and the consequences of the attack were transnational in nature, with victims from over eighty countries, attackers from outside the United States, and political and economic implications that were sustained globally (Andrews 1). As it pertains to literature and discourse, the most important consequence of the attacks, however, is the growing need for representations of the East as well as of those peoples and groups from which the attackers came. Grant Andrews, in his study of post-9/11 representations in literature, considers the post-9/11 novel as "a site of engagement with both national and personal self-understandings, [arguing] that representation of the event and various aspects of identity allow for the act of identity-negotiation to be undertaken both visually and narratively" (Andrews 2).

Related to the post-9/11discourse and theories of representation, Mahmood Mamdani's *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* becomes a useful tool to analyse the problems of representation of the Middle East, in the novels by the later comprador, Hosseini. As it will be further argued in Chapter Four, for Mamdani, the naturalised "culture talk" or rhetoric employed in the types of representations to be found in post-9/11 cultural assemblages enable the West to maintain Orientalist binary structures, thereby legitimising cultural interventions and providing the West with an ethical pillar upon which to base its incursions (Mamdani 24). This conclusion, together with Huntington's thesis of the Class of Civilisations, can be arrived at by taking seriously

Frederick Jameson's account of the "social symbolic" to be found in his book *The Political Unconscious*, whose relevance to exoticisation is discussed in Chapter Two.

While the older form of Orientalism clearly represented the East through a negative lens, working to service nineteenth century colonialism, neo-Orientalism *confirms* this representation while at the same time authenticating its voice. It therefore *encourages* Euro-American intervention, culturally and otherwise, with a solid authorization from 'the inside.' Of course, the Euro-American intervention in the form of the 'White-Knight'[9] is often resisted by some Middle Eastern and South Asian populations, forcing the well-meaning West to resort to violence, epistemic or otherwise. This later comprador says, in a nutshell: 1) if you think the East is a wild place, you are right; As an intellectual Easterner myself, 2) let me *show* you; I can confirm that it is indeed in need of Western tutelage, and on arrival; 3) you will be 'greeted like liberators.

Fatemeh Keshavarz, in her *Reading More Than Lolita in Tehran*, summarises the roles of both self-exoticisation and neo-Orientalism thus:

> [Such novels as *Lolita* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*] replicate [...] the earlier narrative's strong undercurrent of superiority and of impatience with the locals, who are often portrayed as uncomplicated. The new narrative does not necessarily support *overt* colonial ambitions. But it does not hide its clear preference for a western political and cultural takeover. Most importantly, it *replicates* the totalizing –and silencing – tendencies of the old Orientalists by virtue of erasing, through unnuanced narration, the complexity and richness in the local culture. (Keshavarz 3 *my emphasis).*

In my use of the terms, neo-Orientalism, comprador, diasporic writer, transnational subjectivity or native informer, I hope to communicate the inherent double bind, that paradoxical dilemma in communication, which is characteristic of comprador authors from the Middle Eastern and South Asian diasporas. I use the conceptions of diaspora scholars who are in agreement with the idea that 'home' and belonging are, in a sense, imaginary residences rather than strictly fixed geographical locations. While I argue that writers may cathect some narratives with classical Orientalist motifs or tropes, I do not mean to suggest that there has necessarily been a strict break from older forms of Orientalism. Nor has there been, in my view, a solid 'identity' between the two. Rather, there is what might be considered a "type of quest" for some

[9] It is worth considering the example of the former vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney, who in 2006, advocating the fierce interventions in Iraq, uttered the now infamous words: "we will be greeted like liberators". This was of course intended to suggest that the U.S. was indeed noble and knightly in its actions.

coherence in the present (Todorov 14), so that the three diasporic writers in this thesis are neither fully within orientalist structures, nor yet fully outside of them.

Chapter Two: Writing Back? Salman Rushdie and *Midnight's Children*

The Empire writes back to the Centre... – *Salman Rushdie*

The Political Unconscious

This chapter explores the idea of self-exoticisation, and suggests that exoticism may well be an unintended consequence inherent in the representation of 'the East' in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. I locate Rushdie within a category I shall call, for expediency, 'early compradors', South Asian diasporic writers whose work is produced between the years 1970 and 2000. Such a writer,[10] tends to reflect the consciousness of the generation of writers who are, in a sense, the first respondents to the postcolonial situation in India and who have, in keeping with the nature of the compradorial figure, one foot in the 'East' and the other in the 'West.' That is to say, their identities are influenced and constituted by a central tension, one of the characteristics of transnational subjects, between their 'homeland' and the adoptive homeland in Euro-America.

Starting with a symptomatic reading of *Midnight's Children*, the chapter seeks to determine the extent to which these early compradors,[11] Rushdie in particular, are (i) conscious of and (ii) strategically employ essentialising gestures in their narratives. In other words, the interest lies in the extent to which they are mindful of the pitfalls of exoticisation and the implications of their transnational subjectivities. I use the term 'symptomatic reading' as developed by Fredric Jameson who, in *The Political Unconscious*, proposes three 'levels' of reading the "ideology of texts" (4), namely, the text as "a social symbolic act", or the text as a "cultural act" and as a "political act". A symptomatic reading, therefore, will bind this chapter to the rest of the chapters in this thesis, mindful of Jameson's proposition that what is most interesting in a text is "that which it represses" (46) or that which it does not say on the face of it. The social level of the political unconscious writes itself on the text not as some individual act, but as a "heteroglossal" expression of voices, or a collective expression of points of views and ideas (Todorov, 73, *Dialogical)*. By this logic, an individual such as Rushdie may believe that his expressions arise out of his own individuality. However, simply by being a member of a particular class or by virtue of the fact that he occupies a certain social status, his expressions

[10] This list could be expanded to include works such as Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) or Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1998), all novels that enjoyed massive success in Euro-America, and about which Timothy Brenan says their authors capitalise on their "politico-exotic" appeal (Brennan qtd in Huggan xi).
[11] Such a generalisation about a type of 'category' is mitigated by the Jamesonian symptomatic reading which I proceed to incorporate into my methodology.

of certain "ideologemes" (Jameson 76), even if unbeknown to him, are conditioned by a set of social circumstances. A symptomatic reading, then, historicises such circumstances.

Significantly, if as I proposed in the Introduction as well as in Chapter One, Rushdie is an example of the comprador phenomenon, whose etymological significance is traced back to the metaphor of the Chinese agent, and if, accordingly, such a comprador figure is susceptible to co-option by the Western metropolitan publishing companies, then, as a result of the co-option, he is forced to straddle two positions, between Euro-America and the homeland. The historicised definition of a comprador provided earlier has immense explanatory power as well as an understandable ideological relevance and reference to the study of self-exoticisation by diasporic authors who may be called 'early compradors'. Insofar as their diasporic position forces them to stand astride, I contend, the project of Euro-American cultural imperialism is given power by their chosen manner of representation which, arguably, may facilitate cultural domination or, at the very least, cultural consumption by a metropolitan audience.

Midnight's Children and Rushdie's Unconscious Complicity

A great deal of scholars, including Appadurai (1986), Brennan (1997) and Huggan (2001), have noted that Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* had released the possibility for other South Asian writers to be taken seriously in the West. Indeed, according to Karamechi who made one such an observation as early as 1986, the novel came to be seen as the birthplace of Indian diasporic writing in English. There might be benefit, for the sake of chronology and in light of its generally accepted snowballing effect, to begin with an analysis of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and then move on to Hanif Kureishi whose career begins a few years after Rushdie's.

Born to an affluent Indian Muslim middle-class family, Salman Rushdie is the only son of Anis Ahmed Rushdie, a Cambridge educated businessman in whose house Rushdie gained the first intimation of secularism and a culture of questioning longstanding religious and social structures (Grant 24). Rushdie is also a Cambridge graduate, having obtained his MA in Islamic history, which suggests – at least on some level – that he has access not only to financial resources, but also to an upwardly mobile line of social and cultural resources. If Rushdie's fiction is read, as it has particularly been the case with his controversial *The Satanic Verses*, as reflecting an autobiographical impulse, then it becomes impossible to resist the temptation to read some of the characters of his earlier works, or those in *Midnight's Children* for the most part, as an extension of the author or as an attempt to write himself into the text so that it becomes something of a fictional autobiography. A huge amount of scholarship engages with this topic. For instance, Stephen Morton asserts that Rushdie's life is "inextricably bound up

with" his fictional writing, and that, at the very least, his life and the events in it are "written in and through the fictional texts themselves" (24). Of course, this does open his novels up to *ad hominem* interpretations of what are complex characters.

To begin with, Rushdie's grandfather, Ataullah Butt, was a medical doctor who held highly progressive views on gender issues. He was distinctly critical of the *purdah* laws, encouraging his daughters not to wear headscarves in both the household and in the public sphere (Idris 315). It would make sense to draw some connections between Rushdie's grandfather, Ataullah Butt, and Adam Aziz the grandfather of Saleem Sinai – the narrator-protagonist in *Midnight's Children* – who loses his faith after coming into contact with European culture while at medical school in Germany. At the start of the novel, we are told that Adam loses his faith after bumping his nose on the floor in a prayerful position in his Kashmiri home. Adam is chastised by his community and his wife for abdicating his religious values and for holding such 'progressive' views. Similarly, Rushdie's grandfather, according to Farad Idris, was also rebuked by his wife and family for his unusual secular views in the early twentieth century. This case of the real grandfather who bears a resemblance with the fictional grandfather would indeed suggest that it is possible and perhaps likely that the novel contains some aspects of autobiographical significance.

In the context of the novel's literary criticism, *Midnight's Children* has been read as a comment on the social and political challenges faced by the Indian Subcontinent on the cusp of independence and the consequences of its division into Pakistan and India and, not least, the war that was waged between the two countries over Kashmir (ten Kortenaar 28). The novel also, in a very perceptive way, presents the genocide that was inflicted upon thousands of refugees on both sides of the India-Pakistan border following this crucial event which became known as 'Partition'. Also of importance is its representation of the autocratic leadership of the postcolonial governments lead by Indira Gandhi and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto as examples of the nationwide repression and violence that engulfed the two postcolonial states. In addition, *Midnight's Children* focuses, in a way related to the crisis in leadership, on the idea that there existed a massive gap between the people of India and the political elite who ruled over them.

Arguably, Rushdie's affluent and cosmopolitan background, therefore, is reflected in the ways in which the characters in *Midnight's Children* interact with the subaltern[12]

[12] Throughout this thesis, the term 'subaltern' or 'subaltern groups', refers to the collection of people in society that, when considered against a stratification grid, are far removed from the macro-structural dominant groups. That is, they have no access to the dominant foreign group (colonial), or the dominant indigenous group (post-independence elite). They represent, to follow from Gayatri Spivak's formulation, "the

underclass, those who are, in whatever sense, cut off from the lines of social mobility. This idea will be explicated momentarily. Within the context of this thesis, *Midnight's Children* should not be read as advocating or exposing strictly socialist or communist ideals about the experiences of 'the people' in favour of the false and mendacious 'elite', since of course, the novel also satirises the romantic ideologies of a 'unified' nation (Kane 95). Yet, as Stephen Morton asserts, by having "the material effects of national independence in India and Pakistan" as the centripetal concerns of the novel, Rushdie effectively "exposes the violence associated with postcolonial modernity as a counterpoint to what he calls the 'optimism disease' of national liberation" (34). In the novel, then, the postcolonial state is neither altogether hopeful nor altogether hopeless, but it is nevertheless, as the author seems to suggest, in need of ongoing critique. It is, therefore, the novel's chosen manner of critique which I shall argue gestates the tendency for self-exoticisation.

While *Midnight's Children* has been read as an allegory of national liberation (Ten Kortenaar 1995), it will be argued that part of the issue around postcolonial representations in such texts, and in fact transnational literature in general, has to do with the exoticist representation of the subcontinent using the English language. In a way, it is the English language itself which facilitates the commodification of Indian culture and society for the consumption of a Western metropolitan audience (Huggan 59). This idea of consumption is, as discussed in Chapter One, given credence by the position of being 'in between' and serving both sides of the cultural 'divide'. Rushdie himself comments on the dilemma faced by the immigrant and transnational writer in his collection of essays, *Imaginary Homelands*, in the following way:

> The Indian writer, looking back at India, does so through guilt-tinted spectacles [...since] *we are now partly of the West*. Our identity is at once plural and partial. 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. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (15 *my emphasis*)

What is important, although conceptions of 'Centre' and 'Periphery' are increasingly nebulous for transnational subjects, is Rushdie's insistence that the writer in such a situation, because

demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those [who could be] described as elite" (Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* 284).

she now also identifies with the West, is in a unique position to provide new perspectives on India.

If Rushdie's comments about being "of the West" are taken as face value, and if, in addition, we are to consider Said's postulations about the subject's position, then the stages leading up to the creation of *Midnight's Children* must be seen as bearing a resemblance to the familiar Orientalist voyages into the 'extraordinary' East. Such voyages created the conditions of possibility for exoticisation in the first place and marked European scholars as investigating subjects. It would make sense, then, that in the introduction to the 2006 Vintage publication of the novel, Rushdie mentions that this second novel was a result of a seven hundred pound advance from the sale of his first book, *Grimus*. Equipped with this capital, he says:

> I decided to travel to India as cheaply as possible for as long as I could make the money last, and on that journey of fifteen-hour bus rides and humble hostelries *Midnight's Children* was born [...] I had wanted for some time to write a novel of childhood, arising from my memories of my own childhood in Bombay. Now, having drunk deeply from the well of India, I conceived a more ambitious plan. (*MC* ix)

Tongue only half in cheek, Rushdie's blockbuster can be said to be a product of travel writing, contingent on the same explorative impulse that pushed European travellers in the East to commit their experiences to paper in an attempt to relay and 'confirm' the ontology of the place to which they had travelled, to say with authority from the inside, that it contained *these* types of cultural practices and so forth. And so, from the very beginning of the endeavour, Rushdie assumes the role akin to that of the investigating subject from the Centre rather than that of the author who speaks from 'within' the margins, at which point he becomes the author who straddles two worlds. Therefore, Rushdie as the outsider looking in, the comprador as discussed in Chapter one, writes from within a previously conceived discourse which is imbricated in the exoticisation of the East.

The importance of migrancy and location in the depiction of India is better understood when one considers the author's own words on positionality. Again, in *Imaginary Homelands* he says, in a manner that suggests an understanding of the novels' implication:

> Writing my book in North London, looking out through my window on to a city scene totally unlike the ones I was imagining on to paper, I was constantly plagued by this problem, [of physical alienation from India] until I felt obliged to face it in the text, to make clear that (in spite of my original and I suppose somewhat Proustian ambition to unlock the gates of lost time so that the past reappeared as it actually had been, unaffected by the distortions of memory) what I was actually doing was a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: 'my' India... (*IH* 10)

While the honesty of the above extract illustrates Rushdie's yearning for a type of 'return' to the Bombay of his childhood, it also hints at the constructed nature of the place about which he writes, the systematic and deliberate attempt to fashion it according to his own ideas and recollection. If indeed the India in *Midnight's Children* is to a certain degree a conjuring-up of a space, it must be important to understand the author's political concerns and the intellectual and imaginative territory that produces it. As this thesis argues, and as Timothy Brennan notes in his probing study, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, it is "consistently difficult to tell in Rushdie's parodies where complicity begins and ends" (92). At any rate, Rushdie renders the Subcontinent exotic, even where his writing is intended to be a counter-discourse of the very Orientalist discourse against which it ostensibly positions itself.

Correspondingly, in view of Jameson's theorisations on the political unconscious, as a migrant writer, the economic standing of the one from whom the writing emanates will invariably influence the manner in which the writing is approached. And, perhaps, nowhere is that more obvious than in *Midnight's Children*, wherein the subaltern groups are rendered invisible through the narrative strategies, both of the author as well as of the protagonist who, evidently and quite daringly, claims to represent an entire nation because of the coinciding of his birth and that of independent India. Saleem is, for all intents and purposes, an unreliable narrator, since he engages in a form of narration that attempts to recuperate the past in the present – a function of memory – which he himself admits can transform, complete and change the past. This form of narration can also affect the future. As Saleem concludes, comparing his narration/history to the act of pickling: "I shall have to write the future as I have written the past, to set it down with the absolute certainty of a prophet" (Rushdie, *MC* 646), meaning of course that he is aware of the implications of his memory as a narrator, but chooses instead to find recourse in the sheer impossibility of authentic narration. Far from simply recounting facts, history for the narrator involves the active making process, about which he concludes: "I reconcile myself to the inevitable distortions of the pickling process" (644). For Rushdie, writing about India involves, as he has mentioned in a number of interviews, remembering the ontology of his 'homeland' or 'the East' in the context of the West, his current location. Indeed, the problem with the act of remembering is that the function of memory involves the recuperation of the past *in* the present, and it is this very present which locates the individual writer.

Following Said's proposition in *Orientalism*, Rushdie could be read as writing within a complex system or discourse which predates him. In the post-Saussurean view which indeed undergirds Said's philosophy, it is axiomatic that one conceives of textual representation as

bearing the impossibility of finite truth (as opposed to believing that it is able to provide one with 'the truth' of all things). In other words, if one takes representation as that which is enabled by the sheer impossibility of final 'truth', then one understands the inherent problem, the double-bind, of diasporic literature. This also means, then, that if one takes into account the construction of Saleem's narration (which as mentioned above is in fact the work of memory), one understands the double-bind of the author, who as mentioned is indeed written into the novel. Said makes this connection between the writer who writes from outside the East and the inevitable outcome of her endeavour:

> For if it is true that no production of knowledge in the human science can ever ignore or disclaim its authors' involvement as a human *subject in his own circumstances*, then it must also be true that for a European or American [or hybridisation of East and West] studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of *his* actuality: that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American [or hybrid] first, as an individual second. And to be a European or American [or hybrid] in such a situation is by no means an inert fact. It meant and means being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important, that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement in the Orient almost since the time of Homer.
>
> (my emphasis, *Orientalism*,11)

If, according to this view, Rushdie has such an understanding of literature, he should be able to interact differently with India especially because he is geographically removed from it. Rather than suspending disbelief in his epistemological procedures, Rushdie seems to interrogate them so as to alter his relationship with the Orient from one in which he is simply writing innocently; to a relationship that recognises the imbricated nature of the comprador. The tendency to interrogate such procedures suggests, at best, Rushdie's awareness of his accidental complicity as a comprador who writes from outside. And so, neither Rushdie nor *Midnight's Children* can stand outside this historical system, since, as a subject mediated by his experience and positionality, as the early comprador first, then as an individual, Rushdie's works may therefore belong to the cache of Western literary productions on exotic India. Simply put, the thesis does not suggest that Rushdie is a writer who 'takes up' a particular position. Rather, the way to proceed with an analysis of *Midnight's Children* is to understand that Rushdie is not an autonomous author, which is to say, he is *already positioned* by his transnational condition which means, to a certain extent, that the novel is neither transparent nor innocent in its attempt at representing the East. In other words, because he is a transnational subject he cannot avoid self-exoticisation.

Midnight's Children, therefore, can be seen as precisely the act of providing 'new

angles' through which to view the subcontinent. On the face of it, as many critics and scholars have since argued, not only would such an angle serve to subvert Orientalist notions and stereotypes about India, but it would also be seen as a response to the essentialising literature about India which was hitherto produced by the 'Centre' and consumed by a 'Western' reading public. According to Neil ten Kortenaar's analysis, the novel speaks to post independent predicaments from varied perspectives by relying on rhetorical complexities and juxtaposing stories from different political, religious and cultural groups (138). Roger Clark too, in his study of Rushdie's works, has celebrated the text for its religious diversity and sensitivity. Surprisingly enough, even Edward Said has celebrated the novel, indeed its author himself, as a good example of postcolonial strategies of subversion.

In his *Culture & Imperialism*, Said suggests that Rushdie's transnational subjectivity positions him strategically for the purpose of his narrative. In a chapter called "Resistance and Opposition" (to the master narrative of Orientalism), Said supports Rushdie's efforts to represent multiple Indian perspectives in his novel and to replace, as he sees it, older narrative devices with a more "powerful" narrative style:

> Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* is a brilliant work based on the liberating imagination of independence itself, with all its anomalies and contradictions working themselves out. The conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories is of particular interest in Rushdie's work, and in an earlier generation of resistance writing. This kind of work was done [by many scholars] in the peripheral world... (260-261)

For Said, *Midnight's Children* represents a break from the old forms of writing about India using Orientalist tropes, styles and figures of speech which are common in Western discourse.

Against Said's reading of the novel, this chapter argues that it is difficult to efface or escape completely that type of hegemonic discourse. Even if a writer such as Rushdie is aware of the position he occupies as an early comprador, a text such as *Midnight's Children* may also be understood as a messy palimpsest, with the older aspects of (Orientalist) form still hazily visible, and the 'plurality' of the author – his being 'partly of the West' – markedly apparent in his narrative strategy. This is *not* to say, however, that the plurality of the diasporic author, his being 'of the West', inherently and necessarily constitutes a problem. Rather, it can be seen that what the author produces and what he is produced by are a certain set of circumstances which enable self-exoticisation and which raises question about the complicity of the comprador. And so, the "worldliness" of the text, to quote Said in an earlier book about the

influences both of imaginative and critical writing, its being *in* the world, is exactly due to the fact that the novel exists in the world, in a certain time, place, society and so forth (4).

Without a doubt, his Janus-faced position, in other words, his compradorial position, gives him the difficult task of looking both outwardly, as the European cultural translator, and inwardly, as the postcolonial and transnational opponent of cultural domination. With this in mind, when as Aijaz Ahmad notes, the notion of 'the literary canon' begins to fossilise and become rigid, even in the case of the early comprador who wishes to 'write back to the Centre', starting out as a counter-discourse, a certain "desired literary topology" is established (Ahmad 123). The forces responsible for the canonising in the English language invariably prescribe a homogenous type of author, text, style or classification system that may exclude authors who arise "from the same space of production" (123) but do not fall within the principles of inclusion which are prescribed by such an agency.[13] This can be seen, possibly, as a certain type of cultural domination which, to quote Huggan once again, results in the "superimposition of a dominant way of seeing, speaking and thinking onto marginalised peoples and the cultural artifices they produce" (24), which, crucially, resonates with my argument about the novel and the author – that of complicity with global capitalism, as well as that of self-exoticisation.

If *Midnight's Children* does not, as I have repeatedly argued, stand outside of what can roughly be described as a diasporic literary topology, then we must determine its relationship with the laws of supply and demand that govern diasporic literature about cultures of their author's erstwhile localities. What are the stereotypes that are used to sell and market *Midnight's Children* to a 'Western' metropolitan audience? Rushdie, it must be noted, demonstrates that, even when a work is produced in opposition to an established canon, it is not only vulnerable to co-option into the system against which is ostensibly positions itself, but it is also financially beneficial for the author who pens it.

When, for instance in *Midnight's Children*, the cultural translation in the novel is contingent on *individual* statements that masquerade as *cultural* statements writ large, often inserted by Saleem in a parenthetical manner, the novel gains an authority that it otherwise would not have. Using his grandmother, Nazeem Aziz, as a figurative description of the miracles that women in India perform, Saleem mentions how she would eavesdrop "on her

[13] This is most applicable to *Midnight's Children,* since the novel has been so successful in the West, to the point where it has established itself as the benchmark against which all other novels about India are measured. About this claim, Norbert Schurer has observed in his reader's guide to Rushdie, how since the publication of the novel, Indian literature "is now occasionally divided into two major categories, the more experimental followers of Rushdie and the more realistic ones such as Vikram Seth" (84). The former are thus cleverly called "Rushdie's Children" (84).

daughters' dreams, just to know what they were up to" (69). There is "no other explanation", he maintains (69). But he assures his listener/reader that "stranger things have been known to happen in this country of ours, just pick up any newspaper and see the daily titbits recounting miracles in this village or that ..." (69). Here, Rushdie's language relies purely on what Saleem, in the very same passage refers to as "an audience [with] their own idiosyncrasies of belief" (69). The language used in such an example works well to contain the very idea that 'this country of ours' is one in which 'strange' things and miracles are known to happen. This works well to corroborate the view by Huggan that, paradoxically, Rushdie may wish to oppose the canon but even in his own strategies, he does not escape "rehearsing a continuing history of imperialist perceptions of an 'Othered' India. (India as available spectacle; as alternating object of horror and fascination; as world of magic, mysteries and wonders; as site of colonial nostalgia; as forbidden space of cross-cultural desire; as romantic tourist goal; and so on)" (81).

For Huggan, Rushdie is well advised that his work might just be used to reaffirm an exoticising imperial gaze. Thus, as Jean Kane asserts, the novel's conflation of the individual and the populace, the nation and the citizen, "centrally depends on a cultural understanding of the subject as corporeal, recapitulative, and porous" (Kane 96). Rushdie's famous words, which have become the popular book title of the writing back movement, are appropriate for this section which deals with the extent of his complicity with the forces of global commodification of culture. One could, therefore, proceed by manipulating Rushdie's own phrase: the Empire writes back to the centre, *from* the Centre.

In short, while the notion of 'authorial genius', the author as the originator of his expression, or even that of the narrator who quite clearly is in control of his own narrative, may present Rushdie or Saleem as individuals in control of their expressions, it is also important to understand Rushdie and *Midnight's Children* as being products of a particular set of circumstances, especially those unconscious aspects of such social circumstances, which compromise the idea of untainted representation by the authorial figure.

As we are reminded halfway through the novel, "one thousand and one" is "the number of night, of magic, of alternative realities" (261) that are born in India at the stroke of midnight on August 15 1947, the aptly named Midnight's Children who, through the narrative of Saleem Sinai, become part of a "modern odyssey" or an "an epic navigation" through these many alternative realities (Grant 38). Adeptly juxtaposing the many entities in this novel, myth and history, memory and narration, day and night, the centripetal and centrifugal "dynamics of the self" and the conflicting political and religious ideas about the nation are all part of the narrative threads that Rushdie, via Saleem Sinai, attempts to weave together in his narrative.

Synecdoche and the Staging of Exoticism

As a type of autobiography, the novel traces the life of Saleem as simultaneously bound up with the life of the new independent nation. From the very beginning, Saleem mentions that he "had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country" (3) so that it becomes clear that the individual narrator is tied up to the nation not only historically, but also in the moments yet to come, the future of India, as such.

Saleem can be seen as a figure that foregrounds the postcolonial freedom of India since he is registered as having a much anticipated birth. His sense of worth is determined from an early age, and he is constantly reminded by the state apparatuses, radio, newspapers and public opinion, that he is an important individual who is responsible for the destiny of the nation. On occasion of his birth, and the independence of India, Saleem receives a letter from the Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, which further encourages him to consider himself tied to the nation:

> Newspapers celebrated me; politicians ratified my position. Jawaharlal Nehru Wrote: "Dear Baby Saleem, My belated congratulations on the happy incident of your moment of birth! You are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own. (*MC* 122)

To a certain extent, Nehru's letter to Saleem invites him to consider himself as a national figure, to metonymise himself and his body so that his individual self represents and is an embodiment of the larger nation. This letter also encourages Saleem's gallantly hyperbolic statements about facts and possibilities, so that his own life and that of his family at large are seen as a catalyst for the incidents in India throughout his lifetime. For instance, the riots over language in the later chapters, the Amritsar massacre, and the partition of India itself are seen as arising from the private space of his own home. His elite background is itself extended and, in a way, super-imposed onto the nation. We are told, from the opening scene that Saleem's grandfather, Adam Aziz, is inclined towards secularism, denouncing much of the backward and archaic traditions that are associated with India at the time. This inclination, it is made clear, is a result of his coming into contact with the liberating forces of Europe, his 'enlightenment', as it were. It is significant that Aziz must go to Europe, and immerse himself within European culture for five whole years, in order to gain this change, this "altered vision" (5) as Saleem puts it. Upon his return, Adam Aziz "saw through travelled eyes" (5) which is to say, that his encounter with Indian culture and lifestyle was henceforth mediated by his now 'Westernised' vision of the world. Aziz, like the European Orientalist who first encounters the uneducated locals, is said

to have felt a sense of resistance upon his return, a type of national conservative impulse that is averse to change. He "felt – inextricably – as through the old place [the India now seen through travelled eyes] resented his educated, stethoscoped return" (5). Even if Rushdie intends to satirise the notions of cultural purity, by insisting that the general attitude to Aziz's altered self in his village would be that of resistance, he also suggests, of course, that the 'culturally backward' nation would be unable to come to terms with modernisation in general, a notion quite popular in Orientalist discourse, and one which indeed tends to exoticise India.

It is significant too, that Saleem's narrative begins with Adam Aziz, the one from whom Saleem originates, and hence, if the body is metonymised, the one from whom the nation of India originates too. For Adam Aziz, in a way that is reflective of postcolonial discourse, begins his existence with an encounter with the West. As Leela Gandhi proposes in her book, *Postcolonial Theory,* it is a Eurocentric habit, and a distorted form of Orientalist discourse to assume that, for the colonised, life begins with their encounter with the coloniser. It is for this reason, after all, that even the terms postcolonial or pre-colonial wrongfully place the position of the colonial experience as the sight of reference for the colonised. In a way related to this notion of the point of origin, the story of Adam Aziz begins when he has had contact with the West. In fact, his philosophies of secularism and progress, with all the connotations that the term "secular" has come to signify in the modern world – upward mobility, hubris, large-scale mobilisation and democracy – are to be credited to his contact with the West.

And so, as Neil ten Kortenaar suggests, Adam Aziz's loss of faith and the adoption of secularism, his 'discovery' of secular humanism, bears a striking resemblance to the influence of Western epistemology on the then Prime-Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his vision of a postcolonial modern (secular) India. For ten Kortenaar, Adam Aziz "learns to identify with a political state of his own, fully modern in the sense of secular and democratic, but in which he can see his own image and not that of his European friends [...] His Indianness does not precede his internationalism but arises in response to it" (29). Similar to Adam Aziz and his apparent identification with the political state, Saleem's history and the history of the nation are paralleled, said to begin at the intercultural contact between West and East.

By the end of book one, Saleem discovers that his lineage is not, in fact, pure. He comes to learn of his hybrid parentage, that he is the illegitimate son of William Methwold, a member of the British colonial elite, and the subaltern small peasant, Vanita. This knowledge obviously puts a bizarre spin on the genealogy that Saleem constructs for himself since he is not merely an Indian, but an Anglo-Indian, or as Padma, his ever uneasy listener puts it, an "An Anglo" (158). On the one hand, he is the result, literally, of the crossbreed of cultures and 'nations',

and indeed class structures. On the other hand, Saleem is also the embodiment of an illegitimate relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. The trope of birth, that of the nation or of the protagonist, is therefore not the birth of the new and unadulterated nation with endless possibilities for growth, if indeed the desired purity of his lineage is intended to resemble the desired purity of India which has the potential to develop without Western interference

This representation of purity raises a few questions which might be beneficial for the argument henceforth. With Saleem's body as a symbol of the body politic, is Rushdie suggesting, given the eventual disintegration of the protagonist's body and the parallel death of the nation, that Nehru's secularism was destined to fail from the beginning? Or is he implying that, inevitably, Indians would be unable to come to terms with modernity in the postcolonial world? Better still, is the novel simply a dramatisation of the notion that the failure to modernise in the postcolonial context, if it read as such, is covered by the illusion of national coherence and unity which constitutes most postcolonial national narratives? Does *Midnight's Children* question whether or not unity is, at any rate, the prerequisite for building the nation? These questions are all important ones, but in answering them, indeed the novel registers something of an Orientalist topos in the sense that it depends upon what Said in *Orientalism* calls, a "strategic location" – the way in which the author positions herself in relation to the material about which she writes. To invert Said's formulation just for the purpose of this point, Rushdie is seen, then, not as a writer who chooses a strategic location, but rather, as a writer for whom a strategic location is already prearranged – by virtue of his diasporic position.

Consider, for instance, the narrative of Saleem Sinai in the chapter about Pakistan, "How Saleem Achieved Purity". It is also concerned with the failures of the ruling elite in the events subsequent to Partition, the rule of Gandhi in India or that of Bhutto in Pakistan, for example. What we have in this instance, through the rhetorical stance of the book, is a narrative that necessarily imposes the experience of the ruling elite as the experience of the entire Indian/Pakistani population which, as suggested earlier, is precisely the reason why Rushdie is able to weave together all the major characters as belonging to a closed circle and network (Ahmad 140). Ironically, the singularity of this narrative strategy, therefore, belies the threads of multiple 'narratives' that Saleem claims are 'jostling inside him' at the beginning of the novel. The implication of Saleem's contradiction is simply that even if he intends to, he is unable to speak about a multiple India, and therefore reduces the heterogeneity of the region to homogenising symbols which are intended to stand in for India and Pakistan. Following Aijaz Ahmad and a similar argument he makes about another of Rushdie's novels, *Shame*, I would argue that, the difficulty of writing about Pakistan for Rushdie would be that, unlike India –

about which he has fantastic early childhood memories, Rushdie can only relate to and conceive of Pakistan as a political state. Thus, his strategy, which is to make all the characters of the ruling elite belong to one family, effectively demonstrates the close-knit networks of power and hegemony in Pakistan. This does not allow him, therefore, to engage with the question of the military elite vis-à-vis those over whom they rule. For Rushdie, it seems, these groups all have a similar origin. Rushdie's failure to point to a heterogonous group, therefore, can be noted when:

> The ferocious fable of the state is elided, again and again, in his own recurrent rhetoric throughout the book, with a society which is declared to be conterminous with this state structure, equally deformed and irretrievably marked by its purported civilisation (Islam) and its generic origin (the Partition) [which Rushdie represents as] more catastrophically wounded even than Naipaul makes out India to be in *A Wounded Civilisation.* The rulers and the ruled seem to be joined together, each mirroring the other, in a Satanic compact. (141)

The representation of the cataclysm and violence in "How Saleem Achieved Purity", the section of the novel that deals with the effects of Partition, demonstrate therefore, another way in which the strategies, both of metonymy and synecdoche, facilitate the exoticisation of the East, even if the novel is intended to be read within the context of the writing back movement.

Markers of the Exotic

The formation of the perspective of the singular narrator allows for the type of self-exoticisation that is to be found in *Midnight's Children*. This is because the narrator-protagonist, if we are to take him on his insistent appeals to accept him and his body as synecdoche, attaches himself to the nation and in so doing, allows for the process of idiosyncratic self-determination to be inscribed on a national scale. If, therefore, Saleem sees himself as a combination of myth and history, then the nation which he so heroically represents is itself a creation of myth and history which indeed Rushdie intends to expose. It is mythical insofar as he mentions that India existed in an ancient time so long ago, that it is futile to enumerate, but simultaneously, it is historical since he attempts to "write history" from his own memory since the time of his birth, significantly coinciding with the celebrated birth of the nation. He mentions, at one stage, that what distinguished his grandfather, Adam Aziz, from his college friends in Germany was simply that the Germans were aware of the construction of the East by an oppositional West. And this knowledge, Saleem suggests, is what allowed them to look contemptuously at Adam Aziz's religious practice, forcing him to question his cultural

performance and the performance, literally, of his five daily prayers which he subsequently rejects:

> Heidelberg, in which along with medicine and politics, he learned that India – like radium – had been 'discovered' by the Europeans [...] and this was what finally separated Adam Aziz from his friends, this belief of theirs that he was somehow the invention of their ancestors [...] so here he was, despite their presence in his head, attempting to re-unite himself with an earlier self which ignored their influence but knew everything it ought to have known, about submission for example, about what he was doing now [praying], as his hands, guided by old memories, fluttered upwards, thumbs pressed to ears, fingers spread, as he sank to his knees [...] (*MC* 7)

The above passage, which is the prelude to Adam Aziz's final "resolve" never to be involved in Islam again, can be read as his attempt, even in the liberating presence of 'the West', to 'return' to some kind of mystic and spiritual self which 'he had always known' before coming into contact with the West. His failure to effectively do so, and so to have to adopt secular humanism and progress instead, is Rushdie's way of addressing what might be seen as the naivety and the backward nativity of Adam Aziz, those exotically magical attributes about his prayerful performance which his European friends know so well – and know well to reject – and which he will later come to learn are regressive. If the East is a timeless and static place, it is also, correspondingly, a place which was created through the sustained discourse of Orientalism, promulgating the passivity that was understood only through Western epistemological certainties, which echoes the earlier adumbrated idea by Gandhi that in standard Eurocentric accounts of the East, the story of the East begins with its encounter with the West.

Damian Gant, related to this notion, posits that such an understanding of history is why Saleem, who holds the same basic views as Adam Aziz, notes that the story of the creation of India is a myth which is coming into being, "at a designated moment in time, [it is] a 'mass fantasy', a 'new myth', a 'collective fiction'" (44) which must be understood in view of Saleem's own biological parentage, not the pedigree he so desperately wishes to construct for himself. For Saleem, history is a constructed imaginary, put together by a people, just as an individual or subject exists at the behest of her circumstances. The creation of Saleem was also the creation of India:

> A nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a

> country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream [...]. (*MC* 150)

Here, Rushdie intends for Saleem to be an extension of his grandfather, Adam Aziz, at least in the views they hold. So, if we consider Saleem to be the chronicler of India, and then cast the net even further from this historical time back to his constructed mythical age, we encounter the legendary figure of Tai, the boatman, on whose boat Adam Aziz commutes from his village to the other, there to perform medical examinations (through a perforated sheet) on the woman to whom he will later be married. The age old Tai, conveniently enough, is juxtaposed with Adam Aziz. Described in truly prehistoric, enigmatic and oracular terms, Tai is said to have had a sense of "an antiquity so immense it defied numbering" (15), and that his meditative wisdom, his "magical talk" was attributed to the "the most remote Himalayas of the past" (14). In fact, Tai claims that "I have watched the mountains being born; I have seen Emperors die" (17). When he talks his 'magical words', he calls upon his memory of a timeless period, "at the dawn of time [...] in this primeval world before clocktowers" (18). This strategy of figuring the boatman as reflecting a perennial India is clearly in keeping with the much older tropes of Orientalist discourse. Arguably, it is a suggestion that Rushdie relies on certain expectations and preconceptions of the exotic, imbedded in the imagination of the audience he has in mind. In compliance, Rushdie must therefore present this fantastic and primitive world as envisaged by such a metropolitan audience which is informed by Orientalist/ historical discourse (18).

It is, again, from Tai's 'magical words' that Adam Aziz learns "the secrets of the lake" (14) and other legendary stories about the vexatious water which drowns Europeans who dare to cross it, as it did "the three English women [who had] drowned a few years back" (15) suggesting that this mythical water is also not open to contact with the outside world. Notably, it is also from Tai that Saleem's grandfather learns about noses, his own being so big that 'he could start a family on it' as Tai mockingly insists. Referring to Adam Aziz's enormous nose, Tai mentions that "it's the place where the outside world meets the world inside you. If they don't get on, you feel it here. Then you rub your nose with embarrassment to make the itch go away. A nose like that, little idiot, is a great gift. I say, trust it. When it warns you, look out or you'll be finished" (15).

Interestingly, it is the nose that later becomes the part of the body that facilitates the Midnight's Children's Conference, something resembling an All India Conference, indeed bringing the 'outside world' – with all its multiple representatives, poor, rich, Hindu, Muslim – into contact with the inside world of Saleem. And if Tai's 'magical words', deliberately so exoticised, are anything to go by, then his advice to Adam Aziz is something of an

anachronism. For he says, after recounting a classical story of a man who lived in the time of "Iskandar the Great" (16) and who had a "vegetable just like yours hanging between his eyes", (16) that the nameless man's failure to heed Tai's advice leads to his ruination, a man split between two worlds: "He became – what? – a stupid thing, neither this nor that, a half-and-halfer with a nagging wife and an itch in the nose, and in the end he pushed his sword into his stomach [...]" (16). Adam Aziz, who, having been to the West, is himself transformed into a half-and-halfer, himself neither this nor that, foreshadows, in a sense, the arrival of the *literal* half-and-half, Saleem.

Notwithstanding his persistent desire to construct a pure belonging to an Indian heritage, Saleem, true to Tai's premonition of the nose and its collision (collusion?) with the outside worlds, truer still to the omen of the half-and-half (in that he is half British, half Indian), is in fact the one to whom this warning is most applicable. Accepting his body as allegory, the nation of India itself is the one to whom this warning applies, the historical India, foretold and forewarned by the mythical India. And still, when Adam Aziz questions this Charon-esque figure about the fantasies and unbelievable experiences of survival in the "dark forest", he refuses to divulge his "real age", as if, in a sense, he symbolises time immemorial, the unchanging Indian who, for many years until he eventually dies, cannot be bothered to clean himself, becoming redolent with a sour smell as a result. As old as time itself, Tai is the embodiment of oral tradition, and is, as one might expect, illiterate. Rushdie registers Tai in strictly hyperbolic and wacky terms. Tai's vision of family values, and his aversion to all things European, is strikingly 'archaic' in contrast to the transformed young Doctor he transports every so often. For instance, Adam Aziz's medical aid bag, which contains all his operating tools, is made of pig skin which makes Tai highly uncomfortable. Saleem mentions that: "To the ferryman, the bag represents Abroad, it is the alien thing, the invader, progress" (19) which is in contrast, it would seem, with Tai's desire for a static and unchanging 'Indian life'. To be sure, Tai is India in the image of the West, always 'up against the wall' and coming into contact with the threat of secularisation. And so, Saleem narrates his own birth in the frame of "the dark backward and abysm of time" (Grant 44):

> Think of this: history, in my version, entered a new phase on August 15th 1947 – but another version, that inescapable date is no more than a fleeting instant in the *Age of Darkness*, Kali-Yuga [... which] began on Friday, February 18th, 3102 B.C; and will last a mere 432,000 years! Already feeling somewhat dwarfed, I should add nevertheless that the Age of Darkness is only the fourth phase of the present Maha-Yuga cycle which is, in total, ten times as long, and

> when you consider that it takes a thousand Maha-Yugas to make just one Day of Brahma, you'll see what I mean about proportion. (*MC* 269)

Here, one might ask if indeed, as Huggan argues about the novel in general, such a passage is an example of the "ingenious interplay between myth and history" (73) or if the text employs such mythical or fictional discourse, fully aware of this interplay between the parallels of its narrative and those of the history it wishes to portray. Both Rushdie and *Midnight's Children* have been praised, in spite of everything, for the focused reflection on the mediated representation of India's recent history. Rather than focus on the authenticity and 'truth' of the historical discourse in the novel, it is more interesting, perhaps, to understand it as a constructed sense of 'reality' which, both for Rushdie and Saleem, is more important than gaining 'truth'. Recall Said, in his delineation of the signifiers of Orientalist discourse, is not concerned with "the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original" (21) but rather to the much more nuanced textures, the style, narrative voice or speech, the "setting, narrative devices" (21) and "historical and social circumstances" (21).

In addition, such instances in *Midnight's Children* can be read, necessarily, as the 'exteriority of the text', as mentioned in Chapter One, those parts of the texts which give off an Orientalist impression based on that which appears on the surface rather than that which is hidden in some allegorical device. To expound further, Said mentions that the exteriority "of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient" as well (21). In a manner that reveals his cognizance of the interplay between myth and history, and a consciousness of the subtle differences between reality and truth, Rushdie reflects this very notion in his representations of Saleem's self-awareness. In the opening of the chapter entitled "All –India Radio", Saleem offers a self-reflexive account, (often quoted with reference to the complexities of reality and truth):

> Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems – but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible. Suppose yourself in a large cinema, sitting at first in the back row, and gradually, moving up row by row, until your nose is almost pressed against the screen. Gradually the star's faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself *is* reality ... (*MC* 229)

This passage, which reappears a decade later as a quote in one of Rushdie's essays, in *Imaginary Homelands*, speaks to the inability of achieving any real or authentic 'truth' in representations.

This has been a source of contention among many critics who argue that the novel, given its filmable and adaptable qualities, had not been turned into a movie (Grant 50). Others argue that such an adaptation would lead to further exoticisation and a visual display of the pandering to a Western reading/viewing public (Brennan 1989). Others, against such a reading of exoticisation, argue that Rushdie's work does the exact opposite (Gasiorek 1995) since, especially in the chapter entitled "How Saleem Achieved Purity", Rushdie is at pains to show the intersection of media – be it radio, television or print – and the state, and how, simply put, such an intersection may (when not monitored) lead to the detriment and delusion of a nation. Saleem mentions the "divorce between news and reality" (464), again, hinting at the social construct of reality itself by a nation controlled by the media. Of course, the cinematic adaptation was only filmed and released late in the year 2012, thirty-one years after the novel's publication. About such a translation from the written to the visual, this thesis will not delve into any detail. Suffice to say, however, that despite the arguments about the authenticity of the representation of the novel, the mere curiosity about the film version speaks to a fantastic image of "India as object of metropolitan fascination: an India which, while it cannot be fully comprehended, can certainly be consumed" (Huggan 63). Such a move, at any rate, only serves to cement Rushdie's position as the 'cosmopolitan celebrity' as Brennan has branded him (98).

Falsifying History for the Metropolitan Reader

Indeed, Hugh Eakin argues that Rushdie is aware of the dangers of exoticisation that come with the expansion of the canon. For him, novels such as *Midnight's Children*, while may be "experimental in nature", they nevertheless "form part of the 'familiar fabric of the mysterious East'" (qtd in Huggan 71). Furthermore, whether the reality of the representation bears any semblance to truth is not, once again, at stake. Huggan observes via Eakin, that Rushdie is "well aware of the risk inherent in the canonization of the exotic novel: like travel writing and guide books, it depicts a cultural other [that metropolitan] readers want to believe in and experience, with little regard for its factual basis" (Huggan 71). Saleem's manipulation of history, to suit his narrative, is not an inaccuracy. This is why, this thesis contends, Rushdie's use of history depends on the manipulation of easily verifiable facts, the death of Mahatma Gandhi, for instance. Saleem's conception of truth, as earlier mentioned, is convenient for his narrative strategy. India, as he sees it, is shaped in his own imaginary:

> Rereading my work, I have discovered an error in the chronology. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi occurs, in these pages, on the wrong date.

> But I cannot say, now, what the actual sequence of events might have been, in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time. (*MC* 229-230)

The main point being made here, is that Gandhi should not have died prematurely. Moreover, in "Errata", another significant essay in *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie comments on the painstaking process and the lengths to which he went to create factual inaccuracies. For him, the reader must be made aware of the fallibility of the narrator and must therefore recognise that there is an extra textual India which is described by Saleem, just as there are many textual Indias described by Orientalists (Eckstein 285). Saleem, quite convincingly persuades his reader to believing his lists of facts and possibilities in Indian history: "When Valmiki, the author of *Ramayana*, dictated his masterpiece to elephant-headed Ganesh, did the god walk out on him halfway?" (206). This is, of course, an error in history, since Valmiki, as Ten Kortenaar correctly points out, "dictated the *Ramayana* to Rama's twin sons, Lava and Kusa, Vyasa dictated the *Mahabharata* to Ganesh" (236). This chain of narration is, unlike the falsity of Gandhi's death, not as easily verifiable to a Western metropolitan audience for whom Indian culture is, here, being translated. Might such a scene, therefore, be an example of exoticisation on the part of the author?

If Saleem is genuine enough to confess his wrongful entry of the death of Gandhi, he demonstrates a seriously disingenuous attitude to the exotic, less easily verifiable facts. The inaccuracy in Valmiki's narration is not confessed to, but instead, we are persuaded by our narrator to believe and accept his account as an unquestionable fact. He proceeds: "Does one error invalidate the entire fabric? Am I so far gone, in my desperate search for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything – to rewrite the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?" (237). Furthermore, Saleem goes on to try and emphasize his Indian/Hindu cultural credentials: Immediately following this erroneous 'fact', he appeals for the reader to "note that, despite my Muslim background, I'm enough of a Bombaytie to be well up in Hindu stories, and actually I'm very fond of the image of a trunk-nosed, flap-eared Ganesh solemnly taking dictation!" (206). The disclosure here, that Saleem is well versed in Hindu stories, as a Muslim, is intended to assuage the reader, to suggest that the fear of an inauthentic narrator is irrational since the narrator, by simply having been in Bombay for a long time, understands the mythologies about which he speaks. This is yet another strategy that allows Rushdie to further exoticise India, even if he aims to draw attention to the fissures in narration.

For the most part, as a necessary precondition for exoticisation, it cannot be assumed that the Western metropolitan audience is sufficiently well-versed in Hindu literature such that

a cultural broker, a native informer, a tour-guide in the form of Saleem Sinai is not necessary to facilitate the consumption of this exotic space. With this in mind, Huggan hastily warns that it is misguided to assume that "audiences are neatly separable by ethnicity, class, gender, [and] location" in an era where "reading communities, as well as individual writers, are products of an increasingly diasporised world" (72). While it is important to point this out, it is equally important to note, as Schurer argues, that the novel has indeed been embraced more hopefully in the Western world than it has been in India (85). This suggests, at some level at least, that the even if the writer did not begin with a specific metropolitan audience in mind, he ultimately appeals most strongly to such an audience. As early as 2001, it was noted that "the accolades [that the novel] has received have come on the whole from outside India" (Huggan 70), an observation Huggan makes in describing the valuing communities related to the novel. The process of exoticisation in *Midnight's Children*, therefore, serves the interests of such an audience.

Therefore, quite contrary to Said's claims about Rushdie writing against Orientalist discourse, the writing of *Midnight's Children* in itself may, when considered in light of its anticipated success and subsequent consumption by a Western metropolitan audience, be seen as an exercise of Western power in a twofold sense. Firstly, the author's power *to* narrate and define the Indian body in a self-determining way that gives the false impression of the elite narrator-protagonist as a representation of India itself. This power is conferred to the author by virtue of his class positioning in relation to those on whose behalf he speaks. Indeed, the use of a Western traditional mode of communication, the novel, is already a form of authority that reveals the author's connection to the systems of power that control the means of communication. Secondly, the power *over* the subaltern, 'the people' who, by Rushdie's own admission are 'spoken for', and in the process denied a sense of what might be called their own "voice-consciousness" (Spivak 285). Concerning this voice consciousness, Spivak questions whether or not the comprador intellectual, or author, can indeed absolve herself from the totalising power of (re)presentation: "How can we touch the consciousness of the people even as we investigate them?" (285). Indeed, Rushdie was seen as the author who "gave a voice to [the people and] writers from the Indian Subcontinent" (Schurer 83), a task he had himself taken up as early as 1983. Surely, there is arguably a certain irony in the way Said reads Rushdie and *Midnight's Children*. In light of Said's appreciation of Rushdie's attempt to 'write back' to the imperial Centre (260), it seems that the implications of Rushdie's positionality are, for Said, a blind-spot. If, as earlier discussed in Saidian terms of reference, the European Orientalists are taken to task for their cultural voyeurism in *Orientalism*, then Rushdie's

commodification of his heritage using the figure of Saleem Sinai, however inadvertent it may be, cannot be condoned simply because the author has claimed to represent an alternative voice while being cognizant of discourses of homogeneity.

By the same token, *Midnight's Children does* have a recorded self-awareness of its complicity with the global market insofar as it comments on itself as an object of Western consumerism and desire. It is for this reason that Rushdie, in what could be read as an ironic self-consciousness, constructs the figure of Saleem as an Orientalist merchant whose primary source of income is derived from selling what Huggan would call his, and India's, "exotic wares" (72). Interestingly, that Saleem invites us to take part in the chutneys or the delicate pickles in the shop, is precisely the author's way of showing the complicitous, indeed imbricated nature, of the reader as consumer.

Still, throughout the text, the signifiers of exoticism are shown to be inviting to such a reader in a way that also suggests that Rushdie is, to borrow Anis Shivani's words, "accomplished at simultaneously catering to the thirst for exoticisation and deconstructing it in subversive ways" (qtd in Lau 92). Typical motifs and the trope of the exotic are employed in order to put together the delicate buffet that is offered to the reader – strange names, wild timeless forests, fakirs, elegant saris, snake charmers, genies and assorted chutneys are all semiotic signifiers of Orientalism and exoticism which Rushdie 'strategically' employs. Whether this is what Huggan calls "strategic exoticism", the deliberate incorporation of exotica "into works that challenge – often looking to subvert– metropolitan mainstream cultural codes" or whether it is the commodification of cultural difference is difficult to determine with this early comprador, although what is clear is that the novel is self-conflicted, to say nothing of Rushdie's being acted upon by Orientalist discourse.

Finally, it is not an exaggeration to say that the publication of *Midnight's Children* has come to define the parameters for literature of the South Asian diaspora in English. It is almost impossible for any writer to escape being measured against this foundational yardstick of Anglo-Indian writing. The rhetoric that surrounds the novel has made it, and continues to make it, difficult for any writer from the South Asian diaspora to write and stand outside the shadow of Rushdie. Michael Gorra, in his study *After Empire,* has written about the metropolitan reception of the novel, arguing that any writing which comes after Rushdie, must inevitably

> recognise that Rushdie has given it a new start, a new and bolder life. No one else has done so much to make English into an Indian language; no one else has so fully used that language to probe the nature of national identity or to define a model for the postcolonial self. No other writer has so energetically

> and joyously peopled the immigrants' London or the great city of Bombay; and no one since Dickens has offered as engaging a gallery of self-dramatizing rogues and charlatans and madmen. (147-148)

The compradorial position that Rushdie is placed in could on the one hand be used as a way of critiquing the imperial centre and for introducing alternative modes of representation that do not exoticise India. After all, it is the notion of writing back that perhaps helped cement Rushdie into the canon as the proponent of a form of counter-discourse. Yet, it is equally important to note that the author may choose to manipulate the aesthetic conventions of the exotic, concomitant with the desire to write back, so that his cultural heritage enables him to market himself to a metropolitan readership. Written in the English language, the novel is, in any event, aimed at a specific audience. Indian writing in English, it has been very well argued by Nivedita Majumdar, often constitutes a certain dissonance between the author and her subject matter (Majumdar 4). Rushdie, as I have repeatedly argued, is interpolated because of his transnational position. Therefore, he *becomes* a comprador as a result of his diasporic positionality. It is this position that subsequently gestates the tendency for self-exoticisation. What must be asked, consequently, is this: is it possible for a writer to critique the master narrative that has been enabled by Orientalist discourse in India, without falling susceptible to that very narrative? The answer to this thorny question may be inconclusive, but ultimately, what is clear is that Rushdie, even where he begins with the intention to subvert a certain discourse on India, cannot escape this meta-exoticism.

Chapter Three: Irresolvable Oxymorons in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

In this chapter, I posit that Hanif Kureishi's novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* attempts to parody the issue of self-exoticisation within the metropolitan centre. However, I suggest that in so doing, the comprador author has to take up a position within the semiotic system of exoticism, thereby writing himself into a position that can be read as reflecting non-complementary paradigms. I argue that while Kureishi begins with the view to turn Orientalist discourse on its head by using exoticism to critique cultural consumption, his novel, as well as the ambivalent meanings that can be derived from it, ironically lends to the very system it wishes to challenge. It is, therefore, simultaneously bound-up with processes of cultural commodification while attempting to critique the institutional or discursive practices of exoticisation.

Using Rushdie as an example, I have thus far argued that the supposed autonomy of the comprador author who writes about South Asia is, in fact, a phenomenon that is neither innocent nor neutral. The writing by this early comprador, who seems cognizant of the implication of the individual subject in the community in which they are located, and indeed which locates them and their cultural codes and values, is always mediated by language, which is to say, it is mediated by historical discourse and social circumstances.

The argument in this thesis is that the exoticisation of India and the Middle East, more generally the Orient, the marketing and packaging of a culture, has been on the steady increase, beginning with the early comprador who, while he cannot escape complicity, seems nevertheless aware of the pitfalls of his representational modality. The later comprador, as I shall argue in subsequent chapters, is more controversial in that he has imbibed Orientalist discourse to such an extent that he is blind to the dangers of self-exoticisation and neo-Orientalism.[14]

My focus in this chapter is on the theatricality of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, more particularly, the staging of marginality and authenticity that the characters are forced to perform. Huggan, in defining staged marginality, draws attention to a phenomenon called "staged authenticity", (87) a term coined by Dean MacCannell, which refers to the manner in which tourists sometimes encounter certain cultural objects, which are in fact designed to give them 'access' to the 'real-life' setting and the authenticity of such a setting. This staged

[14] An alternative, and perhaps more generous, view in assessing the work of this comprador could also be that the world has since changed, with these locationist binaries having collapsed, that this contemporary author, if we consider him as a transnational subject, does not feel the need to be critical or self-aware in the same way as the early comprador, the 'postcolonial' subject. Nonetheless, it will be important to note that this author has not, to date, acknowledged the way in which historical discourse influences his writing and the positons he takes with respect to his homeland. I will deal at length with this point in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

authenticity, as Huggan notes, is constructed to cater to exoticist expectations of the cultural other with whom the tourist is met. Huggan's understanding, therefore, has its roots in this conceptual paradigm. His focus is, additionally, concerned with such touristic appeals from the local metropolitan space.

Staged marginality, for Huggan denotes "the process by which marginalised individuals or social groups are moved to dramatise their 'subordinate' status for the benefit of a majority or mainstream audience" (87). It is not, however, a strict exercise in "self-abasement" as one might think (87). What Huggan does not mention, in contradistinction to Rushdie, is that the case of Kureishi is special insofar as his staging of marginality has both a critical and a subversive function. It is given credence by the fact that the novel relies on knowledge of the 'Third World', even though – or especially because – it is not set in South Asia but rather in England, and gestures towards the discourse surrounding South Asian immigrants in Britain. In other words, while the novel insists on dealing with Indian immigrants and the politics of 'being Indian', its setting is nevertheless firmly in the 'First World'.

Significantly, as far as the idea of self-exoticisation in diasporic literature is concerned, the early comprador, Kureishi, presents an anomalous situation. While it may seem a natural progression to move from an analysis of Rushdie's early indications of exoticisation to the later compradors who take full advantage of the demand for exoticism, the transition that I suggest, from the early writers to the later ones in ascending levels of marketing the margins, is not as seamless and easy as it appears. It seems to me that the focus in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, despite the diasporic or transnational subjectivity of its writer, is less about the binary of 'home and abroad' than it is about consciousness of exoticisation, cultural commodification or the strategies of cultural identification on the part of the author as well as the characters in the novel. Therefore, I suggest that Hanif Kureishi and Salman Rushdie, while both can be considered early compradors, write from opposite ends of the diasporic spectrum.

Indeed, writes Bart Moore-Gilbert, certain diasporic writers, whether they are read through the lens of transnational or postcolonial theories, may be seen as writing about necessarily 'global' issues, racism, the legacies of colonialism or even the devastating conditions of poverty and class in much of the 'global south' (Moore-Gilbert 112). Kureishi's novel, on the other hand, is more 'local' than it is global, rooted in a metropolitan – rather than, strictly speaking, globalised space.[15] What this distinction between localised and globalised means, in short, is that the former is concerned with "the state of the nation" (115) of England

[15] Since he is in the UK, 'local' for Moore-Gilbert refers to the global north.

while the latter is often read as relatable to other 'Third-World' nation-states. There is, at any rate, a genre known as 'the condition of England', which began in the nineteenth century and continued to influence many twentieth-century writers including H.G. Wells, J.B. Priestley and George Orwell, all of whom wrote extensively about social justice (Moore-Gilbert 110). In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, 'the condition of England' is the main concern of one of the more complex characters, Jamila, who is committed to social democracy. The condition of England, that is to say, the localised rather than globalised concern, also becomes one of the thematic concerns for the play in which the protagonist Amir has a central role. By focusing on the 'local' that is, England, Kureishi constructs a far less expansive imaginative history and geography than does, for example, Salman Rushdie. The chronological span of Kureishi's work in general, and *The Buddha of Suburbia* in particular, does not extend to earlier than 1970. It is indeed important that the setting of his novels and plays, *The Buddha of Suburbia* especially, is confined to London or the South-East even though there is, however, a brief moment set in New York where Karim, the narrator-protagonist of the novel, takes up brief residency.

The impetus behind Kureishi's focus on what might be called the 'local' rather than the global space is, possibly, the concern with strategies of cultural identification that are negotiated by transnational subjects, generally, or Muslim Asian-British subjects specifically. Related to these strategies, as discussed in Chapter One, is a particular type of understanding of culture which takes as the starting point the basic distinction between peoples of the East and those of the West. And Kureishi, with his concern, aims to defeat such dichotomous predilections. In a sense, the artificial unity that is presupposed when one talks about the "Asian-British" is a result of the homogenisation of discourse. And so Homi Bhabha, against such a predisposition, proposes a move away from such an understanding and instead places the concern on the *boundaries* of these supposed cultures, what he calls the 'interstices' (Bhabha 1). As Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* suggests, one tends to think of the ontology of Indo-Pak, the quality of being Indian/Pakistani, as having to do with being within the object of the Indian 'community' in which there is a type of homogenisation wherein all such peoples are essentialised into one group that roughly speaking, bears the same characteristics. Whereas in reality, the very discourse of being Indian or Pakistani in the UK is something which might be said to be located on the boundary of the binary opposition of, for instance, 'Asian' and 'British', or 'Pakistani' and 'British' and so on. What occurs in such an interstitial space is a type of disruption of the dichotomy of East and West which was brought about through historical discourse. About such a disruption, the concern is not merely in the obvious unity of the two, a synthesis or a coming together, as such. However, it is, more specifically, a hybrid

moment that not only disrupts the known discourse of West and East, but gives an abrupt spontaneous type of newness which has come from neither West nor East (35).

What should be of interest is Bhabha's move towards defeating notions of cultural 'diversity' in favour of cultural 'difference' by demonstrating, from a structural level, what an interstitial moment consists of. This notion will prove to be imperative for an understanding of Kureishi and his first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* insofar as Kureishi's undertaking, as I shall argue, is to challenge the traditional Anglo-centric notion of other cultures in Britain as being a mere appendage to the dominant culture. The relationship I wish to establish between the notion of the Third Space in diasporic communities and the novel's concerns is seen precisely in the ways in which Kureishi complicates the often oversimplified understanding of English pluralistic society, a 'globalised' 'transnational' and heterogeneous England.

Emerging from the Margins?

Unlike Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi was born in Britain, in 1954 while the British government as well the British people was recovering from the devastating social and economic effects of the Second World War. His childhood was marked by the emergence of an individualistic culture in the 1960s, which, much like the structure of the *Bildungsroman*, proposed that an individual was capable of, through reason and ration, manifesting a destiny which was completely different to the social circumstances into which such an individual was born. As it is now known, this idea of self-fulfilment and individual control would be short-lived in Britain (National Archives, 1966). It was quickly undercut by the economic strife of the late 1960s through to the 1980s, in which the leadership both of Margaret Thatcher and then John Major thereafter, threatened the lives of the working class by challenging the trade unions and, subsequently, bringing the value of the British Pound to an unprecedented low. Kureishi's early life saw much social change in Britain, including the change in the collective consciousness – those factors in society which act as a unifying force – of the nation around the eighties (Coman para 13-15) .

The most notable influence on his works, however, is the social makeup of Britain which underwent change in the sixties, seventies and eighties with the arrival of a great number of Indian and Caribbean immigrants whose presence in Britain was beginning to be visible and felt. Kureishi, as a son of such an immigrant, no doubt would have felt the pressure to be a commentator on the lives and experiences of such groups of people. Kureishi has himself, in a sense, admitted to having assumed the burden of representation of minority cultures in Britain,

although tentatively. In his interview with Colin MacCabe, Kureishi mentions his complicity with the well-meaning British media in representations of the East: "they were liberal. And they needed an Asian, and I was the Asian" (qtd in Buchanan 13). However, Kureishi's own experience as the child of an Indian immigrant, and a white British mother, set him quite apart from other Indians at the time, those whose fathers, for instance, did not have the education which Kureishi's father, Rafiushan Kureishi, had had. For the most part Rafiushan Kureishi belonged to a white-collar family while many of the immigrants in Britain at the time came from working class backgrounds and remained working class. Kureishi, unlike other Asian-British authors such as Meera Syal, for instance, was not in a position to write, at least from lived experience, about the class apartheid to which immigrants were subjected (31).

Hence, some commentators have criticized him, as Bart Moore-Gilbert notes – labelling him "a middle-class exploiter of working class struggles" (16). And, most importantly, unlike Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul or even Sam Selvon, to whom Kureishi has often been compared, his writing emerges, not out of some apparently dislocated non-Western perspective, 'the empire writing back' per se, but from within the margins of Europe, as a 'Western' subject. Susie Thomas, in her study of Kureishi's oeuvre, has noted this distinction by adding that such a condition automatically positions Kureishi differently from other 'transnational' subjects. In fact, she writes: "unlike Salman Rushdie [...] or V.S. Naipaul [...] Kureishi is not a displaced post-colonial writing *back* to the centre; he writes *from* the centre" (Thomas 1).

Concerning this type of positionality and the productive output that is a result of the occupation of such a space, Kureishi has noted time and again, his reticence to pose as the 'middleman' or "representative for Asian British lives" (Nasta 194). For this reluctant comprador, in contradistinction to the pioneering Rushdie who has set himself up as "an authoritative voice, spokesman for the writers of the Third World" (194), writing about a place about which one knows very little is a disingenuous task. He mentions, in the authorial notes to his 1981 play *Borderline*: "I wasn't keen on the idea of a project about Asian immigrants in Britain. I was afraid of being asked to write outside my own experience [...] I preferred familiar territory" (194).

This position, again as Bart-Moore Gilbert has suggested, stands in contrast to Rushdie's views about writing with the intention to "create a literary language and literary forms in which the experience of formerly colonised, still disadvantaged peoples might find full expression" (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands,* 394). In short, Rushdie has adopted the position of the spokesperson while Kureishi has attempted to stay clear of such a burden. Kureishi, in problematising the question of categorisation, wishes only to be read as a writer,

devoid of any labels such as 'Asian-British', 'postcolonial', and 'transnational' and so on. Of course, what determines one's inclusion and exclusion into such categorisations are political identifications, based mainly on migration and cultural translation, as well as the subject matter of the literature one produces. Yet, Kureishi does not see it that way: "Critics have written that I'm caught between two cultures. I'm not […] I'm British; I've made it in England" (Kelata 7).

Nevertheless, as Huggan mentions, it is usually assumed that "minority literatures are written at least in part out of the experience of social marginality, as undergone at some combination of individual, collective and institutional levels" (83). At any rate, Kureishi, elsewhere, has suggested that there is precariousness to writers who only write from one position:

> If contemporary writing which emerges from oppressed groups ignores the central concerns of major conflicts of the larger society, it will automatically designate itself as minor, as a sub-genre. And it must not allow itself to be rendered invisible and marginalised in this way. (Nasta 194)

What must be understood from this quote is the extent to which Kureishi refuses to align himself with "minoritarian" (Moore-Gilbert 133) politics that favour the representation of a particular type of nationalist view of identity politics. To focus only on the external nations from whence the immigrants originate is to reinforce their status as minority subjects. To merely say, for example, that Indians bring a sense of diversity to the British cultural software, so to speak, is to already affirm the presumed notion that there is a 'major' and indeed 'normal' culture in place, to which every other culture is secondary and supplementary. *The Buddha of Suburbia* problematises 'diversity' in this way, by insisting that the condition of the immigrant does not constitute only marginality, since, culture begins at the boundaries. Far from being that which 'precludes', *Buddha* reminds us that the cultural boundary is that from which "something begins its presencing" (Heidegger in Bhabha).

Staged Marginality

The same idea can be applied to minority literatures, a category against which every Indian writer since Rushdie has been measured. Thus, the importance of Kureishi's intention in *Buddha* is underscored by the distinction, although implicitly derived, between diversity and difference. This position in the novel is also, apparently, a way of safeguarding against exoticist representations which often seek to 'add flavour' to the already existing 'major' culture. Through the staged marginality of the characters in *Buddha*, Kureishi is able to expose the

novel's 'Western' Suburban culture, and its desire for an inherently 'strange' counterpart.

Properly diagnosed in Said's *Orientalism*, this view of culture being constituted necessarily along binary oppositional lines is ubiquitous in the novel, with characters such as Eva, the Indian admirer whose infatuation with the exotic is what propels Haroon to take on the role of guru and Buddha in the first place. And later, Karim's theatre practitioner – Shadwell – encourages the narrator-protagonist to exhibit exotic gestures and symbols for his play, a move which bears family resemblances to the notion of cultural 'diversity'.

And so, noting Kureishi's caution about the minoritisation of the diasporic community, the significance of my argument here is premised on a crucial difference between Kureishi as a second-generation Indian writer born in Britain and the other diasporic authors, Salman Rushdie and Khaled Hosseini, who have closer links to their erstwhile localities. Among the many factors which distinguish Kureishi from his counterparts, and this point can hardly be belaboured, is his reluctance to speak on behalf of the 'voiceless' Easterners, Indians or Pakistanis for example, a burden which Rushdie, in part, and the later comprador – as it shall be seen, are only so eager to take on. While much of the literary criticism of South Asian diasporic authors, conducted mainly in a comparative manner, habitually aligns Rushdie and Kureishi, this great body of work sometimes ignores that fact that the latter author, while he is similar to the former, is concerned more about the limitations of representation, as a result of this hybridization, than about the attempt to represent people in the first place.

It is for this reason that Peter Hitchcock, in *Decolonising (the) English* suggests that while Kureishi's novels do not register a type of nostalgia for the ancestral past, they do have a semblance of a type of cultural deracination, an apparent 'rootlessness'. This deracination, at least at the level of the text, implies that there is a "rejection from both sides" (756), even though:

> The work of Hanif Kureishi, while indebted to Rushdie's in important ways, complicates the tokenist assumptions of cosmopolitanism by foregrounding hybridity yet questioning its role as the nirvana of subjectivity. (755)

It is this very idea that supports a reading of Kureishi as a writer who is neither, strictly speaking, postcolonial but rather, one who is more concerned with the postmodern awareness and axiom of identity performance and the arbitrary and contingent nature of identity. Therefore, Kureishi and *Buddha* posit identity "both as performative and as subject to active negotiation [...] and his work chronicles *not a straight-forward clash of fixed identities* but a

complex interplay of many cultural movements" (my emphasis Buchanan 14). This is another way, perhaps, of rearticulating Bhabha's ideas about the Third Space so that a reading of Kureishi precludes any simple conclusions about political allegiance to one culture or ideology but rather makes way for the type of abrupt and spontaneous newness that is to be found in the interstitial moments with which both Kureishi and Bhabha are concerned.

Once again, I borrow from Graham Huggan who has rethought the other side of the marginality question. Drawing on David Lloyd and Abdul JanMohammad's argument about the nature and context of minority discourse, Huggan mentions that minor literature is inevitably minor when one considers it:

> in relation to the major canon, and [when] its characteristics are defined in opposition to those which define canonical writing. To enumerate them briefly, [... these] characteristics would involve the questioning or destruction of the concepts of identity and identification, the rejection of representations of development itself, and accordingly a profound suspicion of narratives of reconciliation and unification. (83)

Indeed, to think that all literatures by diasporic writers serve a counter-hegemonic purpose is to claim too much for the 'category', as it shall be seen with the later compradors who arguably, (in reality) serve the imperial state using the very minority status which is often presumed to be in opposition to the major culture. Of course, the success of minority representation is itself dependent, to some extent, on the existence and bloodline of 'major' or dominant cultures.

Semiotic Tropes of the Exotic

We are told, from the opening lines of the novel, that the narrator-protagonist is struggling to define his identity. The first paragraph of the novel, perhaps the most quoted in relation to the protagonist's self-consciousness, indicates that the protagonist elicits comments from those around him:

> My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care – Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. (3)

This provocative opening, significant in that it is narrated in the first person present tense, while the rest of the novel is retrospective narration, should be seen as a mission statement of sorts: a fictional embodiment of what Bhabha calls 'the Third Space of enunciation' (37). Karim,

from the very beginning, is registered as soliciting comment from those around him ("I am often considered") because of his "odd mixture" (3) and because of his "not belonging". Yet, the adjectives he uses are themselves a vague impression. He is "not proud", a "funny kind of Englishman", "new", "restless" and "easily bored" (3). He is ambivalent in his self-description since he is "going somewhere", but he comes from neither "here" nor "there" (3). His mission to define himself, therefore, is difficult and leaves him in a position in which he has to use approximations, "almost", "but not" quite, each of which give him the title of English, except with certain qualifications (Stein 116). These qualifications become the barriers to accessing upward social mobility for Karim, as he hustles in an attempt to circumvent discriminatory impediments, be they race or class related. Yet, Karim is positive in his declaration that he is "going somewhere", a statement about this future which will be rendered ironic later on in the novel.

The novel follows the life of Karim as well as that of his father, Haroon Amir, a civil servant and Indian immigrant living in the suburbs of London. Haroon, who comes from a well-to-do family in India, was "sent to England by his family to be educated" (24). There, he meets Margaret "a pretty working-class girl from the suburbs" (25) to whom he soon gets married. Much to Haroon's dismay, England is not the perfect utopian land of opportunity that he had imagined would edify him as a young man, where he would "return to India a qualified and polished English gentleman lawyer and an accomplished ballroom dancer" (24). Instead, on arrival he discovers that England is not "roast beef and Yorkshire pudding all the way" and that there are, just like in India, many English people who are "in poverty, as roadsweepers, dustmen, shopkeepers and barmen" (24). England is also, much to his dismay, unwelcoming.

Buddha opens with Karim accompanying his father, Haroon, "the future Guru of Chislehurst" (25) on one of his spiritual teachings. The two travel regularly from Bromley to Beckenham, where Haroon gives spiritual lessons to middle-class white people, a group of people he came to know through his friend/lover – Eva Kay – and her entourage. Witnessing these spiritual lessons, Karim is somewhat enthralled by his father's ability to captivate an audience in the manner that he does, wishing that he too could also capture the attention of his school-friend, the son of Eva, Charlie Kay. Later, the middle-class's felt need for spiritual enlivenment is so overwhelming that Haroon decides to leave his wife – Margaret – and move in with his lover, Eva. Karim then decides to follow his father's prosperous and promising path, and joins him in his move. In the subsequent chapters of the novel, the focus is less on Haroon and shifts towards Karim and his exciting peregrinations. He commutes not only from one household to another, but follows Charlie around as far as New York, as he searches to make

meaning of his life.

As a young boy, Karim wanted to be Britain's first black football player, but decides, after returning from New York, to settle for being an actor instead, where he is cast as Mowgli, an "Asian" boy, in Kipling's popular *The Jungle Book*. The novel, by drawing attention to this type of staging, develops and emphasises a particular theme, the meretricious role of self-transformation, by underlining the stagecraft and performative nature of identity. Despite these transformations, the novel closes with Karim landing a job in a soap opera, in which he plays a role, again as a representative of India, which he had previously sought to evade. Haroon and Eva too, at the close, announce their marriage, a state which they had also previously evaded.

So, if Kureishi's novels are concerned with race, class and the position of the diasporic subject, it makes sense that his focus on ethnicity will be inextricably linked to the class formations of the British lower-middle class and the British working class. His concern, as always, is that the South Asian diasporic community, when considered against a stratification grid, is positioned in such a way that race becomes a disempowering aspect in England. For Kureishi, race affects class just as much as class affects race.

For this reason, for the characters of Indian decent, their only way towards social upward mobility is to market themselves, turn themselves, in quite a literal sense, into commodities so that the white middle-class city dwellers create a space for them in the social milieu. If race is indeed an impediment, as a result of the provincialism of the suburb, then social climbing through exoticisation presents itself as the only way out of the divisions of race, as is the case with Haroon and his son Karim, who attempt to overcome racial divisions by re-inventing themselves as minorities that can be marketable, and therefore exploiting, to their own benefit, the (white) British Orientalist gaze.

We are told, for instance, that this "scheming", for Haroon involved a conscious adjustment of the performative aspects of his identity. As Karim goes to bed one evening, he encounters his father "speaking slowly, in a deeper voice than usual, as if he was addressing a crowd. He was hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent" (21). This transpires despite the fact that Haroon had come a long way since his arrival in England from India, attempting strategies of cultural assimilation for the sake of belonging, or, as Karim puts it "[h]e'd spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous". After this newfound gap in the market, Haroon then began "putting it back [his Indianness] in spadeloads. Why?" (21). So, when assimilation fails, Haroon attempts to emphasise cultural difference as a strategy for survival, particularly by exoticising himself.

Like Haroon, the novel itself relies on ethnic stereotypes, contingent upon them, one

after the other, so that it is not only Karim that wonders "why", but also the reader, registering the list of clichés that Kureishi offers through his characters. Whether it is arranged marriages (a very common trope in Indian writing in English) or stories of "aunties and elephants" (141) as Shadwell puts it to Karim, the sharp reader might very well ask the same question about the whole novel. What role does race play in 'diversity'? Is Haroon's performance as the spiritual guru, particularly the solicitous manner in which he is called to perform, a blueprint for the rest of the novel? I suggest, as Mark Stein intimates in his study *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*, that the *excess* of ethnic symbols is "indicative of the novel not conforming to but parodying the sometimes constricting expectations directed towards post-colonial [and transnational] literature" (118), which is to say that the novel registers something of a self-reflexive awareness, albeit an ironic one. At the same time, however, it is almost impossible for the novel to escape the double-edge blade associated with the type of subversive writing the author wishes to achieve. While *The Buddha of Suburbia* challenges the dominant British cultural capital by parodying the symbols of exoticism, it is simultaneously bound-up with the late capitalist processes of commodification of culture, always to be assumed by a metropolitan centre.

On the one hand, it seems that Kureishi is at pains to do away with the associations of being an 'in between writer', a professional Asian, in other words, a comprador. This is clearly seen in his attempt to draw attention to the expectations that are placed on 'marginal' writers to represent pockets of the diasporic community. If, for instance, one considers the example of Jamila, daughter of Anwar and niece to Haroon, one can see the double-edged blade or what Huggan refers to as the "double-exchange value of a deliberately exoticised Orient" (89). Jamila, with whom Karim has sex, is required to enter into an arranged marriage, made enforceable by her father, Anwar, and his stern hunger strike, his "major Gandhi diet" (60). He insists that his daughter marries Changez, a boy from India who comes from a decent family and has a reputable background in India. Jamila, who is a self-declared feminist, agrees to marry Changez to prevent her father from dying. The novel thus features a popular cliché in India writing, the arranged marriage, although, only to undermine the legitimacy of such a marriage. Jamila's "big decision" is registered as a type of "perversity" (82) on the part of the bride. Her marrying Changez, for Karim, is a perversion on *her* part since it goes against her strict feminist values and her own good sense. Karim mentions how "[m]arrying Changez would be, in her mind, a rebellion against rebellion, creative novelty itself" (82). This episode of the reluctant bride who refuses but then later becomes willing to enter into such a marriage disavowing her political activism is a good example of Kureishi's contrived strategy. Even

Jamila, for all her advocacy against patriarchy, must be sacrificed to the arranged marriage, even though – of course – she later undermines the institution by having unconventional living arrangements.

Yet, what is obvious is that Kureishi, by making Jamila eventually accept and grow to love Changez, as far as love can go in such a situation, is perhaps challenging the Western assumption that all arranged marriages are doomed to fail. Such assumptions emerge from the idea that the will of the woman in such marriages is subordinate to the will of her father, which therefore establishes the ontology of patriarchal domination.

On the other hand, one could very well read this as a lampoon of stereotypical notions of marriage. To explain further, the arranged marriage is featured and therefore criticized insofar as it is said to denigrate and oppress the bride.

Concomitantly, however, this arranged marriage disrupts any stereotypical conception of an arranged marriage since Jamila, ever the indomitable feminist, does not conform to the diagrams of traditional marriage. Jamila is the breadwinner and supporter of the family in a house where Changez is unemployed. It is Changez's brother who sends him what little money he can from India, an ironic twist since his departure was heralded as the beginning of a new and prosperous life for him. Jamila refuses to grant Changez any conjugal favours, prompting him to begin a relationship with Shinko, a Japanese prostitute who later becomes Karim's extended family. Jamila subsequently moves into a commune, taking Changez with her, where he will be the primary care-giver of the communal baby, who is fathered, not by Changez but by a white man and commune member – Simon. Moreover, much to Changez's nonchalance, Jamila has a string of sexual lesbian encounters with a member of the commune. Changez, who moves from lines of patriarchy to adopting a maternal role, can thus hardly be said to conform to the stereotypes associated with the signifier "arranged marriage".

This process of the defamiliarisation of the signifier is, therefore, a way of rendering unstable the understanding of arranged marriage. This raises the question: if indeed Kureishi has an audience in mind, is the author directing this arguably didactic episode to the Western metropolitan audience who have contempt for Eastern practices such as arranged marriages? By subverting certain expectations, the episode is didactic in that it ultimately exposes the preconceived notions that the reader, and hence society, might have about the nature of arranged marriages. Alternatively, is Kureishi simply allowing his narrative to be consumed by expectations of such a reading public and hence including the marriage, a phenomenon that could be described as a feature of difference and unacceptability? Or is he simply recording what he has observed, choosing to undercut or parody the practice with his hyperbolically

deviant example of an arranged marriage?

The suggestion is that such episodes, by implication, may mean that it would not be erroneous to conclude, given the novel's oscillation between the familiar tropes and markers of the exotic and the occasionally strange appropriations thereof, that Kureishi is, here, "simultaneously feed[ing] readerly expectations and [thus challenging] them" (Stein 120), which inevitably makes it difficult to determine exactly where satire ends and where exoticisation and complicity begins with this author and his debut novel.

Kureishi cannot escape the ambivalent portrayal of the marriage in relation to self-exoticisation. Changez, true to the readerly expectations of an Indian who has just disembarked a plane in England for the first time, is registered as innocent and in need of Western tutelage, just like the country from which he comes is somehow thought of as innocent and childlike. The trope of the Indian who comes to London for the first time is not elided, but is in fact enhanced by a discourse of splitting ('the homeland'/ 'the West'), which in a sense demonstrates the extent of the disparate worlds of 'East' and 'West'. Karim notes how "Changez's disgust at everyday things inspired me to show him South London. I wondered how long he'd take to get used to it, to become, in other words, corrupt" (97). And Changez too uses such a discourse as he begins to get comfortable with his unconventional marriage to Jamila. When "late at night the two of them liked to play cards" Jamila would midway "ask him [to tell her] about India" (98). His response marks what might be considered a self-conflicting strategy for Kureishi:

> He told her tales of run-away wives, too-small dowries, adultery among the rich of Bombay (which took many evenings) and, most delicious, political corruption. He'd *obviously picked up a few tips from the paperbacks*, because he spun these stories out like a kid pulling on chewing-gum. He was good at them linking all the stories together with more gum and spit, reintroducing the characters with 'You know that bad bad man who was caught naked in the bathing hut?', as in a wild soap opera, until he knew that at the end of her day spent sucking on dusty brain juice, her maddening mouth would inevitably say, 'Hey, Changez [...] don't you know any more about that politician geezer that got thrown in jail?' (98)

That he had 'picked up a few tips from paperbacks' is a significant insertion which must be seen as the author's direct acknowledgement of the common Orientalist literary tropes of writing about India which peddles familiar stories of "run-away wives" who are in oppressive marriages or of the political climate which is often considered corrupt and hopelessly tyrannical. However, even in his own acknowledgment, Kureishi must himself use this discourse that relies on previous knowledge about India and Indians in general. If these stories

are taken at face-value, for Changez especially, and if to Jamila and the reader they are considered to be expected and commonsensical, then the implication of such a suggestion is, in line with the post-Saussurean axiom, that "common sense itself is ideologically and discursively constructed, rooted in a specific historical situation" as well as "operating in conjunction with a particular social formation" (Belsey 3). In other words, to the extent that language is the bearer of discourse, the attitudes and beliefs of a society, and therefore Jamila's expectations, arise from a previously conceived semiotic system.

Such a social formation is rendered opaque and difficult to grasp since Changez is, as the Indian-born individual, the one from whom the stories of political corruption and patriarchal domination emanate. This gives the impression that the stories carry with them a sense of authenticity and 'real' value since they are being disseminated to the reader through the eyes of an insider. It is Changez who, upon entry into Britain, positions himself in opposition to those expected qualities of the 'typical' Indian immigrant to such a point that it becomes difficult to tell whether or not he is simply distancing himself from an image of India and Indianness or whether he is genuinely a self-loathing character, much like Karim. He constantly iterates that he is "the intellectual type, not one of those uneducated immigrant types who come here to slave all day and night and look dirty" (107).

In fact, many such statements are left open and unresolved, with Changez presenting an image of himself as the 'good Muslim', to use Mamdani's term, who rejects the 'backward' and regressive ways of his homeland. This is akin to Arjun Appadurai's notion, as discussed in Chapter One, that the "diaspora of consciousness" cannot be fixed and seen as monolithic, since there is a tension that forces diasporic subjects to stand astride. This tension is best represented by Changez's double consciousness, the other half of which is characterised by a certain sense of self-loathing.

His frequent repudiation of all things Indian, in an abhorrent tone, makes him an expedient tool for the neo-Orientalist discourse that the novel wishes to undermine, but ultimately ends up reinforcing. Changez says in disgust: "Look at that low-class person', [...] the reason there is this bad racialism is because they are so dirty, so rough-looking, so bad-mannered. And they are wearing such strange clothes for the Englishman, turbans and all" (210). The only way for Indians to be accepted, he proceeds, is that they "must take up English ways and forget their filthy villages! They must decide to be either here or there. Look how here I am!" (210). Of course, Kureishi is aware of the problematic implications of this hilarious scene. But, he has to take up a position in popular Orientalist discourse in order to mount a critique of the very ideology in the first place. Again, as discussed in Chapter One, Said

mentions this trend in *Orientalism*, making reference to what he calls "strategic location", the occupation of a position which a writer who writes about Orientals employs, his "narrative voice", figures of speech and imagery.

Again, such a text as *Buddha* must be seen, therefore, for what it says on the surface, its exteriority, since, according to Said, Orientalism is to be found not in the veracity of the statements or re-presentation, but in the language used to talk about it. This also means that Kureishi cannot stand outside language and must, therefore, depend on the figure of speech and narrative style that is in keeping with the expectations of Orientals that readers may bring to the text. This notion might not be very far off from Spivak's ideas around "strategic essentialism", also discussed in Chapter One, inhabiting the ideological space of the imperial centre, if only to critique it. Ultimately, Kureishi is less successful in his attempt to find a critical vocabulary that attends to the double-edge tactics of self-exoticisation, than he is in his use of strategic essentialism.

Whatever the case may be, it is obvious that Kureishi is deliberate in his representation of Indian immigrants as complex and as having a felt need for hybridization, which he contends is not the same as assimilation. Here, again as Bhabha later echoes in his ideas about the Third Space, the British Orientalist gaze is seen as constantly desiring to determine Indians in an essentialised way so that they are turned into monolithic anthropological units which can be examined and required to perform their identity so that the performance is in line with preconceived notions of the homeland to which such identities apparently correlate.

Examining Staged Indianness

By drawing attention to the British Orientalist gaze and the accompanying desire to determine Indians (a desire which Changez shares) *Buddha* succeeds in showing how Haroon and Karim negotiate the felt need for self-exoticisation. In reality, the British Orientalist gaze would inevitably see these minority subjects as, Kureishi suggests, adding diversity to the superior (white) British cultural performance which, incidentally, is registered as 'normal' or default and, in contradistinction to the Indian diaspora, unraced. This is why Haroon, in the presence of Karim's white girlfriend – Helen – mentions that "[w]e old Indians come to like this England less and less and we return to an imagined India" (74). In a seemingly condescending manner, Helen takes Haroon's hand and pats it "comfortingly", responding with the classic liberal platitude: "But this is your home,' she said. We like you being here. You benefit our country with your traditions" (74).

Helen's response, which must be read as the liberal response to multiculturalism in Britain, is exposed as emerging from precisely that notion of diversity which takes as its starting point the basic distinction between 'the East' and 'the West'. Yet, at the same time, Jamila, as the second generation Indian, is herself at pains to prevent people from perceiving Indians as unable to come to terms with modernity. Karim, wanting to tell Helen about Anwar's hunger strike, is met with unease by Jamila. For Jamila, one should only do so "if you want to expose our culture as being ridiculous and our people as old-fashioned, extreme and narrow-minded" (71). She is otherwise circumspect about her own representation, wanting forever to show the ability of the immigrant to hybridize.

In opposition to this view, her uncle, Haroon together with her father Anwar, are registered as actively working towards a return to a somewhat imaginary and mythical India, where the performance of their identity marks a separation of their culture from that of the British cultural fabric. Indianness is therefore seen for its inherent bellicosity or mutual incompatibility, which means that it must necessarily clash with the white British culture at any cost. It makes sense that Haroon, then, must work hard at putting his Indianness back in "spadeloads" so that this clash is put to work at the service of his spiritual lessons. Without maintaining this dichotomy (of East and West), Haroon cannot be successful in captivating an audience eager to rid themselves of their middle-class provincialism, a certain type of ennui. Much to the bewilderment of his son Karim, we are told that at these spiritual congregations, Haroon:

> [w]as certainly exotic, probably the only man in southern England at the moment (apart, possibly, from George Harrison) wearing a red and gold waistcoat and Indian pyjamas. He was also graceful, a front-room Nurveyv beside the other pasty-faced Arbuckles with their tight drip-dry shirts glued to their guts and John Collier grey trousers with the crotch all sagging and creased. Perhaps Daddio really was a magician, having transformed himself by the bootlaces (as he put it) from being an Indian in the Civil Service who was always cleaning his teeth with Monkey Brand black toothpowder manufactured by Nogi & Co. of Bombay, into the wise adviser he now appeared to be. Sexy Sadie! Now he was the centre of the room. If they could see him in Whitehall! (31)

What Haroon succeeds in is simply replacing one form of cultural performance with another. No longer is he aiming at assimilation or an adoption of British culture, but he is literally performing a type of identity which cannot itself exist without the presence of the West. His self-exoticism is a result of the dyadic relationship of supply and demand, producer and consumer of ethnicity. And so, rather than thinking of the demand for the exotic as merely a

demand for the foreign, if one considers the origins of the suburbanites' desire for exoticism as exploitative and pecuniary as opposed to philosophical, then exoticisation can be seen as a process of the domestication of the foreign. Exoticisation, therefore, emerges as a form of substitute of the aesthetic, which, as Edward Said puts it in *Culture and Imperialism* "replaces the impress of power with the blandishments of curiosity" (159). In fact, the aspirant social climber and lover to Haroon – Eva – is quick to recognise the marketability and profitability of the ethnic minority in the presence of a white Western majority. She approaches Karim, in one of her first encounters with him, as though he were an artefact with the potential to yield fungible returns:

> The only thing she wore was a full-length, multi-coloured Kaftan, and her hair was down, and out, and up. She'd darkened her eyes with kohl so she looked like a panda. Her feet were bare, the toenails painted alternatively green and red […]. She was a kind of human crop-sprayer, pumping out a plume of Oriental Aroma. I was trying to think if Eva was the most sophisticated person I'd ever met, or the most pretentious […]. Then, holding me at arm's length as if I were a coat she was about to try on, she looked me all over and said, 'Karim Amir, you are so exotic, so original! It's such a contribution! It's so you!' (9)

The above passage is clearly supposed to be a comment or a meditation on the process of minoritisation, the fossilising of minority cultures into auxiliary pockets of a 'major' society, a process which is arguably the derivation of self-exoticisation. Eva, born into a lower middle-class family herself, with the added twist that she is a white female who represents the individualism and capitalist instinct of the Thatcherism era, sees this as an opportunity to convert the ethnic qualities of Haroon into a full revenue generating occupation, based on the originality and authenticity of the guru and, of course, the notable demand for spiritual enlightenment in the West. She notices, just like the Indian characters, the value of a pre-packaged identity.

Eva therefore wishes to connect Haroon with some influential people in London so as to increase his clientele base, and so, she facilitates a move from the suburb to the city, where opportunities are plentiful for the four aspirant climbers; Karim, the one through whom the city is narrated; Haroon, the eponymous Buddha; Charlie and Eva herself. The city represents a world of possibilities for marketing the margins. It is there too that Karim will later be cast in a play in which he is required to display his 'authenticity' for an audience and public whose stereotypes about India and Indians he is expected to confirm. Enthusiastic about the lucrative industry of alterity, Eva manages to help expand Haroon's guru business by securing an interview designed to enhance the publicity of the guru:

> Eva knew a man on the local paper, the same co-operative journalist who got Charlie on the front page of the *Bromley and Kentish Times*, and he interviewed Dad. Dad was photographed in his red waistcoat and Indian pyjamas sitting on a gold cushion. His commuter companions were impressed by this sudden fame, and Dad told me delightedly how they pointed him out to each other on Platform Two. (157)

Kureishi is suggesting, by the popular response that the guru receives after the interview, that for as long as the minorities in the suburbs are thought of as providing a sense of 'diversity', Haroon will never run out of business since, of course, his authenticity as the Indian means that he can facilitate the much desired bridge between the suburbanites and the exotic land which they endeavour to vicariously explore. Even if an attempt to understand the 'other' is made on the part of the white British, Kureishi is in a sense suggesting that these attempts are driven by a patronising approach to Indian communities which favours a multicultural society in which minority cultures can both be produced and consumed by a white Orientalist gaze which associates Indians with the mysticism of their native East.

I suggest that perhaps Kureishi attempts to address the subject of cultural performance by presenting both Haroon and Karim as individuals involved in a performance of their 'Indianness.' If, without over-simplifying it, one considers the idea presented by Bhabha, that colonisation is a particular, and indeed particularly violent, type of cultural exchange during which the coloniser, the British in the case of *Buddha*, seeks to create a 'mimic man' in order to aggrandise and reaffirm his own cultural code, then both characteristics which Haroon assumes, pre and post spiritual 'enlightenment', are by implication involved in a performance of identity. If, as the novel suggests, the British *perform* their cultural identity, it follows then that the diasporic community imbibing such cultural symbols is itself systematically involved in a performance of identity which renders the entire process of identity representation, in this case, a function of simulacra. To follow on this line of reasoning, it is little wonder that Karim is sexually appealing to Pyke, the play director. This appeal is mediated by his being exotic. Haroon too entices Eva to bed by recounting embellished, fantastic and extraordinary notions of Indian exoticism shortly after putting on his Indianness in "spade loads".

However, Haroon, fully cognizant of the burgeoning and unyielding demand for spiritual activity, begins – perhaps unconsciously – to believe his own performance, rendering unstable any claim that Kureishi might, in fact, have used this character to parody the notion of cultural purity. Towards the end of the novel, Karim mentions, for instance, that:

> [a]pparently these kids from Dad's classes were always turning up at the flat, and he had to deal with them. This he considered to be 'compassionate

> activity'. He was now saying that, for the sake of 'harmony', each day of your life should contain three elements: scholarship, compassionate activity and meditation. (279)

Haroon had to ensure that he was "teaching this several times a week at a nearby Yoga Centre" (279), the clichéd rendezvous for spiritual consciousness and training. But for Karim, who had "always imagined that Dad's guru business would eventually fall off in London" (279) it eventually becomes "clear now that he would never lack employment while the city was full of lonely, unhappy, unconfident people who required guidance, support and pity" (279). Still, that Haroon has himself internalised the performance of Indianness, or has learned to optimise it, is telling. In an interview aimed at increasing his clientele, Haroon tells the white journalist and photographer that despite having been in the West since his late teens, he cannot identify as British since the West, for him, is morally and spiritually bankrupt, its material development notwithstanding. The view of a first generation immigrant towards the English, as per Haroon, was always characterised by a valorisation of all things Eurocentric. With the attention now fully focused on this previously marginalised immigrant, Haroon can turn 'inward' and infuse his Indianness with the depth and meaningfulness[16] that the lack of attention and ethnic discrimination in Britain did not, previously, offer:

> I have lived in the West for most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian. When I was young we saw the Englishman as a superior being [...] this society you have created in the West is the richest there has been in the history of the world. There is money, yes, there are washing-up bowls. There is domination of nature and the Third World. There is domination all round. And the science is most advanced. You have the bombs you need to make yourself feel safe. Yet there is something missing. (264)

The 'yet' in the above quote warrants closer evaluation, because Haroon proceeds to qualify his remarks by adding that in the face of all Western advancement, "there has been no deepening in culture, no accumulation of wisdom, no increase in the way of the spirit" (264). Ironically, such a Western culture was perfectly acceptable during his many years "trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous" until deviation from pure Englishness and consequent antithesis to it became fashionable and profitable. Kureishi thus wishes to expose the Western metropolitan audience for their mindless consumption of the East, but, paradoxically and perhaps simultaneously, the glove can be turned inside out so that such an episode is read, moreover, as providing a comment on the advantaged position that postcolonial

[16] Although, there might indeed be something else going on here. He also seems to be turning "Orientalism' on its head by using exoticism to critique and exploit white British people (previous colonisers).

and transnational writers may assume, so that transnationalism and postcoloniality become terms that, similarly to Haroon, benefit from the resistance and the dominant culture against which they are positioned.

"In The City", the second part of the novel, is focalised through Karim himself, while less emphasis is placed on the renegade atheist-turned-Buddha. Here, Karim will also be required to put his ethnicity to work for a metropolitan audience. He does so at the orders of the self-proclaimed anti-racist theatre director – Jeremy Shadwell – and later, for another theatre practitioner, Pyke, and his associates. He is required, literally, to stage his Asianness. Shadwell has cast Karim in his apparently revisionist version of Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, in which Karim is expected to act, by virtue of his ethnicity, the elephant-riding Indian boy, Mowgli. Karim tentatively accepts this role, not wanting to have cultural assumptions thrust upon him. But the episode is a critical, if ultimately hilarious, account of the expectations that metropolitan audiences have of an unsullied Indian authenticity. After asking Karim to dress up in a loin-cloth and smear himself with brown make-up to darken his skin so as to appear more convincingly Indian, ideas he believes are "making the world uglier" (146), Karim gets comfortable with getting "competent as a little organ-utan on the scaffolding" (146). But, having overcome his hesitation, he quickly learns that his aversion to the make-up and the performance as a monkey are the least of his problems. Shadwell pulls him aside:

> 'A word about the accent, Karim. I think it should be an authentic accent'
>
> 'What do you mean authentic?'
>
> 'Where was our Mowgli born?'
>
> 'India.'
>
> 'Yes. Not Orpington. What accent do they have in India?'
>
> 'Indian accents.'
>
> 'Ten out of ten.'
>
> 'No, Jeremy. Please, no.'
>
> 'Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not for experience.' (147)

It is not surprising that Shadwell should say this, if the semiotic markers of exoticism are to be inverted so that they reveal the mind-set and prejudice of those who require them. What should be of interests is the manner in which Karim responds. While all his close friends and family warn him about accepting and performing such a role, Karim recognises that experience will

be the only access to the world of theatre, and so assumes the role which, as Jamila mentions, is akin to a neo-fascist production in which he is supposed to pander to the white Orientalist gaze, demonstrating his "innocent and young brown body, as well as reconfirming prejudices and clichés about Indians" (Nasta 201). Similarly, Tracy, a black colleague of Karim, notes with discontent his acceptance of another role in which he is expected to perform the story of his uncle Anwar: "Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we're funny, with strange habits and weird customs [...] and then you go and have Anwar madly waving his stick at the white boys" (Kureishi 180). While Pyke might consider himself a left-wing proponent of cultural diversity and anti-racism, his insistence that Karim develops the story of Anwar along ethnic lines, as Bart Moore-Gilbert has argued "effectively and economically symbolizes how a (neo)-colonial mentality underlines western radicalism's desire to help give voice to or liberate the oppressed" (201).

Nevertheless, the novel must be seen as expressing what Simon Gikandi says about Rushdie's early novels, that it presents an "irresolvable oxymoron" (qtd. in McLeod 148) in that it makes use of language, beginning as a counter-discourse, only to be consumed by the language of the space which it seeks to challenge. This means that *The Buddha of Suburbia* may employ tropes of the writing back movement, or even of postcolonialism, but concomitantly, it may also tend to undermine the authority of such tropes. This is to say that the novel is, in a sense, self-conflicted about the position it occupies in wanting to create a counter-discourse and in exposing the machinations of the British Orientalist gaze. It would seem that Kureishi is highly aware of the fact that the transparency of language and discourse is an "illusion" (Belsey 4). Since *The Buddha of Suburbia* invokes the discourse of Orientalism, it necessarily invokes the problem of language because language is itself a function not only of discourse but also of ideology. The importance of the treatment of Orientalist discourse in *Buddha* cannot be overstated as one must understand that at the heart of postcolonial or transnational writing is an attempt to represent the 'other'.

In the end, however, Kureishi can be accountable for leaving unanswered questions about the narrator's attainment of a secure public or personal identity. Unlike Changez or Haroon, both of whom represent a maturation of sorts, Karim is, contrary to his earlier assertion that he is "going somewhere", in fact, stuck in a fence-sitting position where he has not progressed – neither in his political orientation, nor in reconciling the anxieties which he so clearly laid out at the beginning. *The Buddha of Suburbia* does not, therefore, end with a neat and liberating closure for the protagonist, as he had wished. If a pessimistic reading is applied to his concluding lines "I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't

always be that way" (284), then Karim has solace only in the embrace of what Bhabha refers to as "the art of the present;" which is to say that maturity and catharsis, for Karim, lie squarely in his acceptance of selfhood as necessarily bound up to hybridity and deracination. In this way, the novel can be read as an anti-*bildungsroman*, since maturity is not a destination that is there, waiting to be discovered by the protagonist, but a process of negotiation, of manoeuvring through the interstices.

Finally, Kureishi writes to challenge existing attitudes towards multicultural Britain, arguing for difference in place of mere 'diversity', which has inherently minoritising power over the Indian or black diasporic communities. In doing so, however, he does not escape benefiting from the occupation of the imaginative territory which produces the Orient and which, in essence, exoticises the East and its people as a place of innate difference. Of course, there is the need to mount this satirical critique, and Kureishi must be commended for the attempt, however, even in showing up Orientalist discourse, Kureishi employs the double-edge strategy of self-exoticisation which is complicit with global capitalism and its commodification of culture.

Chapter Four: The 'Good Muslim': Self-Exoticisation in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

This chapter argues that Khaled Hosseini, in his novel *The Kite Runner*, relies on a type of exoticisation which in contemporary literature is, arguably, a paradigmatic example of neo-Orientalist representations of the Middle East and the Muslim world. In other words, the cultural representation of Afghanistan and the Middle East in Hosseini's novels is reminiscent of Orientalism *par excellence*. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on Hosseini's debut novel *The Kite Runner*. In addition, the second analyses his subsequent novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns.*

It has so far been the contention of this thesis that the early compradors, while they seek to undermine popular stereotypes, inescapably reinforce such stereotypes by constantly making use of, and relying on, the immediate recognisability of the Orientalist tropes and motifs that predate their writing. However, Hosseini, as an example of a later comprador whose writing is influenced by a strong post-9/11 discourse or similar discourses related to the resultant 'War on Terror', emerges as an author who claims to speak with 'authenticity' about his homeland, Afghanistan. Yet, quite ironically, he ultimately reduces the region and its people to an undeniably negative representation, which has as its locus, radical and fundamentalist members of a culture and religion. These people, by implication, are unable to come to terms with modernity, and, therefore, in need of Euro-American intervention, both cultural and military, in order to help facilitate the move from the unprogressiveness of their traditions, to the enlightenment of Western modernity.

Unlike the position of Rushdie and Kureishi, for this comprador the task of speaking on behalf of his erstwhile locality does not arise out of the need to subvert older narratives about Afghanistan (the Orient), but rather, out of his determination to reaffirm, 'from within', the inherent bellicosity of the nation's people and their apparently uneasy relationship with the Western world. In other words, both Hosseini's reasons for – and means of – self-exoticisation function to serve an affirming and supplementary role for Euro-American conceptions of the Orient, while he cashes in on the fungible aspects of his culture .

In Chapter Two, I offered a symptomatic reading of Rushdie's novel and suggested that an adoption of the such a reading was necessary in order to assess the early comprador's novel, fully aware of the intellectual and imaginative territory which produces it. Here too, it is equally important to consider Hosseini's text as emerging out of a certain set of socio-political circumstances. There are, then, potentially two conceptual frameworks which one might use to

proceed with an analysis of Hosseini's novels. The first involves the mentioned symptomatic reading, the *political unconscious* which imposes itself on the author's intentions. The second concept and perhaps the most striking (especially when discussing Middle Eastern diasporic writers) is Mahmood Mamdani's concept of "good Muslim/bad Muslim", discussed in Chapter One. Since I suggest that Orientalism is the force behind Hosseini's two novels, and that, accordingly, exoticisation of the homeland is what enables the sentimentalism and noted exaggerations in them, there is reason to privilege Mamdani's approach, specific to this later comprador and his literary strategies. In addition, given that the two novels under evaluation in Chapter Four and Five were written about the Middle East after the attacks on the World Trade Centres and The Pentagon, it will be the argument in this chapter that the popular reception of the novel by a Western audience, gestures towards the successful implementation of a specifically neo-Orientalist literary modality.

To recapitulate, in his thoroughgoing study of post-9/11 discourse, Mahmood Mamdani posits the view that the 'War on Terror' was advanced by President George Bush in his enunciated distinction between "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims" (15). The difference between 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims', according to Mamdani's analysis, is that the latter "were clearly responsible for terrorism" whereas the former "were anxious to clear their names and consciences of the horrible crime [of 9/11] and would undoubtedly support 'us' in a war against 'them'" (15). He further claims that a "central message [in] such discourse [was that]: unless proved "good" every Muslim was presumed "bad". All Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against "bad Muslims" ".[17]

And so, the question must be asked, in what ways are Hosseini's novels influenced by the world that produced them, and, consequently, in what ways do the novels in turn influence the world from which they come. To answer these questions, it is necessary to position one's response within the contemporary political realm since the very answers to the questions point to the relationship between literature and political phenomena on the one hand, and literature and economic phenomena, on the other (Ashcroft 11).

[17] It is crucial to note that Mamdani is not suggesting that there are no Muslims capable of committing atrocities or planning terror attacks. He merely problematises the discourse employed when these events are talked about. Surprisingly, the rhetoric is not unique to the West but in fact has become adopted by many, including diasporic authors who now live in Euro-America. It is logical, therefore, to conclude that my study, similarly, does not assume that atrocities do not occur in the homelands about which the authors write. However, the extent of the negative representation is what is at stake.

Literature as Political Tool

It is interesting to observe the responses to the two novels in light of their political and economic implications. For instance, Laura Bush, the former first lady of the United States, on 12 February 2003 was expected to host a poetry forum at the White House. However, having caught wind of the fact that some of the poets intended to use the forum as a platform to oppose the proposed attack of Iraq, the forum was summarily cancelled. A press statement published in the *New York Times* immediately thereafter, claimed that "while Mrs Bush respects the right of all Americans to express their opinions, she, too, has opinions and believes it would be inappropriate to turn a literary event into a political forum" (Younge para. 5).

One has to ask what it means, then, when the same Laura Bush, together with her husband, George Bush, give praise to novels such as *The Kite Runner,* as they are known to have done (Bush para. 4). At a dinner held specifically to celebrate the author, Laura Bush counted Hosseini among those "few writers [who] have changed the world with their writing" (Bush para. 1). She emphasised on another occasion, that Hosseini "invites Americans to look beyond the 9/11 stereotypes" that have become commonplace in the U.S. (Bush para 6). Interestingly, it is now known that throughout her husband's term in office, Mrs Bush refused to provide a platform for literature that seemingly opposed the U.S. policy on the invasion of Iraq. Yet, as her comments about the author indicate, she simultaneously applauded a book about Afghanistan at the height of the U.S. invasion of that country. It may therefore be worthwhile to determine what the implications of the latter are and what her actions suggest about it. Conceivably, Hosseini's novels might be viewed as functioning as supporting documents to the U.S. policy on Afghanistan, or, as some commentators such as Hamid Dabashi argue about similar texts, as the emotional addendum to such world views. If this seems slightly exaggerated, it's worth considering that the Bush couple may have wanted, by virtue of this paradox, to be seen as "open" towards and "accepting" of Afghans, or at least those who fulfilled their image of what Mamdani calls a "good Muslim".

I suggest that the implications of Hosseini's diasporic subjectivity might be better understood if considered in light of the notion of the neo-Orientalist comprador figure, or in other words, the First World's Third World expert. Hosseini is encouraged, through his apparent expertise, to confirm the basic distinction between the West and 'the Rest', a distinction made vexatious by strategies of exoticisation. What emerges from both *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns,* then, is the trace of the compradorial figure who observes, describes, comprehends and perhaps even apprehends (in a captive sense) the Middle

East. As with the Saidian theory of Orientalism, discussed in Chapter One, such an apprehension – by means of cultural or military incursion – could be seen as a transition from a type of textual attitude and willpower to know, treat and capture the Orient, to the manifestation of the literal act of knowing, treating and capturing the Orient. For instance, the two novels about the observation of Afghanistan (always in the generalised sense) in the twenty-first century, translate themselves into the making of policy on or about the mentality of 'the Afghans' or 'the Muslims' writ large, even in Iraq or wherever else they may be. In other words, the link between politics and Orientalism, or as Said more cautiously states, "the great likelihood that ideas about the Orient drawn from Orientalism can be put to political use" must be treated as "an important yet extremely sensitive truth" (96) especially, I would add, when such ideas are seen to emanate from 'the inside'.

Born to an upper middle-class family in Kabul, Khaled Hosseini's father was an Afghan diplomat, and his mother, a high school teacher. After accompanying Hosseini's father on his ambassadorial missions in Paris, the Hosseini family was not allowed to return to Afghanistan in 1978, during the Soviet invasion of the country. They sought political asylum in the United States, and were granted citizenship shortly thereafter. Hosseini graduated with a medical degree from Santa Clara University as well as the University of California, San Diego in the early 90s.[18]

The Kite Runner traces the life of Amir, an Afghan boy growing up in Kabul in the early seventies, the heyday of the Islamic monarchy. It is a time of remarkable stability in the country despite the fact that there are inequalities across ethnic groups. Amir's best friend and servant, Hassan,[19] the son of the elder household servant, Ali, learns to crawl and walk side by side with Amir. While Amir goes to school, however, Hassan remains behind ensuring that Amir's clothes are ironed, his meals prepared, and his boy-master's bedroom is clean and tidy upon his return. Amir, the privileged Pashtu boy from the higher echelons of Afghan society, will later face a devastating and life-changing challenge to gain his father's love and acceptance in the presence of the impoverished, destitute and loyal Hassan, who is loved just as much by his master, Amir's father, Baba. The two motherless boys share the best moments in their young lives, watching their favourite American films in the local cinema, flying kites in the dusty

[18] So compelling is the marketability of his 'exoticness', that after the publication of his first novel, which sold over 6 million copies the world over, and has been translated into more than 70 languages, Hosseini resigned from his job as a doctor, to become a fulltime author. He also provides humanitarian assistance in the Middle East, particularly Afghanistan and neighbouring regions.

[19] The novel contains only Arabic names, all of which denote a trait specific to the character whose name it is. For instance, Amir (meaning Prince/Warrior) and Hassan (meaning good/good-natured).

streets of Kabul, eating lamb *kabob,* and innocently teasing stray dogs together.

Their lives are turned upside-down when Assef, the older teenage Pashtu boy in the neighbourhood, accosts Hassan, who belongs to the poor and minority group known as the Hazara, on the day of the kite flying tournament, in order to settle a score he had sworn he would one day accomplish. Hassan, cowed into submission because of his loyalty to Amir, is raped by Assef in an alley on this wintry day, while Amir witnesses the event in hiding, fearful to intervene because his father's long sought after acceptance is at stake.

Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union begins its occupation of the country, forcing Baba and Amir to immigrate to the United States. At age 15, Amir joins an American school, learns to speak English and imbibes 'Western' liberal values. Graduating years later, he subsequently marries a young Afghan-American girl, Soraya. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, Hassan has also married, and fathered a child called Sohrab. Amir, still struggling with his conscience, receives a call from his father's long-lost friend, Rahim Khan, who assures him that "There is a way to be good again" (2). Finding this 'way' will involve Amir returning to Afghanistan, only to discover that he and Hassan are in fact half-brothers, and that the truth was concealed for years since it was supposedly shameful for a Pashtu, such as Baba, to have sex with a member of the Hazara ethnic minority. However, the new government, the Taliban, have killed both Hassan and his wife as a function of their disdain towards the Hazara people, and Amir must now become a man of honour and save Hassan's little boy, who has since been abducted as a sex slave by a Taliban official who, it emerges, is Assef. For Amir, then, the road to redemption not only includes saving the boy from his hellish captivity, but also providing a home and new opportunities for him in the United States. The novel ends with Amir, Soraya and Sohrab living a seemingly happy life in California as Americans who are now far removed from the violence of their former country.

For the purpose of this chapter, the background to the publication of the novel is almost as important as the novel itself, since it was published after the World Trade Centre attacks of 11 September 2001. While many books (such as *The New Jackals: Osama Bin Laden and the Future of Terrorism*), articles and magazines had been published about the Taliban, Bin Laden, and women's rights in Afghanistan at this time, a work of fiction – in the English language – on these related issues had yet to be produced by an Afghan author. Two years after 9/11, *The Kite Runner* emerged as a novel that claimed to be representative of Afghans. Hosseini says in an interview, that he hoped the novel would "give a voice to the people of this country", by which he meant his former homeland, Afghanistan (Edwards 9). An examination of Hosseini's motivations and the seemingly lucrative business of the exotic which informs his purpose in

writing the novel is revealing. In a panel discussion immediately following the publication of *The Kite Runner*, for example, he expressed how he hopes "this story resonates with people and that it emotionally is a story that people will think about long after it's done" (Edwards 9).

While this chapter is not primarily concerned with the novel's sentimentalism, Hosseini's appeal here to sentiment and emotion may well gesture towards the successful implementation of a strategy of exoticisation. This strategy speaks to the Westerners' disposition towards concern for the cultural, specifically Oriental, 'other'. However, while the rapturous reception of the novel and the film, four million copies and a worldwide box office income of seventy-three million U.S. dollars, may point to a degree of empathy towards and yearning to understand this Other, it also expresses the limits of "acceptable difference" to which Muslims are subjected in the West (Mamdani 24).

The enthusiastic reception of the novel by a Western audience, suggests that Hosseini, by representing the protagonist Amir as a 'modern' character imbued with 'Western' liberal ideals, has established a point of familiarity for Euro-American readers. Kwame Anthony Appiah proposes that "conversations across boundaries of identity – whether national, religious, or something else – begin with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own" (82). In light of *The Kite Runner*, however, this statement cannot hold, since Amir is not a 'foreigner' to the 'Western' reader, but in fact represents the 'familiar' precisely because he typifies the West in many ways – more especially after his emigration to America. In his essay on *The Kite Runner* as political allegory, David Jefferess describes Amir's redemption as one that celebrates Western liberalism and is in fact indebted to it:

> While Amir's quest for personal redemption may be read as an allegory of Afghanistan's national project of healing, I read the novel as a political allegory that reflects the way in which the "third world", marked by its difference from the "West", becomes a site to be transformed through the project of nation-building. This project is presented in the West as an ethical demand that is paradoxically conceived of as both a humanitarian project and a disciplinary one; to be recognized as human, Afghanistan must conform to particular western expectations of democracy, liberalism, and multiculturalism. (3)

From this perspective, the sentiments engendered in the Euro-American reader are an indication of the need to subscribe to a shared global ethics of 'responsibility', as symbolised by Amir's return to a Taliban Afghanistan in order to rescue the oppressed and now dehumanised Sohrab. Does the novel suggest, then, that Western interventions and intentions

are essentially philanthropic? Moreover, does it imply that interventions are necessary for the stability of the Middle East?

Exotic Appeal and the Touristic Reader

Hosseini's form of exoticisation can be found in the strategic neo-Orientalist narrative structure of *The Kite Runner*. As Amir's journey continues upon his return to his homeland, he drives past increasingly disturbing images: a man who is selling his prosthetic leg, for example, or a body that swings on an improvised gallows. There is no electricity in Kabul, and there are constant patrols by the truck full of Taliban officials that serve as a reminder that they control this space. So, as Mark Graham in his study of cinematic representations of Afghanistan suggests, by evoking such "mainstream images of the Islamic world's benightedness" (Graham 156), the novel, especially considering its target audience, "palliates the earlier image of civilized, moderate Afghanistan and returns the audience to the familiar violence and erotic excess of Orientalist imagery" (156).

It is interesting that this imagery, although subtle in the beginning, becomes stronger when Amir, the symbol of American infiltration, returns to rescue Sohrab. Thus, the public stoning of a woman in the Ghazi stadium is no surprise to the now Americanised Amir, just as the erotic and absurd dance that Sohrab is ordered to perform for the perverted Taliban paedophiles comes as no surprise to the reader since, as it is sustained in Orientalist discourse, both Amir and the reader are not only 'familiar' with violence in such regions but in fact come to expect it. The reason for this is that both the stoning and the paedophilic actions are examples of the presumed horror and savagery that tourists like Amir can expect when entering the Afghan chamber of terror. The only thing left for Amir to do, then, is to fight against such savagery so that civilisation will once again triumph over the barbarism that persists. The smell of burned diesel that has replaced the bygone aroma of lamb *kabob* in the street is, thus, not merely an example of change in times, but of the kind of disintegration that ensues when Afghans are left to their own devices. Consequently, the remedial action to be taken is clear: American intervention is justified for the sake of redeeming the benighted Orient. It would seem that Amir, whose Americaness is accentuated in such juxtapositioning, is cast as "the lead in a Wild Eastern replay of the captivity narrative" (156). It is no surprise, then, that the culmination of this Oriental experience, for Amir, results in his admitting that "I feel like a tourist in my own country" (Hosseini 234).

Orientalising Violence, and Occidentalising Ethics

While Hosseini may have wished to build a bridge of understanding between 'the West' and 'the East', what he ends up doing is reducing the Islamic world to stereotypes which he sustains throughout his debut novel *The Kite Runner*, and in the subsequent one, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. And so – to borrow again a crucial concept from Mamdani – "culture talk", by which the critic means the simplistic way of framing the problem of terrorism, for instance, by assuming that Eastern "culture seems to have no history, no politics, and no debates, so that *all* Muslims are just plain bad" becomes the pillar upon which Hosseini's novel stands (18). In contrast to Rushdie and Kureishi, discussed in Chapter One and Two, Hosseini's essentialism does not begin as a counter-discourse, nor as an attempt to use exoticisation in any strategic or political way that might be deemed subversive.

Samuel Huntington's account of the "clash of civilisations", also discussed in Chapter One, may best find its relevance here, with Hosseini as the buffer of the supposedly incompatible ideologies. While there have been many books dedicated to identifying future sources of conflict, Huntington's thesis, similar to the conclusions that can be drawn from Hosseini's novel, is predicated on the idea of an interminable clash between the West and what Huntington might call "the Rest". Unlike most anthropologists and authors dealing with transnationalism and cultural intersections, the increasingly permeable global networks signal, for Huntington and Hosseini at least, an opportunity to shine the Western democratic and civilising rays on the rest of the world rather than any enunciation of a 'Third-Space' or corresponding and comparable notion. After detailing the distinctions between these clashing civilisations, Islam given the greatest detail, Huntington's civilisation theory proceeds to advance an interventionist approach. It is significant that Huntington concludes his essay by suggesting that in order to prevent civilisations getting into further embattlement, the West (by which he means Euro-America) must:

> [E]xploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states; to support in other civilisations groups sympathetic to Western values and interests; to strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate Western interests and values and to promote the involvement of non-Western states in those institutions.

Considering the social-political implications that the consumption of these novels by a metropolitan audience may contain, *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be seen as literary manifestations of Huntington's recommendation above. It is my argument that Hosseini represents such a process, properly identified by Huntington a decade before his debut

novel, *The Kite Runner*. It not inappropriate to conclude that Huntington, and Hosseini by extension, are drawing on long-standing Orientalist notions, giving their 'expert' account of the Islamic world and the ways in which to deal with the Muslim's inherent bellicosity and indignation. Given that Huntington's writing is aimed at policy prescription and directed to influence foreign policy makers, his role as the crisis management expert is obviously an extreme example of the transition from textual attitudes to manifest institutional Orientalism.

What such a theory as Huntington's needs, moreover, is the emotional backing of an insider, the one 'sympathetic' to Euro-American values, as he so plainly puts it. Hosseini, therefore, presents himself as the perfect comprador for endorsement of the civilising mission, and his diasporic positionality, arguably, accrues to him a sense of legitimacy in the 'Western world'.

What is interesting to note is that the representational modality of *The Kite Runner* rests upon the rather simplistic and, perhaps, one-dimensional, organising principle of 'doubling' between the protagonist and his Americanised family and the antagonist, Assef and his immoral associates. The problem with doubling as a motif, for this reason, is that Amir's development and his resultant rationality, responsibility and desire "to be good again" (2) serve to aggrandise his now ameliorated Western self above his previously Afghan identity. Hosseini offers the trajectory of Amir as one that traces his progression from condemned to redeemed.

As the novel progresses, so too does Assef's villainous identity evolve, and his infamous character is a foil to the heroic, less "savage" character of Amir (33). The boys, then, do not come to innocently represent the merely idiosyncratic characteristics of children; rather they embody the supposed values and representations of the geographies to which they belong. In the first encounter with Hassan and Amir, Assef takes on the role of the racist whose mission it is to protect cultural and ethnic purity. The racial purist, chastises the assimilationist Amir for befriending someone who is deemed inferior by Pashtu standards, while Amir, not wanting to indict himself, almost blurts out that "he's not my friend" (36). At this stage, Assef has already demonstrated his bigoted and conservative mentality, which can be read as the mentality of the "bad Muslim." That Afghanistan belongs to a certain type of racially pure group he overtly states when he claims that "Afghanistan is the land of the Pashtuns", and adds that "it always has been, always will be [...] We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here" (35). According to Assef, people like Hassan have "Polluted our homeland" with "their dirty blood" (35). In the same way that Hitler shared his "great vision" of a pure culture, Assef would ensure that "the world is a better place" by "finishing what Hitler started" (35).

This is a trope that will re-emerge in his life as a Taliban villain, as we later see him recall what he describes as the most "liberating" exercise he has ever done, the process of ethnic cleansing which resulted in the Hazara Massacre in Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998 (242). In true "bad Muslim" style, Assef recalls how he and his Taliban members went door-to-door and "only rest[ed] for food and prayer" (243). Moreover, he mentions this story "fondly, like a man telling of a great party he had attended" (243). His nature at this stage epitomises the demonic Taliban warlord as imagined by American popular audiences – the sadistic man who is propelled or justified by religious fanaticism and extremism. Amir recounts:

> He spoke rapidly. "Door to door we went, calling for the men and the boys. We'd shoot them right there in front of their families. Let them see. Let them remember who they were, where they belonged." He was almost panting now. "Sometimes, we broke down their doors and went inside their homes. And ... I'd ... I'd sweep the barrel of my machine gun around the room and fire and fire until the smoke blinded me." He leaned towards me, like a man about to share a great secret. "You don't know the meaning of the word liberating until you've done that, stood in a roomful of targets, let the bullets fly, free of guilt and remorse, knowing you are virtuous, good, and decent. Knowing you're doing God's work. It's breathtaking." He kissed the prayer beads, tilted his head. (242)

The above passage is designed, quite overtly, to construct an image of such a deplorable Muslim, and the representation conveniently falls into the reassuring Orientalised stereotypes that reverberate throughout the novel. The Islamic fundamentalist who also embodies pro-Nazi ideologies suitably serves the purpose of the 'Islamisation' of evil, while the morally upright, Americanised Amir serves to facilitate the 'Westernisation' of good. According to Mamdani, the naturalised "culture talk" or rhetoric employed in these types of representations enables the West to maintain Orientalist binary structures, thereby legitimising wars and invasions, and giving the West an ethical pillar upon which to base its incursions (Mamdani 24).

It is important to note, having portrayed Assef as the ultimate desperado figure who represents an anti-Western, 'Islamic' fundamentalism, Hosseini projects Amir's contrary acquiescence to American ideologies as a demonstration of 'integrity' by default. Amir, who transforms from a cowardly and fainthearted character to the most courageous person ever to have challenged the iniquitous character of Assef, has, by virtue of his self-realisation in the United Sates, gained the ability to undo the sins of his past. The United Sates therefore becomes the vehicle enabling his absolution and manumission. In this way, the Amir who once voyeuristically observed the rape of his best friend, because he "was afraid of Assef and what

he would do", earns his entry into the category of acceptable Muslim by becoming the man who "feels healed at last" through his confrontation with Assef (253). Amir's immigration to the U.S. is not simply a relocation, but also entails personal growth. Moreover, this transition from shabby Kabul to prosperous California means that he can now be portrayed as possessing courage and an ethical impulse, the characteristics of an adult, rather than as the child that was afraid of facing the monster-terrorist, Assef.

Graham cites from Fredric Jameson's contention that "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (Graham 151). In relation to this claim, it becomes easy to see that a split representation of Amir – into a 'before' and 'after' (immigration) self – is indicative not just of the boy, soon-to-be man, but also of his homeland. In line with this outlook, one can conceive of an Afghanistan that comes into contact with "the rehabilitating and empowering potential of American identity" (151) as illustrated by the doubling of Amir's two selves as well as the contrast with Assef and his degenerate self. The growth of the former and the stagnation of the latter, for this reason, bolster the sustained doubling that comes to a climactic end in the scene leading up to the confrontation with the Taliban warlord.

As if representing a battle between ideologies (once again following Huntington), neatly organised along oppositional symbolisms, Hosseini presents, in the one corner, the bearded Assef, savage and psychotic Muslim fundamentalist. In the other corner, there is his polar opposite, Amir, now "stripped of the false beard he'd been wearing as a disguise", who comes to represent "the forces of tolerance and rationality" (151). This is highly significant in relation to Mamdani's analysis of post-9/11discourse since Amir *becomes* a "good Muslim" *only* after having struggled against the "bad Muslim". We know, for instance, that he begins to pray and read the Quran regularly, as he had promised he would in his deepest moment of despair when Sohrab, once saved, attempts suicide after overhearing a telephone conversation in which his uncle laments the difficulties in adopting him legally in the U.S. In fact, while awaiting the travel and adoption documents and dealing with Sohrab's near-death experience, he attends prayers in a mosque in Pakistan. Never having practised his religion, this act is itself indicative of the now concrete, good Muslim identity that he begins to take on:

> There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. I see now that Baba was wrong, there is a God, there always has been... I bow to the west and kiss the ground and promise I will do *zakat*, I will do *namaz*, I will fast during Ramadan and when Ramadan has passed I will go on fasting. I will commit to

> memory every last word of His holy book, and will set on pilgrimage to that sweltering city in the desert and bow before the Ka'bah too [...] I will think of Him every day from this day on if He only grants me this one wish: My hands are stained with Hassan's blood. I pray God doesn't let them get stained with the blood of this boy too. (301-302)

If Amir's intervention to rescue Sohrab from Assef can be said to be the result of a sense of ethical rationality engendered by his encounter with the West, and yet his Muslim identity re-emerges strongly only after he has saved the boy, then what does this suggest about the "good Muslim's" position in the declaration of war against the "bad Muslim"? I contend that Amir's redemption and "healing" serve to realise the supposedly transformative powers that Laura Bush and other like-minded Americans may find in *The Kite Runner*. That, in fact, while Western presence in Afghanistan is viewed as necessary, it is further legitimised by "good Muslims", such as Hosseini and his characters – Amir and Baba, "in order to bring regenerates such as Assef up to par with modernity" and instil in them the humanity which they lack (Hunt 15). As a result of the violent encounter with Assef, which casts Amir as the Western victim of religious extremism, Amir gains redemption simply because he has acquired an understanding which was hitherto impossible without the righteousness inculcated by America. In other words, "to be good again", a serious motif in the novel, means he has to fight the pernicious Assef, thereby "no longer [being] willing to be a passive" onlooker and not only confronting "his own racism but also that of others, changing the world for the better as a result" (Graham 150), an ameliorative project which precisely reflects Laura Bush's sentiments cited earlier. This project also includes embracing his hitherto abandoned religion. So, in this exoticisation, the good Muslim, although 'Westernised', is also religious.

In this way, Amir has "crossed the threshold from benighted Eastern world to the glorious day of the West" (150) as reaffirmed by his transition, reminding the reader that the "good Muslim" has now been made manifest. If, indeed, Amir and Assef can be seen to function synecdochically in the manner that Graham suggests, it is little wonder, then, that the West has consistently identified with Hosseini's story of 'redemption'. It is significant, in this regard, that the redemption of Sohrab – the "healing", as it were, is the one scene that most Euro-American readers and viewers have found to be the most heartrending. Thus, in 'order to change the world for the better', Mr and Mrs Bush together with Hosseini are of the view that America, the moderate and secular ideology that is constantly threatened by monster-terrorists and that is ordained with higher moral values, must intervene to correct the fanatical, sadistic and simply lascivious Other.

If Hosseini or the Bush family mean to suggest that the well-being of Afghanistan is at the behest of the West, then the author and his novels must adhere to particular notions of power and influence. The American intellectual, Joseph Nye, coined the term 'soft power', in his book *Bound to Lead*. For Nye, there is a distinction to be made between "soft power" and "hard power" (4). While the latter refers to a nation's (or an individual's) ability to militarily and economically coerce another into submission, the former, simply put, involves "getting others to want the outcomes that you want – to co-opt people rather than to coerce them" (5). The notion of soft power includes popular culture, political values and transnational trade. Khaled Hosseini's novels, conceivably empowered by self-exoticisation, are an exercise of soft power in that they are involved in the struggle to win over the hearts and minds of Euro-American readers. This brings me to a pertinent point about the target audience of the novels, and the exoticisation of the Middle East, which is tied to the representation of Afghanistan in both of Hosseini's novels.

Target Audience and Marketing Margins

For the Euro-American audience, the novel has enjoyed great acclaim. Timothy Aubry in his analysis of *Amazon* reviews of the novel and its author has concluded that the success of the novel rests on the sadomasochistic experience it registers for readers, presented as a de-historicised tendency to brutishness, as if the monstrosity of the Taliban officials has no factors which contribute to its emergence, other than a natural appetite for the violent and wild (34). And so, in conversation with his nephew, imparting what to him is a hard-learned lesson, Amir speaks of Assef thusly: "Your father was a good man. But that's what I'm trying to tell you, Sohrab jan. That there are bad people in this world, and sometimes bad people stay bad. Sometimes you have to stand up to them" (319). American readers will recognise that Amir's primary source of guilt, after all, is his *failure* to intervene when Assef, prefiguring his role as a Taliban monster, brutalises Hassan. And so, as one reader declares, moved perhaps by the repudiation of passivity: "Anyone who doubts the need to stamp out terrorism should read this book" (35).[20] It is at such instances that Hamid Dabashi, analysing the effect of exoticisation, would insist that the comprador figure has put his ideological service to work for the imperial master, exemplifying an advanced form of Orientalism.

[20] For more responses similar to this, see Timothy Aubry's "Afghanistan Meets the *Amazon*: Reading *The Kite Runner* in America."

While Euro-American readers rushed to purchase *The Kite Runner* at the bookstores in droves, the Afghan response to both the novel and the film was far less enthusiastic (Edwards 2). At this juncture, I consider whether or not Hosseini's text has had the same effect of speaking on behalf of the subaltern, maligned and Othered voices for which he hoped to have been the mouthpiece. It would seem, ultimately, that his text *has* been a voice, albeit not the kind of voice through which Afghans stand to benefit. Instead, this voice has been made to say what the listeners of it would like to hear and not so much what the mediated speakers would like to have articulated.

The problem, of course, is that implicit in an Afghan aversion to either the novel or film is the conclusion that the disinclination towards this 'voice' is indicative of the gap between Western liberalism and "ethno-religious extremism" (1). The death threats against the two main boy actors, as Janette Edwards points out, resulted in the Afghan Ministry of Culture "quietly" banning the film out of fear that the boys' lives may have been endangered (2). While the Anglophone press had already concluded that the ban was because of a national inability to appreciate art, she notes that:

> remarks by the president of Afghanistan's state-run media company to *Washington Post* reporters suggesting that Afghan audiences would believe the on-screen rape was actual and respond accordingly supported a broadening consensus that the ban was the government's concession to the 'mentality of an illiterate and religiously conservative rabble incapable of distinguishing between cinematic mimesis and real life. (2)

This perception not only lends itself to a gross anthropology of low expectations ("well of course *they* wouldn't understand it"), but it also enables American media to simply dismiss this complex incident as inevitable cause-and-effect, suggesting that this type of literature or film is a higher artistic endeavour which 'traditionalism' precludes one from appreciating.

The problem with this simplistic understanding is that it assumes that Afghans are not in a position to appreciate provocative American cinema, when, in fact, that is far from the case. Many Afghans, as is cited in the novel itself, owe much of their youthful entertainment to foreign movies. In a telling study on the Afghan responses to the novel, Edwards interviews two expatriate Afghan men who live in the California Bay Area, just as both Amir and Hosseini do. One of the men, Mr Salimi, contends that the scenes which "describe Hassan's devotion to Hollywood Westerns [are] among the few authentic elements of the novel" (4). He asserts that "it was *not* that [*The Kite Runner*] was told from a Western point of view" (4). But rather, what

moved Afghans the most was the very inauthentic and insidious manner of representing the "particularity" of the film which Mr Salimi insists is not the "celluloid rape of a male child. It is the aversion, celluloid or otherwise, of sexual violence against a member of one ethnic group – in this case, the Hazara, who were mostly Shi'a Muslim – by his historical oppressor, namely, Sunni Pashtu" (4). Certainly, glossing over such pertinent historical detail leaves little to the imagination of the reader, forcing her to accept the violence that the novel registers as an effect of its own cause.

Critics, by merely suggesting that Afghanistan's natural reflex against *The Kite Runner* would be violent because of the nation's inability to understand art, neglect the historical significance of the complex interethnic relationships in Afghanistan. While the author may believe that his novel resonates with people in Afghanistan, "the temporal and social fallacies" prove that Hosseini has neither the knowledge nor the authority to write a novel that treats historical events in Afghanistan, especially events that retain the power to incite riots" (6) with due diligence. To many Afghans, the novel has, thus, compromised Hosseini's standing as "the cultural insider" (6). This is obviously not consistent with the author's own views, nor with those of some Euro-American readers who identify with the novel. Contrarily, Hosseini believes that "Afghans see the mainstream success of these books as a point of pride in their community. And also they recognize their stories in the pages of these books, they say "that happened to my cousin" and "this is exactly what we went through, thanks God somebody is telling the story" (Dumas Interview 2011). In opposition, the disagreement many Afghans have towards the novel lies principally with the inaccuracies of the depiction of the social fabric and the misrepresentations of Afghan society.

Mr Salimi insists that "the more you know Afghans, the more you know the [...] holes [...] in this book" (Janette 5). This should explain, as Mr. Salimi suggests, why even such basic phenomena as Afghan socialisation are taken for granted. Remembering the thirteen times he and Hassan saw *The Magnificent Seven*, Amir says that "with each viewing, we cried at the end when the Mexican kids buried Charles Bronson – who, as it turned out, wasn't Iranian either" (Hosseini 23). Mr Salimi is adamant that it was virtually inconceivable to have had such a scene manifest itself, even in the darkness of the cinema, since: "I've never seen in my life... you would never see [boys] cry, even with a friend. No matter if that friend is Amir, or whoever that is. And [Hassan] is a young man... he could go there and do something by himself, but not to cry with another person" (Janette 6). For Afghans, then, the inaccuracies in the representations of Afghanistan and the Afghan culture in *The Kite Runner* only point to its author's "inauthentic" motives which are thus rendered "suspect" (5). For this reason, it is not

difficult to align oneself with the view that Hosseini's credentials as the "preeminent voice of the diaspora" are compromised by his "exploiting his heritage" for commercial reward (6). Of course, it could be argued, as some scholars have about diasporic literature in general, that readers dissatisfied with inaccurate representations have brought to the book their own pre-conceived ideas and "misplaced expectations", political and sociological dimensions which may be "beyond the purview of a work of fiction" (Aubry 34). However, as Aubry correctly points out, the data on *Amazon* and other cultural literacy barometers corroborate the very idea, since readers of Hosseini's text approach the novel "either as an accurate record of Afghanistan's recent history" or in some cases as, "a preferable substitute for such a record – more valuable than nonfiction precisely for its humanizing function" (34). Arguably, and perhaps in support of Aubry, whether or not this is what Hosseini intended is not as important as the very fact that the consequences of his writing a novel about Afghanistan exists within, and are enabled by, a conceptual frame of reference about the Orient that predates the author.

Simply put, Khaled Hosseini and *The Kite Runner* rely on a type of self-exoticisation which, unlike Rushdie and Kureishi's arguably mitigating appropriations of alterity, functions only to affirm Euro-American expectations about the author's homeland. His diasporic subjectivity, then, positions him strategically for the transactions involved in the consumption of 'the East' by a metropolitan audience. More importantly, it also facilitates the alibi for cultural and military interventionist strategies in these troubled zones.

Chapter Five: The First World's Third World Expert in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

The only person an Afghan cannot defeat is himself

--- *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Representing Middle Eastern Women

Having so far argued that exoticisation is played out in various ways throughout the diasporic literary topology, I shall, in this chapter, argue that one of the aspects of self-exoticisation and neo-Orientalism occurs in the terrain of gender politics. I maintain here that Khaled Hosseini and his novels may function to rearticulate particular popular ideas about women in the Middle East which are predominantly in keeping with Orientalist notions of the region and its people. Having positioned Hosseini squarely as a comprador author whose work serves to normalise popular assumptions about the Orient and who himself occupies a position sympathetic to cultural and military intervention in the Middle East, I focus on women in order to argue that, as a consequence of the woman's condition of oppression, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* represents the Afghan female body as a subject to be pitied. Subsequently, I posit that the novel not only suggests that the monster-terrorist figure should be corrected, but that it also implies that this corrective mission is represented as being the burden of Euro-America. Lastly, I suggest that Hosseini is himself complicit with the structures of neo-Orientalism, by choosing a narrative strategy which privileges sentimentalism and exaggerated descriptions of gender dynamics in Afghanistan. This type of portrayal is aimed at a Western metropolitan audience, and may tend to inspire a desire to do good abroad.

It is worth considering, therefore, the ways in which gender and sexuality are central to the ongoing 'War on Terror', and how Hosseini's novel lends itself to the "counterterrorist" strategies of the Western world which are bolstered by the novel's prosopopoiea as well as a representation of the terrorist figure vis-à-vis the hapless female victim. Such a figure, consistent with a similar trope of the bad Muslim in his earlier novel, is diametrically opposed to the rational, more civilised figure of liberation. A nascent study by the American theorist, Jasbir Puar, reveals the manner in which Euro-America often adopts a stance enabled by a sense of paternal responsibility towards its citizens, so that the figure of the "terrorist monster" becomes the embodiment of the Orient and its people, there to be dominated by well-meaning Western forces. This chapter, taking Puar's question – "how are gender and sexuality central to the current "war on terrorism"? (117) – as a guiding principal, explores this concern and

seeks, thereby, to link Hosseini's novel to the global imperial machine, as well as to the metropolitan centre which is the locus of the mass market consumption of his text. Simply put, Hosseini's novel utilises a mode of self-exoticisation by using the female body as a site of, among other themes, violence and erotic contestation. The novel, written clearly for a Western audience, represents the female experience in this way in order to draw attention to the lived experiences of Afghan women in general. It ultimately elides, as does *The Kite Runner*, the heterogeneity of the region as well the complexities of its conflictual history. As Dabashi concludes about Nafisi's *Lolita*, I likewise argue that *Splendid Suns*, "exemplifies the systematic abuse of legitimate causes", in this case women's repression, "for illegitimate purposes", such as U.S. cultural and military domination.

It is Puar's contention that popular 'expert' analyses of the war and the region, ultimately infantilise the Euro-American population, subsequently positioning the Western states as the parental organs of protection (127). In all facets of media representations of the Middle East, and Hosseini's novels may very well corroborate this notion, such analysis will inevitably, "scream with what seems to be at times one voice: "The terrorist is a monster. The monster is the enemy. The enemy must be hunted down to protect you and all those women and children that you do not know, but we know" (Puar 131). If gender and sexuality are central to the creation and conservation of a certain type of knowledge about the Orient and the terrorist figure, then such knowledge ties the figure of the modern terrorist to a much older Oriental figure of savagery as well as to a fossilised historical discourse, which Said properly recognised in *Orientalsim* (117).

The grand narrative in Western media's representation of the Middle East has undergone a tectonic shift since 9/11. Novels, films and other forms of new media seem to be less concerned with the "typical 'billionaires, bombers, and belly dancers'" as they are with portraying images of the land and its women which, to quote Coeli Fitzpatrick, "succeed in promoting and reinforcing perceptions and attitudes about Muslims in the 'Orient' which are at best oversimplified and racist, and at worst prepare the ground for further violent U.S. intervention in the region" (Fitzpatrick 244). Naturally, since Hosseini's debut novel, *The Kite Runner*, does not provide a space for the representation of Afghan women, his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, makes up for this dearth by attending to the missing voice of the Afghan woman. However, the author employs a strategy that sends the female subject deeper into the shadows, one which in the long run seems reductive at best, and derisive at worst.

To appreciate the representation of women in this novel, it is necessary to understand the impetus behind it. What emerged very soon after the success of his first novel was Hosseini's non-profit organisation – The Khaled Hosseini Foundation, which, together with the United Nations refugee organisation (UNHCR) works to "provide humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan" (Hosseini *para. 2*). Hosseini's philanthropic impulse, one might argue, is here accounted for in the form of his humanitarian organisation. The appeal, on the foundation's website, is for good Samaritans in the 'Western world' to enlist themselves, where they are unable to donate money to the cause, in order to develop the country. In addition to building shelters for families, "it also provides economic opportunities, education and healthcare for women" in the region, a group which Hosseini believes is, in Afghan society, under threat (Hosseini *para 2*). In light of his philanthropic and interventionist impulse, it is not erroneous to suggest that the women in *The Kite Runner*, as well as those in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, are literary representations of the author's own beliefs about Middle Eastern women in general. In other words, since his organisations are designed to address social problems in the Middle East, the women in the novels also function to highlight those very problems, among them, the 'fact' that they are oppressed and live in the shadows and are mostly subject to unending brutality.[21] How the first novel registers this fact, for instance, is rather simple: that is, women exist in the text, but only peripherally. They are given no voice that suggests their involvement in the social-cultural milieu, with the exception of the women who move to America, there to discover what might be called, following Spivak, their "voice-consciousness" (285). And so, as I argue, one gets the impression that the author is interested in Afghan women's status only as victims. Furthermore, the exoticisation of the Afghan female body in Hosseini's text can be seen in the sustained representation of the Afghan woman as corporeally susceptible to abjection or indeed as constituting the very space of abjection.

Gayatri Spivak, in her seminal piece *Can the Subaltern Speak?* questions the ethics of representing subaltern women, and in particular, the claim to speak on their behalf. Spivak's intervention in this piece, as well as intermittent postcolonial feminist pieces throughout her career, takes Western feminism to task for its universalising claim to represent all women, regardless of class, region, religion, race and other non-biological factors. Like Said, she proceeds from an understanding of the worldliness of the texts, which is to say, she adheres to

[21] In an interview entitled "Behind the Veil", Hosseini discusses what he describes as a difficult process in writing about Middle Eastern women, and how he overcame his fears of inauthenticity the more he saw their plight as needing to be brought to the attention of 'the First World': "At first I was a ventriloquist and they were dummies speaking with my voice. But as I began to know them, the characters took over and I became a mouthpiece for them. That was a watershed moment for me" (Alden para 5).

the notion that "all texts are worldly, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said 4).

And similarly to Said, Spivak notes the semiotic marker of worldliness in a text as located in its style. For Said, just as it is for Spivak, style is "the recognisable, repeatable, preserveable sign of an author who reckons with an audience […] style neutralises the worldliness, the silent, seemingly uncircumscribed existence of a solitary text" (33). Her criticism, in essence, is that Western feminism and modes of representing women's suffering tend to claim that women the world over suffer from indistinguishable forms of oppression simply because they are women. For the representing author, the lie of a "global sisterhood" (Spivak, 226) does not take into account the complicity between the author and the dominant socio-political structures.

It is important to recall that Hosseini has often claimed his Afghan heritage as that which affords him the right to represent the region. However, in his unacknowledged complicity with neo-Orientalist discourse, he effaces the role that Afghan women have played in social change, which effectively privileges the male 'subaltern' as the object of such social change. But more disturbingly, Hosseini seems to believe in the transformative powers of a 'global alliance' against women's oppression in the Middle East. This belief suggests that he understands the situation of Afghan women as irresolvable in the absence of Euro-American forces. Therefore, if the military and cultural interventions in the region are seen as arising from an ethical impulse, then women can be seen as the means to exercising such an ethical compulsion. Indeed, Spivak notes the emergence of global do-gooders who themselves have not insisted on marking their positions relative to the subaltern. For Spivak maintains that "imperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind" (299). But the sexed subaltern is subject to a type of double oppression, first by the patriarchal structures of her society, then by neo-colonialism itself, so that we have a situation where:

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third wold woman' caught between tradition and modernisation, culturalism and development […] (*Can the Subaltern Speak?* 306)

With this understanding, there is no space from which Hosseini's female characters can 'speak', by which I mean, they cannot have their *speech act* recognised. To elucidate this

position, there is benefit in dwelling upon *The Kite Runner* momentarily: there are five women in total, including the protagonist's Afghan-American wife, Soraya, as well as his Americanised mother in law, Jamila. As for the others, those who do not come into contact with the 'liberating powers' of America, theirs is a wretched and melancholic ending. Hassan's wife, Farzana, is shot execution style by random Taliban men, while Sanaubar – Hassan's mother, disappears from the very beginning, only to make a brief comeback three decades later, impoverished and injured. She appears at Amir's door looking almost mutilated as a result of her encounters with the Afghan, specifically Taliban, men:

> [A] toothless woman with stringy greying hair and sores on her arms. She looked like she had not eaten for days. But the worst of it by far was her face. Someone had taken a knife to it and […] the slashes cut this way and that way. One of the cuts went from cheekbone to hairline and it had not spared her left eye on the way. (*KR* 226)

Since this is one of few incidents in which women in the text are described, Hosseini is guilty of reducing the female body, as earlier mentioned, to representations of abjection and the grotesque. Furthermore, at the public stadium during a soccer match, another woman is stoned to death for adultery at the centre of the field, during half time, to the cheers and applause of the spectators, after which the match timeously resumes without further pause, as if to suggest that such an incident were an everyday occurrence in Kabul. However, the American women, and hence by extension the nation of America itself, arguably, represents for Hosseini the ability to transcend the savage treatment of women in the Middle East. Even if Amir's wife, by the apparently ordinary Afghan standards, has become sullied and therefore her reputation tarnished, the now Americanised man still decides to marry her, much to her own consternation. She says, in a manner that suggests the rarity of such transpiration, that "I am so lucky to have found you […] you're so *different from every Afghan guy I've met*" (my emphasis 194). Women, as far as they are represented throughout the text, do not know of, and have not experienced an Afghan man who is capable of treating them in any manner that is not ultimately callous.

Narrative Strategy: The Doubling Continues

A Thousand Splendid Suns, told through the eyes of the *burqa*-clad figure, is a fictional biography of two women, Mariam and Laila, which accounts for three decades of Afghanistan in which the women themselves do not have a voice-consciousness. The second novel, like its

predecessor, rests on a simple strategy of doubling. While *The Kite Runner* is a tale mostly about fathers and sons, *Splendid Suns* is a tale about mothers and daughters. However, Hosseini has not abandoned the formula of the villain and the hero that proved successful in the first novel, which is to say, he again employs the 'good Muslim'/ 'bad Muslim' discourse. While he still enthusiastically offers the abuser-victim-saviour triangle that is replete in *The Kite Runner*, and while he continues to represent the unspeakable misery of the first novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* nevertheless provides an interesting vantage point from which to identify the significance of a Euro-American interpretive community, with its inherent assumptions. The novel seems to provide no chance of amelioration for the Afghans, without the assistance of the U.S. For this reason, apart from a glimmer of hope after the invasion of Afghanistan by the U.S., the novel represents a situation in which Afghanistan and its people are otherwise doomed to fail in their unattainable quest for self-determination. Hosseini's narrative strategy also takes a similar approach in this novel, employing the doubling of characters and the geo-political dialectic of person and place, as a way of highlighting the superiority of 'Western civilization' and cultural codes. Mariam, the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy businessman who fathers a child with his epileptic maid and, Laila, the daughter of a liberal and educated man who believes in and advocates for women's rights, resemble the dualistic strategies of the former novel.

On the one hand, the illegitimate daughter, much like Hassan, the illegitimate son of the wealthy man in *The Kite Runner*, is restricted to the confines of her house and knows no life outside of it. On the other hand, Laila, similar to Amir and his liberal lifestyle, epitomises all the benefits of an ostensibly liberal lifestyle. Mariam is orphaned at an early age following her mother's suicide, forcing her to seek refuge in the house of her long lost father, where her evil stepmothers decide to set her up in an arranged marriage to a local shoemaker, Rasheed,[22] a random man who is much older than her. He is notoriously nefarious and villainous, and his brutality, much like the Taliban warlord in *The Kite Runner*, knows no bounds. His iniquitous character is a foil to that of Tariq, Laila's liberal boyfriend who, accordingly, values education for women and, much like Amir in *The Kite Runner*, is agreeable to sex before marriage. Both women, according to Michiko Kakutani's review, are represented stereotypically, especially that they both suffer at the hands of a brutish husband:

[22] Rasheed is an Arabic name, which means, 'the rightly guided one'. In the novel, it befits this character as he acts mostly from the guidance of a particular reading and understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, which often cites itself as *the* only and correct way to be a Muslim. Most fundamentalist Muslims believe that they are indeed rightly guided.

> [T]he characters are so one dimensional that they feel like cartoons. Laila is the great beauty, with a doting father and a protective boyfriend — a lucky girl whose luck abruptly runs out. Mariam is the illegitimate daughter of a bitter woman and a disloyal father — an unlucky girl whose luck turns from bad to worse. And Rasheed is the evil bully, a misogynist intent on debasing his two wives. (Kakutani para. 11)

If one reads *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a novel about the experience of Afghan women in general, then Mariam and Laila may themselves be seen to function synecdochically, as the parts by which they are abstractedly connected to a whole – Afghanistan. The implication is that the nation itself, then, is a victim of oppression and abuse at the hands of 'bad Muslims'.

Possibly, the only character who offers a modicum of complexity slightly removed from the superficial doubling strategy is Mariam's mother, Nana. Nana must therefore be read as something of a pariah, cast aside not only because of her geographical location which is isolated from the rest of society, but also because of her having epilepsy, a condition considered by Afghanistan's "backward" (111) society to be associated with bewitchment and satanic possession. Nana, despite her tendency for hyperbole and hysteria, is the only character in the novel who offers a comment on the ontology of patriarchal domination in general. When Nana speaks of the relationship between men and women, she employs a type of universalised rhetoric, although the reader is keenly aware that her utterances arise from her own socio-epistemic limits. Early in the novel, she warns Mariam about the problems associated with womanhood: "Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always. You remember that, Mariam" (Hosseini 7). This advice then prepares the grounds for the justification and introduction of one of the principal thematic concerns that will be ubiquitous in of the novel, namely, the sufferings of Afghan women at the hands of brutal and iniquitous men. But Nana's awareness of gender politics ends with the simple recognition of injustice since she is never allowed develop into a character that has more to offer on this front. Because of the shame associated with children born out of wedlock, Nana dramatically pronounces that she would die if Mariam ever sought her father.

The author, instead of developing the only complex and multi-dimensional character in his novel, kills her off at the earliest stages of the novel, by compelling her to suicide (committed because her daughter defied her instruction not to leave the house in search of her father, the obviously undependable man). It is not enough for Mariam to ignore her mother's advice not to go out in search of her father. She must further be thrust into an arranged marriage with a man five times her senior, so that she stands only to inherit those words from her anxious

mother, which will become significant in her agonising marriage, repeating the cycle of violence and mistreatment and thereby emphasising the unending oppression which is represented as ahistorical and characteristic of Afghan culture in general. And so, with Mariam's disavowal of her mother's somewhat feminist caution, Nana's death has in fact been in vain, a disheartening incident included for sentimentalism rather than for any real value in the plot or narrative situation, in a sense corroborating the idea that Hosseini is determined to confine his female characters to the status of victims. Of course, had she lived, Nana could have played a different role in the narrative, perhaps a guiding one which would conceivably put Mariam out of harm's way. This, of course, would not square up with the author's strategy of representing women as only oppressed.

The episode of Nana's death is an example of the author's deliberate attempt to maintain an emotional attachment, on the part of the Western metropolitan readership, to the characters who are depicted as victims of the overstated Afghan culture of violence against women and girl children. On the one hand, the idea of an Afghan girl who is conscious of the systems of patriarchy and who, accordingly, chooses to resist it, is inconsistent with the author's strategy of highlighting the oppressed condition of women which begs Euro-American intervention. On the other hand, if Mariam were to resist the forces of domination, her active struggle could suggest that women in Afghanistan and the Middle East are in fact capable of initiating resistance against systematic oppression, at least at an individual level. And so, in keeping with the notions of the Orient as that space which, when left to its own devices is *incapable* of self-determination, Hosseini must proceed to enumerate the unspeakable misery that accompanies some of the 'realities' of being an Afghan woman. The main reality, as the novel suggests, is the great likelihood that girls will be coerced into marriage by the oppressive cultural systems of their country.

The Bad Muslim's Oppression of Women and their Failed Resistance

Colie Fitzpatrick, in her essay "New orientalism in popular fiction and memoir: an illustration of type" is in agreement with Said's formulations on the perceptions of gender in the Orient, stating that the representation of the Orient by such a 'Western' figure as Hosseini, *for* the West, is consistent with the exoticisation of the bodies to whom the novel refers, even if, ultimately, "the problematic consequence of Orientalist discourse" is its "great effectiveness at silencing the people about whom it [writes]" (245). Given that the women in the novel show no inclination to resist their situation, to argue that women in Hosseini's novels are not made to speak, but rather, are simply made to assume a position of victimhood – always in fear of

the petrifying man – would support such postulations as proposed by Fitzpatrick.[23] In Hosseini's descriptions of the barbarous man, Mariam's husband, Rasheed, the reader gets the impression that his obnoxious physiognomy is expected to instil terror, both in the reader as well as in the soon-to-be wife, who will before long discover what despair her impending nuptials will involve:

> Mariam smelled him before she saw him. Cigarette smoke and thick, sweet cologne […a] tall man, thick-bellied and broad shouldered, stooping in the doorway. The size of him almost made her gasp […] Then his slow, heavy-footed movement across the room. The candy bowl on the table clinked in tune with his steps. With a think grunt, he dropped on a chair beside her. He breathed noisily […] the big, square, ruddy face, hooked nose, […] watery, bloodshot eyes, the crowded teeth, the front too pushed together like a gabled roof, the impossibly low hairline, barely two fingers widths above the bushy eyebrows; the wall of thick, course salt-and-pepper hair […] This is the face of my husband, Mariam thought. (52-53)

Indeed, Rasheed is to be feared. Hosseini, by first highlighting Rasheed's physiognomy, encourages the reader to make inferences about his personality based on his physical characteristics. The reader shares Mariam's nervous condition when she haplessly realises that "this is the face of [her] husband" (53). Initially, Rasheed is seen as a level-headed man who is sensitive to his new wife's move from the dusty village to the big city of Kabul. He assumes the role of caregiver for a few days, ensuring that she comfortably settles in her new home, and takes her on an excursion in the city to expose her to architectural wonders of which she hitherto had no knowledge. He also sets her up in a separate room in order to have her habituated to her spousal commitments. However, without a moment's notice, Hosseini makes a desultory shift from the well-reasoned man to the monstrous Muslim male figure emblematic of Orientalist fantasies about the general nature of men in such regions. Having waited just over a week, Rasheed now demands that Mariam "act like a wife" (64). Their first sexual encounter is ultimately described in rape terminology. "I can't" (75) Mariam cries, but Rasheed, the lascivious and animalistic Afghan man, forces himself onto her:

> His hand was on her right breast now, squeezing it hard through the blouse, and she could hear him breathing deeply through the nose […] she could feel his hands working at his belt, at the drawstring of her trousers […] Mariam closed her eyes, gritted her teeth. The pain was sudden and astonishing […]

[23] At any rate, it is known that there are a number of Middle Eastern women, including Afghans, who are capable of forming collectives and have been doing so for many years. My argument is not that there are no atrocities occurring in such regions. However, it seems that a failure to register or even to gesture towards such efforts unintentionally assists in normalising assumptions about the hapless state of women, who must be saved from their own people.

> she sucked air through her teeth and bit on the knuckle of her thumb […] stared, wide eyed, at the ceiling above his shoulder, shivering, lips pursed […] (76)

In addition to the violence played out on Mariam's body, Rasheed forces her to wear the *burqa*, unable to understand why some men in Kabul allow their wives to walk freely without headscarves. But the young wife had never before worn the veil, until she was coerced to hide behind it, imposed onto her by her husband:

> Rasheed had to help her put it on. The padded headpiece felt tight and heavy on her skull, and it was strange seeing the world through a mesh screen. She practiced walking around her room in it and kept stepping on the hem and stumbling. The loss of peripheral vision was unnerving, and she did not like the suffocating way the pleated cloth kept pressing against her mouth. (71)

The above passage seems, to some degree, designed to provide what readers should consider a commonsensical account of the automatic and spontaneous transition from freedom to oppression, symbolised here by the enshrouding essence of the *burqa*. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* fails to offer a nuanced perspective on such socio-political issues. It does not gesture towards the notion that, for instance, the veil itself has become a powerfully symbolic garment that has, since 9/11, been the signifier of female subjugation in the West, despite the view of many Afghan women who consider the *burqa* a liberatory tool. In their analysis of the conventional media representations of the veil, Sheida Shirvani and Annabelle Sreberny find that women in the Taliban regime, contrary to popular assumption, have affirmatively appropriated the *burqa* as a means of "exerting personal control and forcing others to deal with the person without the complication of [their] physical form" (Shirvani 268).

Rather than seeing the veil as a signifier of oppression, many Afghan women often see it as a coping mechanism *against* patriarchy as well as a means of negotiating personal identity without the presuppositions which otherwise accompany the unveiled face (268). As the authors observe, it is also interesting that in 2004, following the defeat of the Taliban regime, media outlets were preoccupied with covering Afghan women as having finally being liberated from their bondage. *Time Magazine*, for instance, featured a number of cover pages depicting Afghan women without their veils. While *News Week* ran an article entitled "Now I See the Sunlight", *Business Week*, and *USA Today* respectively ran a series of articles about women having experienced a sense of liberation after the U.S. invasion of the country and the resultant freedom of living without veils (Stabile 774). Hosseini, in what seems to be a corroboration of such representations of Afghan women and their newfound liberation, depicts Laila and Mariam as forever veiled, and therefore as being shackled by Rasheed, with the veil as the

ultimate symbol of this enslavement.[24]

Furthermore, Rasheed persistently afflicts pain on his young wife, in the name of Islam, from apparently religious injunctions which he himself does not follow. He is ill at ease with other men who allow their wives to show their faces in public since for him a woman's face is the husband's business only. Yet, stacked hidden in his drawers is a stash of pornographic magazines which he has been collecting for many years, as well as a gun which he is quite ready to use, perhaps, in line with his moral obligation to protect his dignity. While he mocks his wife for her ignorance and lack of knowledge in general, he is averse to any form of education for women, since their role is within the confines of their home, under the supervision of their husbands whose job it is to hold and preserve the dignity of the woman. In short, the reader can hardly be expected to sympathise with Rasheed.

A thoroughgoing brute, he is the embodiment of Hayden White's idea of the Wild Man in Medieval texts, as Eman Ahmed Khamas notes in her Ph.D. dissertation on "New Colonial Rescue". To the reader, Rasheed is, "desire incarnate […] glutton, lascivious, and promiscuous, without even consciousness of sin or perversion. His physical power [is] conceived to increase in direct ratio to the diminution of his conscience" (qtd. in Khamas 302). If the Euro-American reader, through the entrenched discourse of Orientalism which Said maintains, has come to know the Orient as a place of such characteristics as those embodied by Rasheed, then Hosseini has provided for such a reader a first-hand confirmation of the types of features to be found in the Middle East. That is to say, the author makes use of a stereotypical character. From Rasheed's physical appearance, to the depraved, misogynistic behaviour he exhibits, the novel re-inscribes a neo-Orientalist discourse by indulging popular perceptions about the East. The implication is that, for the Euro-American reader, these perceptions are to be taken at face value, with the knowledge of the evidentiary legitimacy of the author's authenticity. Therefore, the preconceived notions and fantasies about the Orient that predate his writing work well to serve Hosseini in his novels, since the author not only wishes to highlight the plight of women in Afghanistan, but also to evince an ethical response in the reader. Rasheed's ultimate 'bad Muslim' image, then, corresponds with the author's intentions to highlight the threat that Afghan men pose to society. Consequently, the law that governs the demand for otherness in a

[24] It is important to note how pervasive the discourse of the Oriental female victim is: In 2010, the French government legislated against the use of the veil by Muslim school girls, believing that they were 'liberating' these girls from a sort of oppression – also thereby turning them into 'proper' French citizens. Fadela Amara, a prominent minister in the French government, (who is herself from Muslim background), was supported both by the president and the public when she declared that: "the veil is the visible symbol of the subjugation of women, and therefore has no place" in society (George *para* 11 2006).

metropolitan centre is underpinned by Oriental discursive systems, and the supply that is intended to fill that demand is the strategy of exoticisation. In the case of *Splendid Suns*, it is the exoticisation of women, of men and of the Afghan cultural fabric.

The second protagonist, Laila, on the contrary, is raised in a comparatively liberal world that is portrayed as entirely antithetical to the experience of her Afghan counterpart. Laila, unlike Mariam, has had the benefit of being raised by a father who, as Hosseini seems to suggest, is very much unlike the 'ordinary Afghan man'. Hakim,[25] the young girl's father, is a secular humanist and an example of a liberal progressive, at least in comparison to most of the men in the novel. Although Laila also suffers from the stranglehold of her people's attitudes towards girls and women, her family represents a special enclave in Afghan society, with an inclination to favour Western liberalism.

Babi, Laila's affectionate name for her father, stands in contrast to the callous character of Rasheed. Indeed, this dichotomous analogy is the main strategy for Hosseini's mission to highlight the plight of ordinary women in Afghanistan. Laila's father does not encourage the covering of women, and is perfectly fine with the idea of his daughter having a boyfriend and having them visit one another without any chaperone. Babi, unlike Rasheed's ignorant repudiation of woman, repeats time and again that "the most important thing in his life, after her safety, was her schooling" (114). He insists that she learns that "marriage can wait, education cannot" (114) because once the country is saved (presumably by the Americans) it is "going to need you as much as its men, maybe even more. *Because a society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated*" (original italics 114). In fact, Hosseini creates the character of Khala Rangmaal, another liberal figure that influences Laila. As her teacher, she forbids girls to wear any head covering, with the conviction that women are equal to men in every way, and that if men are not forced to cover their heads, women too should be exempt from the practice. Such a narrative strategy quite properly gives credence to popular 'Western' struggles around women's rights as well as their need to be saved from the oppressive cultural norms of 'the East'. These 'struggles', especially when seen to emanate from 'within', begin to gain traction in the 'Western world', as evidenced in the earlier mentioned position of the French government towards the veil.

Like Babi, Khala Rangmaal believes that the country was better under Soviet rule, and that "everyone in Afghanistan would be happy too [like the Soviet nations] once antiprogressives, the backward bandits, were defeated" (111). In other words, the suggestion

[25] In Arabic, Hakim means the intellectual/wise one.

here is that the Afghans are better off under any government, even the Soviet, than they are under the rule of 'bad Muslims'. For Babi, such 'bad Muslims' are historically barbaric. On one occasion, he takes both Laila and her beloved boyfriend on an excursion to the Bamiyan statues, whose ruination, he explains, was a result of an attack by the "*Arab Muslims*" more than a thousand years ago.

To further illustrate the unforgiving nature of life in the Middle East, Babi's two sons in the jihad are killed by the Soviets. He and his wife are themselves killed, following the rain of mujahedeen rockets after the withdrawal of the Soviets. This leaves Laila orphaned, just like Mariam, while she is pregnant with her boyfriend's child. She subsequently feels forced to marry Rasheed, who together with Mariam are responsible for her rescue after the tragic incident, out of fear that she will not survive "out there" as she is likely to fall prey to the "bloodhounds" (209). Of course, this decision only means bad news for her. Mariam dislikes Laila at first, but eventually develops an intimate relationship with her co-wife. Laila too is mistreated and abused by her husband, but her sense of courage, inculcated earlier in life by her father's reverence for women, puts her in good standing to resist and plot an escape from her husband's torture chambers. She argues back at him, stands up to his oppression and prevents him from beating Mariam any further. Moreover, she steals his money and conspires to flee Afghanistan in search of a better life, but is deceived by a young man who promises to pose as their male chaperone at the bus station, only to be double-crossed moments before departure. Rasheed, embarrassed by this attempt at flight, which in Afghanistan is apparently indicative of a man's failure to exert control over his wife, mercilessly brutalises Mariam, nearly killing her:

> Downstairs, the beatings began. To Laila, the sounds she heard were those off a methodical, familiar proceeding. There was no cursing, no screaming, no pleading, no surprised yelps, only the systematic business of beating and being beaten, the *thump, thump* of something solid repeatedly striking flesh, something, someone hitting a wall with a thud, cloth ripping. Now and then, Laila heard running footsteps, a wordless chase, furniture turning over, glass shattering, then thumping once more. (262)

Hosseini silences Mariam, even when she ought to be screaming. Mariam must therefore be passive. It seems that for the author, in order for any form of resistance to be noted, it must be coupled with the silencing of the victim, followed by the guiding voice of the liberal figure, represented in the novel in the Chapter entitled "April 2003" which of course, is the post-9/11

moment. In this moment, life is exactly as peaceful as Laila and Tariq imagined it would be. After all, Laila thinks to herself at one point, that once Bin Laden has been found, there will only be prosperity for the Afghans: "Maybe this *is* necessary [the US invasion]. Maybe there *will* be hope when Bush's bombs stop falling" (original italics 375) since, by implication, the monster-terrorist will have been corrected.

Furthermore, for there to be any end in sight of the violence, Rasheed must be killed, which is to say, the figure of the 'bad Muslim man' must be wiped out at all costs. It is significant, then, that Mariam must end this cycle of violence by killing Rasheed, even if it means that she will face trial and risk being stoned to death by the Taliban. Laila, because she has failed to resist patriarchy on her own, decides to leave "this unforgiving city […] the despondent country altogether" (359) until the Americans or some liberal force which will save Afghans from themselves emerges. And in keeping with the novel's incremental catastrophe, Mariam dies a gruesome death at a public stoning in Ghazi stadium, as spectators cheer on. The stoning scene, reminiscent of the public stoning of an adulteress in *The Kite Runner*, together with other melodramatic scenes of violence in the novel, suggest that Hosseini is determined to represent the Afghan female body as nothing more than a bloodied subject which must be pitied. It is for this reason that he does not have Laila succeed in her bid for self-liberation.

Thus, as Khamas rightly notes in her analysis of the discourse of the 'War on Terror', the representation of the unending violence to which Afghan women are subjected aims at scandalising the Taliban and drawing the attention of the democratic world to their suffering in order to suggest that without the interventions of the West, women are hopeless (Khamas 310). In its representations of gender, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* enacts a profound manipulation of the Afghan female body. Potentially, such a manipulation has, at its nucleus, a certain set of political objectives which govern the narrative situation. That is to say, the novel's obsession with women as forever subjected to grotesque violence is intended to shame and decanter the Taliban. However, in the process, the over-amplified violence against women in *Splendid Suns* undermines whatever claims Hosseini may make about the project of liberation, since it frames the debate squarely within the discourse of the 'monster-terrorist' who is to be eliminated, in other words, the 'bad Muslim' who must be eradicated by the West, with the aid and abet of 'good Muslims'.

Fighting the Good Fight: Defeating the Monster-terrorist

And so, in an attempt to *be* and *demonstrate* his good Muslim-ness, Hosseini must take up a position within the discourse of the 'War on Terror', by making it his job to attach a face (or faces) to the popular stereotypes about Muslim men prevalent in Western media. Typically, men from and in the Orient are, to briefly enumerate some of the hackneyed characteristics: polygamist, misogynistic, backward men who force their wives to wear veils and favour boy children instead of girls, they see women as existing only for their sexual gratification and prevent them from being educated. After all, the first act of violence by Rasheed against Mariam is sexual, followed by unrelenting cruelty meted out to her as a result of her having seven miscarriages. Laila too, is brutalised for not producing a male child.

Therefore, it appears that what reveals the strategic formation of Hosseini's politics is the consistency of the dichotomisation of good and bad, Islam and West, civilised and savage, from the first novel to the second. In other words, the Islamisation of evil in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is concomitant with the Westernisation of good. By making use of similar narrative strategies in both novels, Hosseini is able to confirm what he sees as the uncomplicated reality of Afghan society, easily binarised into 'West' and 'East'. On the one hand, there is Baba and Amir or Hakim and Laila who symbolise the liberal and open minded Afghans who love America and welcome Western presence in the region, in other words, 'good Muslims'. On the other hand, Hosseini constructs Assef and Rasheed as similar, the antagonists and villains who symbolises the 'monster-terrorist' to be corrected.

The seemingly irreconcilable differences between the two sets of characters are, for Hosseini, a matter of ahistorical fact. In particular, the attitudinal biases against woman and girls are a phenomenon not new with the Taliban government. Hence, Babi says to Laila on one occasion, making reference to the institutional culture of universities in Kabul, that "*Women have always had it hard in this country* […] *of course, women's freedom* – here, he shook his head ruefully – *is also one of the reasons people out there took up arms in the first place*" (Original Italics 133). By "people out there" Babi means the Western democratic world which is said to have inspired the traditional women in villages and tribes who could no longer withstand the stranglehold of oppression. By not presenting a nuanced representation of his homeland, Hosseini reduces the portrait of Afghanistan to an ahistorical patriarchy. Therefore, the tendency to fixate on the oppression of women in the Middle East decontextualizes the complex social, historical and political dynamics that account for the state of Afghanistan. It follows, then, that the simplistic perspective of Afghanistan in the novel excludes any

experiences related to the political economy of the region, even if these experiences may account for the rise of fundamentalist movements such as the Taliban.

Fitzpatrick, to quote her again, argues that it is easy for a Western readership, the target audience of such literature, to 'understand' in unsophisticated terms, the Orient and the Muslim world, without having been exposed to nuanced perspectives of the matters leading up to Afghanistan's current condition (246). And so, if *A Thousand Splendid Suns* "begins with Muslim violence – not as a reaction to anything prior but simply as the starting place of memory (fiction or otherwise)" then the violence is understood as "its own cause, or rather, Muslim-ness becomes its own self-generating cause of violence" (246). It is for this reason, therefore, that Hosseini's novel has enjoyed much success as the galvaniser of philanthropic impulses across the metropolitan readership. One reader, an American student in response to an online review of the novel, comments that:

> This book has helped me decide on what I want to do with my life which is help those women in Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey or wherever else they are starved, tortured or deprived. I may not be able to save every woman, but I will lie down at night knowing I did my best. (Flanagan review 2)

In view of the representation of women in the novel, as well as the overall suggestions about the social fabric of the 'wild East', the question to be asked, then, is: does *Splendid Suns* imply, as the student above believes, that interventions are a necessary and unquestioned good for the stability of the Middle East? Ultimately, Hosseini's representations of women have an age old colonial and Oriental legacy, one that Gayatri Spivak characterised as "White men saving brown women from brown men" (300), except of course Hosseini is himself a 'brown man', albeit a transnational 'brown man'. While the Western readership is not homogenised and purely white, Spivak's use of whiteness here should be taken as that which symbolises access to power structures and revisionist history. In that case, Hosseini's novel functions to service the Euro-American structures of power, by depicting powerless women who are at the mercy of 'bad Muslims', and therefore, in need of Western salvation.

At this final juncture, it is important to include a seemingly fanciful but no less germane analogy about the gendered subaltern to be found in Spivak's essay as well as in, I would argue, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. In the conclusion to *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak maintains that the gendered subaltern cannot be heard, since any attempt to speak outside of the normative patriarchal channels becomes silenced by the heteronormative discourse that can neither understand nor support the unique position of the female subaltern. To illustrate this point, she

invokes the history of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, a young middle-class Bengali who in 1926 was "entrusted with a political assassination", but committed suicide because she was unable to carry out the task. She was found dead in her father's apartment in North Calcutta. Bhubaneswari disguised her death as a modern-day version of Sati, the ancient Hindu practice of widow sacrifice. Spivak reads this death as an elaborate attempt to cover up her involvement in the anti-colonial insurgency movements. However, Bhubaneswari calculatedly inscribed a message through her body by timing her death so that it coincided with her menstrual cycle. Bhubaneswari did this in order to prevent her family and society from thinking that she committed suicide as "the outcome of an illegitimate passion" (308).[26]

Importantly, Spivak argues that in doing this, Bhubaneswari's voice and agency, as "a real historical woman, and an anti-colonial freedom fighter" (Morton 33), disappear altogether from the official "male-centred" historical records (33). Now, if Bhubaneswari's gesture was an attempt to resist being identified as a woman who was inextricably connected to a man (her husband), the price she pays for the presence of a *listening* subject is her death. Similarly, and I aim to connect Hosseini's text here, Mariam has to die in order for her to fully resist patriarchy. If her killing of Rasheed is seen as resistance, then it follows that the very act of resistance, for Hosseini, is linked to the death of the speaking or resisting subject. Mariam cannot simply resist oppression and then live through to experience liberation. When Mariam, no longer able to endure her husband's oppression, decides finally that she will stand up to protect herself as well as Laila, she does so with the knowledge that she will have to face trial and be sentenced to death by public stoning. One instance where this idea is most notable is the bloody scene in which Laila is being beaten, and Mariam has a lengthy interior monologue in which all of the brutalities of her marriage flash before her eyes. Interrupting Rasheed's beating of Laila, she strikes him with a shovel, and realises that he has not yet died, she strikes again:

> Mariam raised the shovel high, raised it as high as she could, arching it so it touched the small of her back. She turned it so the sharp edge was vertical, and, as she did it, *it occurred to her that this was the first time that she was deciding the course of her own life*.
>
> And with that, Mariam brought down the shovel, this time she gave it everything she had. (my emphasis 311)

[26] According to the norms of the practice, a woman who was menstruating could not perform *Sati*.

The killing of Rasheed, the monster-terrorist to be corrected, by Mariam, the victim female subaltern, must be seen as committed in "solidarity" with Laila. If we are to think of the characters in terms of their symbolic purposes, Mariam's solidarity, it follows, is the solidarity of the supremely oppressed figure of the Afghan female with the Euro-American infrastructures of resistance, symbolised by Laila. It is, after all, the message of the discourse of the 'War on Terror' that women in Mariam's position should not simply confront patriarchy, they should seek to "discard their fear and dismantle the patriarchal system once and forever" (Khamas 311) which is really to say that they should exterminate it from the social fabric.

The reader of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is aware that the novel spans three generations, and that in all three generations and those preceding them, Afghanistan is locked in traditional and antiquated customs, unable to come to terms with modernity. The author seems to suggest, therefore, that no matter the type of political system in place, the Afghans will always resort to barbarism. It is no wonder, then, that after the U.S. occupation of the country, the novel registers a new horizon. The streets are safer for women to saunter unveiled, girl children can now go to school, there is relative peace in the region, liberation has been achieved, to be sure, there are indeed a thousand splendid suns to come. Hosseini, even if he intends to provide a voice for the voiceless, ends up exoticising the unheard voices.

Towards Positive Complicity: A Conclusion

My argument throughout this thesis has been that writers are positioned by history, which is to say, they are positioned by the discursive and institutional practices in which they are located. As a result of their transnational subjectivities these authors are not neutral in their representations of the 'East'. Even where they begin with the intention to subvert, as I have pointed out about *Midnight's Children* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* respectively, the novels cannot escape the semiotic system to which they are historically bound. And so, the attempt to write about or to speak for the marginal spaces or groups about which these novels are concerned, will inevitably constitute a double-bind, that is, the novels will mediate the international trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the so-called periphery (Appiah 149).

While I have argued that the comprador authors' transnational subjectivities have a bearing on their propensity for self-exoticisation, one of the limitations of the thesis has surely been that it did not take into account the question of the gender of the author and therefore could not examine a gendered experience of the diaspora, and some of the ways in which identity formations and modes of representation might differ in a transnational feminist aesthetic. In addition to this, the thesis looked neither at enabling strategies of writing the diasporic subject, nor at other regions which form part of the transnational networks that trade in or benefit from marginality in the metropolitan centre. It excluded, to name a few; Africa, South America and the Caribbean Islands. Moreover, the study did not explore the recuperative work that transnational or migrant literature can do (for instance, the advancement of cultural hybridity), nor did it account for the disenchanted representation of cultural hybridity among writers whose position of de-territorialisation has forced them to negotiate their split subjectivities in a fractured world. Future inquiries into the problems of representation in transnational literature will address these areas which have been neglected.

At any rate, my reading of the all novels has attempted to show that the 'transparency' of the comprador author's representation – and certainly their *re*-presentation – of society is perhaps what undermines the project of writing back or speaking truth to power. The reader's or author's assumption of transparency, it seems, is what ought to engender what Spivak calls "a real phobia" when one who is in the compradorial position takes up the task of speaking in the name of others (*Post-colonial Critic* 63). Indeed, my point about the early compradors has been that, while they undeniably negotiate the murky waters of exoticisation, there is a strong sense in which the novels suggest a 'strategic essentialism', and therefore an awareness of their

imbrication with the institutional structures of cultural commodification. To be sure, while self-exoticisation is noticeable in Rushdie and Kureishi's novels, it is certainly not unambiguous. It has been my contention throughout that the diasporic writers who serve as an example of the comprador in this thesis are acted upon by their location and therefore tend to pander to existing stereotypes about their erstwhile localities. I have shown how exoticisation is a consequence of their transnational subjectivity, even if it is unintended.

Cumulatively, what I have also shown, is an extreme example of the later comprador. I have suggested that there is a strong predisposition in the post-9/11 compradorial space, in which the hegemonic power structures are used to perpetuate the subjugation of the very peoples on whose behalf the comprador author, Hosseini being my illustration, wishes to speak. My point has been that this later comprador, assuming his positon as the native informer, simply confirms, from within, the predetermined ideas and stereotypes that the 'Western' metropolitan audience may have about his former homeland. Such preconceived ideas, as I have argued, exist as a result of the discourse of neo-Orientalism which not only enables but also encourages the representational mode of the exotic. To put it differently, it's worth considering the following observation as an encapsulating example of Hosseini's negligent approach to self-exoticisation. Babi, in *Splendid Suns* confides in his daughter and expresses his agony over the dying of his two children in the war, after which he shares with her his dreams of moving to a better place, somewhere where it is "easy to forget […] America. Somewhere near the sea. Like California" (148). Once there, Babi would save up and:

> Open a little Afghan restaurant. Nothing fancy, mind you, just a modest little place, a few tables, some rugs. Maybe hang some pictures of Kabul. We'd give the Americans a taste of Afghan food. And with your mother's cooking, they'd line up and down the street". (148)

Such a moment may seem like the innocent dream of an Afghan man, but the giveaway, as I see it, lies in its nuanced self-reflexivity. If Babi seems – to a certain extent – aware that marketability or exoticism would be a component implicit in his marginal status in America, then the claim, in view of this mindfulness, that *the author* is himself aware of the marketability and profitable outcome of his own marginal status as an exotic Afghan in California is not without foundation. The congruity between Babi's dream and Hosseini's reality, moreover, is that both men trade their otherness to a metropolitan clientele, in other words, they both give Americans 'a taste of Afghanistan', the former through an Afghan themed eatery and the latter through his chosen manner of communicating the dreams of the former, namely through self-exoticisation.

So, it is significant that, contrarily, Rushdie and Kureishi, the authors who might be credited for prompting an ethical self-reflexivity in their novels, have chosen to make use of essentialism in a strategic way, thereby acknowledging, albeit not explicitly, the complicity with the imperial centre that comes with their positions.

Here, I should point out by way of conclusion that while some of her views about the efficacy of speaking for the subaltern have evolved over the years, the most persistent contribution that Gayatri Spivak has made to the field of postcolonial and transnational studies are her ideas about the implicated position of the comprador.[27] For example, Spivak recognises her position as inevitably imbricated with the dominant discourses, the discursive and institutional practices which implicate her in the transnational moment. What comprador authors can take from her is best captured in her response to her often misunderstood notion of strategic essentialism. In an interview, she comments that:

> Remaining in the United States was not at any point an examined choice, a real decision made […] I have two faces. I am not in exile. I am not a migrant. I am a green-card-carrying critic of neocolonialism in the United States. It's a difficult position to negotiate, because I will not marginalize myself in the United States in order to get sympathy from people who are genuinely marginalized. (*Spivak Reader* 18)

Here, what Spivak demonstrates through this self-critique, is an awareness of the power structures which tie the comprador to the very systems she wishes to challenge. Her comment above also interrogates her complex and indeed ambivalent relationship with the metropolitan centre. She notes in the preface to *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* that although she is critical of metropolitan postcolonialism she is, unlike the Indian literary critic, Aijaz Ahmad, "less locationist, more nuanced with a productive acknowledgement of complicity" (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* xii). What critics of transnational literature can draw from Spivak's mediations on the comprador is that is possible to have *positive complicity* in the comprador's situation. By this I mean, it is possible to represent 'the East' or 'the homeland' in a way that acknowledges that the author does not stand outside of historical discourse. It is, furthermore, preferable for individual subjects in the compradorial position to develop a narrative that interrogates the very position from which the transnational subject operates.

I have therefore argued that some earlier compradors, Rushdie and Kureishi, have tended to occupy such a position, but that in their occupation, they have nevertheless been

[27] Although Spivak focuses on the comprador intellectual, her lived experience being a guiding principle, these erudite views can be extended to the authors and writers who mediate and translate their cultures in the West.

folded together with the 'Western' structures of domination. Indeed, as I have shown, their novels register this self-consciousness in many ways, but I suggest that there will have to be an earnest and explicit acknowledgement of the limitations of their intention to (re)present the marginal spaces about which they write.

On the other hand, a failure to recognise this complicity results in what readers will find in Hosseini's novels. There, it is clear that the position of the comprador is compromised, devoid of what Spivak has called strategic essentialism. The process of self-exoticisation in these novels is therefore useless for the writing back mission. What happens in such an instance is that the comprador author simply re-affirms the Orientalist understandings of 'the East' that operate within the discursive institutional practices across Euro-America, that is to say, the power structures sustained by neo-Orientalism.

On the whole, it is necessary to conclude by answering Amit Chaudhuri's question with which I opened in the Introduction. The question relates to the subject of the target audience as it pertains to self-exoticisation in diasporic literature: which audience do you write for and are you exoticising the East? While it is indeed admirable for 'the empire' to write back, it often does so *from* the centre, *for* the centre.

Bibliography

Primary Texts

Hosseini, Khaled. *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007.

Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003.

Kureishi, Hanif. *The Buddha of Suburbia*. London: Faber & Faber, 1990.

Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage, 1995.

Secondary Texts

Abrams, M. H. *Glossary of Literary Terms*. 9th Edition. Wadsworth Publishing, 2007. Print.

Alden, Mudge. "Khaled Hosseini - Interview." *BookPage.com*. Web. 7 Nov. 2014.

Ahmed, Aijaz. *In Theory*. New York: Versobooks, 1992. Print.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader. Ed. Braziel, Jana Evans and Anita Mannur. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2003

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. Oxford University Press, 1993. Print.

Ashcroft, Bill., Gareth Griffiths., Tiffin, Helen. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays/by M.M. Bakhtin*. Trans. M. Holiquist and C. Emerson. Ed. Michael Holiquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. Print.

Belsey, Catherine. *Critical Practice*. London: Methuen, 1980. Print.

Bethlehem, Louise. *Skin Tight: Apartheid Literary Culture and Its Aftermath*. 1st ed. Pretoria : Leiden: University of South Africa Press ; Koninklijke Brill, 2006.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.

----. 'The World and the Home.' Social Text (31/32), 1992: 141-153.

Biskamp**,** Floris., and Willaert, Thijs. "Postcolonial Problems, or: Why *The Kite Runner* Does (not) Matter." *International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture*. Giessen, 27 July 2010.

Brennan, Timothy. *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. Print.

Buchanan, Bradley. *Hanif Kureishi*. Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Bush, Laura. "The 2008 TIME 100 - TIME." *Time* 12 May 2008. *content.time.com*. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.

Célestin, Roger. *From Cannibals to Radicals: Figures and Limits of Exoticism*. U of Minnesota Press, 1996. Print.

Chaudhuri, Amit. *Clearing a Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008. Print.

Clifford, James "Diasporas" *Cultural Anthropology*. Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies. 9.3 (1994): 302-338.

Dabashi, Hamid. *Brown Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto, 2011. Print.

Dayal, Samir. "Diaspora and Double Consciousness," *The Journal of the Midwestern Modern Language Association*. 29.1 (1996): 42-62.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. London: Archibald Constable, 1905. Print.

Eckstein, Lars. *Re-Membering the Black Atlantic: On the Poetics and Politics of Literary Memory*. Rodopi, 2006. Print.

Edwards, Janette. "Expatriate Literature and the Problem of Contested Representation: The Case

of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*". *Inter-Disciplinary.net.* 3 Sep. 2008. Web. 10 Jun.2010.

Enders, Walter and Todd Sandler. "After 9/11: Is it all Different Now?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49 (2005): 259-277.

Fitzpatrick, Coeli. "New Orientalism in popular fiction and memoir: an illustration of type." *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 4:3 (2009): 243-256.

Flanagan, Mark. "Reviews of A Thousand Splendid Suns." *About.com Contemporary Literature*. 7 Nov. 2014. Web. 7 Nov. 2014.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock, 1972. Print.

Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory A Critical Introduction*. New York. Columbia University Press, 1998. Print.

Gasiorek, Andrzej. *Post-War British Fiction: Realism and After*. London, Edward Arnold, 1995. Print.

George, Rose. "Ghetto Warrior." *The Guardian* 17 July 2006. *The Guardian*. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.

Gorra, Michael. *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie*. University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print.

Graham, Mark. *Afghanistan in the Cinema*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010. Print.

Grant, Damian. *Salman Rushdie*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1999. Print.

Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage, 1997. Print.

Hawthorne, Susan. "The Politics of the Exotic: The Paradox of Cultural Voyeurism." *Meanjin*, 48.2 (1989): 259-68.

Hemer, Oscar. *Fiction and Truth in Transition: Writing the Present Past in South Africa and Argentina*. LIT Verlag Münster, 2012. Print.

Huggan, Graham. “Prizing ‘Otherness’: A Short History of The Booker.” *Studies in The Novel.* 29.3 (1997): 412-433.

---. “(Not) Reading Orientalism” *Research In African Literatures.* 36.3 (2005): 124-136.

---. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Hunt, Sarah. “Can the West Read? Western Readers, Orientalist Stereotypes, and the Sensational Response to *The Kite Runner*.” *ECLS Student Scholarship* 18 (2009): 1-19.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations?: The Debate*. New York, Foreign Affairs, 1996. Print

Idris, Farhad Bani. *Reimagining India : Narratives of Nationalism in V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie*. na, 2001. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Routledge, 1989. Print.

Jefferess, David. “To Be Good (again): The Kite Runner as Allegory of Global Ethics.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45.4 (2009): 389–400. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.

Kakutani, Michiko. “A Woman’s Lot in Kabul, Lower Than a House Cat’s.” *The New York Times* 29 May 2007. *NYTimes.com*. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.

Kaleta, Kenneth C. *Hanif Kureishi: Postcolonial Storyteller*. 1st University of Texas Press ed edition. University of Texas Press, 2010. Print.

Kane, Jean M., and Salman Rushdie. “The Migrant Intellectual and the Body of History: Salman Rushdie’s ‘Midnight’s Children.’” *Contemporary Literature* 37.1 (1996): 94–118. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Nov. 2014.

Keshavarz, Fatemeh. *Jasmine and Stars: Reading More Than Lolita in Tehran: Reading More Than Lolita in Tehran*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2007. Print.

Khamas, A. Eman. “New Colonial Rescue: Appropriating a Feminist Discourse in the War on Terror.” Diss. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2013.

Lockman, Zachary. *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Lau, Lisa, and Ana Cristina Mendes. *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics: The Oriental Other Within*. Routledge, 2012. Print.

Macfie, A. L. *Orientalism*. London: Longman, 2002. Print.

Majumdar, Nivedita. “When the East is a Career: The Question of Exoticism in Indian Anglophone Literature.” *Postcolonial Text* 4.3 (2008): 1-18.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 2004. Print.

McLeod, John. *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*. Routledge, 2004. Print.

Media Education Foundation. *The Myth of The Clash of Civilizations Professor Edward Said in Lecture*. Media Education Foundation, 2002. videorecording.

Menocal, Maria Rosa. *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Print.

Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Hanif Kureishi*. Manchester University Press, 2001. Print.

Morton, Stephen. *Salman Rushdie: Fictions of Postcolonial Modernity*. Basingstoke [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.

Nafisi, Azar. *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*. Random House deluxe trade pbk. ed. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2008. Print.

Naidu, Samantha. “Towards a Transnational Feminist Aesthetic: An Analysis of Selected Prose Writing by Women of the South Asian Diaspora.” Diss. Rhodes University, 2006.

Nasta, Susheila. *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002. Print.

Nye, Joseph S. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Basic Books, 1991. Print.

Puar, Jasbir., and Rai, Amit. "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots" *Social Text* 20.3 (2002): 117-148.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991*. London: Granta, 1991. Print.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993. Print.

---. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin, 2003. Print. Penguin Classics.

---. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Harvard University Press, 1983. Print.

Schurer, Norbert. *Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children: A Reader's Guide*. A&C Black, 2004.

Shirvani, Sheida. "Voice from behind the veil." *Feminist Media Studies*, 2.1 (2002): 268-270.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.

---. "Can the Subaltern Speak" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Crossberg (eds.) *Marxism And The Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan. (1990): 271-313.

---. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. Psychology Press, 1993. Print.

---. *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Sreberny, Annabelle. "Seeing through the veil: regimes of representation". *Feminist Media Studies*. 2.1 (2002): 270-272.

Stabile, Carol A., and Deepa Kumar. "Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan." *Media, Culture & Society* 27.5 (2005): 765–782. *mcs.sagepub.com*. Web. 7 Nov. 2014.

Stein, Mark. *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation*. Columbus: Ohio State University, 2004. Print.

Ten Kortenaar, Neil. *Self, Nation, Text in Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children."* McGill-Queen's Press - MQUP, 2005. Print.

Thomas, Susie. *Hanif Kureishi: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Manchester University Press, 1984. Print.

---. *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations*. University of Chicago Press, 2010. Print.

Varisco, Daniel Martin. *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007. Print.

---. "Review of Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's 'Orientalism' by IBN WARRAQ." *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 42.1/2 (2008): 178–180. Print.

Vertovec, Steven, and Robin Cohen, eds. *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1999. Print.

Wyatt, Neal. "Travel the World Through Words." 15 September 2009. *Library Journal Archive*. July 18 2012. < http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6695148.html>.

Younge, Gary. "First Lady Postpones Poetry Talk over Protest Fear." *The Guardian* 31 Jan. 2003. *The Guardian*. Web. 10 Nov. 2014.